

**'Hunting is boring and unreliable.
Let the men do it!'**

Helga Vierich

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Did women once hunt big game animals? In this discussion, I hope to relate some conversations about hunting, among recent Kua San hunter-gatherers, that I hope might help us to re-imagine the human story.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nTQazFW-nD4>

Introduction

Camilla Power: So, I'll formally welcome Helga Vierick.

We're incredibly pleased to be able to welcome to these series of radical anthropology seminars.

Helga really represents a kind of four field anthropology approach.

I think that's fair enough to say.

With both a cultural anthropology, evolutionary anthropology, archaeology and linguistics type of background, it's the interdisciplinary approach that we've always tried to follow in radical anthropology group.

So we're really interested to hear what you have to say on this question of sex division of labour and your general experience and thoughts in the matter.

So over to you and talk for as long as you feel like and we'll then have discussion.

Seminar

Helga Vierich: So to introduce myself a little bit, I did my doctoral program at the University of Toronto.

I initially was going to go into archaeology.

I did a summer dig at a place called Nasharini in Lebanon with a team put together by Bruce Schroeder and that research, that dig was one of the last ones done there because, of course, the civil war and everything else that happened since then.

made it impossible to go back and so Richard Lee, who was another one of my instructors there, said, why not, since I had funding and grants and so on, why not switch and do something in ethnography of hunter-gatherers? Because I was already talking to a man called Hank Lewis, Henry Lewis, at the University of Alberta.

about fire ecology and I was very interested in the role of ecological engineering among hunter-gatherers, particularly as it was, to my mind, an intensification of this, which eventually led to domestication of plants and animals.

In any event, I was thinking about going to Alberta to do research, following up on what Hank Lewis had done and then Richard Lee stepped in and said, no, why not go

to the Kalahari? I can get you in there and after a wonderful lunch with Pat Draper and Henry Harpending, I got the use of a vehicle.

Richard set that up and off I went and I did in the end for, well, not quite four years in the Kalahari.

I did a drought survey towards the end of that time.

However, I couldn't do fire ecology because the Botswana government had just initiated a law against all kinds of belt burning and people got fined and jailed and stuff if they set fire to the landscape.

So I couldn't very well do interviews on that and it took me a long time to actually get the data on that, until things kind of calmed down and so I had to switch and I wound up being really interested in the interface between hunter-gatherers and the farming and pastoral people and I wound up doing my PhD on that and what I found out was very interesting to my mind, it was that the interface was really a zone of shall we say, economic experimentation on the part of the Bushmen.

Okay, I call them Bushmen because in the end, they told me they wanted to be called Basarwa.

Well, this stuff about Khoisan and Khoisan and everything is kind of politically correct, but they never even heard those terms.

So Basarwa just means Bushmen in Bantu, in the Bantu language and in their own languages, they didn't have a term for themselves, except the real people.

in other words, their language name, which was Kwa, and then Kwa, which means, the real people.

I suspect every cultural group has a similar feeling about themselves.

Anyway, okay, so.

I was very lucky in that this group had long passed any kind of interest or fascination with the herding and farming culture and the outside world that was brought to them more recently and they were very conscious of the racism with which they were faced in these other cultures and rejected them.

I still remember one of my closest, I don't know, I would call it a friend or an informant, said one day, he said, if you ever see me with a chicken, I'm translating now, it's my chicken.

I'm not looking after it for some, Bakalahadi guy and that kind of illustrates to me the rejection of the role of surf or even employee.

Most of the people I knew had at some point or other been, closer to working for, as a herd boy or as an assistant in a agricultural operation, doing bird scaring and harvesting or, cooking or, looking after kids in a camp or something like that and they did this.

became very clear.

They did this because by filling in at times of labor shortages, they were very much more tolerated by the people who now controlled the main permanent water points.

Now there's another topic I'd like to get into, but I can't because there's no time and that is what happened to their hunting systems and their interaction with wildlife

and so on as a result of what they call the totally stupid hunting practices of the Bantu dogs and clubs and hunting on horseback and everything else.

But I'll get into that in another talk if I'm permitted.

Okay, so the reason I am here today is because I think it was sometime last year, in the early part of the year, there was a report from South America about the excavation of a young person who turned out to be female, but who was buried with hunting paraphernalia, okay and there were a number of very excited reports about this.

Hang on, I'm just going to call them up so I can, if they will.

One of them, the main research article was published in Science Advances, and that was last November, 2020 and it was Female Hunters of the Early Americas.

Randall Hawes, James Watson, et cetera, et al.

Okay and what What they basically then did was they questioned sexual division of labor among hunters and gatherers.

They said, this was kind of a standard empirical reality that most people had suggested based on ethnographic data and it was then inferred to be the ancestral behavioral pattern.

Okay, so then they suggested that their discovery of this girl with the hunting paraphernalia challenges the man-hunter hypothesis and of course, this was in the Andes, and it was a burial that was about 9,000 years old, and so on.

Most of you are familiar with this.

It was picked up all over the place on inverse, and somebody called Sarah Wells actually wrote Actually, ancient big game hunters were women and prehistoric hunting wasn't just a man's game, et cetera, et cetera, with, predictable and there was an article which I can't remember where it appeared, but it was a picture of a young girl in a pink dress throwing a spear at a bunch of wild vicunas, I guess.

Anyway, so So anyway, this caused a great deal of excitement and it was picked up here as well and it was picked up on Twitter and everywhere else and I was almost amused by it.

First of all, there is no man the hunter hypothesis that I'm aware of.

That title, Man the Hunter, was the title of the conference, the Man the Hunter Conference, the original hunter-gatherer conference, and it was decided by Werner Gren, who were the funders.

The book that subsequently followed, edited by Richard Lee and Irvin Devore, was also called that and I think it was not only just for continuity, but it was because it was a kind of a catchy title, and they didn't want to fight with Werner Grin about the funding, et cetera.

So the thing is that it upset a lot of people who were feminist at that time.

Somebody even wrote a book called Woman the Gatherer and this is very ironic because, most of you realize Richard Lee, in that edited volume and at that conference, was the one who pointed out that his research indicated that women were supplying, 75 to 80% of all the calories.

All right.

He even expressed dismay that it was titled this way and that it got him under, it put him under attack, okay, by people who felt, that the role of women was being minimized, et cetera.

But there is in our society, and has been throughout probably the history of civilization, a kind of a glorification of men as hunters.

You see it on the tombs of the Egyptian pharaohs.

There they are killing some poor leopard or, eland or something with their chariots.

You see it today when, the guy who runs that, what is it? I can't remember which big corporate guy this is, but he goes off to Africa and kills elephants, baby elephants, and stands over them like he's a great hunter.

This is a meme, as it were, that has persisted and it has infected a lot of people and the way that they view hunting as an activity.

All right.

Well, when I got to the field, And I got a little bit better at the language.

I always spoke basically children's language or baby talk, if you will, but because it's a really, really hard language to learn.

It's got, like, I don't know how many, I think it was 39 different sounds and there was clicks and toning and everything.

I once asked a man if I could, I got the tone wrong and left, asked a man if I could leave my camera equipment in his wife's vagina.

The hut, word for hut in vagina is very, very, very close.

That's a kind of mistake.

So I was a subject of considerable humor, I think.

But anyway, so I started asking the women I knew and the picture that was put up to announce this talk is very indicative because the two girls that I'm sitting with became my best friends.

They were the ones who jollied me off to go and do to go and do a gathering with them.

All right? And I became more accepted, as a part of the scene because of them and Malipai, the middle one, actually ran a trap line at one point.

So that interested me and I started to ask about whether or not she and, some of the other girls I knew aspired to be hunters and felt, kind of pushed away from that by the men and they laughed at me.

They said, why would you want to be a hunter? I mean, young men do aspire to be good hunters.

That seemed pretty clear to me.

So I said, well, why wouldn't you? And they said, well, for one thing, and I don't, I suppose they've been told about this, or perhaps some of them have tried it.

In any event, for one thing, they said, you walk around all day, either with your, instructor, the person you're apprenticed to, or by yourself, if you're supposed to be trying to hunt by yourself, which is the aim, I guess, ultimately of becoming a good hunter.

You walk around all day in silence.

