



Radical Anthropology

Sarah Hrdy
Cooperative childcare

Kate Pickett
Health and inequality

Sian Sullivan
Green capitalism

Morna Finnegan
Eros and women's power

Simone Pika
Chimps, ravens and language

£3

www.radicalanthropologygroup.org

ISSN 1756-0896 (Print)/ISSN 1756-090X (Online)

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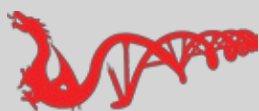
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On the cover:

The journal's logo represents the emergence of culture (dragons feature in myths and legends from around the world) from nature (the DNA double-helix, or selfish gene). The dragon is a symbol of solidarity, especially the blood solidarity that was a necessary precondition for the social revolution that made us human. For more on this, see our website -

www.radicalanthropologygroup.org.

The cover picture features Mbendjele women and children engaged in cooperative childcare. See Morna Finnegan's article on page 31.

Back cover:

Climate Rush protestors storm

Westminster Bridge under ancestral guidance, June 1, 2009.

Photo: T Dalinian Jones

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Who we are and what we do

Radical Anthropology is the journal of the Radical Anthropology Group.

Radical: about the inherent, fundamental roots of an issue.

Anthropology: the scientific study of the origin, behaviour, and physical, social, and cultural development of humans.

Anthropology asks one big question: what does it mean to be human? To answer this, we cannot rely on common sense or on philosophical arguments. We must study how humans actually live – and the many different ways in which they have lived. This means learning, for example, how people in non-capitalist societies live, how they organise themselves and resolve conflict in the absence of a state, the different ways in which a 'family' can be run, and so on. Additionally, it means studying other species and other times. What might it mean to be almost – but not quite – human? How socially self-aware, for example, is a chimpanzee? Do nonhuman primates have a sense of morality? Do they have language? And what about distant times? Who were the Australopithecines and why had they begun walking upright? Where did the Neanderthals come from and why did they become extinct? How, when and why did human art, religion, language and culture first evolve?

The Radical Anthropology Group started in 1984 when Chris Knight's popular 'Introduction to Anthropology' course at Morley College, London, was closed down, supposedly for budgetary reasons. Within a few weeks, the students got organised, electing a treasurer, secretary and other officers. They booked a library in Camden – and invited Chris to continue teaching next year. In this way, the Radical Anthropology Group was born.

Later, Lionel Sims, who since the 1960s had been lecturing in sociology at the University of East London, came across Chris's PhD on human origins and – excited by the backing it provided for the anthropology of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, particularly on the subject of 'primitive communism' – invited Chris to help set up Anthropology at UEL. During the 1990s several other RAG members including Ian Watts, Camilla Power, Isabel Cardigos and Charles Whitehead completed PhDs at University College London and Kings College London, before going on to further research and teaching.

For almost two decades, Anthropology at UEL retained close ties with the Radical Anthropology Group, Chris becoming Professor in Anthropology in 2001. He was sacked by UEL's corporate management in July 2009 for his role in organising and publicising demonstrations against the G20 in April.

While RAG has never defined itself as a political organization, the implications of some forms of science are intrinsically radical, and this applies in particular to the theory that humanity was born in a social revolution. Many RAG members choose to be active in Survival International and/or other indigenous rights movements to defend the land rights and cultural survival of hunter-gatherers. Additionally, some RAG members combine academic research with activist involvement in environmentalist, anti-capitalist and other campaigns. For more, see www.radicalanthropologygroup.org

Editorial: A Willingness to Share

In this bicentenary year, Darwinian feminist Sarah Blaffer Hrdy has published a book that would likely have astonished and fascinated Charles Darwin himself. *Mothers and Others* is a landmark work, an infant's eye view of the first steps towards human hypersociality. Arguing that we became human through cooperative group childcare, it demolishes lingering doctrines of humans evolving in patrilocal bands of fathers and brothers with wives dutifully tagging along. Ranging over developmental psychology, primatology, anthropology and endocrinology, Hrdy writes lucidly and accessibly. This is a book everyone interested in human evolution – well, everyone, mums, dads, uncles, aunts, grandparents – should get their hands on.

Radical Anthropology is delighted that amid an extremely busy Darwin schedule, Hrdy found time to talk with us about her work (p. 10). As she says, "The fact that human children depend so much on food acquired by others is a big reason why anyone seeking the most significant human universals would do well to start with sharing." But Hrdy writes this as a fully paid up sociobiologist. We need to explain the sharing, the connection, the empathy as strategic behaviour that survived the test of natural and sexual selection: that is, benefited our 'selfish genes'.

If this issue of *Radical Anthropology* has a unifying theme then it probably is how fundamental willingness to share – food, stories, lipstick, medicine, beads, dances, childcare – is to humanity. Another perfectly timed arrival this year is Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett's *The*

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Spirit Level. Just as the City of London croons ‘bonuses are back!’; just when the Chairman of the Financial Services Authority describes most of the City’s trading and hedging as “socially useless”, Wilkinson and Pickett provide us with the scientific data demonstrating the harm done to us all – even those poor, overworked bankers – by inequality. These huge gaps between richest and poorest eat like acid into the fabric of community. No one wins. Pickett’s graphs on pp. 7-8 send a powerful and important message: there’s a point beyond which growth – the ever-resounding mantra of Capital – cannot make us happier or healthier. An exactly

similar graph shows us there’s a point beyond which increase of CO₂ emissions cannot add to our health or happiness

either. Here in the affluent West, *we have long passed both these points*. So what is to be done? With the lamentable failure of political will to change when people at large cry out for new direction, with no politician able to refute the ‘growth at all costs’ indoctrination, we need to act ourselves. The Climate Campers (p. 41) have been showing the way, occupying Blackheath like a new citizen army ready to swoop on the sinful City. Over a sunny and breezy August Bank Holiday weekend, suddenly you didn’t have to be dedicated to direct action to roll up to Climate Camp, just a concerned mum and dad with the kids coming to find out about sustainable living.

Those of us who have been stirring it up this year following Lehman Brothers’ collapse know capitalism is not going to lie down easily. Following Naomi Klein’s *Shock Doctrine*, that corporate capital feeds on disaster and only smells out more opportunity for profit, Sian Sullivan (p. 18) examines how the ‘environmental crisis’ has blossomed into a welter of schemes involving Payment for Ecosystem Services. Of

course, no one actually pays the non-human world anything. Oklahoma Land Rush-style, the payments go to whoever is able to stake their claim over the ‘products’ and ‘services’ provided by nature. What will happen to us as human beings, asks Sullivan “if the best we can come up with is money as the mediator of our relationships with the non-human world”? What do we lose when we can no longer listen to or learn from alternative models of reciprocal, moral relations with nature, models that still are cultivated by cultures which coincidentally – or is it a coincidence? – live amid the greatest biodiversity?

“ If this issue of Radical Anthropology has a unifying theme then it probably is how fundamental willingness to share is to humanity ”

Morna Finnegan’s beautiful essay on Women’s eros (p. 31) deserves to be read and reread. It brings the riches of European philosophy to bear on the concrete, bodily wisdom of the forest. It takes us close to the mystery at the heart of human existence: how to share power. The answer, shown to us in direct action of ritual and dance, is by being willing to give it up, then take it back, then give it up again, and take it back. With poignant delicacy and humour, Finnegan leads us into the sensual experience of give and take, of ribald taunting between the sexes, of the “political pendulum” animating life in a Central African hunter-gatherer camp. This article is not about exotica. It is telling us a deep-down truth about what makes us human; it’s giving us a key, a secret about what is needed in our world. We can take heart, those of us who hope to dance on the grave of capitalism, all who’ve been flowing into channels of resistance, from Climate Rush to the Vestas occupation to Notting Hill Carnival. We can dance our way to power; we

need government by dancing in the streets.

Trained in the Tomasello school of Leipzig’s Max Planck Institute, Simone Pika (p. 28) proposes a gestural precursor to the evolution of language, drawing on her classic ethological work on chimpanzees and ravens. We begin to understand just how smart these species are when applying a ‘competitive paradigm’ – that is, reconfiguring in lab experiments set-ups that are more similar to the competitive social contexts of the wild. By contrast, human infants of 12 to 18 months are not necessarily more advanced in cognitive skills than apes, but

when it comes to understanding a shared goal, reading intentions, and anticipating collaboration,

children are off the chart against chimps. We need evolutionary models like Sarah Hrdy’s to begin to understand “how on Darwin’s earth” our species came to flourish through this willingness to share intentions, and ultimately resources.

We were going to run Chris Knight’s response to Chomsky’s interview in last year’s issue, but some readers may have noticed all our contributors happen to be women this year. We admit, this was by design after last year’s virtually male-only edition, which was by accident. We also admit that to date *Radical Anthropology* contributors have been overwhelmingly Euroamerican, even if they’ve spent decades of their lives informed by cultures across the globe. Next year, *Radical Anthropology* will work to correct that.

Finally, *Radical Anthropology* wants to say thank you to Stuart Watkins, editor of our first two issues, who had the original concept of launching an anthropology journal that trampled down the barriers between activism and academe. ■

Why Equality is Good for our Health

If it benefits everyone to live in a more equal society, what is to be done? **Kate Pickett** discusses the main message of her recent book.

Radical Anthropology:

Congratulations on your book, *The Spirit Level: why more equal societies almost always do better*, co-authored with **Richard Wilkinson**. The book offers a mass of evidence to show that more unequal societies do worse on a whole array of health and welfare indicators. Some left activists might think: Isn't this kind of obvious? What would you say is new and remarkable about these findings?

Kate Pickett: Thank you, I think it is true that people on the left have felt for a long time that more unequal societies must be bad for our health and social wellbeing, and indeed there is a body of research linking income inequality to levels of violent crime and a more contested evidence base for the effects of inequality on population health. There are two major new and remarkable aspects of the evidence we present in *The Spirit Level*.

First, we show that a wide range of health and social problems are affected by levels of income inequality, including levels of trust, mental illness, life expectancies and infant mortality, obesity, educational performance, teenage births, homicides, rates of imprisonment and social mobility. And we can show these links in two separate tests – among the rich, developed countries and, independently, among the 50 American states. The correlations are strong and statistically significant. Second, we show that inequality seems to affect almost everybody, not just the poor or those with low social status. It is hard to compare people's health and wellbeing at the same socioeconomic position across

different societies, but in the few studies that have been able to do this, it is clear that health and educational performance are better even at the top of the social hierarchy in more equal societies. As an example, death rates are lower in more equal American states, even among those that live in the most affluent counties. And even for the most highly educated parents, their children will have higher education scores in more equal countries than their counterparts in more unequal ones.

“... inequality seems to affect almost everybody, not just the poor”

Taken together, these findings show that the instincts and feelings that many people have – that inequality is not only morally wrong and unjust but also harmful to the social fabric – are based on a reality that can be demonstrated empirically. So our book makes the link from ‘knowing’ to ‘showing’.

RA: You mention people's ‘instincts’ that inequality is morally wrong and unfair, harmful to wider society, and in the book you highlight our evolutionary heritage in hunter-gatherer egalitarianism. We do seem to be happier when we are among our equals. Yet many of the social ills associated with greater inequality seem to arise because of something equally natural – our innate tendency for status-seeking. So which is the true ‘human nature’? Can we explain the paradox?

KP: I don't think we have a paradox: we are sensitive to the social world.

The structure of that social world then shapes our responses to it; we have different responses to different environments. In a more egalitarian world we can be collaborative and trusting; in a dog-eat-dog world, we need to seek as much power and status as we can.

I think that the important aspect of our psychology that we need to understand in this context is how we know ourselves through the eyes of others, rather than any innate tendency to status-seeking. As humans, we can clearly adapt to all kinds of social structures, and although we have lived most of our human heritage in fairly small egalitarian groups, we have also lived in extreme tyrannical hierarchies, and everything in between. Status matters more in more unequal societies because it has a greater impact on our access to resources – whether that is meat in a hunter-gatherer tribe, or a high income and private education in modern Britain.

You say that we are happiest when among our equals. But I think it is more accurate to say we are happiest when among our friends (usually chosen from among our equals), because they like us and value being with us.

RA: That's a very encouraging answer for anarchists or community activists since it implies that ultimately we have the fate of our communities in our hands. But is the political will there to acknowledge and act on your findings? At the moment it seems just the opposite. On the one hand, we have the bankers backsliding into yet more

bonuses. Then in summer 2009 we heard John Denham, New Labour Minister for Communities, saying that the 1960s ideal of equality is 'redundant' – trying to divert resources to people at the bottom of the social scale 'alienates' those in the middle. How do you react to that?

KP: Political will is clearly needed to bring about changes in the level of inequality in the UK. We can think

supported progressive tax and benefit systems, and targeted help for those most in need. When shown evidence of the impact of inequality on health and social problems, they showed "strong support for a social vision based upon improving quality of life for everyone and were prepared to support certain egalitarian policies in this context". So I think the evidence shows that the general public is already disposed to prefer more

economic growth and health and wellbeing. As Figure 1 shows, as countries get richer, life expectancy improves, but only up to a point. Beyond a certain level of economic growth, among today's rich market democracies, there is no association at all between levels of average income and health and wellbeing. A similar graph for happiness looks just the same. So poorer countries need to continue to pursue economic

“ Research ... found that Americans were ‘deeply ambivalent about wealth and material gain’, wanting society to ‘move away from greed and excess’ ,,

of political will as arising from two sources: from politicians and policy makers who want to change society and make it more equal; and from the general public demanding changes to promote equality from politicians and policy-makers. Change would obviously be easiest if both groups were aligned in wanting greater equality. Surveys repeatedly show us that people think that income differences are too big, and worry that society is increasingly focused on materialism and status, at the expense of quality of life. Research from the Harwood Institute for Public Innovation in the USA found that Americans were “deeply ambivalent about wealth and material gain”. They wanted society to “move away from greed and excess toward a way of life more centred on values, community, and family” and when brought together in focus groups people were “surprised and excited to find that others share(d) their views”.

In the UK, the Fabian Society recently completed research for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on public attitudes to inequality. Although people were not opposed to high incomes if they deserved them through ability or performance, after the economic crisis they started to question whether high salaries really were deserved. The majority also

equality and would welcome a shift to a society that emphasized a better quality of life for all. The public's political will is in place. And the evidence that we lay out in *The Spirit Level* could be used as an evidence-base to support a call for a new social and political vision. What we seem to be lacking is a politician or mainstream political party willing to make that social vision a reality. We are at a critical turning point for our society – we can't afford to go back to an emphasis on runaway economic growth at any cost, we must constrain our energy consumption and CO₂ emissions, and we have a public yearning for something different. It's an opportunity for profound change and I hope that politicians and policy makers will have the courage to seize the moment.

RA: You point to the critical nature of our time for our society and the whole planet. How do you link issues of equality in the richer nations to the world's great problems of sustainability in the light of global warming? What about countries where wellbeing can still be significantly improved by economic growth?

KP: First, you need to understand the shape of the relationship between

growth, but it is no longer beneficial for rich countries.

Second, you need to understand the shape of the relationship between carbon emissions and health and wellbeing....it's the same! Figure 2 shows that as developing countries expand their economies and start to emit more CO₂, their populations gain in health, but rich market democracies are characterized by incredibly high rates of carbon emissions that bring no benefits in terms of quality of life. Rich countries need to constrain economic growth and emissions, and they can do that without damaging health and wellbeing.

As rich countries contract their growth and emissions and poorer countries pursue the economic growth they need, countries ought to converge at a point of optimal quality of life without excessive emissions, putting them in the upper left corner of Figure 2 (where Costa Rica is already). This would reduce global inequalities, as well as addressing problems of climate change.

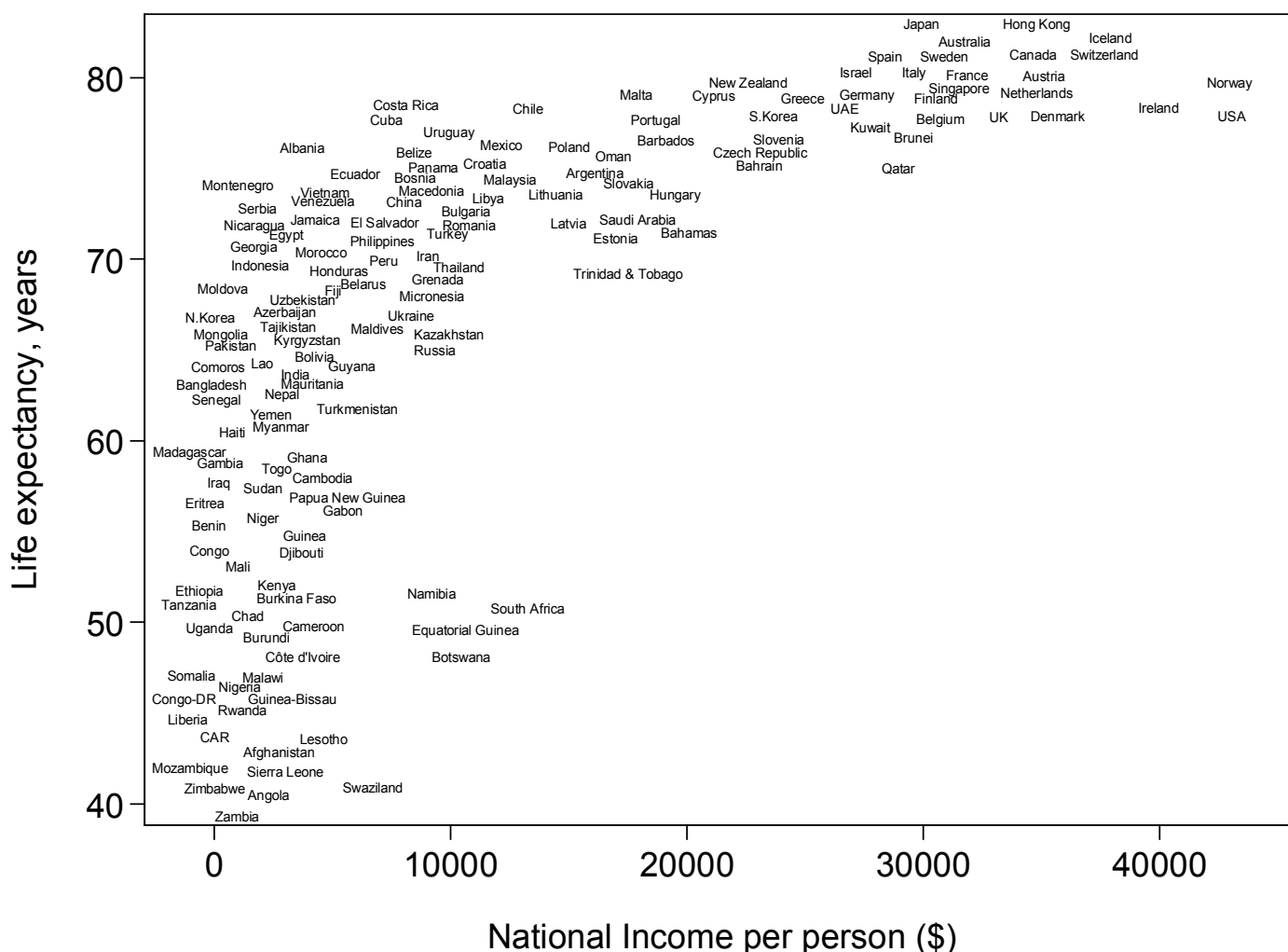
RA: Among the rich democracies, more homogenous populations such as Japan or Sweden regularly do well while the more ethnically diverse USA and UK do persistently

badly on such indicators as life expectancy, infant mortality, obesity rates, educational performance, levels of violence, and imprisonment rates. Could it be that discrimination against ethnic minorities is fundamental here, and really confounded with income inequality effects?

