

Gender and Ritual Power

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Contents

Judith Butler's Book Gender Trouble (14:01)	7
Sex strike and the origins of gender (17:39)	9
Bushman initiation - Eland dance (41:09)	16
Solomon's analysis (1992) (59:19)	21

Talk given to the Radical Anthropology Group at Daryll Forde Seminar Room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street, London WC1H 0BW on 19 February 2019.

In this talk, Camilla Power explores the relation of sex and gender among African hunter-gatherers.

Egalitarian peoples like Khoesan Bushman, Congo Forest hunters and the Hadza of Tanzania have a straightforward sexual division of labour: men hunt; women gather.

But gender does not reduce to a masculine/feminine binary.

Instead, evidence from Bushman rock art, story and initiation ritual reveals a fluid and mutable gender transformative through time for men and women.

Central religious concepts - the Moon, the Eland, Trickster - all show this gender transformation in relation to the lunar cycle.

Rather than a hierarchical opposition of masculine over feminine, gender oscillates between a 'gender of power' which fuses features of the sexes, and a 'weak' gender which disambiguates the biological sexes.

Evidence from Central and East African groups is compared.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ejTcBiY4L_U

This is actually quite a dangerous lecture to do, because talking about sex and gender these days is getting more and more tricky, and people are really in a mess.

I mean, whatever we can agree, disagree about, probably people are really in a mess with this terminology.

And I can't define it or decide anything, but I am going to do a bit of exploration around sex and gender, and really ask the question, why do we need these two words anyway? Why isn't one word good enough? What's the difference here to start off with? Let's start kicking that about.

And ever since, I mean, this confusion has gone back quite a while.

And I'm going to take it back into the era of the '90s, when maybe it started to get pretty murky.

There's, for instance, a very famous biology book, evolutionary book, The Red Queen by Matt Ridley, which used gender as a synonym of sex all the way through the book.

So he was discussing the gender of amoeba.

This is a bit alarming, because what he meant was that amoeba have sex cell replication and sexual reproduction.

He wasn't talking about gender at all, in my view.

And so he was collapsing, he was pulling gender right into nature at a level that just didn't make sense.

But then we have cultural theorists, very important cultural theorists such as Judith Butler, major philosopher, leading queer theorist, one of the most influential people perhaps on where the discussions of gender are today, Judith Butler.

And she has this viewpoint, which she put out in her great book, *Gender Troubled*, from 1990.

The distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all.

Sex is as culturally constructed as gender.

Indeed, perhaps it always already was gender.

So for her, sex from biology just collapses into gender in culture.

It's all culture.

She's a follower of Foucault, Hegelian follower of Foucault, and that kind of lineage.

OK, so we've got a really wide array with gender just being used for biological sex and then sex being brought right into gender.

Let's just...

I'm going to use data and address this question through the lens of African hunter-gatherer gender games, gender performances.

And I hope to show you very clearly that gender is not at all reductive to sex.

That they correspond– I mean, these days, science is acknowledging a great deal more intermediacy in terms of sex and sexual polarity, with the possibility that aspects of sex chromosomal, hormonal, gonads, anatomy, may have contraindications and may not all land one way or another, and that there is a whole array and spectrum of intermediacy in sex.

This is clear.

But even so, some aspect of sex comes down to some kind of determinism of biology.

It comes down to body at some bodies and cells and hormones and something at some level.

It may not be crystal clear, but it's coming down to that.

Whereas, in my view, gender is just not, it doesn't really exist.

It's purely imaginary.

It's performative.

It's constitutive.

It is play.

actually, a pretend play.

And it was Judith Butler who sent us down that track.

But let's think a little more about some animals, animals are good to think with, that do, where the word gender actually may be the right kind of word to address.

Now, I don't even mean very close relatives of ours.

I mean animals like mollusks.

Snails and slugs, they're exciting to think about in terms of gender.

So-called hermaphroditic, but what it is that a snail has the capacity to play a role as a male and be able to impregnate, or as a female and be impregnated.

And they compete.

They have penis fencing competitions.

They compete with each other to be the one that wins being male.

So it is apparently an advantage.

Don't ask me why, get into that argument.

But they want to win being male, and the loser gets to be female.

Argue with the snails, not me.

Argue with the snails.

Now, when that's happening, you can see why reaching for the word gender now starts to make a bit more sense because it isn't in essence, this snail is not a male snail and that male or a female snail and there's something essential about it.

They're doing it.

They're playing it out.

And what is really forcing the use of gender is that there is an ambiguity and some mismatch between the actualities, biological actualities and what's happening and what's being performed, what's so.

And another example, a little bit closer to mammalian, is my poor late rabbit, Molly, who is a very tyrannical, very dominant rabbit, but she was absolutely definitely female, but she used to play out.

her dominance by regularly giving a ***** and a right seeing to her male partner.

So she really, you know, she was doing gender.

There's absolutely no doubt she was sex female, but she was doing gender in a very male way.

So we're seeing this ambiguity aspect.

So perhaps where gender comes in is when there really is some, there is a gap between what they're doing and the performance is and what the actual— yeah, Judith Butler would not agree about actual sex.

But she gives this lovely— and Gender of Trouble has many, many interesting things.

She quotes a very famous anthropologist, Esther Newton, who was the major anthropologist of drag culture in the period after Stonewall, the Mother Camp famous book.

And she's quoting Newton saying this.

At its most complex, drag is a double inversion that says, appearance is an illusion.

Drag says, my outside appearance is feminine.

So she's talking about a drag queen performing outside appearance as feminine, but my essence inside is masculine.

At the same time, it symbolizes the opposite inversion.

My appearance outside, my body, my gender is masculine, but my essence inside is feminine.

Now that's really expressing something about a kind of tug-of-war pull between this kind of realities of sex and a performance of gender that also has the possibility of sort of flip and transformation going on there.

Something very powerful, very magical and very imaginary about it that's going on.