You can't talk to anybody.

You can't even sing.

You have to be careful even to sneeze in case you scare something and most of the time you come home empty-handed and it's hot and you're covered with thorn scrapes and mosquito bites and, you're miserable.

You come home miserable because again, you didn't succeed.

Like the hunting success ratio, the average is 1 hunt in four is successful.

Okay, with that.

means, that's just the average.

The success rate of men over 35, was higher.

It was like one in every third or second hunt.

The success rate of the youngest men who were just learning was way lower.

It was like one in seven hunts.

Now, can you imagine what that's like? You go out and it's hot because they hunt during the day.

That's another story that I'd like to explore, when did this night hunting with dogs start? But anyway, you hunt during the day, you hunt as quietly as possible, you wander around for hours, you follow tracks, you try to get close enough to animals to hit them with a poison arrow, right? And at that point the animal will continue going on, probably itching and bruising at that spot, until it feels a paralysis coming on, and then it will seek someplace to go lie down.

In the meantime, you hare back to camp and you get, all the men that you can to come with you to make sure that it gets tracked properly.

Because if you're a young hunter, your tracking skills are not that good.

Okay, it's very hard to learn to track properly in this kind of sandy environment and you're going to need assistance in, first of all, preventing other predators from zeroing in on this animal and also to, butcher it and get it home, all right? So then, okay, so that was the goal and if you manage that, you were, it was clear that it was a group effort.

It wasn't some great hunter, being the supplier of meat or anything.

It was a lucky hit.

In fact, most of the time, what I heard, and I was able to tag after these guys when they went after such an animal a couple of times, was that, this was an animal that had sacrificed itself for the sake of the children in the camp.

This was an animal that had decided, to help its brothers, the humans and I remember one day, the first time I went out, one of the older men stopped when we came in sight of the animal, which was down, now it was down under a tree and he sighed and he said, oh, oh, it's her.

He knew this animal.

He'd known it for years.

He'd seen it have babies, and on this occasion, this was the one that caught the arrow.

so that's the, that's the atmosphere.

All right.

So then I asked, but, okay, so it's hard and it's, you can't talk very much, but, and it doesn't give you very much kind of benefit at the end of the day and what the girl said then, and she said, well, that's why we let the men do it.

Because it's, You can't talk, you can't stay, you can't joke, you can't tell stories, you can't gossip while you're doing it like you can when you're gathering.

I mean, I've been on those gathering trips.

I mean, the ones where they didn't want me to come were ones where I guess either they were talking about me or they were discussing very, delicate matters of, love and marriage or whatever, and didn't, wanted privacy.

But the times that I was able to go gathering with them, not that I gathered much, I mostly just carried my camera, but It was just endless chatter, jokes, especially talking about the guys, and gossip that people have picked up and just little dances impromptu and singing and stuff like this and that it was a lively, fun outing compared to, the way that hunting was described and the most important thing of all was that you always came home with plenty of food.

There were no like failed gathering trips, right? You're not going to go out there and go, oh, I don't see any nuts in the trees.

I don't know where the roots are.

No, they knew this whole area, like the back of their, like a garden.

In fact, they called it a garden.

In fact, they had gardened it in the sense that, well, They were making the landscape more productive with every trip, for future, for the future.

When I was walking along the first few times, I was really puzzled to see women taking some nuts or some berries, out of their pouches.

We'd just been gathering these things, right? And I had to stop because they were healing the bunches over underneath the ground and they did like three or four times on our way home and I said, what are you doing? and there, of course, because I always ask questions and I was hot and bothered and they said, we have to give something back to the mother, right? But if you consider the consequences of just that, okay, aside from all the times that stuff fell out of their, fell out of their crosses every time they plunked them down to dig a root or something.

Because there were always stuff falling out.

I used to be trying to be really helpful.

I'd scoop stuff up and try to put it back in and they laughed at me and they said, don't.

So all of this stuff, the whole, provisioning expedition, of gathering, scattered seeds and berries and nuts, in other words, the babies of the mother, everywhere and if you

think this is, women do this maybe three times, maximum four a week, because they gather enough to last for two days for their household.

the mathematics, I once tried to figure it out just for the group I was with, which was about 1000 people, all in, the whole language area and within, 100 years, they would have planted like 10 million plants.

That's minimum, assuming just six per trip.

But if each woman is doing this, just do the math in your head.

This is major ecological engineering, and most of it's done without even planning anything.

Okay, it's about gratitude.

It's about reciprocity at that point.

Okay, so the gathering activities and this isn't even counting the ecological hotspots that are created around every one of these temporary camping sites, because people spit stuff out, they throw things into the midden, the withered little roots and stuff, they don't get eaten, they go into the midden.

The little kids are told, put that thing away in the midden before it dies.

So the old camping sites were just, immensely productive, probably after a 10-year period or so.

You could always count on finding edible roots and berries and nuts and certain kinds of plum trees and so on growing there and we would actually, during the winter, during the dry season, we would actually sometimes zigzag among old camping sites on our way back just to fill up on stuff easily because in the winter, there wasn't that much in the way of fresh fruit and so having a lot of different groves that you could go to was really beneficial.

The other thing was root crops.

It was full root crops because these things have been replanted.

So, looked at in terms of the subsistence economy and division of labour of hunter-gatherers, what women do gathering is not only more fun, always productive, and, relatively shall we say, unarduous, really? I mean, they carry a lot, but they don't seem to worry about the weight of it because the heavier guests, the closer they are to camp, right? And then they can rest for two days, do other stuff.

In any event, what the women do is not only dependable and fun, but it's also ecologically, completely critical.

to the hunter-gatherer relationship with their ecosystem.

All right and I think looking at it from a kind of, division of labour point of view, there another thing becomes clear, at least to me, and it was clear to them too, because it was a, it was a, who was it, was Bethle or Bethle's son.

I can't remember which one said it.

I was doing hunting interviews because I did tons of these interviews on hunts and one of them just said, you realize, that if we didn't have the women gathering, we couldn't afford to waste all this time hunting.

They said that.

He didn't say waste, he said to while away our time, translating badly.

But in other words, this, obligation to bring meat into camp, that was, it was enough to actually depress young men when they were unsuccessful when they were young.

A lot of the trance dances that I saw were for treating people who were so depressed by their lack of hunting success that they'd fallen into a depression and they'd refuse to get up and they were still lying in their, on their, crosses for days and days and then the whole group would get together and they'd have a trance dance and a big celebration and this person would be kind of jollied back into a state of hopefulness, like we're going to cure your bad luck, you're going to keep trying and so on.

Hunting is hard, right? Because it's the least rewarding of the activities that hunter-gatherers undertake.

That is my impression and I know that this contradicts the view of many of the archaeologists who are excavating, sites 100,000, 300,000, no, three, well, yeah, a long time ago, of our hunter-gatherer past, because what they get is the lithic remains of the hunting toolkit, right? And some of it has, I think, been misinterpreted as a hunting toolkit, because some of these scrapers and other things could just as easily be used to process and dismember plants.

But the thing is, hunting was not done as a male activity that excluded females.

All right.

Men were perfectly happy to come gathering.

It's the women didn't want them because they wanted to gossip about the guys.

Sorry, it sounds awful, but, it was not necessary for the men to come.

Plus, young men did not apprentice with their, female relatives to learn where every type of plant grows, to learn, how to gather all these different things and to learn that part of the landscape.

They were more encouraged to learn animal behavior, to understand aspects of, how to make arrows so they fly straight, to target practice, and especially to handle the poisons, and so on.

This division of labour, I think, functioned not because of male domination or anything, but because it was practical and from an ecological standpoint, what hunting did, and I think this is really important, what hunters do when they're out observing animals, trying to get close to them and so on, is they keep very good track of the status, the health status, the reproductive activities of these animals.

They know what can be harvested, to what extent.

They also keep pretty good track of all the kills made by lions and other predators in the environment and one of the things that this does, I think, is it means that they hunt in a in a conscious way to not over harvest certain species that are vulnerable.

I once sat through like a three hour, no, it was longer than that, debate or discussion or whatever it was that was occasioned by the fact that a man had actually killed a female eland and the, instead of letting the Eland calf come to life, as it were and that was a no-no.

