

1. At Home

Setting and Mind Setting

Kungan awakens every day in the small forest clearing that overlooks the gorge, his eyes opening to the soft morning sunlight. The six closely spaced huts (which Mohandes has measured by pacing them off and then drawn to scale; see Downscale 1) surround him, standing on three small terraces extending down the hillside, the green of the forest stretching all around them. The huts are made of bamboo and grass. On their walls hang small sections of bamboo containing honey hives. Back carriers made of bamboo hang from the roof beams. Kungan is an early riser, and other people are still asleep, lying on the ground beside dying hearth fires, two, three, four, sometimes even five bodies cuddling together on mats made of forest grass or rough jute sack. Bamboo containers and carrying baskets and metal axes and pots are scattered around them. Dogs laze beside them. Kungan arises from the mat he shares with his wife and two younger children. Then they too rise, followed by all the others, to start another day.

This description could be taken as what in some ethnographies is called the “setting” or “background.” It could be seen as a literary device to convey a sense of the research site, a static backdrop for the presumably more meaningful theoretical concerns to come. Although, for readers this scene may seem to merely set the analytical stage, for the hamlet’s dwellers, who wake to it day after day, it is at once a physical setting and a *mind* setting. It is the focal site of what Tim Ingold (2000) would describe as their dwelling-in-the-world, even as he largely dwells on the world at large, that is, the environment. In this chapter, I delve into and exploit this scene to provide a sense of the local experience of plural life and its scalar context. I probe it for local dimensions of being-*with* others in a tiny hamlet.

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Hunter-gatherer dwellings have previously drawn little interest from cultural anthropologists, with a few tangential exceptions.¹ Their dwellings have hardly been seen as buildings: in popular views and in certain scholarly traditions, hunter-gatherers are distinctive precisely because they do *not* interfere with their environment and do *not* transform it into a “built” one. Peter Wilson (1988) went so far as to suggest that the significant turning point in human social evolution was when people began to live in houses. In doing so, he distinguished, in effect, between hunter-gatherers, who do not have architecture, and other societies, who do. Early twentieth-century descriptions, and even some today, help to perpetuate this impression, if only inadvertently, through the terms used to describe hunter-gatherer dwellings. For example, *shelter* (sometimes in specific combinations, such as *leaf shelter*, *rock shelter*, etc.) is a broad term that is also sometimes used in conjunction with animals, and *hut* and *camp* are words commonly associated today with outdoor recreation and the military, taking their meaning from the opposition between the interior of the house and the outdoors. This language obscures the fact that these dwellings are *home* for their dwellers and that, even though a structure is temporary, it embodies a permanent way of dwelling for those who occupy it.

Martin Heidegger’s (1971) position on the relation between “dwelling” and “building” is helpful here. Building and *then* dwelling in a structure is a common practical experience. Broadly approaching dwelling as a way of being-in-the-world, Heidegger reverses that order (notably, shifting scales) and suggests that “we do not dwell because we build, but we build and have built because we are dwellers. . . . *Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build*” (146, 148). In a widely read essay, Ingold (2000: 172–88) applied this perspective to hunter-gatherer huts, working from a general ecological-anthropological approach and focusing on an archetypal hut as the object of reflection. With Ingold, I pay attention in my ethnographic analysis to Kungan and his relatives’ forms of building as arising “within the current of their involved activity, in the specific relational contexts of their practical engagement with their surroundings” (186). I move on from Ingold by shifting the analytical gaze to the forager community and an actual hamlet comprising several huts. With Jean-Luc Nancy (2000: 3), I maintain that being cannot be anything but being-with, and so dwelling cannot be anything but dwelling-with others. For the foragers I know well, those others are close relatives with whom they share a hamlet. The title of Ingold’s influential essay, “Building, Dwelling, Living: How Animals and People Make Themselves at Home in the World,” expresses a common focus on “people” (in a generalized, large-scaled sense) as they make them-

selves at home in the *world* (again, generalized and large-scaled), and his analytical focus is the (generic, singularized) hunter-gatherer “hut.” Downscaling Ingold’s agenda, and opening it to plurirelational everyday life, in this chapter, I zoom in on the huts of a tiny hunter-gatherer community of relatives and look at, in Ingold’s words, “building . . . circumscribed within dwelling . . . [rather than] dwelling circumscribed within building” (2000: 185).

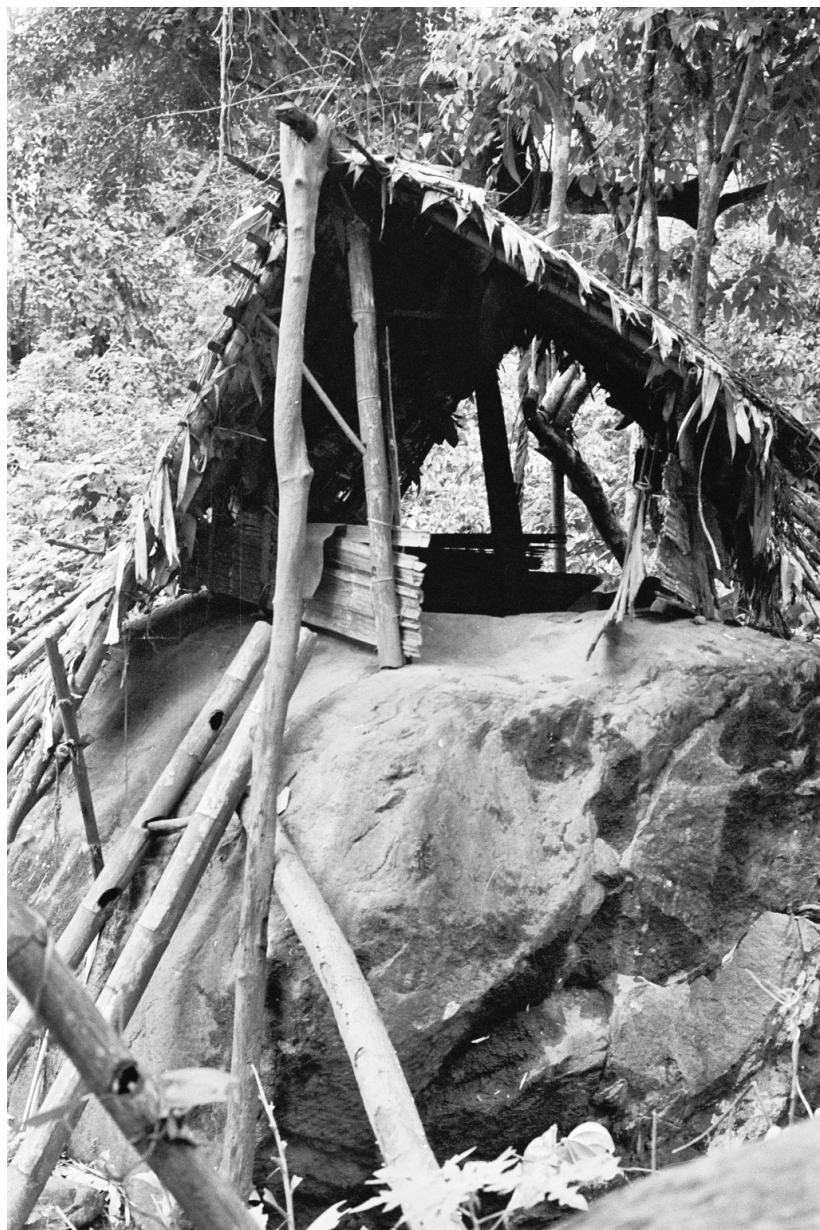
My ethnographic study joins other studies that exploit the rich analytical potential of dwellings (though heretofore not of foragers’ dwellings).² Pierre Bourdieu’s oft-cited study (1973 [1971], based on his 1960s work in Algeria) showing that the Kabyle house concretizes symbolic schemata and cultural values is a foundational example of this focus. In his later work, Bourdieu (1977) pointed to the house as part of the objective reality within which its dwellers grow up and acquire their taken-for-granted and often unconscious habits of acting in the world and thinking about it. This idea was amplified by, among others, Janet Carsten and Stephen Hugh-Jones, who suggested that “house, body, and mind are in continuous interaction, the physical structure, furnishings, social conventions and mental images of the house at once enabling, moulding, informing and constraining the activities and ideas which unfold within its bounds” (1995: 2).