And I'm hoping that even though hunter-gatherer societies have very, very different concepts from the concepts that would arise in very metrosexual drag queen kind of counterculture, nevertheless, this idea of gender having this fluid, fissile tugging and pulling and this capacity of flip and transformation, Judith Butler's metaphor of gender was gender is drag.

Doesn't matter if you play your gender absolutely hard onto whatever is your biological sex, it still is a drag performance.

You're still constituting it.

You're still, you know, the way you sit, the way you walk, the way you, all of that is part of the gender performance and all of that is drag, even if you're not actually a drag queen.

playing opposite sex on some dingy stage somewhere.

OK, so let me first— so what I'm going to try and do is to take three kind of heuristic models of gender, which go back into the '70s with feminist anthropology of the '70s, Sherry Ortner, who Chris introduced a couple of lectures ago, a little bit.

Look at Judith Butler's take.

And then look at, well, what does sex strike theory, which I hope nearly everybody here, apart from somebody who's actually not been here, will know what I'm talking about, but I'll give you the basics first principle.

So I'll do those three theories first.

And then I'm going to look at, just introduce the sources of my data, and then we'll just go to some of the hunter-gatherer data and see where it takes us.

So let's go back to the 70s with this famous essay from Sherry Ortner, still today a major feminist anthropologist.

is female to male, is female to male, as nature to culture.

And the reason for calling Sherry Altner up, she was trying to resist it as a feminist anthropologist, but nevertheless she presented a very rigid model of gender hierarchy.

which she said was lying behind the fact that women everywhere were secondary citizens, somehow oppressed, somehow subordinate.

She accepted that as pan-cultural fact, and she said it was because of their consistently being identified as nature while men were identified as culture, and culture always overwhelms nature.

So in this, which can be said to be the Western gender model, it is pretty much the patriarchal gender model that we are familiar with in this part of the world, a universal dichotomy of masculine and feminine.

So gender is really defined in terms of masculine and feminine.

And that goes everywhere.

She asserted that this was worldwide.

It wasn't just Western.

She was asserting it.

That masculine and feminine correlate in some fixed way with male and female bodies.

And then there was a necessary hierarchy, that the masculine, the possession of a male body with a penis, meant you were necessarily empowered, and to lack that, you were feminine and disempowered.

This is pretty much a reasonable presentation of Ortner's model.

She didn't like it, but she asserted that was how it was.

So what I'm, this is kind of algebraic, the culture, in her view, dominates nature.

Culture, she identified very strongly with ritual power, the power to play with ritual, to perform ritual.

And that males were privileged in that power, and therefore power just maps onto sex.

This is Ortner's argument.

And that is underlying women's everywhere oppression and subordination.

But it leaves all, for an anthropologist, it leaves all kinds of questions.

And I'm asking this question through famous anthropologists like Turner, Victor Turner.

When you look at gender rituals from peoples all over the world, You get these extraordinary reversals going on where you get liminal states where there's ambiguity and obfuscation.

He refers to the powers of the weak.

It's actually a phrase of Johann Lewis.

The powers of the weak, says Turner.

Where do those powers come from? If we just have everything like biology is power, culture belongs to males because they have the...

Where do those powers come from? It's not very sure from Ortner that she can explain it.

Okay, so now Ortner was important from the 70s, she's still alive, very, very significant today, but she really haunted feminist anthropology right the way through the 70s and 80s, because it seemed that there was no way to break gender away from sex.

It seemed to be imprisoned.

Gender might be some cultural elaboration, there could be varying cultural elaborations, but basically it came down onto sex.

Judith Butler's Book Gender Trouble (14:01)

Until Judith Butler turned up with gender trouble and she smashed it.

She just sort of sliced the Gordian knot.

With this metaphor of gender is drag.

Gender for her was just intrinsically liminal.

It was always going to be some sort of between, betwixt between.

There wasn't any reality, in fact, in the sex underneath it, as she just saw that sex is culturally constructed anyway.

Not even sex was real.

Gender itself was a performative play performance.

Butler was attacking binary structure.

So if we think of Ortner, Ortner has a very strong binary structure, culture and nature, inherited from Levi-Strauss, in fact.

But for Butler, binary structure just implied compulsory heterosexuality that forced everybody into a kind of unified experience, which was as much oppressive of men as of women, as much.

So she wanted, the recipe for her was break out of that binary, break out of any culture and nature, forget the nature.

She really wants to forget the nature.

Pull everything into culture and just create multiple genders.

Just create rainbow genders, all the genders you want in your wardrobe and reach in and take them as you wish.

That's what she was positing with Gender Trouble.

However, because she's a very principled thinker, Hegelian thinker, she knows that there are performative constraints.

You just can't do anything you really want to.

You could imagine multiplicity of experience, but it isn't just down to you to imagine it.

matters how others are seeing, interpreting, receiving what your performance is.

So if we think of We go to our drag queens.

We think of somebody who's earning their living as a lorry driver, big, strong person, and they're going to perform as a drag queen at the weekend or when they've got time off.

And well, they've got to dress in certain ways.

It won't work if they, or will it, if they wear denim dungarees.

There's got to be a sort of exact performance exaggeration of somebody with that physique to go into the completely opposite type of hyper feminine.

So they won't be able to wear flat shoes.

They've got to have real big heels.

They won't be able to just do their hair up.

They'll have to have long curly wigs and they'll need makeup and they'll need skirts and curvy.

So performative constraints exist, which kind of keep the binary on track.

It's just the expectation there.

So can we get multiplicity of experience? And again, if you think of Victor Turner with his notions of communitas coming out of ritual experience, that is Very much, the thing that's unifying for Turner is that everyone does have some sort of unity of experience rather than total multiplicity.

And we'll leave Turner out of it for now.
Just focus on Ortner and Butler.

Sex strike and the origins of gender (17:39)

Now I'm just going to say about Sex Strike.

Everybody, I hope, knows roughly what I mean by this.

If we start with sex strike, so this is what Chris is saying about the origins theory.

