



McDONALD INSTITUTE CONVERSATIONS

Towards a Broader View of Hunter-Gatherer Sharing

Edited by Noa Lavi & David E. Friesem



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Noa Lavi & David E. Friesem,
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Chapter 1

Where have all the kin gone? On hunter-gatherers' sharing, kinship and scale

Nurit Bird-David

'Sharing' is a keyword in our digital era, its usage expanding as technology develops. A few decades ago, we digitally shared data, yet now we digitally share our lives through social networks and our possessions through 'sharing economy' platforms. This sharing is spreading so rapidly around the globe that, despite critique of the capitalist motives spurring it, some observers suggest that the new technology is reviving an 'innate human capacity to share' going back to 'our hunter-gatherer ancestors' (Botsman & Rogers 2010, 68; cf. Sundararajan 2016, 5). This thesis resonates with anthropologists of modern hunter-gatherers, as some of them too regard sharing as 'the most universal form of human economic behavior' (Price 1975), arguing that hunter-gatherers display 'prototypical sharing...at the simplest forms of human social organizations' (Woodburn 1998, 63).

In this chapter, I review anthropological investigations on foragers' sharing systems, with an interest in the question of their comparative utility in thinking about human sharing – past, present and future – and an emphasis on problems arising when overlooking scale and kinship. I argue that if we want to understand hunter-gatherer cultures of sharing, in and of themselves and, all the more so, within broad human vistas, we must attend to their kinship and scalar bases more substantively than we have done thus far. Past scholarship minimizes or altogether omits scale and kinship from analysis of once so-called 'small-scale societies' and 'kinship-based societies', known today as 'indigenous peoples', an elision that distorts our understanding and our ability to learn from them.

Both scale and kinship have attracted renewed interest in recent decades. While a detailed discussion of these developments lies beyond the scope of this chapter, it is useful to briefly outline the ways new approaches compare with those enfolded within earlier categories of 'small-scale' and 'kinship-based'

societies before turning our attention to hunter-gatherer sharing as an illuminating case-study.

Socio-cultural anthropology was founded on broadly mapping its terrain in scalar terms – distinguishing between small-scale and large-scale societies. However, as part of resistance to the modernist paradigm, these scalar terms lost their cardinal place, especially the use of *scale* in its modernist sense as an objective independent variable indexing societal progress. Mid-late twentieth century attempts to rejuvenate the scale concept (e.g. Barth 1987) had little impact on anthropology. 'Small-scale society' generally became a worn-out cliché and – in politically correct multiculturalism – a rarely used tag.

However, starting in linguistic anthropology and social geography, recent years have seen the rise of new approaches to scale, sometimes referred to as 'the scalar turn',¹ the focus shifting to scaling as a verb, as agential action and symbolic resource. Cultural anthropologists have exploited this fresh emphasis in studying large-scale(ing) systems, approaching large-scale(ing) as a cultural and political act and as a particular mode of knowing and making a world.²

In recent work (2017a, b), I pursue this approach in studying small-scale societies with a particular emphasis on hunter-gatherer people as my field of expertise. Furthermore, I have argued that if the case for large-scale(ing) holds, we should examine anthropology's own originating large-scale (and continuously expanding) project of studying small-scale worlds. And in addition to recognizing this paradoxical basis of our discipline, we should explore whether and how its large-scale terms compromise the study of small-scale worlds, whose appeal inaugurated anthropology and continues to affect its comparative insights and agendas.

As for kinship, this concept founded debates on communities classified in the 1930s' as 'band societies', later subsumed in the 1960s within the category

of ‘hunters and gatherers’, their mode of subsistence rather than social organization – including kinship – thereafter framing their anthropological study.³ Consequently, few hunter-gatherer scholars continued to focus on kinship. Anthropology generally in those years denounced the study of kinship as a cultural particularity embedded in the Western bio-genetic terms that had shaped its study (Schneider 1968, 1987).

But then, in the latter part of the twentieth century, kinship ‘rose from the ashes’. ‘The new kinship studies’ has of late become a trendy and prolific field. In its new incarnation, kinship is approached as a cultural system, with relations socially and culturally performed rather than predetermined by birth and marriage. The modern Western kinship system is approached as just a cultural option, by no means monolithic even in the so-called West. These developments have filtered back into hunter-gatherer studies, whereby some ethnographers show how continuous performance is essential to hunter-gatherers’ recognition of even close blood-kin and how kinship relations are strategically acted out in these communities (e.g. Bodenhorn 2000; Nuttall 2000; Widlok 2013). This new work revives and delves into earlier concerns (e.g. Myers 1986; Bird-David 1982, 1983, 1994) yet paradoxically earmarked hunter-gatherer kinship as the subject of ‘culturalist’ analysis. Furthermore, this new work diverted attention away from the fact that in these tiny communities many members are birth- and marriage- kin, even if those ties do not alone constitute kin in local terms and require continuous performance for their recognition. Altogether, kinship has remained an optional subject in hunter-gatherer scholarship.