If you were going to hunt, you tried to hunt selectively, so you were hunting a healthy animal because you didn't want to pick up the diseases carried by sick animals, right? You wanted an animal that was in good fitness because you wanted the fat that the animal carried and so, you valued the activities of your fellow hunters, the lions, the leopards, the cheetahs.

Why? Because those animals, and this has been shown now, thank goodness, by wildlife ecologists in Canada, they selectively prey on animals that are sick.

Prion diseases especially are very dangerous.

As you probably know, they survive cooking because it's not actually an organism, right? It's a misformed, misaligned protein of some kind and prion diseases, the danger exists worldwide and it's only lately that we've come to realize how bad they can be.

In the United States right now, many of the wildlife services are recommending that people do not eat venison because there's such an epidemic of what's called chronic wasting disease among the deer.

Well, what brought that on? It's they killed all the cougars, they killed all the wolves.

So the disease is just rampant among these deer and it's spreading fast.

The Bushmen knew They told me, they said, these animals are our brothers.

They keep us healthy because they keep the animals healthy and I'm not the only person that's ever been told this.

was explained to, what was his name again, Farley Mowat, who did some book on people of the deer, on caribou hunters up north and they told him too that the wolves kept the deer healthy.

the herds, needed them and this deep ecological understanding, this symbiosis that is going on here is really important, And so I'm not saying that hunting as such is an unimportant part of the hunter-gatherer economy, but I think in terms of our understanding of how the whole hunter-gatherer cultural ecology worked, how it evolved, that this was, both of them were critical.

I tell this story sometimes.

So if I have time, I'd like to repeat it.

It's about giraffe.

Is that okay? You're familiar with this one? Okay.

Well, as you know, Lorna Marshall's son made a film called The Hunters, and it follows some people up in Ngami Land, where much of the field work has been done among a language group different from the one I was with, about 800, almost 1000 miles to the northwest.

Anyway, he follows a giraffe hunt and so they hit the giraffe, and of course, poison arrows.

Anyway, so it's a long, hunt, and in the end, they killed this giraffe with spears.

Actually, they pulled it down with a truck, but that, or shot it with a, but anyway, never mind.

So I had seen this film and I was very impressed, And so when I came to the Kalahari, there were plenty of giraffe.

I mean, not plenty, plenty, but I certainly saw giraffe quite frequently in the area where I was doing field work.

But, nobody was hunting them.

No, none of the, none of the quoa were hunting them and so After a while, during, after X number of, hunting interviews, I asked about this and I was told, oh, well, it's for a very good reason and some of them were a little hazy about this.

I was told to go speak to somebody, this lady who lived, like about 100 miles to the east of where I was doing these interviews.

So I eventually got out to see her and she was this little, little granny, right? She's sitting there in a camp.

The other women have gone gathering.

A couple of old men are sleeping under the lean-tos, and she's kind of got the kids around her and so I went ahead and explained what I was interested in.

I wanted to ask her about Giraffe.

She brightened her right up.

She was so pleased.

I think most people in her society probably really tired of hearing her talk about giraffe because she's one of these obsessed people, from childhood.

She wanted to know everything about giraffes.

She, anyway, so I asked the question, I said, why shouldn't the giraffe be hunted? I've noticed that the young men here don't hunt the giraffe and she said, oh, it's the midwife of the acacia.

So I go, okay, and I write this down, I'm thinking and then, I asked her more questions and it gradually came out, she had noticed that acacia seeds would pass through the giraffe, be deposited at quite distant, quite distant, and then sprout.

In fact, that's that seemed to be the main thing that was spreading these acacias.

By the way, they're not scientifically labeled as acacias anymore.

These big, fan-shaped giant trees that you see in the Central African savanna regions.

Okay, so, and then she told me, she said, God made the giraffe tall enough to take the babies of the acacia, in other words, the seed pods, and spread them.

Okay, that's why we say it's a midwife.

It was only years later that I learned that the acacia is a legume.

It fixes nitrogen in its roots with a symbiosis with the bacteria, right? And it is because of the spread of the acacia that the kalahari remains as green as it does.

In other words, spreading nitrogen, this is a very, very sandy soil type and not really rich in nutrients.

But having these trees that are basically giant, legumes really opens up the environment to other species of plants and that, of course, leads to more animal diversity as well.

There's another thing there, the so-called Marama nut, which is also a legume.

Okay and by the way, Marama nuts were what these women were often dropping on their gathering trips.

So, just think of the observational and knowledge that sums up.

Like she didn't know how to explain why the acacia was the essential plant in the Kalahari and that the animal that spreads this plant is vital, vitally important.

But she knew and I think that sums up like hundreds of years, thousands of years. of observation and discussion and what we call wisdom, if you will.

It's the first science of mankind is ecological engineering and I won't even get into fire ecology unless there's time.

Okay, does that open up if I talk long enough?

Discussion

Camilla Power: Yeah, that sets things up.

I mean, perhaps if people ask questions, you can come up, respond, and that will get things going.

That was already a really great picture.

I think it's fantastic with the giraffe there.

Does anybody have burning questions to ask at this point? I have a few...

Chris Knight: It's just that I first knew of your work when I heard the story, the Trickster story about God's testicles and you were mentioning how the women, when they're gathering, they laugh A lot and I just wondered if you could tell us that story and, anything else around that whole topic.

Because of course, the issue of whether hunter-gatherers are cowering in the face of kings in the form of their gods or whether they actually their divinities are tricksters has been quite a controversial topic recently...

Helga Vierich: Oh, well, that it's actually an important question.

I appreciate it because there's a lot of misunderstanding about this.

They had when I when I was able to get that depth of interview going.

They had a concept of a single creator, okay, kind of a spiritual creator of the entire universe who animated everything.

They said the two things that came from the immaterial, the spiritual, the unknown side of reality were fire and love.

Okay and love was not just love, love, right? It was, it was the animate, it was life.

It was what made things alive.

All right and so, I finally got the name.

I can't even remember what it is now and it's unimportant because they told me, we don't know the real name of the creator, because how can we know it? It's immaterial.

So then my next question, because I had my copy of, notes and records with me, was what would be the, is your God male or female? I couldn't believe such a stupid question.

They said, what? if it manifests on Earth, when quite often...

If it's human or any other species of animal, then it's going to come out as male or female.

But that's just what happens in a material form.

An immaterial being does not need genitalia.

They don't pee, they don't screw, they don't have sex.

What are you thinking? And I realized how stupid that question was...

So there's that.

Now, Here's the thing.

There are a lot of stories that I was told were sacred.

Okay and one of them was the story of the bees chasing testicles.

Now that with that, introduction to it, I had to ask that it be told to me.

Of course and the story goes that God, this immaterial creator being, was looking down on the world and he was following, for some reason, maybe they mentioned his name, I don't know, or her name, who knows, following a group of gathering women and he was particularly entranced by one young woman in the group and basically wanted to get closer to her and as a result, he popped into material existence as a small human.

Now, I don't know if this was like a homunculus, like a miniature man, or whether it's supposed to have been a child.

They didn't describe it.

In any event, this little being popped into existence, and he was following these women as they were gathering and everything that he saw them gathering, if they stopped at a nut grove and got a bunch of nuts, he would follow and eat a bunch of nuts as well and as he was eating everything that they were gathering, as he saw them gathering, he was growing into, full human size.

At one point, he was already quite big, probably the size of a 10 year old kid or something and the woman he really liked, the young woman he really liked, dropped her cross to dig out a root.

Everybody else was doing it.

So what he did is he snuck inside it because he was getting really tired.

That was what was said anyway and when she was finished, she picked up the cross.

It was a little heavier, but she didn't mind and so while she was, and then they all decided to go home and so when she, when she, that's the other thing, she dropped in on top of the cross, this great big heavy root that she dug up and it knocked him out.

Okay, so he came to about halfway back and he's been, he's walking, he's been aware of the fact that he's being carried along and and he's very hungry again.

So he eats almost everything that's in that cross and she gets home and by this time, he's quite big and she's very tired and so she takes the big root out and she sets it to cook and doesn't notice him.

Okay and so he creeps out of her cross, still eating everything that's left in it, except for the root and hides behind the behind the, I don't know whether it was at the back of the hut or behind the hut.

