

Can Indigenous and Western perspectives see eye-to-eye (Seminar)

The value of two-eyed seeing

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Across Amazonia, myths hold that in early times it was the jaguars, parrots, tapirs and other animals who first invented bows and arrows, cooking fire, ceremonial buildings, religious ceremonies and other complex cultural accomplishments. Then humans stole these things from the animals, elevating themselves above all other creatures – but at the cost of losing their former ability to engage in easy conversation with the animal world. This mythic view of our origins is the reverse of the Darwinian narrative which our own culture holds up as science. In this talk, Chris Knight will introduce a recent trend in social anthropology – known as ‘perspectivism’ – and discuss whether such radically different ways of perceiving our origins and place in nature can be made to converge.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ErDG1ykH7sw>

Good evening everybody. Thank you very much for tuning in wherever you are. It's great to see you. new faces, all faces. good evening to everybody who's come tonight.

That's really great to have such a crowd on this first, week 'cause we're a little ahead of, time. radical anthropology is not really part of the UCL curriculum.

It's, it's an autonomous class that's been going as an evening class for open to the public for 40 more years, like late seventies, isn't that, started it all off. And, it, it is a kind of public forum for discussion of topics of what it means to be human anthropology in its widest sense. And we do not like, we like to break down all the barriers between the biological anthropology over here, social anthropology over here, drag them to each other, screaming and make them talk to each other.

That's what our kind of whole, whole purpose in life is really. and we specialize in issues of what, how we became human, what made us human, human origins, which we'll have some talk about, in other, talks in the term as well as bringing in top sort of biology and fossil and primate specialists, plus social anthropologists who have really got some very interesting things to say. A lot of people from this department, including people like Toy and that I think we give later in the term.

I wanted to have all live talks this term because we have had some zoom, iterations over the last few years, obviously. however we have to respect the U C U strike actions. so what happens next week is that we are going to go back on Zoom only because there is expected, I don't expect it to change at this stage to be a U C U strike during Fresher's week, where our whole theory is about human culture began on the picket line.

So we don't wanna do anything that kind of might be construed, it's crossing picket lines. we think it's okay to do Zoom.

It's not a digital picket line because we'd be doing that class anyway. but at the moment U C L is providing us with this venue. It's wonderful. we love U C L, we're

affiliated at U C L and we did our PhDs here. So this is our kind of home and it's one of the places where anthropology really joins up. U C L.

We have the Institute of Archeology over in the other building.

We have biological and social anthropologists.

They don't always talk to each other. But in, in our experience, in our, trying to our, our studies, our researchers, we've always been trying to make, talk to each other.

We don't think it's possible to deal with the question what it is to be human unless we have all those different perspectives. It, it's, it's got to be a matter of those, those interdisciplinary perspectives. Okay.

So I can't, there's not much more I can say regarding Chris.

Chris can introduce himself. He's going to be speaking tonight on a very, quite a trendy social anthropology topic perspective. His title is, can Indigenous and Western Perspective. See, I two i the value of two IED scenes. This is very much a rag remit.

How do we reconcile sort of western science with indigenous cosmologies? Can it be done over to Chris? I need you in the Zoom.

Yes. Okay. So yes, I mean, anthropology only asks one question, but of course is a very big one. What does it mean to be human? and as Camilla was saying, here at U C L, we address that issue from a number of different angles.

You can ask, what might it mean to be almost human? Like for example, a close biological relative of our, a gorilla or a chimpanzee. what might it be to be kind of a prehistoric human or an extinct version of, of a human, like a neanderthal going back homoerectus.

So that's looking at chimpanzees as primatology and biologic anthropology, looking at fossils would be, paleontology and archeology. and of course the social anthropology where we look at all the different ways that are all around the world of being human, respecting the sacred, bringing up kids, organizing, kinship and sex. So, I mean, as Camilla was saying, we, we, we just don't agree with the way in which kind of the, I dunno, the powers that the fragment, our understanding of this absolutely critical question, what does it mean to be human? We are bodies, we are minds, we are social, we are individual, we are all these different things. Let's, let's join up the dots and try to put the big picture, together. one thing that we've always done, within the radical anthropology group is kind of reverse, the way in which historically anthropology has seen itself.

We even think of ourselves as doing reverse anthropology and I just say what I mean by that. In the past, you had anthropology as kind of armchair theoreticians, Louis Henry Morgan, various other James Fraser kind of looking at other cultures, and, and kind of trying to work out, what they might teach us. the 20th century saw a major shift, from evolutionist Anology looking at everything within an evolutionary perspective to, what was called functionalism, which was essentially a, a product of colonialism.

So the whole purpose of academic anthropology, anthropology and academic discipline kind of began down the road to the, the ee with, Brono Melky, but of course ar

Rediff Brown and various others. And from their point of view, the value of anthropology was that it would help the colonial rulers in Africa and other parts of the world to kind of work out how traditional societies worked in order to be able to control them and exploit them and this is quite explicit in the objective Grand case.

Anthropology teaches us, us how to more efficiently, manipulate, exploit, and control, the savages. when the savages, if like with the colonial people, made that more and more difficult, and we had the, the Colonial Revolution and the Second World War and everything else that followed that, then antibody had to start thinking about other ways to justify its existence.

And, one of the major figures to completely change the whole perspective really was Claude TROs, the French, founder of what's called, struck this antibody and he, kind of looked at the whole planet of various different ways of being human as if from sort of Mars, as if, from from somewhere outside, in an attempt to kind of look at, I mean, just so many disappearing patterns of organizing human lives.

I mean, he was just aware that western culture is a, a western monoculture.

It just gives us one version.

Let's try and piece together all the other different ways of being human.

In particular, he spent his life studying, mythology, and he worked out this vast, three volume, work mythology.

The science of mythology came up with this astonishing conclusion that all the world's magical myths and fairytales, are variations on a theme. And ultimately, they are one myth only.

That's a little bit of a background. When I was mentioning reverse senseology, it was quite connected to the topic of, this evening's talk, which is, too wide seeing. Because let me just give you an example.

I've always thought that development, is a very good idea and what I mean by that is that we in the West need, to be developed morally, politically, socially, in terms of childcare, all kinds of things we do, we do, we would benefit from being developed.

But of course, the cleanliness has this idea that somehow we're gonna develop them and it seems to me that we are in, we are in very great need of, development and all kinds of levels and so instead of thinking of ourselves as sort of studying the natives, studying the people outside, it's kind of getting aware of ourselves in this culture through other lenses.

So looking at Western culture through the eyes, for example, of an Aboriginal Australian, or any one else from a very, very different culture. And of course, an Aboriginal Australian would be just very, very puzzled by the fact that, for example, in this culture, every here a child has one mother and one father.

I mean, the, the, how on earth can she or he possibly manage? In our culture, we have a thing called classification kinship and the kinship terminology is of just about every, every traditional culture really, until we start getting cities, just the people just refuse to make a distinction like mine and thine in respect children, I mean, two sisters will simply say in the language, this isn't that kinship terminology, my sister's child is

my child and the result of that is you get a whole massive different, every child can go to this mother, this mother, this mother.

cause your mother's sister is also your mother. Two si two sisters will say, mother's, my daughter's child is my child. And, and of course, that acted out to an ex, sometimes to a greater extent or a lesser extent in real life, so that children really do have a choice of which mom they want to be with on any particular day of the week. So that's, that's kind of a, a, a something which we need to learn. And we now know, actually, as it so happens that although Bruno Mansky, the founder of Functionless anthropology down at the L s E, he said that, any form of collective motherhood, is nonsense.

No child can have two mothers. It's impossible, doesn't work biologically. and he also said if, if, if any bunch of geese, silly geese, he called them, meaning women feminists thought, thought that, that they child childcare should be shared, it would, it would lead to absolute.

He actually said it would lead to a worse catastrophe than the French Revolution or even the SVI revolution. so you can see there's always been a bit of politics, bit of an understatement there in terms of these, these kind of issues. Now, specifically, to I seeing, is a term invented, it's called eam. I'm, I'm certainly not pronouncing that correctly, but, an indigenous scholar, Albert Marshall in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, one of the Inuit people, but he belongs to the MikMak, tribe.

He said that if you look through two eyes, you can see death. And he, he advocated, he was, he was one of many indigenous people who actually quite keen on western science, I mean, who've done PhDs and so on.

