



# Radical Anthropology

# Who we are and what we do

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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 at [www.radicalanthropologygroup.org](http://www.radicalanthropologygroup.org)

The cover picture shows a protester at the UN Climate Conference, Dec 2011, Durban, South Africa, and was taken by Anne Petermann of Global Justice Ecology Project/Global Forest Coalition. See Daniel Kricheff's article on p.17.

Back cover: \*The Utopian Promise of Government\*, illustration by Andrew Cooper, see p.51.

## RA is designed by

Kypros Kyprianou & Ana Lopes



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

**Anthropology:** the study of what it means to be human.

*Radical Anthropology* is the journal of the Radical Anthropology Group. 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 onto further research and teaching.

For almost two decades, Anthropology at UEL retained close ties with the Radical Anthropology Group, Chris becoming Professor of 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](http://www.radicalanthropologygroup.org)

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## The forest and the city

This year's journal explores the forest – nature in its wildest productivity – and the city, both as nerve centre of capital, and the place where most of us now live. What is to be the relationship between them? Inevitably one of rapacious exploitation and commodification, those aspects of the forest reduced to the only value capital can see? Or could we imagine a more intersubjective connection?

Invoking Marx's commodity fetishism, Daniel Kricheff describes the danger of 'the creeping infiltration of the "phantom-like" properties of monetary value into landscape'. It's difficult to 'imagine...the mystical process by which one transforms the tendency of a tree to absorb atmospheric carbon into monetary value'. How, Kricheff asks, can the carbon-absorbing tree be linked to a carbon-producing tree when stuck in traffic except by some magical

flow of 'money spirit' summoned up by emission trading schemes? What loss is suffered in the relation of human and non-human by this reduction to balance sheets? If we have no other way to conceive this interrelation of the forest and our urban lives, how can science itself and the entire environmental movement escape this paralysing grip?

One source of forest resistance surely comes from the knowledge and experience of forest people themselves. Their animist viewpoint understands relations with the non-human as intensely social. The forest on which they depend is consistently generous, benevolent and abundant. There is plenty for all to share, so long as individuals will share properly. This ethos of exchange and distribution among forest and other egalitarian hunter-gatherers is underpinned by so-called 'demand-sharing'.<sup>1</sup> When

it is unthinkable to refuse another person's request, no one can end up hogging resources.

Further, the relationship is intensely sacred. In fieldwork with the BaMbuti over fifty years ago, Colin Turnbull was told of the need to sing to the forest to 'wake it up' when anything went wrong.<sup>2</sup> Their complex polyphonic choral singing with its magical effect of interlocking hocketing, notably among women, expresses this relationship in the most concrete, bodily way. The highly similar BayAka tradition lured and bewitched Louis Sarno to disappear for thirty years into the forest of the Central African Republic.

Here we publish a record of a session Sarno gave at the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford last April, discussing his experience of change in the BayAka way of life, and the power of music in their community.

He has documented an unrivalled collection of instrumental and vocal music, which can be sampled on the interactive sound links online. Just as the singing is an extraordinarily physical experience of every individual voice attuned to the collective, so too the spirits of the Forest manifest themselves in magical but highly material forms. The spirit of the women, and the spirits belonging to the men have various forms, voices and dances; all animate the forest and the relationship of men, women, young and old to it.

Sarno narrates an episode of forest resistance, where local people burned down a sawmill to keep out loggers. But for the BayAka the threat is to their livelihood of hunting. Traditional net hunting lets animals like duiker and other small antelopes escape as often as not, something the BayAka understand as 'good for the forest'. But now, outsiders with shotguns invade the forest, killing animals in quantities for the bush meat trade. This impact on their hunting economy has consequences for music and culture, with BayAka youth breaking to some extent from polyphonic traditions. The *boyobi* ceremony for the hunt, where the whole group of women sing to lure the bioluminescent *bobé* spirits from the forest in the dark of the moon is one of the most ancient forms now under threat.

Another way to grant agency to the forest is an ingenious transfer of urban high tech into the hands of forest people to enable them to guard valued assets. In what Jerome Lewis describes as 'technological leap-frogging', Congo Pygmy foragers, who are usually not literate, have been able to create maps of community resources.<sup>3</sup> Using handheld computers attached to GPS, by following an iconic decision tree, they walk the forest, locating and describing specific resources on a central database. This is a powerful tool for establishing

respect of those resources in the eyes of logging companies. With a few clicks, paths, trees or graves can be marked as sacred.

But how do we in the city relate to the forest? Following in the wake of Occupy Wall St, Occupy London Stock Exchange (LSX) represented an extraordinary effort to create




Baka youth monitors illegal logging in Cameroon.

assembly and community at the heart of the city. In examining the many facets of this experience, Ragnhild Freng Dale emphasizes how the lack of any defined programme – sometimes mocked as 'lack of direction' – in fact emboldened people's curiosity to join in. Simply by its presence, the gathering together of bodies and fragile tents, Occupy forced everyone to question what capitalism's good for. The Occupy camp demanded a share, not only in wages, jobs and resources, but chiefly in decision-making – besieging the greedy '1%', lapping like a tide around the barricaded Paternoster Square.

The target, LSX, is the planetary interface for buying and selling forest commodities. Motivated only by ephemeral profit, it lacks

empathetic imagination about the humans and non-humans involved in these ecosystems and catastrophically affected by deals done in milliseconds on LSX screens. Down in St Paul's churchyard mushroomed community of a kind which would be directly recognisable to forest people. They would have felt at home with the camp's willingness to share, to establish equality and participation, to strive for consensus and attunement to each other.

But if 'we are the city', we who work in it, live in it, pay debts and seethe at corporate unaccountability in the mayhem destroying our planet, how do we strike a blow for the forest? Veteran of the Prague pink-and-silver carnival that stopped the IMF/World Bank summit in 2000, Ian Fillingham looks to David Harvey's *Rebel Cities* for clues. A model is offered by the case of El Alto, Bolivia, at the sharp end of privatisation and casualisation of the workforce. The identity shared in indigenous traditions of fiesta and carnival mobilised and empowered rebellion. But in cities as diverse and deracinated as London or New York, how do we recreate such

collective identity? Occupy was a raucous shout, and we may not have heard the last of it. How do we sing and dance our streets, to 'wake them up' as forest people do? Could we then begin to imagine our city as organic counterpart to the abundant forest? 

1. Petersen, N. 1993 Demand-sharing: Reciprocity and the pressure for generosity among foragers. *American Anthropologist* 95: 860-874.
2. Turnbull, C. 1961 [1993]. *The Forest People*. London: Pimlico, p.87.
3. Lewis, J. 2012. Technological leap-frogging in the Congo Basin. Pygmies and geographic positioning systems in Central Africa: What has happened and where is it going? *African Study Monographs* Supplementary Issue 43: 15-44. [http://jambo.africa.kyoto-u.ac.jp/kiroku/asm\\_suppl/abstracts/pdf/ASM\\_s43/2.LEWIS.pdf](http://jambo.africa.kyoto-u.ac.jp/kiroku/asm_suppl/abstracts/pdf/ASM_s43/2.LEWIS.pdf)

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# Recording Sounds of Music and Community in the Rainforest

Noel Loblely presents an interview with *Louis Sarno*



Johnnie playing *geedal* inside a shelter, Boundingi, Republic of Congo, 1995 [1997.21.3.608]

Drawn to the rainforests of the Central African Republic by some of the most beautiful singing in the world, New Jersey native **Louis Sarno** travelled there in 1985 with a one-way ticket, a tape recorder and plenty of batteries. Nearly thirty years later he continues to live with a BayAka community in Yandoumbé, a settlement that he helped found.

Ethnomusicologist **Noel Loblely** has been in contact with Louis for the last eight years, working through his unprecedented collection of over 1000 hours of recordings that document the full range of music-making and soundscapes of an entire community for more than a generation. Louis continues to donate his recordings and images to the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, with the long-term intention that his archive will benefit the BayAka communities.

In April 2012 Louis came to Oxford for a month as a guest of the Pitt Rivers Museum, where he collaborated with Noel to enhance understanding of the content of his archive of recordings and images. On April 23 2012 the museum hosted a reception where Louis spoke to a packed room of students, researchers, musicians, filmmakers and others interested in BayAka music and culture. Sipping first flush Darjeeling tea, Louis shared stories of the BayAka community he lives with, his observations on BayAka music, conversations with his BayAka friends, and discussed some of the pressing social and political forces that are threatening the livelihood of such communities in Yandoumbé.

The following article is a record of Louis Sarno's talk.<sup>1</sup>



Louis Sarno, Mekita and Engbété, Losi forest camp, Central African Republic, 1993 [1997.21.3.699]

**Q:** What have you been up to for the last thirty years, Louis?

**Louis Sarno:** I went to the Central African Republic to record the music of the BayAka at the end of 1985 and I ended up – after the first couple of visits – staying there, permanently living there. My philosophy to record right from the beginning was – I didn't want to ask, you know, 'play some music for me' – I did that the first couple of nights – but that wasn't the way to do things. I wanted to give a picture of the community and how they use music in the community. So what I wanted to do was just live there and anytime they made music for themselves I would record it. And back then they were so musical, music was just part of the

fabric of life. Sometimes I didn't get any sleep for two or three days because maybe there was an all-night dance that went on until three in the morning, and most of the people would go to sleep but then someone would sit up and play the harp or something, so I felt I had to keep on recording. I tried to record whenever they made music for themselves, and so that's why I have so many hours of music.

It has changed now. They have two phases in their lives, the BayAka. They live in these permanent settlements by the road for part of the year, but then they spend at least half the year in the rainforest in temporary camps, where they go hunting and gathering honey, and they move around. It used to be that music was in the forest and by the road, but now the village is a lot more spread out. They don't have so much of their traditional music any more by the road; they have some, but not nearly the way it used to be because the society is less cohesive by the road – people do other things such as working for the World Wildlife Fund. Quite a number of some of the major people in the village track gorillas for the gorilla habituation programmes and things like that. But when they go into the forest, then everybody reverts to these traditional activities – the

traditional music – and it is like a spiritual renewal, as well as eating well because they go hunting and their diet changes. When they go into the forest they eat much better.

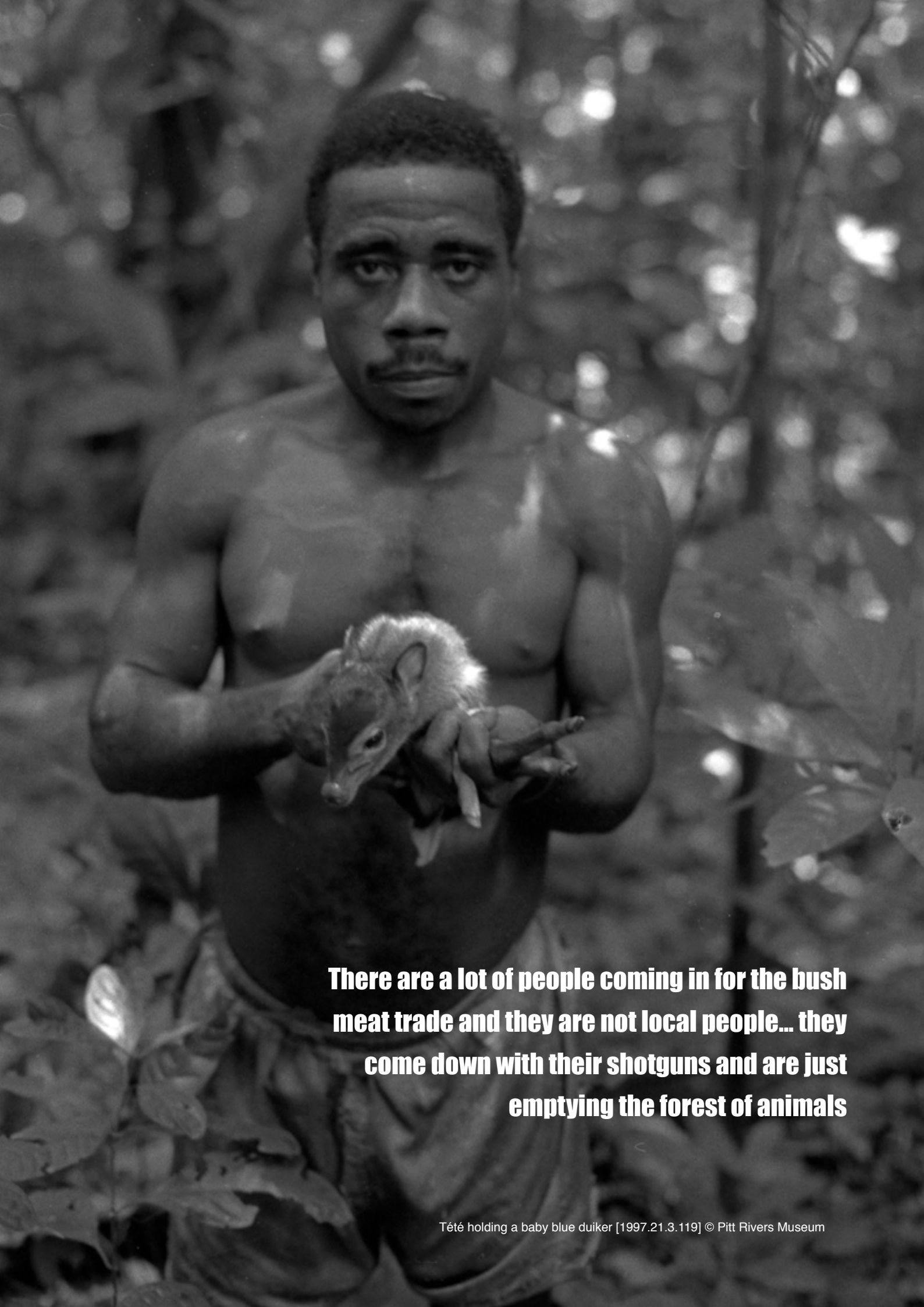
There is a lot of pressure on the forest nowadays because in the last five years or so the international bush meat trade has arrived in our region, so you have a lot of people from other parts of the country coming with shotguns and shooting a lot of the animals, especially the monkeys and the duikers. These small forest antelopes have really suffered and these animals, especially the duikers, are the bread and butter of the BayAka's diet. That's what they depend on when they go into the forest. The animals are under a lot of pressure now. There is the conservation project there – the World Wildlife Fund [in Bayanga] – and I am always having problems with them because they are not doing an adequate job in the conservation. They are protecting the elephants and the gorillas, but the BayAka are not allowed to hunt those animals, so it doesn't directly help the BayAka. I think [the WWF] should spend more time protecting the small mammals which is what the BayAka depend on, and so we always have these conflicts with the World Wildlife Fund.