If we start with sex strike, where does gender come from? I'm going to make the bold assertion that gender wasn't even there apart from things like my rabbit or things like snails or maybe primates play gender when they're doing kind of dominant pretend sexual displays and so on.

Sex strike, whereas Butler has gender kind of entrapped by compulsory heterosexuality.

Sex strike, the only thing compulsory is non-heterosexuality at a certain phase of the moon.

So if women are going on sex strike in the dark of the moon, which is the story, Chris Knight's beautiful story, they're going on sex strike to get the men organized to go hunting and bring the food back to camp by the full of the moon.

So the ritual is the power of culture over nature, culture dominating nature, just like Ortner has.

I'm agreeing with Ortner there, culture and nature.

Ritual power suddenly takes over and dominates normal life.

Normal marital life is disrupted.

But it is not at all playing onto biology.

It is summoned and performed through the play of wrong sex.

So women go on sex strike by signalling, we are not the right, we are the wrong species, we're the wrong sex.

And we're bleeding anyway, so what are you going to do about it? You go hunting, bring back some zebra, then we'll see.

So women are, whatever sex you are, you've got to pretend or accumulate the qualities, the properties of the other sex.

And so the construction of gender in its absolute origin is to gain the attributes of the other sex and add them to your own.

And that is the mark of ritual power.

And then when life goes back to normal, you just sort of go back to your normal biology, biological sex.

So the oscillation is not between an empowered masculine and a disempowered feminine.

It's between an empowered gender where sex gets fused, the attributes of both sexes are fused, and a less powerful, a weak gender where basically sex is disambiguated, you go back to biology.

Okay.

We share, this is saying, like Ortner, we have a binary structure going on, but it's not male, female involved.

And like Butler, Gender is drag.

From its very first, it's always drag.

It's never been anything else.

Wrong sex, wrong species, whatever.

But in this model, ritual has a kind of a unifying tendency rather than Butler's imagination of this total multiplicity going on.

OK, so these are my three models.

And I'm not trying to say— I'm not trying to make sort of scientific testable predictions and hypotheses exactly.

I'm going to use these— I'm going to just adopt the models as approaches, heuristic perspectives on the data.

So now I'm going to go to where does this data come from? What sort of data are we talking about? And then see whether these models can illuminate it.

Okay, so, right, first start, these are Hazza photographs, though most of my data is going to come from Khoisan and Bushman peoples.

But what I just wanted to say with these photographs, because I just have these good photos, the sex division of labour in African hunter-gatherers is pretty cut and dried.

I mean, it's not totally cut and dried.

Men are hunting with poisoned arrows, big animals, this is only a little poor little duiker, but big animals can get hunted with poisoned arrows.

They get honey.

Women might pick up honey, but it's men that are doing the risky business.

Women are digging roots and preparing baobab, and there really is a cut and dried sex division of labour.

I mean, it varies a bit, here and there, but in the Bushmen groups, in the Hadza, in the Congo groups I'm talking about, it's pretty cut and dried.

We heard from Mark Dibble last week on the Agta, even with the Agta, whereas some of the most sort of proactive women in terms of fishing is still a very cut and dried sex.

So you would think, if sex and gender had some reductive relationship, that This is about as reductive a society in terms of sex roles as you get.

And so wouldn't it produce a highly reductive gendering of masculine and feminine? And I hope I'm going to persuade you, absolutely not at all.

OK, so I'm moving really from the Hadza to Khoisan sources now, because most of my day is coming from there.

And I'll just show you.

You can not worry about the little tiny names.

But these names are of ethnolinguistic groups.

There are well over 30 ethnolinguistic groups for Khoisan peoples, including hunters and herders of southern Africa.

And they are kind of divided into northern groups, central and southern groups, basically.

Genetic data tells us that these groups have a time depth of separation of tens of thousands years, 30, 35,000 years old, which is implying that if there are certain shared features in the belief systems of these groups, they are very old.

They're like 40, 50, they're old, they're extremely old.

So where are these data coming from? There has been a significant amount of recent ethnography of ritual practice, including gender rituals and healing rituals, from the Kalahari areas, the Jhun Kwasi, one of the classic groups.

I'll mention quite a lot of Jhun Kwasi data.

I'll also talk a little bit about Kan who are sort of the group up in Angola.

So there's quite a lot of data coming from recent historic ethnography there.

Just to say, later in the— like four weeks today, a really wonderful talk will be done by Chris Lowe, who has experience with healing ritual with quite a number of these groups.

So he will be telling you a lot of very interesting stuff there.

So in addition— so this is recent historic ethnography.

And I'm actually going to read a bit of quite recent stuff from that.

A very important source is this source of folklore collection that comes from the group here, the Kham, down in southern Africa, who are now believed to be a language group extinct.

What that means is the Kham people got hunted and driven out of their lands by farmers and settlers coming in with cattle and so on.

Now, where this folklore collection comes from is the extraordinary work of Wilhelm Blake and Lucy Lloyd, his sister-in-law.

Wilhelm Blake, German linguist philologist working in South Africa down in the Cape Town.

And he became aware that there were a whole lot of convicts on the Cape breakwaters who were speakers of Kham language.

And he arranged with a rather enlightened sort of colonial governor to get some of the Kham people to come and live in his house with himself and Lucy Lloyd and learn from those people their language.

He was fascinated by the possibility of learning the Kham language, learn their language, learn their stories.

history, culture, and they produce this extraordinary collection of folklore, which is an enormously rich resource.

It's so precious because most of the Khan people have and their language has disappeared.

Now there is online, if you search Digital Blake and Lloyd, you will find this resource.

We used to have to pour in microfiches to read all this stuff in the notebooks written in their handwriting, but it is now all up there.

The stories about Willem Blake and Lloyd, about the informants like Dia Quain here, about the whole catalogue of the stories they told, cross-referencing the motifs and so forth.

It's a fantastic resource, so I do recommend to go and look at it.

But this has been very valuable in the analysis of rock art and religious experience for Khoisan peoples.