But he just says, while we're doing western science, from his point of view, it's always important to temper the perspective of Western science with his own indigenous understandings of how things, connect up. and a my, my colleague here at Jerome Lewis, who's not here this evening, we were writing a, a, a, a piece for some indigenous rights, activists and it, and he has just been Jerome, my colleague, had been telling me that I, and I kind of knew this, but of course, it's, it's, it's more, it's more and more of the case that aboriginal Australian, traditional, thinkers were extraordinarily brilliant astronomers. I mean, aboriginal people did astronomy on a level that white men just couldn't even begin to understand. And quite often in their myths, there are references to things in the sky that astronomers in the West have only recently kind of discovered. But many of these, indigenous scholars in Australia, in North America, in South America, in other parts of the world, whilst remaining faithful to indigenous traditions and ways of seeing the world, are also doing PhDs, PhDs, for example, in climate science, while at the same time understanding that their own indigenous ways of dealing with nature were actually a lot more sustainable and clever and scientific in so many ways than, than Western methods. But somehow combining, western science with indigenous knowledge, indigenous science, I would say finding points of convergence is a rather interesting and, and important, um job. 'cause I, as far as I'm concerned, I, I'm a scientist. I'm, I'm actually, it sounds a bit strange to say this, but I'm in, I'm interested in what really did happen during the course of

evolution on this planet for us to emerge as an extraordinary species. We are with, for example, language. I mean, language is a, is an extraordinary thing. Nothing else.

Nothing remotely like human languages with its kind of forms of grammar and also the ability to specify imaginary things exist on the planet.

All other animals have got very sophisticated systems of communication, don't get me wrong.

But the digital structure and grammatical structure of language is kind of off the, off, off the scale, something quite different.

I want to know how it happened, and I just don't think it, I, I would say somebody living in a city to sort of say, well, I, I don't really believe in science. I just think it's unacceptable, to be honest.

I just think it's unworthy somebody that, somebody that says, I'm, I think that my gut, I mean, we know various politicians that tell us that they think with their gut about various things, covid vaccines, all sorts of climate science itself. But I, I, to me, science has to be respected and actually science itself, let's remember is many I'd seen because in science, you have to put your hypothesis to tests.

You have to present it in such a way that other people can follow your steps, follow the evidence you cite. And you can't just be a guru in science.

You have to science, at the end of the day, however much you get brilliant individuals syncing up wonderful ideas at the end of the day, what science is, what has been tried and tested and, and tested to, to almost a breaking point. So often by, I mean, almost any, anyone that comes up with a scientific theory, everyone's initially critical and so you get, you sort of get pulled down as a kind of egalitarian leveling effect of everyone else trying to pull your theory down. And what survives the criticism, what survives the testing is what we call science. So from my standpoint, science is already a thoroughly collectivist and although of course it's elitist in the sense that to be involved in the scientific community levels of privilege and education and so on, take you away from so many other people on that level, it's collectivist and kind of at least, ideally, at least in principle. and I, I suppose I should stress that in principle egalitarianism egalitarian, because there's no doubt at all, of course, that all sorts of corrupt goings on occur within science, as in so many other areas of, life. Right? Many I'd seen is linked, I think to a very interesting development within social anthropology. I mentioned Claude, Debbie STRs. What I didn't mention was what happened subsequently. So, Claude Debbie STRs worked on mythology, fundamentally, north and South American mythology.

Anyone's interested in magical myths and fairy tales, including our own fairy tales here in this part of the world, in Europe, myths anywhere in the world. And when I say magical, i, i, I don't mean sort of myths in the sense of stories about what happened last year or where other years, it's a sort of mythical element.

I would argue that to counter the magical myth of the kind of stresses looking at, you've gotta be able to die and come alive again.

There's a kind of central magic in all those stories involving death in rebirth and rebirth, which I think is the sort of core magical element. In any of these myths, you go into the other world, it's the world of the dead moving from the world of the living to the world of the dead. You know, it is, it's kind of, okay, yeah, we die. So you're alive, something happens, you bleed, you're dead and of course that's not magical. But then comes the magic bit, you come back to life and that is just such a central part of magical mythology around the world that we have to kind of try to work out what, what's going on there and why that motif of deaths followed by resurrection is so universally a part of mythology.

But I wanted to say that following *trois*, very unfortunately, in, in my view, nearly all anthropologists in this part of the world sort of gave up on *nevi* TROs. They didn't feel he'd convincingly shown them the kind of universal structure of all these different stories.

It all seemed a bit complicated. There were these four volumes. and, um it's like, it was, it was, I I, I found it difficult to read those volumes, but I, I, I've one of the unusual people that, in the 1980s, seventies and eighties, I just, I just decided I, I've gotta read these things. So these vast volumes, incredibly complicated. When you're reading myth number 378 B, you've gotta remember what myth number 274 C was.

So you've gotta get through it all. Check it. Oh yes, he seems to be right.

But it's a huge lot of work. and also at the very end of meteorology, it kind of, it kind of ended with a kind of whimper really, because he sort of said, well, these myths don't really tell us anything much except the difference between being a nothingness. And he sort of cited Hamlet, to be or not to be. And I just thought, hmm, there must be a bit more to it all than that. so in most, in over here in, in England, Europe, I think Australia to an extent, somehow Larry Stress, because he'd raised hopes to such an extent that all was gonna be revealed and that somehow it was a bit of a disappointment was a kind of almost revulsion against his, his paradigm within anthropology, which is called structuralism, structural of anthropology, but not in South America.

South America being a place where the myths that was dealing with are still kind of alive in the sense that the people that tell the myths are still, still around, still there, sort fighting back against imperialism, against colonialism, the remnants of all that Spanish occupation and so on in South America, you can, in, in South America, somehow the myth was still attached to living rituals and living people and, kind of *Levi* TROs work, carried on and so, let me say this, today there's a, that's like the dominant paradigm, the dominant theoretical school, theoretical framework within social anthropology is called constructivism. when I've given a few talks just a few months ago, on this, I went, I have to admit that *Perspectivism* has hit me, only rather recently people have said mean, my friend Denise Arnold in in Bolivia have said, Chris, why do you think this is fashionable? The latest thing? How come you've been so slow off the mark? You people every in Britain and Europe? We've been doing perspective since 1998. And I, I can just tell you again why it's a little bit like what I

was saying earlier on. I'm a, I regard myself as a scientist. I think for me, I don't know scientists when it's working, but it is genuine scientists.

It's kind of almost the only game in town. but perspective, perhaps I should say that the major figure in perspective is a Brazilian anthropologist. I'm sure, I'm just speaking to some of you who kind of know this, forgive me if I'm telling you stuff you already know, but Eduardo Viveira, and inhabited of Rio, who developed a, a a a, a paradigm within anthropology, which is intentionally an intervention within philosophy. Vive Castro wants to explode, transform revolutionize philosophy. And I have to say in the past, and I'm still really there, I haven't moved too much. I thought, if you really want to study philosophy, don't do philosophy. Mm-hmm.

Study anthropology. Mm-hmm.

cause then you've got people from all over the world teaching you real philosophy.

But Eduardo Vive Castro is a follower of Deur and other French philosophers, deur, Ari and others. And I had no appetite, whatever for Deur. I just felt, I'm trying to work out what happened as we became human during evolution and I don't feel I need to get into Urs, one of whose, one of whose, famous statements is underneath all reason, lies delirium and drift and I can, maybe I understand what he's talking about, but I, I just, I just felt I don't have the energy to get into all this, even though I'm sure for philosophy, it's all very exciting and interesting.

So I, I'm, I'm using that example to sort of explain why Eduardo Rivera's de Castro's perspective is pass me by. I've, I've been spending the last 20 years trying to work out how language evolved in our species and at no time did Delos or Eduardo ver to Castro emerge did any of our discussions. 'cause it just didn't seem even remotely relevant.

So it's sort of passed me by, and I'm a slightly embarrassed to say that because now I now realize I should have had my antennae more finely tuned to these very exciting and interesting developments. And just to say today as I speak, as we are hear perspective, particularly the kind of perspective that, vi to customer represents is the dominant paradigm.

