

The Elephant Girl and the Buffalo Wife (Seminar)

San Narratives, Exegesis, and Evolution

Megan Biesele

November 29, 2022

Megan starts with Helga Vierich's compelling retelling to the R.A.G. of a Buffalo Wife story she heard from Kua San, northeastern Botswana, in the 1970s. Helga's story eerily echoes those Megan recorded in northwestern Botswana, also in the 1970s, of the Ju|'hoan Elephant Girl. Both address basic problems of life (e.g. that people's food prominently includes sentient beings). But her retold version appears to answer questions posed by seeming "gaps", puzzling to a western audience, in versions Megan collected.

Helga and Megan have since discussed differences between their field conditions of recording, audience, and translation. These help us understand why her version supplies what might be called an "exegesis" of the tale, whereas Megan's do not. Conclusion: as in biological evolution, each version is a random existential experiment in making sense for one audience in one place and moment in time.

For Helga Vierich's Buffalo Wife talk:
<https://vimeo.com/703668006>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6d_S6BUxAWw

Well tonight it's gonna be a highlight of this term, if not this year. It's a great honor.

A fantastic privilege to have Megan's Beasley talking to us tonight.

Megan is a pioneering Anthropologist work has worked all her life really with with the Jew classy Bushman the Kalahari.

She joined the Harvard Kalahari Bushman group in well, she went into the field in 1970. So that's 53 years ago.

She was the only member of the group this was the group headed up was initiated by Richard Lee.

She was the only member really dedicated.

to the classic ideational concerns of socio-cultural anthropology Everyone else was in a sense.

measuring and Counting building and expanding on Richard Lee's work in the mid 60s.

Pat Draper and Henry harpending gave an introduction to the juhual language But it was Homer of Dolby who acted as her language teacher for the first few years and then translator.

interpreter with other languages Megan submitted her thesis folklore and ritual of kung hunter-gatherers at the end of 1974.

Was to take almost 20 years for this to be transformed into a book.

notice now a classic women like meat the folklore and foraging ideology the Juan I was in South Africa at this University.

When David Lewis Williams organized the book's lawn.

In 1993 it being a jointed publication between Indiana and Vicks.

It was no accident that David had taken on this role.

Meghan had introduced into the juicy shortly after her thesis submission.

in 1975 and together they produced Eland hunting rituals among northern and southern sand groups.

striking similarities Which was to revolutionize our understanding of Bushman religion? Unfortunately, I was too wrapped up in my own obsessions looking and Counting pieces of occur in arcological assemblages to attend the book launch and it was to be another 20 years before we finally met.

the conference on Hunting together a studies Liverpool her talk tonight.

is called the elephant girl and the Buffalo wife San narratives exegesis and evolution Meghan starts with Helga verix compelling retelling to rag of the Buffalo Wild story. She heard from quasan in northeastern Botswana.

This was a story that this was a rag session about a year ago, I think And this was this was recorded like Megan's in the 1970s.

Helga's story eerily Echoes those of Meghan recorded in Northwestern Botswana at around the same time.

But the Jew one elephant girl.

both address basic problems one being that people's food from prominently includes sentient being but her retold version appears to answer questions posed by what look like gaps puzzling to Western audience in the versions Megan collected.

Elgar and Meghan have since discussed differences between their field conditions of recording audience and translation and these help us to understand why her version? Supplies what might be called an exegesis of the tale. Whereas Megan's don't does not.

the conclusion I think is that as in biological but as in biological evolution Each version is a random existential experiment in making sense for one audience in one place and Moment In Time.

So without any more well Plus on to Megan.

Thank you so much Ian. It's a Wonderful introduction and I'd like to thank the radical anthropology group for their invitation to participate in this marvelous series of talks that you have. I'm very selfishly glad to be here because to speak to this particular audience is a great privilege for me and I'm extremely interested to hear comments questions and perhaps even stories of One's Own similar experiences the way I've tentatively organized it is in two parts the first part to deal as as Ian said with Helga's story and comparing it with my story and drawing some conclusions from that then a discussion and after that a brief part two in which I intend to offer some comments on Graber and Wayne gross book The Dawn of everything as it relates to my presentation and maybe some last question and discussion time after that.

Well one big difference between me and Helga has to do with the Great Divide between the oral and the scribble worlds. Um, Helga lives not only professionally in the scribal world, but she is also a gifted oral Storyteller, and I'm not This I'm going

to be summarizing from transcriptions and translations that I and the should quad transcription group have labored over.

The Simplicity called me a paper person from the beginning a country and I readily accept the truth of theirs their assessment a conajua basically means illiterate person or a book person. But literally it says paper person.

In my career, I labored a lot with the kind of bubble that is circumscribed around illiterate person and trying to understand an oral tradition.

so I have fairly recently finished writing A Memoir of the process of permeating the walls of that bubble to to try to understand the oral tradition of the children's class and other other son.

This Memoir is called once upon a time is now and I wrote it about the first 18 months of my Kalahari fieldwork, which took place between 1970 and 72 and it was during that time period that I recorded most of the folktales in my collection.

Well for those who did not have the the wonderful chance of hearing Helga tell her story. I'm just going to summarize hers and then go on to summarize mine in comparison.

Helga tells the Buffalo wife's story with motifs and themes that include an uncanny younger brother Whose elder brother has mistakenly married a buffalo? And the younger brother appears as an embodiment of the Creator or of God.

Gets himself miraculously born by emerging from their mother's stomach so he can correct the mistake that his brother has made in marrying the buffalo.

He Journeys to the land of the Buffalo collecting wild foods and creating fire and cooked Foods along the way.

kills the wife and unborn child introduces the elder brother to the taste of cooked meat Meanwhile, the uterine fluid from the pregnant wife who has been murdered.

Goes back to the camp of the Buffaloes.

Alerting them to the fact of the murder.

Then the Buffaloes come to to avenge this murder.

the younger brother shelters his elder brother by causing a termite mound to open so he can go inside.

the younger brother The buff excuse me, the buffalo's learn of their mistake in marrying that their daughter to a human being this human being smells bad because he is eating meat and his poisonous farts kill the Buffalo Avengers and the brothers go back to their mother's camp.

The mother is shocked at first but soon learns to like the taste of cooked meat appreciate skin bags and knits so handily we have have an account of the origin of several enabling features of the so-called hunting Gathering adaptation.

interestingly Helga told me that in another version of this story.

It is not the farts that kill the kill the the Buffaloes but it is the the use of a horn. I'm not sure what kind of horn but I mentioned this because you will see that there's a parallel in the story that I'm going to that. I'm going to go through.

Before I start asking the questions that I asked Helga after I heard her version.

Margin Club version in which the animal wife ranges across characters including not only an elephant but the python girl the aardvark girl the Eland girl Echoes virtually all of the motifs in Helga story, but each variant contains not all of them but makes a coherent story emphasizing some of them.

However, none of them contains the degree of exegesis of the Sacred story.

Helga specifically asked for a sacred story contains that that exegesis that held a story does which led me to communicate with Helga since about last April about the conditions of her collection including the audience how the storytelling session was convened as much as possible about the use of translators Recording Technology possible pauses in the storytelling during which exegesis might have been offered for Helga's own benefit.

So there were fascinating similarities as well as differences in the ways that she and I worked and I was very struck by the way the exegesis her version offered seemed to fill in gaps in those I collected.

I was also struck by the similarity between her stories resolution of the human problem about food prominently including sentient beings that must be murdered prior to being eaten.

When Helga told her story I was of course immediately reminded of rasmussen's iglulic Inuit quote.

Life's greatest danger exists in the fact that man's food consists entirely of Souls.