I'd have to check my notes with how that how that was worded.

But anyway, meanwhile, she goes next door to the to a hut like, 30, 20 feet away and says, oh, by the way, I did get that really nice marama root and I'm cooking it right now.

Can I bring it over and we can share it? Because I guess this was with her mother's or her sister's household or something that she had next door and so they said, sure, okay and then she, in the meantime, because she had taken it out of the fire pool before she went to give this generous offer, the guy had found it, God had found it, and eaten it.

was gone.

So she gets her and she looks around, where is it? And she goes, she goes around to the, to all the households.

There were like four other households in that camp and accuses everybody of stealing it and they all say, we wouldn't do a thing like that.

We've got plenty of food.

you're crazy kind of thing.

She says, well, what happened to it? And they're all mad at her and everything.

So she goes back to her hut and she's really, She doesn't even want to bother eating now and then she lifts her cross to see if there's some berries.

There's nothing left in it.

They've stolen everything.

So now she's really ***** *** and she decides, I'm just going to go to sleep.

So she gets into bed.

It's evening now.

The fire's dying down.

Everybody's quieting and goes to sleep and at this moment, God, now the size of a full grown, human male, I guess, creeps around.

gets under her blankets with her.

It's, oh, you were so beautiful.

You were so beautiful and she says, who are you? Right? You're not and she gave me some name.

It was the name of her.

I don't know what to say, her young husband or her fiance or something.

The man that she was going to be marrying soon.

That's why she had a separate hut.

Who are you? And he, he didn't care.

He just wanted to get his way with her.

He was going to rape her essentially and so, she wasn't having any of this.

she pulled out her knife because they all have knives and stuff, right, for cutting roots, among other things and she just cut off his testicles, just like that and he went, popped right out of existence.

I'm telling you the way the story was told to me with all the sound effects.

Anyway, so then, so then the balls.

in their little sack were left behind, right? She looked around, she said, where'd this guy go, right? And she saw these little balls hopping along, right? And so she called upon her friends to bees and I said, well, wait a minute, people don't talk to bees and they looked at me, the storyteller looked at me, he says, this is a myth.

In other words, it's a story, get with it.

So, okay, so she calls the bees to sting the testicles and what you have to picture here, the bees are stinging, right? The little sacks are popping up and down every time they're stung, and they're trying to get away, and you have to picture something like a sack race now.

I mean, that's how it was described to me and she saw them disappear over, the next little sand dune and and thought, good riddance, what was that? And she couldn't figure out what had happened and so she, again, went to all the other huts and accused everybody, all the men there, of having tried to rape her.

Now, this was just too much and now everybody was really mad at her and they were all telling her off and so by this point, she said, all right, I'll prove it and so she went out and she looked for these balls.

She tracked them, wasn't hard, a little sack.

Anyway, she finally found they had buried themselves in the sand to get away from the bees, all right? So she pulled them out and in the meantime, I guess they died or something, I don't know.

Anyway, she went and showed them to people and said, see, here are his testicles and everybody handled them and looked at them and sniffed them and they said, yeah, they do smell.

They might be good to eat.

right? And so they cooked them and ate them, and they were delicious.

They were the first Kalahari truffles.

The origin of the Kalahari truffle, one of the most expensive of all truffle varieties.

Just look it up.

I just fell over backwards when he hit that punchline in the story.

I couldn't believe it.

But that's the story.

Okay, so now here, you have to remember, this story was told on one of the times, at one of the times that I had a bunch of families invited for dinner at my camp and it was told in front of a whole range of children.

It wasn't just an adult story and The children were reacting to it.

Some of them may have heard it before.

But I started thinking about later, I thought, what are these children learning? Well, for one thing, they're learning that, once you incorporate as a material being, even if you're, the creator of the universe, you can really screw up.

You can really do, silly things and have crazy ideas and all this.

That's a trickster model, right? But as a result of your mistake, good things can happen.

Like every little hole that oozed sperm, right, from those balls as the bees were stinging them and they were trying to get away, gave rise to the Kalahari truffles.

Just spread them all over the place.

So there was that and then the other thing that was really, really clear to me is that the girls were learning that you share food, that's good.

You don't accuse people of not sharing or stealing or trying to rape you, because people in that society take that very seriously and it's usually a wrong accusation, at least in that society.

Is it's, it's not the right way to deal with each other as, for men to deal with women and vice versa.

So God didn't even know how to, the first thing about falling in love or wanting sex, God was so ignorant, he completely screwed up and got his balls chopped off.

So the children were learning that and they were also learning that you don't rape women or they'll chop off your balls.

you don't, even God can't do that.

Now this is a very, very different message from the story of little Virgin Mary who gets knocked up by God and then is informed by his lieutenant, some angel he sends down to tell her to go ahead, she's going to have this baby and it's going to save the world and everything will be fine.

excuse me, but as far as I'm concerned, Virgin Mary should have just done what this little story told, and then we wouldn't be I don't know.

The idea of God the Father impregnating a teenager without her knowledge and then getting her to go along with it and marry some other guy so that the, and all of this is so sick compared to the story I just told.

I'm sorry.

But, it's such a different view of the autonomy and rights of both young people, of both men and women, to interact as individuals and not on the basis of domination and subjugation, So to me, that story says a lot about that kind of culture, And the hunting interviews, frankly, with the girls and the boys, the men and the women, in older age groups also taught me that, it's not a matter of domination.

The choices that people make in that environment are practical and logical and ecologically sound and that was what I learned.

division of labor is a way of expressing it that doesn't even come close to the original form that it took.

if you think, for instance, of collecting clams along a seashore, this is something women could do with predictable results.

They could also manage clam beds and things like that, or oyster beds.

I don't know which one they would be, or other kinds of shellfish.

There would be other kinds of activities where women could participate, for instance, in blind hunting, where you're driving animals towards a hidden location.

This is the technique most often used with migratory animals that are moving in big birds.

The women participate quite happily in driving, in driving the animals towards a few concealed hunters.

But It's not a division of labour based on an idea of 1 sex being superior.

Okay and I think that's really important.

Does that satisfy you, Chris?

Chris Knight: More than satisfying.

It's the telling of a story and probably the best story I've heard in a long time.

Thank you so much.

Absolutely marvelous...

Camilla Power: It's an incredible story.

Helga, can you say more about the young hunters and Issues like bride service, are young men coming into the girls' camp and then kind of learning to hunt with that camp? Yeah, to some extent...

Helga Vierich: Let's put it this way, bride service, it's made it makes it seem like such an institutionalization, right? But in fact, what I saw was that the people who had the most interconnections, who had a lot of social networks and so on, both male and female, marriage into their kind of circle was very desired.

Okay and some of them were, had all these interconnections because they were, very reliable hunters.

as you get older, a man of, 60, 70, who's who's got a hunting kill rate of like one every chicken hunt, that that's going to be a camp, where you're going to learn A lot.

It's going to be a camp where there's going to be a lot of a lot more regular meat supply.

Kids are going to be healthier and it's going to be a bigger camp because everybody wants to learn from them and live live there, right? So you get these kind of network hubs and they're not all men, by any means, but in a case like that, the daughters of such a person will be magnets of young men who want to be involved in that and all their parents too, because the thing is that if you have a charismatic, diligent, generous, diplomatic courageous person who's really learned how to hunt well and the same is true of anybody who's really learned how to heal well, or somebody who's a tremendous creator of new music, by the way.

But anyway, in the case of a hunter, his daughters will attract suitors in part because they want to be in his camp.

Okay and Malapai, the young lady in the middle of that picture that you posted, she actually got married before I left to a young man called Sitle, who was from the, he was from a group of camps near the borehole and he, given, the paucity of game and all the problems of trying to hunt near the borehole, he had never learned to hunt and he idealized it.

the life of the hunter-gatherer, also, he's sick today.

death of the racism from, the Bantu-speaking people there and he focused on her, they fell in love, they got married, and here he was in camp.

Okay and she was really disappointed because she really liked the fact that he had access to the borehole and all the radio music and the goomba goomba dancing and everything and she thought by marrying him, she would have more access to all this exciting outside world.

Well, where he just wanted to get away from it.

But anyway, so there's that.

