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Countering Modernity: Communal and Cooperative Models from Indigenous Peoples.

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**Whose collective? A hunter-gatherer mode of “being many”**

This discussion of indigenous communal models takes place within large-scaled administrative, conceptual and ontological frameworks of “being many,” a general term I use to create space for going being collective, communal and group and for exploring alternative modes, too. We try to explore here, in this large conference, in this large American city, some of us in person and others through the digital network from their distant homes in other parts of the globe, possible alternative modes of “being many” that small indigenous communities show us. Our project is paradoxical, but not impossible.

True, we are trying to figure out alternative group-models. when the impetus, terms and ontological framework of our inquiry are deeply embedded within what could be briefed as our Modern framework and sensibilities. True, we assume from the start a particular configuration of “being many” that can be glossed as “whole-and-parts,” “category-and-members” or an “imagined community” in even bringing to the bar of discussion our fieldwork experiences with indigenous communities who, inevitably, we distinguish from one another by ethnonyms and members’ common traits. We group them together by one or another essential similarity (geographic location, language, culture, descent, ethnonym, etc.). And, true, we so implicitly premise (and perpetuate) a model of given separate individuals, and of social life/system as the outcome of how they interact, group and think about each other. However, I believe that by recognizing the paradoxical nature of our inquiry we can partly overcome it, in the same way that anthropology has always started pursuing other life-ways through its Western Modern-born terms, interests and perspectives.

Drawing on my work with forest-foragers in South India, I focus on a particular claimant's experience of seeking governmental recognition of indigenous identity in India. (This case is elaborated in chapter 7 of my book, *Us, Relatives: Scaling and Plural Life in a Foraging World*, 2017, CUP). I use it as means of illuminating how, compared with the Nation-model, indigenous people think and create their modes of “being many;” how they figure out their equivalent modes of “collective”, "community" and "us", and how anthropologists can help appreciating and conceptualizing the indigenous sensibilities despite and through their Modern ones.

The Modern model of “being many” can be typified for our purpose (grossly simplifying it) as binary, exclusive and classificatory, which is essential for grouping and managing a large population of dispersed and unconnected members. This model can be, and is, too easily downscaled to small indigenous communities of connected members, present in each other’s lives, at the price of exploring their alternatives. Aware of my paradoxical inquiry, I explore their alternative models, and argue for typing them as relational, performative and diversity-inclusive (to the extent of encompassing more-than-humans). It is important to explore their alternatives, I urge, not simply for academic sake, because these models can variously serve practical purposes from dealing with indigenous people's contemporary problems to figuring emergent communal modes in our post-Modern digitally-connected social world.