Shivers your Timbers anyway the exegesis contain in Helga's retelling of the story which she got from ragai her Storyteller and informant suddenly seem to resolve enigmas that I had lived with for decades. Some of these were the identity of The Uncanny younger brother the the purpose and intent of his journey, but why had I never gotten the explanations that Helga had that allowed this convincing retelling that seemed to tie up all the Loose Ends basically the solution to the conundrum of how humans can consume meat despite animals having Souls.

My answer lies particularly in differences between the way I collected transcribed and translated the stories to render them in written rather than oral form and Helga's more immediate grasp of the meaning from the one spectacular story. She heard and wrote notes on.

I believe that the similarities and differences in our collecting can complement each other.

So absolutely no criticism is meant of Helga's approach my Approach was different because I was living in a basically scribal world when I suddenly landed in this oral world and didn't know how to deal with it until much later.

For one thing translation itself is always a form of exegesis.

Oral and written are our worlds apart in terms of experience and its presentation and then there are all sorts of picky little Western presentational choices that can intrude on even the intent of the way the story was told in the first place.

one of these is for instance in the choice of whether so Can be translated as a woman or girl or wife. This has a lot to do with the status of this character Buffalo wife versus

this elephant girl. These were choices. We made capitalizations of names presenting. The episodes are all run on together or as separate stories with separate titles, etc. Etc, etc.

um One of the things that Helga and I had in common though in our approach was that we convened our storytellers and their audiences around full stew pot which was key to setting the right atmosphere.

But Helga was a fully participating member of the audience and she was focused on the content of the story at the time.

Asking questions making full use of interpreters and included by the Storyteller among those For Whom the particular performance would need to be meaningful.

I in contrast.

Was busily focused on linguistic authenticity recording all the versions I could get without interrupting for explanations. Even before I understood the language fully enough to get the meaning and sometimes understanding even the basic action of the story only decades later.

My storytellers were telling their stories for their own people to hear and so my own participation was largely technical. Thus what often remained elusive for me in the stories was already richly allusive for this audiences motifs and themes for them who had heard different versions of these stories. So often in their lives that the last thing they needed was exegesis or even completeness in a variance set off a highly textured set of reverberations in the audience's minds and they were used a new by successive storytellers and their power lay in the stories not being openly didactic.

This is a very very important point.

Rather, they used their allusive power to inculcate strong messages rather as does a great inter-referential body of literature.

This this idea of comparing these this body of recordings to a body of literature was one of the ways that I as a paper person began to comprehend the great strength and power of the oral tradition. And also it's massive massive variability.

one of the other things halgun I discussed was the fact that Children, even though they may very well have heard the stories often in their lives already.

often appeared terrifically shocked and Elizabeth Marshall Thomas also read remarked on that the shock on the faces of the children when adults were doing really terrible dastardly deeds in the stories, but they're shock did not mean in my opinion that they that most of the children were hearing the stories for the first time instead the apparent shock. I believe came from the joy of hearing yet again a permutation of a shocking story that carried a Timeless incrementally learned message anyway, what child can we imagine who wants to hear a good story only once so both Haledon and I invited groups of people and we provided food.

In my case the idea to do this was inspired by Mel Connors and Nick Burton Jones's quote seminar method for obtaining information about animal behavior where they they brought groups of Elders together to tell hunting stories and to explore animal behavior knowledge in that way.

So I'm going to read you now.

My my summary of The Elephant girl story and I think that you will see.

Some of the great similarities with Helga's story. I'm reading out of a collection called Gentile folktales transcriptions and English translations that was published by me andersonquad transcription Group, which the the transcription group was was begun in 1992 and is still active today.

So the beautiful elephant girl.

The elephant girl's husband's younger brother was still in his mother's stomach when his older brother married the elephant girl.

After the marriage the elephant girl's husband brought her to his mother's Village to live and she gave birth to a daughter there, but there were no elderly people living at that Village. So the elephant girl and her husband planned to visit his older relatives at other villages to ask for gifts for the child.

The elephant girl planned to leave her daughter with a woman there while she and her husband went visiting.

The night before they were to leave the elephant girl and her husband slept at his mother's Village.

The mother's stomach grew and she was about to give birth.

In the morning her older son. The elephant girl's husband was packing to leave.

His mother was grinding ocher and rubbing her stomach with it.

Then her newborn son jumped straight up out of her stomach saying mother rub your hands on my head so that I can go with my older brother.

Everyone was astonished but one of them said this is a Sky's thing. So just do what he says let him go on the journey with his older brother.

So his mother rubbed him with ocher and fat and he left with his older brother.

At one of the Villages of the old people the husband was requested to bring his daughter so they could see her.

He agreed and they were walking to fetch the child at the other Village.

As they were walking past a termite Mound the younger brother stepped on a thorn and cried. Ouch.

Then he took off his shoes and threw them away saying they should go off and become vultures that drop down on meat.

Then the younger brother said run older brother go see what those vultures are dropping on and get meat for us to eat.

meanwhile The older brother's wife the elephant girl.

Was wearing a skin apron with a well sharpened middle all stuck in its waistband.

The younger brother asked his brother's wife to use the all to pull out the thorn from his foot.

The elephant girl believed what he said and came close. He took the all and killed her.

The elephant girl had already told her grandmother that she didn't trust her husband's younger, brother.

She had said my thoughts don't agree with a thing that jumps out of its mother's stomach saying it wants to accompany its older brother.

So watch well a little wind will come to you with droplets of my blood and will stick to your groin.

Take the bit of blood and put it into something like a little bowl or a jar and indeed the little wind with the blood came to the grandmother and stuck to her.

The grandmother said in her heart, isn't this just what the child said? What happened? She took the blood and put it in a jar and lived and thought.

She said to herself if they were already completed what she told me. There's nothing more to be done.

Meanwhile, the elephant girl's Brothers went to follow her husband and his younger brother to see if they had arrived safely at the village with their sister.

In fact, the older brother had gone off and had not found the vultures and was returning to where his younger brother was.

the younger Brother had killed and skinned his older brother's wife. The elephant girl and had roasted her and was cutting up and eating her fat.

The older brother arrived and not seeing his wife asked what kind of meat it was.

The younger brother told him not to ask so many questions, but just to come and taste the meat.

Why do you call that which is meat a woman as the younger brother? The older brother was greatly upset and asked his younger brother how he would manage to remain alive if he ate a piece of his own wife.

Stick with me said the younger brother insisting again that it was playing meat.

Finally the older brother took a piece and ate it.

At that moment the brothers of the elephant girl having tracked the two were seen approaching.

The younger brother told the termite mound to break open. So his brother could enter and avoid the anger that was coming his way.

The termite Mound obeyed and the older brother stepped in.

The the Mound closed the younger brother stood alone outside and when the elephant girl's Brothers tried to stab him. He perched on the points of their Spears, like little bird called Omaha. He taught he dodged their Spears perching on their heads perching on their noses and perching on their other body parts and eventually defeated them completely.

They left him and went off.

This Kamaya by the way is a kind of sparrow that acts like that.

Perching different places so it it can never be caught.

The older brother jumped out of the termite Mound and the two of them took the meat and went home to their Village. The people asked what have you done with the woman whose child is standing over there? What kind of meat is it that you are walking around with your stomachs full of you too have done something very wrong.

Meanwhile, a bit of blood stayed in the grandmother's jar and grew the grandmother put it into a skin bag and it grew some more it split the bag. So she put it into something larger it grew and split that too only the grandmother knew what she was doing and kept her intention growing the blood into a regular big woman again.

Finally, the elephant girl was the size of a sack.

One day the women of that Village said they would go Gathering raisin berries, and they took the child along with them.

The grandmother spent the day alone at the village.

