

‘The Moon and the Origins of Death’ (Seminar)

An Aboriginal Australian Myth

Chris Knight

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People once died only for a few days before returning to life as the Moon does each month. After examining some Australian variants on this world-wide tale, Chris Knight will connect it with the 'Bird-Nester' myths so central to Claude Lévi-Strauss' four-volume 'Introduction to the Science of Mythology'.

Image shows Australian ancestral artefacts of the story of the fight between Tapara, who becomes the Moon, and Purukupali, whose son dies (at his insistence when the Moon offers to bring him back to life after he had sex with Purukupali's wife)

<https://vimeo.com/1157886074>

Well, I'm gonna be talking about death. And, how it happened. How it is that we are in this really very unfortunate situation where when we die, that's it. You stay dead.

One of my friends, Dan Mill, one of Ivan's students, does a lot of coppicing. He works in the woods. He cuts the hazel, he, lives with the trees.

And, he makes the point beautifully, makes the point that, you don't really find dead people, dead things, dead trees.

You, you do find sort of dead things, but somehow we kinda sprout up again, sprout up again.

And, he actually said the other day, one of our book clubs, he said, you don't find death because it's, it's always coming back again.

Every, all the plants are coming back again and the leaves fall, seeds fall spread up again.

And of course, that's the whole point of life, that it's fundamentally periodic, death is followed by resurrection.

Winter is followed by spring, the new moon, the dying moon, and the new moon kind of balance each other.

There's a kind of pendulum of constant movement between life and death.

And the stories I'm gonna be recounting to you are attempting to explain this shocking thing that with us, we, we just die.

and, aboriginal people south and African people all around the world is, is probably the one of the few myths that wherever it occurs, and it occurs pretty much all over the world, it occurs in the same form.

I mean, clearly certain differences, but the differences aren't, aren't deep, aren't meaningful.

the idea is that, once with humans, as with the vegetation, we die for a bit, maybe a few days.

and then we popped up alive again, just like the moon.

And, then something went wrong and there's a common thread through all the different variants.

It's that we only died and stayed dead when we lost touch with the moon, when we didn't listen to the moon, any longer and by losing touch with the secrets of the moon, how to die and come back alive again, we arrived in this terrible situation where, when we die, that's it.

We stay dead. So I'm gonna read out some of the stories, but just possibly I'll introduce it by saying, there's no way to look at mythology, which doesn't build on the great French structural anthropologist, Claude Levy Stross.

So, levy Stross wrote, his major work, his magnum opus meteorologic, the four volumes of, an analysis of nearly a thousand North and South American myths.

and it's an astonishing work and what Le has tried to do in that work is, is to show that all over the world, we are kind of covered, wrapped in a, in a, in a kinda web of mythology and although the myths are multiple marvelously varied, there's an underlying structure to all of them and the, the analogy I use is to say that we are a living planet, and life is so, so varied, so many different and even now, of course, we're still discovering species.

But no matter how diverse the different life forms are, they've got an underlying structure and so the same genetic code, and you can write it quite quickly, CGTA, the four base pairs, that sort of letter to the alphabet of, of, of the genes, is responsible for all these different forms of life and we humans are quite closely related to say, bananas or mushrooms.

I mean, not very close, of course, a lot closer to, slugs.

and maybe quite very close to chimpanzees, of course.

But the, but the underlying structure, the, the, the alphabet, if you like, of life, is the same everywhere and that that constant alphabet, the sameness of the alphabet, is actually responsible for the extraordinary variety of the combinations of these genes.

In other words, the different forms of life that there are.

So lemme just is, it's applying that principle to mythology and saying in a deep sense, just as all life on earth is one, in the same way right across the planet, we're embraced by a web of mythology.

But at the end of the day, this is the title of the last chapter of, of, of the final volume of his book.

We are one myth Only.

All the world's myths are variations on a theme.

So I'm just introducing that in that way in order to introduce a sort of subordinate fact that I'm gonna now pick a particular category of myth.

A particular, like almost a, a myth.

But even this one myth, the origin of death comes in, I would say very, very slightly, different, variance.

so let's, start, maybe I'll, maybe I'll start by actually reading out a myth from, Australia.

this is from the, the, the or people of Northeast Aland Australia as recorded by an anthropologist, a wonderful anthropologists in the thirties, Lloyd, Warner.

In the far off dream time, the moon and the Parrotfish had an argument about the best way to die.

The moon decided on temporary deaths, followed by resurrection.

But the parrotfish insisted that this was wrong.

The narrator ends his story with a following comment.

We, in the moon had had his conversation with Parrotfish.

He had wanted parrotfish to be like him.

He said, come on and become alive again.

Like me, I can fix you so that you will come alive again.

No, said parrotfish. I want to die and stay dead.

This is what makes man stated dead and never come back to life.

The parrotfish was a silly fool.

So that's the, that's the first myth.

So it's because of this ridiculous parrotfish wanted to stay dead, that all we, we suffer all that, that fate, all of us.

so we now have another, version from, Ronald Burt, where the, the parrotfish is replaced by a female dugong.

So we get different creatures responsible for this ridiculous decision, to, to die and stated, what you notice is we go through all the, all the versions.

The moon is always on the right side.

You don't fiddle around with different kind of planets or bodies, comets or whatever.

It's the moon, the moon, the moon, the moon, who knows how to die and the different animals that sort of argue with the moon.

if you feel angry about the fact that when you die, you stay dead, you blame these other creatures, the parrotfish, the dug gong, and so on.

So, moon and spotted possum were once men, but they quarrel possum picked up a sharp wooden yams stick and knocked moon down.

After a while, moon got up, grabbed the same yams, stick and hit possum.

Mortally wounded him as he was dying. Possum spoke.

All the people who come after me, future generations, all of them will die forever.

But Moon said, you should have, let me say something first.

cause I'm not gonna die forever.

I've died for just a few days, but I will come back again in the shape of a new moon.

As for human beings, the reason we die forever is because possum spoke first.

I just one or two more. The dab and a central a land relate the myth, the moon and Wallaby disputed as to whose urine their wives should drink.

Eventually, both women chose the wallabies urine.

Now, they should have chosen moon's urine, because then people would've grown, old died, and then come back to life again.

Like, like the moon.

the rain bargain, the, sorry, there I pronounce that wrong.

The rainbow baranga, neighbors of the Dban t myths in which native cat is substituted for the wallaby as moon's opponent.

A final myth from Arnum land Cooper Boingo Tribe.

Buckingham Bay, tells the story of Lindy, a man who lived on an island with his two sons and two wives, angered with his son's refusal to feed him property with the meat.

They were hunted. They hunted and cooked.

Moon enticed them into a fishing net, sewed up the opening and drowned them in a lagoon in revenge.

His wives burned moon to death by setting fire to his hut.

The fire burned the Lindy all over. All his skin came off.

He was finished.

Then outta the smoldering humpy, the sister saw the dead body of Lindy come to life.

It changed into a shining crescent shape.

It grew and grew into a huge glistening sphere.

It climbed up into a tall white tree with white flowers called gri.

Then yeah, Lindy spoke. I died. My body, my hurt.

My heart was burned. My heart, my spirit is alive.

I'm here now. You all you people, you will die.

You will die for always you two sisters.

You burned me because I killed my two sons. All right.

You will die. You will die. Altogether, I was alive.

I died and came alive again.

After rising and falling, sleeping, waking several times in different trees.

Moon finally found a strong tree by means of which he climbed up into the sky where he remained ever since as the moon we know today.

So, and in this myth, you would have noticed that, the alternation between death and life is linked with another alternation.