**Q:** How did people react when you first came to the village? How long did it take to be accepted?

**LS:** In the beginning they were very happy to see a white guy coming, because a white guy is rich – right? – and he is going to be able to supply them with cigarettes and things. And so they were very enthusiastic right in the beginning that I was going to record the music. I couldn't speak the language, and they actually did a pretty good job of pretending they could understand French, although they actually couldn't. The first few days I just slept outside on the ground. And then after four or five days they finally built me a little platform to



Group of BayAka men in the rainforest, Central African Republic, 1987.[1997.21.3.135]



**There are a lot of people coming in for the bush  
meat trade and they are not local people... they  
come down with their shotguns and are just  
emptying the forest of animals**



(l-r): Mowa, Pusuma, Mbousa, Bonolo, and Ngwasebo carrying hunting nets, Boundingi, Republic of Congo, 1994. [1997.21.3.482]

sleep on and put a little roof on top and they seemed pretty accepting. The BayAka are a very tolerant

these were people that were maybe babies when I first arrived, and now they are teenagers and young men

logging, but the local townspeople at a certain point burned down the sawmill and dismantled everything so that has gone and there is no more logging. But we have a problem with poaching now. There are a lot of people coming in for the bush meat trade and they are not local people. They come from the savannah areas and they come down with their shotguns and are just emptying the forest of animals. So that really affects how long the BayAka go into the forest because they used to be able to go into the forest and **hunt with nets**. They make a circle in the forest and drive the animals into the nets. It is a very inefficient way of hunting – about half the animals in any given area get away – and the BayAka know that and they think it is a good thing, although they are very angry when any particular animal gets away. But they understand that it's good for the forest.

## they don't teach other people to play instruments. Anyone who is interested in an instrument, they pick it up and they teach themselves

people and they are non-judgmental, and they accepted me. It seemed perfectly natural that someone would want to record the music. Back then I had the impression that they had never heard recordings of the music because they were so happy to hear the recordings; they would say, 'that's me' and things like that, and they would laugh, so they really liked being recorded in the beginning. I don't think they realized that I would be staying there for so long.

How long it took for me to be accepted, it's hard to say. I think it comes in slow degrees; acceptance goes to a deeper level and deeper level. I am now considered a member of the community, but I have occasionally had problems coming back from America. Say maybe even six, seven years ago I would come back from a visit to the United States and I would get there and I would have all the youth –

– and they surround my house and they want me to give them a whole bunch of money for nothing. And it's like saying 'well, ok, if you're not going to give us money, why are you staying, you have to leave?' And I'm saying 'what do you mean I have to leave? I've been here longer than you guys'. And that was a problem for a little while but they've grown older now and I remind them about those times and they get embarrassed. But I think I'm pretty much accepted as a member of the community, but I am not accepted as a BayAka. I'll never be a BayAka.

**Q:** Across thirty years you have seen a huge amount of social and musical change. What are the major issues affecting the community and their life in both Yandoumbé and in the rainforest?

**LS:** For me the main problem is the poaching right now. We did have

And now it's much harder. They used to be able to go hunting and stop at midday because they would have enough to eat, and now they have to go all day hunting and they might still not get enough for the whole community. And you meet poachers all the time in the forest now, people going in with their shotguns and people coming out with the dead animals and it just makes it more difficult. Plus they are intimidated by the guards who work for the World Wildlife Fund. They are quite corrupt and they tend to harass the BayAka rather than their fellow [non BayAka], who are the ones with the guns who are killing all the animals, because they prefer not to confront people that might be their neighbours in town or even family members. It's always easy to pick on the BayAka. So it is making the forest less attractive to them in some ways.

But they still love the forest and





Balonyona playing *geedal* (bow harp), Boundingi, Republic of Congo, 1994. [1997.21.3.445]

when they go in you will see how happy they are, but there are these things that disrupt the pleasure a little bit. And so that affects them going into the forest, and when they go into the forest less that means they are doing less of their traditional activities and especially the music.

ask the guy who was a really great harp player – Balonyona – he would ask him every evening, ‘are you going to play the harp tonight?’, and if he said no, he would borrow the harp and he would sit all night and he would practice. It was like hearing someone practicing the piano. He would practice the songs

## when I asked about this flute [people said] ‘this is what our ancestors played, we don’t play that anymore’

**Q:** Do they see music as a communal activity, or are there recognized musicians within the group?

**LS:** For instrumental music there are individual musicians, and so a bow harp (*geedal*) player might play some new music – often they do it by themselves in front of their doorway or something – and others might join them or they might not. The thing is, they don’t teach other people to play instruments. Anyone who is interested in an instrument, they pick it up and they teach themselves. That is always how it has been with the BayAka. I lived next door to a young man for one year, I remember, and he wanted to play the bow harp so much, and there was only one harp in our little village. So he would always go and

that Balonyona would play, and if there was a passage he couldn’t get, he would go over and over it. It was like someone learning to play piano.

But other music is communal like the ceremonies – *Boyobi* for the hunt, that is where you have a big choir of women and they sit down and sing to call out the forest spirits, to get benediction for the next day’s hunt.

We used to have flute players and when I was there two old men and one younger man played the flute (mbyo). That was a solo instrument and they usually play that late at night. It was an instrument you are supposed to hear in your dreams. So they would wait until everyone was asleep and then you would get

a flute player [who would] walk around the village for a few hours playing his flute and it was very lovely. Unfortunately, the last flute player died about a year ago and no-one has taken up the flute, so I think that flute music has now gone extinct. I have the last flute – before he died he gave me his flute – and I know how to play it but I can’t play it the way he did. I would make trips sometimes into Northern Congo which was, until recently, a very remote area, very traditional, but even there, when I asked about this flute [people said] ‘this is what our ancestors played, we don’t play that anymore’. Fortunately, I recorded a lot of the flute music when I had the chance.

**Q:** What happened with the flutes? Did they just go out of fashion?

**LS:** They teach themselves instruments if they’re interested, and no one was interested in learning to play the flute. No kid took it up and started teaching himself. There were just three flute players when I went there and one by one they died. The last one died about a year ago. He left me his flute. I sometimes give it to some of the boys or young men and I say, ‘see if you can play it’ and they can’t even get a tone out of it. Maybe there will be a revival of interest. I am going to bring back a cassette of my recordings of the flute now and play it for them. They like to listen to it, I mean they love the music, but no-one has taken it upon themselves. We have the first generation of kids I have seen where they see maybe the possibility of a different future from the one that their parents had. And so before that, and still in Congo, it’s like the only future they can see for themselves is to be like their parents, to carry on the activities that their parents did. Where I live they want to participate in the wider world. I asked one kid whose father does the *gano – the fables*, and tells all these wonderful stories and does mime, and sings with a chorus that responds – and I said ‘don’t you



A group of women in the rainforest, Mombongo, Central African Republic, 1989. [1997.21.3.1007]

want to learn these stories from your father?’ And he said ‘that’s old stuff. I want to learn new stuff’. So this is the big change with this new generation.

**Q:** Sometimes the music is almost like work songs, isn’t it? I mean - gathering mushrooms ...

**LS:** Yeah, well then they just sing,

cathedral. I know it’s a cliché to say it – everyone says this – but it’s true, you know. Sounds hang in the air in the rainforest. If someone yodels you can hear both notes in the yodel it hangs in the air for several seconds, and [the BayAka] are perfectly aware of that, they love that sound and when they go into the forest they love to sing because it just sounds so beautiful.

thought ‘oh you mean like this’, and he attached something to a post in the house and he had a piece of rattan and pulled it really tight on a stick and put a pot underneath it, and pulled it over the pot really tight. And someone else started hitting it with sticks and you kind of loosen it and you change the tension, you get these tones and it **sounds very strange** and he did

## **It’s like a huge cathedral... Sounds hang in the air in the rainforest. If someone yodels you can hear both notes in the yodel it hangs in the air**

they are just singing, I mean when the women go off into the forest they are happy to go into the forest so then they start **yodeling**, they sing these yodeling songs when they are just going to collect water, when they are going to gather something and the forest environment is just so so good for singing. Especially for yodeling voices. It’s like a huge

**Q:** And what about the guerilla music-making that was the *bulubu*, the amazing bow that we listened to?

**LS:** One time I was asking about an earth bow. I was saying ‘you know it is something you attach into the ground and pluck’ and so one guy didn’t quite understand me and he

that and I said ‘no, no, no, that’s not the instrument I want – I’m talking about the earth bow, you know, it goes in the ground’. But anyhow some young boys were there and they saw that instrument and so then later on they started doing it everywhere. Just playing it, doing it themselves, they would use posts of houses to attach it to and it was

very very loud music and it almost sounded electronic. And there was this drumming and the whole house seemed to vibrate and it was almost like guerilla tactics because they would grab someone's pot and they would do it on their house and then the owner of the house would chase them away and so they would go to another house and then they would do it and they would chase them. ... And so finally the only place they could do it was my house and so they were doing it all the time.

**Q:** Have they been exposed to western instruments and incorporated them?

**LS:** They haven't incorporated any western instruments. I mean they know the guitar and occasionally someone carves a piece of wood like a guitar and gets some metal string or nylon string and starts to play it. But I think that what rather happens is that when they try to use western instruments they play different music completely, it has nothing to do with their traditional music. When they do their traditional music, if it's instrumental, they still use their instruments. I mean the flute has basically died out. The **harp zither [mondumé]** it's still there – people play it but not as much. The bow harp (*geedal*) which is not really a BayAka original instrument, that's much more popular in my village, but when I go to Northern Congo it's the harp zither which they say is one of their traditional instruments which all the boys know how to play. But the harp zither is still played by quite a few people where I live and some boys do teach themselves it.

Once I went back to a village in Northern Congo. I'd been going there over a period of more than ten years and then one time I went there and suddenly all the boys were playing these mouth bows which I had never heard before. It's like it just became a fashion and they're

all playing these mouth bows which is a lovely instrument where you hear they shape the notes with their mouths. They had never had that before and suddenly there it was and all the boys could do it, so that was a wonderful thing, a new thing for me to record. I had never seen that with the BayAka before.

**Q:** A lot of your recordings map the relationship between music and the rainforest. When I listen to your recordings of flute playing at distance it often sounds just like the sound of two women singing perfect interlocking hocketing. Can

so you get a kind of polyphony, but it is just one person playing it. In the distance it sounds very beautiful. When I used to record the flute I would just set up the microphones in front of my house because I knew the flute player would be moving around, he would come close and go away again, so you would get some of the flute from a distance and then close up. Beautiful.

**Q:** How does the gender of musicians affect their musical role?

**LS:** [With] most instrumental music it seems to be the men that play that,



Géké playing *mondumé* (harp zither), Kenyé, Central African Republic, 1987 [1997.21.3.61]

you give us a sense of what the flute sounds like in the rainforest?

**LS:** I prefer **the sound of the flute in the distance** because when it gets beyond a certain distance you start to get a kind of reverb, and because of the way the flute is played, it is almost like a yodel style because you can jump between octaves depending on how hard you blow the flute. When [players] get to a certain distance the lower octave notes and the higher octave notes sound like two different voices and

the women are mostly the choirs. For instance, the dance form *boyobi*, and the spirits that come – usually clothed in leaves or something to give benediction to the hunt – you have the women sitting down and they sing and the men accompany the spirits and bring them into camp and the spirits require the women to sing in order to come ... the women are the true masters of the classical BayAka polyphony. The women have occasionally played some instruments – they played once an earth bow in front of me,

and I know that in another part of the Central African Republic they make a little mouth bow out of the leaves that they cover their huts with. It is usually the women who sing and the men who play drums,

and they move around the village until morning performing just music. The spirit is not something you see, it is something you hear, it is a deep kind of hooting voice. But sometimes they would do it in the

to do. Maybe they didn't think of me as a real man so they kind of allowed me to go on recording. But later on when I started to know more about it I didn't feel right recording it and only if they would invite me to record would I record it. ... Sometimes they would call me out to record.

I don't know too much about the ownership. For instance, the *ejengi*, that's a big dance and I'm not really initiated into *ejengi* so I don't really go behind the scenes. Different *ejengis* are owned by different men, different families. You could be initiated into one person's *ejengi* but not be allowed to go into somebody else's behind the scenes.

**Q:** A lot of the other music is communal, especially the spirit ceremonies. Can you tell us about some of the different spirits?

**LS:** In 1989 one guy named Ndima – his name means 'Forest' – he was arrested for killing an elephant, so he was taken to prison in a nearby town about 100km away from us and he escaped, and when he came back to our village



A group of BayAka men and children surrounding a *bobé* spirit, Mombongo, Central African Republic, 1989. [1997.21.3.760]

although when I was in Congo the women also play drums, but not in the village where I live.

daytime and the men would try to interfere because they don't like it, it is making fun of them. Sometimes they try to play drums or they try to

## it is forbidden for the men to be present at the *lingboku* ceremony... if any man shows up they really go after him...