I mean, if you're doing social anthropology, if you're coming to U C L to study social anthropology, you can't get away from perspective. It's, it's, it's, it's the main thing these days. So little bit on perspective, in particular on a, on a very influential article, which was, published in the Journal of the Royal Anthropology Nstitute in 1998, cosmological Dex Exists and Amerindian perspective.

so what this, what this article does, and I've read it lots of times, it is very interesting. It celebrates binary thought.

It, it celebrates a kind of dialectic one thing as opposed to its opposite and so what he does in that, article is show that everything that I think is not only wrong, but beautifully wrong, like precisely wrong in from the perspective of Amazonian thought. So let me just give you some examples.

What I think is that we have a planet, and it's one planet, and it's been evolving life ever since there was a big collision with a huge other planet, which turned into the moon about four and a half billion years ago and I won't go into all the details, all the

major evolutionary transitions, but it took a very long time for life on this planet to end up with us human beings with our strange, languages and what we call culture. And in particular symbolic culture.

So we now have rockets, we have bulldozers, other people have plows, hundred galls have bows and arrows.

They have cooking and all these things, these cultural accomplishments.

So from where I'm standing, you have nature and it kind of evolves into culture. Or you have you have single cell organisms and you have, little, little things floating around in the sea, blue, green aisle guy.

Then you have fish, and then you have mammals, and then you have, and then eventually you get primates, and eventually you get humans.

So you move from nature to culture. Well, according to am an Indian perspective. And as far as I can work out, correct me if I'm wrong, Vive Castro likes this idea.

It's all the other way around because aminian myths tell that originally humans and animals all spoke the same language.

Jaguars had cooking fire tapers had bows and arrows.

All the animals had culture and culture came before we had natural animals. And what happened, according to the mythology, is that the, the jaguar who who invented cooking fire, was robbed. Who was the jaguar robbed by humans. So today, jaguars have to eat their meat raw, okay? But in the past, they had their meat cooked 'cause they had control of cooking fire.

Humans have stolen cooking fire from the Jaguars. and the same applies to all the other animals. So the tapia, and Anacondas, snakes, other animals, pickies and so on, they all had culture. And one of the results of that origin, like they all had culture, was that today, and again, this is Aminian belief according to Castro, the animals among themselves within each species know one another as human beings.

So this is how it goes. we in the West think that humans have souls. I mean, this is obviously, if you brought up in one of these patriarchal religions, humans have souls.

Animals don't have souls without Amar. Indians say that all animals have souls, but souls are things which humans have and animals have and if you've got a soul, you have inte, intentionality, agency, self-awareness, and all the, all the mental capacities that humans have.

So according to Aminian philosophy, because these animals have souls, they all kind of have the same culture.

They all, they all have the same set of beliefs about what a soul is and what it, what it's, what it, what the soul is kind of, in some ways different from the Christian idea of soul.

The soul is much more linked up with blood and body and so on.

That perhaps the kind of very big dichotomy between body and soul in, in western Christian, modes of thought.

But still, the idea is this, that the jaguars see other jaguars as human beings.

The tapers see other tapers as human beings.

So all the animals, all the, all the major prey animals and predator animals that humans are aware of.

So humans, we treat in, in South America, Jaguars as quite dangerous predators and we treat taper as lovely animals to hunt and kill. The point is that, that the jaguars see one another as human beings and so when we see a Jaguar drinking blood, the Jaguar knows that it's actually drinking man of beer.

cause humans love this lovely fermented beer. so we as a, a human being might see in somewhere in Amazonia, a ecky on a mud muddy bank licking, licking the salt lick. And we just say, okay, it's, it's a, it's a taper licking salt.

But the tapia itself sees itself as in a great ceremonial house, and they've all gathered together for a big initiation ritual.

so can you see what I'm trying to say? I'm trying to say that this is a belief system as far as I can work out. The perspective is in anthropology, admire that belief system. What I, what I certainly know is that Vive de Castro treats Darwinism as a myth and I think he thinks of it as a, as a colonialist myth. in fact, he does think that. So perspective is, is like the decolonizing of thought by celebrating and vindicating and validating this complete reversal of what we in the world in the West think of as science, which the perspective is regarded as the result of, of, of colonialism. So whereas I think, I still think this, by the way, well, I think you have nature and then you have culture and you have animals who become human. Some of us, some of the animals perspectivism kind of, reverses that. And one other very important thing about perspectivism, according to, reverse, it's not just, well, he, he makes it very clear what your perspective is doesn't depend on your soul, because all souls are human souls. They're all the same and all the animals think of themselves as human within their groups.

But of course, the animals have different bodies. And what, what, what determines the kind of perspective you have is your body.

So obviously if you climb in the trees, if you've got wings, you'll have a different perspective on the world. If you are, if than if you are like a snake on the ground, if you, where you are, what kind of body you have, what kind of eyes you have clearly will, will make a difference to the perspective you have. But what we, what what we should try to do is what a shaman does.

So a shaman doesn't just adopt a human perspective and just notice all the animals around a shaman turns into, an anaconda, turns into a jaguar, turns into one of these animals, and then is able to see how the animals see one another.

These animals view one another. as humans have, I made myself clear, it's the exact symmetrical di electrical reverse of what Western scientists would say. And it's kind of beautiful. 'cause it's not just, as I say, not just different. It's absolutely beautifully mirror image, upside down view of the world. Yeah, Right. So, sorry, and I am probably completely wrong, but surely in sort of our common thinking, they all see each other as like animals will see each other as alike anyway.

Well, I'm So, like the way that I would picture a jaguar or imagine a jaguar, they are thinking about the jaguars as being No, they're thinking about the jaguars as being humans according to perspective as well. Can I, can I, I can I really encourage you to ask that question when I've done the next little bit? I'll try and remember it, yes. Okay.

Okay. Thank you so much. Right. So, one of the things which LeRose taught was that all of these myths are about the transition from nature to culture.

So, he, his first volume of met was called the raw and the cooked and it was based on the idea that we humans eat our meat cook and we eat our meat cooked. Not that, not just because it's perhaps easy to digest it, there's other reasons, but for kind of ritual reasons, because blood is taboo and eating blood is a kind of very strong taboo against different kinds of blood.

The blood of a hundred game animals, menstrual blood, other forms of blood, the blood has to be respected. It's got huge symbolic potency and you don't just kill an animal and eat it while it's bleeding or after it's dead, but still covered in blood. It, it's only rendered safe for consumption when it's been put in the fire and that all visible blood has been removed by the cooking process. And if you, if you do get an animal and eat it, eat it raw, that's what a Jaguar would do.

That's what a lion would do. That's what an animal would do. And we are human.

So lemme start this argument was that this story is about how it was that culture emerged and one of the things which happened was that men invented cooking.

Another thing which said was that if you eat your own kill, you eat your own meat. That's kind of like incest.

It's like enjoying your own blood, your own sister, your own brother, your own offspring, and you don't consume your own blood.

You offer your blood, your kin, your, your relatives to others to eat in the sense of enjoy, consume and so, and, and the, and the Inces Tory was another thing which was invented by guess what, men. So a whole lot of things wearing ornaments, wearing clothes, cooking all of these were in invented by men.

I won't go into all the reasons he says that it was invented by men and basically it's because men aren't a culture and women on nature and men being culture, established culture. And his theory, his Levi social theory is that men kind of one day realized having previously been incestuous, like rather like canal, alpha, male chimp tea, keeping all all the females in his own haem and having sex with 'em.

He couldn't get away with it. These evolving humans, corn TROs realized something happened in their head, kind of a digital distinction came, they were able to sort of distinguish system from wife and make an opposition there. But what the, the, the reason they did it was to form relationships with in-laws.

So if men will start thinking, if I give away my sisters, instead of having sex with my sisters, I give my sisters to other men.

With any luck, those men will give me their sisters and we've got an in-law relationship and that was his explanation for the origin of the incests to be, I mean, scientifically, I have to say, nothing could be more improbable than that idea.

It makes absolutely no sense. I mean, really, absolutely no sense whatsoever. I mean, if as soon as you look at non-human primates, you realize that the female chimpanzees, they don't like at all being harassed by their older brothers or fathers, ? And the reason is, of course, if there is something wrong with incest, it's the female who will pay because the male can always have sex with somebody else as well as his sister or daughter or whatever. So it is absurd and of course, human males aren't all that well known for being hugely successful in avoiding these, these, sexual things. So, I mean, it makes absolutely zero sense, but we live in a patriarchal world, and the theory became hugely influential and I suppose what I'm saying now is that, well, first of all, let me just put it really bluntly. Those myths are nothing, whatever to do with the origin of culture. Those, all of those myths that they've chosen to study, as soon as you look at 'em carefully, you can see exactly what's going on.