The one between water through which the suns are murdered and fire through which the moon is reborn and you'd also notice that the, the moon loses all its skin and this idea of skin change is a constant sea in all the world's myths and fairytales.

You switch your skin, you change your skin, you turn into a swan, you turn into a frog, you turn skin, skin change is a, is a, is a, is a word that storytellers all around the world use because in, in no fairy story, because all, well, the definition of of fairy stories really is magic.

and the magic involves you turn into something else.

Your metamorphos, you, you shapeshift, you turn into a different creature like a prince turns into a frog, for example.

Or or, or sate all the, all the, or the gorgeous princess as they turn into swans.

So metamorphosing is absolutely, critical to the whole experience, but it's always to do with the, with the moon and again, I'm sure all of you have noticed that the moon, unlike the sun, is magic.

I mean, the sun just afraid. The sun's lovely.

I mean, everyone loves the sun goes sunbathing and sun.

It's bright, sunny, nice and warm, and all the rest of it.

But magic, quite sure, because the sun is too constant, too straight, too bright, doesn't, it doesn't meta or face, it doesn't change.

Whereas of course, the moon, as you see it from Earth, it really does die and come alive again.

It really does go dark and then Wex and Wex brighter and brighter.

And, if I was to speak all evening and all tomorrow, all the next hour, I'd go into what, what's going on here in terms of, of, of magic.

The thing is that, the sun stays the same, the moon changes.

But what I don't want to imply, because I just don't believe it at all, I don't, I don't believe that these fairytales, these magical stories, they came from early humans being astronomers.

It's astonishing how often you get the idea that somehow we were astronomers, we were interested in watching the moon and, and maybe the planets.

And, and of course you can, watching the sun, well, it's pretty obvious was such a huge, bright thing.

But, we've gotta really understand something much more, much more significant than just looking at the moon from time to time and observing it.

the moon was almost the most important aspect of life when we were hunters and gatherers.

I mean, clearly the sun was, of course you can't, you can't ignore the sun.

It is dark and you can't see it at night, and it's bright and you, you can see where you're going in the daytime.

So clearly the sun's important, but what we've forgotten in our civilization is the importance of the moon.

We notice the moon, we see it now and again, but in London we don't.

We had a, we had a, a hata guy coming to stay with us, came to stay with me in hack in Hackney and was as, was it Asima? Asima, that's right.

He said in London, we were living in Hackney.

He said, do you even have a moon? And he said, I've seen your moon.

I've seen you have a, you come, you have your evening class and we had a projector, and we had a picture of the moon on the thing.

He said, that's the only one I've seen so far.

because of course you have all this light pollution.

so it is rather important to realize that when we were hunters and gatherers, and this was a very, very long period of time, at least a hundred thousand years, but likely

very much more than that, we were in Africa, and in Africa we were co-evolving with, cats, big cats, lions, and, and, and, and other, big cats going right back.

You could say the tooth tigers and stuff and stuff.

But the critical point is that all those big cats they can see in the dark.

and, that would mean that you, you don't want to give them the advantage.

So they could see in the dark. We can't.

So we would only have come out and gone hunting ourselves and moved around, traveled overnight, maybe looking for romance.

We would only have done those sorts of things, when it was safe to do so.

So in terms of full moon and dark moon, when I'm gonna ask you a question now, just to make sure everyone's awake, when would we have been moving around either hunting or, or looking for romance, but at any, anyway, traveling and sometimes having to travel overnight.

What, what time of month would we have been, doing that Or mean, or leaning up to fall in? Because the moon will be bright in the sky. Give us, Are you gonna go out at night when the moon's dark? Because otherwise you'll be eaten.

So you wait till the moon's full.

So the, the pot, the time of month when you're gonna be out, out, most of the, most of like almost 24 hours the whole day you could be out, but then into the evening and maybe you, you're partying, you want to stay up even later.

But the point about it is that it's safe to do it as long as the moonlight's shining.

Because, because the point is that the, that the lions in Africa, even to this day, don't even bother to go hunting if they can be seen.

I mean, there may be some, some areas they do, depending on the kind of cam flat the kind of a cover they've got to, to move around.

But essentially in many parts of Africa, the, the lions get very hungry over the period of, full moon, because they can be seen.

And, and then as soon as there's a, a period of three or four hours of darkness, that's when they, that's when they, they, they're already hungry and that's when they do the most of their hunting down.

All that's, that's just pure science.

That's, that's specialists in, in, in, in, in line behavior in Africa, just taking careful records of things.

So, all I here, I don't want to go into that in, in any particular detail, but just to say that you didn't need to sort of observe the moon, the moon was part of our lives.

The moon was the, was the kind of part one of the central clocks regulating the movement between work and play or staying staying close to home.

Yeah. Just to clarify On that, I mean, you want, can I clarify because, with the hua in the Riff Valley, who would have a lot of experience of the risks of lion or leopard attack in relation to the moon, even when the moon is, can we, even when the moon's below the horizon, you ask CADs of children, where is the moon? Yeah, yeah. They know where it, they can point to where it is and where that it's going to rise.

It's not like they're not, they don't know about the movements.

The moon. It would've been a, a thing that was important for people surviving in that environment to have awareness of when the moon was gonna be up in the sky or when it wasn't gonna be up in the sky.

So, alright. Okay. So we can't say it's not, I I'm not saying that, I wouldn't mean to say they're not, they're not observing the moon, I would say.

They're not just, they vaguely interested where the moon is in the sky, the moon is part of their life.

It really, the reason my little children know where the moon is under even, even under the ground is because it absolutely matters and then of course, there's another whole issue, which we, again, I mean, so many things I don't want to talk about particularly this evening because there's so many things we can, I'd rather have a bit of a, a chat with all of you.

but that, but of course then, then the fact that we are a lunar creek species, we are, I mean, chimpanzees have a 36 day menstrual cycle.

Bonobos have a 40 day cycle, all different other primates have different lengths of cycle.

We humans, we have the, the average length of menstrual cycle.

Exactly. Obviously on average, everyone's cycles are slightly different.

But at the time of life when a woman is likely to be most fertile in the early twenties, that's the time when her cycle would be closest to 29.5, days, precisely the time it takes for the moon to pass through its phases to seen from the earth. Again, Hus are women, women of the hazer hunter gathering group use the moon as a clock to tell them when they're going to menstruate.

Yeah. And they relate that to the, the moon.

Yes. Now, another topic, which, connected to this talk this evening is, the whole question of healing.

So, and, and then I think possibly I'll just, maybe just stop there.

There's so many more things we'll talk about, but the point about the moon is it's a healing force.

and I'll just go through some of the, components of that, that insight that thought.

So, I would say that, and this the first, just as you might be interested, the first, article I ever published in anthropology in 1985, I think it was in a, in a, in a journal called, social Science and Medicine.

I published an article called Menstruation as Medicine, and I was trying to work out what it is that the shaman represents.

How does, how does shamanism work? It's clearly, it's a form of healing, but it's not quite the same kind of healing as giving you a pill.

It's a bit different. So the, I, and I'll just read out some of these things and talk about each one.

So the idea is that, health is dependent on keeping a balance.

It's dependent on the maintenance of a correct balance between different states or forces.

Like you don't wanna get too hot, you don't wanna get too cold.

So you want a nice balance between hot and cold, wet and dry, blood and fire, and a balance as well between social relationships.

Like it's good to be with your sexual partner, but you don't wanna be stuck with your sexual partner all the time.

You wanna get back to mom, to brothers, to sisters, to your wider community.