KP: As you point out, at first glance, it looks as if the more ethnically homogeneous countries do better than those which are more diverse. But the picture isn't quite that simple. Spain, for example, has a larger migrant population than its neighbour, Portugal, but is more equal and has fewer health and social problems. And Sweden and the USA have similar proportions of foreign-born residents. Also, an international study, using data on the ethnic mix in each country, found that ethnic diversity did not explain

the inequality and poor health. Among the 50 American states income inequality does tend to be higher in states with higher proportions of African-American residents. Some researchers have suggested that this accounts for the relationship between inequality and health, while others show that this is not the case. Importantly, in the more unequal states health is worse for both the African American and the white populations. Insofar as ethnic divisions are related to inequality and may contribute to its effects it isn't ethnicity itself that matters. Instead, ethnicity can serve as a marker of low social status, attracting stigmatisation, prejudice and discrimination. Rather than ethnic diversity involving quite separate pathways from those through which inequality has its effects, they involve very much the same processes.

RA: Is there anything you can say specifically about effects of inequality on women and their lives? Particularly, when analysing data on social 'evils' which correlate with higher levels of inequality in rich democracies, teenage pregnancy is one of the indicators you put up alongside mental illness, drug addiction, violence, and high imprisonment rates. While it's easy to see that young mums and their children are in danger of falling into cycles of deprivation, isn't there a problem of stigmatising their strategies here? From an evolutionary perspective, first pregnancy at age 18 or 19, say, may be a perfectly viable strategy. And your own data show that teenage births increase where job opportunities decrease, and *vice versa*. So aren't these young women making sensible choices? After all, it's not their fault if society is not



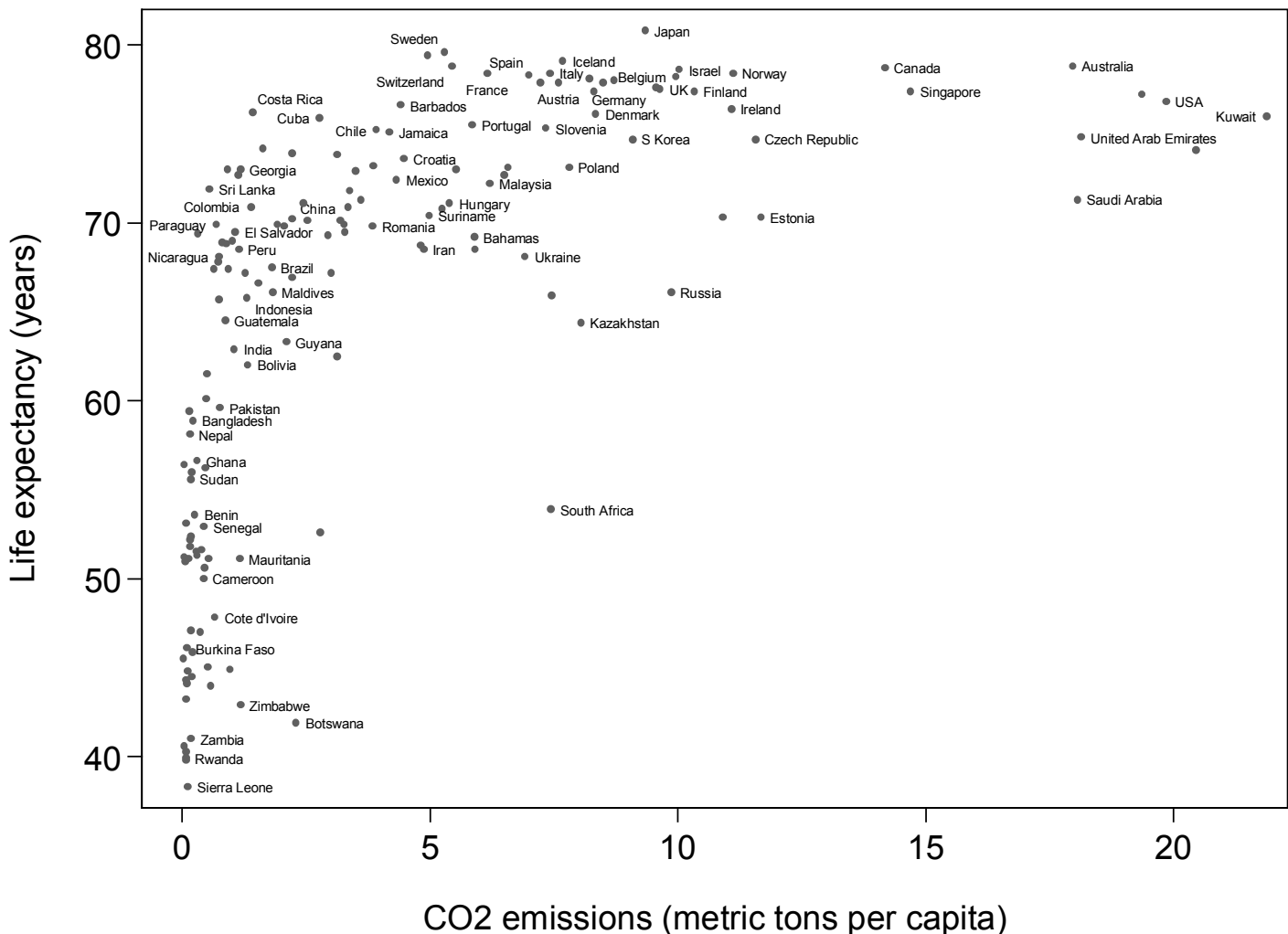


Figure 2: Life expectancy and CO₂ emissions per person(data sources at www.equalitytrust.org.uk)

adjusting itself to our evolutionary heritage.

KP: First, with respect to the impact of inequality on women's lives in general, we show that women's status is significantly better in more equal

teenage motherhood, and whether or not having children at a young age is a reasonable strategy, both in terms of our evolutionary heritage and when opportunities for young women are limited. And you ask if we are in danger of stigmatising the choices

true everywhere – in Japan, 86% of teenage mothers are married, as are more than half of young mothers in Greece and Italy. But many young women in the UK, USA and elsewhere do seem to be choosing early motherhood because society

“ We are at a critical turning point for our society – we have a public yearning for something different. It's an opportunity for profound change „

countries, such as the Scandinavian countries, as well as in the more equal US states. Japan is a notable exception. Where the overall income differences in society are greater, women have lower income relative to men, are less likely to be highly educated and to be participants in political processes, such as voting or holding office. But you asked specifically about

of young women. Society already stigmatises teenage motherhood. In our book we point out that teenage motherhood is not a problem because these mothers are young, but because teenage motherhood in the context of many rich countries is inextricably linked with deprivation, social exclusion and the intergenerational transmission of poverty and disadvantage. This isn't

isn't offering them jobs or education. That lack of opportunities is what should cause public outrage.

We also discuss in *The Spirit Level* the evolution of different reproductive strategies, which make sense in different contexts. If we learn, while growing up, that other people can't be trusted, that relationships are unpredictable

and that resources are scarce (all of which are more likely in a more unequal society), then reaching sexual maturity and becoming sexually active earlier and having a larger number of children with multiple partners might have been (in evolutionary terms) a successful strategy. But in our modern societal context, which values and rewards long periods of education and career training, the postponement of childbearing becomes a marker of successful adulthood. A society that placed less value on income and status would be more likely to respect all the timings and the structures by which families are formed.

RA: 'Inequality is structural violence' is one heading in your chapter on violence. Not everyone resorts to violence. But as recent epidemics of postcode violence and knife crime seem to show, the youngest and poorest men both suffer and perpetrate the most. What can your work say about how to prevent these cycles of violence?

KP: More unequal societies suffer more violent crime and you're right that it is young, poor men who are most likely to be victims and perpetrators. This is because threats to pride and status, which instigate feelings of humiliation and shame, are the most common trigger for violence. And young men have an evolved need to maintain status and face, because that determines their social and sexual success. But violent crime is almost unknown in some societies, so clearly environmental conditions determine levels of homicide and violent crime.

As we show that levels of trust and social cohesion are higher in more equal societies and the quality of family life and education is better, and social mobility higher, I think that some of the pathways that link inequality to violence are clear.

Early life exposure to violence and abuse and a lack of strong male role models are an issue for far too many of our young men, as are the influence of negative peer groups, the high levels of conflict and bullying in our schools and the lack of meaningful employment, training, and leisure opportunities. Even within the most violent countries, such as the UK and USA, most of us don't react violently to put-downs and threats to status, because we are buffered by our education and nice houses, our cars and our jobs, our friends and colleagues who think well of us – all the trappings of our status and potential. If we want to prevent violence, then we need to value and respect our boys and young men and make sure that society provides them with the means to value their own lives and potential. They need an educational curriculum that appeals to them, jobs and apprenticeships that offer them a worthwhile experience of work and a living wage. And we desperately need a concerted political effort to reduce the horrendous impact of the current economic crisis on youth unemployment. Many of the health and social problems that our society faces today, including the homicide rate, can be traced back to the consequences of mass unemployment and rising inequality in the 1980s. We need to learn from those lessons

and we need to learn fast.

RA: Have you got involved in any practical or political initiatives as a result of this scientific research?

KP: Yes, we have. We've felt a responsibility to try and make all the evidence of how badly societies are damaged by inequality better known. Together with a colleague, Bill Kerry, we set up a not-for-profit organisation, The Equality Trust, to educate and campaign on the benefits of a more equal society. We've been given some initial, core funding by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, which enabled us to employ a policy and campaigns manager, Kathryn Busby.

At the Trust's website www.equalitytrust.org.uk, you can download slides, showing the evidence from *The Spirit Level*, a lecture on DVD, and read summaries of the evidence and answers to frequently asked questions. You can sign the Equality Charter, sign up for our newsletter, make a donation, give us your ideas and join or form a local equality group. We're also encouraging people to campaign with us and to develop their own political actions – hoping to create a groundswell of opinion in favour of greater equality.

This autumn, we'll be speaking at all the party fringe conferences and then watching to see how the party manifestos develop, ahead of next Spring's election. We'll be doing everything we can to make the need for greater equality better known. ■



Kate Pickett, PhD, is Professor of Epidemiology at the University of York and a National Institute for Health Research Career Scientist. She is a co-founder of The Equality Trust.

Her latest book, co-authored with **Professor Richard Wilkinson**, *The Spirit Level: why more equal societies almost always do better*, was published by Allen Lane in 2009.

How Mothers *and* Others made us human

Sarah Blaffer Hrdy is the leading Darwinian feminist of her generation. Her latest book, ***Mothers and Others***, delves into the evolutionary origins of human hypersociality. Here she talks to *Radical Anthropology* editor Camilla Power.

Camilla Power: I remember talking with you maybe 15 years ago when you seemed pretty convinced by the model of patrilocal and male kin-bonded evolutionary origins, similar to other great apes. What really caused the shift in your thinking towards female kin-bonding as a more likely default in the evolution of *Homo*?

Sarah Blaffer Hrdy: Oh yes. Back in 1995, when I delivered the Spencer Lectures at Oxford, I took for granted that patrilocality represented the ancestral residence patterns for hominins. My paper on the prehuman origins of patriarchy that came out of that lecture was built around that same assumption. Two lines of evidence – both of which I was subsequently forced to reassess – shaped my thinking.

First, there was the evidence coming in from field studies of chimpanzees indicating that males were philopatric. That is, unlike most species of Old World monkeys, chimpanzee females around the time they matured left their natal communities to join other groups. Evidence for gorillas suggested that they followed a similar pattern, sons remaining with their father, daughters moving. Secondly, there were the classic cross-cultural reviews from George Murdock¹ and others, making it look like patrilocality was the predominant residence pattern across human societies as well. Assuming patrilocal tendencies among our ancestors seemed like the most parsimonious integration of these two lines of evidence.

By the time I wrote *Mother Nature* in 1999, however, we had more, longer-term demographic information for chimpanzees and gorillas, and the picture was becoming more nuanced. At sites like Gombe, dominant females with the option to stay in a particularly productive, or unusually

safe home range, were opting to do so. Jane Goodall's famous "old Flo" was a case in point.² Sometimes, some of their daughters and even granddaughters managed to remain in their natal place as well. Furthermore, significant benefits could attach to remaining

Photo: C. Power



A hard-working Hadza grandmother presents her grandchildren

in one's natal place. Flo's daughter Fifi, and later one of Fifi's own daughters, attained the highest lifetime reproductive success ever reported among wild chimpanzees. Meanwhile, Alexander Harcourt studying mountain gorillas in Rwanda, was also reporting that either sex might move, sometimes more than once.³ Clearly, great apes were more flexible and opportunistic than presumed. Furthermore, females could garner notable benefits from remaining with their kin.

By this time as well you and Chris Knight⁴ were drawing on African rock art, myth and ritual to call attention to the deep legacy and significance of matrilineal ties, and leading a fairly direct charge against conventional wisdom on this score. I read these challenges with interest. My own first incarnation as an anthropologist was as a folklorist, engaged in structural analysis of myths. Your suggestion that anthropologists had too glibly dismissed the old 'Mother Right' literature echoed some long latent doubts of my own, reminding me of how puzzled I had been by rich folk traditions – especially from South America – detailing sexual tensions and matrilineal overthrows. Where there was so much smoke, why not some fire some place? I was also impressed by new cross-cultural surveys by the Embers,⁵ indicating that foraging peoples – especially those living in the most traditional way, without horses or boats – were more often bilocal or matrilocal than in human societies generally. My mind was being prepared to rethink the human evidence in the wake of this series of challenges to Murdockian wisdom.

The more ethnography I read, the more I was struck by how flexible and opportunistic foraging peoples were, moving not just through space but between groups over time. Again and again, I encountered ethnographic reports from African, North American and Aboriginal Australian foraging societies of men

moving to be near wives, hunting on behalf of their 'in-laws' till after one or two children were born, which clearly put women near kin at the time they first gave birth, which primate-wide is an especially vulnerable time for both mothers and especially infants. Also women moved throughout the life course so that some older women were moving to be near daughters – particularly daughters who needed them.

All this time, for years really, I had been arguing with my friend and close colleague, the anthropologist Kristen Hawkes. Every time we got together, the subject would come up. I questioned her very bold proposal about the special provisioning role of maternal grandmothers in early hominin life because I still accepted conventional wisdom about hominoid patrilocal by which females would not have had matrilineal kin nearby. Then Kristen would patiently walk me through her own lines of evidence. But the real tipping point was when Kristen sent me an advance copy of Helen Alvarez's very detailed re-examination of the case studies Murdock had used.⁶ Like many sociobiologists, I admired Murdock for the empirical criteria for classifying societies that he set up. However, Alvarez discovered that in fact, the data needed to satisfy his criteria were rarely present in the ethnographies classified. Obviously, a lot of guesswork had gone on, with Murdock just following his hunches, hunches informed by patrilocal presumptions.

Thus, with *Mother Nature* and then in great detail in *Mothers and Others*, I retracted my earlier position to acknowledge that forager residence patterns were much more flexible than I had initially assumed. Not only were band level hunter-gatherer residence patterns often bilocal or matrilocal, but there also would be many phases in a woman's life when a mother would have access to support from matrilineal kin, both because her mate moved to live with her people, because couples

returned for a time to live with them, or because mother's kin (perhaps especially including her own mother) moved opportunistically to live with her group, attracted by her need, or perhaps by food prospects in her community.

By this point too, I had no doubt that having access to kin would alter patterns of child rearing. In particular, it would make mothers more tolerant of other individuals having post-partum access to her new infant, a tolerance typical of humans but virtually never observed in other apes under natural conditions. I was stunned when I first saw Naka Nakamichi's amazing photograph of the older gorilla mother at the San Diego zoo modeling maternal behavior for her inexperienced young daughter.⁷ I immediately realized how important this rare, definitely atypical, observation was. Not long after, Emily Wroblewski published her report on 'An unusual incident of adoption' among Gombe chimpanzees,⁸ and sent me photographs of this female with her grandson. Under the right circumstances, with a trusted female (like her mother) nearby, a great ape mother would occasionally tolerate someone else helping her with her newborn. Change the residence patterns, and situations leading to selection favoring greater post-partum tolerance in new mothers might indeed be quite plausible.

Then, not long after *Mothers and Others* appeared (early in 2009), I read Kit Opie's and your 2008 chapter on 'Grandmothering and female coalitions'⁹ and was struck by the way you used Destro-Bisol and others' reconstructions of molecular genetics to suggest "an ancestral tendency of female kin to stick together" which was particularly apparent among hunter-gatherer populations from sub-Saharan Africa. For the question I was most interested in, the residence patterns among hominins when humankind's peculiarly prosocial impulses first emerged, it made a lot

of sense to focus on African contexts and to emphasize these venerable populations.

CP: Monkeys are good babysitters. The other great apes don't dare let go their babies. We became the great ape that passed the baby round to others to hold. Why was this so critical to the development of our human psychology?

“ **Shared care and provisioning led to the development of infants ... who became adept at perspective taking** ”

SBH: What made shared care possible among early hominins, was circumstances that increased a new mother's confidence in her surroundings, as we discussed above. What made this maternal tolerance of others so critical for child survival was the combination of infant-sharing with extensive allomaternal provisioning of young. This set the stage for important life history changes because immatures could take longer to grow up since provisioning around the age of weaning and thereafter buffered them from starvation at a very vulnerable developmental stage. But the shared care and provisioning also led to the development of novel phenotypes in infants, who had to monitor both their mothers, and also monitor others, becoming what I term “connoisseurs” both of mothers, and of others, their intentions and feelings. Infants would become adept at perspective taking, and at integrating multiple perspectives (just as we know human children with multiple allomothers do). Importantly, shared care and provisioning also set the stage for novel selection pressures: the youngsters best at reading the intentions of others and eliciting their help would be best fed and most likely to survive. New selection pressures on mothers to solicit help from others and also to calibrate maternal commitment in

line with such social support were also set up. At the same time, natural selection had new opportunities to favor allomothers most interested in and able to nurture young born to kin. This is the point where I invoke Kristen Hawkes and her colleagues' 1998 grandmother hypothesis¹⁰ to explain selection favoring longer post-menopausal lifespans. I knew of other primate species where older females at or approaching the ends

of their reproductive careers seemed more willing to sacrifice themselves to help offspring of kin, but Hawkes was envisioning a setting in which older females could provision as well as protect the youngsters they helped.

CP: Looking now at the flexible strategies of human mothers, you talk of how “mothers from Africa to the Caribbean to the banlieues of Europe and US inner cities routinely enter into polyandrous relationships to make do, hedge bets and improve their lot... their behavior is more accurately described as ‘assiduously maternal’ rather than ‘promiscuous’...”¹¹. This evolutionary perspective makes sense of a whole range of women's sexual strategies as viable ways and means for looking after their kids, but have you had much flack from feminists angry that you seem to be validating sex as work or means for investment?

SBH: So far as I know feminists have not objected to the idea that ‘assiduously maternal’ women are responding to unpredictable or scarce resources or perilous conditions by lining up extra ‘paternal’ investment or protection. But why should they? I simply called attention to maternal strategizing and female agency in response to difficult constraints. Still, as you imply, my history with academic feminism

has been a mixed one. Back in the late 1970 and early 1980s, my allegiance to sociobiology made me suspect among feminists. At the same time that my female-focused perspective stimulated biologists' inherent aversion to the F-word. Instead of viewing Feminism as a source of ideas to help us all critique longstanding biases within Darwinian theorizing, and (as I saw it), expanding our understanding of selection pressures to include both sexes, biologists viewed Feminism as a source of ideological bias. They forgot what a double-edged sword bias usually is – Darwinians had their own share – and that in helping us understand and correct past biases, feminist critiques could actually help us all do better science.