If scale and kinship have been marginalized in hunter-gatherer scholarship, it is not because the relevant facts are unknown to the ethnographers. No ethnographer living with a foraging group can possibly remain oblivious to the fact that it is minuscule in scale with most members kin, some genetically and others related by marriage. The average hunter-gatherer band size is estimated at 28.4 persons (Kelly 1995, 211; cf. Hill et al. 2011); married siblings often constitute its core; and we know these communities have ‘universal kinship systems’ (Barnard 1978), whereby everyone ‘is able to define a kinship or quasi-kinship tie to everyone else’ (Woodburn 1980, 105). These facts are well established, yet they appear minimally, if at all, in analyses and theories of hunter-gatherer cultures, raising the question: Why do these fieldwork facts ‘disappear’ in ethnographic texts?

This surprising ‘disappearance’ of kinship and scalar facts can be identified in my own work’s trajectory. During most of my late-1970s fieldwork in South India, I was living with a small group of foragers,

primarily in one particular hamlet. I studied them, those whom they visited and those who visited them, all of whom they considered ‘our own people’. The adult-residents of this hamlet included a brother and two sisters, respectively married to a sister and two brothers, two of their daughters with their husbands, and a third brother of the second sibling group who was married to a cousin of the first sibling group. Those with whom they exchanged visits lived in similarly small and even smaller hamlets at a distance of less than a day’s walk. For the most part, they were all close relatives (see Bird-David 2017a, 92–3). Notably, except for when I specifically address kinship matters, I identify these close kin simply as ‘Nayaka’ – Nayaka people, Nayaka foragers, a Nayaka man – obscuring their kinship relations and prefiguring them as merely an assembly of ethnic subjects.

My initial writings on this group include demographic estimates, such as that the hamlet in which I lived was comprised of 26 people (8 men, 6 women and 12 children); the local group had under 100 people; and the ethnic group at large – quoting questionable government estimates based on outsiders’ identity categories and identifications – contained 1300 Nayaka (known officially as Kattunayaka, *katu* means forest). As is common in anthropology, I do not repeat these figures in my later publications on the Nakaya, nor are they noted in literature using my work. The small group of kin with whom I conducted my fieldwork has simply become ‘Nayaka’ (sometimes specified as Nayaka of South India or Nayaka of the Nilgiris), at once obscuring their scalar as much as their kinship basis. It took me thirty years, and as many articles published during those years, to realize the distortive effects of this biased representation on attaining an understanding of these (and other) foragers’ experiences and cultural worlds. I initiated a redress in recent years (Bird-David 2017a, b, 2018 a, b), generally alerting attention to what I tag (for lack of better terms) as my, and others’, ‘scalar-blindness’ and ‘scale-insensitivity’. I show how ignoring the scalar and kinship bases of the worlds of hunter-gatherers encourages large-scale biased misunderstandings of their intimate worlds.

In the present chapter, I keep in mind these redressed biases as I look at the increasingly pertinent issue of hunter-gatherer sharing. Hunting and gathering people commonly share meat and, to a lesser or greater degree, other gathered food and possessions. Their students have generally agreed on this fact but have conceptualized this sharing in different ways. Some analyses focus on the survival strategies of rational individuals who respond to unpredictable hunting and food insecurity by shar-

ing a successful day's yield with the expectation of receiving shares from others on unsuccessful days (e.g. Wiessner 1982; Cashdan 1985; Smith 1988). Compared with this 'insurance policy' approach, a 'social cohesion' approach focuses on relations within the community. In this latter view, sharing relieves social tensions and is part of the foragers' mode of sociality (e.g. Marshall 1962; Myers 1986; Ingold 1999; Peterson 1993; Bird-David 2005). Straddling these two approaches, other analyses dwell on political ideology, relating sharing to foragers' egalitarian systems or, conversely, to their collective appropriation of resources (for the first view, see Woodburn 1980, 1998, and Barnard & Woodburn 1988; for the second, see Lee 1988 and Ingold 1986). Still other analyses focus on cultures, with sharing related to foragers' perceptions of the environment or to their construction of a 'self' extended to include others (for the former, see Bird-David 1990, 1992; for the latter, see Widlok 2013, 2017, and in this volume). Whether these studies focus on the individual or on the community – with economic, social, political or cultural emphases – I maintain that they invariably pay insufficient attention to scalar and kinship frameworks of sharing. This chapter attempts to address the question, why, and to argue for their fuller integration.

