

# "Sharing", Transfers, Transactions and the Concept of Generalized Reciprocity

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# "Sharing", Transfers, Transactions and the Concept of Generalized Reciprocity

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# **INTRODUCTION**

Over the last century the availability of imported goods and cash have increased in the village of Isertoq, East Greenland. These goods and the cash have been more or less assimilated into the Isertormeeq socioeconomic system. I have earlier identified the household as the social unit which generates and maintains this system, defining it in terms of three variables: local produce, store bought goods, and cash [HOVELSRUD-BRODA 1997a, 1997b]. These are all pooled, distributed and consumed within the households. In contrast, transactions between households involve country foods, kalaalimernit, only. Store bought goods and cash are typically not incorporated into the village wide transaction system. In this paper I will outline the differences taking place within households [intra-household] versus those taking place between households [inter-household], and I will discuss three types of "sharing" that occur in the village. Transfers ["sharing"] between households, or what I also label transaction networks, are the predominant focus of this paper. I will show that through the "sharing" of country foods, households are linked together in an intricate pattern. These "sharing" networks are explored from the perspective of who distributes what to whom and how the members of the networks are related (see also Hovelsrud-Broda [1999]).

A number of analytical and theoretical issues come forth when discussing the allocation or transfer of resources in a mixed cash/subsistence economic system such as that of Isertoq. One concern is the labels that we use to discuss resource allocations, transfers or transactions. Terms such as 'sharing' and 'reciprocity' are frequently applied to situations in which resources are transferred. The classic framework is that of Sahlins [1965], spanning generalized, balanced and negative reciprocity. Drawing on Polanyi, Price [1975] added the notion of redistribution.

The other major concern is the question of why people share. A number of analyses and explanations are available, ranging from 'sharing' as altruistic generous behavior, risk reduction, to prestige building. The risk reduction argument is the most prevalent: that "one gives up something today in order to receive something of greater value in the future" [HAWKES 1993: 345]. In this scenario it follows that those "who do not give shares do not get them" [HAWKES 1993: 345]. As Hawkes [HAWKES 1993: 345] demonstrates this is not supported empirically. My work in Isertoq shows that shares go to both people who are active and inactive in food gathering activities. Lee's records of the !Kung, and Kaplan and Hill reporting on the Ache, show similar trends.

Other arguments center on sharing as a way to gain social and/or political status. I will not go further into the debate here over why people transfer and share their resources. Suffice it to say that it is clear that resource allocations, transfers and transactions are socially significant. They reflect social relationships and are in some cases instrumental in maintaining the socioeconomic system. Furthermore, the argument about why can better be understood if we first know what. An understanding of the transaction systems and how these are related to socioeconomic structure and social relations will eventually lead to answers to the why question. The various types of transactions and transfers that constitute a given economy reflect different aspects of the social and cultural realities that are critical for understanding a socioeconomic system, hence the fine-tuning of the concepts and their application and use.

Based on ethnographic material from Isertoq, East Greenland, I will outline different types of resource transfers and examine these in the light of Sahlins' framework. This inquiry shows that his framework is not sufficient for analyzing how the Isertormeeq 'move' their resources between households. I detect a significant gap between the empirical data and the concepts we are using to analyze this material. This suggests that the available concepts not only do not capture the intricacies, but they may also contribute to a distortion or even loss of empirical reality. This is most strongly emphasized in the notion of 'sharing,' a ubiquitous term that infers benevolent generosity not requiring reciprocity. The application of the notion of generalized 'sharing' to the complicated resource transfers and allocations found in Isertoq is inappropriate.

# THE PLACE: THE VILLAGE OF ISERTOQ

Isertoq is located in the Ammassalik municipality, in East Greenland (see Fig. 1). The area surrounding the island of Isertoq has been occupied for centuries [MATHIASSEN 1933]. It was an attractive place to live because of a regional abundance of seals, polar bears and narwhal, which fulfilled the needs of food, clothing, and materials for shelter. Until a few decades ago it was customary for the households to move between summer and winter camps [ROBERT-LAMBLIN 1986]. Today the 168 villagers live in imported wooden houses throughout the year. In addition to the residential houses, the village has a school, a store, a church, a municipal office, a combined bank and post office, and various public works buildings.

The East Greenlanders began trading goods with the Danes who in 1894 established a mission and trading post in Ammassalik [MATHIASSEN 1933]. Seal skins, polar bear skins, blubber, and shark livers were the main items produced



Fig. 1.

locally. Today, the main production activities in the village are, as they were in the past, clearly divided along gender lines. The capture of seals and other prey, is the domain of the men, while the women's include preparations of natural resource products (see also Dahl [1989]). The latter includes processing sealskins for final sale, and seal meat for distribution, and consumption. In the 1990's seal meat is still the main source of food for the Isertormeeq who consume it daily, and it is also the main feed of some 350 sled dogs. In 1994/1995, the earnings from sealskins represented twenty-three percent of the total village income, while the remaining seventy-seven percent came from wages and transfer payments. These figures, however, do not take into account the considerable dietary, ideological and monetary replacement values of seal meat (see Hovelsrud [1995]; Paldam [1994]; Larsen [1990]). Seasonal variation in the quality of the skins and seal skin prices may affect a hunting household's decision to prepare a skin. Skin prices have historically fluctuated, but after the trade ban imposed by the EU the prices plummeted. The government has responded by "subsidizing" the skins bought from the hunting households.