The kam, provide, I've just written it up there actually, the motto of South Africa. I don't know if anybody knows that, which I'll try and pronounce, is .

And it is taken as the motto of South Africa because it's kind of the oldest language of South Africa, but it's now extinct.

So there are 11 South African languages still existing.

And it means people who are different meet in its kind of basic sense.

And that's taken as unity and diversity for...

So it was the new South Africa's motto.

And it's thanks to Bill and Blake that we knew this language fundamentally.

Okay, and then the other sources are rock art.

And there is wealth of rock art across Southern Africa, as there is up all around the whole way up to East Africa as well.

But there are two particular areas of rock art that I'll show some examples from.

So this is the Drakensberg Mountains with Lesotho there and Natal, Orange River area.

And I'll show— in fact, I'll start with an example of rock art there.

We don't really know how old this rock art is.

It's very difficult to date it, but it's probably within a few centuries.

It's not that old.

But the people who lived, who created that rock art, the mountain bushmen of this Drakensberg, were also rendered— they were eradicated, effectively, through the policies of settlers, the hunting down.

What happened was the farmers, settlers, bring in cattle drive out the game herds.

And so what do hunting and gathering people do? Well, they turn their weapons on the cattle and then the police turn up and drag, or the soldiers turn up and drag them off into jails and hunting and gathering people don't do well in jails.

Up in Zimbabwe, there are no longer bushmen hunter-gatherers not in any intact cultural sense in that area.

But the rock art of Zimbabwe Highlands of the Matapos Hills really exemplifies hunter-gatherer rock art at its peak, cultural peak, because it was done, that rock art

is very old, over 2,000 years old, some of it maybe thousands of years, almost as old as Upper Paleolithic, potentially.

And this is coming from a time when hunters dominated the landscape, when there were not farmers and not cattle people before that.

So it is like a paradise of hunters.

And the rock art represents this in some way.

So I'm going to draw on these sources to give me data for analyzing gender.

We'll see what emerges from that.

I won't have a little time to mention some other African groups, but we'll focus with the Khoisan 1st and get to grips with the Bushmen groups first.

So I'm going to start with an example from the Drakensberg, which is Fulton's Rock.

And this is quite a big— I mean, the actual— it's like that sort of size.

It's about so.

As a panel, it's a very famous rock art panel.

And I've just tried to line up a black and white against the photograph there.

And I am taking this painting as a representation, a depiction, of what really is the most fundamental of the Bushman initiation practices, gender rituals.

which is called the Ylambol dance, and which celebrates— it's still existent in parts of Kalahari.

It's been danced right up to the very close recent past.

And it's the climax of a girl's first menstruation ritual.

And she becomes— so she is a new maiden.

And this is her— and this is like her walls of a hut.

And she's there covered in a kerosa cloak with a couple of companions inside clapping.

She becomes a woman when the women of the band dance around her, pantomiming, mating behavior of e-lands, e-lands being the largest and most desired by the hunters, animals of antelopes of Africa.

So this picture is expressing two very strong antitheses.

The picture gives us a sort of polarization of the society in this ritual.

It's showing us what people are— the roles, how people are relating.

And one of the antitheses is the maiden who is in her state of menstrual power and these hunting weapons.

So she is highly antithetic to the capacity of those hunting weapons.

The hunters have taken the weapons right away to the edge because her menstrual blood would cool the poison of arrows.

It would destroy the efficacy of the, it's said to cool the arrow poison and therefore it could not work on the animals.

And the second antithesis is between the maiden and any form of contact, and certainly not sexual contact, but even looking.

And the men, hunters, on the edge of the group.

So there's just no possibility of sexual contact.

And you can see that many of the male figures, this one is very exaggerated, with this ethyphallic, technical term, penis.

and a bar representing some kind of taboo.

Patricia Vinnecombe argued that this was some representation of taboo on sex.

And there are actually some other barred penises around the place as well.

So there is a very powerful taboo, which does indeed exist in these Elamboldance-type rituals against any kind of sexual contact, but girl and men, and yet The entire performance in the creation of the girl as a woman is a sexual performance.

It's a fantasy performance of animal sex, where the women are dancing, exposing, and their buttocks are quite naked with these little tails that are in the real life ostrich eggshell, little sort of swingy tails.

And they are dancing and pushing their buttocks towards the girl in the heart.

And they are pretending that they are Eland cows mating, and she is made out as if she is the Eland bull.

Now, so there is, the women are as if animals, but it's not simple because this maiden is in a very, she's supposed to be antithetical to the hunting weapons, and yet actually she herself acts out and performs as a hunter.

So the , the metaphor for a girl menstruating, is she has shot an eland.

That is the metaphor of menstruation.

I'll come to later, I'll mention the Hadza, and they have the same, except they say she's shot a zebra.

So a girl who menstruates shoots an arrow.

And now in some groups of the sun, a girl actually acts that out.

She actually picks up weapons and shoots, while she's in the hut, she shoots a mask of a great game antelope.

And she does that to bring and confer luck to the weapons.

That's the only time of her life she'll touch those weapons because of the danger of arrow poison being cooled.

And so her power, her potency is going to influence hunting and the future of hunting very powerfully.

Like it's drastic.

If something goes wrong with this ritual, it could wreck the possibility of hunting for the group, for the future.

It's terrible.

And we can see there's a kind of shaman with a pointing finger.

That is actually, you can see it better in fact in the painting, that is an Eland, being summoned to this dance, which uses a very ancient scale of music, the Eland music.

And so this Eland is being summoned as the women are performing a dance that evokes a special noise that Eland, when they are big, strong bull Eland, make when they're trotting because their tendons click.

So the maiden is a hunter.

But she's also the most desired hunted animal.

So we have this picture, which famously– it's very dark here, but it's famously on the cover.

Has Chris Knight's book, is it on there with the picture? So the girl is painted with markings.

This girl of– whole group has actually got Hemsbok markings, another great game antelope, but the dance is still called the Elan dance.

