The reference to Naroll´s study holds a relatively prominent position in the “Introduction” – it is cited at the very beginning of the chapter clearly to represent the general anthropological understanding of ethnic groups; it says: “The term ethnic group *is generally understood in anthropological literature* (cf. e.g. Naroll[[1]](#footnote-1) 1964) …” (Barth 1969b: 10; emphasis added). It is not clear what made Barth choose Naroll´s contribution as a typical example. But it is clear that the choice was highly problematic. There is a simple reason for that – Naroll´s study was not what Barth presented it to be; it does not articulate the anthropological understanding of ethnic groups generally shared at that time. And it does not do this at two different levels. First, Naroll did not actually deal with ethnicity. It is clear, when looking at the references Naroll uses, that he did not follow literature on ethnic processes, and he possibly might have been ignorant of its existence. The study Barth cites represented a striking exception to his work, neither before nor after this specific publication (and the corresponding discussions) did his research focus on the question of ethnicity (cf. Otterbein 1987). Second, as documented by Morton Fried among others: “That Naroll´s endeavour [in his 1964 contribution] failed to develop a broadly satisfying answer to the problem [i.e. the definition of an ethnic unit] is obvious from the associated commentaries published with his article[[2]](#footnote-2)” (Fried 1966: 527). It is worth mentioning that one of the comments was written by Edmund Leach, who – in sharp contrast to Barth´s representation of Naroll´s study – concludes his disapproving critique of Naroll by stating: “I would suppose that most British social anthropologist would share my views [i.e. views disapproving of Naroll´s text] on this particular issue” (Leach 1964: 299). But to be fair, Naroll´s approach did meet different responses in other domains of cross-societal comparative studies, nevertheless, in the domain of the study of ethnicity, it “encountered largely hostile response” (Fried 1975: 86).

1. Naroll is misspelled as „Narroll“ in Barth´s text, we correct this obvious mistake. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. I.e. commentaries to the Naroll´s study published in the volume of *Current Anthropology*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)