The Isertoq hunting households are part of a cultural and socio-economic system that combines reliance on natural resource use with a need for cash income (see also Lonner [1986], Wenzel [1991], Langdon [1991]). Through this mixed economy, they have multiple ties to external social, economic, and political institutions.

#### THE SOCIOECONOMIC SYSTEM IN ISERTOQ

The various transactions in Isertoq are best understood through focusing on the structure of the socioeconomic system. The parts of the system are closely inter-connected with the social relations and the way people interact within and outside of the economic sphere. These elements, local produce, store bought goods and cash, converge at the household level. This does not mean that the household exists as a closed, naturally bounded system (e.g. Ortiz [1992], Hart [1992]). The boundaries are highly permeable, but not so much so that "they cannot be considered as bounded units" [ORTIZ 1992: 108]. The boundaries are highly permeable because individual members of a household have important ties to other households and to other social units, such as individuals, the local municipal government, the local KNI store (Kalaallit Niuerfiat or Greenland Trade), and the central Home Rule Government.

The domains of the Isertoq socioeconomic system are shown below in Table 1. There are three main arenas of transaction: within households (intra-), between households (inter-) and outside the household (between a household and other social units, such as the municipality). Each of these involves in various ways the other domains of the system. It is, however, beyond the scope of this paper to outline the relationships between each domain, and I refer to Hovelsrud-Broda [1997a] for a detailed analysis. The three main components, production, distribution and consumption, are associated with three variables: locally produced goods (i.e. production technology, foods stuffs, and clothing), store bought (or imported) goods (i.e. food, production technology and clothing), and cash (from three main sources, wages, institutional transfer payments, and sale of sealskins). These variables are in turn associated with five significant social units: individuals, households, the municipality, the local KNI store and the Greenlandic Home Rule Government (HRG). Collectively these domains and their interactions form the socioeconomic system in Isertoq.

The production-, distribution-, and consumption-activities in the village are all integrated in the household. Whereas it is the individual Isertormeeq who forges the connections between the different social units, these are ultimately significant for the household as a unit. The household is the focal social unit where, in empirical and theoretical terms, production, consumption and distribution of local

Components	Variables	Social Units	Arenas of Transfers
Production	Local goods	Individual	Intra-household
Distribution	Store goods	HOUSEHOLD	Inter-household
Consumption	Cash	municipality	Outside the household
		Local Store	
		Home Rule Gov't	

Table 1. The Domains of the Isertoq Socioeconomic System

produce and cash converge. (This is in agreement with findings from the Copper Eskimo [DAMAS 1975; COLLINGS et al 1998], but is contrary to the Netsilik and Iglulik [DAMAS 1975] and Wenzel's [1995] findings from Clyde River where the extended family is found to be the most important unit.) In Isertoq, the household as a unit is capable of producing something individual actors cannot. The connecting element is the multifarious inter-dependence between the household members, partly expressed as division of labor by both age and gender.

# The Isertoq household

Three basic criteria must be met in order for a household to function within the Isertoq system. It must have a man who is an accomplished hunter, a woman who can process the catch, and a cash flow that facilitates resource use and production activities (see Hovelsrud-Broda [1997a] for a detailed discussion).

Throughout this paper I shift the focus between the individual household members and the unit of the household. Both are equally representative of 'The Household' being considered. Since 'The Household' itself is not an actor with kinship-ties I must turn to the individuals who are the actual connecting factors between households. But I also consider "sharing" as pertaining to the household as a unit, because the goods, in this case country foods, are pooled (or shared in) within the household. In other words, the individual recipient is not the sole consumer of the received food-stuffs. So even though the transactions take place between individual actors, and often because of how those actors are related, it is 'The Household' which is the ultimate beneficiary.

An Isertoq household is composed of a group of people who share both the production activities and the outcome, through the distribution and consumption of cash, locally produced goods, and store bought goods. Households may include a nuclear family residing with extended family members, who may be an elderly



Fig. 2. The flow of resources in a household

parent, young nieces and nephews, and unmarried siblings or cousins. Married couples are found in sixty percent of Isertoq households. Ninety-two percent of the households are composed of a man (husband, son, father or brother) who can hunt and a woman (wife, daughter, mother or sister) who can process the catch. In most cases the key men and women are also the main producers of country food and cash in the household.

Each household has at least one member receiving wages or transfer payments on a regular schedule. In addition to the relatively steady income from wages and transfer payments, many households rely heavily on the extra, albeit small, income earned from sealskin sale. The initial costs of hunting equipment and the daily expendable costs require a cash flow that in most cases exceeds a household's revenue from sealskins. Any member in the household may provide the cash needed to facilitate subsistence production. In some cases a household's hunter receives pensions or early retirement benefits. In other cases another member of the household who holds a wage job or receives transfer payments from the government provides the cash for supporting hunting activities.