But one of the main reasons he was there was because he wanted to learn from her father.

Her father being the fellow who said that about the chicken, right? Did I ever have a chicken? Okay.

So hunting, being an expert hunter was to some extent a statement of ethnic identity.

Just as being a knowledgeable gatherer was a statement of ethnic identity and the wild foods and I've written a little paper on this somewhere in the past.

It it hardens, as it were, the differences between ethnic groups when you get an ethnic boundary emerging like that and so this marriage that I saw was part of that phenomenon.

Now, of course, in other places, I saw marriages take place and almost invariably, the young couple would reside with that girl's parents.

Now, I don't know if you want to call this bride service or not.

Most of it was due to the fact that young women, what they told me was they wanted to be near their mothers during the early years because when they had babies, they needed the support and I'll tell you, I mean, I did extensive genealogies in every camp I was ever in and what I found was it was just as frequent under the such circumstances to have the young man's parents living in the same camp for a while anyways after the marriage and even grandparents and friends of both sides and people would be coming and going and the camp would disperse and it would regroup in other ways.

But what would tend to stay together for the first few years was that girl and her mother.

Okay, and the husbands they were attached to.

So I don't know if you want to call the husband that the young woman was attached to as performing bride service.

I know that's how it was described in the literature and the idea being that what he was now hunting with her father for the household and their households for a long time were somewhat contiguous, but he wasn't doing any service.

He was married to her now.

He was part of their household and gradually, as he learned to hunt better, if like in the case of Cetla, he really needed to learn to hunt, that household began to think, the young household began to see itself as potentially what's the word that's sometimes used? Neo-local.

In other words, to just go and visit friends somewhere, to go stay with, some uncle that neither of them had seen, for a long time, or just to, go visit other people and spend, four or six weeks living in their camping party.

But by that time, they would have had one or two little children.

They'd want to show these children to various relatives and quite often, they would move the furthest.

In other words, they had distant friends and relatives.

In the case of Tsitla, this young man, he was only 1/4 qua.

His mother had been a concubine of a Bakalahari man in that, in that settlement.

So, he grew up basically as a, as a mixed blood, but looked down on by everybody because he was just, he was, he was not the same.

Okay and that's part of the reason, the racism.

That's one of the reasons he wanted to leave.

But his mother's, I can't remember if it's his mother's father or his mother's mother, but had been okay and they had a periodically visited that borehole to visit that young woman living there and so he missed, he wanted to present their, his young children and his new wife to them and just before I left, the two of them with their little child, plus his, her parents came along too, were headed for a place called Tamo, which is in the very southern edge of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve.

It's a community.

Okay and that's when I actually began to realize that a lot of these language groups, they're not unilingual.

they all spoke each other's language to some extent.

They had friendships and to some extent a certain amount of intermarriage.

My estimates were about 2% per generation of all marriages were between different language groups.

So this meant that the networks spread all across the Kalahari from this one little group into, regions hundreds of miles away and it meant too that they could in a sense, visit these other areas.

There wasn't this an agonistic boundary.

It wasn't us, them or anything like that.

All they had to do was show up with the name who they were and who their relatives were and somebody said, oh, I know him.

He's about, he's camped, a day away from here.

Your friend.

Yeah, I remember that and you'd be taken on trust.

That's how the networking works, And the annual assemblages where these different language groups get together are times when these children form these friendships and they last a lifetime, And even if you only get to visit your friend from childhood, maybe three or four times every decade, it still counts.

We do it too.

What do you think, our visiting and everything else, visiting relatives, we visit friends, what do you think our conferences are? Our academic conferences, those are all part of the same kind of networking system.

Anyway, somebody else had a question, I think...

Chris Knight: Just on bride service. So, I think some of us in RAG, although we know that all these concepts are completely useless and inappropriate, some of us actually quite like bride service as opposed to the idea of weddings and marriage because it's important to stress that you don't have a wedding and thereafter the man has conjugal rights in his wife.

Like she can't say no from that point onwards.

So I just perhaps, would you just say a little bit about because even the word wife and husband or weddings or marriages and stuff, obviously all these are pretty much as useless as the other concepts you've been discussing.

But could you just say a bit about what constitutes a wedding and what constitutes marriage and what kind of rights a man does have or doesn't have in the person that we overhear, according his wife?

Helga Vierich: Well, there's no real wedding. It's a coming together. She builds her own hut. She has already been in a relationship with this young man. They're clearly in love. The parents approve. His parents approve. They all come together in the same camp and they see this young couple enter their own hut and then usually the mother is really pleased because this means that this girl is going to get really serious about gathering and not lie around sleeping all day or visiting her pals in the next camping site.

For the young man, it's a point where he has to get really serious about becoming one of the men and learning to hunt properly, it's the initiation. It's like a, you're an adult now kind of thing. You can, you got to try to be an adult now.

In a sense, I think when hunter-gatherers were first studied, when the first ethnography was done, as Chris just pointed out, terminology was applied that formalized what we saw, right? But I think the main purpose of a wedding, a formalized marriage, in subsequent societies has to do with the rights to claim that any children that are born for your own lineage and hunter-gatherers don't have lineages, by and large.

I mean, I know the Northwest Coast ones seem to have a kind of incipient system and so on, but they're not tribal, okay, in the sense of having, lineages and senior headmen and people who can be in charge of things and who have to somehow assemble task forces from, the young people within the lineage to get things done.

That kind of becomes a necessary form of social organization when you have much, much more work that has to be done in groups.

And, forming a temporary task force to drive game or something, or to undertake a group hunt, that doesn't necessarily produce a permanent leader.

It's just the best person for the job.

I mean, I know that the best tracker always took over the tracking.

It was understood, and everybody else was closely watching what he was doing and there were all kinds of people who were acknowledged to be the authorities, the people who knew the most about something like this lady who knew all about giraffes.

Okay and people defer to it because most people are not that interested in giraffes or, the minutiae of how to get an arrow straight.

There was a guy that everybody really liked to get digging sticks from because he had the technique down really, really well about how long to leave it in the coals to make it hard and then to sharpen it really well and he selected the best wood and on and on, and everybody could make a digging stick, but digging stick from him, if you could get one from him as a gift, that was a big deal.

So, and people would actually go to watch him make his tools because he was the expert.

One of the things that really bothers me about recent writings, on, the transition to farming, all the rest of it, is that the idea is that individualism and specialization emerged after.

it didn't.

It didn't.

I mean, hunter-gatherers even have hobbies.

There are people who like watching birds and they've, they've looked at the minuta of all the differences and they worry about their...

This is human.

This isn't this isn't something, individualism isn't something that emerged when we became members of state societies or agricultural communities or anything like that.

So anyway, that's good.

Did somebody somebody speaking? Sorry...

Chris Knight: We've got Jerome here.

We've got a lot of people here who need to...

Helga Vierich: Yeah...

Chris Knight: Any other questions?

Helga Vierich: Is that Denise Arnold?

Chris Knight: Denise Arnold...

Camilla Power: It is Denise Arnold, yes and Jerome, you want to say something? And then William...

Jerome Lewis: Yes.

Well, thank you so much for that, Helga.

Lovely to see you again after a few years...

Helga Vierich: Yeah, it's been since Vienna, right? Yeah...

Jerome Lewis: That's right, yeah and that was really so nice to get your explanation of the, what's often called paracultivation, this gentle encouragement of the wild resources of a landscape and how human beings enhance these resources, not just for themselves, but of course, every other animal that enjoys those resources too and I just, have you published anything on that?

Helga Vierich: Well, I'm trying to.

In fact, I sent something to The journal, what's it called now? It used to be before farming and I sent something to the Journal of Human Evolution and Ecology and I got turned down.

I don't know, I could send it around to you guys if anybody wants to criticize some comments.

Jerome Lewis: Send it to me because I'm surprised we haven't received that at Hunter-Gatherer Research.

I'm one of the co-editors.

Please do send it.

I'd be very interested in publishing that.

I think it's very important...

Helga Vierich: Well, yeah, I think so too and I think part of the thing is maybe I'm too, I'm not academic enough in the way I describe it.

I just, I'm so tired of these dry abstracts and everything else.

I'm not really good at that.