In particular, I aim to examine how facts of kinship and scale disappear in writings on hunter-gatherer sharing (and on their cultures generally) despite their undeniable visibility in the field. I maintain that previous work can be redressed and that future work can give due attention to these factors, yet only if we examine at a fine grain their current textual marginalization. To this end, I here review five seminal articles on hunter-gatherer sharing to illustrate common problems and slippages in writings on the subject. Pursuing a chronological order and geographically moving from Africa through Asia to Australia and back to Africa, I examine work by Lorna Marshall (1962), James Woodburn (1982), myself, Nurit Bird-David (1990), Nicholas Peterson (1993) and, lastly, Thomas Widlok (2013). Again, my aim is to train our attention on common inherent problems in 'writing up' cultures of small scale(ing) societies that are communities of kin.

To clarify my choice of terms, note that I use *foragers* both for brevity and as means of disassociating those I discuss from complex hunting-gathering societies. Foragers here refers to traditions followed prior to, and partly continuing through, these societies' integration into nation-States. As far as *kinship* is concerned, this designation is not a priori restricted to blood- and marriage-based relations nor does it ignore the bases of such relations in social processes.

The unscalability of kinship identities

Lorna Marshall's (1962) article, 'Sharing, talking and giving: Relief of social tensions among !Kung Bushman' permits a useful starting point for our discussion, and not only since it is among the earliest, and remains among the most cited, works on hunter-gatherer sharing. A retired literature teacher adventuring with her family on a scientific expedition, Marshall was a perceptive and skilful writer unbound by the genre constraints that hobbled subsequent students of hunter-gatherers. She lived among the Nyae Nyae !Kung in the 1950s, before governmental or non-governmental agents of change established a presence in their lives.

Marshall focused on this group's sharing of meat, describing it as a 'custom' whose function was to pre-empt conflicts and tensions in the band. To convey the need for this 'custom', she perceptively writes: 'One has only to imagine one family eating meat and the others not when they are settled only five or ten feet apart in a fire werf and there are no walls for privacy' (p. 236). Marshall proceeds to provide a rich description of one particular meat-sharing event (from going hunting to consuming the meat), a significant event in local terms. One hundred people were present in the camp, including all local band members and visitors from four other bands.

Marshall leaves no doubt about the sharers' close kinship ties; here I provide only a brief synopsis. The four who left the camp to hunt were a man (hereafter Y), Y's wife's brother, Y's brother and Y's sister's husband. The latter was a visitor and the other three regular camp residents. These four relatives travelled under the hot sun for eight days until they succeeded in shooting an eland, then spent another three days tracking the injured beast until it died, and two more days carrying the meat back to the camp. Y was the one who shot and injured the eland with an arrow given to him by his sister, who had received it from her husband, who had received it from his brother, who had received it from his wife, who had received it from her brother, who had made the arrow.

Upon returning to camp, large chunks of meat were first distributed among the four hunters and the last owner of the arrow. They all subsequently shared their portions with their primary relatives: the four men with their wives' parents, their wives and children. Next they shared them with their siblings and sibling's spouses and children (we do not hear how the arrow-owner, a woman, shared her large portion of meat). The meat-recipients cooked and shared their portions with additional relatives around their hearths. Marshall writes that everyone present even-

tually received a share and stresses that all of them were kin. In fact, only six of the one hundred people present were 'so remote [kin] that we did not bother to trace them' (p. 240), from which we can understand that the rest, 94 (94 per cent), were close enough kin for her to readily trace their connections.

As her text moves on to analyse general patterns of !Kung meat-sharing, Marshall gradually phases out sharers' kinship identities, presaging a pattern that would recur and worsen in later texts on hunter-gatherers' sharing (and more generally in writings on hunter-gatherer and other kinship-based communities). A practice thus developed whereby local perspectives on kinship identities would give way to observers' general categories. For example, Marshall writes that hunting parties tend to contain two to four or five men, who enjoy hunting with each other, and who can be from different bands (p. 237–8). Even a superb writer like Marshall thus seems unable to avoid 'translating' local kinship identities (Y's brother, Y's wife's brother, etc.) into the sectorial categories of *men* and *hunters*. Relational, situational and diverse kinship identities are not easily scalable. If for no other reason, for the sake of a legible text, a writer must shift from specific details to general categories.