**Q:** And the *lingboku* ceremony?

**LS:** The women have one spirit. The men have several different spirits in different dance traditions. The women have one called *lingboku* and it is forbidden for the men to be present at the *lingboku* ceremony. That really is an expression of the women's power because they mock male sexuality in a lot of songs, and if any man shows up they really go after him and chase him away. The BayAka women are very strong so the men flee in earnest.

It is usually [performed] at night and they wait until the men are in bed

start a different type of dance, but if the women are determined they destroy any attempt [by the men]. Even in Congo, they would do it in the daytime and the men would get very angry but they would have to leave the camp, go and take a walk or something.

**Q:** Are there issues of ownership and propriety that affect what and how you can record?

**LS:** With the women's ceremony, I did record a couple of *lingbokus* before I knew that men are not supposed to be present, and the women did not know quite what

his father and his whole extended family left for Congo and they were there for three or four years. Some of them came back and then two or three years later the rest of them came back, and they came back with a new spirit from Congo, a new spirit dance called *enyomo*. They introduced it to our village and it caught on and so we are the only village in our region that has this spirit.

I started making trips into Northern Congo to record and I would always take a few BayAka with me, and when we went there we thought we would see lots of *enyomo* but

*enyomo* had been replaced by a new dance called *mafoodya*. This is really an interesting dance. Dance forms have owners, especially the spirit dances. One old BayAka –

**Q:** The *ejengi* spirit ceremony is interesting, especially for what it tells us about the BayAka's relationship with outsiders. What is *ejengi*?

and a nun, Sarah-Madeleine. She was quite severe. And [these two] didn't really like *ejengi* because when the BayAka had *ejengi*, they weren't tending to their fields, the

**the *Boyobi*... is probably one of their oldest forms of music. The women sing in a choir... until the *bobé* come out. [They] are usually clothed in leaves, and they have a very high-pitched kind of falsetto voice,**

Makuti – talked to one of the owners of this *mafoodya* dance and he traded his hat for the right to bring this dance back and we brought this dance to our village. And he told me along the way 'by the way you owe this guy a machete because that was part of the deal'. We brought *mafoodya* back and people started doing it – the BayAka are very interested in music from other BayAka communities, especially if it is a new spirit. They were doing it but then Makuti died and there was no one really to oversee the whole thing and the tradition didn't really catch on the way the other one – *enyomo* – did.

**LS:** *Ejengi* is a BayAka tradition. It's a very big dance – they don't do that one in the forest. They do that one in the village because they require a lot of people and they require real drums and in the forest the BayAka just drum on anything, you know, pots and pans.

*Ejengi* is a big dance and when it goes on it might go on for months. ... There is a Catholic mission called Monasao about 50 km north of where I am. It's in a little savannah; this is where the Fulani also meet the BayAka. I used to go and visit now and then. There was a priest there, Père René,

children weren't going to school. The Catholic Church had a kind of programme of work for the BayAka and so they weren't doing their work because they were staying up all night. So they didn't really like *ejengi* and they told me that one time *ejengi* was going on for more than two years, and so one day Madeleine – she was the one who told me the story, she was proud of this – she drove her car right into the middle of an *ejengi* dance and she opened up the door and she told *ejengi* 'get in'. So *ejengi* actually got in the car, and she drove *ejengi* down the road to where it was just forest and she stopped the car and



*Ejengi* spirit surrounded by attendants who direct the movements, Mongengé Village, Central African Republic, 1987. [1997.21.3.7]

**if there's no moon, if it's really dark out, instead of leaves they use this luminescent fungus ... If you put out all the lights you can see it, it looks like the sky at night, just like a lot of stars.**

opened up the door and said 'now go home'. And so *ejengi* got out, the poor guy probably had to walk miles to get back to the village. And so [at Monasao] then they didn't have another *ejengi* dance for a generation.

Then Madeleine and René left and they were replaced by some Polish priests, and one Polish priest was shocked that they didn't have their own tradition. He thought, you've got to have *ejengi*, and he brought them down to our village where we still have very strong *ejengi* tradition, in order to re-learn *ejengi*. So they re-learned it and now they have *ejengi* again.

**Q:** Does their spirituality get influenced by other religions?

**LS:** You know, I haven't really seen them affected by the missionaries and Christianity. Well, they get affected in that they learn these songs and they sing these songs, but that's about it. It's almost like they are just learning new songs. When I talked to Père René – at this time he had been there I think seventeen or eighteen years – and I asked him 'how many converts do you have?' And he said 'one'.

The BayAka they get this, they understand, the whole thing that they got from the Christian religion is they say 'yes, Jesus is in your heart' and that's it. And they also know that for white people, our favourite white guy is Jesus. So if they want to flatter you, or they want you to give them something they might say, 'oh, you've got the heart of Jesus – can you give me a radio?'

But there have been times when, a few people they have become very

Christian and they suddenly don't like *ejengi*. In fact we had a problem at one point because there were a couple of people they became Christian for a while and they were saying '*ejengi*'s just a person' and that really upset the other BayAka, the whole community. And I had a talk with the missionary guy and he was going 'I never tell them to say that, I don't want to interfere with their culture, they can have their dances'. But then that sort of passed by and those people that were saying that after a few months they just sort of reverted to who they were before.

Their own religious beliefs – they are not animists, because they don't believe that spirits are in rocks and rivers and things like that. They believe basically in ghosts, you know, ghosts from people who have died, and you don't want to encounter ghosts. And they believe in a creator god – Kumba – who kind of set everything up and withdrew from the world and has nothing more to do with the world. And so what they do is they propitiate these lesser spirits, these beings or creatures that live in the forest that have some supernatural powers, like the ones that they call out during the *boyobi* ceremony and that still seems to be a very strong tradition.

And they also have this form of music and story-telling called *gano* which is like Just So stories, and all the stories involve the ancient time when all the animals were people and Kumba was just a person as well but with these powers and [they were] all living together in forest camps. And so the stories, they always seem to be about, well they are about how Kumba at the end of the story he always transforms some character into an

animal, and it usually has to do with that character's dancing in a certain way ... the animal who was a person was dancing that way and did something wrong that annoyed Kumba so Kumba changed him to an animal.

**Q:** You have recorded hundreds of hours of *boyobi*. The interchange between the forest spirits – the *bobé* – and the chorus is incredible. Can you give us a sense of what these voices are, these curious voices that the *bobé* use to address the polyphonic choir?

**LS:** The *bobé*, they're the spirits of the BayAka when they have this ceremony called the *Boyobi*, which is probably one of their oldest forms of music. The women sing in a choir, they sit down and they sing, until the *bobé* come out. And the *bobé* are usually clothed in leaves, **and they have a very high-pitched kind of falsetto voice**, and they interact with the singers a lot. So they sometimes joke with the singers, you know, they will come right up to the women and they will joke with them, and they talk, but you cannot hear individual voices because all the voices sound pretty much the same – this kind of high-pitched falsetto.

And in the forest camps when they have this ceremony, if there's no moon, if it's really dark out, instead of leaves they use this luminescent fungus – you see it on the forest floor, little speckles of it. If you put out all the lights you can see it, it looks like the sky at night, just like a lot of stars. And in fact they call these things stars. The men find big pieces and they attach them to their bodies, and the women sing and these spirits come into camp and you cannot see the human form at

all. But you see these weird faces and shapes and they dance around and they joke with the women and sometimes they look like they are floating.

**Q:** And I gather this is almost impossible to film?

**LS:** I have been with many film crews that have tried to film it, but it has been impossible so far. The BBC, Discovery Channel, they have all tried to film these bioluminescent spirits, but it has been impossible.

One time there was, I think it was the BBC – *Human Planet* – they thought they had a technique that was going to work. They were going to take these photographs with this special camera that was specially developed for them, and they were going to take two photographs per second and then speed it up, put it together, speed it up to get the dance movements. And so what they had to do was to make a special arrangement with the *bobé* spirits, I was like the go-between. They wanted [to have a private meeting with] the *bobé* spirits at night where they would move very slowly and they would take these photographs, and then they could put them together and speed it up and make the dance movements. And so of course, you know, the *bobé* asked for a lot of money and they agreed, and we arranged this meeting. And the women had to not know about it, and so [it was] late at night and the condition was that they [the film crew] had to set up their camera and everything first and then not use any lights. And then the *bobé* would come. So we went off from the camp just into the forest – it was really dark – and they set up and we were sitting there and then [the film crew] were [asking] ‘where are the spirits, where are they?’ And then finally you could see these glowing things coming closer and closer

and they came right up to us, but you couldn’t see the human form at all. It was really so dark and there were three of them and they were just standing there. So then [the film crew] said ‘Ok. Now tell them to move very very slowly but the way they would if they were dancing.’

It was sort of an impossible request really. So they started moving together, all turning one way and they kind of turned very slowly and then they froze and it was the design of an elephant with the tusks and the trunks and the ears and everything. It was amazing. But the photographers were going ‘oh, shit! I can’t see anything!’ And then [the *bobé*] moved in the other direction and then they stopped and it was an antelope, you know, a forest duiker. It was amazing and just right close up. And the photographers were doing this for two hours, and finally they said ‘ok. Tell them they can go now’. And the spirits went back into the darkness and they didn’t get anything. Nothing came out on film.

**Q:** How has the BayAka’s relationship to their own music and how they perform it changed in the context of your recording it? Has that impacted at all?

**LS:** You know I don’t think it has. I think maybe my recording the music during that [early] period made them more enthusiastic about music because they knew I would record it. I don’t think my recording has affected their practice of the music, because they know there is great interest in their music from the outside world and yet the music traditions are becoming weaker. So I think if there was going to be a real influence it would make their music tradition stronger.

Nowadays we have this new music [called *bombadou*] that’s a kind of

invasion, it’s the young generation, the kids under, say, twelve years old, it’s their music, but I really don’t like it – it’s not a development of their musical style. It’s a total break, it’s something else now, and it’s come from the Fulani. There is a small savannah where the Fulani and the BayAka meet – this dance style and music has come down to us. It is mostly singing in unison, or a bit of harmony, but it is not polyphonic at all. The drumming is kind of interesting. There are young kids and they have these empty plastic water bottles, and you get a battery of ten kids and they are drumming and the drumming sounds amazing. But the singing is not very interesting and I have never recorded it. Probably when I go back I will record some for completeness sake. I ask the kids, ‘why don’t you sing BayAka music?’ And they say, ‘well this is BayAka music’ – then I realize they have grown up with this music.

They still have the traditional music in the forest, and the elders are very easy. The older people, we sit around and complain about this new form of music, but they don’t force the children, they let them get on with what they are doing. That’s how they are, a sort of *laissez-faire* attitude towards the younger generation. But when they go into the forest the older people won’t tolerate this, it has to be the traditional stuff in the forest.

**Q:** Did you find it difficult to work with these recordings in the context of the museum because obviously when you were recording them in some places you would be seeing other things?

**LS:** No, actually I really enjoyed hearing some of the old recordings as it brought back all these memories, and in fact there are a couple of ceremonies that I even forgot that I

**it’s what made life exciting for them (because) when they’re going to have an *ejeng* dance... you get this kind of electrical excitement in the air**

recorded. For me it was wonderful. What was more difficult was going through the photos. There would be a photo of a group of children, maybe still taken a long time ago, but then half the children had died already in the photograph and I was an adult when I took the photograph and I'm still alive but these children have already died. There is actually one photograph here – it is a little dark and you can't really see – but there is a little girl about twelve years and it almost made me cry when I saw it because she died in childbirth years later and it is very sad because she is just a girl in the photograph here. It was hard for me to go through the photographs. The recordings were a joy to go through. Not so much the photographs.


**Q:** When you were first moved to live with the BayAka, music obviously occupied such a massive place in this community. Why is music so important to a community like this?

**LS:** I think they had a lot of leisure back then because hunting did not take up so much time and they would get enough to eat very quickly, and it was just a way to bring the community together you know so

they would stay very cohesive.

**Q:** It's their major art form?

**LS:** Yes – it's their art form, it's what made life exciting for them [because] when they're going to have an *ejengi* dance or something, or when there is even going to be music in the forest, you get this kind of electrical excitement in the air, you know, like something great is going to happen. I've been reading about some highland New Guinea people in the Baliem Valley or similar in New Guinea and they seem to get that same excitement with their wars that they have with neighbours. It sort of takes up their time, there's lots of ceremonies around, they have their mourning when someone is killed and then they have to have a victory dance when they have killed somebody. And the BayAka are not warlike so they didn't go down that route, but I think it's the same kind of excitement they get when they have this kind of music. And I think it functions to keep people very together in the society because – especially in the old days – this was the main activity when they had leisure. And they just love music. You know, the **harp zither** is an

instrument you are supposed to hear in your dreams and that is especially in a forest camp when everyone would be sleeping and the harp zither player would sit in front of his house and just strum on the harp and sing sometimes. And you hear it in your dreams, you really do. I know I've woken up many times from a beautiful dream because there is this great music in the dream. And then I have woken up and the dream fades but the music is still there, and it's a wonderful feeling. 

Questions from: Noel Lobley, Gerard Houghton, Martin Stokes, Anna Appleby, John Dunbar, Cayenna Ponchione, Astrid Knight and Peter Hudston

#### Notes

1. Some changes in the order of the questions and occasional expressions have been made for fluency, but the record remains accurate.