But in, but a balance between those two is healthy.

so between hot and cold, wet and dry blood and fire, kinship and sex, being raw and being cooked, all these are forces which are kind of polar opposites and illness, according to so many of these traditional views of medicine is you are getting too hot.

You are, you are getting outta balance.

You are getting, you're, you are falling towards one of these extremes and you, and the, the way to keep your health is to keep moving like a, like a pendulum.

So nature, and I was mentioning this with, with my, friend, Dan, in the, in the, in the forest, nature knows how to keep a balance.

Nature achieves her own health by alternating in a balanced way between these opposites as between, dry season and wet don't get stuck in either side, either, either pole full moon and dark, day and night, and life as opposed to temporary, death.

The health of the human individual presupposes the ability correctly to re duplicate within the body itself, these rhythms of periodic renewal.

So to be healthy, you want to sort of take the night day, full moon, dark moon, winter, summer, all those rhythms.

They should be sort of internalized in us.

We, we should be part of that mo constant movement between opposite states that periodicity to keep healthy and then ideally women should do this by menstruating in synchrony with one another and with the moon, thus providing a collective social rhythm through which human society can keep in phase with a self-renewing processes of the wider cosmos.

But failing this, what do you do if you're a man? Well, you'll find that, the shaman's menstruate in different ways.

They manage to bleed in different ways.

They cross dress all sorts of things about the shaman, which sort of comes in some ways more naturally to women, but men can do them as well and right across aboriginal Australia, of course, all men, menstruated, I mean, what I say, menstruated, some men bled from the arm, but they still called it, they still described it as as, as their own menstrual blood.

But other men would, other parts of Australia men would, would you, you boys would get initiated and be sub incised and they, they, they'd menstruate from the penis.

So all of that, all of these things, kind of connect up.

I'm gonna ask Camilla to do a little bit more just to show how, how the, the same myth that we've been looking at in Australia, is, is told in, in Southern Africa.

Is that right? Camilla? Do you want to do it for, well, five or 10 minutes? Yeah, 10 minutes is fine. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Requesting, right.

So, well, one of the things to say about, I dunno if you should, maybe you should sit and be careful.

Okay. rather than disappear, wander off. okay.

So yeah, one of the things to say about this story, is how well we've heard about Australian variants.

but in the African context, especially the moon in the origins of death is you is told in relation to Southern African clique speaking, hunting people's, bushman people's the moon in the hare story, which belongs to, to any one of the esna linguistic groups in, in variants, but in a fundamentally similar structure.

which is implying that this is a very, very old story.

That it's their present in African Southern African monks, very ancient lineages of, of hunting peoples and it's there in Australia.

That would've been a, a, a long ago separation of populations who carried those stories in, very similar versions to different continents onto different continents.

so the moon and the hare suggests that the lunar ability to die and be reborn is referring particularly to menstrual simplicity and the hare in these stories really is symbolizing or emblem of an initiate is a circumstance of menstrual seclusion, or can be also not only female, but a male initiate.

Because with bushman, with initiates of a monarchical girl, a girl at first menstruation, or a boy who's a first kill hunter, actually they are secluded and initiated in very gender, similar, almost gender, sort of ambiguous terms, very similar to each other.

in the story from the southern sun, which was collected by Lake and Lloyd famous folklores of the Southern Sun, the stories of young male hair actually, who wails about his dead mother, the moon tells him, oh, your mother's only sleeping, stop crying hair, refuses to believe the moon becomes angry and so refuses to believe the moon, and the moon gets angry and strikes him and splits his hit lip.

This is the origin of the, the hare lip, hence forth after that, all humankind knows death.

Now because of Bushman beliefs, the mother who lies sleeping about to undergo a lunar reselect resurrection, according to the moon, she can be understood as a woman who's in a kind of lunar scheduled menstrual seclusion.

The the menstruate will come back to life.

This is what the moon's intending.

but when her son does not put faith in the moon's words, the moon smacks him on the lip, so he lose.

So he also bleeds at the same time as his mother in the case of the hair and by extension all humanity.

Death is no longer merely menstrual.

Instead, loss of faith in the moon has made it final and irreversible, as in these cases with the Australian stories.

There are many other versions where the hair is specifically female.

particularly stories amongst nara people collected by Ash Gunter, as well as Lorna Marshall, famous for her work with the Bushman, the split lip.

If we think about the split lip of the hair and what that represents with the moon hitting it to make it bleed, we can think of that in terms of an emblem of vulva female genitals, essentially, it's pretty clear, that that would be the case.

The moon smiting the hair on the lip coats an onset of menstruation look, no.

so the stories, but that I'm going to mention reveal very consistently that the hair links to blood or dirt or ashes.

We've heard about the burning of the moon into the ashe to become sort of ashes in this one of these Australian stories.

so good to gives narrow versions which distinguish between the mortality of men and women.

The female hair contradicts the moon asserting when you die.

The moon says, when you die, you, oh, sorry, the female hair, I keep getting modelled between the hair and the moon hair.

The female hair contradicts the moon who says he'll come back to life when you die, you die forever.

But the moon also said, it's all of the men who die forever.

This is because the moon, he doesn't like boys, only the girls.

A fragmentary ending tells us that henceforth men stay dead.

Women continue to live forever because our, this is the trickster lunar trickster likes women.

Immortality or lunar resurrection correlates with having a menstrual cycle.

Our is the gender ambivalent trickster who actually governs both a female and male initiation amongst nara people.

He clearly takes on the role of either the moon or the hair.

It's like he can switch.

The stories are variable with switch of role by this trickster figure, the very gender ambiguous figure.

Now, the most common form of retaliation by the young female hair, the hair dough is she throws up her leather, her carros, or a blanket, or her pubic apron, which is connoting the ceremonial of, of initiation.

She throws that up at the face of the moon.

and the, this has been made very hot on the fire.

It's been burning the blanket or the apron burns and sticks onto the moon's face.

So the hairdo could also scratch the moon's face making marks on the face.

So generically, these stories are explaining spots on the face of the moon.

They're the mythology, origin, ecological origin of those spots.

in one version, Bower gets angry with the moon and so this is actually the trickster becoming like the hare, getting angry with the moon, throwing the blanket at him.

Bower as trickster initiation deity is the one who can give immortality, trickster governs healing, as Chris says, just like the moon or marks the moon's face, just like the hair.

So swaps between those roles.

There's also a set of stories that recalls the creation of the Milky Way, which has just a similar structure.

A trickster, a secluded female initiate, who throws up ashes into the sky and dirty shoes, which are wet with moon de This sounds like a, a code for a menstruating c**t.

Fundamentally, they're put too close to the sun's fire and the ashes thrown out outta that co cataclysm of putting blood, menstrual blood close to fire, and the ashes coming outta that burning go up into the sky as the Milky Way.

So this is almost the same structure of the narrow moon and hare story, with the, with this pubic hair, pubic apron with blood in the fire, creating the marks on the face of the moon.

Excessive contact with blood, with fire brings about these cosmic upheavals and cosmic creation.

We've heard Chris saying, Levetro discussing Amerindian myths in, in, mythology coming to the end of the naked man, the very end of mythology.

and talking about the, the story, the spots on the face of the moon as the basis of one myth only.

the, the myth from which all the other myths could be spun, where a brother has incestuous sex with a menstruating sister, and she marks him either with her blood, her actual menstrual blood, or du as a stand-in the dark cosmetic that stands in for her blood.

and because as a result of this, the, the moon get the, the brother turns into the moon and goes away to the sky, his head being chopped off and going away to the sky.

but levetro, all the myth of the Americas logically are derivable from this simple type of fact he said of supreme importance.

Now, if we come back to the narrow of the moon and hair again, another version of this, a Gunter tric Tu collected so many variants of this, this basic story.