This perspectival shift abstracts the actors from their hyper-relational kinship context, where each individual is uniquely and multiply related to each of the others. It standardizes and serializes the actors as four men – four times the category 'man' – with each one appearing as a stand-alone being, abstractly groupable and re-groupable with like-others. While Marshall could have written that *male-relatives* or *related men* usually go on a hunt, keeping their kinship entanglements visible in the story, this representation might suggest to readers a preference for hunting with relatives, whereas it is clear from Marshall's work that the reverse is true: whoever one prefers to hunt with happens by default to be one's kin. The necessary literary style attendant to shifting from a participant's to an observer's perspective has implications as serious as they are unavoidable. For example, Marshall abstracts what she observes as 'waves' of meat sharing going outwards to kin, the evocative image continuing to animate discussions of sharing today. But how does this image apply if members of this small community are multiply connected to each other in diverse ways? Does not the meat criss-cross among multi-related relatives? Cannot a couple get meat as a hunter's wife's parents, as a hunter's parents, as siblings of another meat-recipient, and so forth? Later in this chapter, I show how Widlok (2013) argues that strategic choices from diverse relational options is precisely at the heart of the work of sharing.

Enter individuals

We remain in Africa yet move on to James Woodburn's (1982) important article, 'Egalitarian societies' based on his work beginning in the 1960s with Hadza living in Tanzania. Woodburn offers a different perspective on such communities' sharing, shifting focus from small-band living to economic transactions and property relations. His usage of the term *sharing* opens up to encompass the sharing not only of game, but of resources of all sorts, both consumable and non-consumable. Woodburn's work demonstrates how the ethnographic drift toward the general continues, further pushing kinship and scale to the backstage, if not offstage, in hunter-gatherer studies. He moves past Marshall's categorical terms, modelling these people simply as individuals, living in and constituting groups.

Whereas Marshall details a particular event then moves toward generalizing patterns, in 'Egalitarian societies' Woodburn (1982) describes Hadza patterns from the get-go, the standard approach by that time, and compares them with !Kung patterns. Woodburn argues that hunter-gatherers with immediate-return systems live by an egalitarian ideology, which explains their sharing. Game initially belongs to the individual hunter through whose labour it is obtained. However, an egalitarian ideology enforces sharing the kill among the group's members, who are entitled to shares, not as common owners, but as political equals. Sharing, he argues, helps to assert and enforce the hunter-gatherer political-ideological commitment to equality. Sharing serves to disengage property and prevent its accumulation as an unequal basis.

The term *individual/s* recurs in this text far more frequently than do *kinship* and *kin* – 38 times compared with seven and eight times, respectively. The latter two terms arise primarily when Woodburn notes the little bearing particular kinship relations have on the traffic of sharing. In addition to the general problems ethnographers face in writing about tiny communities of kin, Woodburn's use of *individuals* aligns with the 'subsistence-turn' in hunter-gatherer studies, which assumes individuals (rational, in some scholarly traditions) as existentially given and basic units of analysis. His use furthermore derives from his choice of *egalitarian* societies. Woodburn (1982, 431–2) was aware of this concept's modern French and English connotations – an ideology that ontologically prefigures individuals as society's primary moral and political units. As this term travels from nation-states to tiny communities of kin, despite the huge scalar disparity, it carries these ontological

attendants to foragers' worlds. The Hadza (and other hunter-gatherers) are thereby projected as individuals, their kinship relations a merely optional issue in the analysis of sharing.

Hadza kinship had troubled Woodburn earlier on – for example, he wrote:

As an anthropologist, one is accustomed to thinking of a hunting and gathering society as held together by a mutually acknowledged set of rights and obligations – especially kinship rights and obligations – that it comes as something of a shock to find that this does not apply here (1979, 257–8).

Woodburn struggled to accommodate this perplexing discovery of a lack of a familiar kinship system with the counter-fact that Hadza had a 'universal kinship system', a form first identified and conceptually developed by Alan Barnard (1978), which Woodburn defines as a system 'in which everyone – or at least everyone within the political community – is able to define a kinship or quasi-kinship tie to everyone else' (1980, 105). To resolve this apparent tension – foragers framing themselves as kin in ways counter to anthropological expectations of the time – Woodburn characterizes these relations as not 'load-bearing': '[They] do not carry a heavy burden of goods and services transmitted between the participants in recognition of claims and obligations' (1980, 105). Woodburn thus marginalizes kinship relations as a factor in his analysis of sharing, whereas an analytical alternative involves rethinking kinship in a society that is itself a community of kin.