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Photo accession nos can be searched on:

[http://databases.prm.ox.ac.uk/fmi/iwp/cgi?-db=Photos\\_PRM&-loadframes](http://databases.prm.ox.ac.uk/fmi/iwp/cgi?-db=Photos_PRM&-loadframes)

**Text underline** indicates sound link embedded online.

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*This extract is from a much longer ongoing collaboration between Noel, Louis and the Pitt Rivers Museum. Louis Sarno intends to develop an interactive website and blog – 'Aka TV' – in Yandoumbé so BayAka communities can represent themselves. For more information on the ongoing developments with the Louis Sarno archive and its potential benefits to BayAka communities in Yandoumbé see*

<http://pittrivers-sound.blogspot.co.uk>

[www.prm.ox.ac.uk](http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk)

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# Market Environmentalism and the Re-Animation of Nature

*Daniel Kricheff* argues that market environmentalism blurs the rhetorical boundaries between nature and society, fetishising human and non-human alike by measuring both in monetary terms.



photo: Hollywood North

Trees protest in Durban

In recent years, the pressing need for creative ways to stem the flood of carbon emissions, deforestation and ecological degradation has led to the emergence of a broad range of proposed solutions and interventions. For some, ecological crisis reveals the need for a radical reworking of global economic and social relations. This view calls for a rethinking of contemporary society's conceptions of the relations not only between humans, but also between humans and *non-humans*. No longer can we treat the rest of the planet as an inexhaustible resource, and as a category of being

from which we are ontologically separated by virtue of our perceived special status as humans. On the other hand, others argue that the current global economic system and the cosmology on which it is predicated is not an alterable paradigm, that if these forms of relations are not exactly innate and eternal to the human condition, then they are at least so deeply entrenched as to be beyond the reach of our efforts to alter them.<sup>1</sup>

The latter view calls for a solution to climate change involving not less, but rather 'smarter' consumption. It envisages new structures and

adjustments within the current commodity-based economic system which will lead to better environmental outcomes. This is manifested in the tendency of many environmental economists and some environmentalists to view ecological processes and phenomena as commodities. The churning of life on earth reduces to 'ecosystem services' which, in an increasingly crowded world, are coming under critical pressure.<sup>2</sup> According to proponents of this view, we live in a capitalist world, and the best solution is to value nature in monetary terms, to treat it as a commodity, and like all

commodities, to understand that it is subject to scarcity in supply and fluctuations of the market, rather than its own vastly complex dynamics.

Since the 1960s when the environment first became a cause for concern, the stage has been set for this debate on the future of our species' relationship with the rest of the planet. Early environmentalists passionately drew our attention to the fact that we cannot take for granted that the rest of the world will carry on as a background constant, providing us with a hospitable medium in which to pursue unending growth and consumption. The world, and its ecological forms and phenomena suddenly became visible as a space for action. No longer was nature something to be taken for granted as a limitless, de-animated space.

These new conceptual spaces presented radical possibilities for questioning a general tendency, in the West at least, to view the 'human' and the 'natural' as separate ontological spheres. The early language of the environmental

*those who drink from once-pure wells...Along with the possibility of the extinction of mankind by nuclear war, the central problem of our age has therefore become the contamination of man's total environment with such substances of incredible potential for harm – substances that...alter the very material of heredity upon which the shape of the future depends.'*<sup>3</sup>

Although this new language was framed in material terms – the ecological and chemical links between humans and their environment – in conceptual terms, previously taken-for-granted 'nature' moved from the background, not just to the foreground, but to the very space in which humans exist. Interestingly, though not too surprisingly, capital quickly found its way into this new conceptual space. From the 1970s, a decade after the publication of *Silent Spring*, economists and ecologists began discussing new ways of 'valuing' nature, not simply in conceptual, moral and

include specific characteristics of animals and plants (such as the absorption of atmospheric carbon by trees), and broader ecological phenomena (such as the capacity of upstream areas of a watershed to provide water for human use downstream).

The basic premise of PES is the



photo: Jerome Lewis

The forest canopy in central Africa: Carbon sink? Or living landscape with greater forces at play?

transformation of complex natural forms and phenomena into concrete 'things' – commodities – which can be isolated, measured and traded.<sup>4</sup> In order to become commodities, such ecosystem services must be imbued with an exchange value,

## **economists and ecologists began discussing new ways of 'valuing' nature, not simply in conceptual, moral and aesthetic terms, but now in financial terms.**

movement pointed to the physical unity of all life forms on earth, implying a unity of fate. In *Silent Spring*, one of the foundational texts of the environmental movement, Rachel Carson wrote:

*'Chemicals sprayed on croplands or forests or gardens lie long in the soil, entering into living organisms, passing from one to another in a chain of poisoning and death. Or they pass mysteriously by underground streams until they emerge and, through the alchemy of air and sunlight, combine into new forms that kill vegetation, sicken cattle, and work unknown harm on*

aesthetic terms, but now in financial terms. This discourse has begun to dominate the conversation on how to avert the ecological crises resulting from over-consumption and exploitation.

### **Market environmentalism**

This can be seen clearly in the recent excitement over programmes falling under the heading of 'Payment for Ecosystem Services' (PES), which link the 'performance' of forests, watersheds and other ecological phenomena with a market price. The term PES describes a broad range of concepts and schemes, which seek to put a monetary price on various functions of the planet. These

allowing them to be traded with other commodities through their shared capacity to be conceived of in monetary terms. Ecosystem services can be traded in a variety of contexts, such as global or local markets, and for a variety of purposes, ranging from biodiversity protection, to the 'offsetting' of carbon emissions. This latter purpose is packaged under so-called 'Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation' (REDD) projects, which aim to offset carbon emissions from industrial production by planting and protecting forests to serve as 'sinks' for atmospheric carbon, primarily in the tropical forests of the global south.

## PES, REDD and efforts aimed at poverty reduction ...have been shown to have a complex and contested relationship

At the same time, PES has come under a growing amount of criticism. What started as a 'humble metaphor to help us think about our relation to nature'<sup>5</sup> has been flipped on its head. PES and REDD are now widely used mechanisms to assess and regulate land use and to expand markets, while at the same time convincing those of us in rich countries that present levels of consumption can carry on indefinitely. PES has also been criticised by some ecologists and environmental scientists, who argue that the need to fit complex and unpredictable ecological processes into a conceptual framework conducive to simplistic valuation contorts scientific knowledge and practice.<sup>6</sup> Further, it has been argued that REDD could potentially threaten biodiversity and local ecologies, by providing economic incentives for landholders to favour monocultures of tree species which grow faster and 'store' more atmospheric carbon at lower cost.<sup>7</sup>

PES, REDD and efforts aimed at poverty reduction and human development have also been shown to have a complex and contested relationship. Some REDD programmes do seem to offer benefits to communities, including increased income;<sup>8</sup> and mixed benefits, such as a chance to assert land tenure despite income and livelihood opportunities lost by foregoing more productive land uses in the short term.<sup>9</sup> Yet some analysts argue that there is a long term incompatibility between PES and poverty reduction, with the introduction of PES and accompanying land reforms leading to increased global and national inequality,<sup>10</sup> and deflecting attention from more critical issues, such as land tenure, policy and governance reform.<sup>11</sup> Others point out the ethical and cultural

implications of commodifying nature in comparison to alternative approaches,<sup>12</sup> something which I hope to explore further below.

The ongoing devastation of the environment is *not* necessarily

a shift is taking place. As Naomi Klein writes, climate change tells us that 'many of our culture's most cherished ideas are no longer viable. These are profoundly challenging revelations for all of us raised on Enlightenment ideals of



photo:Orin Langelle/GJEP

Street Banner vs UN Climate Conference, Durban 2011

a problem unique to capitalism. Communist states of the 20th century produced in some instances equal if not more devastating effects on the environment and biodiversity than their capitalist counterparts.<sup>13</sup> The focus here is on the specific economic system increasingly dominating the globe. But it also acknowledges that the environment and the ways people interact with and impact it are complex beyond anything isolated economic analysis can predict or describe in material or ethical terms.<sup>14</sup>

Further, the issue is not a choice between a maligned 'Western' dualistic idea and a romantic alternative. Whatever relationships we engage in with the world and its variant forms and phenomena are bound to be complex, sometimes antagonistic and always mediated – on our end – by the constraints of human knowledge. But clearly

progress, unaccustomed to having our ambitions confined by natural boundaries. And this is true for the statist left as well as the neoliberal right.<sup>15</sup>

### Cosmology and nature

The supposed dualistic character of Western thought, it should be pointed out, is not necessarily as rigid and consistent as is sometimes claimed; further, alternatives to dualism are not necessarily opposite to it.<sup>16</sup> Cosmology is determined by a mutual interplay between categorisation of natural type, and relatedness to oneself. By categorising the world, we organise the various forms and phenomena we encounter in terms of difference and similarity, and further in terms of utility in both quantitative and qualitative terms. But inherent in this is a notion of how we relate to those forms and phenomena, human

and non-human, animate and inanimate. Through this process, we create a reflexive means by which to determine our mode of relatedness to the things we encounter in the world.<sup>17</sup>

The twin assets of outward physicality and non-material interiority are the elementary categories by which we define and experience sameness and alterity.<sup>18</sup>

and animism – as incommensurable ontologies, with the former found predominantly in the industrialised West.<sup>19</sup> Rather than being opposites, the two seem to be at angles to each other, with the ‘animist logics, flows, assemblages and subjective and trans-personal intensities’<sup>20</sup> posing a cogent alternative to the form of radical naturalism which has increasingly come to dominate the globe.

timber) or elements (trees in terms of their capacity to absorb or store carbon) deemed of value. As such, the trees themselves may also be conceived of as a form of ‘empty’, or at least ‘meaningless’ space, in which these characteristics and elements are embodied. Humans, by virtue of their possession of a uniquely human mind, soul and subjectivity, occupy an extra-spatial dimension. It is within this extra-

## **In a naturalist cosmology, non-human objects are devoid of the interior meaning, ‘soul’ or subjectivity attributed to humans, even if the human and the non-human are of the same material**

Alternate conceptions of the world and the ordering of forms and phenomena within it are based on the various combinations of these two

### **Naturalism and the cosmology of capital**

The concept of naturalism provides a useful starting point for understanding how the cosmology of capital intersects with alternate cosmologies, such as animism. In a naturalist cosmology, non-human objects are devoid of the interior meaning, ‘soul’ or subjectivity attributed to humans, even if the human and the non-human are of the same material substance.<sup>21</sup> Descola imagines naturalism as an inversion of animism, in that, ‘instead of claiming an identity of soul and a difference of bodies, it is predicated upon a discontinuity of interiorities and a material continuity.’<sup>22</sup>

spatial dimension that the mystical processes that justify the sanctity of the human form above others operate.

### **Animism**

Animism, as a cosmological orientation, at its essence postulates a social relationship between humans and non-humans.<sup>23</sup> The animist cosmology flips the naturalist cosmology on its head: the unifying feature between humans and non-humans is an interior unity, what might commonly be called a ‘soul’. Contemporary literature on the subject disagrees over how to frame and understand animism and perhaps whether such a category is even appropriate.<sup>24</sup> Yet



photo: Daniel Kricheff

Processing medicinal roots gathered from the forest in Nepal.

## **The animist cosmology flips the naturalist cosmology on its head: the unifying feature between humans and non-humans is an interior unity, what might be commonly be called a ‘soul’**

assets that one ascribes to oneself, and to others (human and non-human, animate and inanimate). The sum of relations one ascribes based on the presence or absence of either in the forms and phenomena we encounter constitutes a general type of ontology. Philippe Descola conceives of two formations, or general tendencies – naturalism

A reductionist focus on the material characteristics of the non-human world can be seen quite clearly in how many market-based policies engage with landscape. For instance, under the premises of market environmentalism, the trees in a forest are further reduced to their selected constituent characteristics (trees in terms of their usefulness as

many past and present case studies point to the fact that animism is a useful general category to describe those cosmologies that invert or subvert the notion that nature and society, human and non-human, are somehow separate ontological spheres. In the animist cosmology, it seems possible – rather, *necessary* – to engage in social relations with the

non-human forms and phenomena one encounters in the world.

This notion of relatedness and unity extends to views of the environment, and underpins environmental perception as much as practice. Nurit Bird-David describes the economic system of Nayaka hunter-gatherers in India as based on a

it is also an inherently physical phenomenon, whereby new spaces are required for market growth, the labour and raw materials to supply those markets, as well as new places for capital accumulation.<sup>27</sup> In this process, value not only shifts to hitherto unexploited locations and commodities, but as ‘raw’ spaces untapped by markets become

of relationship is being imagined in its place? Are we seeing the emergence of a new animism, in which the social, ecological and economic relations between humans and non-humans are recognised? Or is something else happening?

### **The re-animation of nature as commodity**

When human labour was commodified on a near global scale, and when the already objectified forms of nature – such as arable land, minerals and fossil fuels – were over-exploited and claimed,

## **Among Chepang communities, it's said each person has a reciprocal tree in the underworld, sprung into existence when that person first touches the earth as a newborn child**

notion of the giving environment: ‘[t]hey view their environment as giving, and their economic system is characterized by modes of distribution and property relations that are constructed in terms of giving, as within a family, rather than in terms of reciprocity, as between kin.’<sup>25</sup> Jerome Lewis has described Yaka hunter-gatherers in Central Africa as having a similarly inclusive view of the forest, in which ‘they cannot conceive of their lives, or deaths and afterlife, without the frame of the forest around them.’<sup>26</sup>

My own fieldwork has been with the Chepang people, who live in the mid hills of Nepal. Among certain communities, it is said that each person has a reciprocal tree in the underworld, sprung into existence when that person first touches the earth as a newborn child. When a person becomes ill, a Chepang shaman must enter a trance state, through which she or he can travel to the underworld to find the tree, take care of it by providing it with fertiliser and water, and sometimes even coax the *tree's soul* to return, thus restoring health and balance.