# Intra-Household Pooling And "Sharing"

In Isertoq local foodstuffs, store bought foods and cash all enter the household. Locally produced kalaalimernit (country foods) and store bought foods are pooled or 'shared in' [INGOLD 1987] and consumed freely by household members. In addition, some items are allocated to the transaction networks outside of the household. The locally produced foodstuffs are brought to the house (e.g., animals and fish by men, mussels, berries and plants by women), and the key female of the household processes these before the household consumes them. There are no rules excluding any member of the household from consuming any part of the kalaalimernit or the store bought foods. Food is always available for all members. Cash, however, is not directly pooled within the household and is not available in the same way as foods. But cash is not distributed or pocketed by the recipient either, nor is it kept separate from the overall household economy. There appears to be no difference in the distribution patterns between cash earned from wages and cash earned from sealskins (see for example Hutchinson [1992], Parry and Bloch [1989]). Instead, the Isertormeeq convert all cash into food, heating oil, cooking gas, hunting equipment, personal clothing and travel, benefiting the household as a unit.

In sum, household members pool and share *kalaalimernit*, cash and store bought goods. Each able member contributes to the household economy through pooling what he or she can. This includes the *kalaalimernit* any member receives from other households (see below) as well. The social economy of an Isertoq household is all-inclusive of the potential and real sources of goods and cash. This sets the households apart from each other and from other social units. Whether the allocations taking place within a household can be labeled "sharing" will be discussed below. In the next section I will discuss transactions beyond the household. The focus throughout the paper is on foodstuffs only.

# Types Of "Sharing" Outside The Household

In Isertoq there are currently three primary types of transactions beyond those categorized as intra-household: 1) inter-household (or between households) types of sharing, 2) between temporary partners hunting polar bears, and 3) community wide distribution of meat from large whales. Category one, inter-household "sharing", can be further divided into three main types: 1.1) one-way movement of country foods, 1.2) prepared feasts, and 1.3) regular two-way movements of raw country foods. ("Sharing" of store bought goods such as rifles and skiffs along with dog teams and other hunting equipment, follow different paths and deserves attention but will not be addressed here.)

# Inter-household "sharing" patterns

Pooling and sharing within households, as described in the section above, differ greatly from the transactions taking place between households. My observations indicate that all households regularly participate in a transaction network involving kalaalimernit (country foods), in particular seal meat. Seal meat is most significant because of the steady availability. It is the staple in most The transaction networks for kalaalimernit in effect link the households. households together (see Figure 3). Each house in Figure 3 symbolizes the unit "household", including all the individuals belonging to the household. Figure 3 shows that household A "shares" with seven households which do not belong to the networks of households B and C. Furthermore, household A has two households in common with both households B and C. One of these also "shares" with household B. As the figure indicates, household C does not belong to household A's network, but household B does. A distinct chain-like 'sharing' pattern emerges where the people involved are closely related, either through consanguinal (blood relations), affinal (through marriage) and/or classificatory kinship (the latter is based on a naming system, see Gessain [1980]; Williamson [1988]; Nuttall [1992]).

Elder Isertormeeq have described how, in the past, a seal was divided up and distributed (see also Robbe [1994] for a detailed description). Each person within a household would always receive the same cut of meat from the cooking pot.

Such rules applied to the distribution of raw meat to extended family members living outside of the household as well. Some households today adhere to these customary rules about dividing up a seal, but in most preference determines who receives what part. However, many of the other customs pertaining to the distribution of a seal are intact (in contrast see Buijs [1992]). Certain parts of the seals, such as the flippers and the viscera, are not distributed outside the household and do not enter the transaction networks. Meat, with bone and cartilage attached, are the main parts transferred between households, but not all cuts of meat enter the networks. It is very rare that ribs, for example, are "shared" outside of the household, except when given to a sister, brother, daughter or son.



Fig. 3. Transaction Networks for Three Households

Transfer of store bought foods is atypical within, and virtually non-existent outside the inter-household networks. (I exclude here the ubiquitous coffee and tea, which are served to anyone visiting regardless of relationship.) It is, however, unusual to be offered any other store bought foods. Sharing of cash is unlikely both within and outside of the networks (see Wenzel [1995] for contrast). Sometimes cash is lent to extended family members upon request.

I will again point out that the main focus here is foods, predominantly kalaalimernit. The separation of store bought foods from kalaalimernit is important because the two types of food have such fundamentally different roles in the interactions between the households. The role and distribution of cash is indirectly included in this paper, but will not be addressed in any detail. The movement and allocation of cash through the village is a topic for a separate paper.

# One-way "sharing"

Country foods move between households according to three principles. The first refers to transactions that, in the time frame of this particular study, are oneway. Country foods move in one direction only, at irregular intervals. The actors involved are typically kin who are not reciprocally engaged in "sharing". For example, household A receives shell-fish and capeline from a niece and fish from a nephew, household B is a recipient of fresh seal meat from a nephew, and household C receives fresh birds and fish from a cousin. None of these givers are part of households A, B, or C's networks, respectively. Thus, these transactions take place outside of the "sharing" networks and are performed by members of a person's extended family. Furthermore, these are all observed transactions, but the recipients in an interview setting do not mention them. When asked, members of households A, B, and C who in this particular case are at the receiving ends do not specify these types of transactions. In some instances the distributor would mention these people as recipients of their produce. It is interesting to note that the 'givers' may identify the recipients in a one-way transfer system, while the recipients do not acknowledge this transaction. In addition to being one-way, this lack of agreement is another aspect that sets these transactions apart from those pertaining to the "sharing" networks. The observations of "sharing" networks are otherwise consistently corroborated with names given by the participants on both sides.

