

Gender Egalitarianism among African Hunters and Gatherers

Various Authors

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The book under discussion is ‘Human Origins: Contributions from Social Anthropology’, edited by Camilla Power, Hilary Callan and Morna Finnegan. Jacob Fishel recaps Chapter 5 written by Morna Finnegan.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rwg8jAnxyig>

Recap

Jacob Fishel: Chapter 5, Morna Finnegan’s “Who Sees the Elephant, Sexual Egalitarianism in Social Anthropology’s Room”.

The stories that we tell matter. Anthropology’s preoccupation with man the hunter, man the warrior, the farmer, the accumulator. This obsession with male warfare, subsistence, or territory, a hyper-focus on male strategic and reproductive interests, leaves us with a complex hierarchy as the auto-setting for the species. That dominance, hierarchy, ownership, power is the only version of humanity. This one story has dominated the imagination.

This paper, building on Artner’s previous chapter and the questions raised there, if the models of a society are derived from male experience and priorities, the male collective body, how can we hope to achieve a complete picture of ourselves without listening to what the female collective body is saying, especially where it is still active? Everything we know about ourselves is only partial. What has been overlooked is women’s cooperative strategies as a driver for shaping and maintaining social and cultural systems. And the presence and importance of children. That humans are not simply individuals, separate data points, but also defined by the relationships and care that connects them. By drawing upon established ethnographies, of contemporary and recent past egalitarian hunter-gatherers, the works of James Woodburn, Richard Lee, Alan Barnard, more recently Jerome Lewis, along with biological anthropology and primatology, and research coming out of genetics, archaeology, and linguistics, all represented in papers in our book, an alternative story of human origin emerges, one that counters dominance, hierarchy, privatization, and ownership, with one of sharing, of connection, relationship, and autonomy. The evolutionary fuel of reproductive difference. In 1981, Karen Endicott and Eleanor Leacock pushed back on the theory of universal male dominance, noting ethnographers that actually lived with hunter-gatherers found alternative theories feasible. but warned that sexual egalitarianism may not conform to Western expectations, that sameness should not be confused with equality. We see that with male dominance, the first thing to suffer is child welfare. And this is echoing the danger of infanticide seen in primates from incoming males. and

that avoiding or curbing infanticide may have been an evolutionary driver in hominin evolution. Now, in immediate return, hunter-gatherers who travel light, unencumbered by possessions or by constrictive social ties, demonstrate an overarching commitment to

the protection of children as the nerve centre of the community. And that is what would be expected from societies in which the female procreative body has maintained a loud corporate presence.

This brings in Chris's origin model, the human revolution, being rooted in the aggressively egalitarian behavior of women's collectives,

where female inviolability was decisively established by coalitions of mothers supported by their kin. With complex egalitarianism no longer one possibility among many, we become a species in whose evolutionary gristle co-operative breeding is lodged, along with its corollaries – female sexual solidarity, continual infant contact, habitual sharing, motion, a healthy distrust of authority, and enshrined respect for individual autonomy.

With this motion,

power is continually redistributed through ritual dialogue premised on periodicity. And at the heart of this sits the procreative body. Engel's primary themes to be negotiated between the sexes, children, sex, desire, and its uses are central to hunter-gatherer societies.

A ritual dynamic keeps the collective discussion open, keeps the issues public, and subjected to

continual renegotiation. This model for how egalitarian power functions through the strategic opposition of one subgroup to another, the performance of conflict through dance, and the periodic ritual withdrawal of one sex from another, provides a valuable paradigm for looking at power and its uses in contemporary hunter-gatherer society.

Now we take this to human origins and the symbolic revolution. Where encephalization is foundational, the question becomes, how did females fuel the production of increasingly large brains and burdensome offspring? Those of us who read blood for menstrual synchrony, forcing males into increased paternal investment, extended courtships, relating with a partner, and crucially, relating with babies. The selection pressures would then favor cooperative males over alphas. Biological changes were combined with symbolic amplification through the relation of menstrual blood with game blood. And with our sex strike theory, females unite to send away mates to procure

meat. using the signal of menstrual blood and phase-locked rituals with the lunar cycle. Symbolically signaling wrong time, wrong sex, wrong species. Thus, women's collective action overrid pair bonds, structured big game hunting, and provided nutritional support to mothers and children. Looking at primatology, Sarah Hurdy observes that all apes

share a capacity for Machiavellian intelligence. They are all socially astute, sharing cognitive capacities and incipient 'theory of mind'. What distinguishes humans is the need to connect and share inner states with others, to intuit intentions, communicate ideas, and be deeply affected by what others are thinking. All of this she attributes to our ancient evolutionary history of cooperative breeding.

We share resources, but we share our children too. Cooperative breeding leads to emotional modernity, without which there is no human. And

reliable alloparental care would have pre-empted and facilitated the later development of symbolic thought and language.