### **A new naturalism?**

Capitalism's need for growth is not merely reflected in abstract figures of GDP or profit margins;

increasingly scarce, novel conceptions of objectified space and materiality become necessary. This can be seen for instance in Central Africa, where logging companies and conservationists, with the support of the World Bank, other multinational agencies and some local governments, have carved up forests into delineated spaces of exploitation and conservation, with no role for the Yaka hunter-gatherer communities who have inhabited the forest for millennia.<sup>28</sup>

The much touted ‘green economy’ is a product of an institutionalised environmentalism: a seeming grand bargain between the current global economic system and those who point out the environmental destruction produced by that system. In this discourse, the ‘greening’ of capitalism represents a breaking down of the former belief in nature as an inexhaustible, inanimate resource over which humanity can exert its will without repercussions. It claims, and perhaps was originally envisioned as, a repositioning of humans as ecological actors, rather than special, perhaps supra-natural beings outside the laws and systems governing the planet. But what type



photo: Daniel Kricheff

A Chepang \*pande\*, or shaman, in Dhading District, Nepal.

the very temporal and phenomenal existence of nature was next. In conceptual terms, this process entailed a re-animation of landscape, but in a profoundly different way than the animisms discussed above. While the previous animate quality of landscape was destroyed in the objectification of nature that has been unfolding since the Neolithic, it has not been replaced with an intersubjective relationship. Instead, we see the creeping infiltration of the ‘phantom-like’<sup>29</sup> properties of monetary value into landscape and those non-human natural forms and phenomena which have been explicated since it became apparent that our habitat was under threat. It also became apparent that the conceptual shift presented opportunities for financial profit.

Marx was quite aware of the quasi-religious aspects of capitalism, an issue which he touched on in *Capital*, through his introduction of the concept of commodity fetishism.<sup>30</sup> Commodities exist because we are able to conceive of useful goods and objects in abstract terms, creating a universal medium – monetary value – through which they can be compared and exchanged with one another. Although they also exist as tangible objects with a use-value, commodities take on a ‘phantom-like’ quality when their exchange-value – most often represented in monetary terms – becomes reified as a sensual thing outside of our imagination. We fetishise commodities by endowing

of the market economy in their lives and the commodification of their labour with the influence of the devil. Taussig interprets this as a reaction to a radical shift in economic relations, manifested in cosmological and religious terms:



A forest in the mid-hills of Nepal.

monetary value has become the new medium through which sameness is conceived. The new forms of market environmentalism – PES and schemes such as REDD – define this trend. In the same way that the commodification of labour and its products conceals the social relations in systems of production and exchange, so too, the commodification of nature conceals the intersubjective and, one might argue *social* relations between humans and the rest of the planet. If we have moved toward a more progressive understanding of the ultimately interdependent relationship between humans and their environment, by

## **we see the creeping infiltration of the ‘phantom-like’ properties of monetary value into landscape and those non-human natural forms and phenomena**

them with monetary value and taking that value as an eternal and real *thing* existing beyond our own minds, blinding us to the social and cultural foundations of economic relations.

Among critics of neoliberal capitalism, there is a great deal of focus on the changes in material relations of production occurring as nearly every corner of the planet becomes enmeshed in the globalised economy. But there is evidence that the change in material relations of production is also accompanied by cosmological dissonance and disruption among groups who had previously been *relatively* cushioned from large-scale market and industrialised economies. For instance, in his work among peasant communities in Colombia in the 1970s, Michael Taussig observed that these communities often associated the growing importance

*‘[T]he devil represents not merely the deep-seated changes in the material conditions of life but also the changing criteria in all their dialectical turmoil of truth and being with which those changes are associated – most especially the radically different concepts of creation, life, and growth through which the new material conditions and social relations are defined.’<sup>31</sup>*

Within the cosmology of the Tukanoan Indians, also of Colombia, relations between humans and non-humans are mediated by the flow of energy between predator and prey, in which ‘[h]umans and non-humans are...substitutes for one another and they contribute jointly, by their reciprocal exchanges, to the general equilibrium of the cosmos.’<sup>32</sup> In our new cosmology,

festishising the planet as a series of commodities we risk obscuring the notion that that interdependence is conditional and beyond our absolute control.

Market environmentalism brings a new equation into the picture, in which the dualistic categories of nature and society are blurred, but not so as to establish an ontological unity between human and non-human alike and acknowledge a complex social relationship between the two. Rather, once the divide has been broken down, capital has demonstrated its resilience by adapting to the new conceptual space opened up by environmentalist thought.

Nature was previously excluded from the category of animated, and taken for granted as the raw materials for the creation of fetishised commodities. Only

through their transformation into commodities were these raw materials imbued with the ‘phantom-like’ substance of monetary value. Now nature itself is being treated as a commodity. A unity between nature and culture – as defined in a naturalist schema – is being created through the fetishisation of nature as commodity, and the linking of these two ontological categories through their equivalency as exchangeable commodities in a market. Capitalism first had to alienate, and then commodify nature in order to create a new conceptual space for its own expansion. This process has been helped along, albeit more often than not unintentionally, by the environmental movement.

### Re-imagining of interior and exterior unity

The importance of a spatial analysis can be seen quite clearly in how different groups perceive the forest as space, both in terms of the dimensions and the qualities which they apply to it. To simplify Lewis’ analysis of

Imagine, then, the mystical process by which one transforms the tendency of a tree to absorb atmospheric carbon into monetary value. The tree is now outer form: the particular. In the same way, an automobile idling in traffic is also a particular form. The universal nature in this case, the aspect through which universality between them is conceptualised, is the monetary value which links and is posited to ‘flow’ between them, or rather escapes from one only to be stored in the other. Because this cosmology posits no subjective position to any non-human forms of nature, these other forms – be they

in opposition to an animist cosmology. Both presuppose a blurred ontology between the tangible and the intangible, but the similarities stop at the spatio-metaphoric level of analysis. For while the animist orientation fills the space shared by human and non-human forms with a social relationship, the new naturalist orientation fetishises human and non-human alike solely through their shared capacity to be imbued with the obscurantist, non-material form of monetary value.

### The threat to environmentalism’s revolutionary potential



photo: wikicommons

The Amazon river. Forest dependent peoples have been driven off their lands to ‘offset’ pollution generated in industrialised countries

The self-reinforcing circle of exploitation and conservation is as tenacious in its ability to hold onto acquired spaces as it is voracious in its need to engulf ever new spaces. In essence, the seeming oppositional dichotomy between ‘conservation’ and ‘development’ is increasingly becoming a self-contained dialectic: two ways of perceiving the world which are

## Imagine the mystical process by which one transforms the tendency of a tree to absorb atmospheric carbon into monetary value

Central African forests<sup>33</sup> and put it in comparative terms, for the Yaka, the forest becomes a space in which to live; for logging companies, the forest becomes a space filled with trees for timber; for those working in PES and REDD schemes, the trees would themselves be mere spaces of function, or of a molecular compound – CO<sub>2</sub> – to which has been affixed a value, above and beyond the fact of it being a part of a tree. In this latter cosmology, the forest and the trees do not exist. One could say that while the timber companies miss the forest for the trees, those working in PES and REDD miss the trees for their abstract function. Put in these terms, the cosmological orientation of the new naturalism seems quite mystical indeed.

animal or plant species, landscapes containing exploitable minerals, a rare pocket of biodiversity in need of conservation, or even the tendency of a tree to absorb atmospheric carbon or of a forest to protect a watershed – become sites of blank meaning, only existing in the sense that they serve some direct and commodifiable purpose. Further, while the exterior physical link is established between the carbon emitted by a car and the carbon ‘captured and stored’ by a tree, the interior, extra-material link is established through a shared capacity to be fetishised with monetary value.

The fetishisation of nature through commodification is not necessarily

increasingly two sides of the same rhetorical and practical coin. This aligns with Büscher and colleagues critique of ‘neoliberal conservation’ as ‘an amalgamation of *ideology and techniques* informed by the premise that natures can only be “saved” through their submission to capital and its subsequent revaluation in capitalist terms.’<sup>34</sup>


In central Africa, enclosed and privately held land rights are ‘superimposed over the rights of different Yaka groups’.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, the new naturalist cosmology, which de-animates, and then fetishises as commodity the distinct forms and phenomena found within the landscape, is superimposed on alternate cosmologies that

perceive a more dynamic and social relationship between humans and non-human forms and phenomena. This is not to say that animism exists as an ordered system of belief so much as a generalised orientation toward the world; nor is it to romanticise an ‘ecologically noble savage’<sup>36</sup> living in harmony with nature and outside of our own corrupt system. But when the ultimate question is not just the *meaning* of landscape so much as it is the biophysical destiny and use of that landscape, the notion of co-existence between overlapping cosmologies seems less plausible. For while the Yaka ‘have been willing to share the forest with others, and in practice rarely deny anyone access to the forest’,<sup>37</sup> the twin forces of exploitation and conservation, grounded as they are in a cosmology that views landscape as consisting of empty space and discrete elements to be owned and transformed, seem intent on doing just the opposite.

This reimagining of space and relations between human and non-

human produces effects that are of a profoundly *radical* nature. Radical, that is, in the sense that within this cosmology, landscape, and those forms and phenomena which are relegated to the ontological category of ‘nature’, are sites for radical reformulation and reconceptualisation. Landscape thus becomes an object for intervention, conservation and for radical change. In comparison, animist cosmologies present an alternative to radical naturalism.<sup>38</sup> This alternative, conservative<sup>39</sup> in relation to the upending forces of exploitation and conservation, by its very existence undermines the claims to universal validity and inevitability that seem to be one of the prime justifications for the expansion of capital into new conceptual realms and new modes of domination. This is not a call for a ‘return’ to an imagined past: we can dispense with the belief in a mythic Eden while still recognising that there are alternatives to our own present course.

There is a real threat that the emergence of a commodity form of

nature will generate a conceptual paradigm which once again obscures the very unknowable, unpredictable and unstable relationship that exists between humans and the rest of the planet. Indeed, the very means by which the ‘value’ of nature is assessed requires science to frame its analysis not on its own empirical terms, but rather through terms which ‘describe a nature that capital can “see”...in order for trade to occur’.<sup>40</sup> Through such a process of obfuscation, the primary justification of the entire environmental movement becomes threatened. The commodification of nature, more than anything else, represents the current economic system’s ability to adapt to whatever ontological paradigm one throws at it. This system threatens to defeat environmentalism not so much by fighting it, as by seeping into the cracks of its ideas to subvert environmentalism’s central, radical potential. 

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# ANTHROPOLOGY

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# Radical Potential – a sideways look at the Occupy movement

Activist and anthropology graduate *Ragnhild Freng Dale* reflects on her participation in Occupy London.

How did a rag-tag assemblage of people, tents, ideas and practices capture global imagination and spread across large parts of the world? 2011 was the year of protest movements unlike any in our time. Inspired by events in the Arab world and Southern Europe, Occupy Wall Street released waves of people onto occupied spaces across the globe. Cities in Spain, USA, Greece, Germany, the United Kingdom, China and Nigeria, to mention only a few, saw popular, stubborn occupations

alone. With Occupy London as my case study, I consider some of the ideas and practices adopted, and how this both questioned capitalism and generated potential for societal change at a deeper level.

## Occupy London and the premise of ethnography

Occupy London was formed on October 15 2011, one month after Occupy Wall Street first began. An anonymous Facebook event called for an occupation of Paternoster Square, which is home to the

and collectively decided to set up camp. Some had brought tents, others slept on cardboard boxes, and police attempts to remove them failed when people remained peaceful. The following morning Giles Fraser, then Reverend Canon of the Church, blessed the occupation and asked the police to leave. Occupy the London Stock Exchange (OLSX) was born.

At OLSX, like other occupations across the world, it was impossible to tell an occupier from a passer-by or a social researcher. Boundaries were



Camp cosmology

take shape. The entanglement of occupation nurtured radical forms of collaboration, capturing a prominent place in social consciousness, media coverage, and public debate. Their message was as clear as it was confusing: the current system is broken, and the answers are not within capitalism

London Stock Exchange and one of the centres of the financial world. Police cordoned off the area of the square, and kettled<sup>1</sup> the demonstrators outside St Paul's Cathedral – the closest neighbour to the original target. Trapped between the stock exchange and the church, the protestors held a public meeting

erased and participation inevitable: even a simple presence among the occupiers meant they were also 'occupying'.<sup>2</sup> Everyone who came down and sat on the steps to listen in on a meeting – regardless of age, political views, financial situation or social background – quickly found themselves confronted with the

most radical question of all: ‘What do you think?’ As an occupier at OLSX, I therefore make no claim to be outside the events I analyse, but position myself as what Wacquant would call an ‘observant participant’,<sup>3</sup> investigating how the movement itself actively used theory and positioned itself sideways to the current system. Anthropology and – surprisingly – feminism provide us with particularly useful concepts to think through a movement that profoundly fails to fit into neatly predictable models of economic theory. I write in the past tense to highlight that OLSX as an occupation of St Paul’s is no longer in existence, even if the wider movement is still active.

#### A vision of a different society

OLSX unquestionably had its largest impact in its first two months, when the global imaginary swept

of tactics was used, including occupation, use of mainstream and Indymedia press, public meetings, teach-ins, concerts, theatrical and more conventional forms of protest.<sup>5</sup>



There were no leaders; instead occupiers were guided by a shared desire to build a functioning camp and alternative politics. People met at the camp and in the assemblies, and instead of just talking about an alternative, the alternative was already being acted out through their actions. They demonstrated

were open for all to join, and many took part in several groups that captured their interest. Kitchen duties and cleaning of the camp happened on a voluntary, rotational basis, with health and safety measures taken very seriously. Tents were moved around, some disappeared and new ones sprouted, but a solid presence of 200 tents remained on site throughout the occupation. Occupy London may have been angry at the current state of society, but they found it more constructive to make a functioning alternative that welcomed

people and drew them into practical participation, rather than shouting at the passing bankers.