It has its suggests incest or two close sex by kin as a major motive for the hare's, big anger at the moon.

and that's why she contradicts the moon's message about you'll come back to life.

and then throws the, the blankets of the pubic apron.

So she collects some special bear berries.

It's, again, it's a story of healing.

They're medicinal berries and the moon is supposed to be lying sick in a hut as if the moon is the initiate or menstrual initiate there and he calls it's a he the moon in, in most Bushman stories is, is he, but it can't change gender according to the shape of the me and he calls for this medicine, he says to the hair, give me the berries.

The hair tries to pass them to him on a stick, the sort of at length, which suggests a kind of avoidance relation.

They shouldn't get too close to each other and also those sticks might be used in initiation, men exclusion for a girl and initiate for eating.

but the moon comes, says to her, come in the hut and then he rapes her, and then he gives her this message about Luna resurrection, very angry.

She contradicts him in reports to the people, no, that you must die and die.

You must all die because the pus of a person smells disgustingly.

So she's relating the death forever to smell, which of course links to the notion of menstruation.

When the moon finds out, he splits her lip and makes her bleed with an ax, she throws the hot blankets to make the spots on the face of the moon.

Now, in this tale, if the sex isn't incestuous, it's certainly all wrong.

It's absolutely too much sex.

The moon's situation, lying sick in the hut is very suggestive of initiation and the smell of death is very suggestive of menstrual.

now how many other stories I can go, there's a, there is another, version of Moon and Hare with going to the waterhole, which is rather reminiscent of what you're going to tell in two weeks of the well access.

I'm not sure if I should carry on with the detail here, is that it's not per se.

let's see, the, just, so yeah, it's worth speaking again because it's similar Tolai story marking of the moon's face, can occur through the moon scratching blood or putting other wet things on the moon's face.

Now there's another narro version from Lorna Marshall, this one, which has the moon, very unusually as female.

Now, that female moon came be like a full moon, whereas a a the crescent moon would be male moon mentions made at the beginning of about an Elam kale, which would co note it's, this is the time of the Ellan kale, as Ian says, as sorry, Chris says, when the moon is full, you kill the Elam pops.

This is not, very much integrated to the story, but it's like mentioned it's a presence there.

The moon and the hare go to a waterhole to fill ostrich eggshells and wash their faces after they've washed the hare's face was still not clean.

The moon asked the hare to check her own moon's face, is it clean? And the moon then tells the hare, but your face is dirty.

This angers the hare who throws mud at the moon and pushes her into the water.

The hair returns to camp with the water, the ostrich eggshells.

But she comes back alone.

Moon's husband goes off to find moon and sees her light down there in the water, the people are sleeping, and in the morning they go and fish up the moon.

They washed her and cleaned her and brought her home and all lived in peace again.

So in this tale, structurally two women go to the water, one has a dirty face, one is clean, and that then becomes dirty.

There's a connotation here of menstrual synchrony occurring.

Marjorie Shostak, the author of the *Lovely Autobiography*, *Nisa*, she reported the belief that a woman just has to see another woman's menstrual blood and she'll start menstruating herself.

That's a very strong underlying belief for these hunter gatherers.

So this is connected to the disappearance of the moon subject merged in the water-hole, which indicates the darkness of the moon, the moon's disappearance and then the moon is washed cleaner. Please restore.

yeah, I'm gonna skip a little there, but, yeah, the actual sort of basic structure.

So what, what, what I wanna try to get at is why what is this story? Why is it being said so many ways, sort of slightly different ways, but with the same basic structure saying, what is it trying to say? Why does the hare get the message wrong? The moon always in the story states it can die and be reborn.

That's what he's saying. Also, the aboriginal stories.

He then says either people can live forever in the aboriginal stories is nearly always the moon saying, but you can come back to life again.

Or he can make another dead person come back to life again.

or that in some of the African stories, the moon kind of gloats that he can be reborn, and that people can't, the moon might put it that way.

Now, either way, if the moon says you can come back to life again, the hare disbelieves him.

If the moon says, I can come back, but you can't, the hare is angry either way, the hare takes umbrage and gives the exact opposite message to the people that the moon tries to put across.

So she or he, it's gender ambiguous, either rubbishes the notion of a Luna resurrection or resents, and is taking offense at the moon gloating that he can resurrect.

But this is strangely contradictory because if the hare, if we take it as a she, because it's mainly a menstrual initiate, is, is regarded as a menstrual initiate herself.

She's undergoing symbolically death and rebirth.

An emergence and a seclusion.

The tale seems to be referring to a time when men too shared this female ability to undergo lunar resurrection.

They suggest a sort of structural baseline, the default structure that ritual, social and economic life is governed by lunar periodicity correlated with menstruation.

When everyone dies together as if they're kin, blood kin, and then being reborn together, able to have sex, marital sex, able to do hunting, able to do all that, this loss of periodicity permeating the whole of social life results in death becoming permanent.

Now, in this context, a female initiate is absolutely in a contradictory position.

She herself represents, she's like the emblem of that lunar ideal construct of lunar periodicity, governing social harmony, governing the luck of the hunt, everything that's meant to be in time with the moon.

As the moon grows bright, the hunting can take place and so forth.

But the construct is like an ideal that is contradicted by material conditions of life.

So the hare is rebelling against the moon in the story that something gone.

So we are just try, this just illustrates this prominent theme related to initiation and lunar menstrual periodicity with gender ambivalent and periodic lunar periodic tricksters, where the trickster, it seems can perform a moon's role or an initiates role, and sort of the trickster being also governing the, the clever men, the shame and who have the powers of menstruation to come back to life again and who govern healing.

So I think that's, that's probably enough.

I could say more on first creation, but Sure.

Well, well, maybe I should, maybe I should let's say one bit more on, but alright, sit down.

No, no, don't sit down. It won't take long.

Don't wanna sit down. it is the work by Bradford Keeny where he really pointed to this, this concept of movement.

He was working with j choir people, Bushman Kalahari and really focused with the, the info with his informant, a very famous healer of, and, he was learning about how the whole concept of their life of periodicity was movement into what is known as first creation.

Now first creation is, is like dreaming in Aboriginal understanding is a time before time, time before there is any fixity.

When people have an elant heads, when they, humans and animals are together the same, they can talk to each other.

They, they, they operate together.

When people wear animals, animals, there is no death there and to, in order to heal today, it's necessary to come back from this, this world which is a fixed world where everything has names and, and is fixed in.

Its in what it is.

They can all go back into first creation to experience, to be able to do healing and it's the only way they can, to be able to overcome, potentially overcome death.

Death did not exist until we lost first creation and came to second creation.

But through initiation or through healing ritual, it's possible to go back into first creation.

So literally this ha this hair initiate is that menstrual goal in her initiate menstrual seclusion with the power to take all the community back to first creation, to the point where it's possible through the administration of the trickster to do operate healing.

I think that's enough. I, well, I'll, These stories are, so these stories are tens of thousands of years.

Yeah. They belong.

I mean, some of you might just think, well, okay, we're looking at fairytales, and, and a set of fairytales.

You might be interested in reality and truth, what, how humans really were.

But we're, we're, we we're not doing that.

there's these, these, these stories, can I say really strongly? They're true. I don't mean literally true.

Very few things are literally true.

Language doesn't use lit. You know, we, we are not computers.

We use metaphor. We say we write novels these days, for example, in the past we might have done operas and stuff, and you might think, oh, it's not true.

But actually the reason why these things are so meaningful, important, why novels, for example, are important, why I have a drama Shakespeare is because it's, they're true.

