Introduction: Why scale matters

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The issue of scale has been somewhat dormant for a long time in anthropology and archaeology if not in the social sciences and in humanities research more generally. In terms of book publications that tackle scale head-on, the early volume by Fredrik Barth et al. (1978) stands out. It was published in the 1970s at that point in time when globalization received a boost after the Second World War and after many colonies had entered the international scene as independent states. At that stage it had become increasingly difficult in anthropology and its neighbouring disciplines to study people and places as if they had been isolated or as if they had been units that could analytically be demarcated in an unproblematic manner. The immediate result of that awareness, however, was a period of more or less 'peaceful coexistence' between research projects that continued a focus on small-scale case studies (using ethnography) and those who took on the national and international level (using survey and sampling techniques). Only much more recently have anthropologists advocated that the emerging multi-sited ethnography should be complemented also by a multi-scalar ethnography (see Xiang 2013).

In human geography, by contrast, considerable attention has been given to problems of scale in the last few decades. Here, the extensive literature on the topic was, again, triggered by processes of globalization. Globalization is not simply enlarging the scope of social transformations but it provides states and international corporations with the power to implement numerous shifts of scale. For instance, economic differentiation allows development and management to be scaled up in one country or region, where taxation is low, while scaling up manufacture elsewhere, where wage labour is cheap. Scale shifted from being seen as a 'given' dimension to being investigating as something that is part and parcel of political and economic strategies. This led to a situation (at least in human geography) where the social constructedness or 'production' of scale has since become "an established truism" in

the discipline (Brenner 2001: 599, see also Marston 2000). Scale is now something that needed explanation rather than providing an explanation for social processes. The naive assumption that scales (manifest in local, regional, national, global 'levels') are unproblematic and nicely nested systems "of territorial containers defined by absolute geographic size" has been discredited (Brenner 2001: 606). The corresponding "'Russian dolls' model of scales" (ibid.) has as a consequence been rigorously undermined even though it continues to live on outside specialized academia. Scale now popped up everywhere and in kaleidoscopic fashion. So much so that it is debated whether notions of 'scale' (in particular 'the politics of scale') have not become hopelessly overstretched as they were extended to cover many other aspects of spatiality that had previously been discussed using other terminologies (Brenner 2001: 596, see Marston 2000 and Marston and Smith 2001).

The main lesson that anthropology and archaeology can learn from these debates in geography is that scale is currently being used in terms of at least three aspects, namely size, level and relation (see Howitt 1998). 'Size' is probably the most common analogue to scale, as illustrated by the classificatory distinction between 'large-scale' and 'small-scale' *societies* (or similar social entities 'out there') as also discussed in contributions to this volume. 'Larger' here does not necessarily refer to a single type of 'size' but could be conceived of in terms of demography, spatiality, institutional complexity or a combination of these.

The second aspect, that of 'level', is also referred to repeatedly in the chapters of this book when contributors discuss whether and how units are 'nested' at multiple levels, e.g. whether hunter-gatherer residential groups can be seen as being recruited along the hierarchically 'nested' levels of camps, bands, 'tribes' or societies. The point here is that we are always dealing with levels as multiple scales, also when dealing with groups of small size, so that any small number of hunter-gatherers staying together can be conceived of as part of a residential group and – at the same time – of larger territorial groups which in turn can be part of larger networks of trade or cultural exchange. 'Levels' can be constructed on the basis of a variety of parameters. Accordingly, 'small-scale', 'large-scale' or 'cross-scale' *studies* can, in this understanding, be conducted in parallel or as complements to one another.

'Relation', the third aspect of scale, is now increasingly taking centre stage, having been undertheorized for a long time (Howitt 1998: 53). Simply put, it recognizes that every unit can be placed in relation to a host of other units or more generally to a number of *situations* (see Widlok 2016). For instance, out-

side anthropology, cultural features are commonly assessed in relation to 'nations' or 'nation states' while this is rather uncommon in our discipline which is critical of 'methodological nationalism' and which often also has reservations against 'methodological individualism'. Although the measures for 'size' and 'level' are also not given but are constructed and standardized in research, the contingency of scale depending on whoever is doing the scaling is most clearly visible when it comes to the 'relation' aspect of scale. In geography debates underline that the meaning of scalar terms (global, national, regional and urban) "will differ qualitatively depending on the historically and contextually specific scalar partitionings of the sociospatial process in question" (Brenner 2001: 606). Within any particular historical context, scale-making as an embodied practice will inevitably vary since the social agents who take part in these processes are "themselves shaped by gender, race, class and geography" (Marston and Smith 2001: 617).