#### A new public debate

The Occupy movement, then, was not just a radical reimagining of public space, it also facilitated a

## Everyone who came down and sat on the steps to listen in on a meeting... found themselves confronted with the ..question:

### ‘What do you think?’

across the world and made people feel part of something transcending the boundaries of their everyday surroundings. Within a day of setting up at St Paul’s, all the major newspapers had published about the movement, and whether or not they criticised it, they could not ignore it. Members of the public flooded the camp and brought food, financial support, tents, and their presence, to take part in what was happening. Like its sister occupations, OLSX was from its very beginning more than just a response to the current situation or a single-issue protest. As a wide-ranging assemblage of alliances and strategies, the camps became what David Graeber called a ‘vision of the sort of society you want in miniature’.<sup>4</sup> A plurality

that political participation was far from dead; there had simply not been a space for it in contemporary politics.

At OLSX, a number of new initiatives were formed in small groups that called themselves Working Groups. These included a Kitchen working group, a Recycling team, the Energy, Equity and Environment Group, the International Outreach Group, a Press Team, a Legal team, an Indymedia team, the *Occupied Times of London*, a security team calling itself Tranquillity, a Process group that organised assemblies, a Woman’s group and a range of other practical, political, or process-oriented groups. They

different way of relating. It became ‘normal’ to discuss politics both with friends and with strangers – and to demand towards government and society writ large that a change needs to happen. While the media has harshly criticised Occupy, not least for its perceived ‘lack of direction’, the experience on the ground was that the avoidance of a clear-cut programme was highly effective in stirring people’s curiosity to come down and take part. As protesters frequently pointed out, the system was deemed ‘too big to fail’, and any attempt to create an alternative was near impossible without the autonomous space temporarily upheld in the camp.

On the very first day of occupation,

## Occupy LSX, Initial Statement

*This initial statement was collectively agreed by over 500 people on the steps of St Paul's on 26 October 2011. Like all forms of direct democracy, the statement will always be a work in progress and is used as a basis for further discussion and debate.*

1. The current system is unsustainable. It is undemocratic and unjust. We need alternatives; this is where we work towards them.
2. We are of all ethnicities, backgrounds, genders, generations, sexualities dis/abilities and faiths. We stand together with occupations all over the world.
3. We refuse to pay for the banks' crisis.
4. We do not accept the cuts as either necessary or inevitable. We demand an end to global tax injustice and our democracy representing corporations instead of the people.
5. We want regulators to be genuinely independent of the industries they regulate.
6. We support the strike on November 30 and the student action on November 9, and actions to defend our health services, welfare, education and employment, and to stop wars and arms dealing.
7. We want structural change towards authentic global equality. The world's resources must go towards caring for people and the planet, not the military, corporate profits or the rich.
8. The present economic system pollutes land, sea and air, is causing massive loss of natural species and environments, and is accelerating humanity towards irreversible climate change. We call for a positive, sustainable economic system that benefits present and future generations.<sup>1</sup>
9. We stand in solidarity with the global oppressed and we call for an end to the actions of our government and others in causing this oppression.
10. This is what democracy looks like. Come and join us!

### Notes

1. Article 8 was added to the statement following a proposal being passed by the Occupy London General Assembly on 19 November 2011.

the differing reasons for why people had come to Occupy were noted down during the general assembly. On day two, a 10-point statement was agreed by consensus (*see opposite*). This still serves as a guideline and a strong political document that is frequently referred

also recognized themselves in contemporary philosophy, notably the notion of ‘becoming’ from Deleuze and Guatarri.<sup>7</sup> Here, they found support for their insistence that a social movement can evolve organically without a clearly articulated direction, as well as the

team, open for all to attend, and held a daily programme of experts, academics (including several anthropologists) and artists who came to share their knowledge. High profile academics gave the movement credibility in circles and groups all across society. What

**What was truly radical was ... the blending of old social categories: ..students, ... working class, middle class... and homeless ... who became equal in their participation and shaping of the movement.**

to by occupiers as an achievement of OLSX. Similarly, Occupy Wall Street eloquently, loudly, and insistently used words and actions together to express their views and call for change to the banking system they blamed for gambling away their money.

This deconstruction of capitalism was, according to many, Occupy’s main purpose. Rather than address the individual symptoms, such as welfare cuts, library closures, or the lack of jobs, the movement identified a system gone haywire as the main culprit. Theory was not in abstract, but was actively used and reshaped by occupiers and non-occupiers alike, to defend, critique and modify their actions. Furthermore, academics abounded. David Graeber was instrumental to starting Occupy Wall Street,<sup>6</sup> and Judith Butler often wrote in Occupy’s defence and in praise of its achievements. Manuel Castells, David Harvey, and several others gave lectures at Occupy camps across the world. Many occupiers



Kitchen tent

photo: Foong Wai

difficulties of moving ‘against the grid’ of the dominant system.

Tent City University was particularly important in this respect. Set up in a marquee tent centrally in the camp, it hosted a range of workshops and lectures on economics, history, and alternatives to the current crisis. It was run by a small and committed

was truly radical was not the theorists remaining at an analytical distance, but the blending of old social categories: university students, traditional working class, middle class employees and homeless people, who became equal in their participation and shaping of the movement. In a country like the UK, where class is a major marker, the co-participation in the camp was remarkable. As an anthropologist Jerome Lewis pointed out in a lecture at the occupation,<sup>8</sup> the radical sharing ethos where people took what they needed but also had a moral obligation to contribute, resembled structures

of the Yaka Pygmies’ hunter-gatherer societies in Central Africa.

The heart of this democracy was the General Assembly. Like those in Spain and the US, they followed a consensus model that makes decisions by general agreement. Compared to the large buildings of concrete and steel standing tall and

closed next to the Occupy camp, its democratic structures were evidence of what a real, functioning democracy should be: one that gave equal voice and equal weight to every person present. To achieve this, no matter how many people

actual stock exchange, the camp instead ended on a patch of public land, managed partly by the City of London and partly by the Church. It therefore took some time to sort out the paperwork that allowed the City to take the movement to

‘corporate unaccountability’, and the ‘hegemony of the financial sector’. For the authorities, the occupation was a direct threat to the normal order of citizens voting every four years and preferably asking no questions in between.<sup>10</sup>

As Butler wrote from New York, it was a ‘breaking with the neo-liberal status quo, enacting the demands of the people through the gathering together of bodies in a relentlessly public, obdurate, persisting, activist struggle that seeks to break and remake our political world’.<sup>11</sup> Precisely by using the space in ‘unauthorized’ ways, OLSX put the City of London, and the wider UK government, under quotation marks, by asking them *why* things are not different and demanding that they change their priorities to ‘people, not profit’.

The legal process prolonged the life of the camp, and also created a unique historical record. While the court never doubted the European Convention of Human Rights and the right to protest, the issue was with the tents – as semi-permanent structures for which no planning permission had been sought. During the hearings, individual occupiers appeared as defendants speaking in personal capacity to defend the



Camp reception

participated, the assembly would break off into smaller discussion groups to allow everyone a chance to speak, and select one person from each group to report back to the larger assembly. There were no ‘votes’ where the majority won, instead the consensus-process would only make a decision if everyone more or less agreed and no one ‘blocked’ the decision from happening. If someone did, it would be postponed to a later meeting, or discussed further if time allowed. A slow system, but it prevented both the tyranny of the majority and the emergence of elected leaders. Facilitation of meetings rotated, and anyone was welcome to take part and help make them happen.

### The City of London vs. Occupy

The positioning of OLSX also had unintended consequences. Failing to occupy the square outside the

court, and the longwinded period of court proceedings protected the camp from eviction until February 28 2012.<sup>9</sup> The first hearings took place just before Christmas, and

the verdict was delayed by several weeks before the protesters finally lost the case. OLSX therefore lasted over four months. The second occupation at Finsbury Square was allowed to stay until June 14 2012, whereas the squatted UBS building called Bank of Ideas was evicted at the start of the year.

These smaller struggles became metaphors for the bigger fight against abstract entities such as ‘capitalism’,

**its democratic structures were evidence of what a real, functioning democracy should be: one that gave equal voice and equal weight to every person present**

larger movements, recorded in legal records that will long outlive the structures of the tents. John Cooper QC stated after the court case that ‘regardless of the judgment (...) the integrity, the maturity, and the far sightedness, and the fact that the occupiers are holding genuine, proper beliefs, has been vindicated in the court and that is an important step forward.’<sup>12</sup> These and other Occupy-related law entanglements gives OLSX a permanence for time

to come, much more enduring than the flimsy canvases that housed it by St Paul's.

## **For the authorities, the occupation was a direct threat to the normal order of citizens voting every four years and... asking no questions in between.**

The symbolic potency of the church was heavily used by both occupiers and those opposing them, to call for a moral responsibility their opponents lacked. 'What would Jesus do?' was often asked as a rhetorical question, implying that he would have been out on the street, with the protesters, in the same way in which he, according to the Bible, threw the moneylenders out of the temple 2000 years ago.<sup>13</sup> Giles Fraser and two others resigned from their service at St Paul's in support of the movement. Tangible results, such as RBS chief executive Stephen Hester renouncing his £1m bonus<sup>14</sup> were, albeit symbolical, results of a changed political climate where the public no longer would accept the growing chasm between ordinary working people and investment bankers in the City.

### **Social problems**

Yet the duration of the camp also had another effect. As a warm, open and welcoming community with free food and accommodation, OLSX attracted several homeless and otherwise vulnerable people. In the spirit of inclusiveness that permeated the movement, they were not turned away, and the commitment to support and care for all the people who arrived, whether they lived in the camp or only visited periodically, displayed a will to practice what was preached. Some became integral to the running of the camp and found a new purpose in their everyday life, while others added destructive

behaviour, and put a lot of strain on those who attempted to provide social support. As protesters pointed

out, this was not so much a fault of the movement, as one of the society that failed to care for its people. In



Unarmed force

the effort to care for them, however, both energy and resources were poured into maintaining a fragile sense of stability in the camp rather than working for systemic change. With the camp held in suspense over legal decisions and many occupiers going home to their families over Christmas, this strain increased. A growing disagreement between reformists and radicals also took away much of the potential 'line of flight' that had compelled so many people to take part at the start. Eviction was therefore welcomed and mourned at the same time, and the disagreement over tactics has left the movement invisible in the mainstream media in the months following.

At the time of writing, July 2012,

small groups are still camping as nomads, several working groups keep operating, and General Assemblies take place every Saturday at St Paul's. Several summer festivals have invited occupiers to talk, and links are currently being made with UK trade unions. A 'spring of disintegration' and disagreement over tactics has fragmented Occupy London, and many people have left the movement, either to return to their lives or to keep up the struggle in different forms and with different

tactics.<sup>15</sup> Occupy as a wider movement is however active both on a global and a local scale, but what form it takes in future and the legacy it leaves behind, will only be seen in retrospect.

### **Feminist interventions**


The impossibility of seeing Occupy as 'one thing' makes it difficult to identify its impact. As a social movement it remains elusive and, its 'failure' to achieve change may be because it works across old paradigms of radicalism/reformism and left/right, rather than taking a position within conventional politics. Strathern identifies this 'awkward' relationship between theory and practice as the reason why feminism's impact is so hard

to see,<sup>16</sup> and if this also holds for Occupy's awkward defiance of the standard rules of the game, its effects will remain invisible or foggy for years or even decades to come. One occupier, previously involved with Greenham Common, pointed out that the sense of shared struggle reminded her of their feminist occupation. Drawing the analogy with feminism further, we see that though occupiers may not all have had a shared identity outside the occupation, they were allied by an interest that went *against* the current system and for creating an alternative across it. Autonomy of working groups and individuals was always considered paramount, as was inclusivity, empowerment and facilitation of egalitarian power distributions. As a movement centred more on compassion and

less on the neoliberal race for profit, its feminist intervention lies in this destabilisation of the status quo, showing that even in the midst of a city, a different logic and reality is possible.

### Hopes for future?

Benjamin aptly stated history is always crafted in the present,<sup>17</sup> and whatever the fate of the continued movement, its legacy will leave significant marks on history. As a recent editorial in *the Occupied Times of London* asserted, history will remember that OLSX 'saw the coming storm and helped sound the warning bell'.<sup>18</sup> Whether or not its next incarnation captures global imagination, the complex plurality of voices, opinions, people, objects and strategies shows, above all, that

the models of human behaviour underpinning much contemporary thought, notably economic models, are fundamentally flawed. Rational self-interest was rarely the motivating factor at OLSX, which instead fostered cooperation, collaboration and trust. It created an atmosphere that demonstrated how individuals, rich and poor, will put their personal interest aside when they are around people they know and meet face to face, for the best of the social group they are part of. Seen through an anthropological lens of sociality, Occupy makes most sense as a wave of autonomous collaboration and radical practice, where the seeming cacophony reveals an inner logic observed in the practice of changing the everyday and challenging the larger picture both at the same time. 



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### Notes

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# The Origin of Fire

**Chris Knight** decodes a collection of Aboriginal Australian myths on the theme of fire.

Claude Lévi-Strauss's four-volume *Mythologiques*<sup>1</sup> begins with a South American sequence of 'storm' and 'flood' stories which he interprets as inversions of neighbouring narratives about the origins of domestic fire. In this article, I will show that a strikingly similar flood-versus-fire dialectic plays a central role in Aboriginal mythology. As we become familiar with these extraordinary tales, it quickly becomes clear that they are not simply about the weather. Their generative logic, like that of world mythology as a whole, testifies to the power once attributed to the periodicity of the female body –

experienced by our hunter-gatherer ancestors as a monthly 'flood' associated in turn with the waxing and waning changes of the moon (see Box).