And David Lewis Williams, the great rock art specialist.

specialist asked from the Jean Poissy, why is it called the Y Lambo dance? And one of the Jean Pois women said, the Y Lambo dance is danced because the Y Land is a good thing and has much fat.

And the girl is also a good thing.

She's all fat.

Therefore, they're called the same thing.

So this is quite clear that there's an identity of the girl in the Y Land.

as the bull.

And there's a lot of effort, the ritual, the language that she uses.

She has to use special words in relation to the Iland because it's as if her own flesh is Iland flesh.

And what's so special about the Iland? And my people that I've researched, the Hadza, would also have this discussion as well.

So The Jeunqua told Louis Williams that amongst antelopes, females are always the bigger, fatter ones for most antelope species, and therefore females are the ones they want to hunt.

But in the case of the eland, the eland bull has this enormous amount of fat around its heart, which is the sort of the desire, the ultimate desired kill for the Zhunquan, other San groups.

So it's the desired prey.

And this is unique to the Yilan, that it has this peculiar– the Yilan bull has this peculiar androgynous female fatness.

And we see it beautifully in this example of a rock engraving from Transvaal, in fact.

And it's beautifully encapsulating within one outline the androgynous, gender, flexible, fluid characteristics of the ilan.

So this is the male outline here with this great big dewlap because of this enormous amount of fat around its heart of a mature ilan bull.

The female has a fatter sort of belly.

The male's belly, so this is like the penis, the penis sheath of the male.

So they've literally encapsulated the female and the male into like one animal in that engraving.

So it's a very powerful depiction of androgyny.

And the girl in her menstrual hut is, you know, this is a special, this emphasis on her special fatness.

She is the Elan bull, and that bull is a curiously female bull in its fatness.

So the women who are dancing as cows around the hut are dancing as mating to the girl as the bull.

Bushman initiation - Eland dance (41:09)

OK, so I'm saying we've got— in the girl's initiation, the girl is playing the hunter, the role of hunter, and the girl is playing as the ilan bull.

But there are two other particular relationships which make her as if she's male.

And one is her relationship to the moon.

The moon is really fundamental in this whole framework.

So very many of the Khoisan groups would keep the girl into the hut until the new moon's appearance, and then she would be allowed to be released from her seclusion at the same time as the new moon appeared on the sky, because the idea was, well, it's about fatness, again.

So as the moon waxed fatter, so the maiden would wax fatter.

And that implies things about the eland, obviously, becoming fatter.

Also, the moon and the maiden had the same powers of dripping, cooling liquid onto arrow poison.

The moon had the capacity to spoil the arrow poison, just like the maiden does.

Men are not supposed to look at the menstrual girl in her hut on pain of being turned into rocks and stones and trees.

But this was expressed in terms of not looking at the moon once game was shot.

This is from the calm people.

So the moon as it waxed Very like the Eland in its fatness, which is so androgynous, the moon as it waxed for the northern Ku people, they said, as a man it comes, as a woman it dies away.

The moon itself is gender mutable, according to its phase.

So this means that the maiden born at the new moon is effectively born as some male entity.

She's got a male aspect.

And just as she governs the luck in hunting, the hunters would address prayers to the new moon to enable them to see in the hunt and to give them luck in the hunt.

It was very strong, and that would be something that the Hadza would also do.

The other particular gendered aspect for the maiden woven into this identity of the maiden is a marked again by a mutable gender, a flexibility, fluidity, literally, of gender, of maiden, the e-land and the moon, also the rain.

So the reason that rain is constructed with gender, for the Kham people, the southern sun, they differentiated rain as a very desired, a rain they wanted, which was a

gentle, female, soft rain falling and then it would create grass beautifully growing and then the animals would come and it would all be very fertile.

That was the sort of rain they wanted.

But the other kind of rain is the male rain, which has thunder and lightning and whirlwind and in the Kalahari conditions can create very devastating, wreaking havoc.

Now the maidens' danger, the reason why people had to so carefully control the ritual going on around the girl who was menstruating was that she had the capacity to unleash the powers of male reign.

So this was the danger.

Any slight infringement of a menstrual, you know, the observances around a menstrual girl could, for the Kham people, they have story after story of what happens when there is a breach in the observance of menstrual ritual.

And what happens is there is a rain creature called Kwa, and it's like the thunder and the lightning.

And this creature just destroys not just the maiden, but all her folk, all her kin, and creates them as rains creatures.

It's devastating.

And it is actually construed as the disintegration of culture itself.

Culture goes back into, so arrows go back onto the trees as branches.

Game animals made into leather bags turn back into animals and gallop off.

So it's the disintegration of culture.

Now that word, R, stands for water and menstrual blood, though they could be.

When she is a maiden, said the informant, I showed the picture of Dia Quain.

He said, when she's a maiden, she has the rain's magic power.

She can snap her fingers and caw the lightning and make the rain kill us.

So this is a pretty powerful, she's like a vortex of power in this.

Rain could be conceptualized as flowing of blood.

And for the Qam, they spoke about the new rains, because obviously rains are incredibly desired in conditions like Kalahari or conditions of the bush veldt, the high veldt.

So when the rains fall, they come out and they run about.

They're all red.

The redness of blood is very It's got a connotation of beauty and joy, of ornament.

You can think of the use of red ochre and red pigments.

And so redness of rain is a kind of deep structure of Khoisan ideology associated with periodic blood flow of the women, menstruation, and the antelopes, as the great game antelopes are killed.

OK, so I've said that in all those respects, the gender of the maiden is constructed as male, with the male new moon bringing luck to the hunt, her becoming the hunter, as well as the hunted animal, and having the power of the rain, the magic power.

There are very close parallels, which have been argued by David Lewis Williams, by Roger Hewitt, and others, in terms of the Bushman boy's initiation, which happens with the first time that a boy kills a great game antelope like an eland.

And if we just compare from the Kalahari to Kham, the remnants that we have from the Kham folklore of the first kill observance, these are extraordinarily close in parallel to menarche or ritual.