Valentine Daniel (1984: chapter 3) conducted a detailed study of the construction of houses in rural Tamil Nadu villages as part of his ethnographic exploration of the Tamil sense of personhood. His study provides an instructive comparative case for my ethnography, which concerns foragers living at the forested edges of Tamil Nadu. The village Daniel worked in had a population of over two thousand persons (56) and so was nearly a hundred times the size of Kungan’s hamlet, a relevant scalar disparity to bear in mind. The Tamil village house, he shows, is regarded as a person and, like a person, is perceived to be composed of various substances. Its construction involves a great deal of ritual and divination, the goal of which is to achieve the best fit between the house and its owner. A priest accompanies and supervises the building of a house in all its details. Horoscopes are consulted to ensure that key stages take place on auspicious days. Houses are conceived and born, and their formative years determine their *kunam* (quality, disposition). They have good and bad times. They are self-aware. They have feelings, for example, fearing to be alone. The Tamil house and person, Daniel argues, are in a metonymic relation. The house is not just metaphorically depicted as a person but tangibly presents the Tamil sense of person, not as individual but as dividual (in McKim Marriott’s [1976] sense, elaborated by Marilyn Strathern [1988]). Kungan and his relatives’

senses of dwelling(s), I show, stand in stark contrast to rural Tamil house culture, expressing the fundamental importance, for them, of pluripresent relatives living together.

In this chapter, I extend this general perspective to hunter-gatherer dwellings, not least to the huts glimpsed above, which Kungan and his relatives prefer, even though they have the know-how and skills to build more solid structures. The issue came into sharp focus for me in 2001, when I visited a school for tribal children in the region run by an internationally supported local development organization. A teacher proudly showed me a display that the children had made, a miniature model of huts built of twigs and grass, each with an outside fireplace marked by small stones. I assumed the display illustrated a traditional hamlet, like the one I had called home in 1978–79, but I was corrected by a sixth grader who, prompted by the teacher, explained to me in simple English that “this is how early man lived.” Development organizations had, by then, demolished some of the bamboo and grass huts in the Gorge’s hamlets and, in their stead, constructed brick and mortar “permanent” houses for the foragers (see Lavi and Bird-David 2014). The “permanent” houses, however, turned out to be temporary. They were unsuited to the weather and to local needs. Within a short time, some of them were abandoned, annexes made of traditional materials were added to others, and new huts were being built in the old style (see Bird-David 2009; Lavi and Bird-David 2014). Why did Kungan and his relatives continue to build their traditional huts? What did these dwellings reflect about their dwellers’ senses of themselves and their world?

At the same time, can one say anything meaningful about dwellings that are small and simple? Huts that can be built in less than a day? Dwellings with no inner divisions, fixtures, or decorations? Huts that continually change? These questions invite further attention to taken-for-granted everyday activities such as sleeping (which, as Carol Worthman and Melissa Melby [2002] have noted, accounts for a third of a person’s life and has remained largely overlooked by ethnographers, not least those who study hunter-gatherers). In this chapter, I examine dwelling(s) as process and architectural form. I examine a range of everyday activities and arrangements among Kungan and his relatives as they unfold and are manifested in and around their dwellings, including how huts are constructed, their lack of solidity and inner partitions, their constantly changing layout, where and how belongings are stored and the significance attributed to them, and above all, where, how, and, especially *with whom* Kungan and his relatives sleep, sit, eat, and share other quotidian activities in the home place. I turn, then, to the hamlet in which Kungan awakens. . . .



One of TR hamlet's two huts. Photographed by the author.

DWELLING WITH

They lived in a small hamlet of bamboo and grass huts (Take 1)

In the modern evolutionary script, small-scale societies are associated with homogeneity, while diversity and complexity are linked with growing scale (Strathern 1992a: 22). However, the *diversity* of the huts in Kungan's hamlet was striking, as it was in other hamlets I visited.

One could observe huts with roofs extending beyond the walls, creating large shaded spaces, and huts with grass and palm leaves thrown on a simple frame. Some huts were walled on all sides, others were partly walled lean-tos, and still others had no walls but only a thatched roof. One could discern huts erected on mud-beaten raised platforms, others directly on the ground, and still others on rocks. Diversity expressed itself not only in the overall structure but also in the tiny details. For instance, the bamboo used for walls could be split into thin strips or cut open and flattened, creating cracked sheets. In one hut, strips might be laid horizontally, and in another (right next to the first), sheets might be laid vertically. I looked for common patterns in the early days of my fieldwork, and whenever I thought I had identified one, I shared the thought with Kungan or someone else. I was inevitably told that whatever I was pointing to could be or was done in other ways. Often, my interlocutor would then conclude our conversation with words I hoped not to hear yet did time and again: *Bere, bere* (different, different). Once, exasperated, I provocatively asked whether incest was forbidden, and I was told, "It does not happen here but maybe it happens in other places." Kungan and his relatives, I gradually realized, assertively recognized diversity as given.

The huts' diversity, a concrete illustration of this, was apparent in both plan and construction and stood out *because* the structures were so few, thus vividly presenting to attention their idiosyncrasies. The conspicuousness of their diversity was reinforced for me when I learned that, in the late 1960s, Kungan and some of his relatives had built several solid houses, all to a standard plan, for plantation workers who engaged them to do so, using forest materials to the settlers' specifications (a dozen or so of the workers then moved into those houses, which were outside the plantation area in the forest). Had they wanted, then, Kungan and his relatives could have built similar houses for themselves. They did not do so because they did not *build* their huts. From Ingold's perspective, their huts evolved and changed form as part of the foragers' dwelling or, more correctly, dwelling *together*.

The huts in Kungan's hamlet, and in each of the other hamlets in the Gorge, were located close to one another, although there was sufficient space to accommodate far greater distances between them.³ One could argue that

their proximity provided security. However, roaming elephants were the chief danger in this area, and such elephants are better left a clear path between huts, lest they trample one or another down on their passage through a hamlet. The proximity of the huts afforded the dwellers pluripresence and pluri-participation in each other's lives. The small number of huts (six in Kungan's hamlet, including my own, one to three in the others) and their propinquity (five to ten meters between huts) allowed each dweller to remain in continuous contact with *all* of a hamlet's other dwellers. Kungan and his wife, for example, did not need to make any effort to see and hear what others in the hamlet were doing and saying as they pursued their own affairs. All the other hamlet's dwellers were continuously present within the couple's bodily zone of attention. They were vividly visible and audible to the couple, as they lived both close by and in huts that were often not walled or only partly so.

Huts were rebuilt (in the 1970s) every year to eighteen months, at a very leisurely pace. Sometimes, it took several months to build what could have been achieved within a few days. The wood frame was constructed, and thatch was placed on the roof; walls could remain unbuilt for months, if, indeed, they were ever added. In some cases, only one or two walls were built. In other cases, a lean-to with one or two walls was built resting on a rock face or as an extension to a hut. Four-walled huts had no doors closing their entries, and the walls constructed of split bamboo strips were porous and far from soundproof. The most solidly built huts had open verandas (the solid structure carried the extended roof creating the veranda), and their dwellers used the verandas both during the daytime and at night.

A hut constructed considerably farther away than easy speaking distance (e.g., the hut south of the stream in map 4, separated from the cluster of GR huts by about half a kilometer) counted as a different place. A single hut clearly could constitute a recognized settlement, as was the case for both BR and UP hamlets. The local issue was not that a hut feared to be alone, as Daniel (1984: 110) described for the Tamil house. Rather, the proximity of huts in Kungan's hamlet, and the flimsy partitions, spoke to the extent and importance of relatives' participation in each other's lives.