In contrast to human geography, anthropology and archaeology have been eclectic in their theoretical orientations and interpretations concerning scale. Many archaeologists share the 'materialist' bias that we also find in the human geography debates (following the work of Henri Lefebvre), while being less concerned about the subtleties of concepts surrounding geographical scope. Many socio-cultural anthropologists have limited themselves to an 'idealist' reading of scale, consciously chosing for "a semiotic approach" (Carr and Lempert 2016: 8), i.e. scaling that can be researched cross-culturally and cross-linguistically as a "scaling-as-sign activity" (2016: 10). Material affordances are not ignored but ultimately subsumed under 'meaning' following the conviction that "anything can be made big, brought near or perched atop a hierarchy" (ibid.). Carr and Lempert conclude that it is "not only that many aspects of social life can be and are scaled (space, time, politics, publics and interactions of all types); it is also that people employ different *senses of scale* when they engage in scalar practice" (Carr and Lempert 2016: 12). Arguably this raises an "anything goes" expectation with regard to scale and scaling. If the creative imaginary power of humans to think across scales in so many diverse ways is highlighted and if the main purpose was to document the scalar practices of others, why should scale constitute a problem for research beyond the documentation of semiotic complexity?

By and large anthropologists and archaeologists have sought to 'have the cake and eat it', i.e. continue using methods of small scale and individual sites while at the same time maintaining a claim on being able to develop theories of large scale. Archaeologists combined in-depth digging at single sites with

modelling across sites and regions. Anthropologists insisted that they did not study villages but *in* villages, therefore they were dealing with "small places, large issues" (Eriksen 1995). How to get from small places to big issues, or from individual sites to general models for that matter, remained undertheorized and systematically underrated as a problem. Issues of sampling and statistical generalization were largely relegated to other disciplines, e.g. sociology, and questions of universals and their global spread remained a limited specialization within anthropology (see Antweiler 2007).

For the larger part anthropology was content to zoom in on the small scale when talking about the large scale: Single villages even in large societies such as Japan (Norbeck 1965), England (Ahmed and Mynors 1994) or Germany (Norman 1997) were assumed to be able to stand not only for the region or nation at large but also for a larger problematic such as industrialization or modernization. This way single cases came to stand for larger types. For example, 'the Nuer' came to stand for segmentary societies, 'the Hadza' came to stand for hunter-gatherers in marginal environments, 'the Yanomamö' came to stand for violent societies and so forth. The problematics have changed but the underlying strategies remained very similar. Often this involved not only a spatial upscaling or an upscaling from case to type but also a temporal scaling as cases of hunter-gatherers came to represent 'the stone age', just as cases of villages in industrial societies came to represent the rising era of globalization, the post-war period of industrialization, the transitions enforced by climate change in the Anthropocene and so forth. The underlying processes of scaling took place either invisibly or it was insufficiently reflected upon as an analytical problem but it nevertheless had considerable effects. A small group of !Kung could come to stand for human reciprocity or human affluence 'writ large' (see Wiessner 1982) and conversely "*Homo politicus*" could be researched 'writ small' by studying a group of Swat Pathans (see Barth 1959).

This state of affairs has only fairly recently been altered by attempts to reconcile 'materialist' and 'idealist' understandings of scale. Here three 'diagnostic' publications can help to illustrate how scale is currently being discussed – not only as a kaleidoscopic array of multiple worlds but as an issue that demands attention so that it provides analytical gain. Interestingly, all three publications deal with hunter-gatherers, people who had previously been seen as cases that could unproblematically be placed at the 'small-scale' end of the spectrum. The first two publications were extensively discussed during the workshop that gave rise to the current volume.