By now of course, self-correcting processes inherent in science have gotten underway within sociobiology, and many in Women's Studies (now more often called Gender Studies) are undergoing their own transformations. To me, Michele Pridmore-Brown's review of *Mothers and Others* in the May 22, 2009 TLS (*Times Literary Supplement*), was symptomatic of this transformation. Pridmore-Brown was partially trained in a department of Women's Studies at Stanford yet instead of the more hostile queries I had been accustomed to (i.e. why do you evolutionists ‘privilege’ heterosexuality so, etc.) what she wrote revealed a deep curiosity about what our biological legacy as mammals and primates, as well as our intertwined biological and historical legacies as humans, might mean for who we are.

CP: You ask of paternal strategies, “how can something so important be so variable?” How much do men make a difference for children? Are they integral to cooperative breeding in our species? Has the failure to recognise this variability and flexibility of strategies led to wooden models of the ‘real Pleistocene family’ informed more by ideology than science?

SBH: Stereotypes about ‘the Pleistocene family’ ignore the inherent flexibility of human family systems, and yes, I am now convinced that that flexibility has a great deal to do with humankind’s long legacy of cooperative breeding. Given how important male provisioning and protection of young can be under some conditions, and given just how slow maturing and needy human youngsters are, we really do have to ask why human fathers are not obligately paternal the way, say, titi monkey males are. Yet looking across the Order primates as a whole, humans are absolutely amazing in terms of just how much variability in paternal care is observed in just this one species. Nurture so freely given and so extensive in some contexts,

is totally absent in others. There are men – even those with reasons to be certain of their paternity – who invest nothing at all, while other men put top priority on remaining near and caring for their young. It’s a real paradox, and the best solution I can come up with is to propose that throughout our evolutionary history alloparents sometimes filled in for fathers who defected or fell short, doing so sufficiently often so as to keep such propensities in play. Several lovely field studies – for example Karen Bales’ with tamarins,¹² Courtney Meehan’s with Aka foragers¹³ (reviewed in *Mothers and Others*) – document just this sort of compensatory care going on among cooperative breeders. When mothers have more alloparental assistance, some fathers can afford to

caretake and provision less, and they do. There is little doubt that sexual selection and longstanding tensions between maternal and paternal interests are also part of the story here. But by focusing so exclusively on topics like competition for mates and mate choice, we left out this other angle having to do with nurture and who provides it.

CP: I like the way you put it that logically language comes later, after evolving psychologies for connection and empathy. You argue for ‘emotional’ modernity arising with cooperative breeding in *Homo erectus*, already by 1.5 million years ago. So what leads to the difference between us modern humans, with sapient brains, and them? Have you any views on the human symbolic revolution?

SBH: There is an increasingly well-documented literature describing mental differences between humans and other apes. Marc Hauser’s essay on ‘The Mind’ in the September 2009 issue of *Scientific American* provides a particularly thoughtful summary of traits that evolved within the last 200,000 years having to do with the evolution of 1350 cc brains, sapient-caliber intellects and language in particular – a massively important transformation. As Hauser and others acknowledge, we know little about the Darwinian selective pressures behind this ‘symbolic revolution’, and some of the main researchers in this area like Hauser and Michael Tomasello (perhaps wisely) steer clear of speculating about causation. Nevertheless, I have been impressed by Sally McBrearty and Alison Brook’s arguments about the importance of density and frequency of contacts between people and groups for the gradual development of symbolic culture.¹⁴

So much depends on population density and residence patterns, but unfortunately the archaeological record for the Pleistocene remains very spotty, even though the record improves somewhat by the Late



Photo: C. Power

Hadza camp scene, northern Tanzania, with three generations of female kin relatives.

Pleistocene. This paucity of data about topics such as early population densities is pretty humbling.

What we can assume with some confidence though, projecting backwards from modern humans, is that once symbolic thinking comes aboard, it takes on a life of its own, spiraling in many, sometimes quite bizarre, directions with all sorts of repercussions that are not necessarily amenable to materialist interpretations. I am reminded of a much earlier phase of my career when I was engaged in the structural analysis of myths – this is wild and wonderful stuff. Please keep in mind, though, that in *Mothers and Others*, I am focused on the prequel – the initial origins of our hypersocial tendencies, not this main human feature film.

CP: The end of your book sent some chills down my spine. Have we come to an evolutionary crossroads, where a crisis of childcare, under pressure of turbocapitalism, is producing a crisis of human empathy? Having been relatively happy and egalitarian hunter-gatherers for several hundred thousand years, where are we heading?

SBH: Well you are taking me into the realm of purely personal opinions. But yes, I do believe that since the Neolithic, and increasingly in the post-industrial and this increasingly individualistic and hypercapitalist era we have jettisoned values critical for rearing human children with fully developed empathic potential. Worse, since remarkably few ‘fixed action patterns’ are observed in human parents, and since so many features of child-rearing are largely transmitted generation to generation, we risk losing what I think of as the traditional human art of nurture. And yes, because I happen to value this facet of human nature, I do think that it bodes ill both in the near-term for individual lives, and in the long term for our species, to have so many youngsters growing up – and going on to become parents themselves

– without fully developing human potentials for social living. Just because a higher proportion than ever of children born in developed countries survive, does not mean that their emotional needs have been met.

CP: Can you tell us anything about what you are doing next?

SBH: The original plan – to the extent that I ever plan – was a trilogy of books, the one on mothers, mothers and others, and then an examination of what this deep history means for women (whether they choose to be mothers or not) today. What does it mean for my children’s generation and for their children, to live in a world with lapsed patriarchy in some quarters, resurgent patriarchy in others, and with the needs of children fairly constant but with extended family often far away and negotiations between their parents in greater flux than ever, and furthermore with the spectre of over-population and its consequences increasingly widely recognized and better understood. However I don’t know that I will actually write it, or what form it will take. I leave in a few weeks for, among other things, the Darwin celebration at Darwin University, in Darwin, Australia and I was not planning to decide until after I got back. ■

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Photo: S. Bassouls



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She is author of *The Woman that Never Evolved* (1981) and *Mother Nature* (1999). Her latest book is *Mothers and Others: The Evolutionary Origins of Mutual Understanding* published by Harvard University Press, 2009.

Action research: calling for a radical social anthropology

Why hasn't anthropology made more difference? asks Ana Lopes

"The philosophers have only interpreted the world in different ways; the point is to change it."

Karl Marx

Anthropology is the study of what it means to be human. Given its scope and relevance, one would expect anthropology to be the most influential of sciences. Eriksen says: Anthropology should have changed the world.¹ Then why hasn't it? Why is anthropology scarcely known outside the academia and why does it rarely play a part in public life?

There is, within academic institutions, an emphasis on 'pure' research, a suggestion that to be taken seriously, research should be unburdened by practical questions. Disengagement and separation are equated with objectivity. And the myth of a 'neutral', non-political anthropology is created.

Like many others in the discipline, I want to debunk such myths and call for an anthropology that is unapologetically political. Anthropologists have the duty to 'make a difference' – to be relevant and useful and empowering to those who are directly involved in it. I call for an ethical and political engagement through, for example, the use of action research as a tool. Action research, which at its core contains a vision of transformation for social justice, represents an epistemological challenge to mainstream research traditions. By assuming that those who have been most systematically excluded carry the most valuable wisdom, action research is a counterhegemonic approach that fundamentally

challenges the role and value of the expert in knowledge production. So I claim that action research is a viable route for those of us interested in doing radical anthropology, who believe that understanding the world does not suffice and that the goal is to change it for the better.

This article is based on an action research project to establish official union representation for people working in the UK sex industry.

joined the labour movement and argued that their work is legitimate work and the issues concerning abuses and exploitation within the sex industry should be viewed first and foremost as a labour issue, beyond the spheres of gender and morality.

Sex work and the sex industry have been widely researched, but sex workers have seldom been seen as an interested party in discussion

and production of knowledge. By keeping sex workers away from the discussion, academics have participated in, and actively contributed to, the marginalisation, stigmatisation and social exclusion of sex workers. Sex workers and their advocates have been vocal against research that uses sex workers as guinea pigs without any benefit accruing to them as the result of research.

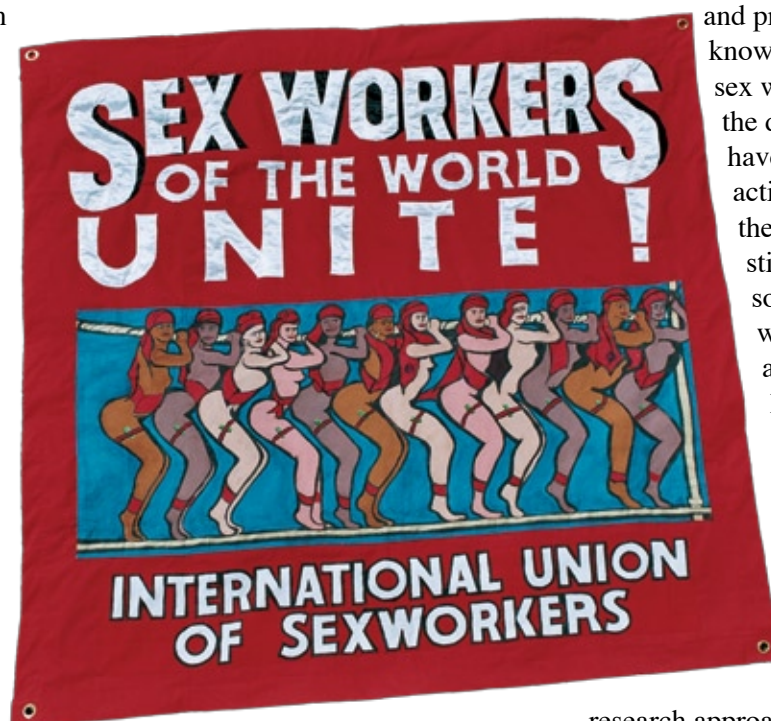
An action

research approach, on the contrary, enables research that benefits those who take part in it. Participation and responding to practical needs have been crucial ethical considerations. Action research is therefore relevant in this field and any others where there is a history of marginalizing and silencing those concerned – and this applies to most fields where anthropologists have traditionally focused their attention.

What is Action Research?

Reason and Bradbury define action research as "a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in

Banner: E. Hall



After a pilot phase, a small group of sex workers and supporters set up an association called "International Union of Sex Workers" in the year 2000. This organisation campaigned for labour rights, especially the right to join a recognised union and the mainstream trades union movement. In 2002, the group was accepted by the GMB, British General Union (originally the General, Municipal and Boilermakers' Union), one of Britain's largest trade unions. So, the main aim of the project was achieved: the right to union representation was granted to those who work in the sex industry. For the first time in the UK, sex workers

the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes.”² It is based on the assumption that the mere recording of events and formulation of explanations is inadequate; and that those who are designated as ‘subjects’ or ‘informants’ in other approaches to research should participate directly in research processes. Moreover, those research processes should be applied in ways that benefit all participants directly. Action research has three major distinctive elements: people, power and praxis. It is people-centred as it is informed by and responds to the needs of the (oppressed or disenfranchised) people. It promotes empowerment of the research

that people have the right and the ability to reshape their lives and their communities.”⁴

Origins of Action Research

The term action research was coined by social psychologist Kurt Lewin in 1946 to describe research leading to social action. Lewin attempted to improve relations in industrial situations and minimise hostility between different racial groups in the US in the 1940s. He described his problem-solving perspective on research as a spiral of steps, each one comprising the stages of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. This “action research spiral” is Lewin’s

and muted in knowledge creation is common to feminist and action research, as is the idea of embracing experience as a source of legitimate knowledge.⁶

Iterative processes

The action research process is cyclical and it is usually visually represented as a circle or spiral. However, these visual representations fail to convey the nature of the action research process, as they erroneously imply that those involved in the action research process return to the point of departure. They cannot convey the idea of the process as dynamic and

“a political agenda is unavoidable –

participants and it is about praxis – it recognises the inseparability of theory and practice. Action research challenges the power relation between researcher and ‘objects’, since the action researcher is a peer of other research participants. Its key methodological feature is dialogue. Action researchers work with marginalised communities and groups through a democratic process of dialogue. They facilitate the process by which those groups identify issues of concern to them, gather relevant information, test and implement possible solutions. Thus, action research is explicitly political and demands that the researcher play a dual role – that of scholar and activist.

All social research is in fact political. Those researchers who claim to work with ‘neutrality’ and ‘objectivity’ are political, by supporting the status quo. The participatory approach demands that action researchers state explicitly their political positions, while other researchers can “hide their partisanship behind a false veil of objectivity”³. Thus, a political agenda is unavoidable – the question is which one you choose: the one that perpetuates existing social hierarchies or the one that “believes

main legacy to action researchers. Action research is strongly linked to the work of Paulo Freire, whose seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972) emphasises dialogue, informed action, and educational activity based on the lived experiences of the participants, community enhancement and *conscientização* – a process by which individuals deeply analyse their own realities. He insisted that knowledge must be created with people and not imparted to them. Freire was a founder of what is now known as critical pedagogy. Participatory approaches to inquiry proliferated in the early 1970s, particularly in Africa, India and Latin America. The term ‘Participatory Research’ was first used by Marja-Liisa Swantz to describe her work in Tanzania, which sought to integrate local knowledge into development projects.⁵

In Latin America, Orlando Fals-Borda was engaged in developing similar emancipatory approaches, leading to radical social change. Feminist theories, epistemologies and methodologies have also inspired many action research projects. The metaphor of ‘giving a voice’ to those who have been marginalised

progressive.

Instead, I see the action research process as a wave: action research embodies a pattern (observation – planning – action), but it is one that takes you further, rather than back to square one. In fact, action researchers never find ourselves back at the starting point, since we are changing our own situation in the process. Within this process, we start by observing and reflecting on the situation and the possibilities available, then collaboratively plan our action. Following action and its evaluation, we are ready to again observe and reflect on the new situation we find ourselves in, starting a new wave.

The process gains a life of its own, independent of the action researcher. Since the activities prompted by action research are fully integrated in the group’s activities, they are likely to continue after the research has been ‘written up’. In fact, although I and other original project participants are no longer centrally involved in the sex workers’ rights movement in this country, the union which resulted from this action research project continues to grow and develop, having a life of its own.

Intellectual property

Nothing about us without us – This motto, originally of the disability rights movement and later adopted by the sex workers' rights movement, according to Mary Brydon-Miller,⁷ captures the dilemma of representation and control over research data and results in action research. Transparent participation and respect for peoples' knowledge are other crucial values that guide action researchers in the management of the representation and control dilemma.

The commodification of the research process results in a system by which

The notion of reciprocity – the ongoing process of exchange aiming at establishing and maintaining equality between parties – is one of the bases of ethical practice in action research.⁹ However, it would be naïve to believe that reciprocity was fully achieved or that privileges and hierarchies were completely absent.

Going Native, objectivity and validity

As an action researcher I took the roles both of academic and activist. The coexistence of these two roles has been central to the success of the project itself. It was by embracing the dual role that access and rapport flourished, as well as passionate

research approaches demand that those involved are reflexive and explicit about the perspective from which knowledge is created. The notion of validity in action research challenges mainstream research cultures. In fact, action research values the process of research as much as its products and its 'success' is based greatly on how much participants' knowledge and capacities are developed within the process.¹¹

Despite the challenges and dilemmas faced, I defend the relevance of action research as a radical approach to anthropology's goal of understanding what it means to be

the question is which one you choose „

individual scholars are rewarded for publications and presentations yet research 'subjects' rarely benefit. Given the nature of our work, action researchers have endeavoured to develop new strategies in the process of knowledge dissemination.⁸ For example, during my involvement with sex workers seeking unionisation, I co-wrote with other project participants several pieces for a number of different audiences – the academic being just one of them. Although collaboration at all stages is an ideal of action research, in practice, the numbers and levels of collaboration varied as the project proceeded. Choices of participation are not controlled by the researcher but are continuously negotiated.

participation. So I argue that this has been a strength rather than a weakness, as it has been a way to diminish the gap between action and theory. Nonetheless, there were problems arising from this dual role and future researchers should be aware of them. These problems included the risk of what anthropologists call "going native", which implies that the researcher loses objectivity.

My starting point as an action researcher was not that of a detached observer, however, but that of an "experiencing subject"¹⁰ embarking on a systematic knowledge and social change quest. While not aspiring to objectivity, action

human. I call on anthropologists to place as much emphasis on action as on research as a means to develop a truly influential and relevant body of knowledge. Other avenues to arrive at the same goal are available and used by other anthropologists – I am saying that action research is a valid and effective one. ■

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She was one of the founders of the International Union of Sex Workers.



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Green capitalism, and the cultural poverty of constructing nature as service provider

Sian Sullivan investigates the bonanza of ‘green’ business opportunities for capitalist investors in environmental crisis. But do communities who live in some of the world’s most biodiverse environments offer ways of relating with nature that are irreducible to monetised economics?

“People differ not only in their culture but also in their nature, or rather, in the way they construct relations between humans and non-humans.”¹

Loss

We hear a lot these days about loss. In April 2009, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimated that banks, insurance instruments and pension funds have ‘lost’ some US \$4.1 trillion from the global economy.² The amounts lost to taxpayers via government removal of the toxic assets littering the financial sector are so huge as to be almost meaningless. According to the IMF, UK taxpayers have already lost over £1.2 trillion to Britain’s financial sector,³ while in North America the Inspector General of the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) stated recently that potential government/taxpayer assistance could total \$23.7 trillion.⁴ Meanwhile, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) asserts that the wildlife crisis actually is worse than the economic crisis, with almost 900 species lost already in an analysis of some 45,000, and no fewer than 16,928 of these currently threatened with extinction.⁵ Habitat loss to ‘development’ is a major cause of these extinctions. Greenpeace reports of the Brazilian Amazon that “one acre [is] lost every 8 seconds”, the hamburger-cattle sector identified here as the major driver of clear-felling in this landscape.⁶

Crisis capitalism and the creation of ‘value’

Notwithstanding the complexities beneath these alarming figures, they do seem to signal some sort of crisis, both of capitalism, and of ‘the environment’. Intuitively it makes sense to think that these crises might be connected in two key ways. First, that economic exploitation and the profit motive, in driving production and transformed consumption of ‘natural resources’, is causing and contributing to ecological crisis. And second, that the ecological crisis arising from these pressures is itself generating crisis in the global economy, through making manifest the material limits to economic production and consumption. This is the so-called Limits to Growth argument of the 1970s,⁷ which posited resource limits to economic growth, and the need to sensibly distribute resources as well as reducing production and consumption to avert both economic and ecological crises.

But this intuitive view – that ecological loss is entwined with and also signals economic crisis – seems to be somewhat naïve. To look at these connections another way is to see that capitalism thrives on crisis. This is its engine of innovation and creativity. As with the Kafkaesque derivatives markets that in part have pushed the international finance market into such recent toxicity,⁸ capitalism makes a virtue of crisis. If the risk of loss or hazard can

be priced, and this financial value captured via trade and speculation, then economic growth – the unassailable good of capitalist ‘culture’ – will be maintained, to the presumed benefit of everyone.