When the sun was getting low she spread a reed mat in the shade and took out the elephant girl and set her on the mat.

She ground ocher and spread it on her fixed her and dressed her and hung her with ornaments.

Fastened copper Rings into her hair. She was the beautiful elephant girl again when the women were coming back from Gathering. They heard the old woman speaking to someone and that someone was laughing in response. The child asked.

Who's laughing in the village that sounds like my dead mother The older women thought the child was crazy, but then the elephant girl laughed again and they all began to wonder they arrived in the village and saw her sitting there her daughter cried. It's my mother and dropped down and began to nurse.

The Other Women asked who has done this the elephant girl replied granny, of course granny alone. The old people give you life.

Another day, the two who had killed her came back to the village and seeing her got a fright.

But they still wanted to take the elephant girl to visit her in-laws.

The grandmother's secretly gave her a magical hemsbach horn and told her how to use it when she arrived at the in-laws Village.

The elephant girl then left with her husband and his younger brother and they traveled a long distance as they traveled the elephant girl kept asking them to let her know before they arrived at the village.

He asked about mountains and riverbeds with water and what the distance was between where they were and the village they would be visiting.

Finally, they passed a hill then a valley of soft sand and another Hill and came to a village Beyond.

Where small children with clean tummies were playing around and laughing? The brothers told her this was the place.

The elephant girl told them to go ahead of her into the village that she wanted to powder herself and then she would follow them in.

When the two brothers had entered the village she took out her magical him spot horn and blue on it.

saying these two brothers and their Village shall be broken apart and ruined.

The horn blew down the village flattened It to the Ground.

Then the beautiful elephant girl walked home.

story in I'm happy to say that there are other versions of this story.

That have other ramifications to the endings.

In one of them for instance.

The the heroine who at that point is is an island.

Doesn't just go home.

She goes home to her people.

She extracts her own heart and she gives it to them.

So that they may have food to eat.

So what I'll do next is I'd like to read you an extract from the Memoir that I've written about.

The 18 months that I spent between 1970 and 72 collecting recording as many of the stories as I could get.

I debated about how best to set up the storytelling sessions.

I knew that unless food was provided some large proportion of the calorie people would have to be out in the bush each day hunting Gathering.

um collecting firewood carrying water I wanted a big enough group to provide the audience needed for vibrant storytelling.

I resolved to experiment with solutions to this problem. My first experimental solution was to set up a retreat like atmosphere a kind of vacation for storytellers. I was lucky this worked. So well, I never had to look for an alternative.

I invited the old people at kaori where I had moved after an initial period at Adobe at the Harvard camp.

The calorie people ranging in number from four to eight depending on their visiting relatives who came from as far away as I or even the Dobie area to stay with me at my camp for a week at a time.

They brought their own sleeping skins and blankets and they slipped around our communal cooking and talking fire. I had a few extra tents with they could sleep in case of rain. I would have enough staples and tinned foods stockpiled to feed them for the week. And we all cooked and ate together often. The younger people brought fresh wild meat like kudu will to Beast or Buffalo or something shot Guinea fowls that I could pay or trade for.

The old people were delighted not to have to search for food during the weeks. They were with me and as I had hoped they relaxed into our Retreat like atmosphere of full-time storytelling.

The fact that this kind of hospitality exchange was comfortable for both me Anderson class made the storytelling Arrangement delightful and productive. I got up each morning wondering what unexpected bounty in terms of both unpredictable wild food. We could share and of further sharing of Stories the day might bring I knew that.

All the stories were involving many activities and problem-solving of everyday life. So it was my intention not only to get as broad a collection of shintoa, oral tradition and understand its content as I could but also to understand environmental references and activity references.

So it was it was a period of full immersion in whatever since classys were doing on a given day and in their stories.

My mentor Lorna Marshall and her daughter Elizabeth Marshall Thomas had written down quite a number of District class stories in English during their fieldwork in the 1950s and they worked through great interpreters like the famous Colonel edemo. I wanted to follow up on their lead by providing both authentic recordings in June quasi and a sense of the tradition as a whole. I saw my role as a dual one, including not only recording and documentation of verbal materials, but also ethnographic and environmental contextualization.

I was first told a series of elaborate and body stories about tricks played upon women played by women upon men alternating with retaliation by men on the women the storytelling grew more and more hilarious with each episode. Oh, one of the older women explained to me that the man began all the trouble. She said, So for a while, I thought that coha one of the many names of a male trickster back in the times.

Quote when the animals were still people.

Was always the initiator of the tricks he was when the storytellers were women, but one day I heard the story from an old man.

Clown now has been telling you all wrong. He said jocularly.

She hasn't told you it was the women who began it in the beginning. He then proceeded to tell the story himself starting out.

The women lived and thought what should we do to this man? In general the women tricked their husband into husband into eating their sexual parts or falling into a pit of sexual secretions or excrement the husband in turn tricks them into biting into his testicles or anus or makes love to them in the guise of dead meat male Connor had told me he collected a version of this story in which the husband is reconstituted after one such episode from his own penis, which the wives have just discarded thinking it was only the penis of an aardvark.

In some versions both cowha and his wives get into each other's stomachs by pretending to be plant food and then laugh or giggle there making life unbearable.

One Storyteller explicitly said that cahau wanted to make love to the women. So he tricked his way inside them by turning into ripe ketua, which looks like a red cucumber when the wives are eaten in turn.

They sometimes pop right out through coha's stomach wall and he has to be sewn up again by obliging flies.

This is the same thing you did to us the wives grow.

But we had a lot of fun laughing at these stories as they were elaborated today by day and part of the fun was the worth given to each individual storytellers rendition of the various stories. You never knew what the next Storyteller would want to incorporate or emphasize in a given story on a given day.

People insisted fiercely on each person's right to tell the story in his or her own way.

Um in many oral Traditions stories vary around a corset of values themes and beliefs and this variability added a great deal to the richness of the experience of hearing gym class stories.

So no exegesis was necessary.

In the variance that I collected.

The exegesis was definitely not needed by community members who had heard these stories in different permutations hundreds of times.

They were deeply needed by me who didn't get the sense of the stories from the fragmentary versions that I heard.

but it came to me a bit later that.

This fragmentation of the versions that I had collected.

Was a pretty fair reflection of the ways that these stories were being told to the gencoa audience. I was just there as a technician turning tape recorder on and off.

The people were hearing stories that though fragmentary.

referred In every instance to well-known plots and so what they were appreciating was the way that different storytellers were ringing the changes on the ways that the stories could be told.

This was true of men's stories as well.

As of so called women's stories like the elephant girl. I wish I had time to go through these wonderful stories for you many of which refer to magical practices and the healing dance the beliefs.

Are omnipresent in these stories in the form of very subtle unexplained metaphors the stories about the trickster God for instance point to the origin of the healing powers in the dance context through the use of animal abilities substances or surrogates such as tortoise shells Island fat and horns information provided by bird-familiars Etc, but they do so without exegesis.

Wow, I asked myself.

Why would hanging horns in a tree bring down magic lightning? Why would powdering oneself with aromatic root powder allow relief from having killed something? Why would sniffing smoke from a fat fire made inside a tortoise shell enable a person to trance? Teasing out these references in the stories led me into ritual contexts whose sideways elusiveness provided ever more richness to the texture of meaning in the tails.

There were very close relationships between how information was communicated and remembered and the people's achievement of daily subsistence.

There was a lot of information about animal behavior and also how humans ought to behave in relationship to the animals.

Storytelling community members and the Morrissey or gathering territories in which they lived were part parts of mental Maps. They were making to the important assets of their lives. Not only the water sources I learned.