Much domestic life was carried on *outside* the huts, except during the monsoon periods, when heavy rains poured down relentlessly and the heavily trafficked area around the structures turned to squelchy mud. Relatives cooked, ate, bathed babies, idled, manufactured items, and frequently slept outside the huts, a few meters from one another, within easy communicative reach. To say, as Wilson (1988) does, that life in hunter-gatherer societies typically goes on outside the hut rather than in it is to take insufficient account of scale. When a *few* huts are built close to one

another, *outside* a hut, in fact, means *in between* huts, effectively increasing pluripresence. The modern idea of the house as one's sovereign and secure castle is far removed from the local dwelling ideal. To the contrary, for Kungan and his relatives, withdrawal into a hut signified physical or social indisposition and could be contentious. Even ill persons spent as much time as they could lying on mats outside the huts. Kungan and his relatives did not look for privacy in the hamlet; if they desired it, they left the tiny cluster of huts and went into the forest. Though this behavior might seem peculiar to a middle-class homeowner with a master bedroom equipped with lock and key, it recurs in many ethnographic settings, among hunter-gatherers and others, as a response to the pervasive presence of relatives.

People who stayed inside a hut could be accused of being stingy. When Kungan, for instance, complained to me one day about how "bad things have become" and how "nobody helps anymore," he embellished his complaint by relating how, when so-and-so died, he alone had buried the man. Even the deceased's *chikappa* ("little" father; his father's younger brother) had not helped but had hidden in his hut and pretended not to be home. Partly walled dwellings, clearly, had a strategic value, in that one staying inside such a hut was still accessible and could not be accused of being stingy. This helps explain the popularity of such dwellings, or at least their tolerance, and why the huts were built at great leisure. The hamlet's architecture perpetuated the dwellers' pluriparticipation in each other's lives but also changed with it, as I show by focusing on shared compound huts.

DWELLING CYCLES

They lived in a small hamlet of bamboo and grass huts (Take 2)

Kungan's parents dwelled in an elongated hut, which they shared with two other families. Each family had its own "room" (in the sense of a space for living rather than a partitioned-off area). These rooms were arranged in a row, each with a separate entryway from the outside. At the same time, they were barely separated from one another internally. Only flimsy twigs stuck in the ground and reaching to knee height marked off the different rooms (in other cases, a strip of bamboo was laid on the ground, constituting a low "wall"). I once asked Kungan's father why these partitions were so flimsy. He puzzled over my question, especially when I shared with him my recollections of having grown up in a modest household in Israel. In our home, my parents had had a brick wall built to subdivide the one small children's bedroom they could afford and, thus, provided their two growing children with privacy. What I perceived as crude partitions, I began to

understand, Kungan's father seemed to perceive as interfaces, markers of separate but adjoined rooms. Occupants of such a compound hut did not step over the low "wall" into another room, yet at the same time, they did not pretend that they did not see and hear their relatives in the other rooms. To the contrary, exploiting the visibility and audibility such flimsy partitions afforded, they talked with one another. But—and this is a salient point—they did not address or expect a response from anyone in particular. They began or continued a generalized conversation that anybody present could join. This form of communication—by no means unique to tiny societies—can be called plurilogue (as opposed to dialogue), and it was especially striking at night, when people lay down to sleep, and in the dark, one could hear the murmur of such conversations going on, linking rooms and outside mats, until everyone nodded off.

A compound hut with multiple rooms (I never saw one with more than three) developed gradually, responding to constant coming and going of visiting relatives and changing relationships. A hut started as a single-spaced structure. Only some dwellings ended up comprising two or three rooms. The process, it cannot be stressed enough, did not involve dividing one hut into separate rooms but was additive, joining rooms together. When the need arose, a lean-to was added to an existing hut. Later, other walls could be added to the lean-to, possibly reusing bamboo from the hut wall it adjoined. The new lean-to was added on the basis of need, for example, for a family who came for a short-term visit and lingered on, a widowed person who had vacated his or her previous dwelling, or a child who started living with a partner. The builders of the annex could be the ones who needed it, the occupants of the original hut, or both. Notably, a room or a lean-to was only added to a structure if no other room was vacant in the hamlet. Often, spaces *were* available, as their occupants had left them, going to visit or live in another place. A game of musical chairs played out over time and resulting in no exclusions provides a helpful analogy for the process. Its result was that, at any given moment, the number and occupation of huts in any hamlet reflected the comings and goings of relatives between hamlets. The huts' forms and occupants at various points provided a series of snapshots, as it were, of the ongoing process of joining and separating from relatives, reflecting chance sequences of loves and deaths, visits and work opportunities, friendships and tensions.

My own living accommodation started a musical chairs cycle of its own, with a novel twist. When you closely share everyday life with those you are studying, fieldwork is an unfolding stream of mutual misunderstandings and adjustments, taking you by surprise, especially on matters that seem to be a part of "what goes without saying." The hybrid situation created by the

ethnographer and her hosts is a theater of the mundane, in which necessary improvisations on implicit cultural scripts expose their respective underlying assumptions. After a few months of short visits to the hamlet, I moved with my partner into a two-roomed hut built for us—as I thought then—by Kungan and his wife, whom I paid the same amount they had been paid to build houses for the plantation workers. Kungan obviously thought otherwise: first, his young daughter and a friend started to sleep in the second room. Two weeks later, my partner had to return to his work in England, and when he left, Kungan, his wife, and their youngest son also moved into the second room. Kungan perceived the situation as involving the addition of a room for me in the hut he and his family were building for themselves and the money I provided as something I shared with them. When I left at the end of my fieldwork, their oldest son, a timid thirty-year-old whose wife had left him a few years earlier, moved into the room I vacated.

That no one normally slept alone added to the musical chair movement within and between these tiny hamlets. Sleeping alone was irregular and undesired. When it happened, it expressed tension and conflict resolved by the solitary sleeper's relocation to another hamlet. For example, half-senile and difficult to be with, Kungan's brother's wife's mother at first slept with her granddaughter, then she slept alone, and finally she moved to another hamlet where she slept with a nephew's daughter. A couple always slept together (failing to do so was a sign of tension and imminent separation), and their young children commonly slept with them. Adolescents and unmarried youths shared mats with age-mates and, as need arose, occasionally with widowed persons and visitors. Daniel (1984: 110) described "slumber parties" in which young Tamil boys, young men, and even older men sleep in a row on mats outside their houses or in a group on a neighbor's veranda, rather than retire to the privacy of their houses; women, although remaining indoors, invite neighbors and kinswomen to sleep with them. Plurisleeping practices in Kungan's hamlet went far beyond these Tamil conventions, often involving mixed-age and mixed-gender sharing of mats and covers by more than conjugal couples and parents and children. Mixed-age and mixed-gender cosleeping was preferable to leaving someone to sleep alone and was sometimes the only possible alternative in such a tiny hamlet. Cosleeping and, often, plurisleeping in the open provided warmth; it obviated the need for more substantial bedding, which in turn contributed to perpetuating these practices. As George Foster vividly described for Tzintzuntzan (Mexico), here too, "what seems impossible crowding by the standard of people who sleep one, or at most two, in a bed, is a source of comfort" (1988 [1967]: 105).

Given mixed-gender and mixed-age cosleeping, an unlikely couple in terms of their ages could sleep together without drawing public attention until they began to spend time together during the day (at which point they begin to be viewed as a couple). Of a new couple who seemed to strategize within these conventions to keep other parties away and maintain intimacy, it was said that they “separately, separately, sleep together.” This phrase wonderfully sums up the local perspective that the salient point was not the uniting of two single sleepers, a shift from one to two, but rather their separation from others *and* their joining together, that is, a shift from one plurality to another. Rather than see sleeping alone as the natural state of affairs until one physically matures and sexually unites with another—that is, rather than see it and sexual sleeping together as dichotomously opposed states between which a body alternates during its lifetime—Kungan and his relatives experienced the ease, flow, and indeterminacy of joining with and separating from others. They experienced sleeping in a series of shifting pluralities, unfolding one from the other. The same serial pluralism characterized their occupancy of dwellings.

