

Seeking the Wounds of the Gift: Recipient Agency in Catholic Charity and Kiganda Patronage

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Critiques of the “compassion industry” have become increasingly common in recent years. Robert Lupton’s bestseller *Toxic Charity* encapsulates many of these arguments in its critiques of the self-serving nature of charitable giving and the forms of dependency, helplessness, and humiliation that he sees emerging from the practice of religiously based charity in the United States (Lupton 2011). Lupton, himself a veteran employee of faith-based NGOs, argues that nonprofits should move away from charity and toward programs that will encourage former recipients of charity to become more self-sufficient by avoiding one-way giving and focusing instead on training, coaching, lending, and investing.

Anthropologists and other social theorists will likely recognize these proposals as neatly aligning neoliberal forms of governmentality which seek to produce responsible self-governing subjects (Muehlebach 2012; Rose 1999; Li 2007; Zigon 2011). What we might be less quick to note is the ways that anthropological writings on the role of

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power in gift exchanges serve to shore up the position that there is a poison hidden within charitable gifts. We often write, and teach, that to receive a gift that cannot be reciprocated is to make oneself vulnerable a subtle act of violence. Such positions are based on readings of Marcel Mauss's 1923 essay *The Gift* which see Mauss as arguing for an agonistic theory of exchange in which social actors are primarily interested in securing power and prestige through their generosity, thus inflicting humiliation and exerting power over recipients who find themselves unable to make a return (Mauss 1990, 65). Drawing on such a reading Mary Douglas and Pierre Bourdieu have framed their readings of *The Gift* in relation to the problems they believed were caused by charity in their own societies (Douglas 1990; Bourdieu 1977). Yet, such analyses of *The Gift* focus on the self-interested nature of calculated reciprocal gift exchanges, ignoring Mauss's fundamental insight that the division between self-interest and altruism is a product of history (Parry 1986), not a timeless truth.

This chapter follows Jonathan Parry in contributing to an emerging body of anthropological work on religiously motivated charity and philanthropy (Bornstein 2009; Elisha 2008; Parry 1986; O'Neill 2013; Zigon 2011; Halvorson this volume; Rahman this volume), which has transformed the question of charity and its wounds from a universal "moral conclusion" into a matter for situated empirical inquiry. By focusing the role particular sociohistorical conjunctures play in shaping the ways in which givers and receivers understand acts of charitable giving, I explore the role of recipient agency in Catholic charitable practices in Uganda. By examining how prospective beneficiaries sought to attach themselves to a community of East African Catholic nuns in efforts to secure future support for themselves and their children, I illuminate important instances of beneficiary agency which mirror the forms of client agency central to the ethics of patronage in Uganda. These instances of asking, giving, and receiving in both charitable and patronage relationships complicate arguments about charity and humanitarianism which see the charitable gift as a necessarily dangerous imposition which cannot avoid harming the standing of the person who receives it. In making this argument, I join Deborah Durham (1995) and Frederick Klaitz (2011) in their focus the forms of agency involved in various forms of asking and attachment seeking and what these moments of agency might tell us about the forms of self-making that are excluded from forms of development that attempt to exclude gifts and dependency.

IDLE BEGGARS

Arguments concerning the necessary violence of charity are but the latest version of four centuries of argument concerning the dangers of charity and dependency, which have only become amplified under contemporary neoliberal regimes. Since the introduction of the Elizabethan Poor Law in 1601, there have been periodic movements that have sought to replace religious charity with more secular forms of poor relief. Many of these measures have been based on the idea that the rich ought to engage with the poor in a manner that will discourage idleness while providing assistance to morally upright people who were unable to care for themselves and their families. In the eighteenth century, French proponents of the Enlightenment advocated the elimination of Catholic charity in favor of state-driven programs oriented toward *bienfaisance*, a form of rational, methodical, state-driven poor relief that aimed to eliminate both unjustified idleness and poverty. The failures of the Revolutionary Government led to a hasty reinstatement of prior forms of charity (Jones 1982, 317), but the Enlightenment logics of *bienfaisance* continued to play a major role as states gradually took biopolitical control of their populations.