And I will back that up with a more recent ethnography, which is saying the same thing.

First of all, the boy and the girl both have a profound symbolic identification with the wounded prey, the wounded eland, expressed in many ways.

Just as the girl— I don't think I've said— the girl, when she comes out of her hut, has to keep her head down and make sure she doesn't look up.

Because if she did that, the eland— yeah, this is on the front of— if she looks up, she's looking down.

Because if she looks up, when the eland is hit with a poisoned arrow— remember, her menstruation is like a poisoned arrow— the eland would look up and see the hunters and run.

So she keeps her eyes down.

Similarly, the boy hunter, at the moment he's shot the arrow— so the arrow, the head of the arrow goes into the hide of the animal.

It carries the poison that is then going to work its way into the bloodstream of the animal.

The animal will run.

It will run fast.

But slowly, slowly, the poison seeps in, and the animal is getting slower and slower.

And that enables the hunters to track it over a long way.

But the boy, he doesn't say or do it.

He's keeping his eyes down.

He is limping along, because any movement he makes will enable, will be the movement that the animal can make.

So he's got to mimic the movement of the Elan, going slower and slower, keep his eyes down.

Just like the girl, he gets marked with exactly the same tuft forelock designs of the Elan's face.

He gets smeared with Elan fat.

He has just the same identification.

Like the girl, from the moment he shoots that poisoned arrow, He's almost the same as the menstrual girl.

What happens when he's shot that arrow, the arrow shaft falls away.

He can't even touch it.

He has to wait for some other hunter to come and have a look and check it out.

If he picked it up, if he touched it, would be like the menstrual girl touching hunting weapons.

effectively.

It would have the effect of cooling poison.

What happens, this is when the trickster can intervene.

And the trickster is the master of the animals who will try to protect.

The trickster created the antelope.

He loves the e-land.

He tries to protect the e-land.

And the way he will do it is to come as a louse and bite the boy to make him jump. because that will make the Eland run and jump.

And the boy can't do, if he tried to squash that louse, get rid of that louse, the blood shed from the louse bite is just like the menstrual blood that could stop the arrow poison.

So it's like any bloodshed he's shedding is like menstrual blood.

He's almost like a menstruant.

He's kept inside a hut that is a hut of sickness with a medicine fire.

He limps and he can't talk, just like the girl has to wait until people talk to her.

She can't talk.

There are all kinds of ritual injunctions about what food they can eat.

They cannot be near a cooking fire.

They can't be anywhere in the sun.

They're meant to bring the rain.

They can't touch the earth.

All those old injunctions that James Fraser used to have about menstruating maidens.

So there's just such a strong.

And then in the ritual performance of the Ylan dance, there are highly significant similarities with the boy and with the girl as well going on.

So we really have a situation where the construction of gender of a girl in her first menstruation and of a boy in his first kill is extraordinarily parallel.

They're being as if conflated and confused with each other, or being rendered in some way completely equivalent.

OK.

OK, so Lewis Williams tried to say that in some ways these initiates were sexily ambivalent, like the Eland, the Eland that is a fat female-like male, and he tried to say they are neither male nor female, but I think that isn't necessarily the right way to express it.

Instead, what they are.

This is expressed beautifully from this rock painting of the Drakensberg, of Wilcox's shelter, Natal.

And it is like a fusion, a double sexing, of both male and female happening to those initiates.

So this ritual potency is symbolised.

They both identify to the androgynous Eland.

And I am saying the gender does not just reduce onto one sex or another, but this is a kind of gender of power, a gender of ritual power being expressed.

So this double-sexed image from Drakensberg is really showing, it's part of a larger set of what are called spread leg figures.

If you think of the idea of Sheila Nagig, This is like one of the very original motifs of Sheila Nagig, with the spread legs, genitalia very widely demonstrated.

And in this case, ***** some very penis-like shape, this potency, this great red blob of potency that seems to have association to menstruation as well.

So Now, Lewis Williams has looked at that with colleagues, and he's tried to interpret this in terms of shamanism, of healing, dance.

But Anne Solomon, I'll talk more about Anne Solomon's work and interpretations, she has just pointed to the fact that if we think about it in terms of initiation, we can suddenly begin to understand What do the arrows do? She's got a bow, an arrow, but she's also an animal.

This might be hare as well as eland, actually.

So she is both a hunter, but also something hunted.

She is fat and powerful, fat and good, definitely.

She's a maiden at Menarche, constructed as a kind of unified power of gender.

Hunter, animal, reign on these stripes and dots, it might be.

So she's bloody, she's fat, she possesses A ***** a penis.

And we see it again.

This isn't just one figure, as I've said.

We get this patterned in the whole area of Natal, Orange River.

We get many examples.

And as I say, spread leg figures go from Southern Africa right up East Africa.

It is a common motif.

In fact, I could point to examples in the Upper Paleolithic from European rock hard as well.

And it is an expression of taboo and ritual power with a fusion of gender as its source of power.

A fusion of sexes in gender as its source of power.

OK.

Right, I'm moving into the Zimbabwe.

Let me see, I've got, oh, I'm going to go to about 8 o'clock.

I'm sorry.

I didn't do so.

Hopefully we can end at that.

The Matapos Hills, Zimbabwe, just to give a couple of examples from this very old rock art from Zimbabwe.

And this could be more than 2,000 years old.

Again, if we look through the lens of initiation ritual, we can start to make some sense of what is being represented.

So this is very characteristic motif.

Excuse me about the presentation, because this was Peter Garlake in his research, and he managed to cut off the edge as though this was not really important to keep the figure.

in the picture, so I'm just showing you what happens with that figure there.

In these depictions, there are always at least two females.

They're usually pairs.

So there's another female figure.

This very large fat...

We think of the Upper Paleolithic as sort of fatness, but the fatness is a connotation of power and potency, really, not to be necessarily interpreted literally.