The small size of hunter-gatherer camps additionally receives scant mention in Woodburn's article, only noted in introducing the ecological-material setting: 'People live in small camp units containing usually a dozen or two [dozen] people and moving frequently' (p. 435). In his initial work, Woodburn writes that the Eastern Hadza population he studied in the 1960s comprised four hundred people, with group size varying from 4 to 38.⁴ Had these figures not been omitted in later work (as was then commonplace in cultural anthropology), perhaps we could have intuited that its members cannot simply be individuals living in a group. Rather, many of those Hadza were – and could not have been other than – interconnected kin. Evident of a general pattern in hunter-gatherer scholarship, this article co-marginalizes both kinship and scale, to all affects erasing them.

Notably, in Woodburn's (1998) later work, egalitarianism moves to the background. He argues for regarding hunter-gatherer sharing as a distinct eco-

nomic type, in line with earlier work by Bird-David (1990) and Peterson (1993) discussed below. Suffice it here to note that *individuals* hardly appears in this later chapter, but also neither does *kin*. The currency becomes *people*, a common choice in today's hunter-gatherer scholarship. For example, Woodburn observes: 'People should give freely without expectations of return. People should share, not exchange.... People are expected to ask for the share to which they are entitled. If people can avoid requests to share, they will often do so' (pp. 54–6). At best, *people* is scalarly ambivalent, obscuring the actual local group size and even training the reader to imagine far greater numbers than the reality of a few dozen kin in a local band and few hundred to a few thousand regarding themselves as part of a 'political unit'.

Kinship as a root metaphor

The article I next examine is my own, 'Giving Environment: Another perspective on the economic system of gatherer-hunters' (Bird-David 1990), based on my work with forager Nayaka in South India since the late 1970s. Known mostly for its contribution to studying cultural perceptions of the environment, this article also approaches foragers' sharing as a transactional system, contrasting its logic and forms with those underscoring the gift economy and, more generally, with exchange as a transactional type. It relates the Nayaka's distinctive economic 'sharing' system to their understanding of their environment in terms of kinship: Nayaka register the forest as a parent giving them food and themselves as its children; they are thus siblings who share that food (see also Bird-David 1993 on other hunter-gatherers). Accordingly, the Nayaka's economic repertoire does not include gifting, reciprocating or exchanging, but instead giving, requests to be given and avoiding giving.

While this article broaches the subject of kinship, it is not sufficiently sensitive to the foragers' scalar context and their overall kinship framework. Kinship figures in the analysis largely as a metaphor, albeit a key cognitive metaphor underlying the Nakaya's environmental perceptions and cultural-economic models.⁵ In addition, while kinship relations are identified in some of the article's ethnographic illustrations, the remainder of the group is described simply as 'people'. For instance, I describe one 'old lady' as living 'with her daughter, son-in-law and their child' (p. 91). This woman would frequently ask 'her daughter and other people in the hamlet to give her food'. Her constant requests upset her daughter and son-in-law and so to avoid

the requests, they moved to another place. I would not be surprised if readers assumed that only those specifically mentioned in the article were kin, as opposed to the old lady's other neighbours. Such an assumption could not be more incorrect as everyone living in the Hamlet were closely related kin.

Alongside my partial employment of kinship terms, I repeat the ethnonym *Nayaka* alongside *people* and, on occasion, *individuals*. This article thus provides an apt case for showing how the use of ethnonyms also contributes to the 'disappearance' of kinship and scale, just as much as do sectorial categories and *individuals* as illustrated above.

Ethnographers must use ethnonyms for the sake of legible texts, not to mention comparative work, even though their study-subjects may not use such names themselves. For example, those I describe – and whom are known by outsiders – as *Nayaka* would call themselves *nama sonta* (us, our relatives), usually encompassing humans and non-humans 'living with us'. Many hunter-gatherer (and other small-scale) communities referred to themselves by contextual terms translatable as 'real people', 'humans', 'kinfolk', and so forth, prior to their subjection by externally introduced proper ethnonyms (see Bird-David 2017b).