They're not about, the emergence of culture are about the emergence of male dominance over women. And the, the, the nature, which is so apparently conquered isn't nature at all.

It's women treated as nature, treated as body rather than Mike and the problem is that per protectivism has kind of carried on, carried on with that kind of assumption that we're talking about nature and culture in those, those terms. And one of the things which a really brilliant, social anthropologist, Louisa Ndi has been pointing out in response to what's happening she's been working in, in, in South America, she, she points out that this thing called perspective, which is looking at the world from these different perspectives Paris perspective, a Jas perspective an anacondas perspective. There's all sorts of different perspectives, but there's one perspective missing, says Louisa and that's a gender perspective, because the whole paradigm is entirely looking at things from like as if gender wasn't important.

Whereas actually gender is hugely important and Louisa Malone, just takes a, a particular aspect of the body of males and females as a kind of as a kind of illustration of what's wrong with perspective as it is at the moment and she points out that women, well, everybody knows that women cycle, and menstruate. That's a, that's a bodily feature, of course.

but she points out that theists treat menstruation and the rituals around menstruation purely in terms of the oppression of women.

A woman has to go into her heart. She's secluded, she's dirty, she's polluted, she has to be, her blood is dangerous, and all the rest of it and what Fernando is saying is that, yes, of course in a patriarchal society, that is how women, especially when they're menstruating, do tend to get treated.

But what she points out is the enormous, huge potency of menstrual blood, enormous power, terrifying power, if you like, of, of menstruation. And she had, she's, she's, she says, what we need is, an Amazonian hematology.

cause if you don't understand the significance of blood as a potent liquid shared by gay animals and by women, you can't even, you can't begin to make sense of anything going on in the myths, which, rather ro analyzes.

Next point. I hope I, I, I see some very puzzled faces around that. What do, I'm hoping you're all kind of, you're all kind of following a kind of threat. Let me just say the animals that the caster is talking about, they're very strange animals, of course. I mean, when I read that stuff, I think, what, what are we talking about? Why on earth would Jaguar sink they're humans? What is going on? Why would ies sink they're humans? Why would tap ears? I mean, what on earth is going on here? And to be honest, I don't think that saying that that's how Amazonian people think.

I don't even think that's celebrating their thought.

I think it's saying something which is actually quite, I don't know, quite dubious. I mean, surely, I mean, I think there's probably your question surely to say that Amazonians who hunt animals live with them, live in the forest, very familiar with them.

For them to seriously think that all these animals think of themselves as humans, I, I just don't even believe it. And I don't believe it.

It's not what's going on. So let me explain.

Every animal is two, there's two versions of the animal, one's the body one's a sort of potent soul animal, which you can't even kill.

It's immortal. Again, that means explaining, obviously it does.

But let me just say, let me give you an example and it's still around this topic of menstruation, which is so, so important.

It's important to within rag. You know, I've written the whole book about it all and Camilla's written about it. We, we, we are aware that if, okay, very simply, if you want to get to the ultimate, most primordial, sacred prohibition, the root of all taboo, what's the most taboo substance in the world for humans? Well, yes, it is menstrual blood okay, that, that so taboo that I can hardly talk about it in this class. I mean, I do, 'cause we're kind getting used to it, but it's not feel that easy. And it, and, and actually in a way within academia, you're not really allowed to talk about menstruation unless you're doing medicine, unless you're doing gynecology to, to talk about the cultural significance of menstruation. It's still we have to remember our universities. Not so long ago, a couple hundred years ago, there were theological colleges.

One does not talk about those things. One talks about blood in religion, the brother Jesus, for example, the blood of the sacrificial lamb, the animals itself.

One does not talk about menstrual blood in a cultural context.

It's just not done. So it is actually quite difficult, even for rank for us to talk about these things. But kind of, you have to, in order to be kind of respectful of indigenous thinking, where these things are absolutely central. So let me just say, I just mentioned that Louisa's complaint, that menstruation is only seen as polluting as negative as oppression, not as power. What do I mean by power? I haven't brought

the book along, but one of the finest books in all of anthropology is a book by Peter Gao. I so much recommend it.

It's called an Amazonian Myth and its history. I won't go into it. It's, it'll take far too long. But in that wonderful book.

But he takes one single myth in its context and just, I don't know, you just see a whole new world as you follow the logic of that argument at the center of it all is the, is the ritual of these people called the ro, in Peru. And it's called Kio.

It's the biggest celebrity of the, of the community and it's a celebration of what happens when a girl first men rates, people come from up and down the river. This tributary of the ent for, for this joyful, powerful ceremony where everyone comes together, it lasts, lasts it lasts weeks, the build up ceremony and what happens is that as the, as the guests and the hosts are all arriving for this great ny the first time, they set eyes on each other.

They see each other as Jas and, and a condors and parrots.

cause they're all dressed up in their feathers and their costumes and their spots. And the most intensively decorated person of all is guess who? It's the girl at the center of it all.

She is the jaguar. She is the jaguar woman.

When she emerges from seclusion her, her future husband sees her for the first time he sees his, his bride, his future wife as a jaguar, beautifully decorated her body with the spots of the Jaguar.

He has to take it very seriously. He does not think, oh, this young woman is dressed up as a jaguar. No, no. He has to take her at her word. She is truly a jaguar.

Be very careful.

Do not look too closely bow your head and respect.

She is the true jaguar across Amazonia. Whenever a girl was menstruating, she would go through a very powerful initiation ritual and become either a jaguar or a, an anaconda, a snake or a tapia, but some kind of animal and the critical point about these animals, the way they're chosen is that they're on a predator prey relationship, predator and prey from the point of your humans. Now, I'm gonna read out a story not from Amazonia, but from California, which makes the point I want to make, I think probably better than I can, just giving a kind of talk, a lecture. And it's in, it's actually in my book, bud Relations in the chapter called The Sex Strike.

Because my own view is that men did not invent the inces view at all.

Women had to get together to say, our bodies are ours.

No means no, we don't want sex with you just now and, the, the signal of like no means no with a, a coalition of women was blood, menstrual blood, anything connected with menstrual blood, like red pigment or ochre and those women needed to make very, very clear with their bodies, not just whispering no, like in like a a continent of our, but really quite a loud and insistent and repetitive no, that they meant what they meant, what they were saying. So I'm gonna read a, a story which tell which, what it, the point I want to come outta this is that women need to sort of, women who want to

say no to men's approaches when they, when they're unwelcome, they're gonna think about what, what do you do with your body? cause the female body to the biological human male looks pretty attractive.

How do you deal with that? How do you make your body signal? No, this is a California myth of seven sisters recorded at the early in the 19th century in Los Angeles County, the seven sisters, there were seven brothers, married to seven sisters who lived in a large hut.

Together the men went daily to hunt rabbits and the women together roots of flanks for food. The husbands invariably reported bad luck in their hunt, with the exception of the youngest who without fail handed his wife a rabbit.

This continued every day until the females held a conference and became convinced that they were being cheated by their partners.

They agreed that the youngest sister should remain at home the next day under pretext of having a pain in her jaw and so watch the return of the hunters next day. The men as usual, took their bows and arrows and set forth the six sisters.

They departed, leaving the other concealed among the flags and rushes at the back of the Hutt in a position from which you could see all that happened inside.

Several hours before sunset, the hunting party returned, laid with rabbits, which they commenced roasting and eating, except one, which the youngest set apart. The others called him a fool and beat him, eat the remaining one, which he refused to do, saying he still had some affection for his wife and always intended to reserve one rabbit for her. More full use of the others.

We care more for ourselves and for these root dickers. When they're finished, they carefully hid all the evidence of their feast.

When all this was later reported to the sisters, they cried a great deal and talked about what they should do. Now, this next bit is a critical part.

It's what do you do as a group of women to punish the men who are cheating on you to say no. Okay, what do you do? Let us turn into water, said the eldest that would never do respond to the rest.

For in that case, our husbands would drink us.

The second proposed being turned into stones, which was rejected on the ground of being trodden upon by the fertility.

The third wanted to turn themselves into trees, which was not accepted because they would be used for firewood.

Everything proposed was put aside until it came to the turn of the youngest.