But the other thing I think is that in the intervening years since Vienna, I have actually been, where I presented all that stuff on networking and dependency ratios and so on, which I didn't even talk about here now.

But since then, so much more material has come out on the use of fire ecology, the use of replanting, the whole discovery that the Amazon forest is basically a man-made food forest and I think that started long before people were using slash and burn there.

the fact that Australian hunter-gatherers had actually managed wildfires there for centuries, or thousands and thousands of years, in a way that prevented massive forest loss and die-off, The fact that the very similar information on ecological engineering exists worldwide, California, Northern Alberta, along the East Coast and so on and it's not just engineering using fire ecology, it's management of hydrology, to keep the wild fish populations up.

It's management of other species like wolves.

why, what I touched on before, why not? eat wolves and lions in the Kalahari because they keep us healthy.

They keep the game healthy.

that awareness is still not penetrating.

I saw a kind of a horrifying, to me, report on the Hadza recently.

It was on YouTube.

It was something about wild and free.

I can send you the link and this guy is interviewing these young Hadza guys on what's important and how they hunt and I found out from that, they were hunting at night with dogs and spears, and they were hunting baboons.

Baboons! The Bushmen would be horrified by that.

They said, that's okay, eating people and actually, I mean, that may be the way that they understand it...

Camilla Power: As relatives...

Helga Vierich: Yeah and the thing is that must be new.

But anyway, I mean, it's like a taboo.

that probably kept people healthy because the diseases carried by wild primates are much more easily transmittable to humans and you really don't want to kill those animals and touch them and get close to them.

Like look at Ebola.

Where did that come from? You know? I mean, so the fact that they're hunting baboons, that they're killing and eating anything, that they're no longer hunting with bows and arrows much, like nothing, subtle.

nothing involving distance hunting...

Camilla Power: That would be...

Helga Vierich: That really worried me...

Camilla Power: That would be quite recent that.

Yeah, because they were certainly hunting poisoned arrows within 10 years ago...

Helga Vierich: I know, I was really horrified.

Anyway, the thing is that pattern that I saw, there's a little YouTube video on it, a couple of them that he did actually, and presented there.

The pattern of hunting with dogs and spears at night, right? That was emerging in places very close to the Bantu settlements and that's because the game had a very big flight distance there, and they had to kill anything they could.

most of the really good game was gone.

The animals had far too much fear of humans to be approached to get them with a poison arrow and hunt them quietly.

In fact, you couldn't get them to approach them at night in daytime at all, because the flight distance was so huge and the only quad that I spoke to who had this problem and were starting to hunt with dogs and spears were the ones right near the Bantu settlements.

who had, the people of the Qatlang district and some of the people down in the western Kwinang who were in areas long settled by Bakalahadi and they had kind of given up with their proper hunting methods because the animals' behaviour had changed.

it takes, the estimate now is between 7 and 12 generations in a population of wild animals is required to eliminate the fear of a certain predator, And the best estimation, the best illustration that I can give you of how that works is what happens in national parks.

You've all been to a national park, right? A place where, wild animals are still living and what happens there, I don't know, Algonquin Park, Banff, Yellowstone, is that the visitors come and the animals just walk right by them.

In fact, they come up for potato chips and that becomes a danger.

the bison are no longer afraid of people.

The elk are, woppity are sleeping all over the golf course and people can't play their games.

I've been to these places, Jasper and Banff.

It's a real problem.

That means the animals, animals have a culture and within that culture, they pass on to each new generation what critters you have to be afraid of, what things you must be afraid of and if they go for many, many generations without any attacks by humans, humans are fine.

Humans are fine.

Don't worry about the humans.

In fact, they'll give you food.

That's what's told of these young animals and I think our original hunting and gathering system was developed including the fire ecology and all the replanting and everything else, at a time when most game populations were extremely endangered.

there were mega droughts in Central Africa, four or five times that were so severe that like Lake Malawi was evaporated.

Like it was like a muddy little death canyon or something, it was almost gone.

That's how bad these droughts were.

Can you imagine what the fires were like? They had to defend themselves.

The people had to develop ways of preventing these wildfires from overcoming them in whatever refuge areas they were able to retreat to, where there was still an ecosystem to support them and of course, they didn't just go there by themselves.

All of the game animals and the types of plants that were critical to their survival.

Those were right there in these refuge areas with them and at that point, if you start, going after a herd of gazelle or duikers or elephants or anything else with a spear with a bunch of guys, right, those animals are going to disappear.

you can't hunt animals in a small contained area.

with great frequency, loudly and obviously, because anybody who survives that particular hunting experience is going to be really frightened every time they see humans after that, right? And predator fear, we now know, there's data, there's quite good data on this, can actually interfere with the reproductive abilities of animals.

Animals will abandon their young.

Birds will just not even have nests.

They'll just, drop eggs everywhere.

They won't even They won't even feed their young if they have any and pregnancies will end in abortions, in wild game animals, much more frequently where there's enormous fear of hunting.

Okay, so the keystone role of the human as a hunter in the African environment, right, was probably good in the same sense that the keystone role of wolves in Yellowstone, which has now been well documented, restoring them to Yellowstone caused a change in behaviour of the animals.

They didn't overgraze.

Fear of the hunter meant that they moved differently and the whole ecosystem, in a sense, revived because, the areas near rivers and were no longer overgrazed, and so on.

Well, I'm sure the humans worked in a very similar way.

They were added to a suite of predators.

But in addition to that, they weren't just hunters, as I've just explained.

Most of what they did was was enriching and diversifying the ecosystem.

They created hotspots of plant growth and a lot of the material that they were doing, and this is probably through for millions of years, was beneficial and that's, I think, one of the reasons why, humanity evolved as a successful species.

It wasn't just the man, the hunter role.

It wasn't just the keystone hunter role.

It was the ecological engineering role and at the point where we had these these mega droughts in Africa, in Central Africa, and people were confined to small refuge areas with the whole viable ecosystem that they were dependent on, they had to learn to look after that ecosystem and the animals within it and one of the things they learned was to reduce predator fear if they could and you only do that by not appearing to be hunting them.

Okay and so you learn to hunt very, very quietly, little bows and arrows, something which the rest of the herd won't even remember.

And, that way you reduce predator fear, you reduce stress.

Sometimes by using fire ecology, you prevent wildfires.

So everything they were doing was conserving and preserving those ecosystems and until we understand this as a culture, Western civilization as a culture, we will not stop doing the opposite, logging, overfishing, destroying wildlife everywhere we find it, all the poisons that we spread out.

If we're going to save humanity, the hunter-gatherers are the key...

Jerome Lewis: Yes.

Thank you.

I have one question, Helga, but I'll leave that because I see other people have got questions and I'll come back to it later.

But thank you very much...

Camilla Power: So, William and then Denise, and then we'll come back to Jerome...

Helga Vierich: OK.

William.

Yes...

William: Hi, yes.

I had a.

Is there any information on two-spirits there, like whether men would stay with the women and women would go with the men?

Helga Vierich: You mean homosexuality and transsexuality?

William: Well, yeah, that's if you want to reduce two-spirit to that, yeah...

Helga Vierich: Sure.

In fact, such people were treasured.

I'll tell you why.

Here's a case.

I mean, I actually observed this.

There's these two men who formed a household together.

I assumed, I mean, nobody ever said anything and I didn't want to give offense or appear too inquisitive.

I've never come out, I mean, under the same cross.

Anyway, they were older guys and everybody adored having them in their camp.

Why? Because they were both decent hunters.

They were good storytellers.

No one was a bit of a, he could do some good healing as well.

But they were really decent hunters.

They were older.

They'd had experience.

They dropped the ratio of no show hunts to successful hunts in the camp quite a bit.

In other words, they increased the supply of meat to the whole camp because they had no other dependents except each other, right? And so, the fact that you have the occasional gay couple in a hunter-gatherer camp is such a benefit to the meat supply and, the level of security within the whole camp that, as far as I can tell, I mean, I think this was actually selected for, in a way what I mean? I don't think it was certainly not seen as something negative.

Now, Two-Spirit, I'm not sure about.

I do know that one of the healers, one of the healers, I always thought he was really a woman, but, it was accepted as a man and everything else.