It also is in times of crisis that new forms of capitalist value, new frontiers of accumulation, and new enclosures and dispossessions, are created. In *The Shock Doctrine*, Naomi Klein forcefully argues that various crisis events, from natural disasters to terrorist attacks, in fact are central to the creation of the openings required for incursions of corporate capital investment, thinly masked by the seemingly liberating guise of instituting free markets and democracy.⁹

In this zeitgeist of crisis capitalism, the environmental crisis itself has become a major new frontier of value creation and capitalist accumulation. Referred to by terms such as “market environmentalism”,¹⁰ “green neoliberalism”¹¹ and “green capitalism”,¹² the understanding is that if we just price the environment correctly – creating new markets for new ‘environmental products’ based on monetised measures of environmental health and degradation – then everyone *and* the environment will win. If nature can be rationally abstracted and priced into assets, goods and services, then environmental risk and degradation can be measured, exchanged, offset and generally minimised. At the same time, the new financial

values accruing to nature's assets, goods and services might in and of themselves attract more financial value via speculative trade on stock exchanges. Indeed, stock exchanges focusing only on new environmental products now are arising, the Climate Exchanges in London and Chicago being key examples. These have been established for the sole purpose of brokering and trading the new commodity/currency of tradeable carbon – created as the vehicle via which climate-change-causing carbon emissions can be measured and ostensibly reduced.

An ecosystem at your service?¹³

Behind this monetisation of environmental crisis is a logic and language that transforms the global environment – Nature – into a provider of services for humans. This conceptual capture, and the economic rationalisation of nature's value that it permits, is facilitating the creation of markets for the exchange of 'ecosystem services' in the form of Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES).

Arguably this construction and discourse is justifying *right now* what in time might be considered a critical, cultural transformation in how relationships between humans and the non-human world are conceived, valued, managed and governed globally.

Conservation biologists have been labelling nature as service provider by using the language of ecosystem services since the 1970s.¹⁴ As noted above, this is a decade which also saw the first globalising statements of concern regarding the ecological limits to [economic] growth and the emergence of environmentalist discourses requiring development to be ecologically, as well as economically, 'sustainable'.¹⁵ Some years later, Robert Costanza and colleagues brought the concept of ecosystem services firmly into economics by estimating their annual value globally to be \$16-

54 trillion.¹⁶ The ensuing alliance between environmental economists and environmental campaigners has emphasised "convergence between commercial interest and environmental imperative" in demonstrating "the business case for sustainable development".¹⁷ At the same time, assertions of the monetised values for defined ecosystem services has led to the corresponding conclusion that currently they are not being valued for what they are worth, and that somehow they should be paid for. As Jean-Christophe Vié, Deputy Head of IUCN's Species Programme, stated recently: "[i]t's time to recognize that nature is the largest company on Earth working for the benefit of 100 percent of humankind – and it's doing it for free."¹⁸

In recent years, two phenomena have conspired to push these concerns and concepts together to generate a utopian win-win scenario of both mitigating environmental degradation *and* facilitating economic growth through pricing the ecological services provided by nature. The first is the 2005 publication of the influential United Nations Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA), which highlights human-generated change of the biosphere and overwhelmingly uses the language of ecosystem services in speaking of the non-human world. These are further categorised into provisioning services (food, water, timber, fibre, etc.), regulating services (floods, droughts, land degradation and disease), supporting services (such as soil formation and nutrient cycling), and non-material cultural services (recreational, spiritual, religious, etc.).¹⁹ Through combining the quantification skills of ecological science and economics, the MEA proposes that breaking nature down into these increasingly scarce services,²⁰ quantifying their functionality, and assigning a price to them, will assist conservation by asserting their financial value; at the same time as fostering economic growth by creating new tradeable

assets.²¹

The second is the creation of a multi-billion dollar market in a new commodity – carbon – intended to mitigate (i.e. minimise) climate change by providing the possibility of profitably exchanging one of the gases contributing to anthropogenic global warming. As noted above, this is generating a market-based context for approaching the broader environmental concerns of the MEA. Like Adam Smith's putative economic 'invisible hand',²² the assumption is that both good environmental governance and the equitable distribution of environmental services will derive from the correct pricing of quantified environmental goods and services, combined with the self-regulating market behaviour that will emerge from their market exchange.

In this case, the financial price attributed to carbon is allocated to, and therefore captured by, heavy industry emitters. It is they who gain tradeable carbon credits (i.e. the currency representing carbon), for example, under the European Union's Emissions Trading Scheme.²³ Some (currently minimal) scarcity is built into the market by allocating credits at a level below what major installations require to cover their emitting levels, so as to meet the emissions reducing targets set by the Kyoto Protocol of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Once these credits enter the international financial system their future value can be speculated on (as with any other currency or commodity, including derivatives) and significant profits can ensue. In the wake of this, a veritable ecosystem of economists, stockbrokers and financial advisors has emerged to service trade in this new commodity, as epitomised by the Europe Climate Exchange in the City of London. This is "the leading marketplace for trading carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions in Europe and internationally",²⁴ and basically a stock exchange for the

currency of tradeable carbon credits. Interestingly, the website of the Europe Climate Exchange provides very little information connecting this exchange with environmental impacts through the reduction of atmospheric CO₂. Such presentation seems to emphasise that this is a product with a great deal to do with trade, finance and profit, operating at a rather large remove from the materiality of global climate and eco-systems.

The Ecosystem Marketplace

Of course, payments for the environmental services produced by nature's labour do not go to the environment itself, but to whoever is able to capture this newly priced value. A key logic is that such

by water-users upstream and PES schemes may be established to alter upstream behaviour so as to maintain downstream water quality and access. Paradigmatic here is the case of Vittel (Nestlé Water) in north-east France, who came to a financial agreement to compensate farmers for altering their nitrate-based fertilising practices upstream which were contaminating the aquifer producing the bottled mineral water sold by the company.²⁶ In this case the key parameters were relatively clear to define. They included the environmental good (uncontaminated water), the potential 'servicers' of that good (nitrate-using farmers), the environmental problem (contamination by nitrate-based fertilisers), and the purchaser of the environmental good (Vittel). Further

alternatives, prior to the long-term establishment of a PES scheme. Even with these factors, the initiative cost Vittel some 24.25 million euros to develop in its first seven years (an estimated 980 euros per hectare per year),²⁷ and it took some ten years following the initial four-year period of research for the scheme to become operational.

Increasingly, PES involves the creation of derived environmental 'products' that are agreed by sellers and buyers to represent some sort of measure of environmental health or degradation. An example might be the creation of schemes financed as commercial deals by private investors whereby new products representing a defined environmental good are sold both

“payments for the environmental services produced by nature's labour do not go to the environment itself, but to whoever is able to capture this newly priced value,,

payments will act as compensation for economic opportunity costs in contexts where environmental-use practices are altered so as to conserve ecosystem services. As stated by Conservation International, “the payment for ecosystem services concept helps address the destruction of Earth's habitats, landscapes and ecosystems by assigning a value to these services, and compensating the people, communities and countries whose actions enhance or protect ecosystem services and the costs that work incurs.”²⁵

This might take the form of relatively simple direct payments for transformed behaviour to maintain a particular and clearly defined environmental good. In water management, for example, the water available to those living downstream can be directly negatively affected

critical factors are embodied here with implications for the applicability of such initiatives elsewhere and over broader geographical scales, such as between contexts in the urban industrialised north and the rural 'underdeveloped' south. The wealth of the purchasing company and the continued market value of their product, provided economic sustenance for their interest in pursuing the ecosystem services exchange. The land constituting the source area for the water is enclosed as private property under clear tenure arrangements, permitting the establishment of relatively direct contracts between service purchasers and providers. And Vittel was able to collaborate with a professional and well-funded prolonged (four-year) period of research on the connections between farming practices, water quality and potential collaborative

to fund conservation practice and to generate a return to investors. The Malua Wildlife Habitat Conservation Bank (MWHCB), also referred to as the Malua BioBank, in Sabah, Malaysia (www.maluabank.com) might be considered a paradigmatic example here. In this scheme a collaboration between private investors and the Sabah government has created saleable 'Biodiversity Conservation Certificates', each representing 100m² of rainforest restoration and protection. Over a 50-year license of conservation rights to the BioBank from the Sabah government (via the regional state organisation Yayasan Sabah, www.ysnet.org.my), the sale of certificates is intended to “make rainforest rehabilitation and conservation a commercially competitive land use.”²⁸ It is projected that the initial US\$10 million of private investment

committed for the rehabilitation of the Malua Forest Reserve over an initial six years will be recovered from the sale of these certificates and also will endow a trust fund (the Malua Trust) to fund the long-term conservation management of the BioBank over the remaining 44-year period of the license. In this case, investment is via the Eco Products Fund, LP, a private equity investment vehicle managed by the international asset brokers Equator Environmental, LLC (whose self-defining phrase is “creating value by investing in ecosystems”, equatorllc.com) and New Forests Inc. (www.newforests-us.com). As a member of the collaborative Clinton Global Initiative (www.clintonglobalinitiative.org) between governments, the private sector, NGOs and “other global leaders”, the Eco Products Fund commits US\$1 million over 6–10 years towards finding ways, globally, “[t]o realize value from illiquid environmental assets such as carbon, water, and biodiversity, and to use innovative financial structures to represent the value of these critical services in the marketplace.”²⁹

In the case of the Malua BioBank, any profits from the sale of biodiversity certificates are to

be shared between the forest management license holder and the investor. The purchase of certificates does *not* constitute an offset against rainforest impacts elsewhere, and as such is designed to constitute a simple purchase of conservation. It is projected that by the end of the initial licensing period the initial endowment “will be fully capitalized and this funding can be used either to renew the conservation rights to the Malua Forest Reserve or to establish a conservation bank on another property with high biodiversity value.”³⁰ Within-country ‘conservation banks’ and ‘species banks’, involving the creation and trading of ‘credits’ representing biodiversity values on private land, also are proliferating, particularly in the US.³¹

While purchase of the Malua BioBank’s biodiversity certificates is not designed to offset environmentally damaging activities due to the transformation of landscapes through economic development elsewhere, much of the anticipation regarding the new pricing of ecosystem services revolves around exactly this. Thus the attribution of new prices to conserved land already owned by commercial companies

might be mobilised so as to offset environmental degradation caused through resource extraction elsewhere. Even more attractively, companies might be able to trade newly priced marketable ecosystem services on appropriated land that they now own, thereby capturing new financial value from the new construction of nature as service provider. Mining conglomerate Rio Tinto, for example, are exploring with the IUCN “opportunities to generate marketable ecosystem services on land owned or managed by the company.”³² These might include “potential biodiversity banks in Africa, as well as the opportunity to generate marketable carbon credits by restoring soils and natural vegetation or by preventing emissions from deforestation and degradation.”³³ Environmental credits rewarded to businesses for ecosystem improvement activities also might be “‘banked’ against future environmental liabilities” or sold to other land developers “to compensate for the adverse environmental impacts of their projects”,³⁴ with a new generation of “commercial conservation asset managers” required to broker these exchanges and revenues.

These new forms of ecosystem value

Acronyms of ‘green’ capitalism

ARIES	Artificial Intelligence for Ecosystem Services
CI	Conservation International
CONFENIAE	Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon
ECX	Europe Climate Exchange
EUETS	European Union’s Emissions Trading Scheme
FAO UN	Food and Agriculture Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
MWHCB	Malua Wildlife Habitat Conservation Bank
MEA	United Nations Millennium Ecosystem Assessment
PES	Payments for Ecosystem Services
REDD	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation
TARP	Troubled Asset Relief Program
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
WBCSD	World Business Council for Sustainable Development
WWFN	World Wide Fund For Nature

thus become conventional business opportunities for investment: the ensuing transformation of ecosystem services into marketable assets provides “new trading opportunities” such that buyers and sellers of these services can generate profit that “does not imply the loss of natural assets.”³⁵ Large corporations, investors and investment brokers now are moving to claim slices of emerging ecosystem markets, and the potential finance flows accruing from newly priced species, ecosystems, services and environmental products.

The new global multi-billion dollar trade in carbon, in particular, is providing a market-based model, embraced by both business and major environmental organisations, for pricing and exchanging environmental products across the environmental spectrum under the rapidly proliferating arenas of PES and the proposed programme administered by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD). A critical component of the logic underlying these approaches is an assumption that environments, emissions and effects in very different locations somehow are equivalent and therefore substitutable, such that they allow negative impacts in one location to be offset against environmental investments in another. So the REDD programme proposes equivalence

between carbon emitted in the fossil-fuel fumes of cars and industry etc., with that stored in living and decomposing biomass in the myriad configurations of long-evolved and diverse assemblages of species. Emissions therefore can be offset against newly priced carbon stored in standing forests, principally in ‘developing countries’. An accompanying logic is that the new financial value accruing to standing forests will act to reduce the carbon emissions produced by their potential transformation into different landscapes which currently might be more economically profitable (to some people at least); examples might include the clear-felling of the Amazon for hamburger-cattle, soya or oil production.

But significant questions remain. Are the molecules of CO₂ emitted through fossil-fuel burning really equivalent to the carbon stored in complex terrestrial ecosystems whose assemblages have evolved over many millennia? Do such offsetting schemes actually reduce environmental impacts (e.g. levels of CO₂ emissions), or do they instead provide incentives to continue to profit from these emissions and their trade? And how does trade in derived environmental products relate to and affect the peoples, livelihoods and lifeworlds located in the landscapes from which these products are derived?

Nevertheless, new markets for ecosystem services and other ecological products now are proliferating, with an accompanying array of brokers advertising ecological wares online. Websites and companies abound with names such as ‘Ecosystem Marketplace’ (www.ecosystemmarketplace.com), ‘Species Banking’ (www.speciesbanking.com) and ‘Climate Change Capital’ (www.climatechangecapital.com). At the same time, the major global conservation charities such as

Conservation International (CI), The Nature Conservancy, and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) are embracing PES as a critical tool for generating and distributing the finance needed for conservation activities. A CI glossy brochure called *Nature Provides*, published in August 2009, thus announces the forthcoming launch of ARIES – Artificial Intelligence for Ecosystem Services – described as a “web-based technology... offered to users worldwide to assist rapid ecosystem service assessment and valuation at multiple scales, from regional to global.”³⁶ This alliance between investment capital, business and environmental organisations is being fostered by the world’s oldest and largest global environmental organisation – the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) – a network of governments, donor agencies, foundations, member organizations and corporations (www.iucn.org). An onlooker at the four-yearly IUCN World Conservation Congress in Barcelona in October 2008, for example, would be forgiven for thinking that multinational corporations now are the planet’s conservationists. At this event, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) was particularly visible. This is a network of the Chief Executive Officers of some 200 corporations, whose mission statement is “to provide business leadership as a catalyst for change toward sustainable development, and to support the business license to operate, innovate and grow in a world increasingly shaped by sustainable development issues.”³⁷ The image in Figure 1, taken at the prominent WBCSD stand at the 2008 World Conservation Congress, is suggestive of its planetary reach and ambition. It depicts the brand logos of many of the world’s largest multinationals, stretching across an abstract earth, smoothed of difference, diversity and inequality. This is a world good for capital.



Figure 1.
The world according to the World Business Council for Sustainable Development: a smooth earth populated by corporate logos. From the WBCSD display at the 2008 World Conservation Congress of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

But is it also good for cultural and ecological diversity?

A unifying language?

Recently, the UNEP and the IUCN described ecosystem services as a “unifying language” in global environmental policy.³⁸ This indeed may be the desire. Significant questions remain, however, with serious relevance for an anthropology concerned with the distribution of power and voice in global decision-making. Who is creating and writing this language and for whom? What are the ontological and epistemological assumptions built into the construction of nature as service provider – i.e. what is understood to be the nature of nature? And what are thereby legitimated as appropriate

Some of these questions can be approached through the brief descriptions of PES concepts and schemes outlined above. The construction and monetisation of nature as service provider clearly produces a range of significant transformations. Through PES the non-human world in all its diversity and mystery becomes the provider of services for humans. People dwelling in areas now valued for the ecosystem services they provide to people in other locations become the necessary custodians and providers of these services, with recompense from service-users being dependent on services received. This may be a double-edged sword for people living in newly priced service-providing landscapes, especially in the global south. Continuing a long history of displacement for

the creation of new ecological commodities and markets – accountants, brokers, bankers and assisting ecological scientists – become the expert mediators and managers of monetary value for both.

All these transformations emphasise conceptual difference rather than continuity between human and non-human worlds. Nature somehow is backdrop to, rather than co-creator of human activity. At the same time they reinforce somewhat Hegelian master-servant relationships between human and non-human realms, extended further to those between ‘experts’ on and inhabitants of newly priced service-providing landscapes.⁴⁰ Nature serves culture; and those dwelling in landscapes newly monetised for their provision of ecosystem services are themselves

Photo: S. Sullivan



Figure 2. Nathan #Uina Taurob and family greet and gift the spirits of the land in |Giribes plains, North-west Namibia.

methods for claiming ‘nature knowledge’? How are human/non-human relationships being structured, both materially and conceptually, in the process of creating and instituting this ‘unifying language’? And what knowledges and experiences are being othered and displaced through the parlance and practice of ecosystem services markets?

environmental conservation,³⁹ food-producing practices and cultures may be restructured and constrained in the process of shifting from direct production for subsistence and livelihoods to producing environmental service-oriented landscapes. And finally, those numerate in the labyrinthine abstractions accompanying

constructed as servers for visions of the appropriate nature of these landscapes, as perceived by policy and technical experts who, while globally mobile, frequently are based in distant urban locations.

These transformations are critical for cultures as well as for landscapes worldwide. I opened this article by

noting the ways in which economic and ecological crisis narratives revolve around assertions of loss. To complete the picture, the 2009 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger announces the loss of 233 known languages, with a further 574 classified as "critically endangered"⁴¹. If language is a key lexicon through which culture is expressed, exchanged and made meaningful, then the loss of languages equates with the demise of cultures. The causes are complex interactions of marginalisation, 'acculturation' to modern monetary and capitalist culture, and direct displacement. The outcome is a subtle 'culturecide': the death of collective identities through displacement by a dominant and globalising culture that has among its norms and values certain disciplining assumptions about the nature of reality. These include rather strict conceptual separations between culture and nature (echoed by that between mind and body, male and female, civilised and wild and so on) – separations which tend to privilege the first part of each of these binaries; together with the elevation of monetised exchange as the key measure and mediator of value. As indicated by the global loss of languages, the peoples, cultures and epistemologies that are othered in this capitalist structuring of values can become rather "disposable"⁴² in part through constructing them as poor, marginal, and often as environmentally problematic.

As an extension of a globalising capitalist culture which has these assumptions at its heart, it is difficult not to see the unifying language of ecosystem services as part and parcel of these processes of cultural displacement in the realm of human/non-human relationships, understandings and values. In part this is because the proliferating freedoms and futures espoused by free-market environmentalism simultaneously close off possibilities

for other freedoms and futures in how relationships between human and non-human worlds are practised and expressed. Many forms of value, appreciation, understanding and experience of non-human worlds simply are incommensurable with economic pricing mechanisms, and are displaced or closed off completely in the process of pricing for monetised exchange.⁴³ Where money and capital are the measures of wealth, economically marginalised indigenous cultures frequently are seen only as materially poor and thus requiring intervention to foster economic development. A recent UN Food and Agriculture Organisation report thus focuses on the desire to better capture the ecosystem services provided by dryland ecosystems globally, in part through shifting the livestock-based livelihoods of 'the poor' who dwell in such lands.⁴⁴ As I have noted elsewhere,⁴⁵ the 'poor' in these contexts include peoples as diverse as Maasai of East Africa, Raika pastoralists of India's Rajasthan, and Quechua-speaking highland herders in Peru: a global fabric of rich and different cultures sustained through mixed farming practices of which livestock constitute a major part. Importantly, such peoples may not define themselves and their land-entwined lifeworlds as 'poor', as indicated by Maasai in the strong statement that "the poor are not us."⁴⁶

A particular irony here is that many of the endangered languages noted above are those of so-called indigenous cultures; of people who retain and can trace some form of coherent connection with the landscapes with which their lineages are entwined. Often these connections seem to be in landscapes that currently are highly valued for their biodiversity and other environmental riches. At risk of essentialising or romanticising, perhaps it might be that the complexities of indigenous cultural engagement with these landscapes have something to do with their current conservation

value. It might also signal that disappearing languages and their associated cultures have something relevant to say and teach about other possibilities for what it means to be and become human today, in dynamic relationship with non-human worlds.