Her proposition to change themselves into stars was objected to on account of being seen, but then overruled as they would be outta reach.

They proceeded to the lagoon where they daily collected flag routes and constructed a machine impossible to describe outta reeds and ascended to heaven and located themselves at the ADEs for consolation of the seven sisters.

These seven stars still retain the names of the originals.

Can you see what I'm trying to say? You've gotta work out as a group of sisters what to metamorphos into in order to convey this rather important message of resistance.

Of course, the stars, they're not animals actually, though most of the constellations are animals. You know, the bear all the various other Scorpio, the various other concept.

All, all, all cultures treat these conservations kind of as totemic ancestral beings conservations. But yeah, of course in here we don't have them telling themselves in animals.

What I'm suggesting is, and I've course I've got matters of evidence, I've just given you part of the evidence is that what the, what women would do would turn themselves into, an animal collectively into an animal and just to make the point even more obvious with their bodies, a really big animal and a male one. Turning back to, Amazonia in the VA region of Amazonia and Northwest Board of Columbia, a group called the Asana, one of the Chicano Indians. the girls have a ritual for first menstruation, not too different from the, the one I mentioned from the, the period with the Jaguar. and they go into seclusion during the, the girl will go into seclusion, for her during that period and she goes into a kind of hutt made of six taper hides. So the women who organize this ritual, they take the taper, they sew the hides together.

So the woman goes into a huge taper. You know, what a taper is. I mean, lovely animal looks a bit like a pig.

This huge, big, beautiful thing. Lovely to hunt of course, but, but you have a giant one. And this giant tapir is called thunder tapir and it's a terrifying god. These girl, the girl turns into this terrifying figure.

It's a male figure. It's an animal figure, and it's bleeding.

Now what's so interesting is that in that tribe, everything's made clear.

cause when people go hunting for tapir, actually any other animal they hunt.

But tapir, there are two kinds of tap.

There's a, there's a tap here, which is just an animal, and there's a tap here, which is really a human being wrapped up in the skin of a taper. And what the people say is that when you're hunting tap here, you've gotta be very careful what you think.

In order to be able to kill and eat the animal.

You must think of it not as a shaman would you mustn't think with vision, you must not think of the true tapia, which is of course a human being. Okay? Going through initiation.

Very, very powerful. But coming meta of foes outta resistance into taper. God, you must just try to just hunt on the assumption that the animal's just an animal and you kill it and eat it.

Because as soon as you think like a shaman would, in other words, if you, if you, if you think truthfully, if you kind of remember that the true tapia is a human being in a tapia skin, I mean, it's just terrible, you'd be accountable. You'll be eating a human being.

So sometimes the hunters in this tribe, they actually kind of make a mistake.

They realize that as they were killing the taper, they were thinking it's probably a human being.

Now that human being taper will tell its family who killed it and there'll be terrible re retribution.

So what the hunters do when they kill the taper, they cut out its tongue and throw it away so that the tap can't tell its family who killed it. Okay? What am I saying here? I'm saying that the animals who think they're humans, I I remember I was asking that question, why would they think they're humans? It's a really difficult question.

What do you think my answer is to have a guess.

Why would they think they're humans? In the light of what I've just been saying? Oh dear. Well, alright, I agree. It's difficult.

The answer is very simple. It's because they are humans.

How can, how can a jaguar be a human? I've just told you, as a woman, when you, when you're initiated now, your initiation sets the pattern for your life.

You've been initiated as a almost a traumatic experience, a hugely important thing. You become an adult as a jaguar, you are woman jaguar, or among the designer you are the taper, the great s God.

Why do these animals jug a woman? The great taper. Why do you think they're humans? Because they're humans. They're, they're under the skin.

They're humans. You've gotta be very, I mentioned to you when, when a young man meets his future bride, she's the jaguar, he can't, he can't even touch her, let alone poke a arrow into her or eat her or something. I mean, you can't even touch her.

The idea that you could kill her and eat her. I mean, just absolutely. This, this is like eating, I dunno, it's, it's like more than worse than eating God.

cause of course Chris, you do eat God on commun obviously lots of rules around people, but I mean, you are allowed to drink that blood. It's set under certain conditions. But, and of course actually in, in these cultures, you can kill the animals under certain conditions, but have conditions are quite severe. But as I was saying, among dish, You must be aware that the taper are doubled.

There's ordinary animal tap ears. Just kill them, hunt them, eat them, cook them. So even them, of course, you could be quite careful with the blood and all that, but you want to be really careful about messing with, a, a tapia who's actually a human. And so one of the things which, vi Castro emphasizes is this idea of skin change. So, so, and he points out that when, when you, when you've got a human being in the, in an animal skin, he says it's not just, it's not just the skin is some kind of, superficial covering over the real creature. He's arguing and it's this true that the skin makes what's inside the skin real, if you like, almost like more real than reality.

So the asana, they will say about the tappi, some tap here, just animals, you can kill them.

But the true taper under the skin is a human being.

What's that? What's that meaning of that word? True. It means for a shaman.

When you're thinking properly, when you're thinking as an initiated adult, when the secrets, when you have the full interior knowledge, when you can see beyond appearances that taper is a human being. so next question I'll finish in a moment.

I mentioned earlier that according to the prospect, all these animals are kind of p****d off.

cause they're resentful at the fact that they used to have both an arrows and cook roast meat and lived in big grand houses and all that culture was stolen from 'em, right? I'm simply saying the reason they're p****d off is because as I mentioned earlier, the stories have nothing to do with the transition from nature to culture.

They're about the establishment of male dominance.

When male dominance is established in a culture which is previously being gender egalitarian, what happens is that instead of being women with their menstrual periods being connected with the moon, being supernaturally potent, I mean all these powers, what happens is increasingly the shamans become men who also know how to become animals and how to bleed in certain ways, rather like menstrual blood. So of course, if increasingly these powerful animals within which are women acting as animals, but being animals in a very true sense, if what's happening is that those animals are gradually being replaced by a different kind of animal, namely men doing those sort of things, which women used to do and increasingly displacing women's powerful menstrual ceremonies by men's male initiation ceremonies. Well, you'd expect those women, or if you like those animals, cause women have to be animals when they're being ferocious and to fire the reasons I've just explained, you'd expect them to be a bit disgruntled because they really have been robbed of culture. 'cause what happens, and this is what happens in these myths that is talking about, and it's what levy so themselves says, women become treated as nature.

Okay? In other words, it's like, like other animals and give if given that actually in real life women invented the incense. We were cooking all these other things actually and there's a very powerful arguments to say that you can imagine why women themselves, therefore the animals that people treat them as will be, feeling that they have been, robbed.

I I can't just quite leave it there 'cause I, I probably just leave you all feeling you bit unsatisfied. so within race, not all of us, but kind of most of us, I think within RACE over the years, we kind of think we've more or less worked out how human culture was established. Now, one of the things which needed to be established is this very simple principle fundamental to all the world's religions, which is that some things are sacred.

What needed to be established first and foremost was that the body is sacred.

Females, human females, let's face it, are not very good at one particular thing.

I've seen you really very shocked at this.

Women are not so good at violence as men on average.

Now, if you think that being human is all about violence, and there are people that think that there's a whole deco school about theory there was a killer rape theory. Humans are killer rapes.

They had all these weapons and stuff, and a very popular warfare model these days about violence.

So if you think that if you think that becoming human, developing language, developing religion, all that was all about being extra violent, of course it would make sense to say that men were doing that. Actually, the whole point about language is that it doesn't work if violence is the language people speak, you need a lot of trust, cooperation to be able to function in a world where just these very, very quiet sounds that we make when speaking would even work as forms of communication. So you need a lot of egalitarianism, a lot of trust egalitarianism. And, and actually in our model within, within, the radical anthropology group here, we, we actually say that the fundamental rule wasn't even the rule against right against incest. The much more deep rule is the rule against rape.

Women had to establish some things are sacred, our bodies are sacred, no means no. That was the fundamental rule and if women were doing that while menstruating, the brilliance of that was that it the becoming, defiant while bleeding, turning into animals while bleeding, turning into male animals while bleeding. Can you see what's happening? Just like jaguar woman we, that this is just what actually does happen.

But we're saying it happened at the origin of culture as well and it's kept on happening ever since. Okay? Women have turned into, let's just say, I dunno, a a particular antelope in Africa, ellan bull.