Focusing on a single house, hearth, or body to describe a broader type, following the common singularizing mode expressed, say, in the anthropology of *the body*, of *the house*, and of *the self*, conceals the shifting pluralities I have described. The fluid, flexible nature of dwelling with others in the tiny hunter-gatherer hamlet can only be gauged by examining the *plurality* of huts, hearths, and bodies. And their plurality can be kept vividly in focus, in this case, *because* there were few of them, because they were few-many.

BELONGING(S) WITH

They lived in a small hamlet of bamboo and grass huts (Take 3)

Kungan and his relatives’ dwelling experiences are further illuminated by training the analytical lens on the things that lie in and between their huts—their belongings—and by considering them from the perspective of “belongings with.” I purposely use *belongings* in preference to *possessions*, *objects*, *goods*, and so on, capitalizing on that term’s early English synonymy with *relatives* and on the fact that, as Jeanette Edwards and Marilyn Strathern (2000: 159) note, “belonging” today encompasses all forms of human-nonhuman association and appropriations. Scholars have long regarded absence of storage as a defining attribute of hunter-gatherers’ mode of subsistence (e.g., see Woodburn 1980; Testart 1982; Ingold 1983). Below, I examine that standard as I use everyday storage praxis as a prism on hunter-gatherers’ senses of themselves and their worlds.

I was struck initially by the apparent disorder of household objects (in fact, “hearthhold objects,” but I retain the conventional term), jumbled together in corners of huts, hung on ropes, or simply scattered on the ground. On my side of the hut I shared with Kungan and his family, I kept the few things I had brought with me in five plastic storage boxes, stacked one on top of another, one each for kitchenware, food, clothes, hygiene and medical supplies, and professional equipment. My tiny corner of the hut reflected the habitus and logic of a bourgeois household with its functionally differentiated rooms, its cupboards, drawers, shelves, hangers, and other means of storing objects by kind and specific use. The scene in and around Kungan’s family’s side of the hut could not have been more different: cooking pots left beside the hearth contained leftover food, plates lay on the ground next to pots holding water brought from the river, other plates were piled at the edge of the veranda alongside small open parcels of salt, chilies, and rice. Clothes were thrown together over a rope hanging between the hut’s poles. On the same rope were hung blankets, backpack baskets, and traps made of bamboo, all jumbled with the clothing. The family’s belongings were not separated and assigned to particular places by class and function, as mine were, and for this reason they struck outside observers as being in disarray.

In *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Gregory Bateson (1987 [1972]) offers a starting point for a fresh exploration of the local senses of what I initially perceived, ethnocentrically, as disorganized storage praxis. Through a delightful narration of a bedtime conversation between a father and a daughter who asks him, “Why do things get in a muddle?” Bateson (13–18) develops the argument that “tidiness” references particular habituated locations. And so, what is “tidy” to one person is not to another. In the example he uses, his daughter’s paint box is not “in a muddle” only when it stands upright on the left end of a certain shelf, its habitual place (14). In this example, Bateson assumes a bourgeois household with multiple rooms, partitions, fixtures, and furniture, a house that presents a rich grid for defining a tidy state. He could have further defined the right place for the paint box as the daughter’s bedroom, not her brother’s or her parents’, not the kitchen or the bathroom. To give another example (my own), the father might have instructed the daughter to place a dinner plate in the middle drawer of the lower cupboard next to the refrigerator, above the drawer where the cups are kept. The sense of order this instruction expresses hinges on additionally compartmentalizing things by logic of sameness according to kind, purpose, and status. This logic is consistent with a world in which goods are mass-produced for specific uses.

Could the few seemingly muddled belongings lying here and there in Kungan’s hamlet express another sense and logic of order? I argue that this

is the case and that that logic is underwritten by the idea of things belonging *with* people and *with* other things rather than *in* places. One should not forget that the hut and hamlet architecture afforded only a rudimentary grid, if any, for assigning belongings to their “tidy” places. The hamlet’s dwellings did not offer an elaborate storage environment. Huts (and rooms in compound huts) had no fixtures or furniture, no inner partitions, and sometimes no outer walls. Moreover, as I describe above, they dynamically changed in response to circumstances. When Kungan brought home small amounts of rice, chilies, and salt he obtained at a tea shack on the edge of the plantation, he did not have a kitchen, a special cupboard, or a specific shelf on which to store them. The shopkeeper wrapped each of these provisions separately in a plantain leaf and then placed all three packets together in a larger leaf or a piece of newspaper. Back home, Kungan untied the bundles to allow access to the contents, leaving everything together on the leaves until consumed. The foodstuffs belonged together, he explained to me, when I asked why he did not at least separate out the small bundles; they all came to the hamlet together and for the most part would be used together.

Retrospectively, a household survey I carried out throws more light on belongings. I undertook it with little enthusiasm, seeing it as an expected component of fieldwork at the time. An ethnographer, in those days, was supposed to go from family to family and record what kinds of things and how “many” instances of those things each had. I integrated this obligatory task into my informal conversations, regarding the “survey” as occasioning, involving, and taking place within a social process. I simply asked people what they had and jotted down their responses as close to verbatim as I could, as I did for all my other conversations. Having so few people in the study group, and living with them on a daily basis, I felt comfortable lapsing into such informal data collection rather than filling out prepared forms in formal, dedicated sessions at appointed times. Later, I abstracted the information from my running notes. Among other things, I distinguished between objects of forest and market origin (see table 1) and compared the household belongings of an old couple (in their seventies), their married child and his wife (late forties), and their married granddaughter and her husband (early twenties; see table 2). The paucity and simplicity of material belongings clearly stand out in these tables, which represent the household objects in Kungan’s world in their entirety, by essential kind, quantity, and owners. Surplus accumulation hardly seemed to have taken root among members of the younger generation, although they had a few novel items, like the two cloth bags, the “cushion,” and the stool enumerated in table 2.

TABLE 1. Inventory of belongings by type

Forest origin	Backpacks, fishing traps and traps for wildfowl (all made of strips of bamboo woven or tied with strips of bark), bamboo vessels, bamboo poles (for shaking high-growing fruits and pods), digging sticks and arrows (with iron heads), mats (woven of grass), and ladles (made of halved coconuts).
Market origin	Metal cooking pots, plates, knives, cups, and axes; plastic containers and glass bottles; a torch; matches.

TABLE 2. Inventory of belongings by generation

Grandparents	One billhook knife, one ax, two bamboo carrying baskets, one bamboo container, one grass mat, one medium-size clay pot, two metal pots, one metal plate, one tiffin carrier, three metal cups, one glass bottle, two small metal tins.
Parents	One billhook knife, one metal ax, one bamboo carrying basket, two traps for wildfowl, four bamboo containers, one grass mat, one metal digging stick, three metal pots, one plastic jerrican, one torch, three glass bottles.
Grandchildren	One billhook knife, one pruning knife, two bamboo containers, one grass mat, four metal plates, one metal cup, one glass bottle, two cloth bags, one “cushion” (cotton stuffed in a plastic bag), one small wooden stool.

The tables provide, at a quick glance, a useful perspective on local belongings but reveal nothing about the dwellers’ own perspectives.

What did Kungan and his relatives actually say in response to my questions about belongings? For each item, they detailed *who* had delivered it into their world, for example, mentioning the “sickle knife given by the plantation’s supervisor,” the “grass mat made by an aunt,” the “cooking pot given by a cousin,” and so on. More than half of the items mentioned were described as having been procured by a particular relative. The remainder were described as made, found, or bought by someone’s spouse (these three modes were secondary distinctions). Kungan’s wife surprised me when mentioning a plastic jerrican her husband bought with money I gave him, extending the genealogy of the jerrican to include me “with” it as the money giver. Every item, including market-purchased objects in daily use, was connected with a relative who procured it.