And she has this great ribbons of blood flow between the legs, up through the horns of the great antelopes there, so linking her to the great antelopes.

Fatness, potency, carrying some sort of ritual paraphernalia as some sort of crescent shape there.

Very reminiscent, I have said, of the Venus of La Salle in some ways.

And again, more obese, potent women, obese, we say fat potency, blood flow of the legs, pairs of women, ritual paraphernalia, again, that crescent shape.

OK, here again.

Peter Garlick points to the fact that the manes, these hair-like manes on the heads of these women, they're normally only seen in hunters, these particularly ritually empowered women.

And then if we look at— so androgynous aspect.

And if we look at figures that seem to have male genitalia, We're also getting this androgynous fatness, which sort of looks like as if it could be pregnancy, but there seem to be males.

So Peter Garlick refers to the ideology of the fat female bull, the Eland bull with this female fatness, and that somehow men are being richly empowered by identity with that.

So we're getting this flipping of androgyny all the time.

OK, I'm going to lose Hadza to the time being.

I'm not sure I'm going to make the Hadza today.

Solomon's analysis (1992) (59:19)

So I'm going to reach back to my models.

And in particular, I'm going to get– I'm going to look at the model of Sherry Ortner.

And the person who used Sherry Ortner's model is the very knowledgeable and scholarly rock art analyst, Anne Solomon, who is a great scholar of the, who is a great scholar of the Qam materials.

So she really knows the cosmology, the literature and so forth.

And she has great knowledge of the rock art and the representations.

And she particularly focused on the spread leg figures and argued against David Lewis Williams, who was saying that those spread-legged figures, it was to do with trance.

And she said, no, it's got to be gender ritual that is what's going on here, because we can interpret much more.

But she started to apply Sherry Ortner's masculine and feminine.

Now, she's got this at the top in terms of kind of shapes and just the fact that roundness Fatness is feminine.

Shortness, feminine.

Broadness, feminine.

Here, the gendering is the other way.

Masculine means tall and slender and narrow and sharp.

So this is just a sort of grammar of shapes.

And then I'm going to pull this out.

But then she brings in– remember, the moon has a gendering.

So full moon is round and fat, it's female.

And new moon, tall, slender is male.

And then she puts blood on one side and water in the other.

And then she starts bringing in, well, blood is, the stuff about menstruation.

She starts bringing in sort of pollution, death, herbivores, gathering, prey, weakness. whilst carnivores and hunters are strong and powerful.

So she really starts to get these value judgments with males being valued highly and so forth.

And there's some other details there.

But let's just pull that out.

OK, so what I'm going to say is this really doesn't work.

And what Anne Solomon has done here is demonstrate to us just how badly, Ortner's model, her boxes, work for the Khoisan.

It just doesn't work at all.

For starters, think of this.

looks like Man the Mighty Hunter, the carnivore, hunting and strong.

And now just think of that boy who's limping along and the louse bites him and the blood of that is like being a menstruating girl.

He can't even kill a louse.

because the trickster would make the game run away.

So this doesn't fit terribly well.

Blood versus rain and water, but actually these substances– we said the idea of the rains are red.

The maiden's blood is so empowered.

It's so much got the possibility of conjuring the male rain that you just can't– these two fluids are just, they just fuse together with a kind of cosmic power.

How do you separate them out like that? It doesn't work.

And now let's look at where the Eland is here.

The Eland would be herbivore, prey, dying, bloody, weak.

The Eland is the most powerful cosmic entity for the metaphor for healing, the metaphor for the goodness of life and fertility, it just isn't fitting.

And so Solomon is realizing, well, the E-land, it's androgynous, it's feminine, and it's masculine.

The trickster is gender ambivalence, it's masculine, it's feminine.

The moon is, you know, so the moon, the trickster, the E-land, they're the most powerful supernatural entities of the Khoisan cosmos, they are just going between two poles.

They're not going to fit on one side or the other.

So I am going to take it from the Khoisan cosmology, and I'm going to say that instead of being obsessed by sex, we should take the moon instead.

And the moon will sort it out for us.

Because instead of having things into fixity and polarity, we get things that are moving cyclically and changing as they.

And this idea of a dynamic transformation that is a constant oscillation is just the way, the cyclical way of life that is expected in these hunting cultures.

So now we can, okay, the waxing moon is identified, in gender terms, the tall, thin, waxing moon is male.

We remember that, the maiden identified to the male new moon.

The waning or full waning moon is female, fat and round.

And this is connoting a time of ritual, when the initiate is hungry, she can't eat.

She is meant to be fattening, and the eland bull is meant to be fattening with the waxing of the moon.

By contrast, waning moon, it isn't ritual.

There aren't food taboos.

You can start to eat food.

The ylan starts to be eaten.

The waxing moon, flesh is raw, it's bloody, the girl is menstruating, the game animals bleed.

Waning moon, the flesh is cooked.

Here, male rain.

Female rain.

So you don't just have rain in one box, you have different types of rain.

Different types of fire, medicine fire, not cooking fire.

Yes, death, but death that comes back to new life.
 Life is just like ordinary life here.
 Menarche, taboos on access to women.
 Women that are naked, they're male, they're animals.
 The e-land bull becomes the female initiate.
 The female initiate becomes a hunter.
 The hunter is the wounded prey, the e-land.
 They're all turning into each other all the time.
 These are kinship and avoidance relations.
 By contrast, on this side in waning moon, women, taboos are relaxed.
 Women become available.
 They're modest.
 They're not showing naked buttocks, but they are.
 They're not dancing riotously, but they They're sexily available.
 Women become flesh to be consumed.
 Women are like meat.
 Their wives, they're eaten by their husbands.
 Their husbands feast on meat.
 So this is where the carnivore husbands are.
 Not there.
 So the males are herbivores there, and carnivores there.
 And for those who know sex strike, who have been at earlier lectures this term, on the time resistance syntax, which we did.
 When did we do that? We did one of the stories.
 What were we doing? Which one were we doing, the stories? Anyway, we were looking at time resistance syntax.
 We were saying it came out of the sex strike model, dark moon to full moon, dark moon to the time of sex strike, women menstruating.
 Waxing moon, seclusion, the other world, night, wetness, bleeding, roar, hunger, flesh taboo, gender inversion, wrong sex, wrong species.
 And these are all the ritual power signals switched on.
 And this is the suppression, the ritual power signals switched off.
 OK.
 Right, if we just focus on the gender terms quickly.
 Oh, my voice is going.
 What are we actually left with? So that waxing moon of menstrual, ritual menstrual power produces a gender of power where all performers are going into the mode of animals becoming the Eland.
 Women, particularly male in their performances, sacred and unassailable, they're completely taboo, Men are also becoming bloodied and wounded, as if they're the wounded prey, identifying to their bleeding sisters.
 But both sexes have a conflation of sexual attributes.