The mutual aid societies central to social life in nineteenth-century Britain and France provide another example of the ways in which people increasingly sought to protect the well-being of working-class people against the possibility of becoming dependent. These societies that provided a form of social insurance to their healthy, working, dues paying, members in the event of illness, accident, or death explicitly excluded the sick, the unemployed, and the elderly from their ranks (Mitchell 1991), as the purpose of such societies had little to do with assisting the presently vulnerable, but rather focused their attention on the “potential poor” (Jones 1982).

At the start of the nineteenth century, the figure of the idle unruly beggar appeared again in debates in the United States. Local governments charged with the task of ministering to an increasingly large number of people receiving outdoor relief complained that the immigration of large numbers of Europe’s poor, the excessive use of alcohol, and poor-relief itself had led to an overwhelming increase in the numbers of people requesting outdoor relief. As historian Michael Katz writes, many Americans of that time posited that

[i]ndiscriminate charity and outdoor relief eroded more than the will to work. They also destroyed character. When the poor started to think of relief

“as a right,” they began to count on it “as an income.” All “stimulus to industry and economy” was “annihilated, or weakened” while “temptations to extravagance and dissipation . . . increased.” As a consequence, “The just pride of independence, so honorable to a man, in every condition” was “corrupted by the certainty of public provision” (Katz 1986, 18).

In contrast to French *bienfaisance*, which sought to end poverty for good, those in opposition to outdoor relief had more limited aims. They sought only “to keep the genuinely needy from starving” while avoiding “breeding a class of paupers who chose to live off public and private bounty rather than to work” (Katz 1986, 18). Efforts to discriminate between the worthy poor and their unworthy brethren resulted in the creation of the poorhouses which were purposely designed to discourage their use.

Fears of the unworthy dependent continued into the twentieth century, taking the form of the “welfare queen” drawn from Ronald Regan’s 1976 campaign speeches and serving as the root of neoliberal welfare-to-work programs such as the United States’ 1996 *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act* that sought to transform dependent welfare recipients into independent employees.

In international development discourse, this steady liberal drum beat of individualism and independence finds an unexpected resonance with arguments which speak to the damage done by trade policies and aid programs. Over the past fifty years, scholars and practitioners have argued that poverty results from processes, which cast certain countries in dependent relationships with the metropole (Frank 1967), that humanitarian assistance furthers this dependency by devastating local markets (Schultz 1960), and that development aid undermines governments’ accountability to their citizens (Moyo 2009). Such concerns with dependency have given form to the ideas and practices of sustainable development, which have shifted aid away from macrolevel project-based planning and direct forms of material charity toward the propagation of participatory self-supporting microinstitutions. This understanding of sustainability, which is distinct from the environmental use of the term, rose to prominence during the last decade of the twentieth century. As development experts sought to fill the gaps left by the dismantling of state services under structural adjustment and World Bank president James Wolfenson pushed for broad participation, the creation of community-based microinstitutions became an increasingly important element in the fight against global poverty (Mallaby 2004).

Under this logic of sustainability, the primary goal of many NGOs is to create community institutions that can assume “ownership” of a project after an organization and its resources leave the community. This pre-planned exit strategy, and its opposition to any action that might create dependency on external institutions, has led to programming decisions which favor capacity building and nonmaterial interventions. Where material resources are provided, they are generally given in the form of one-time capital-intensive building projects or in the form of high-interest microcredit loans.

Elsewhere, I have demonstrated that communities in Uganda have experienced these attempts to avoid the poison of the gift and the forms of long-term interdependence which may accompany some forms of charitable giving not as acts of empowerment but as evidence of corruption and a lack of care. By contrast, many rural Ugandans see more traditional forms of redistributive charity as deeply intertwined with their own ethics of care and exchange (Scherz 2014).