The wild food areas the hunting grounds were include included in these knowledge Maps, but also Giuseppe.

people who know things these people who know things included not just sages not just healers not just old people full of environmental wisdom, but also musical composers expert trackers, excellent dancers whose work they could enjoy and learn from Taken together the interlocking Morrissey formed a reliable mental map of physical and spiritual Community Resources that were open to everyone.

I came to see that this dazzling resource map was made possible. Not only by the leveling mechanisms of their sharing system, but by lack of competitiveness in Creative achievement.

Beautiful things like medicine songs were seen to come through people.

To belong to everyone and we're to be used in celebrated by all there seemed to be a precise parallel here to the modesty of gencoa hunters about the animals. They killed.

The meat they brought in for the community Through quietly doing their job as Hunters did not bring them personal Glory.

It was meat destined for every member of the group.

So there was a parallel. I found between the sharing of meat and of powerful created beauty.

So it's hard to emphasize enough how the storytellers and healers. I had met all seem to fit along with the rest of vision for people.

Fun creative Community the same augmenting and reinforcing meanings crossed all the media had encountered and were freely shared. I never got the sense that knowledge or meanings or artistic skill were being sequestered by anyone rather. They seem joyfully accessible to all So I saw the central Artist as spiritual guides who could not do other than pursue their artistry.

I decided when writing my Memoir to include profiles of these of these spiritual guides. There's one of a composer of thumb piano songs many of storytellers men healers women Healers.

Of the women and girls who sang for the dancers or played the look like five string gouache all were viewed as channels to the Beyond.

giving access to the realms of aesthetic enjoyment of knowledge of Health and Welfare for everyone.

These artists readily acknowledged and often acknowledged the people from whom they learned.

So this sense that I had of having somehow landed in a creative community of individuals functioning for each other as well as for themselves.

Was beyond anything I had ever experienced. It was beyond my wildest dreams. I told myself a collective work of art. Like I had observed here such as the constant dialogue among living stories.

Or the gorgeous achievement of song and movement. That was the healing dance must be no less a work of art than what we in the west call quote a work of art. In fact, I marveled at how very much more art and social genius it must take For individuals to coordinate themselves in these ways that I had seen.

I saw that the healing narratives and the folk tales far from codifying a single version of Dogma were carrying on a dialogue among themselves about what is to be valued and believed.

That belief was not enshrined somewhere beyond the stories but was rather in the stories themselves in the intertextual repartee among them.

In retrospect. I realized how very fortunate my timing was that I had a chance to observe it close hand the workings of this still exclusively oral tradition.

It was an interweaving of tradition of creativity that seemed to keep the society itself alive.

So that individuals experience their own lives as contributions to the shared reality.

It seemed that past Traditions were nothing unless they were alive renewed today now.

Taken together the ideas about healing power about human relationships with weather and carnivores and food and the events of the stories of transformation add up to a complex of belief that enables trance and the community healing on which the sons ancestors have relied for millennia and as we have seen this vast web or network of meaning was shared across thousands of kilometers in many click languages in the kalari as we see from Helga's Buffalo wife's story in the Far East with the qua in my elephant girl story in the far west of the Kalahari from the schindclassi.

Yet importantly. I saw that these beliefs were always alluded to only indirectly through the intricately interwoven metaphors of dance song and story and they're in laid their strength.

The junctua expressive forms glittered with powerful but only briefly and delicately phrased allusions. I saw the whole then as a panoply.

Similar to a vast fine deeply interconnected literature and one was that one that was fully embedded in its local environmental context.

So I want to end This this part of my presentation before we go on to just discussions by reading a last.

Excerpt from my Memoir one in which I address.

The great overarching story that all of these stories contributed to I found that virtually everyone of visual class stories.

Had some kind of reference either direct or veiled to the concept of womb.

This is a metahuman power as, a kind of spiritual energy and one of the realizations that I came.

To about it was that.

It was something that was absolutely dependent on.

this whole communal form of creativity that I had stumbled into I was a person who first went to the Kalahari thinking. Oh, my job is to collect as many variants of these stories and get them into print as I possibly can and that's the end of end of what I'm there to do. Well, it was a much bigger Adventure than that.

So the communally built genquis story of the ways and power of moon is but one of what must have been thousands of such stories told in human prehistory and into

today the moon story Edition class is an example of the scenes of meaning generated about the unknown and tried out for efficacy by every culture.

These are all well-honed artifacts built of the imaginings of generations of people sharing their ideas and experimenting with them on each other.

These ideas grew and became embedded in the consciousness of various cultures as people performed act related to them and from seeing and valuing what achievements came out of the mysterious networks of healing meaning healing peace. Social harmony ecstasy. Each such story is a cultural jump Beyond human limitations in the direction of what some call God.

Each culture uses its own contemporary catapult of meaning to make its jumps.

Not every jump succeeds. But those that do can become part of a specific Canon at least for a while.

As in biological evolution each story each idea is a random existential experiment stories that work that enable social cohesion or among the most important intellectual achievements of human kind.

The story there's one class. He told themselves over and over about their dance and about their own ringing the changes on its basic theme of healing.

Remains by constant renewal the powerful engine that made it possible for them to get along with each other they told and danced and sang the story incorporating the flashes of insight that occurred to different individuals in the process.

The story lived in its never ceasing variance.

Born of its enfranchisement of each participant of each new generation. It was always contemporary or it was nothing.

Westerners of the late 20th century have largely lost their connection to such powerful jointly lived and jointly constructed stories. Thus I felt deeply privileged to witness and even to participate in this still living still breathing ancient human process of meaning.

It was a means of social control through shared. Joy that stayed ever contemporary because it valued each person's contribution. It contributed to the unspoken as well as the spoken consensus that made a reliable fabric out of the contentions and contradictions of their lives.

Even my watchful Outsider observer's presence could not interrupt the flow of this powerful synchrony.

It strengths tossed me aside like a twig washed up on the banks by a river torrent.

So I've reflected later.

That what was magical about.

These stories and the tradition of the stories is that storytellers were never just repeating a story rotely.

But instead we're performing it over again to a live audience that importantly included themselves.

Maybe this is a good point to stop for discussion. I would be so interested to hear of other people's fieldwork experiences.

They they may be similar. They may be different, but any comments would be so welcome. Thank you.

That thank you very much for this first part Megan and the sense of your your feeling of the Grandeur of the achievement and creativity of this individual performance as well as the collective dialogue flowing through these these stories. It's really wonderful to to hear about it. And does anybody want to come in with questions or comments? We've got some wonderful contributors here.

Anybody like to raise hand or say anything? He's a mattress.

You want to unmute my test? It's your commute.

As much as speaking comic, can we unmute? Is that better? Much better. Yes, that's better. Okay. Yeah.

My my question was coming the question right? Sorry.

On The Exodus component of guitar that again.

Sorry.

the not working I can hear you. Yes, fine.

Yeah, I had in my fieldwork and story collecting amongst the narrow and enhance the one of my Most knowledgeable and skilled Storyteller komata. He told me actually the same.

a variant of the same story The Elephant a girl and how her Young Brother You know.

Brother-in-law got her husband to kill her and Peter and so on and what I found is that this story The kamaka told me.

was part of another story and which had to do also with elephant transformation, but not with the a different story altogether about people transforming especially women into into elephants in the context of some my they had to leave aside and move to another side and in the context of that they transformed into elephants. So my question yeah about introduces is that to to understand the meaning which is as you say extremely subtle and complex and multifaceted.

It's important also and I think you make this point in somewhere in your own Publications that one see a specific story in the context of other stories that preceded.

In the same storytelling session or in later story sessions that then make reference to that particular story and then stories that follow it so I think that's another important key in there in the exegesis. How does this particular story that? you focus on as the analyst the link up with other stores, in this particular.