Cultured landscapes

Despite a problematic past in service to colonial endeavours, anthropology has relevance here as an academic discipline that at least makes some effort to understand and enter into culturally unfamiliar experiences and conceptions of being human. With Damara or ǀNū Khoen people living in the dry, open landscape of north-west Namibia, I have been privileged to witness, experience and learn some very different ways of relating with the non-human world. Here, for example, the process of acquiring food and other substances, while a pragmatic effort to procure resources, at the same time also required constant conversation and exchange with the ancestors and other non-human presences populating the landscape. Non-human worlds were alive to be spoken to, and variously remonstrated with and celebrated through words, song, dance and gift-giving. People were not separate and alienated from the non-human world; they were co-creators with it.

To illustrate this, let me relate one story here.⁴⁷ Figure 2 is an image taken in 1995 at a place called !Giribes, which are large open grassy plains to the northwest of a larger settlement called Sesfontein or !Nanilaus. We had driven there early in the morning, and the sun was starting to burn. I had my notebook and plant press at the ready, and was keen to get going with the resource-use documentation – the knowledge collection, if you like – that I hoped to do that day. But the first thing that these three people did – they are Nathan ǀUina Taurob on the right, his daughter and her partner – was to move some way away from the car, sit down and start talking out at

the landscape. I remember feeling slightly bemused and impatient at the time, anxious to get on with the ‘real work’ of resource collection and documentation. But I was curious enough to ask what they were doing.

The answer I received was that this was *aoxu* – the practice of connecting with and giving something away to their ancestors remaining in this landscape and to the spirits of the land, to ask for safe passage and for success in finding the foods they wished to gather. They were giving away tobacco – ꞑNū Khoen, particularly of Sesfontein/!Nanilaus, have long been known regionally for the pungent tobacco they grow in small gardens – and also the leaves of *tsaurahais* or *Colophospermum mopane* valued locally for their healing properties. The direction they are facing is to the north – towards the settlement of

relationship with the other sentient beings making up what we now call biodiversity. In this way of doing things, all resource-use practice simultaneously is a conversation, a negotiation and an exchange that binds people into multilayered and multifaceted reciprocal arrangements with ancestors, spirit and with other species. It is not just about something that is taken to be consumed; it also is about something that is returned, through direct material and energetic exchanges with the non-human world. Human beings can thereby communicate with and serve the known and unpredictable manifestations of the non-human world, and in doing so affirm reciprocal moral obligations as well as make moral sense of phenomena that cannot be completely knowable or ultimately controlled. Infusing this is an epistemic and ontological orientation to non-human worlds that

the need for “ensuring effective participation” of indigenous peoples and local communities,⁴⁹ and many such communities may see participation in these schemes as a means of generating income and gaining footholds in global economic structures. Others, however, express resistance to ‘being participated’ on the programmatic terms laid out by these schemes. A recent declaration of Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon (CONFENIAE) thus states that: “[w]e reject the negotiations on our forests, such as REDD projects, because they try to take away our freedom to manage our resources and also because they are not a real solution to the climate change problem, on the contrary, they only make it worse.”⁵⁰ Such resistance denotes a missed opportunity. This is not in terms of local peoples coming on board in these narrowing

“ We are critically impoverished as human beings if the best we can come up with is money as the mediator of our relationships with the non-human world. ”

Purros. This is the land where Nathan ꞑŪina grew-up; it is the landscape that he knew and loved, and with which his heart as a healer was connected. Nathan and his family were no longer able to live there, but in the 1990s they continued to return to these areas, sometimes for several weeks at a time. Most of this movement was completely invisible to the various formal administrations of the region. And some of it meant moving into tourism concessions, run by commercial enterprises, to which they officially no longer had access.

It took a fairly prolonged period of unlearning of my own encultured assumptions regarding the nature of reality to reach some understanding of what might be going on here. From this and other experiences, I know now that it is possible for human beings to embody an implicit ethos of reciprocity in

embraces continuity with, rather than separateness between, these realms, and that encourages movements with, rather than ownership and management over, dynamic ecosystem processes. I perceive also that this practice and logic is encountered in remaining shamanic cultures worldwide – cultures that interestingly also seem to be those who have maintained currently much sought after biodiversity. There is depth and diversity in the coherent understandings and communications with an animated non-human world embodied by many of the world’s now disappearing cultures,⁴⁸ approaches that are opaque to a modern world whose cosmovision rests instead on fetishised commodities, financial transactions, private property and competition.

International PES policy developments such as REDD assert

trajectories for determining value for the global environment. It is in terms of missed opportunities for listening to and learning from different ways of conceptualising and enacting relationships with the non-human world.

Serving nature?

Green capitalism and market environmentalism are rapidly becoming the dominant policy and political choices linking environmental health with economic development. In this paradigm the creation and capture of market value for the services provided for humans by the non-human world is considered the most efficient and sustainable means of mitigating global environmental problems while maintaining and even enhancing economic growth. In this article I ask some questions of this significant

conceptual reframing of nature as service provider. What might this discourse say of the ways in which our collective relationship with the non-human world is construed and constructed? What is othered and excluded in the process, and what significance does this have for understanding both the phenomenon of nature and for the cultural and epistemological inclusiveness of contemporary environmental agendas? And finally, what potential does the understanding of nature as service provider really have for kindling health in the earth's psychosocial and eco-systems?

Gretchen Daily and colleagues represent a common optimism in claiming that "[t]he main aim in understanding and valuing natural capital and ecosystem services is to make better decisions, resulting in better actions relating to the use of land, water, and other elements of natural capital."⁵¹ Such a statement, however, is devoid of political and epistemological context. It effects an illusion of solution through ecological modernisation⁵² and linear progress.⁵³ At the same time, and in common with most international environment and development initiatives, it uses a depoliticised language that excises the significance of 'for who' and 'by whom' questions in this new governance arena.⁵⁴

The core idea underlying these initiatives is that so-called environmental services have not been correctly valued to date. Of course I would agree that capitalist culture has tended to ride roughshod over both biological and cultural diversity. But it seems to me that *pricing* something financially is not the same thing as *valuing* it.

We are critically impoverished as human beings if the best we can come up with is money as the mediator of our relationships with the non-human world. Allocating financial value to the environment does not mean that we will embody practices of appreciation, attention, or

even of love in our interrelationships with a sentient, moral and agential⁵⁵ non-human world. Instead, it lowers "the moral tone of social life" and, through doing so, it furthers damage to both humans and ecosphere because "the pricing of everything works powerfully as a device for making morality and love... seem irrelevant."⁵⁶

We are bearing witness to another significant and accelerating wave of enclosure and primitive accumulation to liberate natural capital for the global market. Commodification now extends from genes to species and to ecosystems, i.e. to all the domains of diversity that are delineated by the Convention on Biodiversity (www.cbd.int). The continued capture and monetised exchange of the non-human world in the form of Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) seems set to have an impact on global human/non-human relationships as significant as that which began with the transformation of land into individualised property in England from the Tudors onwards: formalised throughout Europe through escalating Enclosure Acts and accompanying property law, and exported globally via European colonial adventure.⁵⁷ We know from history that this past revolution in capital creation, accumulation and investment had major social and environmental implications, reducing diverse cultures to labour in the service of capital, and disembedding peoples' relationships with landscapes in the process.⁵⁸

It seems clear that collectively we are in need of some radically different ways of valuing the global environment. But is it possible to turn instead for training and inspiration to those who, in many different contexts, and often against the odds, seem to have both valued and served nature's 'services'? And through doing so is it possible to (re)claim and (re)learn communicative relationships with non-human worlds: worlds which express the same moral, creative, mysterious and

playful agencies that humans also embody? Perhaps it might be that ways of relating with and valuing non-human worlds that are othered by modernity and capitalist culture, in fact are those offering openings into possibilities for dwelling that are less hungry, more sustainable, and more meaningful and poetic. But it is only through stopping to listen that it is possible to hear this. ■

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Gestural precursors to language:

What chimps and ravens say

Language is unique, yet – contra Chomsky – we can learn from other animal communication systems about factors in its evolution. **Simone Pika** talks here to *Radical Anthropology* about what chimps and ravens can teach us.

Radical Anthropology: Simone, you have a range of experience of observation of animal communication. What for you is the key puzzle of language evolution, and how do you link your animal communication studies to this?

Simone Pika: In my opinion, one of the most interesting puzzles of language evolution is why only one species developed a communicative ability which enables us to use and create multifaceted symbols, not only communicating about the here and now, but most notably to communicate and interact in bubbles and hallucinations of thought, about yesterday and tomorrow. My work with other animals is inspired by this question and aims to provide an evolutionary perspective on communication and cognitive skills. However, insight into other communicative systems also teaches me that speech is only one of many sophisticated tools to transfer simple and complex messages and meanings.

RA: Can you give us some concrete examples of the kind of sophisticated tools you mean in other species?

SP: Examples of sophisticated communicative tools range from olfactory and tactile cues in ants (e.g. for recruitment to defensive action or a new food source), visual signals in bees (whose waggle dances transfer information about distance, direction but also danger of the journey to flowers), auditory and visual signals in whales and dolphins (e.g. dialects, vocal imitation, synchrony to mediate alliance relationships), to two of my research species: Chimpanzees (*Pan troglodytes*) and



Chimp watching in Salonga National Park, Democratic Republic of Congo

ravens (*Corvus corax*). Chimpanzees for instance live in groups of 50 to even 150 individuals and are able, without speech, to communicate information about complex activities such as hunting, travelling to feeding trees, patrolling the borders of the territory, and to form alliances and collaborations. For long-distance communication they use mainly vocalizations, while non-vocal signals play a crucial role in close encounters. For me studying their gestures, one of the most interesting contexts is during grooming, which consists of brushing and picking through the fur with fingers, mouth and toes. It ranges from self-grooming, over two-chimp interactions to grooming sessions of several individuals and enables observations of very fine-grained and subtle gestures, used to solicit grooming, to request a distinct body part groomed or a change of body position.

Ravens on the other hand impress

through their vocal imitation abilities, but also through their non-vocal abilities. Although very different in their anatomical features to chimpanzees, ravens show a related behaviour to grooming – preening – and, like chimpanzees, they use sophisticated, flexible gestures to solicit preening and to attract one another's attention. These recent observations are especially interesting, because, although already described by Gwinner in 1964¹, due to the extensive work of Tinbergen and Lorenz on non-vocal displays of gulls, ducks and geese, non-vocal signals in birds had long been seen as simple “fixed patterns” with no need of highly cognitive skills.

RA: It seems you are suggesting that we should look not at chimp vocal communication but instead at their manual gestures for a precursor for language. How do you justify that when many scholars would look for vocal precursors?

SP: Most naturally, researchers looked first at precursors to spoken language in vocalizations of non-human primates. The majority of studies however show that the production of vocalizations is still largely hardwired and tightly tied to emotional states, while the appropriate usage has to be learnt. Monkey alarm calls (and also alarm calls of for instance chickens and prairie dogs) function referentially (which means that signalers have learned that the call is linked to a specific predator and/or event), but they are not produced intentionally and cannot be controlled voluntarily by signalers. By contrast, research on gestures of apes provides evidence that only the production of species-typical gestures is innate, while a considerable amount is learned individually and socially and is produced flexibly, intentionally and strategically by signalers. So in my opinion, it's more likely that language originated in gestural communication rather than evolving from primate vocalizations, even if this is not obviously the most parsimonious account.

RA: There has been quite a controversy over Michael Tomasello's assertion that apes never point, and that if they can't get to that stage, we don't even have precursors². What's your view on that? And do you have evidence from chimp grooming contexts of specific gestures that might offer a precursor for linguistic signs?

SP: There is convincing evidence that captive chimpanzees are able to point while interacting with their human experimenters³ as well as human-raised or language-trained apes⁴. These points however qualify as so called 'imperative' gestures, which are used to get another individual to help in attaining a physical goal, such as getting an object, playing, etc. Mike Tomasello's argument however, focuses on the use of so called 'declarative' and 'informative' points, which are used to draw another's

attention to an object or entity merely for the sake of sharing attention or to inform another individual. All three forms of pointing can easily be observed in human children around the age of 12-18 months. Concerning apes however, declarative gestures have been described in apes living in a human enculturated environment while informative points are absent. The whole debate thus centres around the question why only humans do this strange thing of declarative and informative pointing, while other apes do not.

Because our observations on chimpanzees at the Ngogo community provide clear evidence that chimpanzees have the cognitive skills to use gestures in referential ways with one another, reasons for the absence of declarative and informative gestures might be due to differences in the social structure of human compared with ape societies. The distinctively collaborative nature of human family groups might provide a more conducive environment for cooperative gestures to develop than the predominantly competitive social systems of apes. Furthermore, while original definitions of the term declarative defined it as a means to obtain adult's attention⁵, most recent formulations of imperative and declarative communication define these modes of communication by reference to underlying psychological processes, or mental states⁶. Simon Baron-Cohen even explicitly excluded proto-imperative gestures (e.g. infant reaches in direction of biscuit) from the category of intentional communication, arguing that only proto-declarative gestures (e.g. infant points at something outside bus window) imply the signaler's possession of a nascent theory of mind⁷.

RA: Is the difference between a so-called 'imperative' point and a 'declarative' one that the first is selfish and the

second cooperative?

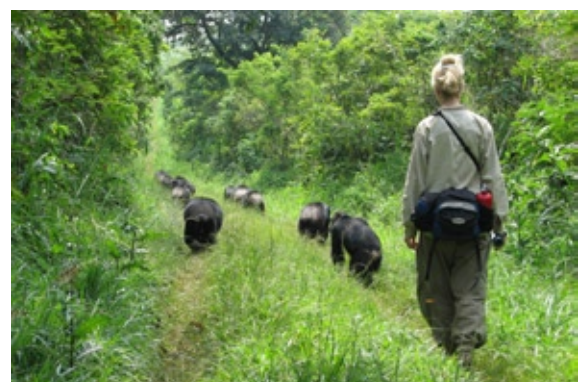
SP: Hmmm, I am not so sure about this, because a child who shares attention with Mum also acts selfishly, because it gets her full attention.

RA: You mention that apes don't do this and also that their social arrangements are more competitive than those in which human children are raised. Has enough been done to explore the nature of these ape/human social distinctions especially in the wild?

SP: I think this kind of research is only at its beginning, because most studies so far have focused only on apes in captive settings, but also children raised in western societies. Furthermore, all comparisons have been carried out on a qualitative basis only, but we need to study children and apes in comparative contexts to enable direct comparisons. If the scientific gods are protecting me than hopefully I may be able to start research addressing some of these issues soon.

RA: Have you any ideas about field studies or experiments which might clarify the relevant social variables?

SP: I have the feeling that researchers go more and more back to classical ethological approaches, by first carrying out behavioural studies on species with conspecifics in their natural environments and then using these insights to develop the appropriate experimental set-ups. Best are collaborations between field- and experimental researchers to



On patrol with the Ngogo community, Kibale, Uganda.

develop feasible experiments in the field and in the lab.

One of the best examples for this change in scientific approaches is the work of Irene Pepperberg with the grey parrot Alex⁸. Although humans always knew that grey parrots were smart and able to develop large vocabularies of speech, detailed insight into parrots' complex cognitive abilities has only recently advanced, using competitive paradigms to match natural, social interactions with other parrots in the wild as closely as possible. Similarly, experimental studies of cognitive skills of great apes at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Germany have also shifted to the competitive paradigm.

RA: How do ravens compare with chimps and bonobos for showing contexts of cooperation and complex communication. Surely birds couldn't be more relevant to language evolution issues than apes, could they?

SP: Although recent research has shown that corvids (e.g. ravens, crows, jays and magpies) rival non-

human primates in many physical and social cognitive domains, we need more studies in the field and the lab to draw appropriate comparisons. I am however quite intrigued by recent observations on non-vocal abilities of ravens, which, although more limited in signal variety than apes, show a high degree of flexibility in signal usage and produce some of their signals in intentional ways. Although these similarities in communicative skills are clearly analogs and not homologs, such close parallels can provide clues to the types of problems that particular morphological or behavioural mechanisms are 'designed' to solve and thus also very important for debates concerning language origins.

RA: Any discussion of language evolution can hardly avoid the subject of Noam Chomsky. How would you place your work in relation to his? For example, his focus on innate mechanisms and his insistence that language could not have emerged gradually. Can primatologists use the work of Chomsky?

SP: If Noam Chomsky had fully convinced the whole scientific community that language is so "perfect" as to resemble the work of a "divine architect";⁹ that the origin of language was not gradual but "effectively instantaneous";¹⁰ that "asking how it arose from calls of apes and so forth...is a complete waste of time because language is based on an entirely different principle"¹¹, then my scientific interest and career would probably have taken a totally different path.

Luckily, although amazingly successful in convincing a large number of scientists with his theory, he also intrigued and fascinated many sceptics in the field of language research and thus clearly aided directly and indirectly in developing hypotheses. These, although not always right, led to experimental scenarios and better hypotheses. In this regard, he reminds me a lot of Konrad Lorenz, who also revolutionized and inspired a whole new field of research and his theories and approaches have even today still an impact on behavioural studies and current developments. ■

Simone Pika is assistant professor in Evolutionary Psychology at the University of Manchester, UK. Current projects concern the use and function of gestures in humans with different cultural backgrounds as well as the communicative abilities of animals, especially chimpanzees of the Ngogo community, Kibale National Park, Uganda and captive and wild ravens at the Konrad Lorenz Forschungsstelle in Grünau, Austria.

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Political Bodies:

Some thoughts on women's power among Central African hunter-gatherers

Morna Finnegan explores women's erotic enchantment among Central African forest peoples.

Photo: M. Finnegan



A group of Elande dancers relaxing before a dance

“ I shall take the universal secondary status of women as a given, and proceed from there¹ ”

So wrote Sherry Ortner three decades ago. The proposition has since dominated the feminist theoretical landscape and has generated a vibrant body of writing. But ethnographic evidence accumulated over the last three

decades on egalitarian hunter-gatherers contradicts it. Taking as my point of departure women's collective social agency, I've argued that the intense solidarity of Mbendjele and other Central African hunter-gatherer women is directly connected to their collective control over their reproductive and sexual energy. This is illustrated graphically in a kind of erotic, slapstick theatre that is remarkably effective. Through ritual and dance performances collectively known as *mokondi massana*, the relationship between the autonomy of the female procreative body and women's

political power is emphasised and explored. The ritual conversation that occurs between groups of male and female initiates, and which elaborates routinely on these themes, is a visceral repartee.