THE CHILDREN WHO HAVE BEEN LEFT BEHIND

This preoccupation with avoiding dependency is especially striking when one finds it in organizations working with orphans, as this is one of the few populations often thought to be appropriately dependent. Many organizations working with orphans and vulnerable children in Uganda have thoughtfully sought to work with existing relatives, as in much of sub-Saharan Africa the extended family is the primary body through which orphan care is negotiated and provided (Dahl 2009; Madhavan 2004; Ntozi 1997; Ntozi et al. 1999). This care is an extension of other forms of voluntary and crisis fosterage (Aspaas 1999; Goody 1982; Southwold 1965). Voluntary fosterage has long been used to serve many purposes including the use of children in domestic and agricultural labor and as temporary gifts to maintain and reinforce relationships (Southwold 1965; Bledsoe 1989; Bledsoe 1990; Goody 1982), which may in some cases obligate voluntary foster parents to foster these same children in a crisis (Goody 1982). Voluntary fosterage can also be used to give children access to education, both in terms of formal schooling and in terms of the forms of personal discipline and reliance thought to be created through hardship (Bledsoe 1990).

Yet, given the numbers of orphans in need of care, by 2005, 14% of children in Uganda had lost one or both of their parents (UNICEF

2006), and the demands of schooling and urbanization, many families have been pressed to their limit and relatives have become increasingly selective about who they will take in and what they will do for them. In Buganda, orphan care has traditionally been the responsibility of the child's paternal grandparents as the child properly belonged to them and their clan, given Buganda's patrilineal tradition. If the paternal grandparents were not available, the maternal grandparents might be called upon to care for the child, or this responsibility might be shared between the two sets of grandparents. Yet, the present state of kin fosterage in Buganda, and throughout much of Uganda, in which these old rules of obligation are broken as often as they are followed, reveals the inadequacy of the language of obligation which shape so much of the classic writing on kinship (Rivers 1968; Lévi-Strauss 1969; Evans-Pritchard 1940), demanding instead a set of idioms capable of describing how people actively participate in the negotiation and practice of kin relations (Strathern 1988; Carsten 2004; Trawick 1990; Povinelli 2006; Borneman 1997; Weston 1997). This understanding of kinship moves away from legalistic obligation and opens up new possibilities for analyzing and imagining the ways in which children and other dependents might be cared for. We are called to attend to the important role of friendship, and to the multiplicity of caring relationships one might be involved in. Much of the existing writing on voluntary and crisis fosterage of orphans and other children in Uganda and elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa follows this trend, focusing on the microdynamics of reciprocity in a way which brings attention to the ways in which exchange creates relationships (Whyte and Whyte 2004). The importance of exchange and selectively realized bonds has only become more important as the numbers of orphans and childcare costs have increased.

MERCY HOUSE

Some children who have been unable to find support elsewhere arrive at institutions like Mercy House,¹ a Catholic charity home for more than 150 orphans, children and young adults with disabilities, and the elderly, run by a Franciscan order of East African nuns. Given the demands for sustainability and critiques of dependency and institutional care, such organizations are few and far between, but a few remain in operation despite limited funds.

Mother Mary Patrick, an Irish Franciscan nun, established Mercy House in 1923 as a place where people who had been discharged from the Catholic missionary hospital but who were still in need of nursing could live. In 1928, Mother Mary Patrick established a new order for African nuns and Mercy House was moved from its original site near the hospital to its present location near the novitiate in Namayumba where young women seeking to join the order receive their most intensive training as part of a nine-year formation process. The relocation of Mercy House was initiated so that the novices and the newly professed sisters could practice the form of charity that is central to their beliefs, commitments, and mission of their order. Charity, in this case, is thus not only about serving the poor but is also an end in itself. Here charity is conceptualized of as a way to enact one's love and devotion to God and neighbor and is also part of a highly intentional process of ethical formation through which the sisters hope to form themselves and each other as Christian subjects.