As used today, ethnonyms prefigure a world comprised of a series of distinctive and exclusive ethnic groups, each of which includes members sharing one or a combination of determining attributes (language, ethnicity, country, etc.). Using ethnonyms in hunter-gatherer scholarship carries this social ontology into their world, leading us to imagine such societies as the *Nayaka* as distinct from other societies, with each of its members a *Nayaka* person. We regard each such person as an individual, and not a priori inter-related with the others, again marginalizing their kinship relations, which for them define their community as well as the identity of each member.

Notably, in later work (2005) I employ the metaphor of 'connected vessels' for thinking about hunter-gatherer sharing. This metaphor helps in imagining their sharing as resources flowing among connected beings until they are levelled, rather than as dividing them among separate individuals. I note how 'sharing' is not a direct translation of hunter-gatherers' vernacular terms, for it carries diametrically opposite usages in English: sharing-as-dividing objects versus sharing-as-joining experiences. The 'connected vessels' metaphor helps to foreground the second sense, even when, in Western terms, material objects are shared. While this metaphor may help Western imagination better envision *Nakaya* sharing, it still fails to incorporate kinship and scale.

Demand-sharing constitutes social relations

We now move eastward to Australia to textually examine Nicolas Peterson's (1993) landmark article, 'Demand sharing: Reciprocity and the pressure for generosity among foragers.' Peterson's article presents ethnographic data largely from Aboriginals in Australia, who in many respects diverge from the foragers examined above, yet he nonetheless makes some comparative references to these and other cases. On this comparative basis, Peterson claims that unsolicited giving is less common among hunter-gatherers than is nagging and demanding shares and raises the question as to why this discrepancy has been so little addressed. His inquiry notes the mindset anthropologists bring to the ethnography of sharing, just as they do to the ethnography itself. He points a blaming finger at Westerners' ethical construction of generosity as 'outwardly unsolicited and altruistic giving' (p. 861). Because Westerners positively construe free giving as generosity, he argues, and because ethnographers have not explored hunter-gatherers' own ethics of sharing in its day-to-day practice, 'our deeply held understanding and evaluations slip into the vacuum...[leading us to] inversely figure demand-sharing as negative' (p. 870).

Peterson thus debunks sharing's earlier and ethnographically popular association with generosity. Meanwhile, he powerfully trains our attention on its everyday practical performance and then back again on its social function. He observes how hunter-gatherers construe unsolicited giving as rude, dominating and even aggressive, especially when large gifts are concerned. In their system, unsolicited giving is associated with asymmetrical unequal relations and demanding shares with autonomous agency; an agent who demands shares thereby tests, asserts and builds his/her relations with others. Therefore, solicited givers are not dispassionate. They are indeed compassionate, but act only when someone presents him- or herself as lacking something and asks for it. On their part, share-demanders do not just selfishly ask for what they want. Demand-sharing is a deep and nuanced social practice, at times strategic and at others well-removed from self-conscious calculation (pp. 870–1). Thus, Peterson concludes that demand-sharing carries a positive ethic of generosity.

With all its insight, like other works of the time, Peterson's analysis still lacks attention to the scalar and kinship framework of hunter-gatherers' bands and societies. Not a single population figure appears in his article, not even for the groups providing the main ethnographic illustrations: the Yolngu (Murungin), Wik-mungkan, East Gunwinggu and

Pintupi. While Peterson occasionally uses the term 'small-scale societies', he does so in the classic sense whereby he does not refer to the scalar basis, but to types of social relations that differ from those in modern large-scale societies.

Attending, as he does, to social relations, Peterson leaves their kinship basis elusive, along with the ways the foragers themselves describe their relations. The dominant analytical concept is *social relations* – appearing eleven times in the article – rather than *kinship relations*, which appears only once as 'kinship connections'. Furthermore, *social relations* dominates the article's argument throughout. For example, in the abstract Peterson argues that demand sharing 'is important in the constitution of social relations in egalitarian societies' (p. 860). Then in the introduction, he states as one of the article's objectives to emphasize 'the constitution of social relations through social action' (p. 861), which he pursues in a section titled, 'Demand sharing and the representation of social relations' (p. 868). Peterson concludes by stating that future research is needed to determine whether demand sharing is also fundamental to 'the constitution of social relations in less egalitarian, pastoralist and agriculturalist societies' (p. 871). Peterson is thus caught in the same apparent paradox as is Woodburn, namely that kinship is pervasive, whereas demand-sharing (simply sharing for Woodburn) does not follow kinship's 'normative morality' nor any other 'prescriptive behavioral formulas'. Like Woodburn, Peterson's solution is to keep kinship relations outside the analysis.