## **Myth 1. The Acquisition of Fire (Kakadu)**<sup>2</sup>

*Two men went hunting with their mothers. While the men caught ducks and plovers on the plain ('dry'), the women collected lily roots and seeds from water pools ('wet'). The women possessed fire, but sought to keep it secret from the men, who were ignorant of fire. The women cooked while the men were away, and*

*on seeing them returning hid the live ashes in their vulvas. The men asked where the fire was. The women denied that there was fire, a row broke out, but the women gave the men cooked lily cake, after which they all ate and slept. Then the men again went hunting while the women cooked.*

*The weather was very hot. The uneaten remains of the birds went bad. The men brought a fresh supply and again saw the fire burning in the distance. A spur-winged plover flew to warn the women, who hid the fire as before. The men arrived, they argued, the*

### *The raw and the cooked: Sex-strike logic and the ritual syntax*

*The original sex-strike model outlined in Chris Knight's Blood Relations (1991) argues that human culture was born in a revolution when women went on strike. Women with their kin, sons and brothers, would celebrate ritually at dark moon, signaled by menstrual blood (real or fake); as the moon waxed and the night sky got brighter, men would go hunting for large game, bringing back kills to their wives' camp for the full moon feast, when all taboos on marital sex and meat were relaxed. At the next dark moon, women would go on sex-strike again to keep the cosmos turning. This syntax, waxing vs waning, raw vs cooked, blood vs fire, kinship vs marriage etc. persists at the core of all magical myths, fairytales and ritually derived narrative dramas.*



women denied the fire. The men said, 'we saw a big fire; if you have no fire, which way do you cook your food? Has the sun cooked it? If the sun cooks your lilies, why does it not cook our ducks and stop them from going bad.' There was no reply to this. They slept.

In the morning the men left the women, found that they could make fire by rubbing sticks, and then decided to turn themselves into crocodiles, of which there were none. They made crocodile heads, pierced their lungs so that they could breathe underwater, practised swimming, and then hid the heads and returned to camp. Again they saw fire, again the plover gave warning. The women wanted to know what the men had been doing, but the men said nothing at all.

Late in the afternoon the women set nets for fish. In the morning when they went to take in the nets, the men arrived first, turned themselves into crocodiles and dived into the water. They hung onto the nets so that the women could not pull them in. When the women felt for what made the nets heavy, the crocodiles dragged them under... The women drowned; the crocodiles dived into the water in which they have lived ever since.

A slightly different version is given by Harney<sup>3</sup> (1959: 53-4):

**Myth 2.** Two hunters returned to their camps to discover that their two half-mothers who cooked for them had allowed the camp-fires to go out. Yet the birds they had brought in that morning were nicely grilled and ready to be eaten. The men demanded

an explanation. The women lied, saying that they had sung magic songs into the sun, whereupon the old Sun-woman had thrown out hot-wind which had 'cooked the goose nice way.'

Suspecting a lie, the men pretended to go away, but sneaked back to watch what really happened. They saw the women cooking the goose by chanting 'sexual songs' over



Women gathering with baskets, Arnhem Land 1928

the meat, using 'the heat that came from their bodies.'

Horrified at such 'incest', the men turned themselves into crocodiles and wreaked vengeance on their 'mothers' as these went down to the water to release their fish-traps. The crocodiles held the fish-traps in their jaws, pulled down on them and thereby drowned the women (an encounter with sexual and therefore incestuous connotations – 'Crocodile can't eat women, only keep her for sweetheart business...'<sup>4</sup>).

I interpret these stories as follows. Two women menstruate – that is, they enter the 'wet' phase of their cycle. By doing this, they withhold

cooking-fire from the world (cooking is ritually prohibited for the duration of menstruation). Withdrawing from their husbands, the women become excessively intimate with their own kin (the 'incest' motif). They are therefore, as an appropriate punishment, given an excess of such scandalous intimacy. They are 'swallowed up' in their own 'wetness' and 'flesh', becoming incorporated into 'crocodiles' – aquatic monsters depicted in the myth as their own sons.

Kenneth Maddock comments that 'if the fire myths collected from different places in Arnhem Land are examined it looks as though they fall into place as segments of a super-myth on the origins of fire...'<sup>5</sup> this 'long and involuted story' not being known by any one group although 'each group knows a fragment of the whole...' In this light, it would seem reasonable to suspect that the two myths just examined permit only a fragmentary glimpse of the worldview familiar to the Aborigines. Both stories emphasise the vagina as the source of woman's 'cooking-fire'; both explain how this vagina (presumably with its fire) came to be 'drowned' through the agency of crocodiles. Neither, however, goes on to explain how fire ever came to be rescued from this watery fate and saved for the benefit of men. Two short myths – also from Arnhem Land – stress the missing aspect.

### **Myth 3. The Acquisition of Fire (Dalabon)<sup>6</sup>**

The crocodile possessed firesticks. The rainbow bird used to eat fish raw. Then the rainbow bird climbed into a dry tree. Down he came to snatch the firesticks, but the crocodile had them clutched to his breast. Again and again the rainbow bird tried. At last, he snatched the firesticks. Away he flew. The crocodile

could do nothing. He has no wings. The rainbow bird was above. 'You can go down into the water', he called, 'I'm going to give fire to men!'

the firesticks and ran to the river to put out the fire. But the plover was too quick. He snatched the firesticks back and ran into the hills. Since then crocodiles have lived

### Myth 5. Kunmanggur the Rainbow-Snake (Murinbata)<sup>8</sup>

Kunmanggur the rainbow-snake had two daughters and a son (alternatively, two sister's daughters and a sister's son – Stanner 1966: 89). The son – Tjiniman, The Bat – lusted after his sisters. Soon after he had been subincised – when his penis was still painful and sore – he came to a place where his sisters had recently been camping. He noticed some of their menstrual blood. At the sight, he had an erection. He hid, waited for the return of the girls, and forced his sexual attentions on them when they arrived.

Later, the sisters escaped and eventually arrived at the camp of their father (or maternal uncle), Kunmanggur, the Rainbow Snake. Tjiniman

## Whatever women may be doing during their periods, men from now on will be eating their meat cooked. 'You can go down into the water', as the rainbow bird shouts, 'I'm going to give fire to men!'

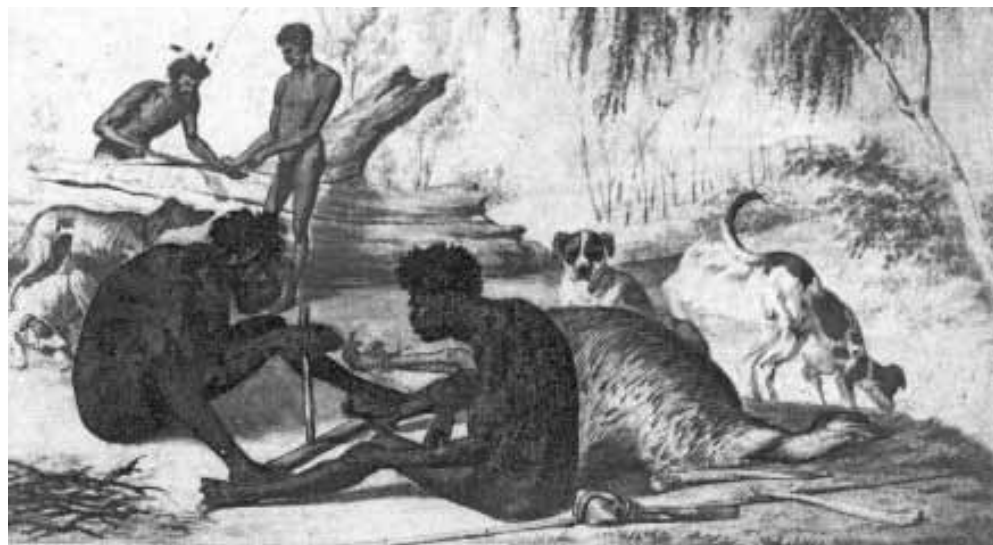
It's significant that before stealing crocodile's fire, the bird climbs 'into a dry tree'. In real life, in Aboriginal Australian traditions, men would often want to cook meat far away from the contaminating threat posed by menstruating women. The mythic narrative is purporting to explain how men first succeeded in resisting the anti-culinary effects of women's periodic 'wetness', establishing the current situation in which they can cook their own meat out in the bush. Whatever women may be doing during their periods, men from now on will be eating their meat cooked. 'You can go down into the water', as the rainbow bird shouts, 'I'm going to give fire to men!' The two sexes, coded as different 'species', will henceforth go their own separate ways – existing as far apart as crocodile from bird, terrestrial water from sky.

### Myth 4. The Acquisition of Fire (Djuan)<sup>7</sup>

Crocodile and plover possessed the only firesticks in the world. One morning, before hunting, crocodile asked plover to light the fire ready for his return so that the game he brought back could be cooked. But when crocodile returned with a kangaroo, the fire was unlit and plover was asleep. The crocodile abused his companion, snatched

in water, plovers in the hills. But for the plover, men would have had to eat their meat raw.

This version doesn't add a great deal to the previous one. It suggests that the two species originally collaborated: it was only when an argument broke out that the snatching of fire took place and



Firesticks, 1850s. Drawing by G. Mützel

they both went their separate ways. Given this unfortunate conflict (the myth implies), all fire would have been extinguished in water had it not been snatched from the crocodile in time.

Let's turn, now to a more elaborate 'origin of fire' myth. It comes from the Port Keats region, Western Australia:

arrived and organised a big ceremony; he danced so as to make the women desire him. Kunmanggur played on the drone-pipe; everyone was dancing.

Then Tjiniman suddenly spoke in the Wagaman language, which no-one understood: 'I am going to kill your father, I am going to kill your father'.

People did not understand and asked: 'What is it you say?' 'I told Walumuma to get me water', Tjiniman answered. Walumuma brought water in her hands; Tjiniman spilled it without drinking. All this – the misunderstood words, the bringing of water and the spilling of it without drinking – was repeated three times.

Then Tjiniman carried out his threat, spearing the Rainbow Snake (who was still playing his drone-pipe) in the back. 'Yeeeeee!' cried Kunmanggur, and threw the drone-pipe into the water.

At the instant of death, all Kunmanggur's children cried out in grief. The Flying Fox people turned into Flying Foxes, crying 'Heee!' as they flew into the air. All the birds flew away. Tjiniman ran off and, standing far away, looked back, wondering what they would all do. But no-one sought revenge.

Kunmanggur rolled about in agony. He plunged into the water at Naiyiwa, where one of his sons pulled out the spear. He stayed there for one moon. They made fire and put hot stones to his wound but to no avail; it did not heal; and water came out through the fire. Then he wandered from place to place, accompanied by his people. At many places his wives and sons dug a hole in the ground, made a fire to heat stones, and tried fruitlessly to staunch his bleeding wounds, and at each such place water came up through the flames.

At last, wearied and angry from his sickness, Kunmanggur arrived at a place near the sea. Slowly, he gathered all the fire from that

place and stood it on his head as though it were a headdress. The people said to him: 'Why do you do that?' He replied: 'Stay silent; I shall take this fire for-ever for myself.' He entered the water. Slowly, the water rose upon him to here.., to here... to here... The people cried out to Kadpur the Butcher Bird: 'He intends to take that fire into the water there!'



Flying foxes

Kunmanggur was now far out. The water rose on him to here.., to here.., to here... it was up to his chest. He went to the place known as Lalalarda, where he pushed out his legs to make the creek. Kadpur flew swiftly to where

## The description of Kunmanggur's place as a 'mother-place' may seem strange – until it is realised that Kunmanggur, although described here as a 'father', is in fact of uncertain gender

the water was beginning to cover Kunmanggur's head. Pit! (the sound of snatching). He snatched the fire out of the water. But Kunmanggur's fire was out! Finished!

Pilirin the Kestrel, who had followed Kadpur and Kunmanggur, flew close to the people. He made fire with fire-sticks – this was the first time

man had used the fire-drill. He set fire to the grass on all sides. To this day all that country looks fire-scorched.

Kunmanggur now thrashes around in the water, making it turbulent with foam. He thrusts out his legs and makes creeks, finally creating the big creek which men call Doitpur ('mighty strong mother-mother mother-mother place'). The description of Kunmanggur's place as a 'mother-place' may seem strange – until it is realised that Kunmanggur, although described here as a 'father', is in fact of uncertain gender and quite possibly feminine. 'Even those who asserted the maleness of Kunmanggur', as Stanner writes,<sup>9</sup> 'said that he had large breasts, like a woman's'.

From the moment of his/her immersion, Kunmanggur assumed the form in which 'he' nowadays makes his presence felt. Kunmanggur the aquatic monster or 'Rainbow Snake' is a fearsomely prodigious serpent, 'with sharp protuberances on his spine, and a long tail that curves scorpion-like over his back.' This tail 'ends in a hook'. Although in his former life, Kunmanggur had been 'mild and beneficent', in his transmogrified form he is 'fierce'. It is said that,

'using his hooked tail, he lies in wait for people in deep waters, with some ill-disposition towards them, and may 'sting' or 'bite' or 'pull' them...'.<sup>10</sup> He seems, then, not too different from the crocodiles so prominent in the previous myths.

What are we to make of this story? It begins with an episode of brother-sister incest. Tjiniman – violator of multiple taboos – is

deeply involved in menstrual pollution. Not only does he have an erection at the sight of his two sisters' blood, but he himself has just been subincised, rendering his cut penis painful ('bloody?') and sore. As far as concerns the blood-versus-fire opposition so central to all these myths, Tjiniman, then, is emphatically in

with land, fire, and drought, belongs to Ti'wunggu'.