Okay, now you see a real ellan bull. Can you see what's happening? You have the women turning into the magic ellan bull or the all the rainbow snake or the dragon or the taper, whatever. But now you see a real animal.

Can you see how once you've been initiated and you can see true things, you've got a kind of problem. Is this the sacred animal, which with intentionality that you can't really kill is a ridicule thing Or is it just an animal I'm allowed to kill and eat? There's always gonna be that ambivalence once you've had that thing. So, okay. I mean, how do I end here? the, the, the, the culture I know best. I, I, Camilla has done proper field work with a group called the Hanza in Tanzania.

These are the among the world's last surviving, hunters who hunt with bows and arrows in the area of, of East Africa, where we evolved hunting relatively large, well, large game animals, even to, even to this day, up to a point where we're sitting up problems these days and I remember giving a talk rather like this talk, but a way, way, way, way, way back, was it 1993? I think I was giving a talk on this whole theory that women turning into animals, while menstruating means that you are both the animal that you are hunting and also the animal hunted. 'cause you are the, you've turned into that hunted animal while bleeding.

Can you see what's happening? Your menstrual blood has never come.

The blood of the hunted game animal, both of which are sacred and I remember just giving us rather theoretical talk, and James Woodburn, the great expert on the hater, he, he said, oh, yeah, yeah.

He said, when a, among the hata, when a girl first has a menstrual period, everyone celebrates, and I've got the, I've got the hat out worked here, we productive product it wrong. I won't pronounce it right.

It's got a big click in front of it. It's a, and that what, what that means is she has shot her zebra.

So packed in there is predator and prey turned into an animal, a breeding animal, you become sacred.

It's kind of the origin of the whole complex scheme. And, I'm just, I don't know. I just feel how can Protists have got it so sadly wrong, as to really imagine that the actual jaguars and animals, I, I mean, maybe I'm not being quite fair, I mean, but as far as I can work out reading very carefully, the perspective is give more credence to this perspective than to what I would call science. But I just think how can, how can you accuse really intelligent Amazonian hunter galls of, of just thinking that the jaguars tapers, ies parrots all think of themselves as humans? And my answer to that difficult question is, no, they don't.

Okay. That's it.

We've got plenty of time for questions.

Okay. Here we ask to be here. Okay. Answering, okay. Sorry, I, we're just having a little discussion about the origin of the NCES booth, and I think I probably Yeah, yeah. Talk to everyone on Zoom.

Okay. So I'm so sorry because Camilla was fixing all this, and I thought we we, we were. So, I I, I, I think pretty much everyone here, obviously I've been a bit persuasive, perhaps I've been talking too much, but I, I think people agree with me that, it's most unlikely, that the incest, prohibition in humans, was a male invention, much more likely that resistance to incest would've come from sex, which incurs the cost if there are any costs, genetic costs and those would be females. And we already know from chimpanzees and other, great eight relatives of ours that females tend not to want their sons, brothers, fathers, and so on to hassle them for sex and they themselves push those males away if they can. But sometimes, of course, with chimpanzees, the females are raped by, um by an older brother.

So I, I'd simply say that's an underlying thing that the fundamental rule of human society was the rule against rape that had to be established by females and of course, if human evolution females had to come together to form coalitions to do that, and in order to resist male unwanted approaches, they had to use bloody language. They had to meta more foes into some, like display, not their ordinary human female, therefore rather attractive to males display as in the midst.

What do we turn ourselves into? Water know the men will drink US stones know they telling us wood know they're burners so far with let's make ourselves attractive but unavailable.

So they turn themselves into those stars.

But we know from all sorts of ethnography, what women actually do most often is turn themselves into a very powerful animal. the Jaguar in Amazonia, the ellan bull

in parts of Africa, Greek Anaconda, and other parts of Amazonia, the rainbow snake, the kind of dragon in Australia.

So you turn yourselves into a creature which is joined up big, imposing, and everything, which a male doesn't want to have if he wants to have sex. So that, so, and therefore, those animals, those animals you turn into are the supernatural ones. and those are the ones that kind of have human agency and human attributes, and if you like, think of themselves as humans.

The reason being because they are humans and there is a, an interesting question on Zoom. Josie, do you want to ask that question on the Zoom platform? Josie's saying, do you see, two I'd seen of Albert? Oh, that's a Lovely's Speaking perspective, is say some more. Yes.

Okay.

about the idea of depth.

Okay, now, okay. Really, thank you for that because I see a complete opposition between two I seeing and perspective. Why, because as I understand it, the perspective coming from Castro is making science and indigenous wisdom not connect up. He's pointing out, he argues that there, they're so different.

They're so incommensurable, they're so loggerheads with each other that there's no common ground and he prefers on, on this level. I, I'm sure it's a real human being.

He probably agrees with climate science and goes on airplanes reasonably confident that some scientists have made sure that the thing will stay up and all that. But in his role as a, as a, as a per protectionist, an anthropologist, he seems to be overwhelmingly favoring, these perspectives. I'm an Indian perspective as he calls them, at the expense of western science on the grounds that you've gotta choose, because they're just completely the opposite of each other. Whereas two, I seeing, as, as, as, as, developed by, Albert Marshall is quite the opposite, is trying to find points of convergence between indigenous ways of knowledge and science. So there's a very big difference and what I'm arguing is certainly not that science is like to be preferred.

There's all sorts of things wrong with science. And science of it very, very often has got things so ideologically wrong that it really needs to listen to indigenous thinking. And a good example, by the way, is the whole topic of menstruation all over the world.

Indigenous people think that menstruation has got something to do with the moon.

You'll find science. And it's really strange, this thing called science, western science. Look up Wikipedia, any dictionary, any any textbook.

They will tell you that menstruation has got nothing to do with the moon.

I prefer indigenous wisdom, because then that makes you ask a question about menstruation of the moon and it sure enough, it turns out that the reason why the lengths are the same, and we won't go into all that, but I'm just, there's an example of indigenous thinking, getting something right, and science under patriarchy, getting things extremely wrong, particularly things which matter most politically and in terms of gender science has been absolutely hopeless in some, so, so many of those areas, horribly, ideologically distorted and, and kind of useless. And we, we desperately need

to be taught how to get o outta those holes and many indigenous people can help us to do that and any questions in the room? Sure. You're welcome.

Yes.

I, I'm wondering if it's the difference between Western thinking as a metaphor.

So we've taken, we've taken lots of myths to be metaphors for something, whereas this is being seen as so literal and like, we can't sort of get a head around this literal thing. But if you, if you take like Catholicism Yeah. With ification that Catholics actually believe they are lip eating, the flesh God drinking the blood of Christ.

That we actually just, I mean, I'm not Catholic, but that's just taken granted here. Is it, is it that like the same sort of disparity between literally a a That's such a, that's such a repeat to the zoom. Okay. So, so I mean, so yes, the question is about metaphor and is the problem here, rather, like I've been asked like the, the problem of this, this woman being an animal, being a, being a, like a, a jaguar is the problem that, that actually would be a metaphor.

That she's a jaguar not to be taken literally, rather in the same way that within Catholicism, we should understand that the idea that Jesus is a sacrificial lamb, whose blood we drink, we should understand it as a metaphor not to be taken.

Literally. That's a brilliant question.

But the problem is that in order to be religion, you mustn't just treat something as Oh, just a metaphor. Oh, it just symbolism.

No, but I don't think Catholic thing, and I think they hold that Dissonance. Yeah. Yes. Yeah. Okay. I mean, I, I know all about this 'cause I'm a Catholic, I was brought up a Catholic, and it's, but We do have that, which is sort of, seems to me is sentiment all, well, Yes. That's, that's a kind of a cognitive dissonance.

You think one thing and you think the other thing. So with one part of yourself, you kind of know, it says a bit of bread, and this is a bit of wine.

But on the other hand, in your role as a devout Catholic, you mustn't just say, this is, I mean, obviously Protestant has ended up doing that. It's just a symbol.

But as a devout Catholic before the reformation, you mustn't just say, oh, it's just a metaphor. You must treat this as genuinely the blood of Jesus.

I mean, but I'm, I'm aware of what you're saying, that on another level you won't. So the way the West thinks About, well, I'm not even thought it's the way the West thinks.

cause you see what I'm saying is that when that, when that girl, that p girl during Marlow, when she makes her first appearance, she's the most beautiful, powerful, impressive girl with all these wonderful decorations on her skin.