Both sexes are sharing in that gender of power and entering it at the same time as a kind of unified gender.

When gender of power relaxes, it's as if gender kind of gets suppressed.

And then everybody just becomes human, but also biologically sort of sexual, normal biological sex.

Women are women, men are men, women are female and available.

All the flesh is cooked.

Sexes get disambiguated.

Heterosexual versus kind of androgynous, that's not really in opposition, but you can see what's going on.

So the oscillation of gender is just nothing like masculine and feminine at all.

It's an oscillation between a fusion of power in the gender of power ritual phase and a relaxation of taboo where sexes become disambiguated.

So it goes between fusion and sharing of sexual attributes to disambiguation of sexual attributes.

And this is framed by the dynamic, moving, flexible, gender-mutable phases of the moon and the e-landing.

I can just about finish now.

Just to mention, yeah, I can't really do too much on the Hadza, it's too much.

Just to mention, some of you will have seen Jerome Lewis's incredible, it was actually Bruce Parry's film, wasn't it, made with Jerome, with the Bayaka of the Ngoku.

the Women's Secret Society.

Some of you will have heard Jerome talking about it.

And these are performances.

You can see the women of Ngoku in the Bayaka Central Congo sweeping the men out.

They have this militant dance formation, sweep the men out of the camp.

Men are hiding in the huts.

So Jerome's taking this photo from a long way away because he can't get close.

And this is just showing the girls proudly as initiates afterwards, making a mockery of men's sexual ineptitude, singing and chanting, singing their little hearts out about how old men are no good, their testicles are broken, the penis is useless.

And this is total, they are just adopting, mimicking male performance.

And this is the gender of power in action, without any doubt, in my view.

The situation with the Hadza is complex to be discussed, but they are enacting in their initiation.

They are, again, they become the hunters and they hunt hunters.

They hunt the boys with their with these sticks that they chase after the boys.

They are enacting an origins myth of matriarchy, of the woman with the zebra's penis.

The metaphor of menstruation is the girl has shot a zebra.

They have these little zebra socks made in the memory of this woman of the zebra's penis who used to own the special meat called epemem meat.

So it's a matriarchy myth of the world turned upside down where the women's initiation ritual resurrects that world and women are masquerading as the wrong sex and the wrong species again.

So we have the same pattern going on.

I can correlate the Hadza girl's initiation with the Khoisang, the Elan bull dance, really.

quite closely.

So just to sum up, I would have liked to have said something about Bradford Keeney's ethnography, but I'll do that maybe if somebody asks the question.

What is this model saying about gender at origins? The whole ritual domain comes into being on the basis of a sex segregation and sex solidarity.

Women disrupt, they break up relationships with their husband, disrupt marital sex, so it's compulsory non-heterosexuality.

Women amplify and exaggerate this very improbable message of we are the wrong sex and the wrong species, this is the wrong time, we're bleeding.

So the first prediction about gender as it's originally constructed is women mobilize ritual power becoming animal, male and bloody.

Therefore menstruation itself is coded as if male.

That is something that very regularly occurs.

And this is what I'm talking about as gender of power.

Women mobilize their ritual power in alliance with men who are their kinsmen, their blood relations, And their solidarity with those men is expressed with blood symbolism.

And boys going through their initiation in this kinship and ritual power, they too bleed.

And they necessarily bleed.

They're bleeding as if they're menstruating.

So both sexes, in gaining their gender, both sexes become ritually empowered.

Gender indeed constitutes the relations between the sexes because it's separating sexual partners in the phase of ritual, but we don't have any simple male-female dichotomies in this newly constructed domain of gender because of this kinship solidarity.

When ritual power is mobilised, both sexes have, they share gender, they share the same gender.

They're going through the same thing.

The gender of power.

The opposite category is kind of gender gets drained away or suppressed.

Weak gender, corresponds to the status of marital availability when the sexes can come back together, can have sex, the taboos are relaxed.

The sexes, again, they're sharing the same gender of relaxation of gender, but the sexes are disambiguated.

Men are men, women are women.

So most basically, symbolic reversal has been central to gender from the beginning.

It's always been there.

It's never been separate.

Women seize ritual power at menstruation, signal non-availability, becoming male
an animal.

Men share ritual gender of power, becoming, in some sense, female and animal.

So gender is inseparable from sexual, symbolic, sexual reversal of sex and human-
animal characteristics.

So we can now really respond to Sherry Ortner and turn her argument absolutely
on its head.

So Sherry Ortner was trying to say, that because of women's species life, because
of their life of their biological capacity of reproduction of menstruation and pregnancy,
that they were denied access to ritual power and men took that as a privilege.

But this is far from the case.

Actually, ritual power in its origin was predicated on models of female biology.

And so ritual menstrual synchrony or collective blood flow was the source of it.

So, this implies that to be ritually powerful, like the Eland Bull, it is necessary to
be wounded and then periodically bleed.

And that's really the source of gender.

The Ted K Archive

Camilla Power
Gender and Ritual Power
19 February 2019

<www.youtube.com/watch?v=ejTcBiY4L_U>

www.thetedkarchive.com