Still tell us repertoire but also within the collective repertoire of stories and yeah, well, that's that that's my comment. I could illustrate it more with the article that I wrote on this in which the connection was the human.

animal likeness emerging a cook merging of identities of human and animals.

That is a that's a wonderful question the TSN. It's one that I've been breaking my head over for half a century. I don't think I have a good answer even yet. It was actually Mel Conner who made me aware that there were these many many episodes of a multi-identity.

Heroin floating around and he was in hopes that in my fieldwork after he and Marjorie schostock left go back home and I was on my own he was in hopes that I would be able to put together the entire story cycle.

We use terms like that and I was on fire to do that because I thought wouldn't it be terrific to to know how this story? Fits together. It's like an epic Etc and yet I never Got it told in that way. It was only told to me episodically and I felt that if I tried to stitch them the the episodes together in my own way it it would be an imposition of a kind of order that shouldn't clusty where apparently not using or maybe they were using it in other contexts that I had no idea about maybe they were telling them as as short short stories because something about the condition in in which we were working so I don't have a good answer to that but it's certainly is an intriguing question. I did get some some interesting Clues though to the relationships between the different heroines as I've mentioned. Are you and elephant Buffalo? So Etc and python one time when an elephant story was being told to me.

the Storyteller made a slip and she she referred not to the elephant girl, but to the python girl I said Oh, I thought you were talking about an elephant and she said Um, no the python girl the elephant girl. It doesn't matter. They're the same and I asking further questions about that. I got mostly statements about how much fat they both had. It's always good to have fat if you're going to be as your heroin. So Aardvark girls Elon girls with plenty of fat pythons apparently have a lot of fat too and buffaloes and elephants.

Thank you.

Thank you Matthias.

It in do you want to go next? Yeah, you're not mute. Here. You have actually It was another suggestion on mute I have on muted.

Can you hear me? I can hear you. Yeah, um.

Maybe to come back to discussion afterwards and maybe to just jump you you are off tantalizing suggesting.

A take on when growing Graybar Graber and wangrow maybe just to jump into that and then come back to the stories.

Through that unless there's oh but I see there are other field people with field experience with hands up. So maybe not.

Okay, but interesting suggestion we'll get there.

Okay, so is that nothing so Jerome? Hi. Well, thank you Megan. That was an absolutely beautiful telling of the stories and it's always just so lovely when you get that direct telling coming back. So thank you for sharing that something you obviously learned with your your various storytelling Retreats sessions, which sound absolutely wonderful something. I want to try it very nice methodology.

What I was particularly interested in and this is something just about the sort of the the way that people in these very egalitarian societies where it's really rude to explicitly teach.

Encourage or create these items which are just confounding and they just naturally sort of draw you in to start wondering why on Earth should this be the case in the way that you for instance were confused by Buffalo girl and python girl being very similar.

But what I was particularly intrigued in your presentation was you talked about key unexplained metaphors? And I just wondered if you could talk a little bit more about that and perhaps give us some examples of the type of thing you mean or and how they work to to Intrigue and create that opportunity for the dialogue that these stories have with people's lived experience to occur.

Thank you.

Thank you for that. Good question Jerome. I hadn't hadn't really thought of it in exactly that way. I too am very excited about the The relationship of the lack of didacticism to egalitarianism. And also as you point out this this particular Nexus, there can have a wonderful effect on educating young people who may or may not already familiar with all of the Arcane circumstances of ritual and they may not really have yet had all of their questions answered. So these are and these are learning devices par Excellence for the children without being in the slightest didactic which Mel Conner has always pointed out it tends to make Hunter-gatherers and a substantial proportion of Western societies very annoyed and not learn very well if they feel something is being foisted on them. Yeah, but I guess one of the examples I could give is of the many ways that that the stories that I collected referred to.

tortoises and their connection with magical medicine smoke that allows trance one of the stories in one of the stories coha.

goes to rescue his his two his two sons who have been killed by lions and buried in a pile of the Lions a of the stomach contents, and they They are pursued okay with coha, the the father who is also the original healer we find.

For a long way and they he go he goes with with a tortoise who is his his familiar to attempt to find his two sons who had had gone and killed killed an island and then been killed by lions in turn and buried in the stomach contents of the even.

so at each successive fire.

The cowha says to the tortoise, just poke your head in into the coals and see if they're hot and then we'll know how long ago they were here and so both first one it's totally cold and so they keep going and the next one. There's a little bit of warmth in the glowing coals and in the third one the tortoise sticks his head into the fire and It was a living hot fire. And so his his head was burned and in fact his whole self inside of his shell burned and smoke came out of it and was inhaled by kaha and this caused him to have an altered state of consciousness. He then went into a trans for the first time.

So when you get mentions of tortoises and particularly tortoise shells with tortoise inside or oily substances that are emitting.

Smoke aromatic smoke particularly you go into a whole world of not only the plot of this story but to the implications of these substances and objects and items to creating

the the possibility and Magic can happen that Mom can happen and this goes on and on over and over and over again in the stories and just as an aside, I'll say that.

David Lewis Williams, whom Ian Watts started his introduction with has made note of many many such what he calls nuggets metaphorical nuggets in in the Rock paintings too.

So, I believe that these kinds of processes are operative in many median.

Thank you. That was wonderful examples. Yeah, really nice.

Thanks, Jim.

Anybody else have we got anybody else asking because if not, I would put something in if there's nobody else no and yes it I'm but it's been so so interesting to to hear your dissection of this these stories as communicative Acts.

Taking account of who are you communicating to and therefore being so variable in their in their kind of Direction and their emphases and their Politics as well. And there's so multifaceted. There's all this discussion of gender relations human animal relations relations of in-laws and and bright service and all this this layers as well as all the illusion.

Engines in respect of ritual healing and first menstruation women's blood and so forth and I'm really interested the in the ways the differences highlighted the Helga's story The exeggetic and somewhat more didactic story. It does not seem to have as many episodes to it or it becomes more kind of fixed then the versions that of the elephant girl where there's much more cyclical coming back to life and coming back to life. But we get the possibility of the roles changing between the brothers including The Uncanny brother and the Elephant girl has self because it's the brother who is the one that flattens with the farts or the horn, but The June class story The Elephant girl flattens the village of the brothers so we can see how the reversal goes of the roles depending on the perspective and but could you say any more about this kind of cyclical nature of the of life and death and the and the metaphors underlying that and because the didactic version seems to bring the episode kind of to a halt.

that's such an interesting observation because a lot of what I've been thinking about for so long is that it was my recording of stories at a moment of time and then fixing them in print, coming coming from tape into into transcription into print was the form of the was the form of fixity that would would be, less worthy of the tradition and yet you're absolutely right that it was through the Inquiry that Helga was making in the moment.

That she when she heard the explanation then the exegesis from the storytellers that ended up making a different kind of fixity really this is this is just such a fascinating observation. I thank you so much and really what what you're making me realize is that the fact that I collected so many variants without interfering with them is what allowed me to know how, massively multifaceted the tradition was and responsive to the the actual audience. That was there for instance. Okay.

Um I Heard this version most often these versions most often when I was recording them.

They it they involved blowing blowing on a magical against Buckhorn or a different kind of p***. I was never told about the poison farts.

You know, I only learned about the poison farts from Helga, many years later.

So I think that, there was a there was this Victorian Anthropologist there who was collecting the stories and nobody wanted to talk to her about poison farts.

Yeah, the rocketness is something special. Yeah.