They're, they're, they're describing life and the reason why all this moon is everywhere is just because we were heavily involved with the moon.

it, it, I mean, it's, it's, it's not just that there is a moon and that that in itself is weird.

I mean, the fact that we have a moon, which has looked the same size from the earth as the sun, and the fact that you can have eclipses and all these things, I mean, that, that's kind of weird.

Anyway, but that's not the point I'm making.

I'm saying that the, the moon wasn't just like there, it was actually a hugely important part of our lives and it was more important than the seasons and the days in, in many ways, in terms of getting to the core of our being, getting to our blood, reproductive cycles and all the things which matter most to us, and actually ended up governing the basic work rhythms of society.

that that's what we think and we just think there's a, a kind of strange, patriarchal allergy to the moon.

It's like we can't even, it's impossible to talk about the moon in a, in a, in a scientific way because you've got moonshine everywhere.

You've got lunacy everywhere.

You've got all these patriarchal hangups around the moon.

Whereas in the past when we were hunters and gatherers, it was, it was just you got two clocks in the sky.

One's the sun one's the moon and the moon was an extremely important, clock.

So let me just sort of summarize what I think between the two of us.

We've, we've said, one critically important point is that the moon disappears from the, from the sky and mythology says the reason why, the reason why it's not up there, you can't see it, it is down on earth, is because the moon, the dark moon is having sex with all the women.

That's why women menstruate and obviously women's often pregnant and they're not doing that.

But still, the moon's still coming down and it just is a, it is a fact that the traditions around the world say that you don't want to be menstruating doing your honeymoon.

There are very, you don't, full moon is for honeymoon and being out and having a party and stuff, dark moon is a kind of death.

It's a sort of dark, dark moon and menstruation.

It's like a little death.

Women die a little bit, but of course they come alive again, having, having bled. cause everybody knows that a bleed is to die.

I mean, you bleed for a while and soon you are, and soon you are, you are dead.

But what I want more important, when I say the whole story's true, I want to make a case to you.

Now, I really want to say that there was a time when we didn't die.

I mean, obviously I can't say that straight, I can't say it just mechanically and one sidedly, but there are different ways of being human and one is to be a bit of an individual and possibly when you're having sex, you want to be having you wanna be quiet with one person and their body's very important and, you fancy them and you're having a bit of a, a kind of private time together.

but there's other times when you feel, and this happens, I mean, just talk to Jerome Lewis about the baka.

When you are having your rituals, when you're having your dance, when you're having your, and we were gonna be having a phony.

When, when you, I mean, in my case, I remember when I spent a lot, huge amount of time in a samba band.

When you're drumming and, and you are, you are part of a, you're part of a kind of monster, you're part of a band, you, you, what you find when you're singing, drumming, all those different things, going through these rituals, you find that your, the border of your, the band of your body begin to dissolve and you feel like a, a large creature.

You don't feel like whole little individual.

One of the reasons why when you're in a band of that sort, say a military band, why you feel so brave? You feel, you, you just feel, I don't know, you just, you can, you can walk through tanks and machine guns because you just feel it's not, you feel you're a huge monstrous creature all over the place.

well, all I'm saying is that insofar as you're an individual, when you get old and old and older, eventually you are dead in so far as you're an individual.

But in so far as you're a collective in so far as your community, as this, this boundaryless sort of monster of flesh and blood you don't die.

Your community doesn't die.

I mean, we, people would worry situation these days because we, we, we've got climate change and it's not, not really clear, but in the past, you, you knew that you would continue onwards, but only if you have community and of course the, the, the, the, the, the lunar rhythm we're talking about is you move between those two things.

You, you are an individual now you're community, you're an individual, now you're community, full moon people I dunno, you, you eat and it's really important.

You are eating you, you're filling your, your stomach.

You are having, you might be having sex, all those things.

But during these periods of ritual, you're kind of as an individual to some extent, you are dying.

But as a collective to that extent, you're coming alive again and I, I remember something I read years and years and years ago.

I don't think I ever put it in anything I wrote.

It's an amazing description by of, by an anthropologist of an old Aboriginal, Australian elder and it's about what happens when he dies, when he does what we call dying, because he's just so calm about it.

Because every time you go, just as when you are, when you're a woman in a Australia, then you go into a seclusion, you are kind of dying, but then you come alive again and you do it again, and you come alive again.

The same with with going through the different stages of initiation and I remember this beautiful description of an old, old man, and he just says, yeah, I'm dying.

I've done this lots of times before.

cause every time you, every time you go through initiation, you die and there's always something beyond it.

There's always something. Next you die and you come alive, you die because you go into initiation, which is similar for men.

It's very similar to what menstruation is for women.

You go into that, but you come out again, I, I remember there, there were the anthropology was describing this old, old man just saying, I wonder what's comes next.

so I'm yeah, I, I, i, unfortunately, I'm a bit of an atheist these days.

I'm not quite sure anything comes next when I, when I, when I die.

But I'm simply saying in insofar as you've got a, a vibrant ongoing community.

You've got your children, your, your, all the other people around you, and you don't die because you are part of them.

But when you you, you ignore the moon, that's terrible because you're not gonna have your rituals and I'm very sorry about it, but you will die.

That did.

Okay. Point on time. Hold on.

So yeah, comment, Discussion, argument.

Paul, like the ja Japanese people say that there's a, how we see a face in the moon? They see a rabbit, don't they? Shiny? Yeah.

Japanese, Chinese, there's the rabbit, definitely the rabbit in the moon.

The hair and the moon is very, very old and unlike us in, in Japan, they're very happy to spread the evening out watching the full moon.

They don't think it's moonshine.

They don't think it's lunacy.

They don't think it's, I dunno, all these ridiculous patriarchal terms, which are bishops and people give us they're all horrified at the moon, because of and, and menstruation of course, because, the blood, they, they worship is this, this man's blood.

And, somehow anything which comes up from earlier periods is regarded as very, very threatening. Well, They, they would be a line of argument that to make the, this, this Christ out as a luna trickster, because that is what Bushman people think Bushman has.

Because of course, the only Luna, the Christianity tries and tries and tries to get rid of the moon, but it can't get rid of the moon in relation to Easter.

Easter is, it's solar, it's, it's linked to the sun.

Vern Equinox. But it's, it depends. Be Honest, if you, if you got rid of the moon, you wouldn't even be religion.

You couldn't, he couldn't rise, not religion in bed without it. If you, If you haven't got death of resurrection, why, why call it religion And he bleeds and does the so Kind of No, but it's not Religion.

So Jesus Christ is funda lunar and menstrual something like down that.

But they try to cover it up these issues.

Tony Brett tried to get rid of Easter, by the way.

Yeah. That, and they tried to a thousand years before that.

But it couldn't, they just can't because it's getting rid of the magic, getting rid of the power of transformation.

You can't do it. Are you still on a full No, it, it's, the Sunday after the first full moon of vernal equinox after vernal equinox.

So it's, you Have the Equinox, The Equinox, And then you have the, And there's gonna be a mo a four minute after that and then you Sunday, next Sunday generally to Be then full move and then Sunday after.

So that the reason Easter moves is because the moon moves, whereas the sun's always the same, same say mood, But all over the world, all the ancient religions, they all move because they're nothing to do with the sun, they're just to do with the moon. That's, If we think of That's why they move Muslim calendars, Judaic calendars, Hindi calendars, they're all lunar calendars.

Yeah. Is there a link within those stories regarding the moon and the aboriginals in there? They don't discuss death, like after someone passes, it's, you don't normally have that conversation of talking about people.

Is that story linked with that the moon obviously is resurrecting and, and the, the people had passed.