# Kaffimik—Feasts

The second distinct type of transaction between households is the distribution of prepared country foods. There are at least two types, an invitation to a household for a feast such as a *kaffimik* (usually in connection with a birthday, Christening, or when a young boy catches his first seal), and when a visitor is casually invited to eat what is in the cooking pot. The semi-formal invitations to a feast generally involve extended family members. However, in most cases not all kin are invited to a *kaffimik*. Certain criteria dictate the inclusion or exclusion on the 'guest list'. The *kaffimik* may include store bought foodstuffs but the focal point of the feast is the *kalaalimernit*. Following the customary patterns the country foods are eaten outside or on the floor in the kitchen away from the coffee table where tea, coffee and cakes are served. The people who at any given time are eating the *kalaalimernit* do so without the social component of "eating together"; one eats and then moves into the living room to socialize.

In the case of casual invitations, visitors are often urged to eat independently of the household members. In other words, the meal itself is not a social occasion. It is quite common that a visitor serves him or herself directly from the cooking pot and eats in the kitchen before sitting down with the hosts. Casual invitations to eat are more frequently extended to relatives, although non-kin are not excluded completely. Closely related family also visit with each other more frequently than do more distant relatives or non-relations, increasing the chances of kin being offered country foods over non-kin. I made few observations of non-household members, kin or not, being offered store bought foodstuffs. This is reinforced in the interviews, where people without exception maintain that they only share store bought foods or cash with members of their own household. The exception is the custom of gift giving. Feasts held in connection with events when gifts are distributed may involve store bought foods and goods. This differs from observations made in the town of Tasiilaq where store bought foods regularly are prepared for non-kin guests and extended family members (e.g., Eistrup [1998]). Regular inter-household "sharing"

In the last and most important type of inter-household "sharing", foodstuffs,

especially seal meat, move back and forth between the same households on a regular basis. The fact that transfers are repeated suggests that this is a system of regularized linkages. However, these linked transactions are delayed because the distributor does not usually receive anything in return at the moment the transfer takes place. Therefore, the linkage is not observed directly, and because it is delayed it is also difficult to observe what an expected reciprocal response to an act of sharing may be. In addition, a transaction may not necessarily represent the reciprocal to the one immediately preceding it. In other words, one transaction may be linked to another that took place many transactions prior. Nevertheless, country foods move back and forth between households joining them in a distinct pattern.

## An example: household A

The wife in household A divides a seal catch in the following way: Her household keeps the heads of the seals and their front flippers. Her sister receives a part of the ribs and spine. Two sides of ribs are set aside for a son's family, and another side for a daughter's family. The wife gives a selection of cuts (with more meat and thus less desirable because the Isertormeeq prefer the bone marrow and pieces with cartilage) to her husbands niece, while a nephew receives a large piece of ribs for him and his mother. She offers a brother's widow a cut of fresh meat and also a prepared meal. Lastly a niece who is also a classificatory daughter (she is named after one daughter who died as an infant) receives a part of the spine and a small piece of ribs. She and her teenage daughter currently live alone without a hunter in the household. In contrast, most of the other people who regularly receive meat from household A live in households where there are successful hunters. (See Appendix 1 for a list of the most commonly "shared" species in Isertoq).

Household A in turn receives country foods from most of these recipients, although some do not reciprocate in kind. For example, the classificatory daughter may share berries, fish, or shellfish, but not seal meat with household A. As mentioned above, household A also receives foodstuffs from kin with whom they do not reciprocate. These appear to be one-way transactions. However, they may also reflect long-term reciprocal "sharing" relationships, which were not evident in the two-year study period.

The analysis indicates that regular transactions are made back and forth between particular households. The trend is that transactions of country foods only take place between households where the members are related. In itself this is not a remarkable observation given the fact that in Isertoq "one couple out of four" are in second cousin marriages [ROBERT-LAMBLIN 1986: 57]. Thus, most Isertormeeq are related to another Isertormeeq in one way or another, and in many cases the actors have more than one kin-tie to a given person. This fact begs the question about how, and by which criteria the networks are formed. It is not simply a reflection of kinship.

#### "Sharing", Transfers, Transactions

On the other hand, the transactions that take place between parental and adult children's households I will argue are a continuation of the parent-child dyad. In this case, then, kinship is primary in determining the transaction networks. Households frequently and regularly move country foods between those of parents and those of the children. Households with no parents or children in other networks maintain ties through the next closest level of kin (e.g., brothers and sisters).

In my sample, frequently classificatory relations exist between people who are also consanguine kin, but this is not always the case in the village. The transactions between, for example, a woman and her nephew who is also her classificatory 'brother' are based on a 'brother-sister' relationship rather than the aunt-nephew dyad. The differential terms of address, depending on the context, used by the two emphasize which relationship is being evoked. Likewise, another woman's young nephew and niece are at times interacted with and addressed as 'mother' and 'father', rather than nephew and niece, by the elder woman. They were named after her deceased parents and are addressed as such.

The households' networks may also include bi-lateral kin. For example, both husband and wife in a household may have multiple consanguinal ties, through the marriage of brother-sister sets. Here there are significant ties with both pairs of siblings. In contrast, a niece may be part of a household's network, while her brother and sister are not. This example illustrates the point that a group of siblings may not necessarily participate in the same network. Hence, the uncle/aunt-niece/nephew relations are not the only determining factor for establishing transaction networks. Many households exhibit complex patterns of sharing with their children's, or extended family's households in other villages and in the town of Tasiilaq.