So what kind of 'body' are we talking about? The very notion of 'having' as opposed to 'being' a body derives from an ideology of ownership not appropriate to egalitarian societies. When we speak about "the sexual division of labour", or "unequal" gender relations, profound ontological and affective assumptions of a split or discordance at the level

of the person are triggered. These are emotive issues for us because they're experienced as painful, disempowering – injustices to be addressed. But we cannot argue for analytical sensitivity to “qualitatively different kinds of society”² without exploring the repercussions of qualitatively different kinds of somatic experience and response.

Here, in addition to my fieldwork experience with Mbendjele Yaka hunter-gatherers in the Republic of Congo between April and July 2005 (cut short by pregnancy), I draw on the work of three longstanding ethnographers of Central African hunter-gatherers – Colin Turnbull, Michele Kisliuk, and Jerome Lewis. Each of these writers develops an alternative argument for experience and agency, one which not only commences from the body but which stresses the discursive, and subversive, potential of the collective body manifest in Central African gender ritual. Each of them deals with communities widely recognised as egalitarian. Such communities, as noted by James Woodburn³, are characterised by a strong social and ideological imperative to share; by direct access to material resources, knowledge and skills by all members of the community; by relative gender and age equality; and by an unparalleled degree of individual autonomy and freedom of movement.

In the typical Mbendjele camp there is no domestic curtailment, whether of body or voice. Doorways lean towards one another in an intimate architecture reminiscent of Lewis Henry Morgan's longhouse economy. One of the first things you notice on entering an Mbendjele camp is the visibility of children, particularly small infants who are continually passed between people and frequently end up in the thick of dance performances on someone's back. Another striking thing is the collective nature of women's movement and voice – it's rare to see a woman going about any task alone, and this is intensified during

dances. None of this forecloses individual differentiation – people are aggressively autonomous, and a large part of the social *mêlée* in camp is the perennial negotiation involved in reaching a consensus.

Imagining an egalitarian body

Bodily hexis, wrote Bourdieu, is “political mythology realised, embodied, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable way of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking”.⁴ But what are the implications for a society when the political story that is ritualised through bodily comportment highlights female reproductive anatomy, bodily fluids and desire, and refracts these back to the community as cultural power? Understandings of gender in recent decades have undergone a substantial change. The work of Judith Butler in particular has destabilised the feminist subject of ‘woman’ and claimed to replace it with a re-imagined, “troubled” and potentially gender-less or gender-multiple person.⁵ Yet if we remain faithful to Butler's plea for cross-cultural sensitivity, we must explore not only those contexts in which binary gender is rebelled against but those in which the gender argued for by women themselves capitalises on the sense of the biological body. If the gender of recent Western theory pertains to biological bodies at all, it does so in the guise of hierarchy.

But what Yaka women construct is precisely the body, albeit not the closed, discrete body familiar to Western science, ostensibly pre-discursive and pre-sensible, derived as it is from notions of a delimiting “nature”. When one begins to examine what's being done and said by women in forest communities during large, collective dance performances, there's a new voice, which slowly becomes recognisable as the voice of the body itself. Sex, blood, procreation, birth – in Yaka ritual lyric and cosmology, these are already resolutely cultural items.

The long-standing feminist attempt to break away from or deconstruct them has been formed in response to one historical trajectory. It's no coincidence that the phallus has become the metaphor for gender oppression. But compare this taunt sung with relish by BaYaka women who have just seized the public camp space: “Eloko tembe ya polo, a mou wa lai. Eneke ganye!” – “The penis is no competition, it died already. The vagina wins!” Here, while the body is clearly at issue, the phallus is de-centred in the most graphic of terms.

While feminist perspectives on the construction of gender commence from the hierarchy and constraint of duality, and press on from there to a disembodied realm of multiplicity in performance, Yaka or Mbuti narratives on gender seem to commence from a realm of multiplicity and draw back, in ritual performance, to a sharply defined gender showcasing sexual difference and inviolability. The body takes over. I attempt to present a Yaka-centred understanding of sex, power, and the political implications of the ritual conversation encompassing both. I use the writing of Bakhtin,⁶ with its insights into the subversive folk humour of the “material lower bodily stratum”, to reflect on the political implications of Yaka and Mbuti women's performances. There are interesting parallels between Bakhtin's writing on the world of carnival, with its laughing body animated by strings of insults and bawdy jokes, and much of the data on hunter-gatherer cultural life.

Turnbull and the theatre of conflict

Colin Turnbull in *The Politics of Non-Aggression*, an essay on Mbuti forest hunter-gatherers in the former Congo-Kinshasa, begins his analysis with a description of pregnancy and the treatment of the unborn child as a person whose relationship with forest and community has already commenced. Shortly after birth, infants are passed around a variety

of complementary ‘mothers’ so that the child’s experience of parenting expands to incorporate “a plurality of mothers and safe territories”.⁷ Nights are spent on a bed of leaves between parents. No infant is ever left alone. Turnbull implies that this sensuous incorporation of the infant’s body into the body of the community, and beyond that, the body of the forest, has profound consequences for the kind of bodily kinesis we see later in the ritual domain. His work suggests egalitarian sociality derives from a bodily imperative instilled from the moment of birth. What’s striking in Turnbull’s description of Mbuti concepts of self and well-being, is the way in which such notions are always tethered to the body. Thus the idea of a sphere or radius of energy carried by the person through life, the term for which is the same as the word for “womb”. The “womb” is what moves with one, bringing a sense of security and bodily composure to new situations. Sudden or aggressive action can result in this centre being pierced and in individual disorientation or imbalance. Even as the adult is absorbed into an often fraught social field, navigating multiple responsibilities and loyalties, they remain centred in the uterine matrix.

All this is preamble, however, to the main source of *akami* (conflict, noise and hunger): Sex. Turnbull postulates that it is the potential conflict between the sexes that is from the moment of birth onwards being prepared for by parenting and socialisation practices which emphasise the need for cooperation, the integrity of the community and the perpetuation of uterine ties. More specifically, it is the potential for organised adult male violence that is being controlled through a variety of social, ritual and cosmological institutions. Turnbull differentiates sex from gender in speaking about conflict: “It is sex and sexual relationships that are important to the Mbuti both as a potential source of aggressivity and as a principle of social organisation.”⁸ It’s at the

moment that male youths begin to hunt seriously and girls to menstruate that *akami* rises to the level of the ritual performance. The opposition of the sexes is clarified by those rituals which formalise and showcase difference. Ostensibly, it’s the need to avert conflict between the sexes that is performed. Yet this is achieved in the ritual theatre of conflict.

The honey-bee dance overtly explores the tension of desire and “the individual quest for pleasure”.⁹ The dance is a bodily commentary on the social interweaving of sex and labour, the way in which themes of complementarity and sharing mediate both. Sex and honey as metaphors are used interchangeably in many Central African cosmologies, the sweetness of both being something one must hunt and share. Men are the prime honey hunters, and are expected to return caches of it to their wives. During the honey-bee dance then, men in one line, brandishing bows and arrows, advance on women, wielding burning firebrands in another. In Mbuti communities it is women who control fire, and the intention of men during the dance is to steal this. By stealing fire, men steal women’s cultural power over food brought into camp. As they approach however, women break lines and attack men aggressively with burning torches, spraying them with sparks and coals. The men never succeed in their attempt to steal ‘honey’. The dance concludes when an older woman presents a leaf cup of honey to the men, who must share it with the women. The message is clear: Men can steal neither fire nor ‘honey’, but must be given these willingly by women and on condition they be returned to the collective.

Adult, reproductive-age women assume the power to “tie up” the hunt, to control “the fire of life”, and to engage in coordinated mockery of male virility. The adult woman is coded as “life-giver” while the adult man becomes “the bringer of *akami*”.¹⁰ In a crucial insight,

Turnbull comments that “it is just as vital that he plays that role as it is that the female plays hers.”¹¹ These then are not inevitable dispositions. They are carefully constructed and circumscribed roles, the making and fulfilling of which achieves a critical balance of power. There is in all this the injection and entropic loss of power, an oscillation between the sexes and between individual desire and group equilibrium. But the sexes are themselves to a large extent made by the political and ritual conversation between them. To enable the waxing and waning of power, poles are required; a pulling back into the sexed body is necessary. But the body at play is both itself and more than itself. In the “culture of laughter”, the drama of bodily life does privilege sex, growth, birth, blood, eating, defecation. “But”, writes Bakhtin “of course it is not the drama of an individual body or of a private material way of life; it is the great generic body of the people.”¹² And the political statement achieved by that synergetic motion is remarkably effective. This is not mere theatre. These are people moving through webs of relationship who stand, with the loss of the dialectic of power, to lose their much-prized independence. How does this tension manifest then in lyric and gesture?

Female ritual taunting

In *Seize the Dance*, Michelle Kisliuk examines the “ongoing, informal negotiation and disputed expectations”¹³ that are a normal part of BaAka daily interactions and which gender relations particularly encapsulate. Egalitarianism in BaAka contexts is a relationship rather than a static term, within which there is continual bargaining and disputation. Individual autonomy and freedom, as in all hunter-gatherer communities is prized, so that the social ethos of sharing and the perpetual motion against dominance must be continually reinvented. This tension is what gives the egalitarian relationship its fluid,

dynamic quality. Kisluik highlights the concerted sexual teasing with which women's songs occupy themselves. One popular Dingboku chant, directed at male spectators cries: "The penis gives birth to nothing, only urine!"¹⁴ An obvious but sometimes neglected point is made by Jerome Lewis concerning women's ritual elaboration on the "miraculous" ability to grow and produce from their own bodies new human beings. Biology here does not necessarily bear the reductionist connotations it holds for us. The body, particularly the female body, is a powerful cultural player. In its creativity and doubling capacity, it offers a key metaphor for ritual and cosmological transformation.

Another well known Elamba song, stripped back to its lyrical bare bones consists of just one word: "Dumana" – "Sex". When Kisluik later relayed these songs to some non-BaAka Congolese men they were, she reports, horrified that BaAka men "would put up with such humiliation".¹⁵ So why do BaAka men engage with women in a ritual dialogue which assertively undermines their own ability to dominate? Why do they not respond aggressively to these deliberate provocations? "Remarkably" says Kisluik, "the anthropological literature has usually set aside the question of gender when discussing egalitarianism."¹⁶ Kisluik's description of the choreography of women's dances as embodying the negotiation of power between the sexes also illumines the broader egalitarian ethos. During a performance of Dingboku organised by two experienced dancers – Sandimba and Djongi – two closely entwined lines of thirteen women each (including grandmothers and women carrying infants) open the

performance with a rendition of Dumana. The two lines of women – each closely interwoven with arms draped over each others shoulders – moves back and forth stepping rhythmically. Moving into a rendition of "The vagina wins!" the lines turn to face each other and with one line moving backwards "they move together as a unit across the space."¹⁷

Then, "Sandimba's line circled

**“
When “the penis is no competition”
or “their testicles are broken”
is delivered by a line of oiled, painted,
dancing women,
the sting is somewhat softened
”**

around at close range to face in the same direction as the other line, only a foot or so between each line, and the women all ran forward together, then backward together. Mandudu leaves bobbed on buttocks, and dust rose from tramping feet."¹⁸ Kisluik views Dingboku as "an aesthetic abstraction of love-making".¹⁹ Yet in contrast to other courtship dances, no men or boys are involved. It's the way in which the body directs its desire, and more precisely the affinity of its desire, that matters in these moments of female "communitas". The Yaka believe it is the beauty of women's polyphonic song and the eroticism of their collective movement that lures spirits in from the wider community of the forest. Women, through bodily comportment and intelligence, captivate non-human entities and enchant them. Having experienced these performances, most memorably Biboudja – dance for joy - what occurs to me is the corresponding potential enchantment of men, the way in which they too might be 'tied' by the power of communal female Eros. In *Paths Towards a Clearing*,

Michael Jackson comments on the *sui generis* power of dance and music in indigenous dialogue, noting that "movement and music promote a sense of levity and openness in both body and mind...which verbal and cognitive forms ordinarily inhibit."²⁰ Turnbull, Kisluik and Lewis each comment on the trance-like state achieved by participants during these dances, and Turnbull explicitly connects such experience to the politics of the dances. There is clearly a connection between collective joy and the engagement of adult men with such scripts. When lines such as "the penis is no competition" or "their testicles are broken" are delivered by a line of oiled, painted, dancing women, their sting is somewhat softened.

But the fact they have been spoken is important. The playful challenge, and the affirmation of female body power, has flooded out into the public domain.

Lewis tells us that Ngoku (referred to as "the primary dance" by an informant of mine at Mboule), is believed by women to be the most powerful spirit.²¹ Ngoku, he continues, represents women's collective spirit and like Ejengi – men's equivalent – is dangerous to the opposite sex. When Ngoku is summoned by women into camp, men are expected to retire to their huts or leave for the forest.²² Women and girls link arms and charge up and down the length of camp singing "Ngoku! Ngoku!" Older women lead the songs, most of which focus on sexual insults to men or declarations of women's reproductive and sexual superiority. The female body and its confrontation with male claims to authority is the substance of the ritual commentary being elaborated. Examples of songs sung are: "Doto ba die ebe!" – "Old men are no good!" and "Mapindi ma mu bola!" – "Their testicles are broken!" There is

a wide repertoire of dances connected to this *mokondi*, most of which “have sexual connotations”. During one performance Lewis observed women lie together on their backs in the dust, “rubbing their thighs together until they become frenzied and are lifted up from behind one at a time by one of the elder Ngoku initiates.”²³ These are not wifely, available women. What we’re seeing is a remarkably frank commentary on women’s sexual autonomy and inviolability.

The ritual association of Ngoku centres round women’s reproductive and sexual skills. While the biological body clearly provides the template for ritual thought, it is seized upon and surpassed by the collective female body which works on the matter and politics of biology. Laughter, polyphony, Eros – the carnivalistic experience of dance and song – are how the individual reproductive body is ‘cooked’ by the collective. It’s worth bearing in mind that Bakhtinian entertainment was itself political and subversive. The breaking of normative moral or postural modes and the infusion of public space with the topsy-turvy, the spectacle of carnival, asserted new meaning. Lewis describes how men, during Ejengi, explore fear, threat of physical harm, the potential of brawn. In Ngoku, women use satire, parody and sexiness. Ejengi and Ngoku constitute two halves of a whole conversation that plays out first in large-scale ritual spaces and subsequently informs more informal relationships and interactions. So they, and other *mokondi massana*, are not additional to political life and the absence of hierarchy, but central to these. In the bodily conversation between the sexes – a shifting, cyclical debate or weave – power is made, measured and celebrated.

When Yaka women dance, they assert their total presence by forming a tightly branched body. The lyrics of their most prized songs relish bodily fluids, appetites and productions. This assertion of bodily meaning

makes sense because on a daily basis they are so intimately part of each other’s skin, pooling milk, nurture and children. These performances pivot on a contradiction that emphasises sexual attractiveness and unavailability simultaneously. A review of them shows women publicly mocking male sexual prowess. These are not blind bodies – matter moving as the puppet of mind – but articulate bodies in a state of heightened awareness. They link arms, work up erotic frenzies, sing and dance choreographies the beauty of which is believed to summon forest spirits and captivate game animals. They declare the victory of the vagina, the miraculous division of skin from skin, celebrate sojourns with the moon, rush at men and boys beating them gleefully, hitch up skirts and perform men and boys with ruthless humour. This is the body at work, the person of the female body at work. “Culture” comments Kirsten Hastrup “exists only in practice”.²⁴ A focus on the experience and politics of women’s rituals and dances – what they achieve and defend – has led me to think of them as articulating (more specifically than the power of gender) the power of Eros.

By this I mean the female body as the creative matrix of ritual action. Eros describes the intense, uninhibited enjoyment of life, the irrepressible sense of well-being with which women’s performances flood the community. There is no evidence that hunter-gatherers subscribe to the mind/body distinction as we know it. This must profoundly influence what ‘gender’ is, what ‘the body’ means, and the power of bodily metaphor and agency. We should expect women, in ritual performance, to be declaring the significance of reproduction, blood and sex – the very things a Western feminist focus on cultural constructs starved of biological currency sidelines. What then if symbolic thought is literal, sensuous, a creative shoot from the sexed body?

In *The Ritual Process* Victor Turner describes symbols as “the molecules of ritual”.²⁵ Yet molecules are the stuff of matter, the building blocks of the body. I argue therefore for an expansion of our understanding of bodily epistemology, bodily ways of seeing, knowing and speaking, most particularly as these illumine complex inter-sexual conversations and disjunctions in the ritual domain. In Central African societies, gender does not belong to the individual and nor does it constrain them. The emphasis here is of the body as a path of access rather than a thing, and of the socially experienced and speaking body. *The Body in the Mind* by Mark Johnson is clear on this point. In keeping with the literature on African hunter-gatherer ritual thought, he describes “a vast realm of meaning structure...that lies beyond concepts”,²⁶ a domain in which symbols are living entities drawn up from the body. Image schemata and metaphor are both “embodied imaginative structures...forms of imagination that grow out of bodily experience”.²⁷

Political bodies and laughter

This brings to mind Mbuti or Yaka women’s dances and the parsimonious nature of their songs – allusory, scatological, libidinal. Pared down to the bones: “The vagina wins!” “Their testicles are broken!” “The penis produces nothing!” If the female body could utter repartee to the ideology of the alpha-male, the shadow of hierarchy, this might be what it would say. So many analyses begin with the mind, the ordering and categorising of bodily statements – the body as object to be dissected, peeled away from the finer and more complex sense of the mind. Mbuti and Yaka women’s rituals lead us toward another kind of analysis, and I follow their essentialism in pulling the terms back to the sexed body. But as with the people themselves, this is an essentialism privileged only in order to transcend it. As Durkheim knew, what’s collectively imagined

and integrated – brought into the field of the pluralistic body – goes far beyond individual meaning-making capacities. I see the body here at its most attentive and articulate, the person snapping into full presence. Symbols in the context of Mbuti or Yaka dances could almost be argued to be the thoughts of the body: Blood, meat, fire, sex, death,

and oaths, his vulgar quips” as the beginning of a move in which folk humour, and the jokes representative of it, were “torn away from the original stem, the ambivalent material bodily lower stratum that supported them. Thus they lost their true meaning...the broad social and political ideas were broken off this original stem; they became literary,

and cosmic laughter exist not in the crypts of the social or the psyche, but in diurnal order as its engine and purpose. This isn’t mere frivolity, the reign of chaos. “True ambivalent and universal laughter does not deny seriousness but purifies and completes it...from dogmatism, from the intolerant and the petrified... from the single meaning, the single

“ through this sensual repartee between male and female ritual collectives the political pendulum at the heart of community life is animated ”

birth. The world, not rendered more abstruse and complicated but stripped back to its bare bones, its reflective core. Symbols could be seen as the body’s letters, brail for the skin, the reading of the unreadable. As such, ritual – the body in full flame – should be the place we first look for sense.

Both Henri Bergson²⁸ and Bakhtin noted the mediatory power of laughter, capable of representing counter-culture while circumscribing and defusing powerful tensions. For Bakhtin, “all fears and lies are dispersed in the face of the material bodily festive principle.”²⁹ Bakhtin, foreshadowing Turnbull, used specifically the analogy of the mother “which swallows up in order to give birth to something larger”.³⁰ “Warm blood”, the genitals, the womb, the nipples, are what give flesh to and unify the comic principle as it attacks “all that oppresses and restricts”.³¹ The cosmic laughter of this body “could never become an instrument to oppress and blind the people. It always remained a free weapon in their hands.”³² Importantly, Bakhtin sees the contorting of this principle in the hands of later writers who were shocked by Rabelais’ “sexual and scatological obscenity, his curses

academic.”³³ All that remained was the obscenity, rendered “narrowly sexual, isolated, and individual”.