Is that that link then? Like is that why they like, I'm not sure if it's across all of the communities from like the east all the way down to like Victoria. I'm not Sure when we say in England, when we say he's passed away, pa passing means you're going from A to B from one one, this world to the other world.

So I mean, I mean that's just, I mean, It is a very strong, you're talking about the very strong taboo that nobody should see from the image of somebody, someone dead.

It's also the conversing, because I know, I know voices are like, obviously there's like the stories of live birds, the communities back home, and they talk about like people being strong away by like voices of people.

That that's part Oh, that part, right.

Like in that instance of things, because obviously if the moon that's really on is interesting.

That's A really interesting point because because of this kind of cataclysm of deaths becoming, as Chris says, very linear, linear, then now it's like your, there's a kind of abyss between those walls is right, like a lot, a lot of TV and it being historic stuff.

We'll have to put your claim out. Yeah.

The people I know that, yeah.

Like affected by that because it is very interest, very heavy for those people.

Yeah, That's a really, you Might, you might know a bit about this, I'm not sure, but, and I, I, again, one of the things I missed, I didn't quite get it.

I happened to be watching the television and I thought, oh my God, this is really interesting.

It was about, aboriginal people in Australia dying and what they do and it was, it's all beautifully filmed, but I've never really heard of it before.

You, you sit facing where the moon's gonna be rising just like that, sitting down in the sand and you walk to the moon and and, I was really, really astonished that they, they they, they feel that they're, they're, they're all, all their, all their relatives, they all arrange them nicely.

They might be almost dead, but they're just waiting and they're looking towards them and as it yes, as it, as the all moon rises and, and off they go and I just thought, I, I mean this is, this is little bit separate from everything we've been talking about here, but this is a one, this is, and Ian Watts, found this in, in it in his lovely, essay.

He, he article he wrote for a book on time back in 2000 and I two or three or five, 2005, sorry.

Yes. He discovered this beautiful thing and it's, it's not from Australia.

It's from it's from Southern Africa.

and it's time to grow with the moon.

And, and what, what's the, what's the group in, I think? Is he in there? He'll, he'll remind me where it's, anyway, I can't remember.

Anyway, there's a, it's a, a little saying by, a Kalahari san, old man.

The moon is nearly dead.

United is a bowl throwing water to the earth.

Time to gross on the moon.

We are the moon people after we die, the good people, they walk to the moon.

Everyone is very happy. And content in the moon, Kalahari, you say, I have told you a charming story.

You wish that you could tell me that you believe it to be true, but you have to tell me that the Americans travel to the moon in some kind of super airplane.

The mood is a desert.

You say, you say you're sorry to have to tell me this.

Why are you sorry? I know you are not a liar and a thief and I I'm also not a liar and a thief, but tell me this.

When the Americans travel to the moon, was the moon full? When the moon has grown until it's full, it's a wonderful place.

Not of course, when it's dying.

I thought that was rather actually put, thank you.

Nobody, the city Americans didn't notice whether it was full of, full of when got up.

What, what was the phase? The me when they landed on it.

Ivan, do you wanna ask something? Oh yeah. Well it was kind of a comment really.

I really enjoyed the talk tonight.

Both parts your part, Camilla and Chris is obviously really, really super and I thought you put, you framed things really, really beautifully, lots of ways.

Like Chris, when you mentioned about the different difference between the sun and the moon, the moon being really magical.

cause it dies and it comes back.

I mean of, of course it's a really simple point, but that is the magical thing it has to be said, in term, there's lots of other things, comments, lots of great stuff you did.

But anyway, the question comment, and this is more I guess for people who might be there in the room who aren't kind of rag regulars that The people in the room. Yeah, very Few rag regulars.

Okay, so Camilla, in your part of the talk you were talking about, initiation, male and female initiation.

Yeah. Mm-hmm. So an initiation, obviously you only get initiated once.

Okay. But we are talking about, this is not, this is just to try to clarify things for the audience.

Remember? Yeah. So don't shout at me. Okay. Right.

so, I think you, Here by the way, What you could elaborate on is how these, it's, it's, it's a kind of matrix, a kind of a pattern, a kind of, model if you like, for something that happens.

Every moon, even if you're talking about initiation, that might only happen to an, an initialed once.

Actually. It's that ritual time that's repeated again and again each month.

That's what matters most. Yes, Yes. Thanks. Thanks, Evan.

I mean, that would be very nice to be able to spell that out.

I mean, for with work I've done with hazai hand gatherers in Tanzania and recent article that we've written with Hadzabe people, in many ways had a ritual social and economic and sexual life is governed by the moon and it, and it really is true.

Women's menstruation and the time of ritual around dark moon coincide, and they, they clearly coincide as aspects of shadow.

The men dance as shadows, spirits coming through them, and the women menstruating have, are in some sense shadow.

and that precedes the time.

At the time women are menstruating, men cannot go hunting.

Mm-hmm. They're not gonna be hunting when there's, the moon is so small in the sky, the lions would eat them, they can't be eaten.

But as the moon gets bigger and it's waxing, its gibb us, and there's brightness in the night sky, there's no more ritual.

That is the time when actually nighttime hunting by waterholes is the very most successful strategy for bahaa to hunt.

So there is an actual lunar cyclical model that relates women's menstruation, ritual activity, and the outcome of hunting it.

It's, it's actually in real life to the very recent past, if not even today, that this occurs.

so these initiates, when a Monarchial girl has real power, she's like an emblem.

She's, she's an emblem of beauty.

She's an emblem of fertility, of power to affect hunting.

So she's like the ideal.

But this, this does not mean all the women.

Maybe if the woman is a bit older than the monarchal girl, she may start menstruating early in the epi air time after the last quarter.

The Monarchal girls start menstruating when the moon is very visible, just become visible young crescent moon.

but every woman is menstruating.

She's using the moon as her clock to tell her when she's going to do so.

So it's like the moon is just the practical.

It, it's very interesting with the hearts that they don't have so many obvious stories about the moon.

Unlike Bushman peoples, Chris was just talking one of these stories just now.

unlike Bushman peoples, I had to have the, it's a very concrete and practical framing of time for them.

But the moon is just a presence in, in life the entire time.

so I don't dunno.

That's my big best way to explain that.

Just love right. Now, one, one point, Ivan and, and everyone here as well, is just when I was describing that old, old man who was completely, I mean, easygoing about dying.

I mean, those people actually, they get initiated 5, 6, 7 times.

They have a, they go up and up as they get older and older stop, they get more initiated certain, So initiation can have a cyclical aspect to it, but you are, but obviously it's true for with a, with a bushman practice of, we quite practice for Monarchal girls.

the first, second and third time she's bleeding will be the special time when she carries the community into the first creation particularly.

But it can be repeated. It, it, it's got a rhythmic repeat and just a one minor comment, tying into my own field work with, with hunter gatherers in Malaysia there, obviously you don't go hunting if your wife's menstruating, so it's kind of backs up what you, what you guys are saying there.

and also the moon is associated.

Well get to the question of healing. Coolness.

Coolness for btex is what keeps you healthy.

The forest is the healthy place outside the plantation, the city, the town, it's hot, it's dangerous, it's smelly, it's stinky.

the sun is the place of, of death and stench the moon coolness and beautiful fragrances.

Yeah. Same with John Overing.

It's very similar about the moon in, in Amazonia. Yeah. Mm-hmm.

So it's completely different context.

I thought it's interesting for the the, the general public there today. Definitely.

Thank you. thanks. Somebody here.

Great. That's okay.

I haven't finished just thinking that, the menstruating and the blood, the bloodletting of the European medicine.