Table 2 reflects three representative household samples and shows the number of households with which each is involved (see also Figure 3). My data suggest that households A and B are each involved in sharing relationships with eleven other households, and C with eight. These figures include both reciprocal and irregular one-way transactions. Some networks may become apparent only over a much longer study period, and that what seem to be irregular one-way transactions in fact are reciprocal (see Bliege Bird and Bird [1997]).

Households A and B are part of each other's networks in a reciprocal fashion, and they have two other households in common. Consequently, both A and B branch out to eight different households as part of their sharing networks. B and C are also part of each other's networks and have three other households in common. So, B and C, respectively, have eight and four different households in their networks. Households C and A are not part of each other's networks, but have two households in common. That means that they have six (C) and nine (A) nonoverlapping households in their respective networks. All three samples have one household in common in their "sharing" networks.

The networks of the three sample households involve a total of twenty-three

<b>Table 2.</b> Sharing Networks of Three Households in	in Isertog.
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A'S "SHARING" NETWORK INVOLVES ELEVEN OTHER HOUSEHOLDS
B'S "SHARING" NETWORK INVOLVES ELEVEN OTHER HOUSEHOLDS
C'S "SHARING" NETWORK INVOLVES EIGHT OTHER HOUSEHOLDS
* A AND B ARE INVOLVED IN A RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIP, AND HAVE 2 HOUSEHOLDS IN COMMON IN THEIR RESPECTIVE NETWORKS.
* B AND C ARE INVOLVED IN A RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIP, AND HAVE 3 HOUSEHOLDS IN COMMON IN THEIR RESPECTIVE NETWORKS.
* C AND A ARE NOT INVOLVED IN A RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIP, BUT HAVE 2 HOUSEHOLDS IN COMMON IN THEIR RESPECTIVE NETWORKS.
* The three samples have a total of 23 different households in their "sharing" networks. * Together they "share" seal meat and other country foods with 62% of the 37 households in the
village.

different households (including A, B, and C). Together the three study households share country foods with sixty-two percent of the households in the village. This indicates a high level of connectedness between the thirty-seven households in the village. The result is that all the households are materially connected to each other, at least indirectly. The span of this study was just over two years, and thus the time frame involved is relatively short. Nevertheless, I will claim that: 1) linked transactions exist and are maintained between households whose members are either consanguinal, affinal and/or classificatory kin, but that not all kin are necessarily part of the same transaction network; and 2) the "sharing" networks involve country food only, which is the prime aspect that separates inter-household from intra-household transactions.

# Resource "sharing" 1: whales

Greenland is issued a yearly quota of minke whales from the International Whaling Commission. The Home Rule government distributes this quota to the different villages throughout Greenland (e.g., Jervin [1989], Caulfield [1993]). Isertoq has a quota of one minke whale per year. The whole community is at some level involved in hunting large whales, and in the subsequent flensing and distribution of the meat. Each household, whether one of its members participates in the hunt or not, receives a share of whale meat. This is an example of community wide big game distribution (see Hovelsrud-Broda [n.d.a] for a detailed discussion).

The hunters divide the meat and the mattak equally between all the households in the village. The whaling crew divides the ribs and distributes them to the men, who are usually the sole consumers of whale ribs. The throat and 'skin' of the abdomen (*qiporaq*) is divided only between those who participate in the hunt (but any member, male or female, of a household may eat the *qiporaq*). The hunters, forming a tight circle around the *qiporaq* and carrying on an intense discussion, do this division. After the circle dissipates the men have decided who will receive which piece of *qiporaq*. This is a sought after delicacy, and care is taken that each hunter receives an acceptable share.

The social and economic significance in landing a large whale is not easily measured and expressed in quantifiable terms. The meat and *mattak* clearly have dietary value. But the village effort involved in whaling moves beyond basic economic measurement. The women and the children share, with the men, in the preparations and elation associated with the whaling effort. All the villagers are present when the whale is brought ashore, not because they are all participating in the butchering, but because landing a large whale is a unique event. It is in many ways a celebration of the Isertormeeq culture.

Whaling is unique in at least two ways. It is an annual event, but more importantly it is the only event that involves the entire village. No other production activity generates a similar village wide gathering. Thus, a sense of cohesion and euphoria apply to both the landing of the whale and its subsequent distribution. Landing a large whale can be differentiated from seal hunting and processing in numerous ways, one salient aspect being the village wide interest and involvement it creates. Another aspect is that it is a cooperative hunting effort, but more importantly every member of the community shares in the whale meat. This is the only event in which this community wide distribution of meat takes place (in contrast see Wenzel [1995]).

# Resource "sharing" 2: polar bears

In polar bear hunting, partnerships form somewhat spontaneously between hunters who jointly track an animal. Polar bear meat is not distributed community wide. Instead, the hunters involved receive a share of the polar bear according to ancient customary patterns (see Robbe [1994]). For example, the person who spots the bear gets the skin and one back leg. The hunter whose shot first strikes the bear gets the other back leg. The next hunter, who may have been part of the hunt, but who may not have fired a shot, receives the front leg, and so on. The subsequent shares are adjusted according to the number of participants.