So how does this then apply to the division of labor in current hunter-gatherers? We see a relationship between women as producers of people and an ambivalent relationship with game animals and hunting technology. Looking at the Benjele concept of *ekila*, quote, it

refers to both women's menstrual blood and the blood of game animals, weaving successful hunting into successful childbearing, and expressing a profound taboo against the mixing of substances. Jerome Lewis, in his discussion of *ekila*, stresses the complementarity integral to it: through women's ritual tracking and tying of game, they 'give' men meat. Through men's repeated contributions of sperm throughout pregnancy, they 'give' women babies. In this manner each sex contributes to the other's valued activity. This in turn echoes ethnography of Southern and East African hunter-gatherer groups, where female procreative fluids are in continual ritual conversation with male productive fluids

We also have on offer a little correction that

the danger to hunters does not come from a condition of "uncleanness" in the woman. Rather, she is in a state of extraordinary power

the danger to hunters does not come from a condition of uncleanness in the women. Rather, she is in a state of extraordinary power. This symbolic antipathy between female blood and the blood of game animals exempts women from the hunt. They do

not need to. Rather than they are excluded. And it compels men to return the meat to the community, going into antipathy as power. Here we make a brilliant distinction between women being able to perform the same tasks as men and whether or not they choose to

“choose” between the performance of energetically demanding tasks and the successful production and feeding of an infant ... The crucial deciding factor appears to be whether women are able to work collectively, making use of other women’s support, and engaging in labour which does not require them to leave small infants for long periods of time.

The crucial deciding factor appears to be whether or not women are able to work collectively, making use of other women’s support, and engaging in labor which does not require them to leave small infants for long periods of time. Cooperative mothering, for instance, nursing each other’s babies while working cooperatively, in contexts where continued breastfeeding and late weaning can make a difference to infant survival. It’s a system that’s flexible, dynamic, fluid, this fluid nature of care. And through such solidarity, women are able to elicit male provisioning, ensure sharing, enable women to remain close to vulnerable infants. Shifting Breitman’s narrative of female biology’s relation to culture as weak, passive, sedentary, and unable to participate in career to female

biology fuelling powerful ritual systems which afford women a substantial cultural presence.

Female biology, fueling powerful ritual systems, which afford women a substantial cultural presence. Looking at ethnographical examples, we have the bayaka. Women are the arms of the hunting nets. The Bobanda functions as a frame for

Biaka ideas about the division of labour as interdependence, an expression above all of ‘the work men and women do for each other

Always called

when men’s hunting luck is considered poor, involves mobilizing women’s ritual labour – singing, dancing and conversation with game spirits

raising power and vitality and transferring it to selected male hunters. According to McCready,

Given the considerable commitment required of women to what may be days of hard physical and ritual activity, they demand the recognition of men: The men (and the entire community) are at the mercy of women and must convince them to perform. The women cannot be coerced ...

In the Baka, through the exclusively female Yeli and Yengepoto ritual associations that focus on the large game hunting, using divination, oneiromancy, the dream interpretation for telling the future, and they are in charge of organizing ceremonies. They locate and attract a game, they designate the hunter to make the kill, and they offer gratitude to the game's spirits. And through their privileged relationship with the spirits, the women participate in the hunt, which affords them substantial claims to the meat. The yucca, the women participate in the elephant hunt through the Mukondi Masana of Yele. In trance, they tie up the elephant's spirit and then direct the men to it, this being referred to as a woman's hunting trip. Jerome Lewis says that the ongoing distribution of power represented by Masana activities, that

Massana deliberately glorifies the forest, the gender groups, and the joy and inherent beauty of their coordination and mutual co-operation in distinctive but complimentary ways'

Now A hunter's failure to respect the game animals or violate taboos destroys hunting luck, and puts the hunter in direct danger of attack from enraged animals. And these taboos, where one thing is negatively associated with another, menstruation, partition, and female sexual fluids, a composite femaleness, must not be mixed with hunting. In all hunting societies, this is conceived as the most powerful relationship in the cosmological and religious sphere. An alternative logic reveals itself through this antipathy. Women's absence from the hunt signifies their power. This move away from the bodies of animals, women collectively become sacred. They have a privileged position to communicate with and attract or repel animals and the spirits integral to the success of the hunt. This sexual egalitarianism is the invisible elephant hiding in anthropology's intellectual room. I quote,

The indisputable reality that humans are co-operative childcarers, together with the rich symbolic field opened around the reproductive body in those contexts described here, indicates the most basic materialist rationale possible: that of survival. There is nothing stronger than the will to stay alive, except perhaps the will to keep one's child alive. And some might argue that we are in desperate need, as a species, of potential alternatives to the kinds of power arrangement that have led us to where we now are.

Wrapping up with complex egalitarianism, communism in motion, We have from Peter Gao, desire, hunger, and sharing are what animate the lines running between women and men, sex and meat, desires which link people inevitably to certain other people. Morna continues, it is in the relational, dialogical space between different bodies and corporeal desires

that sociality, and hence society, is made. Women's ritual relationship with game animals and meat is inseparable from the politics of mothering in such

communities, and from men's corresponding ritual involvement in female fertility.

To make all of this move, we have the lunar clock. Continual motion between fission and fusion, sexual solidarity and marital solidarity. Time and power become dialogical in nature. social and sexual, or domestic and ritual. I quote,

Society here is using the spectre of the state, using the potential for collapse, using concentrations of power and conflict on the most primal level – that of the body – and using a sophisticated dialogue with raw force in order to churn up the political landscape and keep the argument live. Real prosocial power then is at root ambivalent.