PATRONAGE AND CLIENT AGENCY

A deep understanding of divine providence as a guiding force informed their acceptance of the many children and adults who sought their care, some of them having literally been left at the gate without any prior association. Yet, in other cases, the sisters were caring for children in a way that more closely resembled indigenous patron-client relationships. In Buganda, ethics of hierarchical interdependence occupy an important place in local understandings of moral personhood. These ethics of interdependence mean that people with resources stand to gain from their relationships with those who have less; that they have a moral obligation to take on clients; and that people with limited resources must actively try to attach themselves to others as dependents. Within this system, one increases one's standing and sense of being a full person by attaching oneself to others and by acquiring clients, not by becoming "independent." To be dependent on another is not a sign of destitution; as Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz write, "The truly destitute are those without patrons" (Chabal and Daloz 1999, 42).

The multiplicity of patrons actively competing for clients, and the clients' freedom to move from one patron to another should the first fail to meet their needs, builds a critical flexibility into these relations. Thus, as James Ferguson notes, "The freedom that existed in such a social world

(and it was not inconsiderable) came not from independence, but from a plurality of opportunities for dependence” (Ferguson 2013, 226). By acquiring a wide range of patrons, clients are assured of “having people” who can assist them in a variety of ways (Smith 2004), and they also gain a measure of insurance against the fickle fortunes, and hearts, of their patrons.

Historian Holly Hanson has argued that since early in the second millennium, Baganda chiefs, including territorial chiefs (*bakungu*) and officers (*batongole*) appointed by the king of Buganda, clan leaders (*bataka*), and hereditary princes (*balangira*), sought to increase their group of dependent followers (*bakopi*) as a way of acquiring prestige and signaling the legitimacy of their authority (Hanson 2003). Having dependents provided chiefs with labor required for wars of expansion and for the maintenance of their compounds and roads and they also benefited from tribute (*busulu*) paid in kind in the form of bark cloth and home-brewed banana beer. In turn, followers stood to gain in the form of war spoils, feasts, and land upon which their wives could engage in subsistence agriculture (Fallers 1964; Hanson 2003).

While there is no single word that encompasses the concept of patronage in Luganda, the verbs that animate relationships between chiefs and their followers, *okusenga*, to join a chief, and *okusenguka*, to leave a chief, are significant in that they indicate actions taken by followers. This linguistic emphasis on client agency also highlights the dynamic tension between dependence and social mobility in Kiganda patron–client relationships. Many Baganda men received large tracts of land from the king in recognition of their success in battle, thus giving them the capacity to acquire dependents of their own. Peasant boys sent by their father’s chiefs to serve as pages in the king’s court also had the opportunity to distinguish themselves through service, and many of the chiefs began their political careers in this way.

Despite the continuing importance of patronage, this elaborate network of heterarchical ties has been subjected to events that have profoundly destabilized it since the eighteenth century. As the kingdom expanded in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the king appointed an increasing number of officers, many of whom were given control over slaves. The rise in slavery gradually made patrons less dependent on their clients for labor and other services, and physical force came to replace reciprocal obligation as the primary means of control (Hanson 2003). In addition, the rapid expansion of the kingdom and the slave trade created

opportunities for chiefs to acquire slaves through other means, eventually decreasing the chiefs' dependence on the kabaka, resulting in a crisis of royal legitimacy (Hanson 2003).

While many Baganda saw the establishment of the British protectorate as the successful recruitment of a powerful patron capable of assisting them in their ongoing conflicts with neighboring kingdoms, the arrival of colonialism also brought with it another series of changes that gradually made clients less necessary, patrons more demanding, and social advancement more difficult. These interventions included the allotment of private land titles to nearly four thousand chiefs, cash cropping, the emergence of a commodity-based elite culture, the introduction of formal schooling, the increasing stability of positions of political power, colonial demands on labor and resources made through indigenous authorities, and limits placed on people's ability to move.

Yet, despite these changes, creating asymmetric bonds of mutual obligation remains an important strategy for achieving social mobility in contemporary Uganda and in many cases finding school fees, jobs, contracts, and positions on NGO participant rosters depended on an individual's ability to secure some form of patronage.

In line with this, in many cases, the sisters were caring for children whose parents had purposely built labor-based relationships with them before they became unable to care for their children themselves. It is in this way that children like Paul Kasirye whose father had worked as the sisters' driver, and Nalungu Margaret whose mother had been one of the cooks, had come under the care of the sisters. Both of their parents had worked for the sisters and when they passed away, the sisters felt obliged to care for the children they left behind.