I cite this here as a caution in approaching the ethnographic material I’ve used. The body we confront in large, licentious Yaka dances is closer to the Rabelaisian person: An open, ambivalent body whose jokes are “particles of an immense whole, of the popular carnival spirit, of the world that laughs”.³⁴ In the world of Rabelais, laughter is what makes sex cultural. What the work of Turnbull, Kisliuk, and Lewis cumulatively assemble (and I’ve used only a fragment of each here) is the speaking body. This is the body that must be silenced by orders in which hierarchy and structural violence prevail. Take away the static ideology of such orders and the body begins to sing, or as Bakhtin might have had it, to laugh. His writing on carnival and its raucous laughter sheds light on those places where official veneers split – whether in life or thought – and laughter and blood spill through. This is what Yaka community shows us: A space where “carnival” is part of the official order; where “the great generic body of the people” prevails; where blood, sex, desire

level, from sentimentality. Laughter does not permit seriousness to atrophy.”³⁵ Working on the periphery of dominant discourse and status-systems is this subversive, fleshed resistance; the defiant doubling capacity of the maternal; the blade of laughter waiting in the shadow of state gravitas and its law. It is Eros – the raw meat of sex coupled with the alchemy of communal rapture – that holds women’s dances together and makes them compelling to the other gender group and relevant to each dancer, who is also sister, mother, daughter and wife – the thinking body caught in a web of loyalties and tensions. Turner comments: “From this standpoint the ritual symbol becomes a factor in social action, a positive force in an activity field.”³⁶ The double meaning or contradiction generated by these performances is at the heart of them. The streamlining into gender for us conjures up partiality, disjunction, alienation of self from self, realm from realm. But what of a situation where one does not ‘have’ a body but is bodied forth continually by the motion and dance of the collective? Where the edifice of meaning attached to the individual body is not imprisoned within it? Where the pendulum has not been frozen, flagged eternally on one

side or another, one sex or another? Where being the body, with all its effluvia, productions and desires is experienced as empowering? These are communities in which being sexed is an advantage, a claimed and reclaimed political perspective. Gender therefore should be detached from traditional notions of the domestic, the public/private dichotomy and all other assumptions of a negative, delimiting split.

Duality is integral to Central African cosmology and symbolism, but the engine and impetus of duality, rather than a calcified echo of it. Women's power is contingent on men's power and *vice versa*. The conversation between the sexes then constitutes a kind of pendulum or dialectic that continually highlights the tension of differing interests without resolving these definitively so that in Hegel's words in his *Logic*, "the truth is not their lack of distinction, but that they are not the same, that they are absolutely distinct, and yet unseparated and inseparable, each disappearing immediately in its opposite. Their truth is therefore in this movement, this immediate disappearance of the one into the other, in a word, *Becoming*."³⁷ Ironically, resolution

is potentially the point at which the dialectic freezes, motion is stopped, and hierarchy floods the interpersonal field.

Mbuti or Yaka women's public performances operate as a means in themselves, not as mechanisms triggered by a normative order in which linearity and male supremacy prevail, but as a powerful bodily statement on behalf of egalitarian reality. They are a means of creating society, not one of society's tools. The conversation they ignite between the sexes is the structure (albeit a fluid, fizzing structure) of social life itself. The body in this context is not a mere vehicle for the ritual drama. It is the matrix from which symbols emerge and to which they remain tethered. The antagonism or tension of sexual difference is managed by simultaneously privileging it and subjecting it to a theatrical or ritual motion. This is one of the fundamental dynamics

underpinning Yaka community life. And it suggests that antagonism is explored as part of a cultural conversation that is necessary and positive: Tension being continually juggled as a creative force. It's normal to try to conclude or resolve social and sexual antagonism from an ethical stance formed in a belief about dualism not as a conversation but as a permanently closed door. Evidence suggests these communities neither detach gender from biological imperatives, nor confine it to them. Rather, gender is a mutual and ongoing construction based on difference but transcending it. A ritual conversation is maintained between the sexes in which one may temporarily and collectively claim supremacy, only to relinquish it to the other. It is through this sensual repartee between male and female ritual collectives that the political pendulum at the heart of community life is animated. ■

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Singing the Oldest Story:

The Signature of Sex Strike in British Folksong

Amanda MacLean investigates the shared structures in three popular magical ballads.

Once upon a time, our female ancestors in Africa enacted strange rituals when the moon was dark, painting their bodies with menstrual blood and red ochre cosmetics. In the moonless dark, they transformed themselves into animals of the hunt. Then, through the magic of blood, they were united with their brothers, as one great beast, and they secluded themselves in a magical otherworld, where they told tales to help them understand the meaning of their rituals. Their suitors withdrew, knowing that to touch a woman at this time could mean death, and they prepared themselves for two weeks of hunting. When they returned, laden with gifts of meat, in the bright light of the full moon, the women – who had returned to human form – welcomed them. Then began a time of cooking, feasting and love-making. As the supplies of meat ran out, and the moon waned, hunger grew and the women prepared to remove themselves to the otherworld once more through the magic of blood and transformation.

Later, as climate changed and the big game disappeared, men stole the magic rituals from the women, and made themselves bleed instead, and it was men only who were allowed the power to perform the rituals. And they punished the old women who tried to keep to the old ways, altering the tales they told to prove their case.

And even today, these old stories and ways of thinking survive the passage of time, their roots so deep in every culture that when we tell magical stories, they follow the ancient patterns.

That, at least, is the story told by

Chris Knight and colleagues in the Radical Anthropology Group. In other words, not just anything can happen in fairytales. Stories that are based on fact are constrained by the physical reality of the world around us. On the other hand, magical tales, by definition, relate events that do not, and cannot, occur in the real world. Therefore, any combination of events ought to be possible, limited only by the human imagination. But if we find that, contrary to expectation, such ‘rules’ do exist in the magical world – that is, that only certain combinations of events happen – it suggests that there is an underlying cause that generates them. Lévi-Strauss thought that the patterns found in myth were generated by structures in the human brain. Chris Knight's hypothesis, on the other hand, is that they are generated culturally, and date back to the Paleolithic, when coalitions of women signalled periodic sexual unavailability – a so-called “sex strike” – in order to motivate men to provision them and their children with meat. The evolutionary and social explanations for the particular signals they used have been well described elsewhere, and I will not go into detail here, but the combination of signals that they used, in the rituals described above, can be summarised as follows.

Sex strike signals:

- Humans in animal form
- Blood/Redness
- Wetness
- Noise/Cacophony
- Hunger/Raw food
- Intimacy between kin, while marital sex banned
- Gender inversion
- Seclusion
- Other world
- Dark moon/Waxing moon – no full

or waning moon

Knight calls this combination of features the “syntax” or “signature” of sex strike, and has argued that this signature is evident in the indigenous myths of all continents including European fairytales.

My own grasp on European fairytales, already corrupted by Disney, has weakened substantially since I stopped reading them around the age of twelve. But, if Knight is correct, the signature of sex strike will be found in every corpus of myths or fairytales the world over. And so I have turned to a body of literature with which I am more familiar: the traditional ballads of Great Britain.

Ballads are long songs, usually with verses of four lines, sometimes with two plus a refrain, and may have dozens of verses. Their defining feature, however, is not in their structure or length. It is simply that they tell stories. Dramatic, gripping stories. Murder, incest, infanticide, and rape are common subjects, in addition to stories of love, battles and aristocratic rivalries. There are magical tales as well: ghosts, enchantments, journeys to the fairy kingdom. A full analysis of all the magical ballads would be a worthwhile project. Here I concentrate on three ballads whose central motifs are the enchantment and transformation of human beings into animals, and ask: Do these ballads show the signature of sex strike, i.e. are other sex-strike signals emphasised in humans who take on animal form? To demonstrate this convincingly, not only should they exhibit at least some of the sex-strike signals, they should also avoid giving any conflicting signals. For

example, a human-animal might be secluded with its kin when the moon was dark, and might be hungry but should certainly not be feasting on cooked food.

The three ballads I will deal with are: *Kemp Owyne*; *Allison Gross*; and *The Laily Worm and the Machrel of the Sea*. These are numbers 34, 35 and 36 respectively in Francis J. Child's *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, a collection of no fewer than 305 ballads which was published in the late 19th century and is still the definitive work on the subject. Child himself recognized these as closely related ballads by numbering them consecutively.

In *Kemp Owyne*, the worst woman that ever lived in Christendom grows jealous of her stepdaughter's beauty. She gets rid of her by throwing her into the sea and turning her into a savage beast who can only be returned to her proper shape by three kisses from Kemp Owyne, the king's son. Our hero, Kemp Owyne, duly takes up the challenge, crosses the sea, and delivers the kisses (aided by three gifts from the beast, who thus colludes in her own rescue). The enchanted maiden turns back to her proper shape, the stepmother is punished, and, although not stated in the ballad itself, we presume that everyone else lives happily ever after. So far, so standard fairytale. But on closer examination, the story is not quite so straightforward.

As with any oral tradition, most of the Child ballads have been recorded in numerous versions, from a variety of sources, all differing in detail from each other. *Kemp Owyne* is no exception. Child collected five versions of it. In the first, for instance, the maiden is turned into a savage beast, with long hair twisted three times around a tree. With each kiss she whirls around the tree, unwinding herself, and comes back for the next kiss. Although she has both tail and fin, it is not clear exactly what kind of beast she is, but in the other versions she is

a “fiery beast”, or a “long worm”: in other words, a dragon. And the relationship between Kemp Owyne and the dragon turns out to be quite surprising. For, while in one of the versions, as we might expect from a fairy tale, she is his own true love, in others the pair are brother and sister: it is the brother, not the lover, who kisses his sister when she is in animal form. It is not clear where exactly all of this takes place: while it is certainly either in the sea or close by it, in some versions the beast is on a crag, in others in a cave. Certainly the picture is of an isolated and desolate place, removed from normal human society.

In *The Laily Worm and the Machrel of the Sea*, we encounter the evil stepmother once more, but this time she enchants not only the sister but the brother as well. Instead of being thrown into the sea and then tied to a tree by her hair, the sister swims the seas in the shape of the Machrel of the sea, while it is the brother who must lie at the foot of the tree as the Laily (loathsome) Worm. There are no kisses this time, but nevertheless the relationship between brother and sister in the transformed state is an intimate one: the sister returns every Saturday at noon, and takes her brother's “laily head an lays it on her knee, an kames [combs] it wi a siller kame, and washes it in the sea”. This time it is the king, their father, who effects the rescue, not by kisses, but by confronting the stepmother and forcing her hand, before burning her to death as punishment. While the brother returns to human shape, the sister chooses to stay in the form of the Machrel: “Ye shapeit me ance an unseemly shape, and ye's never mare shape me.” But Child suspected, as do I, that this was a deviation from the original story as it lacks both poetic justice

and symmetry. Whether this is the case or not, *The Laily Worm and the Machrel of the Sea* clearly shares enough common features with *Kemp Owyne* to suggest that both tales have diverged from a common origin.

The Laily Worm and the Machrel of the Sea is narrated by the character of the enchanted brother, as is the story in our next ballad, *Allison Gross*. Here, Allison Gross, the ugliest witch in the North country, offers the narrator three gifts – including a red mantle – in the hope of enticing him to be her lover. Riven with anger at his repeated refusals, she casts a spell on him, turning him into an ugly worm. After some time, the Fairy Queen arrives and turns him again to his own proper shape. At first hearing, this ballad shares only general features with the two discussed already. Listen more carefully, however, and salient details emerge that link it to them closely. For a start, the worm in *Allison Gross* is associated with a tree, which he must endlessly “toddle about”. This is strongly reminiscent of the brother's fate in the *Laily Worm*, and of the beast in *Kemp Owyne*.



Alison Gross

And every Saturday night, his sister comes to him, and combs his hair, just as the Machrel combs the hair of her brother, the Laily Worm. Indeed the sisters share the same name, Maisry, in both of these ballads. Another notable feature is an apparent identification between the sister Maisry and the witch Allison Gross. The witch begins her courtship by combing the narrator's hair on her knee, just as the sister does when she visits him, later on, in his enchanted form. Not only that, but the narrator also speaks of them both in similar terms. In rejecting the witch's advances, he speaks boldly: "I wouldna ance kiss your ugly mouth for a' the gifts that you could gi." And he has a similar reaction to his sister: "But or [before] I had kissed her ugly mouth, I'd rather a toddled about the tree." It appears, then, that in this story, the witch and the sister are one and the same. In modern recordings, singers have tended to replace the sister with Allison Gross herself, to make a more coherent narrative. But the sister is undeniably there in Child's version. This identification of enchantress with enchanted maiden also occurs between the ballads, for

while in *Allison Gross* it is the witch who proffers three gifts, in *Kemp Owyne* they are the dragon's to give.

Is the signature of sex strike evident in these three closely related ballads? I would argue yes. Not all the sex-strike signals are evident. The moon, for instance, does not feature, neither is the presence or absence of food emphasised. (On this latter point it is worth noting, however, that in some versions of *Kemp Owyne* the dragon does eat, but it is only the milk of seven cows – a raw food.) We have a coalition of women, in the identification between the sister and the stepmother/witch: in *Allison Gross*, these figures are interchangeable; the witch in *Allison Gross* and the dragon in *Kemp Owyne* share similarities, as the givers of gifts.

The gifts that the dragon/beast offers to Kemp Owyne are, however, somewhat problematic in terms of this analysis. She promises him that while he wears them, "drawn shall your blood never be". In terms of sex-strike signals, surely blood should flow? My interpretation is that the emphasis here is on

protection from harm rather than the importance of blood itself – for if Kemp Owyne does not wear the gifts, "I swear my gift your death shall be." Furthermore, a surrogate symbol stands in for blood in the form of the wetness of the sea, which both the dragon and Kemp Owyne have passed through or over; the Machrel inhabits the sea; the tree (assuming it is the same tree that appears in all three ballads) is either in or by the sea. And other signals are also in evidence. Humans are transformed into animals. The location is secluded, or at least far removed from everyday human society. Finally, there is a clear intimacy between kin – the brother and sister – when they are in animal

form: the kisses in *Kemp Owyne*; the hair combing in the other two ballads.

Furthermore, the moral values assigned to the characters and events in the ballads have the 'spin' that we would expect if women's rituals had been appropriated by men. In order to retain male power, clearly women must be strongly discouraged from attempting to regain control of the rituals. Thus, the stepmother/witch is evil, acting out of jealousy of her stepdaughter's beauty, and must be punished, while those she enchants are unwilling, and collude to escape their situation.

To conclude, then, the signature of sex strike can be read quite clearly in these three old British ballads. When they are sung today, at folk clubs and festivals across the country, most performers will be aware that they are participating in a very old custom. They might guess that the songs date back four or five hundred, maybe even a thousand years. But if these ballads are truly imprinted with the signature of Palaeolithic sex strike culture, then the tradition they are carrying on is far more ancient: they are singing the oldest story in the world. ■

Notes:

Kemp Owyne has been recorded by Brian Peters on his album *Sharper Than the Thorn*, and by Frankie Armstrong on *The Garden of Love*.

A folk-rock version of *Allison Gross* can be found on Steeleye Span's *Parcel of Rogues* album, and a more traditional rendering is given by Elspeth Cowie on *Scots Women: Live from Celtic Connections* 2001.

The Laily Worm and the Machrel of the Sea can be heard on *Borders of the Ocean* by Graham and Eileen Pratt. Images by Vernon Hill, reproduced with permission, Spirit of the Ages collection (www.spiritoftheages.com).

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Kemp Owyne

Politics beyond parties, environment beyond nature

Anna Grigoryeva reports from Blackheath on debates and actions at Climate Camp 2009

“Nowadays, hardly anybody likes it when you mention the environment. ... When you mention the environment, you bring it into the foreground. In other words, it stops being the environment. It stops being That Thing Over There that surrounds and sustains us. When you think about where your waste goes, your world starts to shrink...”¹

For the fourth year running, the Camp for Climate Action gathered over a thousand campers from the UK and beyond, to build a movement for sustainable living and political direct action against the “root causes of climate change”. In 2006, the target was Drax, the UK’s biggest coal-fired power station; in 2007, Heathrow, its biggest airport; in 2008, Kingsnorth, the site of the first new coal-fired power station in the UK in 30 years. This year, in contrast, Climate Camp decided to take on “our economic and political systems” with an encampment on historically rebellious Blackheath within sight of Canary Wharf.

Peter Beaumont in the *Observer* (‘The Climate Camp is too self-regarding to be effective’, 30 August 2009) criticised the camp for taking on too abstract a target and thinking about its own process and directions too much. But what was the camp for and what was it against? Most importantly to me, it is one of the few places where ‘the environment’ or ‘climate change’ are really felt as current and political. The open, fluid, and diverse nature of the Climate Camp movement, with its direct action ‘do-it-ourselves’ ethos, realises something radical anthropologists will recognise: that

every action is political.

Diversity

On one of the camp’s kitchens, a banner pictured silhouettes of three people riding a mountain bike, a tricycle, and a Penny Farthing, underneath the words, “The Strength of Our Movement Is in Its Diversity”. Throughout the camp I encountered Transition Towns activists, Socialist Workers’ Party leaflets, a Liberal Democrat parliamentary spokesperson, Whitechapel Anarchists, and a lone soapbox speaker religiously



Banner at the gates of Climate Camp, 2009

advocating vegetarianism. Most of us were simply Climate Campers: the camp itself, through continued debate, manages to keep clear of any partisan affiliation. This year’s camp was particularly open to the public thanks to being in the middle of London, so an estimated 5000 visitors passed through over the bank holiday weekend.

Climate Camp manages to stay beyond the divisions of party politics, and remains a space which participants themselves can and do redefine. How does this work? Anyone can put on workshops at the camp, or organise in a working group. The consensus decision-making process the Camp uses

merits an article by itself, though I won’t go into too much detail here.

Consensus

The camp is organised into geographic neighbourhoods: London, Yorkshire, Wales, South Coast, and so on. Every morning started with large circles of campers meeting outside their neighbourhood kitchens to take decisions for the day ahead, with two temporary spokespeople being appointed for a site-wide meeting later in the morning. The process at its best ensures everyone in the group participates and respects a decision by following through each other’s arguments. Hand signals make it easy to gauge levels of agreement in the circle, and a facilitator takes stock of the discussion, moves it to a decision or summarises points where necessary.

Certainly, the formally non-hierarchical nature of decision-making does not eliminate informal power inequalities, a source of disappointment among campers. People more used to speaking in front of a group, or who give more time to organising the camp, find it easier to speak up.

Policing

On the first day of the camp, the police’s Silver Commander Julia Pendry and her assistants came on site for a daily meeting with the camp’s police liaison team. On their way out they ended up being accompanied by a loud group of campers unhappy with “police on site”. Next morning, the debate of whether these meetings on site should be allowed (given the absence of other policing measures) put the decision-making process to the test. A significant minority of campers opposed any police officers entering the camp. Discussions failed to

Photo: C. Knight

reach consensus, so next day Silver Commander was not allowed on site. While our potentially dangerous inability to reach a decision was frustrating to many, the debate made several people I met think through others' objections to policing. Policing was the main issue which previously made the camp news. With raids at 5am, arbitrary arrests and stops-and-searches, and violence, the police presence to an extent defined the radical atmosphere of last year's Camp. The significant media and judicial pressure following this April's G20 protests, with considerable work done by the Camp's legal and media teams, resulted in this year's visible absence of police, except for a few vans parked in the distance, and CCTV cameras mounted on a cherry-picker.