Designed to thrive off difference, eliminating distinctions other than that of the sexes of wealth, power, and status, a political system that waxes and wanes. What happens when a society moves away from sensual experience? Towards the end of the Pleistocene, people settled, put up fences and walls, stored food instead of sharing it, privatizing children to ensure hereditary lines, turning the pro-social to antisocial. Children were physically able to survive without contact, and the nurture that their brains and bodies have evolved to expect. Inter-subjective focus, turning from relational to defensive, leading to the phenomenon of disorganized attachment, and teens that have trouble interpreting the needs of others, being significantly more aggressive and prone to behavioral disorders. So the stories we tell of our origins matter today. The paper concludes,

Implicit in the lack of interest of many (though not by any means all) social anthropologists in our common evolutionary heritage is the assumption that male political alliance is the obvious foundation for society. Even the most radical thinkers – Rousseau, Kropotkin – never got close to the possibility that human nature might have been formed in a whole other kind of evolutionary milieu, one in which coalitions of mothers and allomothers take centre stage. From 'man the hunter', or 'man the warrior', then, we come around not to some female equivalent, but to the figure of the child which culture evolved to protect.

Discussion

Morna: I came on late because, Friday evenings are difficult to get space. But I came on and heard Jacob reading this really nice paper. I was thinking, who's that? That's interesting. It took me a few seconds to clock that it was my own. And you read it so beautifully, Jacob. It's amazing how when someone else takes your writing and reads it, you know, like in a compelling way, how you hear it again. So that was

really nice. I'm sorry I haven't been able to make more of these because, I know it's a really nice way to share work and ideas. Well, thank you for reading it.

Chris: I don't think I've ever heard a more eloquent, well-spoken summary of Morna's work, which in turn sort of encapsulates the work which our team has been doing all these years. I mean, somehow there's a kind of synergy there with Jacob, I mean, is it your acting skills? I don't know what it is, but your speaking skills and your gestures as you speak, it just gives every word absolute wonderful bodily sort of meaning. And more now, I don't know, the way you've put it all together is just so, astonishing. I just, I was just reading it again, of course, an hour ago, and I just thought, wow, how on earth is this not the thing which everybody that wants a better world is reading? I mean, how, you know, how can that, how can it still be not recognised in the room, this I mean, this whole book, of course, but I mean, this is just a wonderful, one of the many wonderful chapters, which is so well worth reading again. I missed so much of it when I've read it first couple of times. So thank you, Jacob and Morna.

There was just one place, and just very briefly, when I thought to Morna, you were being rather generous to Sarah Herdy because you described her as, where is it now, as her fundamental point is that these matrilineal, oh yes, you say, what distinguishes humans, this is on page 135, "what distinguishes humans is the need to connect and share inner states with others to intuit intentions. communicate ideas and be deeply affected by what others are thinking". And Jacob read that out. In any go on, all of this she attributes to our ancient evolutionary history of cooperative breeding. And she assembles a huge wealth of data to support her contention that these first cooperatively breeding communities were kin-based matrilineal communities, where mothers had access not only to their own kin, but crucially came to depend on assistance from others in rearing their young. And it's lovely that you say that. And you are right, Maureen. I mean, this is entirely the implication of her thinking, but that's the one thing which Herdie hardly sort of daresay, but sort of suggested. It's such a heresy to suggest that early human kinship was matrilineal. And it's such a heresy as a biological anthropologist or a primatologist to think that, you know, that as great apes, we could agree anything other than male Philopatric. I mean, all the prominent said were great apes, obviously, the females move out and they lose connection with their mother. So, obviously, humans are great apes, so it must be true for humans as well. So, what you're what you're saying about Herdi, Morna, is what she sort of didn't quite dare say herself, although it's sort of there, implied there, although Camilla may slightly disagree with me. Sarah has said to us verbally that she agrees with our position on matrilineal residents.

Camilla: If you look at her book and the structure of her book, she puts all the grandmother stuff right at the back. So for somebody who just read like halfway through the book and got the idea, they would think, oh, but it isn't about female Philip Patrick. But there's a fundamental constraint on her theory that you have to have females with kin-related females to start the whole ball rolling. And she doesn't make that clear enough. So there are still people who think that when Herdie's talking

about cooperative breeding, she just means mummies and daddies, but she doesn't just mean mummies and daddies. And that's not how it starts. It starts with the female coalitions. And then you start to get daddies as well.

Morna: Yeah, I mean, she gets there at the end, and you can feel, I feel like she's getting more and more political, probably to do with where her own conclusions are prompting her to say and to go. And I mean, one of the things that I love about her is that she does like, she kind of almost, is straddling these two worlds. she's just like on the cusp of, all you have to do is like add a little bit of data there and you're moving into, real like deep politics, social and cultural kind of political action and cosmology and everything, it's all kind of there. But I know what you mean, Chris. I think I just, I love her because I found her at a time where I really needed that deep time perspective, and it fits so perfectly with the hunter-gatherer ethnography.

Chris: As Camilla's just mentioned there, I mean, all too many people, and I know this from the Evil and Evo Lang conferences I've been at every two years for God knows how long. So many people go, oh yes, Sarah Herdy, yes, you need, you need, it needs mummy and daddy to bring up a kid. You know, that's it. So we're back to the nuclear family again, on the authority of Sarah Herdy. It's a travesty. It's just a travesty.