In the first relevant publication (Bird-David 2017a) Nurit Bird-David compared work with various "tiny" groups of foragers across continents which led her to diagnose anthropology with "scale-blindness". She complained that even though most ethnographers noted the smallness of the groups they were dealing with, they did not see the far-reaching implications that this had for the analysis but also for the people concerned. Although monographs and introductions to the discipline would note the small-scale of groups, they would still indulge in repeating and generalizing results from celebrated case studies independently of the fact that these groups were in fact tiny. The problem, it appeared, was bigger than simply a matter of statistical representativeness and the smallness of samples. Even though many of these groups would count no more than a few hundred people, it was taken for granted that upscaling was possible, and that it could be done in a number of directions. Bird-David problematized this seamless scaling up and down by arguing that the 'small scale' Nayaka that she worked with were very different and very unlike the same number of people in any larger society exactly *because* they were so few in number. Scale matters, she argues, because researchers living in large societies tend to assume that the social roles, rules and patterns they discover could also be identified in small-scale settings or may even allow us to see social entities and relations in their prototypical form. However, Bird-David states, it is not only that social roles differ across scales but it is questionable whether it makes sense to speak of 'social roles', 'persons' and 'individuals' at all under a certain threshold of smallness. Instead the "pluri-related" "pluripresent" and "pluri-connected" few that we find in these contexts, she maintains, are very unlike the "infinite few" in smaller subdivisions of large-scale societies (Bird-David 2017a: 215). The latter, she argues, can safely be multiplied as they are seen as "many beings of the same kind" (ibid.), similar to one another and deriving this similarity from being parts of a larger whole. For instance, a group of citizens in a nation state would receive their citizenship *qua* being singular instances of multiple members of that state. By contrast, in hunter-gatherer settings, Bird-David maintains, kin live with each other without being like each other (2017a: 219). They are 'pluripresent' (encounter one another in many intersecting relations) and at the same time they are diverse to the degree of being unique. This contrasts with large-scale societies that do allow members to be dispersed to the degree that they are unlikely to ever encounter everyone in the group while insisting on some sameness of members, having or assuming the same origin, same nationality, ethnicity or some other standardized shared feature (see 2017a: 217). What is at stake

here is not only a distortion of life in small groups from the perspective of "modernity's large-scale horizons" (2017a: 215 see also 2017a: 210) but more generally a tendency to overlook what happens when we are scaling up or down in numbers.

Scaling not only refers to numbers and group size. Related but also distinct is the notion of scaling in extension and density. The question whether 'scale', understood as 'size', implies and connotes a whole series of related notions such as 'complexity', 'density', 'intensity', 'heterogeneity' and so forth had already been discussed by contributors to the Barth volume, e.g. by Berreman (1978). Berreman had noticed that many of the bi-polar ideal types such as the distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, folk versus urban, simple versus complex, personal versus impersonal and so forth, which have played a large role in the history of anthropology and social thought more generally, rely on implicit distinctions of scale. Many of these bi-polar distinctions, he argued, turn out to be distinctions of degree rather than of kind (1978: 70) but that this would still leave some "residual […] analytical utility" to use scale in order to arrive at a typology of societies based on scale (1978: 50). This tendency to use measures of scale to place societies into a typology (of any sorts) has since been challenged on several accounts as exemplified by Bird et al. (2019), the second diagnostic text to which many contributors in this volume refer to. Douglas and Rebecca Bird, together with Brian Codding and David Zeanah (2019) combined ethnography with behavioural ecology as they revisited their long-term research with Martu Aborigines in Western Australia, another 'typical' case of small-scale hunter-gatherers (see Tonkinson 1991). They emphasize that although the group of Martu who would happen to be at the same place at any particular point in time would be rather small, these small residential groups were all connected through high and extensive mobility but also in terms of long-distance trading routes, ritual exchanges and marriages. Looking at sample numbers of average foraging groups (1-18 individuals, average 8.2, see Bird et al. 2019: 102), at average hearth groups (2-12 individuals, average 5.7) or average residential groups (41-127, see Bird et al. 2019: 101) is misleading, they claim. The authors conclude that despite residential and foraging groups being small "there is little evidence that these groups are drawn from small communities nested within small-scale societies" (2019: 96). Rather, they are dealing with "larger than expected local groups […] maintained in expansive social networks of relational wealth involving interactions of hundreds of non-genetically related individuals" (2019: 106). There is a whole set of objections here against the earlier

stance towards scale that Berreman and other contributors to the Barth volume, despite their uneasiness, were still ready to accept. Martu – and other hunter-gatherers like the Hadza and Ju/'hoansi referred to in this context – may live in small residential groups but at the same time they are also part of "complex and comprise large-scale networks" (Bird et al. 2019: 105). In other words, as social beings they are dealing with a number of relationships of quite different scale at any one point in time. Moreover, the residential groups are not of the static and tightly-knit type of close genetically-related kin that were often imagined. Instead, they were fluid and permeable so that the features previously associated with 'small-scale' do not necessarily apply, making such a typology rather useless. There is also "no discrete hierarchical scaling of three or more layers", the authors claim (Bird et al. 2019: 98), i.e. the groups or networks of different sizes do not exist as fixed and discrete layers of scale between which a society would 'switch'. Instead, the authors maintain, we are dealing with an "unbounded society" (Bird et al. 2019: 102). The actual groups of co-residences or co-workers cannot be predicted on the basis of any "well-defined community" (Bird et al. 2019: 94) – at any scale – from which they were considered to be drawn. The evidence the authors summon for these conclusions relies on both, the environmental usage patterns and the religious and ritual practices of the Martu, since both seem to defy a typology based on scale.