The ontological premises underscoring this relational system of belongings can be sketched using the example of a knife. In local terms, as I now understand them, there was no specific singular knife in the world that one could access and make one's own, any more than, say, a brother was a free-for-the-claiming entity in the world. Just as a brother was, ipso facto, prerelated to someone—actually, someones, as “brother” entailed other relations—so a knife was prerelated to someone(s). Someone(s) had made it, bought it, or brought it; it did not appear on its own; someone(s) had delivered it into locals' midst, into their lived world. Its origin in an unknown faraway place was blurred in this register. Attention predominantly focused on it here and now, after the item had become relationally present through a relative, after it had become “relatable with.” The knife, then, was perceived relationally, *with* a (familiar) relative in mind but no more exclusively than a brother was, who was related, by definition, to a number of people. The gift in the Maussian sense embodies interpersonal relation, whereas the knife, when passed on to and used by others, embodied the plural togetherness of the relatives among whom it circulated (cf. Bird-David 1990).

In this community, “my knife” was not a statement of ownership. Rather, it registered my constant use of that knife and my being-with it. It was a statement of belonging as a performed relation, corresponding with the way a relative continued to be a relative only as long as he or she remained an actively engaged member of the community (Barbara Bodenhorn [2000] aptly titled a discussion of a similar Inupiat pattern “He Used to Be My Relative”). For this reason, the same knife could be (and was) regarded by Kungan's wife as hers, his, and both of theirs. She referred to it in all these ways, shifting between attributions and confusing me, so I asked her what she meant. She patiently explained that the tool was Kungan's because he had found it and then used it. It was hers because she also used it. And it was theirs because both of them used it. In describing it as *nama* (~ ours), she did not mean that the knife was “with” her and her husband as a unit, as one paired entity. It was not their unity, their two-as-oneness, to which the knife belonged. Rather, it belonged to each of them and to both of them in what I describe as an additive, or a joined, sense: it was with him and with her. The intensity of its co-use was made possible by and sustained their staying together and also reflected that togetherness.

During its constant use, the same knife was employed creatively in multiple contexts and for diverse purposes. Unlike the bourgeois household dinner plate, dedicated to a particular use and stored in a particular place when not in use, here, one and the same knife was plurally and unrestrictedly used. It was used, among other tasks, for digging; hunting; fishing; collecting

honey; building huts; making bamboo containers, baskets, and traps; preparing food and eating; preparing forest medicines; grooming and cutting hair; pulling thorns embedded in the skin; even sharpening bamboos for cutting the umbilical cord at birth. The perceived “affordance” of the knife (to use James J. Gibson’s [1979] term) was not a priori limited either in terms of its logical categorization (say, a “hunting knife”) or its users (e.g., women). The same knife could be used one day by a man hunting, the next day by a child cutting firewood, and the third day by a woman making birth preparations. Often, husbands and wives had *one* knife, which they both carried and used interchangeably. Only couples who casually worked on the plantation sometimes had two knives, given to them by their employers.

Creative multiple uses of one knife rested on one’s skill or, in Claude Lévi-Strauss’s sense, on a *bricoleur* kind of mind; conversely, such skillful use precluded the need for multiple knives of different kinds and, thus, the need for storage facilities to house them separately and safely when not in use. The idea that a thing should be used constantly in turn placed limits on how many items of the same kind one could keep, and it helped perpetuate nonaggrandizement. The value and even the thingness of something depended on its constant use. In the absence of storage facilities and concern with storage, anything that was not actually used could be taken by others. If it lay where it fell or was dropped, it could be trampled on, get covered by vegetation, and deteriorate. A knife did not commonly go through this trajectory. It is a versatile tool, and if, for some reason, one was left lying around, someone would pick it up. Plates and other metalware, by contrast, could lie unused for a long while, such that petty traders periodically climbed down to the foragers’ forest hamlets to themselves “forage” for scattered metalware, offering a rupee or two for each piece they collected. For this reason, increased involvement in wage-paying work and in market consumption did not rapidly lead to self-aggrandizement and accumulation of belongings but rather to increased distribution of objects among relatives. Notably, when relatives moved to another hamlet, they sometimes left belongings behind that others could pick up and use, just as they left their rooms for others to move into. Lest the foregoing discussion imply a world without conflict over things, I hasten to add that conflicts did break out in the interstices of this particular regime. They revolved around belongings that, left lying around, were assumed to be abandoned and so were picked up and used without permission. When sought, permission was always granted, but asking for it was considered proper conduct. For example, in a case I describe elsewhere (Bird-David 1990), a couple departed for another hamlet, leaving an ax behind. Someone used it without requesting

their permission. The couple came back earlier than anticipated and an argument broke out over this unauthorized use.

Huts did not substantially vary from other belongings; rather, they were the largest “stuff” of all (as Daniel Miller [2010] regards houses). If no one moved into and occupied a vacant hut, it slowly fell into disuse. As it was built of organic materials, its existence was hard to discern after a few years. The exuberant forest vegetation soon covered it. For example, after Kungan’s younger brother and his wife moved to a new hut that they built on a terrace above the other huts, no one moved into their old place. Within a short time, thin veins of bare earth, pathways, appeared between the new hut and the ones below, while vegetation started growing around the hut the couple had abandoned. A few months later, one could hardly see the remains of the old hut, and the hut that had been added up the hill no longer looked new. The hamlet—its huts and the network of footpaths connecting them—seemed to have shifted position. Relocation of one hut in a large village would hardly change the village contours, but the relocation of one hut in a tiny hamlet does! Had Mohandes surveyed the hamlet after the couple moved, he would have drawn a different map.

A Tamil man from a small township in the region, Mohandes registered the huts as constituting a village, albeit tiny, a bounded entity comprising the huts he had individually measured. Did Kungan and his relatives share his view? Did they register the closely spaced few huts in and between which they lived as a single hamlet, a camp? I pursue this question in the final section of this chapter, which introduces readers to the local sense of dwelling(s), to a perception of setting, and to a mind-set focused especially on “one and many.”

SIME (~ HOME)

They lived in a small hamlet of bamboo and grass huts (Take 4)

Beginning to think about this book, I realized I did not know a local word for the aggregate of huts (equivalent to *hamlet*, *camp*, or *village*) in and around which Kungan and his relatives pursued many of their daily routines. On my visit in 2001, I asked Kungan’s nephew, “What do you call all the huts here?” I trusted the counsel of this young man, whom I had known since he was seven. He thought long and finally answered, “Aparemane.” Literally, *aparemane* means “many buildings.” *Mane* (building, structure) is regionally used, for instance, by Badaga and Kannada speakers, for “house.” *Apare* (many) is more intriguing; it belongs to the kind of unquantifiable “many” that is part of the “one, two, many” counting systems

found cross-culturally among tiny hunter-gatherer-cultivator communities (Pinker 2007: 138).⁴ Similar counting systems have been debated by cognitive linguists concerned with the existence of numeracy without words.⁵ Addressing the issue, Steven Pinker related that he was baffled by these systems until Napoleon Chagnon told him that the Yanomamo “don’t need exact numbers because they keep track of things as individuals, one by one” (138). A Yanomamo hunter, for example, recognizes each of his arrows and knows whether one is missing without having to count them. The same habit of mind, Pinker suggests, “would make most of us pause if someone asked us how many first cousins we have, or how many appliances in our kitchen, or how many orifices in our head” (138). The point itself is weak (in these systems, there are words for the first few numbers, which are, in this thesis, the least needed).⁶ But the general direction is welcome. The remark prompts me to ask what senses of pluralness are expressed by *apare*, as one of these concepts of “many,” before I continue to explore what Kungan’s nephew’s answer meant, what he was conveying by referring to the tiny cluster of huts not as a camp or village but as “many huts.”