Morna: No, she does draw out a lot of very important conclusions, one of which is basically looking at what happens whenever you lose that. because it's out of the, we know the nuclear family story. We know the mommy and daddy, you know, in the house story. She comes at the end of that book to this question of, given that we evolved, you know, emotionally and socially, in these tight female kin groups, given that we evolved in these clusters, what's going to happen now to our kids who are living out of contact so much of their lives and away from that kind of heat of the communal self? She doesn't put it in those words, but she's asking this question. And she says, capacities that took hundreds of thousands of years to evolve and develop, millions of years actually, can be lost if we're not putting them to use anymore. So she's definitely, she's making a call at the end of that book, I think, for something other than the nuclear family, for sure.

Catherine: Is, I mean, I understand she's a walnut farmer now in Northern California. Does anyone, is anyone in contact with her or does anyone have a sense of how involved she is in activism or academia or?

Chris: Yes, I was quite a lot in contact with her when I was just completing my book on Chomsky and she was, I wanted, I wanted to include Sarah Herdy in the final. chapters, like this chapter called Before Language. And so I was citing her and I wanted a photograph of her and she sent me one. And then of course I wanted to, I wanted to find out what she was doing. And she just told me that she's got very, very, very severe migraine and it's been for years and years and years and it's really taken her out of a huge lot of activity. And And then of course the fires in California, even a couple of years ago, were already very serious. I mean, obviously compared with us with the recent fires, kind of nothing. And I don't, I, okay, now I remember I was

trying to invite her to the conference of Eve Lang in Torun. And she says she's not doing any conferences, she's not going anywhere because of the migraine. Really sad.

Camilla: She has been participating in Royal Society conferences, or at least she's author of papers with Judith Burkhardt. And I'm not sure whether she actually was physically in the conference. But she is somewhat, I mean, she's retired, she's kind of retirement, but she's still the most famous kind of Darwinian feminist on the planet, except that she wouldn't overtly call herself that, or sometimes she might. When we met her in Chicago with Patty Guatti late in 90s, she would have been quite overt about sort of Darwinian feminism. And she still, at that time, was going with the great ape. It can't be female Philip Patrick, can it? When we talk to her. But she has moved from that position. She wouldn't be, she thinks that the science is kind of political enough. I don't think she would be overtly political herself. But as Morta says, the arguments about about what's happening to children. she's intrinsically going to be political because she and Christian Hawkes with the grandmother theory and some of us crazy lot with our female origins of symbolism are almost the only people who stand against the man the executioner, man the warrior, male philipatry, orthodoxy. We practically are. So she's intrinsically political for that reason. And of course, even Tomasello, I don't know if Katrin Went and heard the Tomasello Zoom, even Tomasello is, and we heard Brian Hare at RAG as well, kind of diminishing Hurdy or putting Hurdy in the box that, okay, that can explain genus Homo, but it doesn't explain the rest of what we need to explain about Homo sapiens.

Catherine: Thomas Sellar did mention Hardy yesterday, by the way, which was cool. Someone asked, 'so what are the actual origins of all of this cooperation?' And he said, 'well, I think it comes out of our foraging past'. And Sarah Hardy has talked a lot about, but it was funny because the way he worded it, I had asked a question in the comments box, you know, how did Sarah Hardy's work come into this? So he mentioned her name and I was really excited. But then he said, he said, Sarah heard he's made a made a big deal of our cooperative, our cooperative childcare. And the fact that he used those words, made a big deal of, was that, well, did he see me mentioned her in the comments. I don't know, it just seemed weird. I couldn't tell if it was like an unbidden.

Camilla: Right. He didn't try and integrate it in terms of ontogeny, because sometimes he's some recent papers, there has been a bit of movement between the Tomasello lot and Hurdy lot in terms of, particularly in terms of child mourners important viewpoint, that it's actually the child at the centre. And actually these strategies are not just female strategies, they're child-driven strategies. And that's where the evolution starts. That's where the behaviours that change our patterns start from the children. So Thomas L has kind of been saying something about that lately, but not in that talk.

Catherine: He's very child-focused. All his videos were compared to.

Chris: That's the huge problem with Tomasello, because he only, he does both sexes with chimpanzees, but when it comes to humans, they're children and they're

not sexed. So he's kind of sort of gender blind when it comes to humans because, you know, he never studies humans when they've grown up and when sex begins to kick in, they're all little kids. So you have chimpanzees in a cage. and sort of underage kids where it doesn't matter what sex they are. And so his conclusions are severely distorted really by his sort of experimental frameworks, actually, the limitations of those.

Jacob: It seems his, I was there yesterday, he seems more concerned with cooperation as a behavior or as an abstract than humans. And so his answer to that question was, Yeah, there wasn't a great deal of warmth to Herdi's work, but he said that he felt that was valid, that cooperative breeding was valid, but it was also, it's half of the story, the other half is cooperative hunting. And so he put them both in the space, which was more than I expected, but still, it was more about his theory of cooperation than actual bodies. and relationships between people.

Chris: And even when it comes to cooperative hunting, he doesn't really think that produces wee intentionality, this crucial ingredient. He thinks that comes from circling the wagons from war.

Camilla: Group and group, yeah.

Chris: So, I mean, it really is, he needs to listen a little bit more to Sarah, really, and not saying she makes a big deal out of it, which I'm afraid signifies to me that he feels a bit threatened by Sarah.