Yeah.

the raucousness anymore any most yeah and of course, it's it's absolutely there but in the trick counter trick how close sequences it's completely raucous. It's wonderful. Yes, and I think think of it also this way these were people who lived these these older older people who came and stayed at my camp for a week or so. These were people who lived face to face with each other their whole lives. They had. I mean sure whole histories of Playing Tricks on each other on love affairs infidelities, who knows what what was the substrate of some of those attitudes about tricks and the fun that people had with telling those things, right? It boggles the mind.

Good. Well, shall I shall I move on to the second part that let's go. Yes, he's okay.

Um I finished writing my memoir.

Shortly before I became aware of Graber and Wayne gross book. So in this second part of my presentation, I want to say a few things in appreciation of the the Paradigm that that book is suggesting they that we consider and I acknowledge and celebrate the fact that the Paradigm is open-ended.

It's unfinished. It's generative. It's it's promising for those reasons and I didn't get to attend all of of the tags sessions in Dublin mostly because a lot of them were happening it three am here and I didn't get up but as far as I can tell I'm I was left with the feeling that the dawn of everything was inadequately celebrated at the tags. I was also asking myself why the great Kalahari debate or in fact much of the Kalahari or hunter-gatherer search in general did not get into the dawn of everything.

I asked myself whether maybe Graber and wingrow did not want to further reify the hunter-gatherer category, but rather to emphasize the flexibility of always of life and the creative agency of human beings under whatever circumstances and I also reflected that another way of looking at why the Kalahari did not much get into the dawn might have been that the huge Kalahari and hunter-gatherer literature has already been so enshrined in the general anthropological Canon that the authors didn't feel the need to repeat all that only to challenge it.

which would have made would have made their huge home even bigger in each case.

I also mused that perhaps they had bigger worldwide International fish to fry and Andor that it was something they meant to get to but it just didn't make it into the already lengthy volume.

I didn't know the answer. So and in light of of graber's untimely death just three weeks after the writing of of Dawn was finished. I was just grateful that they had gone ahead and gotten the volume into print.

Um at one point I asked Megan laws.

At who's now doing a postdoc at lse and she she had worked closely with grayburn wingrow during the time that they were writing the dawn. I asked her why if she knew why hunter-gatherer studies in particularly the Kalahari body of work and the Kalahari debate. We're not included. She replied that this question had crossed her mind too and reading it along with their early paper the childhood of man. She speculated that maybe indeed there was just too much the authors needed to cover and she also reminded me that they had intended to have multiple volume. So I look back at the introduction and sure enough wingrow Road in the forward to the book that realizing many of the concepts introduced in this book would benefit from further development and exemplification. We plan to write sequels no less than three, but this first book had to finish somewhere.

Thinking about these questions. I ended up agreeing with William derisiewicz who wrote a review in in 2021 in in the Atlantic called human history gets a rewrite.

It switches above all this book is a brief for possibility, which was for Graber. Perhaps the highest value of all the book is something of a glorious mess full of fascinating digressions open questions and missing pieces it aims to replace the dominant Grand Narrative of History not with another one of its own devising, but with the outline of a picture only just becoming visible of a human past replete with political experiment and creativity.

um even without the sequels I felt that many of the insights of this first book were constant with what Richard Lee and I have called the lessons of virgin p**** and these lessons that we tried to incorporate into our own work. I felt that the insights were consonant with my own engagement with some stories and how I grew to understand them.

So several friends and I here in Texas began reading the dawn of everything and one friend asked me whether the book had dampened my earlier enthusiasm for hunter-gatherer studies.

I then realized that far from any such reaction.

I felt that my long interest in society's considered a hunter-gatherer and that of the surplus or coon in particular was precisely what allowed me to appreciate the dawn so much and to quickly open up to much of its new paradigm within the first few pages.

I read of that book it had been after all in my acquaintance with Jean client hunter-gatherers that I personally experienced living with individuals of the culture very different from my own but like all human cultures truly creative and flexible and resilient.

This experience led me to readily accept the flexible creative model of prehistoric human societies.

That Graber and wingrow propose to replace the monolithic limited evolutionarily restricted model that has for so long held sway in anthropology.

Graper and wingrow were asking that attention be paid to a kind of academic stagnation on this idea of the human story and in some cases they suggested ameliorations to this stagnation.

so it was with a sense of very happy recognition that I read their proposed memories many of them recall notable sticking points in my own anthropological thinking that were overcome by similar solutions that I came up with either on my own or with help from Friends mentors colleagues or other guides and particularly, um from Vision Plus, So after discussions with my friends, I've assembled just a few of the many parallels between my thinking over the years working year after year with vision class and that of grayburn wingrow.

So I include some of the solutions that both I and they crafted two problems with the narratives by which contemporary others as well as the extrapolations from them back into the human past have become known in anthropology.

As I said many of the solutions were first conveyed to me through indigenous critique while I was doing the fieldwork and this was pretty radical at the time. So since I felt they were they were Radical. I thought I thought of Offering them to this group. I'll just list them very very quickly because I know we're running out of time.

One was foregrounding indigenous voices and critique striving to have indigenous voices heard.

Realizing and chronicling the exhilaration of daily life in a creative community.

Understanding that people do reinvent themselves and their social Resort social organization.

particularly in studying individual lifetimes and politics Undertaking and Publishing Cooperative ventures of recording and interpretation advocating better collaboration between archeology and ethnography focusing on individuals rather than assuming Society was monolithic, as chewing statements like well the shoe plus you think because after all there's influsi are a group of individuals and I found their their talking with each other was more much more A Chorus of argument never ending then arriving at a monolithic statement of what they all think. The next similarity was melding research with activism as Graber did and also also went broke. There are some things that you can never know about a society unless you're actively involved.

Um trying to excise some of the circular arguments of capitalism and market economies.

Throwing out theories of social Evolution that relegated hunter-gatherers and egalitarian people to the bottom of some ladder in other words regarding the myth of progress as suspicious.

Believing that people of prehistoric times had clear ideas about why they organized their Societies in various ways.

feeling that myths about Simplicity and egalitarianism of hunter-gatherers have held sway precisely because they are based on biases in our evidence. For instance. There is much more archaeological material from 45,000 BP in Europe, then from 100,000 BP in Africa and also so much of our ethnographic material came to us through filters like Translators interpreters and from picking and choosing with romantic bias.

The last thing that I'll mention is that seeing finally seeing and understanding that social sciences as well as the public have been zoomed to recycle the vision of hunter-

gatherers as either hobzian or resoyan with never arresting point in anywhere between these extremes.

um, basically Coming to see hunter-gatherer societies like all societies as far more complex and more varied than we've imagined.

I conclude from the consonants between these important themes in anthropological thinking and practice that the myth anthropologists told themselves about the hunting and Gathering paradigm.

though now challenged by the dawn did help us along the way to the explosion of good sense that the Graber and when wrote book is I'm going to end by talking about indigenous critique.

Which to me was the most Salient part of the entire book? Prominently featured as is the encounter between the French Jesuit missionaries and the native intellectuals, including the wonderful candy or wrong here on wind up Chief in the Great Lakes region of what was then New France.

these individuals candiarank and others had inherited a tradition of debate and thought And they pondered deeply on.

quote generosity sociability material wealth crime punishment and Liberty the Jesuits in comparison and by extension all French and European Society were condemned by this indigenous critique for and I'm quoting Teresa wish here incessant competition positive kindness and mutual care religious dogmatism and irrationalism and horrific inequality and lack of freedom.

Speaking of indigenous career critique. I'm going to end by reminding us of the figure in Helga's talk named big clay. Remember he was the Healer who said that we can't know what happens to humans after they die or in fact anything about God or another world. It's not given to humans to know any of that. Now, where are those cigarettes you promised me and I'm going to end with a parallel story from my own experience of the good census unclog critique.