In other cases, future obligations were established through longer more tenuous exchanges of gifts and requests. One afternoon, Sr. Jane described the way in which one child's mother established such a relationship with the sisters: "When I was a novice in the formation house [Tamusanga's] mother used to come with her children. She had rashes all over, they had not yet started with those ARVs, and she would come to beg food every lunch. . . . She would bring us leaves [for steaming bananas]. [When] she died . . . Tamusanga and [his] sister were brought to this home." In coming to the novitiate each day Tamusanga's mother was not only looking for food. Rather, through her gifts and daily requests, she was working to establish a bond with the sisters that obliged them to care for her and her family.

Holly Hanson has described how British colonists and missionaries failed to understand that similar requests were themselves signs of love, that gifts did not always result in counter gifts but might instead obligate the giver to future gifts. In one passage Hanson describes how a young Muganda man was disappointed by the Protestant missionary C. W. Hattersley's refusal to give him money to pay bridewealth after he had worked in the man's household for nine years. According to Hanson, the young man protested:

“When I came to join your establishment I gave myself entirely to you. Since that time you are my father; I have no other. Were I to apply to my father, he would only refer me to you. . . . [Y]ou altogether fail to understand the customs of the Baganda. Do you not know that the more requests we make the more we show our love for you? Were it not that I greatly love you, I would never ask for a single thing” (quoted in Hanson 2003, 7).

From the perspective of Maussian reciprocal obligation, the young man's first claim is fairly easy to comprehend. In exchange for the gift of service, Hattersley ought to have recognized the extracontractual relationship that had been formed and reciprocated by helping the young man pay bride-wealth. The second claim, that “the more requests we make the more we show our love for you,” is more difficult to understand but is essential for comprehending how Tamusanga's mother arranged long-term care for her son. In this second claim we hear the ways making and fulfilling requests create an obligation for the giver to give again. These gifts may be answered or prompted by reciprocal gifts, but normally it is the prior giving, not the prior receiving, that creates a precedent and an obligation for future gifts (Graeber 2011, 110). Further, in contrast to Marcel Mauss's framework ([1925] 1990), which focuses on the agency of the giver and the potential shame of being a recipient, within this ethically viable framework asking and receiving constitute an agentive act that asserts one's love for the prospective giver and positions both giver and receiver as equally agentive (Durham 1995). As Fred Klaitis has noted, through both asking and praying one can establish a particular form of intersubjectivity by communicating aspects of one's personhood to others (Klaitis 2010, 2011, this volume).

In addition to the role children's parents played in seeking support and sponsorship, some of Mercy House's residents had themselves been actively involved seeking the sisters' patronage in an effort to pursue

their own plans. Sister Caroline first met Namika Rebecca, a young woman with Spina Bifida, near the Martyr's Shrine just outside Kampala on Martyrs' Day some years earlier. Namika, now in university, was then in primary five. During an interview in June 2010 Namika told me how she had met the sisters:

The sisters were so beautiful, dressed all in white and smiling. I was immediately drawn to them. They asked me where I lived and I pointed to a house nearby. They asked me if I had my Dad; I said that he had died. They asked me if I had my Mom, and I said yes. [They saw the condition I was in crawling on the ground and] said that they wanted to take me to Mercy House to go to school. I was very excited about this idea and went home and told my mother. My mother refused and kept me at home. When I was nearing the end of [primary seven] I went to my mother and asked her what her plans were for me. She said she was planning to put me in tailoring. I said that I didn't want to do tailoring, that I wanted to [do] academics and that I was leaving to go to the sisters so that they would send me to school. I traveled here and started school across the way at Saint Anthony's.

Namika saw the presence of Mercy House and the sisters' offer of an education as allowing her to make own choices about her life plans and to pursue her academic goals. While the sisters did hold the children in their care to strict moral standards, especially in regards to sexuality, Namika's primary experience of their charity was not one of shame and the burden of an unrepayable debt but rather focused on the success of having effectively recruited a powerful and generous patron.