The huts in Kungan’s hamlet can be added up only if they are serialized; unless they are perceived to be what I shorthand as “same and separate” entities, they cannot be perceived as “six” huts. To be able to say “six huts,” one must first perceive them as six distinct entities and, furthermore, as six serialized, same-and-separate units—that is, six times *hut*. As I discuss above, the heterogeneity of the dwellings was striking. Their diversity was cognized as the salient feature, verbalized in the insistence that they were—as so much else was—*bere, bere* (different, different).

Furthermore, before we add the huts up, we must also decide what counts as a “hut” and as part of the group, that is, what should and should not be included in the accounting. Do huts on the other side of the river count? Do two-walled structures count or only four-walled ones? Does a lean-to count or only a full structure? Do dilapidated huts count? Does a compound structure (e.g., a room and lean-to annex) count as one hut or two? If we go by whether one or two families occupy it, we then have to define *family* . . . and so on. Using *apare* preempts such definitional quibbles and the need to standardize. As Kungan’s nephew used it, the term, I argue, emphasized the huts’ contiguity and pluripresence. In the local register, the huts were what I shorthand as “diverse and pluripresent,” adjoined and different rather than same and separate.

My count of six huts is tenuous. Separating and standardizing a fuzzy world is the murky side of any survey. However, in large-scale contexts, the “law of large numbers” minimizes the distortion. Failing to count a hundred

dilapidated houses cannot seriously affect a survey carried out in a town with ten thousand houses. By contrast, in the tiny hunter-gatherer hamlet, even a few divergent instances can affect the results. The scalar effect is also two-sided: Kungan and his relatives could perceive the heterogeneity of all their huts and track them as “individuals, one by one,” *because* the huts were few. To perceive ten thousand dwellings in this way would be a cognitive feat. Even when a hamlet consisted of more than a handful of huts—that is, had “many” huts—the “many” were still what I call a “few-many.” The scale of their manyness allowed registering their vivid diversity and cognizing it.

On the one hand, then, the term *aparemane* reflected the local register of the diversity of huts in the hamlet. Using *apare* precluded setting boundaries and agreeing on criteria of inclusion and exclusion. On the other hand, and this should not be missed, Kungan’s nephew’s choice expressed absent alternatives, words that assembled, singularized, and reified all the huts as a collective. The lack of alternatives was also generally expressed in the absence of fixed place-names for the hamlets. Kungan and his relatives used topographical features (e.g., “up the hill”), the locations of relatives (e.g., “uncle’s place”), or simply a gesture of the hand to indicate where they were going or the place they were referring to. In talking with others (and sometimes among themselves), they used the names of the plantations nearest their huts as place-names. The acronyms I use for the hamlets derive from these place-names.

Their use of *aparemane* for the hamlet, then, reflected resistance not only to itemizing the huts as separate and same entities but also to collectivizing and regarding them as a singular mega-actor. The huts, in this local register, did not constitute parts of the hamlet as a whole; they were not seen through the lens of what Strathern (1992a, referring to the modern view of individuals as components of society) calls the logic of “parts and wholes.” In the local register, what I designate “a hamlet” was an irreducible plurality of diverse dwellings where people lived with their relatives. Likewise, when someone asks us, in our large-scale, parts-and-whole world, how many first cousins we have or how many orifices there are in our head, we do not pause because, as Pinker suggests, we know them as “individuals, one by one” but because we know these entities as plurally belonging with one another, each inseparable from all the others, though each is distinctive; we pause because we know them, in other words, as diverse and pluripresent rather than same and separate. We pause to estrange, decontextualize, separate, abstract, standardize, and serialize them to be able to count them. Perhaps, to generalize from this ethnographic instance, hunter-gatherer concepts of “many” are not premised on the understanding of “individuals,

one by one" but rather of "individuals, one *with* one," that is, few-many pluripresent individuals each related to all the others but who do not constitute a One.

Kungan's huts stood at the core of the *sime*, another word in wide regional use but one that Kungan and his relatives used distinctively. In their sense, *sime* is best translated as "home." The word *home* carries profound ontological senses and cultural antecedents to native English speakers (far deeper than *many* does).⁷ It has been argued that *home* cannot be easily translated into other languages (Rykwert 1991: 51; Hollander 1991: 42) but neither, conversely, can terms from other languages simply be translated as "home." My strategy here is to explore *sime* through its departures from *home*, aided later by comparative reference to *ur*, the Tamil equivalent of *home*.

Sime does not refer to a physical structure, a building (for which the term *mane* is used), and in this way it resembles *home*, which is also distinguished from the English *house*, a building.⁸ From this common starting point, however, the meanings of *sime* and *home* diverge. *Home* is closely associated with *family*. In Europe, it has come to be associated with the nuclear family as, in recent centuries, the occupants of a house have in many cases dwindled to include only nuclear family members, excluding other relatives, servants, employees, and so on (see Hareven 1991). Mary Douglas (1991) went as far as to suggest that the idea of "home" frames the house's dwellers as an "embryonic community." By contrast, *sime* is never used for a single hut in a hamlet and rarely for a hamlet consisting of only one hut. *Sime* is inherently associated with a plurality of relatives who live together in a hamlet of several huts.

In Kannada and Badaga, the regional languages closest to Kungan's dialect, *sime* means a bounded territory, a space demarcated by boundaries.⁹ For Kungan and his relatives, *sime* spatially connoted the plural huts and the arterial of paths spreading between and outward from them. Constant going and coming took place on these paths: down to the stream to draw water, bathe, urinate, or defecate; farther outward in other directions to collect firewood, relieve boredom, stretch one's legs, enjoy privacy; and still farther to forage and visit relatives in other hamlets. *Sime* stretched outward to the horizons of everyday immediate experience. An outside hearth open to its surroundings is a better image than a house for appreciating the spatiality of *sime*. *Sime* refers to an area expanding outward from a shared focus and fading away at the horizons of perception.

Nama sime (~ our home; *sime* commonly is prefixed by a first person plural possessive term) connotes the space where relatives relate with one another, each with all the others. And in doing so, they perform their *sime*

into being; the we-centric *nama sime* is not a pre-given space *in which* they live. *Sime*, in this sense, is contingent on the same continuous ongoing work of being-with that I have described as governing personal belongings. One might rightly ask, what happens when several hamlets exist whose dwellers keep in close touch with one another, as was the case for the local group I studied? If, spatially, *sime* refers to an area expanding outward from a focus, fading away at the horizons, what happens when there are several focuses? The image of several hearths provides for more tangible visualization in this case; even better is the image of ripples spreading out from several stones thrown into the water at the same time, at first marking where each stone hits, then spreading and merging together. The inhabitants of each hamlet regarded their hamlet and its surroundings as their *sime*, a domain that extended to the rest of the Gorge and included the other hamlets they constantly visited. The same additive logic, then, that underlies possession of a knife infuses the idea of *sime*.¹⁰

In his study of the rural Tamil Nadu village, Daniel likens *ur* to *home* and argues that *ur*, like *home*, is a person-centric definition of space. (He distinguishes *ur* from *tecam* and *kiramam*, the last two referring to the nation, country, and village as fixed geographic and administrative units appearing on maps and taught at school.) Daniel introduces the Tamil notion of *ur* in the following words:

When a Tamil asks the question of a stranger, "What is your *ur*?" he is really asking "Where is your home?" As in the case of the English word *home*, the contextually determined speech act will determine the response. Thus, if a Tamil is asked this question when he is in Sri Lanka, he will reply that his *ur* is India. If he is in Kerala, he will reply, "Tamil Nadu," and if in some part of Tamil Nadu itself, he will refer to the district, neighboring town, or to his particular village. (1984: 67)

