Scalar Dimensions of Community: The Sharia Implementation in Nigeria as Example

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Despite the predominant position of decentralization and community development in contemporary development discourse, there are weak conceptions of what constitutes 'the local' and 'the community'. This paper argues for a relational understanding of scale which challenges the idea of the local as a fixed political space ordered by scale. It is also argued for a conception of community in line with Tönnies' distinction between Community (*Gemeinschaft*) and Society (*Gesellschaft*). This distinction highlights issues of authority, logics of practice and suppressive as well as affirmative aspects of different social settings, which is something that the predominant notion of community - vaguely conceptualized as a homogeneous place with shared interests - leaves out. Community is, accordingly, not assigned a certain scale but has different scalar dimensions, consistent with a notion of scale as dimensions of events and processes. The argument is illustrated empirically by an assessment of different community aspects as well as different scalar dimensions of the *sharia* implementation in Nigeria in the early 2000s. The focus is on Kaduna State, where the proposal to implement *sharia* laws led to violent clashes between different groups as the issue became part of a conflict over the political leadership of the state. The empirical case illustrates how the community concept has different scalar dimensions and it also points to norms and values being detached from scale. More specifically, it highlights the ways in which community sentiments allude to tradition and 'authenticity' and how a particular logic determines practice in community. The case also shows how community, at the same time as it provides shared norms, affinity and security, has non-democratic elements as part of its governance structure, making the notion of 'community development' less straightforward than assumed in prevailing development discourse and practice.