WHEN GOD MAKES YOU HIS MESSENGER

The parallel logics of Catholic charity and indigenous forms of patronage are doubled in the ways Catholic charitable givers understand their relationship with God. Kizito Nakatana was a devout charismatic Catholic who owned a successful restaurant in one of the villages where I lived and who regularly gave some of the money he had made through his entrepreneurial successes to the frail elderly in nearby villages. He articulated this double linkage between charity and patronage to me as follows: "When I started reading the scriptures, [I realized] every time God makes you his messenger ... you are greatly protected. [Like] the way

you see [President] Museveni with his ministers . . . If you provide for an elderly person who has no one to help, God thanks you for helping this person.”

Kizito’s reflections on his charitable giving draw on the figures of master and servant, figures that are essential to the precolonial ethics of patronage. Kizito believes that the people whom God chooses as his messengers are protected, in much the same way that President Museveni protects his ministers, an image which he here associates not with corruption, but with the proper state of relations between patrons and clients. Speaking of his own experience, and pointing to a painting of the Virgin Mary hung on the wall of his restaurant, Kizito attributed the successes that had allowed him to save enough to purchase a blender and to add a shaded veranda to the front of his restaurant to her patronage. While most people in Uganda occupy a position in a hierarchy that makes them patrons to some and clients to others, the charitable exchange complicates this, as through the charitable gift one is simultaneously an earthly patron and a heavenly client.

Hopes for God’s patronage and a desire to respond to the gifts they had received from others also inflected the actions of those typically written off as unable to repay the debt of charitable gifts. Owing to the shortage of sisters and paid staff, the children and other residents of Mercy House largely looked after themselves and each other. During a return visit to Mercy House in 2010, I slept in a guest room attached to the boys’ dormitory. Early each morning I was awakened by the sounds of the boys mopping the floors of their dorm and directing one another, as they got ready for the day. Some boys with mobility impairments had trouble in carrying water, so other boys helped them, and they in turn helped others with their washing and made sure that the smaller boys were ready in time. Fred Lukomwa, a young man who still uses hand crutches after having been treated for a bone infection and who had been elected as the head boy of the dorm, told me:

I give [other children] help like, tell[ing] them to bathe, washing [their] clothes, taking care [to see] whether they have got[ten] food . . . In the hospital [a lot of] people [gave] me care. Because my brother was young, he could not manage to take care of me. But different people helped me. And, in addition to that, doctors who worked on me were from different countries. Bas[ed] on that, I see that really I have to help as a reward to those who helped me. I will never be able to help those people and so I help

[the boys] instead. [I don't expect anything from them] [Only] from God, you never know the blessings. Perhaps I may die [tomorrow] but according to what I do, maybe God [extends] my days for being a good person.

Fred did not expect to benefit directly from those he was helping, nor did he feel obliged to directly repay those who had helped him in the past. Rather, he helped the other children in the dorm to reward those who had helped him when he was in the hospital and to secure future blessings from God. These ways of conceptualizing possible opportunities for reciprocity and the expected rewards of giving challenge more simplistic understandings of charitable gift debt and also reveal the ways that people experience themselves as both givers and receivers of charity.

CHARITY'S WOUNDS?

The idea that charitable gifts are actually exchanges with God and the prospect that while recipients may be unable to repay one giver they might go on to give to someone else are among several points that raise questions about Pierre Bourdieu's extension of earlier writings on the gift and his arguments on the symbolic violence of charity. For Bourdieu, charity was the primary example of the symbolic violence he spent his career writing about. For him gifts nothing more than the "endless reconversion of economic capital into social capital." Since "wealth . . . can exert power, and exert it durably, only in the form of symbolic capital," gifts become one of the primary ways the wealthy retain their dominance. Charitable gifts thus function as "ideological machines [which perpetuate the] unequal balance of power." Bourdieu argues that this is all made possible by a collective misrecognition in which both giver and receiver see gifts as "exaltation of gratuitous, unrequited generosity" (Bourdieu 1977, 192). Bourdieu claimed this misrecognition is facilitated by the obligatory time lapse between gift and counter gift (1977, 192–97).