This is another excerpt from the Memoir of just finished.

I have many such stories from the political date debates around the time of namibian Independence. But this this story is one that is more relevant to our current discussion.

Many years after my first field work when I was back in the United States an energetic middle school student in Cleveland.

Named Aaron Cohn contacted me with a plan to bring a fusion 12 leaders to Cleveland to speak to schools and colleges and on the media.

He raised the finances for this as donations to the Kalahari people's fund the non-profit. I had founded with my Harvard colleagues in 1973.

He arranged the visit and set up talks for physician Plus speakers for several days at TV studios at his middle school and at other educational institutions one of the show classy who came with oh a tiny man known by the offer Khan's name of kivit a small bright active bird one of the many kinds of plovers that inhabit the Kalahari.

Keep it was known for his eloquence in speaking in his areas of expertise which were politics storytelling and healing.

In Cleveland, he was to speak one evening at a historically black college and his topic was the intersection of these three domains.

I felt privileged to stand with him at the podium as his translator. The venue was the gymnasium of the college with the audience seated on risers. Cavite was much smaller and lighter skin than almost anyone in the audience the podium dwarfed him and the microphone took a while to get arranged effectively.

But he riveted the listeners with his account of the junka people's participation in the recent Independence process Southwest Africa had gone through in becoming Namibia.

He also talked about the practices and values of their healing religion with its sharing ethic and tolerance for all and spoke of the healer's process of traveling to God's Village on the threads of the sky.

He explained how these ideas had underwritten and supported all that. They should classy had accomplished in terms of community organizing and communication with the new government during the independence process.

Many in the audience could be seen taking out kleenexes and wiping their eyes before the end of the story.

After his speech keep it took a few questions. The last question came from a large black woman on the third row of the risers.

she stood up and said you said that you travel to God when you are in trance and are healing.

Please tell us what God looks like.

Keep it chuckled.

I have never seen God.

Nobody can see God.

All that human beings have his stories.

Thank you for listening.

lovely Um, I think it's almost exactly two o'clock. I don't know if we have time for discussion, but I'm happy to stay if people want to.

Yeah, we we have time if people want to carry on and for anyone who wants to and did anybody want to respond to this very heartwarming generous response to the Graber and went grow doing of everything and did it in. Did you want to say anything or you're gonna go for it before did you want to you or does anybody else want to come back on that? I am making is your indigenous critique going to be going into the Memoirs or are you writing this? Um, what is some of some of it's in some of it's in there already? It's impressed.

beautiful But right did you want french hands up? right It's gone.

It's sound.

Sorry, okay.

I just wanted to really query a little bit your your acceptance of the first chapter. I fully agree with you in the second chapter. I think that was a very profound and important contribution to to really show just the impact of The way that different

ways of understanding the world's can really offer profound critiques and I do think in fact that that Jesuit papers were probably part of the process which really got us out of the the dark ages of the Renaissance, which was just such a an appalling time in Europe.

But I don't feel the same about that first chapter at all. And I think that both when growing Graver fell prey to the very social evolutionary theories that they claim to be country because to assume that living as an egalitarian.

Community is somehow boring. I mean, I can't remember the words now that they're using that chapter but they really are insulting to the many hunter gatherers that I've spent time with who spend an awful lot of intellectual energy in maintaining the system of egalitarianism between each or their relations of egalitarianism understanding who's been doing. What's Who's got what where and how to get it from them without being too brutal or, I mean just that the everyday politics of a camp of hunter gatherers is a really challenging place and I've certainly found that while we lived in the forest for several years with the bayaca. It was intellectually completely satisfying. I had no need for thinking about reading books or anything like that. It's just the everyday run of life was just really challenging maintaining this egalitarian politics in a sort of Relatively, and of course it's not always at all harmonious way in the in terms of relationships and what the reason I thought that Graber and wangrove fell prey to socially evolutionary thinking is the very presumption that living like that is some sort of simplistic ideological romanticization of anthropologists and doesn't really have a founding in the way that people live their everyday lives and so anyway, I just wondered if you wanted to respond to that but obviously those those that book provokes different reactions in different people, but but I really did feel that they did a disservice to themselves and to the title of their book by dismissing the incredible achievements of egalitarianist in these societies something we struggle to do in our own most disastrously.

Thank you so much Jerome. I was hanging on your every word. I think I think you're absolutely right to bring that up. I had I'm sorry, I had forgotten that they used the word boring with with with reference to hunter gatherers. And I agree with you the longer. I stayed with the gentrasi the more.

Intricate and fascinating and intellectually challenging I found the ways that they were constantly challenging each other about them how to be good egalitarians. I mean, these are Fierce Debaters these folks and fierce Watchers of each other to make sure that nobody is strayed too far from prescribed norms and yet maintaining a kind of intellectual flexibility about envisioning ways that problems can be solved. So thank you very much and you've you've put it succinctly and very well. I'm just really hoping that that David wingrow is going to carry on some of this because We need to hear from him some more. I think don't you? Well David, and I we were just in departments. So we have a lot of exchanges and discussions about this and certainly I think what he has which is really important to contribute is this deep understanding of the central European societies where there was incredible diversity and such interesting social

formations. And this is of course what they focus on mostly in the book, but I think pretentious claim that that's the dawn of everything.

Yeah.

Thank you. We have our regular discussions. We said while some things are not.

Well, do you? questions May perhaps prompt a sequel Well, I think yeah, it's a lot to get on with just by yourself such an undertaking, but I do have he's very productive. So I'm sure David will come up with some satisfying sequels.

That's for sure. Okay. Well, I hope that there's some appropriate way for you to convey my greetings to him. Okay, I will do not that I've ever ever met him or written to him or anything. I just yeah. No, that's through the book. Okay. Well, I don't thank you Jerome pleasure. Thank you.

To does anybody else want to come in at Ian did you want to come in? on mute really unmute in case On way ways we might explore this this debate further.

I mean, I think you need to go back to silence article.

About why? egalitarian societies aren't really egalitarian because they submit to Gods met a persons and I although there are certainly are meta-persons in.

Amongst Forest come together as Southern African hunter-gatherers and very much. So in amongst the hadza that they're they're pretty remote and don't have much involvement and I'm not sure how well silence model actually works for African hunter gatherers.

I don't even think it works as well as he tries to make it work for the chuang and I think senior how also disagrees.

With how he interpreted her field work there.

So I mean just just on what you said about. I mean the new the nearest.

we got to met a person's in a sense.

was was when the trickster smelt the tortoise is burning flesh and went into trance. so so that would suggest that trance is is one way that that these other powers are sort of brought about but .

Things are already flow up and up and running long before then I think one.

Anyway, that's just speculation and I'm glad you brought up silence and that particular point and I'm glad that you have doubts about whether it really applies is his idea really applies to African untogethers, and I could say that the use of the word submit It's not a word I would ever ever impute.

To the way some people that I'm aware of relate to.

any metahuman They they mostly chastise them and say oh you've done these Dreadful things and see your stupid Etc. They call them Pricks. It's just amazing.

They're not submitting.

I think that's right.

Okay, Chris. Do you want to say something? Um, yes.

I ins mentioned the sardines article which of course Great Book of kind of wrote with a version of it. So it's it's stuck this the basic idea silences that you can't have a gadgetarianism and certainly Hunter gather this aren't we got to change because they

have We have to have metropressants spirits and so on and these are actually Kings is the word used. It's more than just simply I mean he could so that these are these are Kings and because they're kings the reason they're kings is according to silence and then greater respects that up in his own version.

The reason that Kings is because they have this sort of arbitrary power.

You can just, just kill whoever you like because you're in a rage or something and it's just such an extraordinary.