In one particular case, a hunter not only initially spots a polar bear but also fires the first shot and kills it. His two hunting partners assist him in the pursuit, in the butchering (which is done on site) and in transporting the carcass back to the village. Because only three hunters are involved, the main hunter's share is substantial. He subsequently invites a large group of extended family members to a prepared feast. The inviting process follows the custom of sending a young person from house to house to notify people. People usually stagger the invitations in order to avoid the arrival of everyone simultaneously.

In this way the hunter distributes his catch beyond his household's regular network, and in a prepared form. (Only his mother and sisters receive raw meat.) Thus, the distribution of a polar bear takes place at two levels. First, between the hunting partners, and secondly from the hunters' households to their extended families, beyond the regular network, in the form of a prepared feast.

# DISCUSSION

I have described six different transaction categories: 1) 'Sharing in', in the household, where all the resources are pooled and shared. 'Sharing out', between households, and here I have identified three main types: 2) regular reciprocal transaction between households, 3) one-way "sharing", and 4) prepared feasts such as kaffimik and meals. In all these types the transactions involve country foods only (with the exception of tea, coffee and cakes), both in prepared and raw form. The last two forms of "sharing" are less frequent and differ from the interhousehold patterns. They pertain to 5) the irregular sharing of polar bear meat between hunting partners, according to a pattern that follows ancient custom, and 6) to the village wide distribution of whale meat and *mattak* following a cooperative hunt.

In Isertoq the transaction patterns pertain not only to different kinds of foods or resources (e.g., size versus availability) but also to the difference between types of foods: store bought foods are not widely transferred but seal meat and other locally available foods are. There is also a difference between the way the different types of country foods are "shared". In contrast, cash is not widely "shared", although the products bought with money are, especially within the households, and to a very small extent between network-connected households.

There is also a difference between what is "shared", with whom it is "shared" and the structure of the relationship. The "sharing" patterns form nested hierarchies, or set of circles, in which participants are included or excluded according to the amount of meat the household can allocate out. Thus, the size of the catch determines how much of the network is included. The difference between what is "shared" is particularly relevant in terms of intra- vis a vis inter-household and network vis a vis non-network transactions. Cash, along with store bought goods of any sort, is shared within the household only. In general terms, country foods are 'shared out' between households, but there is a difference between the types of country foods shared. Seal meat follows different paths than polar bear-or whale meat for example, but not all parts of the seals enter the "sharing" networks. However, once polar bear- and whale meat has entered a household, if 'shared out' again they may follow the same paths as other country foods. It is the way it actually enters the initial households that differ.

In principle, "sharing" between households is based on kinship, but not everyone in the same kin group is involved with the same sharing network. Thus, a person does not automatically, by virtue of being someone's sister, become a part of that sister's network. Many of the networks overlap, and ultimately they tie the whole village together. The "sharing" networks represent a complex system in which country foods move through the village.

# **Theoretical And Analytical Concepts**

There are three concepts generally associated with the distribution of goods in hunting-gathering societies: sharing, reciprocity and redistribution. Each of these concepts connotes a particular social content. For example, and in simplified terms, sharing implies generosity; reciprocity implies equality; and redistribution implies differentiation. Therefore the concepts, in addition to describing or analyzing a particular transaction, also speak to the social relationships associated with it. The ramifications are that transactions are often pigeonholed and misinterpreted. For this reason it is important to get the actual social relationships on the ground correct (see for example Hunt [n.d.]) before applying the concepts.

Sahlins [1965] described three types of reciprocity; generalized, balanced and negative (I will focus on the first two here). These have become the accepted way of analyzing hunter-gatherer economies. Sahlins' framework represents ideal types for how to think about the movement of goods through a community and is a good starting point for analyzing the social reality of resource allocation. He places 'sharing' under the rubric of 'generalized reciprocity,' which refers to transactions that are "putatively altruistic, transactions on the line of assistance given and, if possible and necessary, assistance returned. The ideal type here is Malinowski's 'pure gift'" [SAHLINS 1965: 147]. Under this rubric he also includes terms such as 'generosity' 'hospitality', and 'help'. In this framework expectations of a return may be implicit or even unseemly. "The material side of the transaction is suppressed by the social" ... "the expectation of reciprocity is infinite" [SAHLINS 1965: 147]. This may apply in some manner to the Isertoq case presented here, but with Sahlins addition that "[a] good pragmatic indication of generalized reciprocity is a sustained one-way flow" [SAHLINS 1965: 147], the use becomes limited.

Price [1975] also considers sharing as a one-way flow of goods, but sees it, not as a form of reciprocity but separate from it, "(Sharing) is seen as the most universal form of human economic behavior, distinct from and more fundamental than reciprocity" [PRICE 1975: 3]. Sahlins, in comparison, includes sharing as one potential element of 'generalized reciprocity' [SAHLINS 1965: 147]. Here the ambiguity of 'sharing' increases because the concept is equated with 'gifts', 'generosity', and 'help'. In contrast, Price considers 'sharing' as encompassing a whole separate set of social relations. However, Price also suggests that "sharing is usually an unequal exchange..." and that it "is characterized by the attitude that each person will do what is appropriate, not by an expectation of equivalent return as in reciprocity" (Price [1975: 6] emphasis in original). For Sahlins [1965] and Price [1975], sharing is considered to be predominantly one-way. This limits the types of transactions that can be included under this rubric. Also, the notion that transactions are one-way raises the question of time frame. It is possible that oneway transactions are part of a reciprocal relationship if a long enough time period is considered. I will return to this below.