As is clear from this exposition, Daniel takes for granted that a stranger asks about one's home and, similarly, about one's *ur* and that the question is asked of one who is away from home. In fact, one normally is asked, "Where is your home" when one *is* away from home. The questioner is normally someone who does not share one's home. And the question presupposes a "you" not included among "us." Were one to be asked, "Where is *our* home?" one might suspect the question to be philosophical or symptomatic of some sort of pathology in the questioner. *Ur* and *home*, then, are both bound up in a series of inclusive and exclusive abstractions, premised on a world that is partly unknown (and imagined to be so; i.e., larger than one can personally know). In such a world, one explains to strangers where one's home is versus other homes in the village, versus other villages in the

county, and so on.¹¹ These senses of *home* and *ur* are almost incomprehensible in Kungan's world. As an utterance, *nama sime* (~ our home) is not intended to explain to a stranger where one lives. Rather, it asserts that "we, all of us here" share a home together. This "we" applies to all of the dwellers who reside in the Gorge's hamlets, one of whom would never ask another, "Where is your home?" Each of these dwellers not only knows where the others live but also now and then lives with them, shifting his or her residence between hamlets. Thus, unlike *home* and *ur*, *sime* is bound up with a series of inclusionary circles expanding to the horizons of experience. *Sime* is a home that cannot be imagined from afar; it is the spatial concomitant of dwelling *with* others and, as I show in subsequent chapters, not just with fellow humans.

English dictionaries often define the metaphorical concept of *home* in terms of a single person (e.g., a place *one* belongs to, the center of *one's* affections, where *one's* ancestors dwelled).¹² *Home* is peculiarly associated with a single person, although it involves dwelling with a few others in most cases. This same singular bias underscores Daniel's notion of *home* and *ur* as person-centric definitions of space and descriptions of *home* as a place in the world that, in Joseph Rykwert's words, "does not require any building, even if a house always does. You can make a home, everywhere" (1991: 54). I simply cannot overemphasize, in concluding this chapter, that *sime* is, and can only be, a we-centric definition of space. It is a space plurirelationally performed. Perhaps one can make a *home* everywhere, but only "few-many" dwelling together can make a *sime*.

This discussion of dwelling(s) has established Kungan and his relatives' experiential setting and has provided ethnographic grounding for some of the analytical terms through which I approach it: being-with versus being; pluripresent and diverse versus same and separate; expanding ripples versus boundaries; the irreducible few-many versus the infinite many abstracted as a macro-actor, a One. I turn now to varying modes of living with particular relatives who constitute the local pluripresent community in the Gorge.

Census of Relatives

Ethnographers commonly provide some sort of demographic breakdown of their study groups when introducing them to readers. Often they enumerate, either in the text or in a table, the numbers of men, women, and children their groups comprise. Some go an additional step and provide a breakdown by place of residence, age, ethnicity, or other criteria, as relevant to the study's main concerns. I could have followed precedent here and demographically presented my study group in table 3 (reproduced from Bird 1983a: 41) without additional comment. Instead, I want to pause and reflect on the table's methodological and ontological basis, and how the information it relates compromises the study of those it purports to describe.

Tables like mine transform indigenous nanocommunities of relatives into so many generalized, serialized, same-and-separate men, women, and children. The actual numbers in such tables may be minuscule, yet the format of their presentation exerts a large-scale multiplicative alchemy and, in doing so, obscures the nanoness of the study group. The format emulates censuses, which generally are devices used by states and other powers to govern large populations, to represent them and make them known and knowable in particular ways. The census serves a kind of knowing that is superfluous to tiny indigenous communities, whose sense of themselves accrues from their members' years of intimate familiarity with one another. Without denying the effectiveness of the census or the duty of the student to provide demographic information, I narrate how I produced table 3 as a way to reflect on the large-scale-biased "Trojan horse" effect of using this mode of presenting a forager study-community. That is, I present the back-stage of conforming to scale-blind ethnographic standards.

The professional kit with which I arrived in the Gorge included a stack of index cards in addition to notebooks, a tape recorder, and a camera. As the

TABLE 3. The core study group

<i>Hamlet</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Children</i>
TR	4	6	3
TM	6	6	5
GR	8	6	12
UP	1	2	3
BR	3	4	—
Total	22	24	23

SOURCE: Adjusted from Bird 1983a: 41, per middle of fieldwork time.

practical precursor to setting up individual computer files, the neophyte ethnographer in those days was advised to carry a plentiful supply of such cards into the field, to be used to record personal information on individual members of the study group. The cards could then be used for easy retrieval of information also contained in the field diary but less accessible there, given its rapidly cumulating masses of data of all sorts. In preparing my cards before leaving university, I had jotted various headings on the top line of each one according to standard survey parameters I had thought were essential for an individual’s identification and easy to “measure.” Besides an identifying card number, those headings included name, sex, spouse’s name, number and names of children, father’s name, age, and place of residence. As obvious as those parameters had seemed to me in Cambridge, recording the relevant information in the field turned out to be fraught with problems and the process tale telling.

My problems began with my attempt to record people’s names. Personal names are popularly presumed to be universal, a view shared by some scholars (e.g., Alford 1988). Yet Kungan and his relatives, like many hunter-gatherer (and other tiny) indigenous communities, usually referred to and addressed each other by kinship terms. Questioning them about individual names produced thought-provoking vignettes rather than the desired information. “What is the name of this man?” I asked Kungan in reference to a just-arrived visitor I had not previously met. Kungan turned to the man and asked him, “Bava(n)’ [brother-in-law], what are you called nowa-days?” Then, turning back to me, he replied, “He is called Mathen nowa-days on the plantation.” “What are the names of your children?” I asked Kungan early on in my fieldwork. “Madi, Motane, and Inneri,” he replied, referring to the oldest three. “And this boy?” I asked, pointing to the

youngest. "I forget," he said; "we do not remember names." Names and naming have received scholarly attention in recent years because of the way colonial administrations imposed them on entire populations for purposes of governance (see, among others, Alia 1994, 2007; Widlok 2000; Scott 1998; Bodenhorn and Vom Bruck 2006). But they are also important to consider in microsituations like the ethnographic field site. Naming Kungan and his relatives ontologically refigured them as a set of individuals, single essential entities, pregiven in advance of their kinship relations (e.g., "This is Kungan" and "This is Madi" and "Kungan is the father of Madi").

In contrast to the forest foragers themselves, outsiders who engaged with them needed to use fixed personal names for them: the plantation accountant to register their casual attendance at work, the petty shopkeeper to record their custom on credit, and the ethnographer to keep legible records. They commonly used tribal names popular in the region (and increasingly, mainstream Indian names for the younger generation; see Bird 1982). Since the stock of names in use was small, the same name could designate multiple individuals, and since different outsiders compiled their own sets of names, the same individual could be known by various names. Since I already knew a few "Mathens," Kungan's "brother-in-law" entered my notes as BR Mathen (i.e., Mathen from BR hamlet); other outsiders resolved the confusion generated by multiple Mathens by numbering them: "Mathen 1," "Mathen 2," and so on.

Outsiders, however, were inevitably drawn back into the local plural contexts when we tried to communicate about those we so individualized, as became especially apparent to me during my repeated visits. When, ten years after my initial fieldwork, I returned for a visit, I asked what had happened to BR Mathen, and this question started a lengthy process of negotiating contextual knowledge of plural relations. I explained that I meant the "Mathen" who had been married to "Chati," was the son of "Karriyen," had lived in that place next to the river, and so on. I learned by way of response that "Chati" had died, that that place next to the river had been abandoned, that "Chati's" widower had since married so-and-so, and yes, my perspective and my interlocutors' finally converged: the man I had known as "BR Mathen" was now called "Kalan." This conversation, and others like it, evoked a plurality of related people and what had happened to them all, in a way that surely is familiar to readers, although most of us live a large-scale life regulated by use of personal names and surnames, right down to our most intimate relations. In their intimate community, by contrast, Kungan and his relatives used kinship terms and left personal names at the margins, reserved mostly for use at the interface with outsiders.