Of course, there would be no question of, medical intervention or operations or hormone therapy or anything.

It was just somebody who genuinely was to my mind, neither male or female, but tended to adopt A male role and that was because that person was a healer.

In other, in other contexts, and I only met this person twice in the whole time I was in the field, because they didn't live with the group, the local band conglomeration that I was spending most of my time in.

They were actually not hunting.

They were gathering with the women.

So I'm kind of assuming that this was, this person had grown up as a female, treated as a female child and identified that way to a point.

But then as they became really, really interested in healing, it was part of an identity that was generally considered male or something.

I just don't know what to put of it.

But certainly that person was not subject to any prejudice that I, that I could see. Great.

Does that answer your question?

William: Yes, it does.

Thank you and I had so many more too, because, I live in Northern California and you didn't talk on the fire thing...

Helga Vierich: Oh yeah, no, I know.

I was trying to subdue myself and not talk about too many different subjects and Denise, too.

Thank you...

Camilla Power: I was really fascinated by your remarks about the feliners, like the hunter par excellence...

Helga Vierich: And the way that people, the hunters themselves, treated felines.

What other kind of things did they do in their relationship with felines? And when they had a kill, did they leave an offering of a part of the kill for the felines? Oh, well, if it was a lion kill, I only saw this once, but at a lion kill, they chased the lions away, right? And then they took a haunch, and then they left the rest for the lions.

Because, that wasn't, it wasn't fair to take the whole thing, but there was, the haunch was just too tempting, I guess.

They came home and everybody got a piece of it.

was a lot of meat on it.

was, I can't remember if it was a hartebeest or a wildebeest, but, they, but the other thing is, I don't know if you ever saw this, but there was, there were conferences, this one was held in Panama, of elders from various, tribal and band level societies and one of the elders came from a part of the Kalahari and he recounts this thing about just before leaving, just before leaving for the conference, he was, he came out of his hut and he was kind of walking around and he walked around a bush and there was a lioness sitting there and he said, 'I looked at her, she looked at me', he made some gesture of respect and then he just walked quietly on and then he talks about how his people do not see the lions as dangerous or bad.

They see them as kinsmen...

I can send you that report.

But that's definitely what I found.

Like I know that the qua told me after seeing this body compound, they told me that they were horrified by what they saw and what was in the pictures? It was a picture of a lion's head that had been cooked being eaten by a Bakalahati man and his, I guess he had a couple of other people around him and he was sharing with them

and they just said this was completely unconscionable, But of course, the Bakalahati have cattle and sometimes lions do attack people and so I assume this animal was shot by one of the, one of the men in the group and they decided to eat it rather than just let it lie their waste.

I don't know what the details were, but I know that the reaction that I got when I showed people this picture was one of real disgust.

I don't know if that helps, but anyway, most of the time, leopards, oh, the leopard at my camp, I had a leopard that when I had a little camp next to Tuate's camp, right? And for a couple of nights in a row, I heard this sound, right? And I realized it was a leopard walking around the camp.

It was curious, right? And I did a very foolish thing, I guess.

I walked on the inside and I went back at it.

I was kind of playing with it.

I don't know what I was thinking, but it worked and the leopard eventually left and everybody, everybody was very, very amused by this.

the leopard was not seen as a danger to either myself or the other group.

Now, perhaps if I had been more frightened or if I'd been, made hysterical by it or tried to shoot it or something, the leopard would have thought again about how to interact with humans.

I don't know.

But I will tell you one thing.

There was a big cobra.

near the camp where I originally was staying, right? And when I was setting up my camp, one of the women came over and she said she was going to introduce me.

Okay and she walked over and we walked around for a while.

She was looking and looking, and we finally saw the cobra and it was just relaxing.

it was just lying, under the branches of a tree and she said, no, you just have to watch this.

You don't want to step on this.

Okay and I said, my God.

Okay, so you know about the snake.

Thank you for telling me why camp near it.

She said, oh, no, it's very helpful because it cuts down on all the vermin.

In other words, mice and other little things that come and gnaw the, come around the camp and it deters those.

I had no idea.

So if that helps at all.

The other thing, come to think of it that that strikes me about the way hunter-gatherer literature is often viewed is that people, you see these statements all the time that people couldn't afford to settle down.

They couldn't stay in one place because the food wasn't enough and all this kind of stuff.

That's not what I was told at all.

Nobody left because there was no food, ever.

Not if it was a intact ecosystem that they were in.

They left because they had to go to a party or somebody's christening or they had to go visit a friend or they promised somebody else to camp with them.

They had social engagements.

It wasn't hunger and it wasn't even that the local food supply was gone, right? There was plenty, I mean, I was always, I was sometimes surprised when people would suddenly decamp, and because then I'd have to pack up and go along, right? But here's the thing, One of the reasons they gave, now this is kind of creepy, but anyway, here we go.

One of the main reasons they gave, and also one of the reasons why they really, really did not like settlements, the Kalahati settlements and the settled borehole areas, was because of ticks, fleas, mites, and other vermin that built up there.

Right.

Okay and I can speak from personal experience because when I was first in the field, a very kind Bakalahadi headman when I was, interviewing, because I did all these interviews with the Bakalahadi as well, offered me a hut for the night.

Okay and unwisely, I said, how nice, how kind and at that point, it was early on in my field work and SG, my guide, interpreter, he opted to sleep in the truck, right? And he said, oh, you go, we'd always trade off.

I slept not at all because I was so covered in flea bites and mites and I don't know what else was biting me all night.

I would never, ever do that again.

You know? And I think one of the things that you have to remember is that we settled humans, with our civilization and everything else, long history, towns and settled houses and permanent fixtures and all the rest of it.

I think we tend to elevate that to a status where we assume that human beings have always wanted to live like this and I frankly doubt that.

I think if you have a choice, you just go camping and you move frequently and you visit people all over the landscape and you have your whole garden around you and you just, you're not going to worry about food or anything like that.

You spend your whole life camping.

It's fabulous.

What do we do when we're on vacation? We go camping.

A lot of us anyways, and if we don't go camping, then we go visit friends and relatives.

We fly all over the world to keep up our contacts and we go to conferences, right? Well, they get to do that without, the airplanes and all the rest of it.

But they also don't have the housework.

Trust me, I have six huge dogs now, Wolfhound crosses.

The housework.

The dusted for...

I sometimes said, oh, funny, I was a hunter-gatherer.

I could just move away with dogs and I wouldn't have to use the vacuum cleaner and the broom so much.

You think it's a lot of work to be a sedentary person.

It's a lot of work, a lot more work to be a farmer.

Huge amount of work.

Jerome Lewis: My question really is to return to the first thing that you talked about, which is this burial.

of a young girl with her hunting equipment in South America.

Now, the criticism that people like me level against those kinds of extrapolations is that you have one single case and then you suddenly extrapolate to a whole hypothesis of, women being these big game hunters or whatever it is that those archaeologists are saying.

But, at the same hand, on the same in the same way, they criticized people like me for elaborating from the basis of extant living hunter-gatherers and their life ways to critique their assumptions about the past and I just wondered how you deal with that situation in the sense that you have just offered us a very vivid account of how some people engage and live with their environments as a counter to the assumption that women would have been hunters in the past.

So I just wondered, in terms of the theory behind what you're saying, how can you justify critiquing their assumptions through the examples given by living people?

Helga Vierich: Okay.

Well, I didn't emphasize it perhaps enough that my critique of that series of speculations that resulted from that, the finding of that girl, that critique arises from economic analysis.

Hunting and gathering is an economy.

It's an economic system.

In other words, it's a particular, pardon me, it's a particular system of interacting with a local ecosystem and it involves the learning of particular skills, certain practices that lead to a sustainable interaction with that ecosystem.

Sorry, I don't know what I've got.

I must have got a frog in my throat and the analysis of it as an economy means that Worldwide, if we look at every single hunting and gathering ethnography that's been done, there are certain consistent elements.

Okay and the fire ecology, the ecological engineering is one of those consistent elements that's becoming more obvious all the time.

The Organization, the social organization that tends to in more 100.

that in particular, the bilateral kinship system network internal logic of the society that follows from that kind of an economy and I don't think in spite of, all the stuff that's been, in spite of all of the objections to this more consistent picture of what makes a hunter-gatherer economy work, I think that's stood the test of time.