Yeah. Is it related? It is.

The question is, is menstruation as, as a kind of healing force and bloodletting in European medicine historically, is there an association? Very interesting question. And I don't know The answer, know about the history of medicine, but I would guess there is, but whether There is, I dunno.

I mean this is, I'd be surprised if you went Maybe to do with the blood, with the idea of the humor.

It was the medicine to do with humors and blood, hot, cold, dry, what do, Luke? Yeah, yeah. It's balance. Yeah.

A question they that you did you say the fire and and, blood are opposite.

Yeah. Yeah. I always in the human of medicine Yeah.

Associated with sun. Wind, yeah. Higher. Yeah.

Seems, yeah, the opposite.

What sun is associated to fire, but the main would not, The flag is associated The fire.

Well, if you, if you, That would be a very Fiery, Maybe the color could be lacking to blood, possibly the, in the sunset in the evening.

But of course when you cook meat, it get rid of all the blood.

That's, that's the definition of cooking.

So, I mean, there's no question It's fire and blood are opposites. I'm not saying they can't be In, in these connotations of the bushman stories where they put the blood and the fire together.

It, it creates cosmic catastrophe like nuclear fire.

I mean, it's like something, Something Like that.

Well, it's not cooking. It's not cooking fire.

This is the time period for menstruation. And Yeah, I mean, let show has two types of fire, two types of celestial fire that's lightning.

Lightning that does not cook anything.

It just frazzled stuff up and it's, if it's linked with anything, it's like, it's not like linked with metaphor sex like bun in the oven and all those metaphors.

It's, it's, it's, it's, the, the, it's it's incest.

Incest and lightning are Leak in mythology. There's A moon that gets shriveled to ashes.

Yeah. Where whose, who's, he gets burned by the women.

But that, that is like the women with their blood and the burning of the moon is all a dark moon.

You were gonna, you were gonna say something, sorry. Yeah, Yeah, yeah, yeah. So the myths that you read, gave me and perhaps others the impression, that humankind is somewhat destined, if not doomed, to just watch this moon just resurrect itself constantly while we just dropped dead and stayed dead.

the, the interesting thing is, in a world back in the time, in a world where magic was so much a part of the daily life where anything that we would be supernatural at this point was not really supernatural at that point.

Yes, good to have that sense of sistic realism as to the sheer hopelessness of the humankind to ever resurrect itself.

But just to strictly set at that point that we will never live forever is super interesting to me.

I mean, would how that sense of realism kind of plays out in that, environment, even in a world where we see it even in some monotheistic religions, and many other different, fates that there is a promise in the future that maybe a messiah would come again or some cleansing will take place.

The humans will find hope in some sort of eternal life, even in, in an after world or around this world.

But the, the ancients not taking this road at all, but just setting the agenda for a, for an eternal impossibility of, of, of, of eternal life, I found to be fascinating, as, as this sense of realism or, or accuracy in how, how humans work, so to speak.

Okay. That, that's great.

Do you wanna say, I don't know if you would agree with this, if this is not, I Mean, I haven't, one of the things I could have talked about is the, is the main thing in, in

myth, Levi says book, which is the story of the bird nester and I don't, I certainly no time to go into it now at all.

But it's just that, that's about all the myths have a certain structure.

So all the myths, I would say, if they've got a, a narrative moving from A through B through C to D, from one from the beginning to an end, if there's any kind of beginning of the story, middle of the story and the end of the story, it'll be life, death, life, death, life, death, life, death and then suddenly you've got like death up here and life down there.

And, and whereas before, you could go up and down, up and down, up and down between life and death, the story ends up like Jack and the Be Stalk or the Tara Babel.

It goes, the life and death is separate and once you've gone into death, you're never gonna get back again.

So, and then, and then when that happens, the, the death is permanent and, and the life is not really very permanent, but it's, it's not this, this Christian idea and of course it's not only Christian, which is you, you're gonna have, once you've once, once the Messiahs arrived, you're gonna have eternal life.

There's, that's already kind of, anticipated in the sense that to begin with the miss, nice and lunar you just life death, life, death, life death and then something happens and then when whatever happens, it's gonna be a form of fixity where we are all down here and, the dead are up here and it's, there's that element of fixity.

Things have come to a sort of standstill and we've kind of lost the moon and then lo and behold, the myth tells us that that's why we've got fixed.

It's because we've lost the moon. So, And of course the underlying kind of material factors of the loss of the moon will be aspects of women's ritual power.

Are women able to work collectively to maintain this ritual periodicity with menstrual cycles doing performing ritual, which they can join and that's this sort of periodicity between being with Ken, being with marital.

What, and if that is lost, men will take over and run rituals that kind of resemble the, the ancient rituals.

But they're kind of what do, what does the a land yo elders say, take a picture of? That's Right. Yes.

Yes. This was women's Business, right, right across, right across Australia.

They, the men sort of say, well, it's really, really sad, but unfortunately, the great, the great all mother, she started eating her own children and we couldn't trust her with the children anymore.

and so we had to kill her and then we had to make a replica of the Goddess wga or whatever her name is and, and, and we know that the replica, the replica, it, it's, it consoles us.

It's kind of okay, but she's not real anymore.

It's just, it's just a, they say a photograph, they use that a picture that a picture, a picture.

They say a picture. We, it's like, we took a picture, they mean a photograph they Recognize. It's a kind of pretense.

It's not a real thing.

So it's so amazing the men realize that their, their version of the ancient religion is, it's just a, a, a kind of fake, the real one was when real women were bleeding and the real women were really synchronizing their cycles with the moon.

That was the real one. When, when the men, when the men do it, they, they feel, we've gotta do it really, otherwise nothing much is gonna happen.

We lose the whole thing. But they know it's a, a fake, really, really sad.

And, and they say just one thing.

The the, the rin butter. That's right, isn't it? Mm-hmm.

they say, we took a wrong turning.

all of us took a wrong turning in life when we kill the great mother and we, we, we tried to make a replica, and the replica is no good, really.

But on the other hand, without it, I think, I think you can sort of say with them that all the world's religions are sort of no good, really. But there's some, there Various types of replicas, kind of The kind of consolation, but they're not the real thing.

But there's still that belief that maybe you could have the real thing and funnily enough, I half think that because I, all I know is that when you are really having a great time, um it's, it's, it's real.

But when Chris is talking about the rainbow snake and wildlife in two weeks time, yeah.

That this kind of gender pendulum over the rainbow snake is, is a real enact.

It's a real struggle.

It's a real that that's being reenacted and recreated.

But it has a long, deep history that this kind of gender, differences has.

I thought, just to give you a fuller picture of Levy's face, because he is absolutely genius and everything decent done in mythology has come from Levy's face.

But on the other hand, he's, he is the real, he's so brilliant is 'cause he's not just slightly wrong, he's absolutely wrong about everything in the sense that he actually does think that men invented the ancest boo.

men invented the difference between raw meat and cooked all the different men invented menstrual synchrony.

I just, I this is from, this is from the very, one of the critical moments in in meteor.

He's just touched on the dangers of menstrual cycles, which are too slow or too fast and he continues, listen to this.

The reason why women are most in need of education is that they are periodic creatures because of this, they are perpetually threatened and the whole world with and through them are the two possibilities that I've just mentioned.

Women's periodic rhythm could slow down and halt the flow of events, or they, or the rhythm could accelerate and plunge the world into chaos.

It's equally conceivable that women might cease to menstruate and bear children, or that they might bleed continuously and give birth haphazardly.

But in either case, the sun and the moon, the heavenly bodies governing alternation of day and night and other seasons would no longer be able to fulfill their function.