Claim, I mean and of course the way Jerome describe his experience is to say well the mentally just say when we we party with these Kings we make fun of them. There's there's a bunch of jokes. There's no way which you could identify trickster with a king. It's just such complete nonsense and yet that's the greater wingrow you say take from from Silence among others.

So I just I agree with committers and comments on your work making I mean, you're very very generous and it's wonderful. And of course all of us was just absolutely Overjoyed.

I mean, I'm a friend of I've been long with a friend of David greber as an activist. And so we were all absolutely Overjoyed that this book broke so many taboos and released us from all sorts of weird narratives about, letters of evolution and so on.

But but I mean the critical figures is that it was kind of racist to say that the door of everything is it's almost like saying that, yes, okay.

We evolved in Africa. We didn't get smart. Do we hit Europe with the upper Paleolithic Revolution? And of course something Ian's working particularly shown that the dawn of everything if by that you mean the sort of cultural explosion of symbolism and ritual and all the rest of it all these things which make us uniquely human that that goes right back to in Africa way way way before 40,000 years goes back 142, maybe even 200,000 years. I mean, it's got the dates on the Erica record. So it's just it's just very good. Just rather.

Disappointed in the way the Magnificent scheme of the dawn of everything but just so marred particularly with relationship to Africa and it just has to be said that, David Grabber just thought of that African hun together doesn't kind of lost people it's kind of and didn't didn't think there's anything to learn about the the past by studying African hunter gatherers because in a sense, you can't know anything about their past because they have an oral tradition and they don't and they go to say that only we need to get hierarchy do you get do you get so anything interesting going on? Otherwise if and they do it actually say I haven't got the quote here I could reach that. They just say if you're always again, then it's then it's boring it's much better to mix your regulatories and moments of despotism and Alternate between different forms of cannibalism despotism cruelty and a bit of a egalitarianism now again, at least it's interesting and of course I don't know it's just so many things which are disappointing in the books as Jerome's already said so I do think you're being very generous again and it's lovely to be generous but possibly your tips slightly too generous.

They are just, just say I take many of your points, but I want to focus on one thing and that is the title The Dawn of everything. I think that I took that very much more as a kind of tongue in cheek joke about this whole anthropological Enterprise of trying to come up with a history of human kind that that they were they were bringing that to the four in order to joke that it's they did take that title the door of everything from Mercier eliotic who know very fond of horses political reasons, but still I mean the way the book's been received is is no doubt as if this is about the dawn of everything and they kind of traced back and symbiotic culture to that point to the European nap abilities. It's I mean, although it's kind of joking away. I'm afraid to title a book to give that time to a book which is not of everything was a was a kind of I don't know something. I'm Pleasant about it really given that African hunter gatherers initiated the whole story of human creativity and mythology and culture and it's just not a word of that in that in any part of that book. There's no attribution of that creativity to African people. Just not there.

Thank you.

Thanks, Chris and did any more contributions particularly more positive contributions on Gray when grow I mean? I think they can you absolutely right that they've opened up so much space and from that point of view and the book is, it's it's hugely welcome and it's hugely important. It's just generated all these possibilities and we we ran a number of us ran a chag session on dawn of everything. I don't know if you came into that and followed that on the zoom and well we had a mixture of very positive as well as more critical.

He did follow. Yeah. Yeah, so so obviously from our perspective because of our real interest in the question African human Origins as symbolic species. We kind of had a problem with with this mess for it use of doing of everything we talk about the book as the tea time of everything actually, but but you're absolutely right they are.

They're making it a matter for it question. Yeah, it's but but there are many other aspects to the book and did liata. Did you want to come in quickly? We're gonna wind up in a short while but later. Did you want to say something? Yeah, not about the dawn of everything. I just kind of I've been hanging on because this has been such an amazing talk and there is so much and always my I can't even so I'm only starting to kind of process and what I was mostly mostly touched by was the But, we're talking about a garlic, egalitarianism. We, we've been following rad for a long time and the egalitarian nature of the creative act and storytelling and I'm gonna have to go back and I think I'm gonna have to transcribe this lecture for myself because this was totally amazing and I've been writing lately as part of my researchers and I've been writing about the creative act as a liminal act in front of cattle Legacy where I quoted Chris and also, initiations stuff and thinking about, how here the creative acts as, as a mythm making as a seeking of of meaning because it's not a finding of meaning this is what, it's amazing about it that it is seeking of meaning which is not only galitarian. It's embodied. It's performative. It's Collective and he's also Mutual it's non guide active. It's non totalizing non-finding answers, but it's finding possibility about answers and

how these stories all these different versions are not not only that they're not exclusive. They're Really physically complementary and they're complementary because of who tells them and whose lists and in them and any combination thereof and then all this process then becomes historical as Meghan was saying that depending on who receives the story and at what point these stories are incredibly ancient so the seeking and the processing of meaning is never final but it's totally generated purely creative because it's always generally and also it's always shared and this to me mind boggling and my, it's it's something that I've been really interesting in my research lately. And as I said, I'm gonna have to go back and real listen and transcribe this unless can be so amazing and maybe share her lecture with us in written format. Thank you so much for this. So I hope this was a positive and of things so, thank you so much.

Thank you very much.

Lovely and wait her but we we maybe have a last contribution here.

Yes, this is probably the least and my Audible can you hear me? I can hear you. Yeah, yes. Well, this is probably the least informed comment that could possibly be made that and not an anthropologist, but I'm deeply interested in these kinds of concerns and I think that when they used the word Dawn they weren't thinking of the end of the darkness in the beginning of the light like Dawn is at 8 7 15 tomorrow morning a better term might have been Dawning that that out took the meaning of the title to refer to the flexibility and resilience and creativity of human kind that it was from that fountain that things float for recurrently. Not at one particular Point of Departure. And so leaving out the car was bound to be annoying because the people who are deeply concerned about it, but I'm not sure if they're idea was that those people were not part of the dawning.

Yeah.

Very that's a that's a very good comment Walt. Yeah.

like it that sort of comes Under The Heading of They were telling a more overarching story.

They had bigger fish to fry and they were not.

Singling out the Kalahari for Omission as such.

Thank you. Yeah.

Anybody any other comments? I've got one.

Anybody else? Yeah, can I think we've just about three? Hello. Anybody else? Yeah. Yeah come in for it. But no it's on a yeah again a positive note, I think.

What you're in and Helga's workers has done like like you did with David.

All those years ago is shown the power of the comparative method and that needs to be extended.

So so we start need to start looking at? Forests come together as a cosmology and comparing it with a calm and July see cosmology and with their clear.

strong parallels, even down to tortoises and smell and, obviously blood that there's a lot of mileage there and, it's been out of fashion for many decades, but I think that's

the way in the spirit of Graver in Vancouver, which is a comparative work after all no
It would fill out the picture in a way that we're moaning about at the moment exactly.

no, it's sounds like a very good point to end and an excellent comment and I think
We have our marching orders, or maybe those who are younger than I am have their
marching orders.

Wonderful. Well Matt Megan, I can't say how much yeah, I can't say how much
this is been a special occasion for Rag and it's just been a great privilege to to hear
from you to hear from you reading from the Memoirs and we are so looking forward
to the publication and to be able to read and share those and that that is going to be
wonderful. So just very much.

I think everybody here is thrilled by the whole event.

Well, I had a lot of fun. Thank you for inviting me.

The Ted K Archive

Megan Biesele
The Elephant Girl and the Buffalo Wife (Seminar)
San Narratives, Exegesis, and Evolution
November 29, 2022

<www.vimeo.com/776639178> & <www.youtube.com/watch?v=6d_S6BUxAWw>

www.thetedkarchive.com