Combined with notions of generosity, a one-way or unequal flow of goods, is

the pivotal point in Sahlins framework. The notion of 'sharing' is now limited to very specific transactions. This raises analytical questions about the way the concept is applied (see also Wenzel [1995]). The Isertoq case is a good example. Following Sahlins, there are a number of transactions that fall into his category of 'sharing'. I suggest that the term applies to the *kaffimik* and other instances when people are served prepared food stuffs. It also applies to those transactions of raw foods that are understood by the Isertormeeq as being one-way. These are the transactions that are not included in descriptions of country food networks. Both observations and interviews with participants support this claim of uni-directional flow. They can safely be labeled 'sharing' within Sahlins' and Price's frameworks.

Polar bear feasts can also be characterized as sharing partly because these are very infrequent (the villagers catch between 3–5 bears in a year, hence only a few hunters are able to get a bear). Polar bear meat is highly regarded and virtually impossible to be directly reciprocated. To share polar bear meat is considered to be truly generous. On the other hand, prestige is associated with landing a polar bear so the hunter may receive respect in return for bear meat. This may muddle the clarity of such 'sharing' but only if social status and non-material elements are included. If the polar bear meat is 'shared out' from the household after it has been 'shared in', the notion of prestige is diffused because it is not necessarily the hunter himself who allocates the meat.

In the case of whaling, the distribution of the meat can be seen as a form of redistribution. Only the handful of hunters who participate in the capture then redistribute the meat to all the households. There is a form of hierarchy involved because most people in the village cannot undertake whaling for a number of reasons. Seals are more readily available for anyone to catch, while whale hunting requires permits and a particular status vis a vis the government. It also requires a certain amount of knowledge beyond the regular seal hunting skills. And it requires the proper equipment. A whale hunt is therefore something that sets its participants apart from those who do not or cannot go whaling. A temporary hierarchy is created with the whalers at the top. 'Sharing' the meat and *mattak* with the whole village is a form of redistribution.

# **Generalized Reciprocity?**

In contrast, the two-way transaction networks in Isertoq do not fall under the category of generalized reciprocity. If one assumes that one form of generalized reciprocity, 'sharing', is one-way and a generous act the transaction networks between households described above may erroneously be characterized as sharing. They appear one-way because nothing is given in return at the time of receiving. The time frame, however, between giving and receiving is usually relatively short, it could be a day or it could be a week, and it is not clear whether one transaction is reciprocal to the "sharing" immediately preceding it. But it is clear that meat and other country foods regularly move in both directions.

The empirical material presented does not support the claim that the Isertoq

#### "Sharing", Transfers, Transactions

case is a system of "sharing". First, the foundation for the networks is not generosity, but instead underpinned by dyadic social relations. Second, these transfers are reciprocal, albeit not directly, and third, are expected to transfer meat to other households. The movement of *kalaalimernit* will not cease if one party neglects to return meat, but the frequency is reduced, and the social relations are temporarily altered. There are clearly expectations associated with the transaction networks in Isertoq even though the reciprocal act may be delayed for a time. It is not clear what the time frame is for reciprocity to occur, but the regularity of the transactions suggests that a timely return be anticipated.

It can be concluded that these networks do not meet the criteria for labeling them sharing. "Sharing" therefore, may not be a concept that captures the variety of food resource transfers or transactions taking place in Isertoq. Generalized reciprocity as an overarching framework is not applicable, even though it represents a type of socioeconomic relations that would normally apply to the Isertormeeq.

# **Balanced Reciprocity?**

'Balanced reciprocity' refers to direct exchange without delay. "In precise balance, the reciprocation is the customary equivalent of the thing received and is without delay" [SAHLINS 1965: 147–148]. "Balanced reciprocity' may be more loosely applied to transactions which stipulate returns of commensurate worth or utility within a finite and narrow period" and it is less "personalized than generalized reciprocity" [SAHLINS 1965: 148]. The "pragmatic test of balanced reciprocity becomes an inability to tolerate one-way flows; the relations between people are disrupted by a failure to reciprocate within limited time and equivalence leeways" [SAHLINS 1965: 148]. Furthermore, Sahlins notes that the material flow of generalized reciprocity is "sustained by prevailing social relations; whereas, for the main run of balanced exchange, social relations hinge on the material flow" [SAHLINS 1965: 148].

One key point that distinguishes generalized from balanced reciprocity is the one-way flow of the former and the reciprocal expectations in the latter. Ideally the reciprocation is without delay. In the latter, reciprocity is also what sustains the social relationship. Sahlins stresses the difference in the emphasis on social relations. For generalized reciprocity it is the social relations that are significant and for balanced reciprocity it is the material flow. When applied to the Isertoq case, and particularly the transaction networks, there are elements in the balanced reciprocity framework that fit and some that don't.

The transactions in a network are reciprocal because foodstuffs move in both directions. However, the reciprocity is delayed because usually no return occurs at the moment something is received. The time frame involved is such that reciprocation cannot be measured directly. At this point the Isertoq case diverges from Sahlins' framework. This divergence may be a variation on what is discussed as the customary equivalent of what and when something is expected. Hence, this divergence may be insignificant. But if the framework hinges upon immediate

reciprocation, it is not applicable to the Isertoq case. So, even though sharing in Isertoq may be reciprocal, it does not necessarily correspond to 'balanced reciprocity'.