Bird et al. dismantle earlier assumptions that scale could be used to predict the shape of a society based on their mode of subsistence and that scale was an independent variable that could be applied to measure and predict their social relationships or modes of cultural adaptation to specific environments. Ironically, however, that does not lead to the conclusion that scale does not matter, but rather that modes of scaling are part and parcel of the social practices in various domains of life, including the social organization of co-residency and collaborative work, strategies of making economic use of resources in the environment and of living in a ritual and spiritual world of human and non-human agents. All this points to scaling as a practice: No matter whether it is population size, spatial expansion, density or some other dimension of scale that takes centre stage, it is in the nature of scale that has changed in the research process: It is no longer seen as providing a 'quick fix' to characterize or typify a society. Rather, the practices of scaling are now themselves subject to research. Scaling is not only routinely carried out by researchers but also by the researched. The third landmark publication that highlights this dimension of scale is Graeber and Wengrow's "Dawn

of Everything" (2021) in which they show how scaling practices have been integral for social thought since the enlightenment but in which they also break with many assumptions about scale in the history of scholarly social research. Empirically, they suggest, throughout world history "most people live their lives on an ever-smaller scale as populations get larger" (2021: 141) which may be counter-intuitive against the background of current migration and globalization. In other words, there is an inverse dynamic here between regional and global networks growing in scale while the personal scales of movement are for the majority actually decreasing, at least spatially. In the emerging urban centres there is simply no need for the majority of people to travel as far as the Martu would need to do in order to satisfy everyday needs such as exchanging items or ideas (whether ritual or economical) or in order to find a spouse. In other words it seems that the 'overall' social complexity could be scaled up while the average spatial scale of individual moves is scaled down. The other main proposition by Graeber and Wengrow is that "our remote forager ancestors were much bolder experimenters in social form, breaking apart and reassembling their societies at different scales, often in radically different forms, with different value systems, from one time of year to the next" (2021: 140). In this perspective there is no unilinear development at all as people across time have been upscaling and downscaling their polities repeatedly. Upscaling and downscaling may be influenced by environmental factors of various sorts but these are scalar options chosen by the humans who find themselves in constantly changing situations. In fact, this is what Graeber and Wengrow make out as the main capacity that humans have (and non-humans don't), namely that they can switch between scales, both in terms of frames of orientation and in real-life institutions. Humans have, they maintain, for a long-time not only shifted seasonally and periodically between more dense/complex scales and less dense/complex scales. It is the cultural awareness that social relations could be taken to another scale which remained with them across these transitions and which continues to inform their strategies. In Graeber and Wengrow's view processes such as the 'Neolithic' domestication of plants and animals become a complex arrangement of scales as people (especially women) were experimenting with cultivating plants at a small physical scale ("play farming") but across a very long timescale (2021: 270). These small-scale ecological alterations over time would eventually lead to (largely unintended) large-scale changes as non-human species were tinkered and experimented with and as they were taken from one ecological setting to another. Moreover, Graeber and Wengrow break with the long-

held assumption that hunting and gathering was necessarily associated with small-scale. Quite to the contrary, they argue, the scale of human sociality increased even before domestication was practiced at a large-scale. This relates to scale in terms of numbers (being urban) but also in terms of densities (being sedentary) and in terms of hierarchy (being non-egalitarian). One could go as far as saying that increasing scale is not a matter of recent processes of globalization becauset hunter-gatherers were also in the past living at the same scale of complexity as everyone else mastering the complex dynamics of shifting between decentralized and more egalitarian forms of organization and centralized, more hierarchical forms of social organization (Graeber and Wengrow 2021: 314).