Yet, when we suspend our reliance on misrecognition and look more closely at the experiences of givers and receivers of charity in context, we find that Bourdieu's argument concerning the necessary violence of charity is questionable. By opening ourselves to the moral contingency of the gift, we can attend to the specificities of particular gifts, rather than assuming universal motivations and outcomes. While not denying that giving to charity may have increased the social capital of Mercy House's donors, we must also

attend to the ways the ethics of inequality work in Buganda. Bourdieu's problematization of inequality is in many ways foreign to Uganda, for in Uganda it is not dependency and inequality which are themselves considered problematic, but rather, it is what one does from one's position within a given hierarchy that is the focus of most moral anxiety. In addition, while Bourdieu's argument concerning the ways in which misrecognition allows for the perpetuation power does important work in many cases, this sort of argument allows only the anthropologist the privilege of seeing the truth behind the mask. This view minimizes the experiences of the recipients in Uganda, who may find gifts made through logics of patronage or charity to be an effective means of climbing the social and economic hierarchies. Bourdieu's characterization of charity also reduces God's role as the recipient and presumed reciprocator of Catholic charity to a superimposed *illusio* that hides the self-interested nature of charitable gifts. Yet when we resist a hermeneutics of suspicion, Kizito's claim that he gives to the elderly in his village as a way to give to God, both as a gesture of gratitude for the unrepayable gift of salvation and as a way of soliciting God's protection—a claim echoed by Fred Lukowma, the sisters, and their donors—we arrive at a set questions about the effects of this belief. For Kizito, God is his primary exchange partner, so his return gifts from others, even intangible ones like loyalty, gratitude, or respect, are at most secondary to this spiritual motivation. If we follow the anthropologist Jonathan Parry in his critique of interpretations of Mauss that overemphasize the importance of earthly reciprocity (Parry 1986) and open the question of spiritual modes of exchange, we find that the forms and effects of “gift debt” created through charity are radically underdetermined.

In his attempts to separate “self-interested gifts” from “true gifts” Bourdieu also ignores Mauss's primary point that before the creation of the market there was no distinction between interest and disinterest. The separation between self-interest and altruism found in some interpretations of Mauss, which focus on the strategic actions of self-interested actors, blinds modern readers to the inseparability of these categories both in Kiganda ethics of patronage, in which the patron has a moral obligation to take on additional clients if he is able and personally benefits from doing so, and in Catholic ethics of charity, in which the giver has a moral obligation to give to God by giving to the poor and may expect divinely granted benefits from doing so.

Finally, while Bourdieu's claim that charitable gifts fail to overturn structures of inequality seems consistent with my data, certain forms of

charity and patronage do seem to result in significant socio-economic mobility. In Uganda where only 4.5% of adults have completed secondary school (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2002), the charitable scholarships like the one the sisters provided for Namika constitute a critical point of access to higher education. In addition, a national study exploring factors that contributed to social mobility similarly found that having strong religious, personal, or familial networks was among the most important predictors of social mobility in Uganda. While I would not argue for a return to charity as a universal model for interrelationship, I hope that through this examination of recipient agency and this exploration of the interactions between charity and indigenous ethics of interdependence we might unsettle some of the assumptions of charity's critics and what are often assumed to be foregone conclusions about the ethics and effects of dependency in the postcolonial world.

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NOTE

1. Mercy House and all of the names given to the people and places associated with it are pseudonyms. I conducted fieldwork at Mercy House from November 2007 through April 2008 and in May 2010 as part of a larger study on orphans support NGOs in Uganda (Scherz 2014). During this period, I traveled to Mercy House on a regular basis generally staying for a week at a time in the sisters' guesthouse or in a room attached to the boys dormitory. At Mercy House, I spent my days observing activities and talking with the sisters, the residents, and the steady stream of volunteers who came to donate their time through an array of self-defined projects. I have stayed in regular contact with the sisters and residents of the home since that time and have also conducted interviews with many of Mercy House's donors.

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