She looks magnificent. And she's, she is, a jaguar. And it's the, the important thing is that the, the man who's the young man who wants to be, wants her to be his bride, he mustn't think of it, oh, it's just a woman dressed up as, as spots, he must treat her as more jaguar, real Jaguar, literal Jaguar than the Jaguar you might meet out in the forest.

Because otherwise it's not religion, it's not faith. And, and if you think it's just a metaphor, what would be the consequences? I mean, the point is the consequences. If you, if you act as if she's a real jaguar, you really are very careful about how you treat her.

So it is a metaphor, but there's a level within, It's a metaphor. I'm not saying, I'm not saying we've got the vibe that we are seeing it from the right perspective, because I think with, magical realism as a genre Yeah. Like that was, that was appropriated by European literature Yeah.

As, as a genre. But actually, I've, I've spoken to people and it's like things they say it's literal, ? And I, I remember speaking to someone from Cuba Somewhere, Cuba talking about her periods. Yeah and she said it was a river. And, and I said, no, you're exaggerating. She went, no, no, no.

It was literally a river. Yeah. And it's like, she believed it's literally a river.

So I think it's like a perspective of something. So I saw it, I saw her speaking as a metaphor.

Yes, I know. But there's a whole theory of metaphor.

I'm actually having to write a sort of book on it all, which about general language.

But one of the major theories within metaphor is that, what is the meaning of a metaphor? It is like, if you say John is a pig, what do you mean? Do you mean he is, he's a bit messy. He is a bit greedy. Well and all those things. And the point is, you, you're saying, no, no, no, he's literally a pig. He's literally a pig. Yeah, pig. And you say, well, has he got trotters? Does he get sliced up the bacon? No, but he's literally a pig. So it's, it's, if you, if you say he's like a pig. Yeah. That's got no force. Yeah.

If you say he's a pig, it's got force and you're wanting people to sort of take it sort of as literally as they can, given of course that he is not gonna get sliced up.

You haven't got trotters or a curly tail and all those things.

So it's quite subtle. So I think there's a very important difference between metaphor and other figures of speech. Like similarly, one thing really important to say in response to your question, actually, these, well, these magical myths, these myths that tro, talks about, they are extraordinarily elaborate metaphors.

So what what's brilliant about that is that idea, which is, I mean, I can't see anyone can possibly doubt it, is that those myths are true in the way that metaphors are true. Of course, with any metaphor, you have to sort of look to the intention when somebody says he's a pig. Yeah, yeah, yeah. He's a pig. He really is a pig but the, obviously the intention is to get across just what a wretched, greedy, messy, brutish, disrespectful guy, guy this person is. So, but that what, what, what this whole idea of metaphor means in mythology is that it really is worth just considering, are these myths true? Because I think they are, I think they're true. I think Jack and the Beanstalk is true. Right? I mean, I, I've got into trouble for saying this, of course. I, I've heard people saying, oh, Chris Knight, you basis his theory on fairytales. But I'm, what I'm saying is that as soon as you, as soon as you realize that metaphor must be taken, literally something like that to be, to, for it to work, which is a quite a a dominant paradigm

within mythical theory, then you think, okay, I know it's all about a frog and a princess and all these things, but behind it, there's a really profound truth. You've gotta look behind that.

Take it very seriously. What is this myth all about? I, okay, I read out this story about the seven sisters. Okay, maybe it didn't happen, they turned into stars. But I think that story is just, so, I think that story is, I don't know, it is worth, it is worth all the theories about human origins that have been piled up on library shelves for centuries.

It's a brilliant insight into how we became human.

That story about turning into stars.

The brilliant thing is that if women turn into stars, they're sexy, they're attractive, they're enticing. They want you, no, no, no, no, you can't have us. That's, that's the idea of that. I mean, that is, that that's captures something about the machine that's impossible and of course, the, and of course, what they do before going up, right? They go into the reeds and it's quite clear to me from all sorts of other evidence that that machine impossible to describe. Why is it impossible to describe? 'cause the, the narrator was talking to a white man who hadn't got a clue.

It's a menstrual hub that when that when go into this thing in the marshes made a reeds and they go into another world, that's what you do when you synchronize your menstrual periods together. You, you go, you go into seclusion. Seclusion is like a kind of death.

You go into the other world. So I'm just saying that myth is it's a true myth and it's, isn't that Be, isn't that what we're saying in South America? That, that that's true.

Yes. That's, so that's good. But what I'm trying to say is, is okay, but what exactly is true? Is it true that jaguars think they're humans? it is. I, no, okay, let me, it's Wasting that.

Oh, this is so interesting. No, this is such a good challenge.

Thank you so much. It's what you're saying is really brilliant.

What I'm suggesting is that the indigenous people make her a distinction, rather, like the distinction between, as you're saying, she can't really think her periods a river. They make her sort of like, in everyday life, these people, I'm sure know that these are jaguars and they don't think they're human at all.

and, and, the tap is they're tasty.

You can kill them and eat them. But there's a, there's another level, which is the religious level, if you like. So Like the transation, Where exactly where, because women or other shamans can turn into a jaguar.

You never know when you see a jaguar, is it a shamer spirit, Jaguars spirit tap period. And, and, and it's so interesting because right across the, I mean, I should really, one more point I haven't said in the talk earlier on, is that these Amazonian perspectives, they're no way confined to the Amazon, right across the world.

You have this idea that animals have spirit, guardians spirit companions. You, you, there's the there's the, there's the great bear, there's the, I dunno where you, you all hunter gatherers are respectful of the animals that kill you, mustn't laugh at them, for example, especially if they're bleeding.

You must. And so, and, and the idea is that there's a kind of immortal spirit of the animal, which will take ance on you if you, if you abuse the animal.

Look at the cave paintings on, on the, those great bison and horses.

What are they? They're not just ordinary animals, they're woman bison.

You actually see women turning into bison.

These are the great spirits of the animals that you're gonna be and so young boys would've been taken into those caves initiated. And you've, you've seen them in their flickering light. Ah, I know I've gotta be quite careful when I'm hunting a horse or a bison, these immortal spirits, guardians of the animals, they're, you can't kill them and if you, if you disrespect the animals, you will get punished.

Be very careful.

Can we, pick up on, on zoom, there's quite a people, quite a few questions. So one question was about making sense of Chelan, of Chelan contention.

The first oppression was that of women. Yeah. I think you explained why. of course, it's, mainly an Amazon history here rather than Middle Eastern. But yes, that's one thing. manchego here is telling us that, that those stories about the seven sisters have maybe a hundred thousand year old time death, which I believe comes from the studies of, aboriginal, astronomy that are suggesting that. Yeah.

Just, just to fill on that, because actually the stars nowadays have only, there's only six of them, so see six.

So the fact is one of them sort of vaguely disappeared and it takes a long time for them to disappear.

So we know they must be a hundred thousand years old to have even seen seven.

Is the Idea of that, that, somebody else wanting to know about the Panther bride literally being a panther, Jaguar, early referring to Panthers thinking themselves human, are we simply alluding to interconnectedness? Is there a continuation of colonial thinking in a panther thinking itself, human as if hierarchically at the top being human? Well, I mean, I mean, to be honest, I, I think you're right there. Yeah. I, I think you're right there. I mean, I think, to to be honest, I don't see this hugely anti-colonial movement as all that anti-colonial. I think it would be a, a bit more anti-colonial to have a gender perspective on things. And, and, and really to see, I mean, to, I dunno, to see what was celebrated about both genders and different kinds of blood and to see this, these, these, this potency of blood as critical to a Amazonian, but also all human, if you like, civilization. What made us human? How do we become human? We had to establish that some things are sacred, if nothing sacred. I mean, I know that under capitalism, nothing is sacred. Everything's got a price.

You could sell your grandmother, you make enough profit out of it. But I mean but, but any decent human society, there's certain things that held sacred. I mean, we,

we've got a strike next Tuesday. You never cross a picket line, for example. So, and that's a, a pretty sacred rule, part of my religion. So, so I, I tend to agree with the, the, the implication in that, in that, in that, in that suggestion there, I don't, I don't quite see that it's all that, decolonized this whole way of thinking.

I think there's elements of colonialism still lurking around there. Yeah.