The argument that hunting and gathering was one strategy practiced alongside (and alternating with) other modes of subsistence and that the transitions were not simply a function of population growth had been aired before from within the field of hunter-gatherer studies (see Layton et al. 1991). However, Graeber and Wengrow not only advocate a change in analytical perspective but they also connect this to a political agenda and with a critique of strict versions of evolutionary behaviourism. Thereby they undermine the assumption that humans were "naturally" equipped to deal only with small-scale social relationships. They question the assumption that any increase in scale that we see in recent history (larger numbers, permanent settlements etc.) necessarily means that dominating structures had to be put into place (2021: 310) as if, for instance, participatory democratic forms of organization were impossible at a larger scale (2021: 573). The evidence they summon for this position is the observation that many hunter-gatherers live at two scales simultaneously, either in terms of seasonality (see Wengrow and Graeber 2015, going back to seminal ideas by Marcel Mauss) or in terms of their flexible mindset (see Graeber and Wengrow [2021: 314] where they refer to the Bird et al.). What they seek to add to the materiality of changes in scale (population growth) is that scale is a dimension of the mind (2021: 314). Humans imagine cities before and independently of constructing them. This adds yet another dimension to our research on scale. Scale not only has a number of dimensions (quantity, size, density, complexity etc.) but it is also a standard and gauge that is applied as a part of social practice. Moreover, it is not only researchers who apply these standards, for instance when they label a society as being 'small-scale', but humans do so continuously in the process of living their lives. As hunter-gatherers, or as industrial workers for that matter, they set scales which in turn has implications for their behaviour

and for the landscapes and polities that emerge as a consequence. For most contemporary hunter-gatherer groups, for instance, it would be true to say that they have upscaled hunting and gathering from subsistence pursuits to an integrated cultural way of life that goes beyond subsistence activities and which is better understood relationally in terms of a hunter-gatherer situation (see Widlok 2016). This brings us back to the issue raised by Nurit Bird-David: It is not only that western scientists brought up in modern societies are in the danger of mis-representing other people living their lives at different places or different times. Bird-David's Nayaka interlocutors, too, are applying their 'kin scale of plurirelational beings' as a frame for their own actions and for orienting themselves. And if Graeber and Wengrow's argument holds, Nayaka or any humans living together are capable of doing what architects do when they provide models of what is to be built at a variety of scales (e.g. 1:2000, 1:200, 1:20). We all can scale our relations with one another and with non-humans in a similar way. We not only live in different scales, we can also *apply* different scales. We have every reason to believe that this is true for every group of humans that features in the contributions of this volume, no matter where or when they lived. It is not only that 'they' (the researched) scale as much as 'we' (the researchers) scale. Rather, 'we' have learned our lessons of scaling from a long history of scaling that we encounter whenever we turn to a group of 'they' in the archaeological record and in anthropological case studies. Scaling is a complex practice but getting it right is highly relevant not only for understanding ways of living at other times and in other places, but ultimately for exploring the potentials of living our human lives in an environment of multiple scales.

In the sense outlined above it becomes clear that the case studies collected in this volume are really all variants of one single and ongoing case, that of human scaling practice that characterizes the human condition. We have tried to emulate this realization in the way that we present the individual contributions to this volume. The contributions need not be read in any particular order since there are cross-references throughout. The sequence of articles in this book is more or less that of the meeting that we had in 2020 and which was sponsored by the Collaborative Research Center 806 "Our Way to Europe" at the University of Cologne. We acknowledge the support of the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* that funded the CRC, enabled our meeting and subsidized this publication. We are also grateful to the contributors who came together under the adverse conditions of the pandemic and who were prepared to develop their ideas, discuss each other's contributions and

bring this project forward despite the difficulties. We also appreciate the input that Robert Layton (Durham) and Andreas Womelsdorf (Vienna and Heidelberg) provided as discussants during our meeting. Souhayb Zaryah provided invaluable technical support in organizing the online workshop and in preparing the manuscript. When preparing this volume, we took a stance that underlines the distinctive contribution of each author. Hence we have not harmonized the 'Englishes' that are being used and we have been careful not to flatten out the diverging (sub)disciplinary perspectives. During the conference all contributors emphasized how rarely scholars of such different backgrounds actually come together to exchange views in a dialogical rather than a confrontational matter. It was felt by the participants that adding some individual comments to the chapters across the volume would be an appropriate way to capture the constructive atmosphere that the meeting had. Each contribution in this volume is therefore followed by one or two comments by fellow authors. Thereby we try to counteract the growing unease that the subfields of anthropology, and the dominant theoretical currents within the field at large, are drifting apart at a speed, and – dare we say – at a scale, that is detrimental to solving large research questions such as those that are being dealt with in this volume. At a meta-level we therefore hope that we have shown that as specialized scholars we are still in the position to scale our findings and ideas in a way that not only responds to the specific research approaches that we are particularly committed to but that we are also able to collaboratively scale-up when facing the larger challenges of making sense of human life.

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