In the end the policing issue turned into a media game. The "ousted" commander threatened to break off all communication, but retracted her statement following a press release from the camp describing her actions as "unreasonable". For the rest of the camp, she kept a low profile.

Words and actions

Certainly, police lines can provide an immediate threat, an Other to confront – the yellow high-vis jackets appeared in my dreams for some time after the G20. Their absence was puzzling for some campers and even more so for the media. In the media tent, we were delighted when the Camp's first action – a Carbon Casino outside the European Carbon Exchange on Bishopsgate – provoked a discussion on Newsnight about carbon trading. Equally so when *The Observer* article came out. Climate Camp made the media debate what it was actually about!

Our main message focused on the links between "our political and economic systems" – call it capitalism, or unfettered growth, consumption, and corporate power – and the environmental chaos we are headed for if scientists' predictions

are correct. Resistance to an abstract hegemony is a challenge. I'd argue, the actions put on by the camp's activists faced up to it.

A group of naked protesters with a banner appeared in the front window of Edelman (the PR company working for energy giant E.ON) to highlight the "naked truth" behind the "greenwash". So-called "clean coal", a technology propagated by E.ON and the Government which does not yet exist, even when implemented at E.ON's new coal-fired power stations, will only capture 20 per cent of their emissions. Another group entered the Department for Energy and Climate Change – responsible for current climate change policies, and heavily reliant on ineffective mechanisms like the European Carbon Trading scheme – with canoes and goggles to hold a minute's silence for the victims of climate change.

These and other actions creatively, and in physical ways, subverted words and symbols used by corporations and government in power. Whether these constitute direct action – "throwing one's body on the workings of the machine" – was debated in the camp. The workings of corporations where their power is centred are much more abstract than, say, at coal power stations where activists previously stopped coal trains and conveyor belts. But actions aimed at head offices, like the hundreds of Post-It notes listing Barclays Bank's investment 'crimes' on Barclays HQ, bring the other end of the supply chain back to where the decisions are taken.

This is all the more powerful in the presence of those on the frontline of fossil fuel extraction. Several Canadian indigenous rights activists, whose livelihoods are affected by the new development of tar sands – a particularly dirty fossil fuel – joined the camp. They held a workshop and a demonstration visiting key players in tar sands extraction: the Canadian embassy, Shell, and BP.

Interaction with Canadian activists gave Climate Campers something to think about: their ideas of tradition, legality, and indigenous land rights noticeably clashed with Climate Camp's veganism, direct action ethic, and ideas of common land. But the solidarity of resistance across Shell's multinational presence was symbolically celebrated when the 'S' from the Shell Building (taken during the tar sands demonstration, leaving it the 'Hell' Building) was handed to activists from Rossport in Ireland, also resisting destructive fossil fuel extraction.

Ethics

As an activist pointed out, "growing your own veg is also direct action". Climate Camp attempts to practice the sustainable living it preaches: all-vegan food, compost toilets, and power generation solely from wind, solar, and bicycle power. Campers' actions dispel modern-day commodity fetishism by bringing the reality of the devastating effects of corporations' practices to their doorstep; sustainable living excludes as far as possible our own involvement in these practices. Unlike so much popular 'green' rhetoric in Britain, for Climate Camp environmental ethics cannot be parcelled into actions like changing lightbulbs or buying a polar bear calendar. Instead, the camp recognised and acted on the environment as a political issue; every action became a political action with real consequences. It did so with some awareness of its own complex politics, and in constant debate. Whether its resistance and political ethic will grow remains to be seen. ■

Notes: 1. Timothy Morton 2007. *Ecology without Nature*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

Anna Grigoryeva has been an undergraduate student in Social Anthropology at Cambridge. She camped in the Eastside neighbourhood, and will be pursuing both anthropological research and her interest in climate change politics.

Because we're worth it!

Elena Fejdiova explains how women can become allies using and sharing cosmetics.

Naomi Wolf argues the “beauty myth” makes of women competitors and rivals rather than allies. Women are supposed to be objects of male desire, displayed for their enjoyment and controlled by their gaze and agency. If beauty forms the basis of women's identity, this makes them vulnerable not only to the approval of men but to the critical appraisal of jealous fellow women, too. ‘Rites of beauty’ carried out in privacy and isolation would foster divisions among women.

But how can we be so sure about this, especially if this idea is based on theorizing representations instead of looking at everyday practices? Women's normal experience is not actually to be rivals competing against each other as to who is more beautiful. On the contrary, I argue that everyday use of cosmetics can be a mechanism of bonding where sharing products, beautification practices and information create a collective identity of women as a coalition of allies.

My analysis is based on ethnographic research on women in Slovakia who were selling, buying and using Avon and Oriflame direct sales cosmetic products. My focus was on sales representatives who were selling these cosmetics to their family, relatives, colleagues and friends without making any real profit, rather than on profit-oriented sales representatives. And I worked with their buyers. For the period of research I myself became an Oriflame seller and through this a member of such a coalition.

In her female cosmetic coalitions model, Camilla Power argues that cosmetics provide mechanisms for marking reciprocal relations and obligations among women. During the human symbolic revolution, women created ritual displays with red ochre body paints. In line with Zahavi's Handicap principle, the costliness of this display meant the insiders, the women, showed their commitment to each other, while they also demonstrated to the

in the catalogue, usually to work. Often, the women involved are work colleagues. Whenever possible, women crowd around the catalogue and go through it together. This is usually accompanied by lots of laughter and excitement. They call it *babska chvilka* – a phrase very difficult to translate into English, meaning roughly ‘a little time for women together’. All the work is put aside, as are male colleagues, friends or boyfriends who flee

such female incursions. All the time, space and energy is devoted to cosmetics and to being one of the girls. They talk about what they already have, how they like it and who else among them has got it as well. Apart from this, they exchange beauty tips about what to use and how best to enhance their looks. As they themselves put it, they want their girlfriends to have what's best, what will

make them look their best and feel good. In this atmosphere of personal recommendations and beauty advice, most of the actual orders are decided.

After the order is made, one of the women or the representative brings in the products and women crowd again to start *obzeranie* – unpacking and trying out of cosmetics – accompanied by shouts such as “Show me what you've got!” or “Let me try it on!”. Women encourage each other to look at and try out what they've just got as if a general assessment of *obzeranie* were taking place. Refusing or failing to participate is considered bad manners. Apart from that, women assess their own purchases in comparison with others.

How can such behaviour be

Photo: M. Bancanska



Female cosmetic coalition

outsiders, male hunters, the extent of their kinship networks and ability to support children.

I was looking at a modern setting of non-ritual everyday practices of cosmetics purchase and use. In this direct sales context, cosmetics create a niche where female coalitions can form and last. These commercial cosmetics function as a visible and reliable signal of female bonds in the coalition. Shared use and purchase of these products demarcate and guarantee alliances among women.

But how exactly do women create trust among themselves by using cosmetic mechanisms? Let's take a look at how direct sales work. Typically, a coalition member or the sales representative herself, brings

explained? According to Power's cosmetic coalitions model, to join a coalition each member has first to make a costly commitment to the coalition before she can be trusted as a friend, and derive benefits from membership. In the modern non-ritual context, where the costs are relatively low, the commitment needs to be demonstrated repeatedly. Through buying cosmetics regularly in this social setting, women prove to each other their commitment to being friends. Each monitors and confirms the commitment of the others.

When exchanging beauty tips, it is expected that all members of the coalition will provide the best, most reliable advice and compliments they can. They should also accept the ones addressed to them. Although there are beauty tips in the catalogues, each coalition has its own exclusive tips for its own members. They represent specific expert knowledge that is constructed as secret. To reveal one's own beauty secrets allows other women in the

coalition to be as beautiful as anyone else, while to reveal one's flaws to those others requires real trust. It's only safe to do that when women have created an atmosphere of trust, lacking any rivalry. Sexual selection theorists predict that physical attractiveness is the main thing that men seek in women and women should therefore accentuate signals such as slim waists or symmetrical features. According to this theory, women should compete as rivals. How then do we understand the generous sharing of women's beauty tips in favour of other women in the coalition? As Power puts it, sexual selection is more complicated because on the one hand women form cosmetic coalitions as allies, on the other hand different coalitions compete with each other. Perhaps the most important part of the signals women put out is the fact that they belong to a fine-looking coalition of girlfriends. This means female competition is not purely individualistic but entails significant cooperation.

Beauty doesn't have to make rivals out of women. Far from it, using and sharing cosmetics socially creates a niche where women can build coalitions of allies. It's the most ancient and surefire way to establish trust and friendship among women.

Elena Fejdiova is completing her Ph.D in Anthropology at Comenius University, Bratislava, Slovakia.

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Subscriptions

Radical Anthropology is an annual journal and appears every October.

One issue	£3
Two issues	£5
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Herbs of the sun and the moon: Magic girdles, protection and the summer solstice

Jules Nurse looks into the mythic and ritual connection of two herbs: mugwort and St John's wort

This article disentwines the symbolic interplay between mugwort and St John's wort as representations of the sun and the moon, reinterpreted in Christian iconography as Christ and St John.

Artemesia is another name for mugwort, linking this herb to the moon goddess Artemis. In Greek myth Artemis is the elder twin of Apollo (the sun god) and midwife to her mother helping her birth Apollo. From this tale Artemis became the midwife to all creatures. So mugwort is known as mother of all and oldest of herbs, having a long history of use in birth and conditions relating to the womb. Representing Artemis, mugwort stands for the light of the moon, the sky at night, shooting stars and the underworld, opener of the

womb and sometimes manifests as a bear in representations of her role as midwife.

St John's wort is also mythically a being which has come from the sky, most commonly associated with the sun or the light of the sun, and a physical representation of where lightning has fallen, ritually used as a protection from lightning, a more frequent occurrence in the summer. Both plants are deeply connected with blood, and regarded as herbs of high status as primary wound herbs giving aid for different types of bleeding. St John's wort is used to protect bleeding wounds, having its heyday on the battlefields of the crusaders, being particularly reputed for healing puncture wounds produced by sword and

iron. Artemesia by contrast is connected to female blood, a form produced without pricking or injury, a more sacred and mystical form – blood produced in association with birth. Artemesia is used to help 'bring the blood to the moon' – a term often used to hint at herbs having abortifacient qualities, as well as aiding safe childbirth.

In the case of these herbs, a Christianisation of older solilunar myths appears to have occurred. The readings of these are complicated but here are a few clues. St. John's feast day on June 24 coincides with the summer solstice celebrated as the birth of John the Baptist, half a year older than Christ born on December

25, representing the winter solstice.

In symbolic terms then Christ represents the sun, and by extrapolation Apollo – in plant form St John's wort. This places St John in opposition as the moon, represented in plant form by his girdle of mugwort.

Mythically then St John's wort is representative of both St John and Christ. Is this interchangeable plant imagery hinting at a deeper interchangeability of these two Christian figures and the more ancient characters they stand for? St John's wort is obviously solar in appearance with a golden flower and solar rays represented by its anthers, a herbal symbol of St John. This is furthered signified by the red oil produced by the plant representing St John's beheading. However, other interpretations of this plant's solar nature and its ability to bleed symbolically tie it to Christ and the nails placed in him at his crucifixion, thus enhancing the image of this herb as holy and associated with the mysteries surrounding 'the blood of Christ'.

Unusually there are five Christian festival celebrating St John's life. Two can be directly equated to the physical appearance of St John's wort: the first at midsummer with the opening of its flowers, standing for the celebration of his birth. The second of St John's beheading on August 29 when the plant St John's wort appears beheaded, with a reddish seed capsule, representing a blooded neck stump. By contrast mugwort is of 'silvery appearance



Mugwort

and shines in the moonlight'¹
attracting moths, often symbols of
the soul and dreaming.

St. John the Baptist reputedly wore
a girdle of mugwort for protection
when he set out into the wilderness.
Frazer's *Golden Bough* documents
this use of mugwort as a girdle across
Europe and Russia, persisting until
modern times. At summer solstice
fire rituals a herbal girdle based
around mugwort was worn, both
to enhance fertility and provide
protection.

These girdles were thrown across the
fires, to be caught by those who were
desired husbands and wives. Later in
the celebrations they would either be
thrown into summer fires to ensure
protection throughout the coming
year, or taken back to the homesteads
to be placed protectively above
doors and windows. From a practical
perspective, mugwort's length lends
itself to providing the herbal base

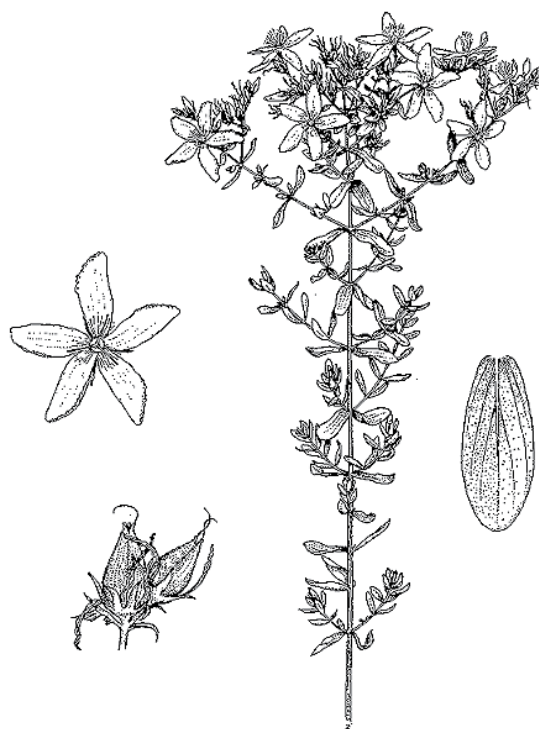
for a girdle, into which shorter
stemmed herbs such as St
John's wort may be entwined.

Reawakening the knowledge
and practice of these rituals
provides a link with our
ancestors, which may be
enriched by recognising these
herbs growing along ancient
tracks and waysides.² ■

Notes

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St John's wort

Jules Nurse is a herbalist and member of the Radical Anthropology Group

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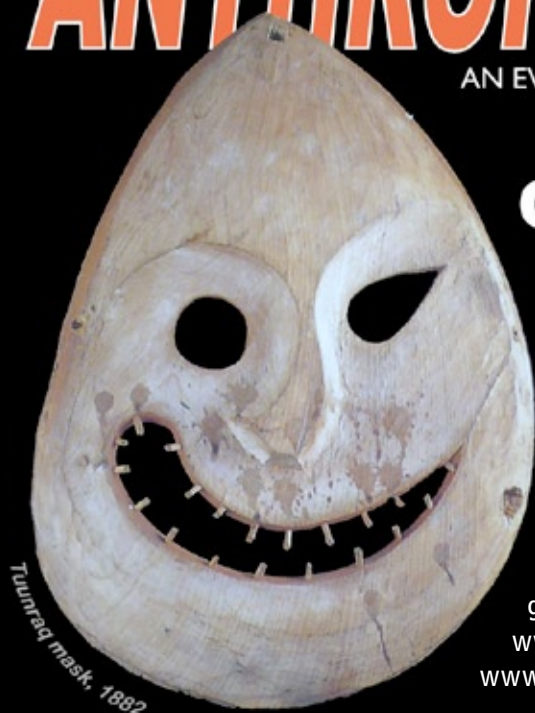
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Raising My Voice by Malalai Joya A review by Olivia Knight

When asked to review the incredible story of Malalai Joya – the child refugee turned teacher, social activist, politician and Afghan revolutionary – I felt unqualified. ‘What authority do I have? I’m not an academic.’ But Malalai’s inspirational message in this part-autobiography, part-manifesto is that the right to speak up should not depend on qualification, or be reserved for those in positions of power and authority. It belongs to ordinary people the world over who are informed and able to speak out against tyranny and oppression.

Armed only with her education and experiences of war, occupation and life as a refugee, Malalai Joya has used every opportunity to Raise her Voice against the long running ‘abuse, use and destabilisation of Afghanistan by great powers and neighbouring countries for their own political and economic ends’. She fights for Afghan independence, national unity and equal rights for all.

Recognising ‘education to be the most effective weapon for defeating terrorism and oppression’, Malalai first began teaching aged 14 when her family left the Pashae refugee camp in Pakistan to return to Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. She immediately joined the OPAWC – an organisation set up illegally, defying the Taliban ban on female education, to teach young girls to read, write and promote women’s struggle for rights and equality. By 25, she was Director of the OPAWC and had opened a health clinic and an orphanage in Farah, offering free medical treatment. This included counselling for rape victims as well as a home and an education for children who had lost parents to war and poverty.

In 2001, with the Taliban supposedly ‘defeated’ and Afghanistan ‘liberated’ by US/NATO, it soon became clear to Malalai, the people of Farah and the country at large that the situation in Afghanistan was not

about to improve. As the New York Times reported on November 19, 2001 ‘The galaxy of warlords who tore Afghanistan apart in the early 1990s and who were vanquished by the Taliban because of their corruption and perfidy are now back on their thrones, poised to exercise their powers in the ways they always have’. Seeing this with the establishment of the Karzai ‘puppet government’, Malalai decided to stand for election as the Farah representative of the 2002 Loya Jirga. Despite widespread reports of vote-rigging in favour of the US-supported warlords, Malalai won her seat with a large majority. She became the youngest woman to be elected to the new Parliament, still just 27.

This success was promoted by the US and the Karzai government as emblematic of free and democratic Afghanistan, and the western media embraced the story. But in reality, her inclusion in the newly formed government was merely symbolic. In her first speech before the assembly and the world media in 2002, she criticised the ‘legitimacy and legality of this Loya Jirga [due to] the presence of those criminals who have brought our country to this state’. As she spoke out, her microphone was cut off and she was silenced.

During her short time in government, Malalai grew accustomed to such treatment besides verbal abuse and physical attacks from MPs. She was eventually dismissed from government, while journalists who attempted to give her a voice were terrorised and tortured; several assassination attempts were made on her life.

Malalai continues to fight the unjust and criminal occupation of Afghanistan by US/NATO forces, and the domination of the country by warlords, Taliban and their lobbyists. While war criminals sit with impunity in parliament, women are

subjugated as second-class citizens. I will use this space to let Malalai share her message directly with you: ‘Today we Afghans remain trapped between US/NATO forces and their warlord hirelings. We are feeling the squeeze and it is costing us in blood and tears. But the situation is not hopeless. I believe in the power of people, and I know that there are millions of women and men standing and waiting eager to play their role in history. Afghans have lost all patience with the corruption and violence that surrounds them, and they are just one spark away from an uprising that will once more demonstrate their power and show their thirst for freedom and justice. With the help of peace-loving people around the world, the Afghan women and men are ready (...) to end this cycle of misery and build a better future. The ‘War on Terror’ is a dead end for the people in the Middle East, in Central Asia and in the West. Only a great, united movement of people can put an end to this foolish policy. I hope President Obama in particular will be made to understand that more troops, more bombs and an expanded war will solve nothing. Might does not make right, and war does not make peace.’

This tragic tale is also a story of hope. It will inspire you to act. The most important thing we women of the world can do to help in the fight for freedom and democracy in Afghanistan is to get informed about the reality of the situation today. Share what we learn, speak out at every opportunity and demand our own governments pull troops out. ■

Read this book, pass it on, buy copies for your friends. Visit the website and other sites such as RAWA which acts as an aggregated source of news reports on life in Afghanistan today: www.malalaijoya.com
<http://www.rawa.org/temp/runews>

Raising My Voice by Malalai Joya was published by RIDER in 2009, RRP: £11.99.

Olivia Knight is a working mother and local community activist

Issue 3: 2009/10



Radical Anthropology

