Smith-Morris White Paper/Panel Introduction
AAA Roundtable, November 2021

Countering Modernity: Communal and Cooperative Models from Indigenous Peoples

Communalism is a moral value system that births cooperative and collaborative social engagements. Following the varied social scientific traditions illuminated by Marcel Mauss, Louis Dumont, Marilyn Strathern, Jeffrey Cohen, Carol Stack, and Rhoda Halperin, the authors in this Roundtable highlight communalism as a touchstone for research in contemporary economic, legal, and scientific ideologies. Indigenous models for social cohesion and governance, once formative to the same colonial governments that would dominate them (Starna and Hamell 1996), have been forgotten at a time when post-state and anti-colonial models are most needed. Yet communal rights and priorities have not been *destroyed* by hyper-individualized liberalism, they have been made *invisible*. For it is the communal, the collective and cultural body that determines how best one *becomes* an individual (Smith-Morris 2020; Kusserow 2004). Anthropological foci that promote attention to these communal processes will not only guide better science but might also repair and redress past erasures through more reflexive and collaborative research and publication models.

Necessary for any discussion of communalism, then, is a probing inquiry to the industrial, settler state's legal and epistemological assumptions about individualism. Powerful influencers in global markets and politics are rooted in assumptions of liberal individualism, a Western philosophical construct that is typically described as the binary opposite of communalism. That is a false binary. Communalism and individualism are values informing myriad choices and actions over a lifetime. Far from destroying individualism, communal forces inform and populate the ways that individuals express themselves. Individualism is channeled into a limited set of prescribed models by each cultural community. Recognizing and documenting these models and practices are a complex, but important methodological task of anthropology. And theorizing their role in the conflicts wrought by contemporary global competition is anthropology's professional charge.

Countering Modernity.

As Jürgen Habermas first said in 1980, "the term 'modern' again and again expresses the consciousness of an epoch that relates itself to the past of antiquity in order to view itself as the result of a transition from the old to the new" (1981: 3). So the idea of modernity is no longer dependent on the classics of antiquity, but simply on whatever temporal past has achieved the status of a meaningful historical referent. Right now, we are consumed with references to pre-colonial and pre-national, rather than to pre-industrial, or pre-modern as we once (fairly recently) were. So in this panel, we are not simply challenging post-colonial forces but exposing the perpetual, repeated, post-ing that the self-referential 'modernity' trope has us do. This is not so much an academic conversation, as an ethnographic meaning-making one in which we attempt --- in Bird David's words --- "to recognize the paradoxical nature of our inquiry [so that] we can partly overcome it".

The paradox is this.

These authors attempt to name and mark communal processes in order to value and protect them. Yet in naming and marking these practices as Indigenous - because that is the characteristic of the Peoples who value and practice them - we draw them under the gaze of our social science, the proverbial diorama glass. In other words, models that Indigenous Peoples reveal for combatting the hyper-individualism, standardization, and anonymity of mass-scale society are ways of Countering Modernity.

When brought together and compared, various Indigenous relational and cooperative models include *Buen Vivir,* Living with Rom, and other alternatives that - - - sometimes thrillingly and inspiringly, but other times regrettably and defensibly - - - resist. Some of our group examines the potential violences of representative democracies; the trope of nationhood; and even the human exceptionalist perspective on identity. Others are

concerned with capitalist - - - or anti-capitalist - - - movements the appear across the spectrum of Indigenous strategies for survivance. Bird David will suggest that communal models may only be safely encapsulated by the framework of "being many", without assumption or even attempt to delineate how, why, or in what form particular People will take. And I take her idea here as a life raft in turbulent waters.

In my recent publication titled <u>Indigenous Communalism</u>, I drew together ethnographic data with comparative, cross-cultural evidence of (1) the tensions of the global and the local increasingly present for Indigenous lifeways; and (2) individualist oppression in modern media, law, and markets. These cases demonstrate how Western ideals of the individual are not *anti*-communal, as White supremacy culture tends to portray, but instead are simply one expression of communal values.

So, moving forward into that paradox, the question for this roundtable is about communal process.

- Morphy is grappling with the degree to which Indigenous Australians have "found it necessary to draw boundaries around their member 'citizens'". They did place themselves; they knew their relations and land-holding units; but the degree and ways in which they had to justify, exclude, and project those representations is decidedly different in the Native Title era. Thus, anthropologists are called upon to understand how these boundary-markings either reflect or differ from "communalism"
  The Yolnu sense of communal identity, crucially marked by 'living with rom' is an exciting idea - "impervious to the political power imbalances introduced by colonisation" and incommensurable with law, it barely yields to Anderson's "imagined communities". "Rom imagines the nexus between the physical and the social very differently… [both] flexible and resilient, … inherently inclusive."

- The Acryclic movement as space of both individual and communal meaning and action. Dussart captured an incredibly poignant definitional - or positional - phrase: "if you are not from a specific place, if your relatives do not teach you, you cannot paint (the geo-specific ritual designs narratives the [Dreaming])".
  It is about knowledge and exclusion (Dussart)

- Gay - despondancy; politics of membership and self-deterinatoin

- Abadia's work grapples with the emergent possibilities in transitional economic strategies.

As Joel Kahn cautioned (2001), "Like it or not, the ethnographer [working with Indigenous Peoples]… is dragged inexorably into a direct encounter with modernity at the same time as its peoples have been enmeshed in modern processes of commodification, insrumentalization, and rationalization." (2001:654). These authors are, therefore, committed in today's works and in our future collaboration to promote Indigenous equity of power and access through our strategies of co-production and co-authorship.

Indigenous communal and collective priorities are simultaneously key to their cultural survival while being particularly vulnerable to post-colonial erasure by forces of capitalism and liberal representative democracy. It is not that communalism itself is precarious, but that the distinctive communal lifeways and priorities of Indigenous Peoples are. We therefore draw attention to the role of anthropological practice and theory for witnessing, documenting, and ethical engagement with these relational priorities.

I suggest the following questions as a starting point: How do cultures build up around communal and cooperative priorities? How do they maintain their communal ideals in the face of long and continuing colonial, capitalist, and representational-democratic influences? How can anthropologists better attend to the *processes* of building relationships, engagement, and negotiation over time? In what ways is the field/science of anthropology neglectful of (or harmful to) communal realities, knowledge, and priorities? And how do communalist endeavors approach change, such that communities can hold together and thrive despite pressures of increasingly globalized forms of mobility, market participation, and governance?

And more specifically for the Roundtable Conversation, (drawing from Morphy, also a bit from MacDonald) How does the work of drawing boundaries around membership reflect or differ from "communalism"?

Must ethnographers [working with Indigenous Peoples] address the problems of modernity or frameworks of post-colonial? Or are these deterring us from more important questions? Is this part of the paradox that Bird David sees in conducting anthropology in/of Indigenous Peoples?

Or, for all authors, please reflect briefly on notions of inclusivity and "balance" (Morphy), belonging and hybridity (Smith-Morris), and other ways that Indigenous Peoples teach against attitudes that suggestion individualism and communalism are polarized/binary rather than complementary.