Re-enter kinship, talk and presence

For a final example, I return to southern Africa and turn to Thomas Widlok's (2013) article on fieldwork he conducted in the 2000s, 'Sharing: Allowing others to take what is valued'. Fifty years since the time of Marshall's fieldwork, the State has deeply penetrated these foragers' lives. This article advances the 1990s effort to distinguish sharing and demand-sharing from reciprocity and exchange with Widlok theorizing hunter-gatherer sharing as a complex transactional socio-economic phenomenon in its own right. He does so in ways that contribute to a renewed anthropological interest in value, treating it as a type of transfer coexisting and expressed in terms of market-exchange and reciprocity, not limited to particular modes of subsistence. He draws ethnographic illustrations from his work with the Akhoe Hai//om in northern Namibia, a southern African community of foragers, who had by then partially assimilated the State's names for them (Widlok 2000).

Widlok identifies three factors in his analysis, the first being kinship. He notes as do earlier commentators that every member of the group is regarded as a kin yet sharing does not abide by kinds of kinship relation (2013, 19–20). At the same time, he examines how the Akhoe Hai//om choice of kinship terms within their small community of multi-related kin is related to sharing: they choose close kinship terms to elicit sharing. Past sharing experiences informs choices of close kinship terms, and close kinship terms informs the likelihood of sharing.

Widlok additionally relates sharing to a particular mode of conversation which he describes as 'a lot of parallel talk' rather than linear 'talk and counter-talk', namely utterances that do not get responses and statements apparently ignored as if they were not heard (see 'pluralogue', Bird-David 2017a). Widlok observes how within this mode of conversation, sharing is triggered through diverse speech acts, ranging from direct demands ('give me water'), to complaints ('I have no water'), to indirect utterances ('imagine that there was something to drink') (p. 21). Subtle speech acts are effective when uttered within earshot of everyone present. The third factor is 'presence', which Widlok argues is the most critical and an underlying condition for the other two. Presence permits participation in such conversations as well as limits those one considers close kin. Sharing-recipients are those who are present, and all those present receive/take shares.

Widlok squarely returns kinship to the picture and, although he does not explicate it, to me he also points to the scalar basis of sharing, yet still insufficiently. The small size of the sharing group is critical to the three factors Widlok associates with sharing, especially the first one relating sharing to the dynamic choosing of kinship terms from multi-optional kinship connections, a sign of a small inbred (not to be confused with endogamous) community. But so is the second factor. The particular type of conversation Widlok describes predicates a small company of interactants within sight and earshot of one another. Most clearly, the third factor, presence, which Widlok regards as the crucial precondition of sharing, indicates a small scale, since – given the local technology of communication – one can be 'present' among only a limited number of people.

Unfortunately, scale and kinship fade to the background in Widlok's (2017) recent book on sharing (see also in this volume), where he instead exploits a concept borrowed from the work of consumer behaviour scholar Russell Belk (2009) on sharing in mass consumer societies. Redressing the academic neglect of sharing in highly commercialized societies, Belk highlights its extensive practice largely within

the immediate family circle. To explain its practice against the grain of *homo economicus*, Belk argues that we consider those close to us as our extended self, making sharing with them tantamount to sharing with oneself (p. 724). Belk ascribes the 'extended self' to the family as a corporate collective body with which its members identify, this identification informing their behaviour. Widlok exports this notion to the small hunter-gatherer community of kin across the vast scalar ocean, adding the proviso that here the 'self' is not only 'extended' but also 'limited' by demands of others and by opportunities to access goods from them. Framing the discussion in terms of 'self' and 'others' moves it away from local kinship identities and obscures the scalar determinants of their sharing logic and practices.

Conclusions

Kinship lost its earlier centrality in hunter-gatherer scholarship, beginning with the groundbreaking *Man the Hunter* (1968), but not because ethnographers have been unaware that kinship relations constitute hunter-gatherer communities, whose members all regard themselves as kin. 'Where have all the kin gone?' and more importantly, 'Why?' are pertinent questions I pursue in this chapter. Addressing these questions is complex precisely because kinship underpins foragers' everyday life, their personal and collective identities and their cosmologies, indeed, every facet of hunter-gatherers' lives, even if not in ways ethnographers expect. While no doubt there are other reasons for this neglect, here I focus on causes related to writing ethnographies on tiny communities of kin within a discipline whose objective has been the large-scale comparative study of cultures throughout the world. My analysis of five influential articles on hunter-gatherers' sharing aims to reveal some of the obstacles that have taken attention away from the scalar and kinship bases of hunter-gatherer cultures generally, and from analysis of sharing in particular. These include prioritizing general patterns, prefiguring hunter-gatherers as individuals, the use of ethnonyms, the habituated focus on social relations, and misapplying concepts suited to describing large-scale societies in analysis of intimate terrains.