Camilla: We've got anybody else talk about aspects of Morna? I can say a little bit, but I don't want to talk very much because maybe I talk too much. I just wanted to say, I mean, everybody said what an amazing chapter this is, but I just have to say, it's the way, you know, it's over and above Herdi. It's the way the Morna seamlessly brings together the biology and the body with the culture. Because, Herdie never tries to do that. She doesn't do that, whatever, however generous Morna's been. She has all the ingredients, but she doesn't try and do that. And Morna is parlaying a lot of complex evolutionary material in a language that's really easy to understand. including Nadine Peacock's material on women's energetics and their work. And then going into this material on the symbolism of the hunt and so on and the issues of egalitarianism. And I just, I know how difficult that is because I've been trying to do it for 30 years and I can't do anything like this. So it is, you know, it just is so amazing. And there's so much going on, and this dialectic of antipathy of power, of the fact that they're removed from the taboo, the hunting and the taboos and so on, is a current of power, this wonderful dialectic. This putting into place the whole idea of Brightman's idea of that the sex division of labour, if women can't hunt, they must have less power. And this is just complete craziness if we think about it from an evolutionary perspective. But that's the standard position. And it was the position being generated by a kind of Western feminist diktat that if women can't hunt, if they can't do everything that men do, they must have less power. And there are male evolutionary anthropologists, Wrangham Foley, Paul Seabright, who think that that must mean men have control of the meat. And that must mean men must be able to control women through being able to, you know, make them have sex because of the meat. And this is just so far removed

from the subtlety which Morna's pulling out with all of this discussion of Peter Gao, as well as Jerome Lewis's material of this, you know, the desire, work is what you do for the other sex. It's just so sweet. It's such a sweet, beautiful definition, actually. That's from McCreedy, isn't it? I can't remember whose definition that was. And That goes with all the arguments about sexual conflict. Each sex wants the other one to do more work in animal terms, but when it comes to humans, each sex is giving to the other sex. So animals are always pulling it, humans are kind of giving it, and that makes so much difference. And then the issue of complex together, I mean, Jacob couldn't mention everything, but of course there's Wenger and Graber hiding behind there, or they're kind of waving behind there. And this issue of egalitarianism somehow not being complex, it is just so, crazy. So I was just looking back at, it was Juaris's material on the hunting rituals for the Baconaca. And She was talking about how the ritual associations in villages that are 30 or 50 people, there'll be as many as six or more ritual associations. There could be 20 ritual associations in just those small camps. So the idea that there is a lack of complexity in this, as Mona's always got it, this incredibly flexible, this incredibly fluid, everyone's moving And it comes back to what Nirat David was talking about on Tuesday, the connectivity. But of course, Nuripa David was, because of her perspective from the Nyaka in South Asia, which is really quite a different attitude from the African hunter-gatherers, Nuripa David was disarming the idea of egalitarianism. And she was, although bodies are there with her, they're not there in such a potent way as they always are in Mourner's text, in Mourner's discussion and discourse. And again, Mona's description of egalitarianism, attacking egalitarianism. It's, and that's what it has is its political idea that you're asserting egalitarianism. You're not just letting it happen. It's not going to happen unless you assert. But when it's talking about aggressive egalitarianism, it's from children and women is this aggressive egalitarianism. So, and it's from children and women dancing and singing. That's aggressive egalitarianism. so complex egalitarianism. There's just so much, so many riches in that chapter and how it all got fused together in this lovely, lovely melange is quite amazing stuff. Yeah, I'll shut up now. Somebody else can say. One interesting question is to think about how Mourner's chapter reflects on that recent sensational news stories about the female burial in the Andes of 9,000 odd years ago. Quite an interesting one, actually, that if people are interested in that. Could I just also add another general point? In relation to the discussions we were having a couple of weeks ago about what we briefly call culture wars, over whether you're allowed to make a connection between evolution and culture and the widespread dismissal of that connection, I think that one of the things that comes across to me more most clearly from your paper, the whole book, but your paper in particular, is that you actually get us past the idea that to admit a connection between our biology and our culture is to be essentially deterministic or indeed fatalistic about what we can be. In other words, our biology limits or restrains or starts short our capacity for cultural invention. And what Morna is saying, I think, almost more clearly than anyone else in the book, although we all say it in some way, is that actually our biology is a driver, a motor of

culture. And what culture is doing is building on what's there biologically and turning it into something different and something new and something innovative. But that there is no there's no limiting relationship between our biology and our culture. And I think more than you've done that answered you beautifully in your paper.