When they used them, they deployed personal names relationally, as they did kinship terms or, to coin a term, as *interpersonal* names.

Ticking off the next parameter on my cards, sex, was simple, but the one after that, age, was problematic, again reflecting the tug-of-war between individualizing and relationalizing forces. Kungan and his relatives were concerned with the *relative* order of birth that was known to everybody and embodied in some kinship terms (e.g., separate terms for older brother and younger brother). They could not, however, tell an individual's age. "How old are you?" can be easily answered in large-scale bureaucratic societies that, since the nineteenth century, have incorporated age criteria into their developing complex institutions, practices, and ideas (Chudacoff 1992). In such societies, age is a major regulative criterion. Moreover, you anticipate who one "is"—what he or she likes, understands, does, thinks—according to the person's age, and you do so reasonably well given a society in which shops, food, clothes, media, school classes, hospital wings, books, laws, and more are tailored to specific age groups. Coming from such large-scale contexts, anthropologists have developed methods for assessing local ages: normally, they transform the local relative register into an absolute chronology by identifying events that can be independently dated. For example, if BR Mathen was born just after coffee joined rubber as an important crop on the nearby plantation, and I establish that the coffee was planted in the mid-1950s, then, BR Mathen was in his late twenties circa 1978–79. The coincidence (birth when coffee was planted) and the objective fact (coffee was planted in the mid-1950s) *relationally* produced the "objective" end result (BR Mathen was in his late twenties). The local relational register tied people together. Ages I recorded on my cards detached them from one another, transforming them into individuals ready to be sorted by and assembled into age-based classes, even though they do not understand themselves to be classifiable in this way, and even though in such tiny intimate communities age classes can barely be constructed as there are so few people to fit into each imagined class.

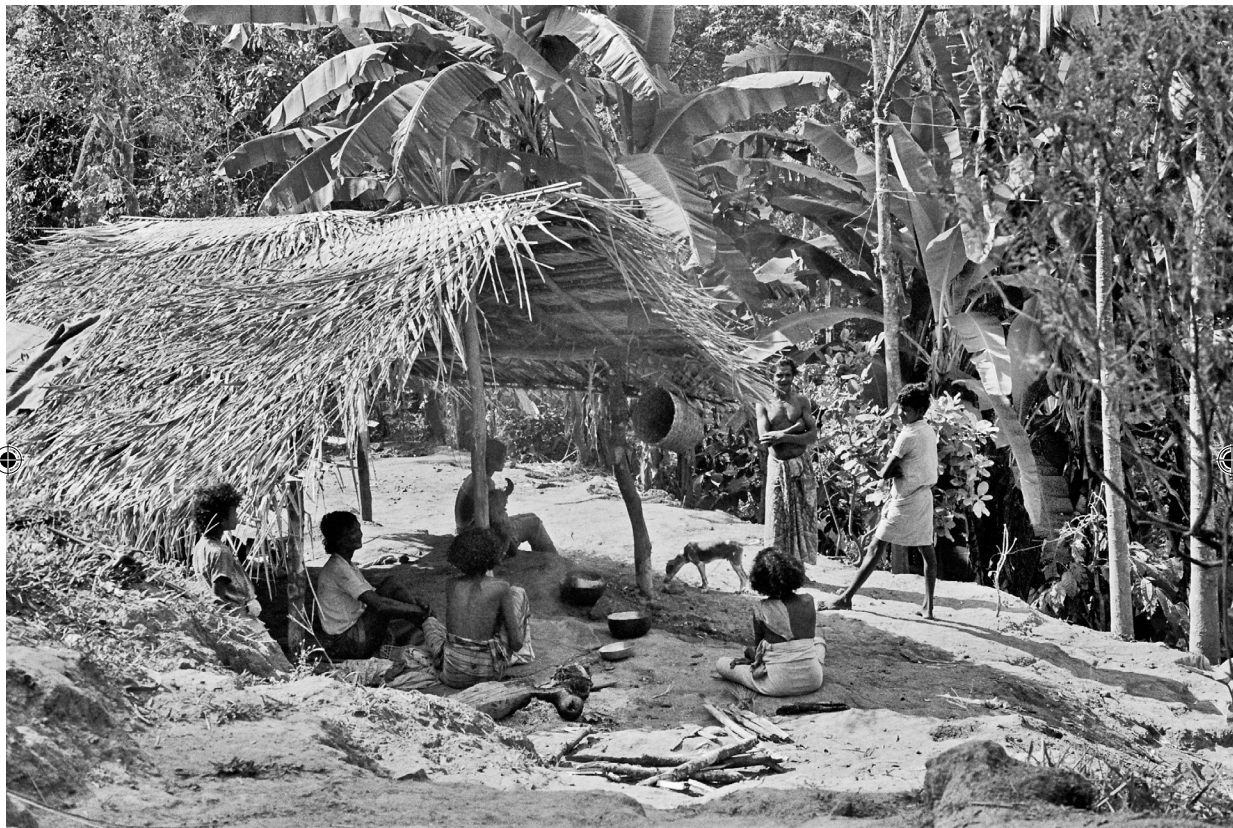
"Residence" was problematic partly because Kungan and his relatives were seminomadic people who moved a lot but also because of the way they referenced locations. As described in chapter 1, hamlets were referred to relationally (e.g., "my sister's place") or topographically (e.g., "up the hill"). This system worked effectively in this tiny community, where places and the people at those places were known to everyone and people were constantly coming and going between hamlets. Among nonlocals and in the satellite hamlets outside the Gorge, various outsider-imposed place names were used. For example, Kungan's hamlet, where I lived, was referred to by the name of the plantation I fictionalize as GR; by the name of a temporary

seasonal forest laborers' camp, Koop; and according to the personal name others gave to one or another of its residents (e.g., "Kungan's place"). Even if one selects a specific criterion for assigning people to places in such a fluid society (e.g., residence on a given day, length of residence, primary place of ritual attendance), such assignment in and of itself—although helpful for taking legible notes and writing and reading ethnography—wrongly suggests that they are divided into small local groups and undermines the cultural effort they invest in constantly visiting and living with one another, each with all the others, as I amplify in the next chapter.

Even identifying "parents," "spouse," and "children," apparently simple information to fill in for people who constantly elaborate on their relations, was problematic. In some cases, views diverged as to whether a couple was married, and when asked about his or her children, a respondent might list only those present at the time the question was posed. Ambiguities inhere in real life everywhere. However, in modern bureaucracies people are accustomed to forcing their life situations into preset parameters, and the ambiguities have little residual effect at the macro level, "the law of large numbers" smoothing over and compensating for them. In a tiny community, by contrast, each ambivalent case bears on the aggregate demographic picture.

Altogether, I filled out eighty-nine of my pre-prepared cards—sixty-nine for Kungan and his relatives in the Gorge, whom I came to know quite well in the course of fieldwork, and twenty for people who turned out to be only short-term visitors, mostly from the satellite hamlets of MR and DV. It is revealing that, except for the headings, the remainder of my index cards remained blank, while my notebooks (fourteen of them, 150–300 pages each, purchased in a market store in Gudalur) steadily filled up with daily observations and unfolding stories concerning those I lived with. As close relatives, their lives were so entangled that one simply could not parcel this or that "bit" of information onto this or that individual's card. The index card technology of knowledge suits life in larger communities with multiple separate domains, where a personal name helps project the constancy of "uncle," "teacher," "New Yorker," and "Saturday football player" as one and the same man. In contrast, in the forager community of relatives, the use of kin terms as means of address and reference relates everyone to everyone else.

My index cards helped me prepare table 3. Like the cards, the table separates and abstracts relatives from the shifting pluralities within which they live. Alas, categorical separations that figure forager communities of relatives in terms of "men" and "women" and "adults" and "children" have shaped many ethnographic analyses. In the next four chapters, I explore Kungan and his relatives' ontological alternatives.



Relaxing together in one of GR hamlet's huts. Photographed by the author.