So I I, I'm not sure whether you hear the irony in that he's, he's just, he's, he's, he's aware that women these days don't synchronize their periods and he's, he's, he's, and, and, but then he's then saying that he, that that's always been the case and when women did synchronize their periods, he's very important that they do was because they've been properly educated by men.

Yeah. Right. Then train them to do it.

Can I ask a couple questions? I've been meaning to ask two questions on this. Exactly.

So, okay, here's my first question.

Growing up as a girl, I've had this thing happen per periodically where I'm talking to friends and we, we discover we're on our periods at the same time.

We get this, this excitement.

Oh my God, we're totally synchronized.

Like this is an experience which every woman knows and there is this theory that if you spend time together, your menstrual cycles are going to synchronize and one time I looked it up and I found this study, which says that there is no proof.

Yeah. There's, there's many, many scientists, often women scientists saying, nah, that's not, you're saying that, that if you spend time together, your menstrual cycles are going to synchronize.

So this is the first thing I wanted to ask you about, because I know that a lot of your work is on symbolic menstrual synchronizing to prevent sexual violence.

But are you saying that actually there's also real menstrual synchronizing going on in gatherer? And then my second question is about, menstrual synchronizing with the moon Kaila, were you just saying that women use, this is hard of women Yeah.

But had you And look at the clock Yeah.

To say when they're gonna use the moon as a clock in order to tell them when they're gonna ovulate or no, when they're gonna menstruate.

Yeah. Menstruate that ovulate Or are you saying that also? No, don't, they don't think in terms of ovulate.

Only In terms of menstruate. Okay. Yeah.

But they think the most important time to get pregnant is after they've menstruated.

Once they just washed that day straight away.

That will be the most in cultures where the moon is so important.

Are you saying that also there's a synchronization with full moon and New Moon menstruating and ovulating? How don't you tell? This is a long, this is a long question. Mentioned James Woodburn recent essay.

Well, I'm just working. that's a long alright story.

we, we are just doing work right now and work with hads of people too.

I don't know, how many people in the room have heard of James Woodburn? Not
Ro Thank you. Thank you for being here.

James Woodburn, one of the most famous hunter together anthropologists who did long, long period of work, the work with HUDs of people going right back to the 1950s hads of people in Tanzania in the river. They Perhaps had the hadza are what possibly the last people who still, until very recently, even today to some extent, hunt with, rose and arrows hunt, relatively large game animals the way that We, large game that we did poison involved poison arrow, bone arrow hunting peoples up to incredibly recently, even if it's not still today.

and they're there in the RIF Valley, right in sort of the cradle of where we became human.

and they, they told James about the idea that yeah, women, men street was synchronized with the moon and in fact there's a, a sequence of ethnographers who've been with the Hadza, myself included, who've been told that by the Hudson.

Is that true? Which going over many decades, this, this whole idea and James wrote a paper in 10 years after he'd written his thesis, a paper on Haa Menstrual Taboos, which he never published.

He gave in seminars he never published. He told us about it.

he died just three and a bit years ago in, in 2022, as, he's really older, 86 and seven by that stage.

and he, we found, so my colleague Ian Watts, with the help of, James' widow found this paper in his paper, in his boxes, a box marked menstruation and he'd kept it.

He set it, he kept on sort of making changes and adding to it.

He heard about the famous paper by Martha McClintock, which was in 1971, published in Nature on Menstrual Synchrony.

This was the first time science actually used the terminology of menstrual synchrony and James heard about that.

The HUDs had already told him about menstrual synchrony had a men had a men.

and so because of that, he kind of was excited about this material and going through the menstrual taboos and what was it all about? And he linked women's reproductive state menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth to men's productivity and hunting.

Big game, shooting a poisoned arrow, tracking the game, killing the game.

It was like there was a, a very close contact between like you Kind of wheel, you produce life and you take life.

Yeah. Producing life, taking life.

But it, but it's like the, the two things, the women's reproductive states, the men's production influence each other, especially the women's reproduction influences behind. so we are working on this paper to bring it to a posthumous publication.

Just say one more little thing, which is that actually in the paper, James said, I am not sure if I have the courage or words to that effect.

I'm not sure I can find the voice to write this.

Our culture to write about menstruation is just such a difficult thing to do. And then he just gave up.

Well, we don't exactly know why he buried it and left it.

He gave some clues in the actual article that He found it difficult. Well, well, yeah, but, And it's difficult because he wasn't encouraged to do it.

nobody wanted it and it sounded a bit embarrassing.

yeah, and I forgot something else I was gonna say.

no, it got outta my head.

so yeah, there was one other thing I was gonna say.

Well, I mean, sorry Vale, your point asking with hunter gatherer women, James had no behavioral data on menstruation, nor do I Nobody's got behavioral data about actually do hunt togetherer, women menstruate together.

The belief is expressed very strongly.

but in the case of hunt togetherer women compared to women here in this room, in, in a city in London, hunter gatherer women will menstruate five times less frequently because of, your earlier age to get pregnant, more pregnancies, longer.

Breastfeeding menstruation, therefore is an extremely powerful signal, is is extremely powerful idea of fertility to it because you menstruate before becoming likely to become pregnant.

and so a younger young menal girl coming to fertility, her menstruation are emblematic of this.

It's a very di whereas our culture regards menstruation.

Oh, this is, that's a failed reproduction.

That's, didn't get pregnant.

Oh, lots and lots of menstruation.

It's like a negative is Antifa, but that's not how it's conceived for Hunter.

Cut.

My my my view is that, is that the traditions that James described, where the men all think, by the way I was told this long ago, I think, that, that, that James just said to me, Chris, the men assume that each dark moon, the women are all menstruating.

So, and that's them saying it.

I mean obviously it's a bit difficult for everybody to be menstruating.

So you canis particularly because women are of different ages, and of course your, your cycle speeds up a bit in your late twenties and early thirties and it, and, and when you in your teens, it's a bit slower.

So you can't really have perfect synchrony.

But I mean, compared with anything else that goes on in the world, in our society, it would've been sufficiently close synchrony for it to that's for people, for women to feel rather like you value you said you, when you, when you were with his other girls, you Like, this is a universal experience. Oh Yeah. And also there's a lovely paper, isn't that, there's a nice paper studying people like you actually stu studying women who gain solidarity and strength from By brilliant Fs.

Yeah, that's right. F yeah. So it's You where there's this kind of contradiction between the fact that science says, no, we can't prove it.

Yeah. We can't prove it's, it's, you notice menstrual synchrony, but you don't notice when it doesn't happen.

Yeah. You're not a is it just a random effect? Is it the statistics aren't good, but Brian f says, we're, but we shouldn't be attacking this idea because women are using it to create connection and create strength and alliance and Yeah, it's a very, it's a very complex subject and then there's all the stuff I've done over my life, which is just showing the, the most noticeable, the most, I don't know, it's just at a mild.

What's the, what's the motif in fairytales? It's the biggest one of all.

It's, it's the dragon or the rainbow snake and the dragon or the rainbow snake is an image of menstrual synchrony.

I mean, there's a bit of an argument to go through all that, but I, I might do that next, next time I'm speaking.

Or the With the rainbow snake. Yeah, the rainbow snake.

The rainbow snake, for example, in Australia, what if you want to generate a rainbow snake and you're two women, you just get together and you, you, you join your, your flows and that turns into a rainbow and a snake.

I, I just believe the Biss, I think they know exactly what they're talking about.

If you want to be really strong, turn into a snake, you want to be really strong, turn into a dragon.

Just make sure your periods sink up and then you'll, then you really are a dragon.

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