Morna: Oh, thank you. Thank you, Hilary. That's, you know, I think sometimes when you've written something a long time ago, and then, you know, you kind of go off on various other, down various other roads. I wrote that chapter in the middle of a big move, actually. I was moving house. So it's amazing that, you're saying it reads coherently, because I wasn't feeling very coherent. But it's been, this is really, from the moment that I wanted to go back into anthropology, having taken a few years out between the masters and the PhD and do the PhD, I just, I remember being gobsmacked that you had the feminist literature in one hand trying to move us all on from, this kind of embarrassing mess of the female body and the fact that it excluded us from culture, apparently. And then you had this incredible hunter-gatherer ethnography with these women using the most graphic kind of earthy parts of the body to express cultural sophistication and solidarity and to create this amazing virtual pendulum. And the fact the two weren't fitting together. And then when you look at the biological anthropology, you have the kind of the final layer. And feminism has suffered such a loss. because of this. We've really, it's like we've taken what is most fierce and, full of creative potential, and we've ditched it because we believed the story, the story being that we weren't powerful if we were our own bodies and our own skin and our own wombs, and that our children were really a bit of a handicapped and, you know, an unfortunate thing that we were going to have to deal with for a few years before we could get back into the real world. And it's really disgraceful because it not only impacts on us as human beings, it impacts on our children directly. I mean, and you see it if you live in these systems day after day, but it also impacts on grandmothers. Where's the grandmother in the political the global political arena. Where's the hag? Where's the old woman? And I was teaching a class last week on witchcraft, and we were looking at the witch persecutions, and also in relation to things like Bakhtin and his work on carnival, and the hag, the crone mother giving birth. And I was really, really struck by the fact that it's not just the loss of the female body. It's all the different ages of the female body. It's the children, it's the young women, it's the mothers, and it's, you know, the grandmothers, the witch, you know, the powerful, those women I saw dancing at Mbula with Ejegi, the two eldest women in the camp controlling the most powerful spirit, and the younger women behind them, And, I realized, and I'm realizing, you have to get rid of that older woman. You have to get rid of her in order to exploit the younger generation. And so that fact of keeping the body there, and by any means necessary almost, in the academic writing, in any story that we tell about evolution, and human political possibility. There has to be that female body, but if you branch it out as hunter-gatherers do, all of us in our bodies, all of us being articulate because we are embodied, because we're able to connect with one another in that way. And it is, it's astonishingly complex. If you think about this idea that for a long time,

you know, the idea that egalitarianism was simple and kind of a little bit boring and a little bit, there wasn't lots of bloodshed, you didn't have canes. The fact that we, when you look at any, as Camilla says, you look at a hunter-gatherer camp in action on any given day and you see virtual sophistication of a level that goes beyond anything tech can come up with, because to be able to use your own body in the absence of any other instrument, to be able to pull everything out of yourself, the music and the blood and the dreams and the dance, and use that as a force for creating sophisticated political motion is extraordinary. Anyway, I'm really glad to have to go back and read some of this stuff because it reminds me that putting things together and bringing in all the different strands is important. And the academic work is important because that's, as Chris says, that's where the science is. That's where you're really bringing hard facts to your own sense of things. And it's important. Yeah. And it does, I mean, I'm thinking a lot these days about where we are as a species and about the children. It's funny how, we seem to have circled around to the point in our species development or lifeline where we're going to have to kind of reenact that moment where women push themselves out into the public arena as a force, as a body, and are able to somehow articulate this kind of, you know, it's survival now. It's not any longer, you know, kind of maybe will, maybe won't. And you do, you do that for the children in the society, not just my children, but you know, yours or all of our children. As people like the Benjelli or the Juntai do. Yeah.

Chris: When you say that the old hag, the witch, you just, you've just got to get rid of that one. All of our fairy tales, you know, every single one, even the very, very, very powerful witches. I mean, it's just that it is just a theme, a theme of fairy tales that doesn't matter how powerful the king is, he hasn't got the right body to be really, really, really powerful. And that's the wicked, that's the wicked godmother or the wicked witch.

Camilla: He's got to steal it somehow.

Morna: Yeah. Also, I think, you know, there is kind of like, It's amazing because you realize that there has been historically this long, kind of wrangle between, the kind of power body that Bakhtin talks about, where you have, the hags or the witch still vocal, still public, and then the alternative. And you also realize that actually, like Jerome says about the Benjelli, there's almost a sense of mortal danger, for in the collective psyche about women, older women in particular, I think, being publicly acknowledged, valued, made central. Because we have in our history this episode where there was this crushing, stamping out of that that archetype. And actually, physically, what's the estimate for the witch persecutions in Europe and America? How many people were burned and drowned and hung? And these were almost like those Benjelli grannies that I watched dance. That's what had to be annihilated in order to privatize the rest of us. They're the ones in any camp who are like, pecking hens. They'll be right on top of you the moment you try to hoard something. So, you know, bringing them in as well, it seems really essential. And connecting things like Kirsten Hawkes and Herdie to the ethnography, even if biological anthropologists aren't doing that

themselves, that we do it. because there's a story there that is just so obvious and has so many interconnecting parts and it needs to be told, as you all know.

Chris: The very first line of your thesis is, culture is biology. That is the thesis. This is the message of this work. I mean, that was just... Yeah.

Catherine: I mean, I certainly feel some uncomfortability. I think for me, this has always been kind of a tension I have within RAG is that I, and I also kind of, I can't help but notice, but that there's a lot of women in RAG like myself, who have chosen not to, not to be mothers and not to, or not to have that be a big part of our lives. So sometimes I think it's funny that we're, we, sit around talking about how women's power is located and, they're being baby minders and their lactation and all of these things that simultaneously a lot of us, I think, don't gravitate towards. And it's certainly that it's like something that doesn't sit well with me, I have to say a lot of times, reading that my, apparently my power as a woman comes from these things because when I, when I hear that a couple weeks ago, when there were these, stories come out that almost fully half of the hunters, found buried with hunting paraphernalia are female. And my reaction, I have to say emotionally, was just like excitement because like extrapolating myself back into the past, I think I probably would have enjoyed, the intellectual work of tracking animals, which it is, it is an intellectual, hunting is, I mean, that way is an intellectual enterprise. And that speaks to me more than, being back at camp looking after kids. I have to say. So it's always something that's, been difficult for me to, fully take on board. And I guess it's just like, I don't know. I don't know what to say about that. If that's where my fundamental power comes from as a woman, then I don't know what to do because it doesn't, I don't gravitate towards being, being a child, a child carer. So, and I think there's a lot of women in RAG who come from that perspective. That's why we spend our free time, sitting around thinking about these things, right? So I just never know what to do with that tension. Yeah, so.