Obstacles are also intrinsic to the irresolvable problems arising in 'writing up' ethnographies, the conventional idiom 'writing up' in part connoting upscaling as a vital part of the job. Scholars must write about intimate worlds known to their dwellers through lived-experience and about groups that often have no written languages, numerical vocabularies, fixed place-names, abstract temporal and

spatial coordinates, and so forth, in ways that any anthropologist can understand anywhere, requiring the use of scalable terms (cf. Tsing 2012; Scott 1998). What may appear a mere stylistic issue can function as a sort of ontology-shifter. The many conventions of ethnographic writing, such as ethnonyms, personal names, maps, kinship diagrams and census data that elsewhere I describe as Trojan horses (Bird-David 2017a, 2018) all distortedly represent local intimate worlds in scalable terms applicable to any society of tens and hundreds of millions. Although such problems are irresolvable, awareness of them can help us come closer to understanding hunter-gatherers' lived experience, despite and past the limits of writing about their societies, cultures and worlds.

The scalar and kinship bases of foragers' sharing should not mislead us toward disregarding their cultures of sharing as simply that which close relatives naturally do. Rather, the articles I here review reveal complex cultures of sharing among intimate kin, from Marshall who focuses on meat-sharing as a core tradition to Woodburn who profiles what people can and cannot do in keeping this tradition. Bird-David's elaborates on attendant economic rationales and repertoires of conduct, whereas Peterson analyses the subtleties and ethics of everyday practice. Finally, Widlok identifies sharing's discursive forms and co-constitution with kinship and community. Taken together, these works furnish a cultural theory of sophisticated cultures of sharing in small hunter-gatherer communities of kin. New work (Hewlett et al. this volume) continues to develop our understanding of sharing cultures among intimate hunter-gatherer communities by describing their members' spatial closeness in terms of density in settlements, house size, bed size, and intensity of touching. Other work (Lewis this volume) delves into the extent to which pleasure-seeking motivates sharing.

In addition to enhancing our understanding of hunter-gatherer sharing, appreciation of the scalar and kinship bases of hunter-gatherer cultures and worlds is crucial for its archaeological study and for placing it into broad historical and comparative perspectives. Indeed, some modern hunting and gathering populations are larger than the forager groups I discuss, recent catastrophic history has impacted the size of some modern groups, and large hunter-gatherer groups likely existed in the past. Nevertheless, I feel we can safely assume the evolution of tiny communities into larger ones, rather than the reverse, and to assume that kin have a significant presence in communities of a few dozen members.

Evidence as much as common sense indicates the small size and close kinship constitution of early

human groups. For example, genomic evidence suggests that our ancestors lived in small highly inbred groups (see Marshall 2013), they commonly mated among close relatives, including with half-siblings (Prufer et al. 2014), and past human populations reached only in the thousands, at most in the tens of thousands, with tiny communities living locally and exchanging mates with the nearest neighbours (Chris Stringer cited in Marshall 2013). Such evidence can speak to the evolutionary importance of intimate cultures and cultures of kin. Only ethnographers are in a position to understand such cultures' dynamic forms and to learn how they function, by crucially factoring kinship and scale into their analysis.

Notes

- 1 Over the past two decades, social geographers have intensively engaged with issues of scale (see, for example, Jones 1998; Howitt 2002; Masuda & Crooks 2007; Moore 2008; Giesbrecht, Crooks & Williams 2010). Anthropologists have considered scale more sporadically (see, for example, Berreman 1987; Strathern 1991, 1995; Ferguson & Gupta 2002; Latour 2005, esp. 183–5; Philips 2013).
- 2 On large-scale and large-scaling as a frame of thought and a resource involving particular ways of seeing and making the world, see Scott 1998 and Strathern 1991, 1992a.
- 3 See more on the shift in Bird-David 1994.
- 4 Based on Woodburn's three-year long synchronic and diachronic survey of one particular old woman with whom he stayed (1968a, 104–5).
- 5 See Bird-David 1993 for a comparative perspective on kinship metaphors in hunter-gatherer cosmologies.

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