I mean, how long have we been studying hunter-gatherers? And the, The essential aspects of it, the fact that it is not associated with starvation, generally, it's not associated with a lot of agonistic behavior because diplomacy and visiting and exchange of information is a far better survival strategy in an economy like that than agonistic encounters, certainly between bands.

You don't see anything like that happening between bands.

OK.

These kind of consistencies, I think, are important and the fact is that I can see two major areas where people are trying to create Another, this one about the labour, which is the one we talk about, right? The other one is the political, egalitarian, they're widely, that there's nobody's going to go hungry if they're in a hunter camp, in a hunter-gatherer society, being attacked right now...

I actually, after my experience in the went, went home and wrote my thesis up and everything else.

But I was hunted by the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics and I, so I decided to take that job because they wanted to send me to West Africa and they wanted to send me to West Africa, where I would be staying in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, mostly in Burkina Faso, and studying in detail the economy of past They were mostly horticulturalists, the farming people, and the pastoralists were classic, mobile pastoralists, at least traditionally and what I wanted to understand was two things.

One is, did ecological engineering continue? Was it consistent with these other economies? Okay, was I gonna be able to find evidence of, some kind of understanding of fire ecology, understanding of creating mosaics, was the pastoral system creating ecological hotspots, which is one of my interests and with pastoralists, I didn't get to do that much research, but I was gratified to see sometime about a year and a half or two years ago, a young woman out of Washington University reported on the fact that in the Serengeti, where pastoralists had been, creating temporary camps for thousands of years, that they were creating ecological hotspots because of the manure, concentrated manure of the animals, but probably also for the same things that I was describing among the hunter-gatherers.

In other words, you're bringing a lot of food there, spitting out seeds and all the rest of it, right? I mean, think about what humans do.

We're A provisioning primate.

We have a base camp, even if the base camp is New York City, right? And what we do is we concentrate resources in these places and provision our dependents.

As a result, we produce particularly in these other economies, proliferations of, wild and now domestic plant varieties, animal varieties, that were the ones we use the most.

So we've actually been, I think, in the, even in tribal economies, we've been able to produce sustainable systems of economic, behavior interacting with ecosystems in a positive way that creates long-term sustainability and also preserves the diversity of the wild resources, the wild animal and plant resources and so I would extend, I would

extend that understanding to all what we call indigenous people worldwide, not just hunter-gatherers.

their systems of economic action within those ecosystems are not universally destructive.

In fact, they're the opposite and if we don't, as anthropologists, if we don't get that message across soon, I don't know what's going to happen to us as a species.

That worries me...

Jerome Lewis: Thank you, Helen...

Chris Knight: I'm just so glad that I kind of came in from the side and asked you about God's testicles and I've got another question, which also is kind of coming from.

So it's about your experience of how time is measured and how future occasions are specified.

So I'm thinking about the sun and the moon, of course, but in particular, when you're talking about the lions, I'm sure you're aware of the extraordinary, marvellous descriptions by Elizabeth Marshall Thomas of the, what she calls the shift system between the lions and the humans, where the lions have the night and the humans have the day and of course, it then makes a very big difference whether the night is a full moon or the night is a dark moon and I just, I mean, just, I'm just hoping you will add to my fascination with those questions.

Any ideas? Any anecdotes?

Helga Vierich: Yeah, night and day.

Well, The thing is, nighttime, this is a bit of a digression from what you were saying, but one of the things that I did learn right towards the end of my field work was how incredibly detailed the memorization of nighttime constellations was.

How much attention was paid to kind of predicting, everybody of course knows night, day, seasonal changes, everything is predictable and so on.

They were interested in predicting, eclipses just like everybody else.

But what really got me was the fact that I had paid no attention to night sky as a really important navigational tool.

constellations and so on and what got me to understand this was just before I left, a number of the people, mostly kids, gave me ostrich eggs.

Okay and these are decorated.

I don't know if they're decorated in other parts of the Kalahari.

I understood that they probably aren't, but they had always decorated their eggs.

It was mostly kids doing etchings and so I saw this one egg, and I wish I could hold it out for you, but I donated them all to the University Archaeology Lab here at the University of Alberta.

But there was what looked like a snake on the egg and I said, oh, is this, and I asked if it was that cobra.

kind of thing and the little kid looked at me and he said, no, it has nothing to do with earthly things.

it has nothing to do with the common things and at night, and then he pointed at the constellation Hydra.

That's what it was and a lot of these designs that they were putting on these eggs were constellations.

Some of them were representations of animals, but they were constellations.

They were using stories about, various events in a kind of mythological sense to help the kids remember these constellations and they were practicing them all the time.

You do by drawing and sound.

But I sometimes...

You're thinking in terms of a numerical sense or an awareness of recording time and changes in time, being aware of the night sky, being aware of the movement of constellations, being aware of, being able to predict these things, that is definitely highly developed and it's so far pretty much overlooked in a way and it kind of bothers me that, we've had so many other things take precedence when we study hunter-gatherers.

Just a very survival now is in question and we haven't, we haven't even, as far as I'm concerned, scratched the surface of their science...

Chris Knight: Thank you very much...

William: Quick observation more than a question, but I would like to see if Helga has an answer.

I have heard that God's Ball stories before.

I read it somewhere and I can't remember, the most likely place I read it was there's a big collection that was done in the late 1800s, I think it was, of South African stories among the Bushmen...

Helga Vierich: Oh, well, I'm sure it's very widespread.

They didn't invent it for my benefit...

William: The more interesting thing is what my first inclination was that I read it in the Raw and the Cook, Levy Strauss.

This would mean it's all the way over here, which means it's one of those really old stories...

Helga Vierich: Well, there are a lot.

I should talk to Megan Beasley more about this because my collection of mythology was very limited.

It wasn't what I was focused on.

But I have a couple of other stories, one in particular, which I call the, what would it called, the, The poisonous farts.

The story of the poisonous farts, which is a story about God coming to Earth to rectify a problem.

Oh, the first part of the story is called the Buffalo Wife and the poisonous farts, okay, which is even more confusing for you, I'm sure.

But Megan has a very similar story from, 1000 miles away, where instead of a buffalo wife, it's an elephant wife and I suspect that this story of a human who mates with

an animal, marries, falls in love with an animal, and then has to be pulled back from that error.

It's very, very widespread.

the mermaid story comes from this, I think.

The story in Scotland about selkies, the sea lions that come into human society is a beautiful, beautiful young woman and Many, many other stories that indicate that the tie between humans and animals is very, very intimate, intimate enough that we can, in a sense, almost see kinship with them, intermarrying with them, and that it's only because of God's interrupt, the deities' rules and interruptions that we pulled back and children are pulled back.

There's a term for it in a sense.

I think it's biophilia, the love of life, the love of living things and this is so critical to the way that humanity functions.

I mean, why do we have house plants?

Camilla Power: I just heard from Jerome about you've got rabbits...

Helga Vierich: Yeah, So, the thing is, we respond, every little child responds at first with wonder and joy, even at the sight of, like ants, little critters, but we just adore living things, especially baby things, right? And most of the people I know don't even think about this.

Why do we have gardens? Why do we bring flowers? I mean, really, the genitals of plants when we go to a funeral.

I mean, just think about it.

But it's biophilia.

It's like, these are the most extraordinary representative tokens that nature provides us.

So the love of the natural world, I think, is something that we have to be taught to differentiate ourselves, but also to be, respectful to it and I see this in a lot of mythology, Anyway, I'm talking too much.

Maybe you could have me back another time for anything we've missed today...

Camilla Power: I think we will.

Yeah, it's been a fantastic talk and You've covered so many things and got so many people enthralled and without PowerPoint is absolutely wonderful to just hear people talking.

It's so nice.

So yeah, we're definitely, everyone's very, very thankful for it.

We'll definitely want to come, we want you to come back and hear some more about it all.

So thank you so much, Helga...

Helga Vierich: Okay, you're welcome...

Camilla Power: It's been a fascinating insight.

So many things come up that we can follow up.

The Ted K Archive

Helga Vierich

'Hunting is boring and unreliable. Let the men do it!'

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