Morna: And I know I've said a lot already, Catherine, so I don't want to... I don't want to talk a lot more. And I don't want to contradict you or challenge that either, because, I know that on many levels you're right. So my nine-year-old has just pushed a note under the door saying, hurry up. As if on cue.

Camilla: There are tensions.

Morna: Yeah, we're supposed to be doing the fire and, you know, baked potatoes, and I'm sitting here talking. But you know, what I wanted to say is, This is one of the really core points is that, we don't have to get stuck at female biology as an individual thing. Because if you do, you're not much better than the essentialists, you know, who would have us limited by that or to it. And it becomes a limiting factor. The whole point is the, you know, we're defined by what we share. You know, so I think the fact that in any real community, we take these assumptions out of the equation. So, hunting, going out, tracking an animal, killing it, is somehow more challenging, more demanding of the intellect than trying to entertain a bunch of really curious, two or three-year-olds and educate them and communicate with other mothers, while

also knowing where to go for the right tubers and maybe having to sat your roof and, working out the next dance. it's like we put things into boxes. Our body, our biology, our work as mothers goes in one box. Hunting goes in another box. And then these things get wed against each other. So I don't think that it's really a case of saying that, being a mother or not being a mother somehow excludes you from this. It's the use of principles to create energy. And to also ensure that those mothers, those women in camp who do have the babies or the ones out foraging or the ones hunting, because we know that women do engage, of course, in small-scale hunting wherever they can, and they're good at it. It's the fact that they don't have to. It's the fact that what they do is sufficiently valued so that at the points of their life where they can't hunt, And, you are at certain moments of your life as a reproductive body, if you choose to do that. It's very useful that there's this taboo around you running around a forest with a spear. You know, if you're eight months pregnant or breastfeeding, it's actually ingenious. And if you look at all the data, what you see is that it's women insisting on this. Meanwhile, they're out hunting whenever they feel like it. as they forage, they can catch a small animal and they're very skilled at it. And we know that with Mbuti, they do the net hunting as well with their husbands and brothers. They have no problem with that. What's interesting is the cultural taboo, saying that men should go out They should catch, the hardest to catch and kill animals, which aren't, then they can't touch them. They have to bring them back to camp, deliver them to the women, usually the elder women, which means the mothers, who butcher them and cook them, and the women also go in trance and track the animal first. The Inuit say, it's the woman to whom the animal comes. There's a wonderful paper by Barbara Bodenhorn where she says, when you speak to Inuit hunters, they say if you don't have a female accomplice, you can't hunt because the animal comes to her. It's her who tracks and entrance and ties the spirit. And it's also her who offers all the, makes all the ritual offerings afterwards. So we're, that's full of intellect. But it's just that we're stuck in our own definitions. And I also think, if we're going back to the past, we have to realise as well that keeping children alive in the group will have been a collective endeavour, whether you had one yourself or not. Everyone's involved. And in the camp out in Boulay, some of the people I saw had jiggling babies in hip slings, the most were boys. There were lots of teenage boys, and if they were passing, slicking off to do whatever they were going to do in the forest, somebody would just stick a baby on them. And they had to be involved because they had as much part in nurturing these children and giving the children the chemical, the tangible, connection with the male body. That's so important to people like the ACA. Barry Hewlett's work is wonderful. He tells us that men, ACA men spend five times more of their time than any other fathers holding and nursing and taking care of kids. And then, you have all the Amazonian literature and the Kuvada and the fact that there you have young men, again, drawn into the pregnancy. They go through the pregnancy of their wife or partner. They actually go through the morning sickness and they suffer the same food taboos. and they talk about feeling pain at the birth. They're taking there, just

as women take, the hunt, they're taking reproductivity, they're taking female fertility, and everything enters the cultural sphere and gets shared. I don't know if that makes sense.

Catherine: Yeah, and I'm not, I wasn't saying that, you know, to women's work is not intellectual. I was just sort of acknowledging that, there's something attractive, the active following animals through the landscape. I think that's probably what I would have wanted to be doing. so, but yeah, absolutely. It's not to say that women's work isn't intellectually demanding, but yeah, I just, I think it's important to address and and kind of work through the sort of inherent tension, between sort of saying that this is where women's power originates and just the undeniable fact that many women, when given the choice, choose not to do that work. So, to me, it's like, if we don't talk about that, we're just leaving this like massive lacuna in the middle of, in the middle of this stuff. So yeah, it's just, it's, that was wonderful what you said. And it's just something I want to put out there, you know, that we need to make it legible. Amy, you have your hand up.