Any more questions from the audience? Trying to think more question. Do you have any comments? Well, I was gonna say, I saw something this week in, it was being touted all over nature.

So big announcements in nature.

They are establishing something in the US called the Center for braiding knowledge. Oh, yeah. Science and indigenous knowledges, braiding science and indigenous knowledges. So it's, it's very, very up to the minute this idea that indigenous knowledge and science should be speaking to each other and inform each other. and they've got huge huge finances for this with projects coming from all over the Americas, Canada, to the us. and yes, examples of, with indigenous scientists and scholars, leading projects, trying to sort of combine approaches, archeologists who were working on prairie archeology, doing work on sort of be meta speed work and this kind of thing. Yeah. Great.

the other thing to say is, is so much, ecology. So we, we are talking about the real knowledge of indigenous people, traditionally ecological knowledge tech, of animals.

So you'd mentioned the Elam Bull, for instance.

Western science is only beginning to catch up with understanding of, the movements and, and, habits and behaviors of animals that are utterly sacred to African hunter-gatherers, like Elam bulls, for instance.

There's mature Elam bulls with their clicking knees. their knees click as tendons slip, and they create this extraordinary clicking noise, which is central in the dances, the most ancient dancers of Bushman people, and also had of people there pen their dancers, as part of their, their kind fundamental rituals. and they knew all this before Western ecologists were working out what's going on with those edam bulls, similar killer whales, yeah.

Which have now become orcas have become the models for understanding menopause. And grandmothers, which hide people on the northwest coast, Pacific coast understood the orcas as their ancestor matrilineal ancestors.

They understood the social structures that were in the orca pods, which they took as a reflection of their own ancestry.

So these are some examples in the ecology of, I mean, another thing to say is that, when it comes to what does it mean to be human? I mean, it's not where science in the West began at all.

A huge amount of Western science was driven by military imperatives.

What it means to be human is just like, kind of the last thing, even now vaguely kind of around. Whereas, as Richard Lee, Richard Lee was one, one of the first people to have seriously studied the Kalahari San, people, he was a Marxist. He's still active. He described the, the way of life of the Kalahari San, the Bushman, as, as communism

a form of communism. and his, his point is that, they know what it means to be human because they're, they're, they're, they kind of, they're still are human, but it's like, it's not like they arrived at being human and they saying, okay, we're here now.

We're human.

There's a constant need to reestablish humanity because there's always a sort of risk of slipping back into something else. So, and, and the work we've been doing in rag with our colleagues and I, and perhaps the best formulation is, is that a Morna Finnegan, she, she, she kind of improves I think a little bit, Richard Lee's concept of like primitive communism.

She calls it communism in motion and she's talking now about what happens today among the Benelli and other aka forest people, which is, which is that they, they don't just make human life by performing their rituals. They, they establish power.

This is women is, and the ritual among the Binet is called the women establish their own right Matriarchy women rule.

But women don't rule for very long 'cause they get fed up with ruling.

They want to like surrender their power, let the men have a a go, then have a another revolution. And they almost mourner points out.

It's almost as if when the men perform their ritual, which is called a Jeni, it's quite muscular potentially because of the muscles and the weaponry potentially violent and it's almost as if the women are wanting the men to, almost pose a kind of threat to them, but just, but don't let it get too far in order to provoke the women into having their revolution again. So you have a kind of revolution of a, an an on purpose counter-revolution when the men take over another revolution as a result of that. And they've been doing it all ever since. Now, why am I saying that significant here is because it's, it's the people that become human and then that delightfully become animals again. 'cause everybody likes sex. And you can just, something do what you feel like, follow your instinct, and then you become sort of culturally be human with all these religious norms.

Again, it's like, how we became human? cause it wasn't in the distant past.

It's not like Hunter gathers are primitive people.

They're doing these things today, and they know more about it because they're having to win the human revolution because they don't have all this technology and all that stuff and also because unlike people in the west, they haven't kind of lost the plot completely. I've been doing in so many ways actually in the West, with all our hierarchies and very little egalitarians that we sharing, we we're actually quite close to chimpanzees.

Zees have an alpha male that they have hierarchies, they have competence, and they have conflict.

The whole world today is looking rather like a Chi Z hierarchy, and hunter gatherers are way, way ahead of us.

Shakti, did you have a question? Your hand was up.

Yeah, actually it was not so much a question where a kind of comment on things that both you and Chris have said. one about taking, metaphors literally, and the other about, um how much ecological knowledge there is to, amongst indigenous people that can be used and, and, and, and that, that that can be used as a start point to investigate.

So I think there's so much animal behavior and other studies going on where the hypothesis being tested are in some ways not as grounded in natural history as they could be. and that grounding of course, can come from, the people who actually live amongst those animals and watch them every day. but also, in terms of taking metaphors, literally, now obviously these knowledge systems.

So the scientific knowledge system is also bringing knowledge to people, to indigenous people in various places. And the, their ecologies are also changing in terms of the animals and the plants around them because of everything that's happening in the world. so I wonder whether they themselves might, the myths themselves might, and the metaphors might be transforming, and they might have questions about those myths and metaphors as well, which in some ways, a scientific perspective could help to, ho, hone that. So, as their own myths because those myths are arising from a point in the past about describing populations and things as they existed at a point in time.

But things have transformed, and not all youngsters believed the myths that are passed down to them, for instance. And so I think it's both ways those myths themselves. there are, I mean, in one way they can inform what scientists do, but in another way, indigenous people might be interested in understanding what parts of their myths, which, which parts of them are literally transformed metaphors and which are more ephemeral.

You put it better than I did. Thank you, Shakti. That's lovely.

Absolutely right. Absolutely. On both sides, they can temper the other, there's all sorts of valuable insights. and yeah, I'm absolutely right.

Beautifully put. And also, it's nice because we could hear you, you've got a very good sound system, mostly, obviously we can't hear what's going on, but you've got a very nice microphone.

But that's the main thing. The main thing is what you said, and I couldn't agree more. Lovely.

Thank, manchego. I'm gonna, ask if there's any more questions in the room, and then maybe Manchego, and then maybe we should wrap up tonight. Yeah. did you wanna add something Manchego? Yeah, Yeah. I was wondering if, if you had any thoughts on the, the fact that, at least in the Western, mythology, the, when people settle down and then they get cities, they're, the person or being that brings civilization to them.

in the case of the Mesopotamia, they were fishmen, they had fish tails. And in the case of the Greeks, you got Chiron, the Centaur, or you have, sea crops, who has a snake body from the waist down? Who founds Athens? Well, I mean, as I said, when you go, when you are initiated, you, you met, you go through a metamorphosis. I mean, there's

no question that, and if you're not initiated, you won't have all the, the power needed to do these amazing things to found Athens, to found civilization. So in a sense, you've gotta be more than human to do these things. And, but changing a skin, becoming some kind of animal while retaining human characteristics.

So of course, one of them, one of the ways you can be an animal, but somehow a human is to have an animal skin.

But you've got a human soul somewhere in inside you. But of course, another one is to have like a mermaid. You can have a, you a human top and a fishy body, fishy, fishy, lower path. So of course, there all these lionhead men, these animorphs, these these, the sehr is the word, sorry, theros is the word. half human, half. I mean, that those, those images capture this movement between animal and human state, as is a sort of static image that you can have as an, as an icon.

You can draw it. So and actually one of the very first bits of, art, we know steinle, what date is that? Is it's 35, 5,000, 35,000. It's a, it's a line headed man. So Possibly man or Woman must, yeah. Yeah. So these things go way, way, way, way, way, way back.

But the reason they go way back is because in ritual, and the initial rituals, for no doubt about it, the most powerful ritual would be women's first menstruation rituals.

I don't think that could be doubted.

You need to turn into animals to be powerful. Then you've got like dream hibernation where, incubation where people wrap themselves up in a, in a sheep skin while they sleep.

Oh, right.

Like that.

Okay. Yeah. That must feel quite good. Yeah.

Okay, I'm gonna intervene 'cause I think we are coming to, a couple of things to say before, one is a lovely recommendation from Leonia on the Zoom chat of the beautiful book. Some of you may have heard of Robin Wall Kimura's book, braiding Sweetgrass, which is very much, interested in, she's an indigenous scholar and author, very much interested in this subject of this kind of braiding of knowledges and, we're reminded by Sika here.

Thank you very much.

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