Such delayed reciprocity may not be the most significant example of how the Isertoq empirical data differ from the theoretical framework. The time frame discrepancy can be adjusted for in the analysis. A greater concern is the distinction between social relations versus material return. In balanced reciprocity, social relations depend on material flow. This is problematic when applied to this case study. I have shown that the transaction networks are formed on the basis of kinship. This means that social relations already exist prior to the formation of the networks. It is likely that the material flow between the network householdmembers strengthen the social relationships, but the empirical material shows that social relations also exist between kin who are not transferring country foods to each other. Thus, material flow is not necessarily a criterion for creating social relations. Contrary to what Sahlins suggests, it is the relationships between the Isertormeeq that form the basis for the networks, and not the material flow. His balanced reciprocity framework, therefore, does not capture the social economy inherent in the reciprocal networks in Isertoq. Again the complexities and nuances of the system are not addressed properly.

One role of theoretical concepts is to provide frameworks for understanding and analyzing empirical data. The various transactions observed as continuously taking place in Isertoq are reflections of the socioeconomic system. The theoretical concepts available to the researcher do not capture this aspect. A re-examination of the received wisdom of Sahlins' frameworks is thus in order.

Two simple inquiries can measure the applicability of generalized and balanced reciprocity, as defined by Sahlins. First, check, and if possible determine, the time frame of the transactions. Second, examine the transactions, not as single events, but maybe as linked, multiple household sets. The criteria presented by Sahlins are not sufficient to determine the nature of the transactions in Isertoq. By treating these transactions as single events and not mapping them out over time, critical information regarding social continuity is lost that can shed light on what is actually taking place. And, because these concepts carry so much analytical weight, the potential for heading in the wrong direction with the analysis is real. Within the current understanding of generalized reciprocity there is a potential for perpetuating the perceptions of the generous hunter-gatherer community where social relations overrule material interests.

# CONCLUSIONS

Two probable explanations for the intricacy of the various transaction patterns in Isertoq are that the system maintains social relationships, and that it ensures dispersement of a critical food resource throughout the village. One result is that all Isertormeeq have access to preferred and nutritionally valuable food when they themselves are unable to hunt. Resource transactions clearly have a functional and/or practical role in the community, but also represent something more. The transfers of country foods validate the very structure of the society and its social organization. The configurations of the networks may also speak to other elements of the social organization, such as interpersonal alliances and political support.

Resource 'sharing' has deep cultural meanings in Isertoq. This may explain why cash and store bought goods are not included to a comparable extent. Both are relatively recent additions to this community, and do not have the social and cultural salience that seal meat, for example, has. The transaction networks have deep roots in the customary socioeconomic system, back to a time when it was imperative that people shared resources. These networks reflect a cultural aspect that has been retained through changes in the material and economic structure.

In contemporary Isertoq people participate in a mixed economic system in which cash and subsistence are of equal importance. As I have shown, only country foods, or those resources directly related to local production are transacted. The transaction networks are a part of this mixed economy structure, and even though cash is deeply involved in all the activities it does not carry the same cultural meaning as does *kalaalimernit*. Country foods are significant for cultural, social, economic and dietary reasons; to eat seal meat is to be an Isertormeeq; kinship relations are maintained and strengthened through transfers of *kalaalimernit*, and transfers of country foods reflect the mixed socioeconomic system in which the Isertormeeq participate. Transactions of country foods are, therefore, not simply a remnant of a pre-historic past, but have been incorporated into the contemporary system and are salient markers of the current Isertormeeq social structure and culture.

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# Appendix 1

Names of the most commonly shared species in Isertoq.

East Greenlandic	Latin
Miigattak	[Phoca hispida]
Anneq	[Erginatus barbatus]
	East Greenlandic Miigattak Anneq

HOODED SEAL	Niiniarteq	[Cystophora cristata]
HARP SEAL	Nalanginnaq	[Phoca groenlandica]
FISH	0 1	
COD	Aalisarngaq	[Gadus moorhua]
CAPELINE	Ammatsak	[Mallotus villosus]
ATLANTIC SALMON	Kapisilik	[Salmo salar]
ARCTIC CHAR	Kaporniarngaq	[Salvelinus alpinus]
GREENLAND HALIBUT	Qalarngalik	[Reinhardtius
		hippoglossoides]
CATFISH	Qeerngaq	[Anarhichas minor]
SCULPIN	Qivaareq	[Myoxocephalus scorpius]
POLAR COD	Uuvaq	[Boreogadus saida]
SHARK	Niialingaq	[Somniosus microcephalus]
FLORA		
ROSEROOT	Torteernaq	[Rhodiola rosea]
CROW BERRIES	Pugungaq	[Empetrum nigrum]
ANGELICA	Kuanneq	[Angelica archangelica]
BIRDS		
PTARMIGAN	Nagalarngaq	[Lagopus mutus]
EIDER DUCK	Maleersartaq	[Somateria mollissima]
GOOSE	Nerteq	[Anser brachyrhyncus]
SHELL-FISH		
CLAMS	Paaq	[Mya truncata]
MUSSELS	Kiliilaq	[Mytilus edulis]
WHALES		
MINKE WHALE	Tigangutti	[Balaenoptera acutorostrata]
LAND MAMMALS		
POLAR BEAR	Naneq	[Ursus maritimus]

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