Amy: Yeah, I think about this a lot too. And like, especially now, the time in the world that we're living in, it's become a contribution to the future and to the future children by choosing to not have children. And that for me, in this work, what's more striking than the biological capabilities that women have is the power that women have in solidarity in the coalitions, and that power is also very spiritually rooted. and that like it's that power of women's intuition and the women's connection that is really able to work in that power dynamic that we're not used to in the Western world. And so like for me, that's sort of where my interest is when I get caught up in the like, well, I'm not having babies, so I don't know how I fit into this model. But also what's so striking to me in this paper is that the spiritual is brought up multiple times. And like reading this, I'm so caught up in like where we are right now in lockdown, like gyms are open, but schools are closed. Like what are we saying about how we care for children and how we care for ourselves and the planet? And sort of like weaving that thinking in as I read this. But like what's so missing in the Western is the spiritual. And that like we're so secular, that doesn't come in and that like the coalitions become purely political. And they talk about the body, but they're not in the body, which I think is like then why we get into the biological capabilities because like pregnancy and nursing bring us into the body. But also like thinking about how not having children is helping future children. And there are ways that in our modern Western world, we're contributing to the future children without having to babysit, I guess, is what I'm saying. If that makes sense.

Chris: I'm just wondering whether we shouldn't let Morna go at this point if there's so much to do. I really think that you're here.

Morna: No, thank you. Thank you so much. It's just, I mean, you know, that I think that's talking about sharing and, you know, the ability to connect. You don't, nothing is really works, you know, as a standalone thing anymore. I think we have to, you know, it's the connections and it's the fact that people feedback and challenge and

we really look closely at stuff together. I wish I had more, a wee bit more space and time to do that. And I really loved your point, Catherine, about being careful to kind of set up this, mother goddess thing, which could alienate others. It's really very much for me about The fact that we're all daughters, and you could take that and look at that. I have a 14-year-old growing up in this mad world, and that's relevant too. But like I said, I think we're now really, we're working, all of us, in any way that we can for ourselves, for our own lives, but for each other. And that means, to me anyway, it means for the children who still have so much possibility and who deserve to have a kind of community that is able to move beyond me and my needs and taking care of me. We've really done that to death now. So I guess that's what kids give us, isn't it? That's what Sarah Hurdy says. She says, it's the young, you know, it's the big eyes and the way they look at you and the way, you know, that they bring out the spontaneity. They're designed to do that, whether you have them or not. They're designed to elicit your protection and to make you care and to make you want to help them live on the most primitive level. I don't think there's any shame and admitting this that we're touched, really deeply by children and wanting to put them against, all the other, this power alliance full of stampeding, old kind of Trump type alpha males. let's put the children into the middle, followed by all the rest of us.

Camilla: Perhaps the most encouraging political thing that happened was in the last two weeks when Marcus Rashford, this great hero, this footballer who's come from himself a background where he didn't have a, where he was raised in care, And he has fought a battle against the horrible Tory, corrupt Tory government to ensure that children who are in poverty will get free school meals even when lockdown's happening, even when the half term is happening at school. So our American comrades, colleagues may not have heard about this story. But this has transformed, this has brought cooperative childcare right out of the whole of the British, of England, Scotland, everywhere, because As soon as Marcus Rashford stood up saying, we've got to feed the children at half term, all these restaurants, all these cafes, everywhere, a great map was produced to the whole of Britain, Scotland, Northern Ireland, everywhere, saying, we're going to give free school meals. Anyone comes along to get their free meals, we'll go and produce them. Come with your kids, we'll give you free food. So suddenly communism, cooperative childcare was all just happening. And the main description of even some of the mildest Labour MPs were mouthing the Tories, Tory scum in Parliament. And this was trending on Twitter, the fact that they wouldn't feed the children whilst the whole rest of the country was insisting. So that was something that was very heartening. And it just, I don't think we can, I think Catherine's really well done to raise the issue because it's something I haven't had children. It's something I've often thought about in RAG, that people at RAG are very often concerned, you know, they're working at this issue of having of childcare and cooperative childcare, but themselves may not, not just women, but also men. And from my point of view, it really was looking at the situation that we do not have. We do not have the collectivity. We have this privatization. And it was a situation that I just didn't really want to get

into. Even if I would have wanted children, it was the social setup for it was just really not in the right place as far as I was concerned. So the other thing I wouldn't support is Amy's, you know, what Amy was seeing there in that chapter, in Mourn's chapter, because culture is biology, biology is culture. Mourn's making this so clear that it isn't just reducing to mother and child. It is female collectivity is producing the whole society. It is producing the art, the philosophy, the poetry, the beauty, the song, the dance, and it's doing the hunting as well. There's no limit to it. There isn't any limit. So I wouldn't see it as a constraint. I wouldn't see this description of women's power by a mourn as a constraint. Just one more thing to say, Catrin, is Frank Marlowe's discussions of Hadza camps, and I've had some of this experience too. The idea that women are sitting in the camp baby-minding all the time is complete. You know from a Hadza camp, it's just not true. What happens in a Hadza camp is they leave all the kids, one adult, often the male researcher, is left with all the kids to look after and mind while the women go piss off to go and find themselves some bangy to smoke. I mean, you know, that is not, this is not a description of women having to be hanging with kids at the apron drinks at all. They have, these are women who are organized. And organization means they're women who have autonomy and freedom to decide what they want to do. That's what it is.

Morna: Thank you Camilla, that's a brilliant note to leave on.

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November 20, 2020

Radical Anthropology. <www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rwg8jAnxyig>

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