From this structure of opposition arose the mythical conflict between the two ritual camps. Kunmanggur belonged to the *Tiwunggu* moiety – the possessors of fire; Tjiniman belonged to the water-owning *Kartjin* moiety

*down and was frightened by all the blood which flowed. No one had had menstruation before. She made herself a shade from a tree which she first created. This first camping place of hers lay exactly on the boundary between two clan territories – Madje'lindi with its watery*

## **We may discern echoes of dragon-slayings, giant-killings and other bloody episodes central to world mythology**

the 'bloody' or 'wet' camp. Just before murdering Kunmanggur, however, he three times refuses to drink water – although he pretends to have requested a drink. He lets the water spill, as if surreptitiously establishing himself as 'dry'. In this way, preparatory to his murderous act, he aligns himself in the camp opposite to that of his intended victim. If this is accepted, Tjiniman's refusal to touch water echoes the rainbow bird's distancing himself from the same element as he climbs into a 'dry tree' (myth 3) before snatching the element of fire.

This secretive change of status – Tjiniman's transition from the 'wet' camp to the 'dry' – is corroborated by ethnographic contextual evidence. Murinbata society is divided into two patrilineal moieties, named after *Tiwunggu*, the Eaglehawk, and *Kartjin*, the Kite-hawk. Each camp was 'composed originally of different orders of people in continuous conflict.' Stanner continues: 'Each possessed a vital resource – fire or water – without which the other could not live.'<sup>11</sup> Each would have died from excessive wetness (or dryness) had it not succeeded in obtaining the missing element from its partner. In the Dreamtime, 'only *Tiwunggu* people had fire'.<sup>12</sup> The *Kartjin* people had water. 'When discussing the dual organisation with Aborigines', confirms Falkenberg<sup>13</sup> 'one will often hear that everything that has to do with water belongs to the *Kartjin* moiety and everything which is associated

(implying that Kunmanggur was in fact Tjiniman's maternal uncle). Yet at the conclusion of the myth, the status of each is apparently reversed: Kunmanggur has lost fire ('But Kunmanggur's fire was out! Finished!') and is now completely submerged in the sea, while Tjiniman – formerly of the water-owning moiety – has asserted himself as 'dry'. Kunmanggur's fire-stealing opponent flies up into the air as a bird; Tjiniman turns into a bat.

The primal murder occurs at the high-point of a ceremony in honour of the Rainbow-Snake – an event which Tjiniman himself has organised. We may here discern echoes of dragon-slayings, giant-killings and other bloody episodes central to world mythology. Tjiniman seems to be confirming that it is through distinctively male trickery that the sovereign authority of earlier times is cruelly betrayed and killed.

The next section of the myth is reminiscent of the Murinbata story of Ngun'bal:in, who wandered across the landscape, stopping periodically in order to rest while menstruating:

### ***Myth 6. Port Keats region, Western Australia***<sup>14</sup>

*Ngun'bal:in wandered about in Madje'lindi at the time of the new moon. Suddenly she got pains and began to bleed from her vagina. She looked*

*creeks on the one hand, and the dry, hilly country of Jendalar on the other.*

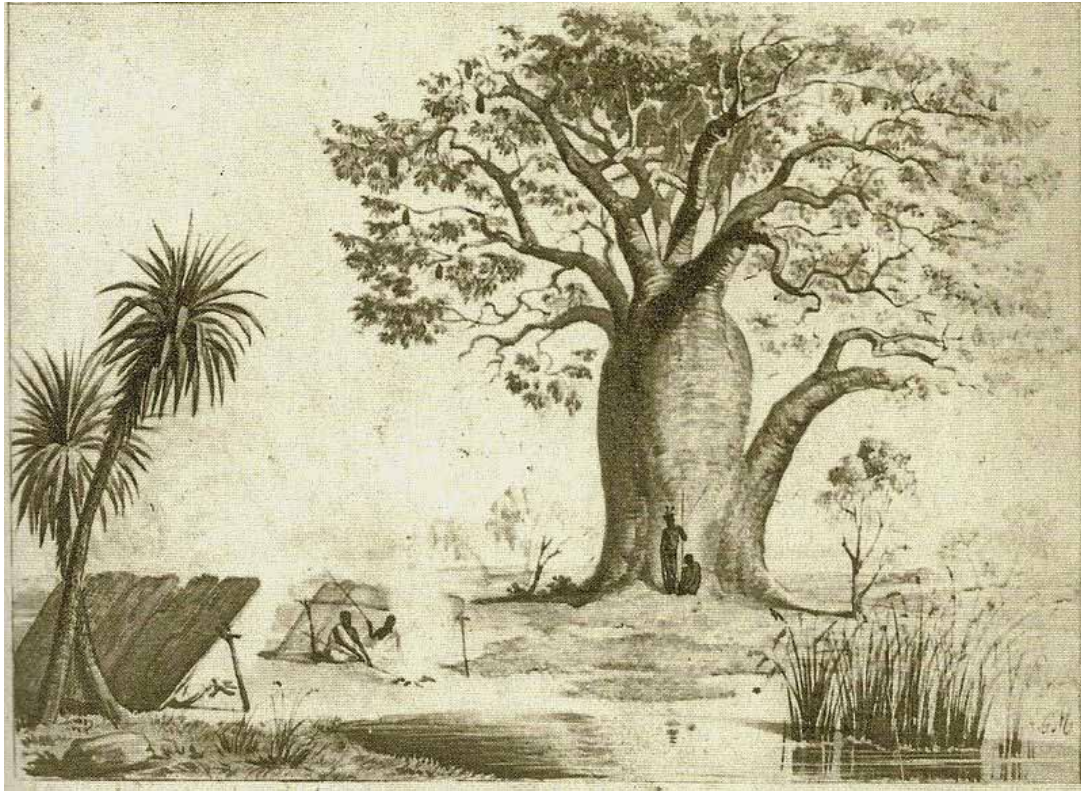
*While she sat there on the Madje'lindi side of her shade, she saw the snake Koidar (a group of males) who came up to the Jendalar side, wishing to have intercourse with her. But Ngun'bal:in explained that she was menstruating and must therefore hide from men. When the Koidar heard this, they began their wanderings in Jendalar; Ngun'bal:in began her wanderings in Madje'lindi.*

*When Ngun'bal:in saw that her bleeding stopped, she began to wander. But then she began to bleed again, and had to camp at a new place. Here she made a waterhole of the blood. But when the bleeding stopped, she went on. In this way she wandered and made camps until she had formed and named all of Madje'lindi.*

The mortally wounded Kunmanggur also meanders snake-like across the landscape, stopping periodically in order to bleed. When he stops, we're informed that it's for 'one moon'. Attempts are made to use fire to counteract the flow. But nothing works: 'water came up through the flames'. Nothing can be cooked at such a time.

Finally, Kunmanggur wades deeper and deeper into the water,

drawing by Baines



Hardening spear tips in hot ash by waterhole, 1857.

determined to extinguish the last spark of fire. In the nick of time, Kadpur swoops down and snatches the precious fire, passing it on to men.

My final myth (**Myth 7**) comes from the Yolngu of north-east Arnhem Land. Instead of describing

In the Djanggawul myth, Two Sisters are depicted as having created the world. Each has a supreme possession: a uterus. Every effort is made to emphasise the potency of these reproductive organs. They are filled with great quantities of offspring who are released in childbirth in large

To the extent that they are depicted (in certain versions) as accompanied by any male, it is invariably their younger brother, over whom they have ritual authority and with whom they enjoy incestuous sexual intercourse. ‘Surely, I listen to your words’, says this brother to his sisters in one song, ‘for you are my great leader: I always follow you....’.<sup>16</sup>

## mortally wounded Kunmanggur meanders snake-like across the landscape, stopping periodically in order to bleed

a bird stealing fire from a watery monster it admits, quite simply, that men stole the secret from women. Women originally monopolised the ritual secrets – including above all the magic of blood alternating with fire – thanks to their primal custodianship of their own reproductive organs. When men stole everything through trickery, women consoled themselves by recalling that they still possessed wombs and vaginas. These, however, had been robbed of their former magical power.

groups. The sisters are depicted as streaming with blood – particularly afterbirth blood. Finally, they drag immense clitorises along the ground. Possessing these, the sisters are reproductively self-sufficient. They don’t need men. As an informant explains, the two sisters ‘...may originally have been bisexual, so that their clitorises were actually penes which they used to impregnate themselves by inserting into the vagina; for the ‘clitoris-penes’ were sufficiently long to curve round and use for coitus’.<sup>15</sup>

The Two Sisters wander over the landscape, giving things their present names. In the words of one of Warner’s informants:

*‘...they gave all the trees, stones, birds, animals, everything names. They named the mud and everything. That is why we have names for these things today. We did not name them ourselves’.*<sup>17</sup>

Sacred objects known as *rangas* fell out from their wombs at various named places as the women wandered on their journey. For example, a particularly large *ranga* fell from the younger sister’s womb

at the Yaor-yaor well of the Naladaer people on Napier's Peninsula:

*'...those two women squatted down there and a stone ranga fell out of the womb of the younger one. This stone can be seen a short distance from the well. Anyone can go touch it. That stone is bigger than a house. Women do not know it is a ranga.'*<sup>18</sup>

At Nguruninana on Elcho Island, the sisters left magic dreamings, the most important of which was the red ochre dreaming. The sisters are said to have spoken here: 'We leave this red ochre, so that all the people may get it from us'.<sup>19</sup> Red ochre, according to Berndt, 'is symbolic of the afterbirth blood shed by the two sisters', and is also associated with the redness of the sun. Today, red ochre from Elcho Island is traded far inland and all along the coast.

The myth explains that when the sisters possessed the *rangas* (that is, the ritual power conferred by their own sexual organs), they were thereby enabled to compel the men to hunt for them:

*'In the old times men used to get food for women and*

## **the sisters left magic dreamings, the most important of which was the red ochre dreaming**

*the women sat down on the inside and looked after the rangas.'*<sup>20</sup>

But then something terrible happened. One day, the sisters were camped as usual in a sacred shade – a place of seclusion and intimacy, prohibited to men. Unknown to them, a group of sons and brothers who had recently emerged from the sisters' wombs were hiding nearby. They enviously watched from afar as the all-powerful Sisters held a sacred *nara* ceremony 'which was their "own business", to which the men could not come'.<sup>21</sup> It was during this ceremony that the

women 'made fire, *rindjarei*, the sacred fire dreaming, for fire comes from the redness of the women's

## **The sisters drag immense clitorises along the ground...They are reproductively self-sufficient. They don't need men**

vaginae'. Berndt adds: '...the sun's full disc at midday is termed *dagu*, *ganbai*, or *dala*, vagina or vulva, and it is from the vulvae of the Sisters that the sun's rays come....'<sup>22</sup>

After their ceremony, the women 'hung their fighting dilly bags, decorated with tasselled pendants of red parakeet feathers, on the limb of a tree, and went out to collect shell-fish.' The elder sister had made the decision to leave. She had said to the younger:

*'We had better put our dilly bags in this shade, and leave them here for a while.'*

*'What are we going to do?' asked the other. 'If we put them here, what are we going to do?'*

*'Well, replied the elder Sister, 'we can look around for mangrove shells.'*

So they both abandoned their 'dilly bags' in the sacred shade, with the sacred fire still burning there, and went to collect shells.

As soon as the women had gone, the men crept up:

*The men sat listening in their shade; and when they heard no noise, no singing or dancing, they said to one another, 'All right. It is no good that we are men. It is no good that women should have that sacred bag and all the dressings, and we should have nothing. We'll take over*

*from those women.' They all agreed, 'Yes'.*

*So they came up to the women's sacred shade and went inside; and there they found all the dreamings, all the *rangga* and clan patterns. They began to dance and sing the sacred songs which they had learnt by listening to the women, and which are still sung today in the *dua nara*. As they sang they looked in the direction the women had taken, but saw no sign of them. Then they took down the sacred dilly bag of the women and danced with it.'*<sup>23</sup>

The sisters were still out collecting shellfish, when suddenly they heard a *djunman* bird crying aloud. 'What is it crying for?' asked the younger sister:

*'That bird cries to let us know', answered the other. 'Perhaps something has happened to our sacred dilly bags. Maybe the fire has burnt them. We had better go back and look.'*

*They left what they were doing, and ran back towards their shade. The dilly bags were gone, and on the ground about the shade were the tracks of the men who had stolen them.*

*'Sister, look!' called the younger Sister. 'What are we going to do now? Where are our dilly bags?'*

*'We had better go down and ask the men' said the other, 'it's nothing to do with them.'*

*They hurried off, down towards the men.'*<sup>24</sup>

The same scene is depicted in an alternative rendering in song, this time with an emphasis on the theme of fire – the ‘sacred fire dreaming’ left by the women in their shade:

*There is nothing here, Sister!*

*We must ask the others: for here are the footprints of our Brother Djanggawul,*

## **given the transfer of women’s ritual power to men, we would expect an economic inversion, with men now using their ‘stolen’ ritual power to compel women to bring food for them**

*‘We shall see what has happened to our basket.*

*The long-drawn cry of the djunmal bird has warned us: perhaps the fire has burnt it...*

*and the galibingu. They may have taken it from us!*

*Go, pour the shells from our basket on to the glowing coals of the fire...*



Yolngu waterscape

*Yes, indeed, Sister, let us go now, and look!*

*Quickly, indeed, go and look!*

*There is nothing here, Sister! But we left the sacred basket hanging here!*

*Only the tree, the claypan tree, is standing alone!*

*.. It must have fallen down, arid been burnt in the fire.*

*Yes, Sister, indeed, it must have fallen somewhere!*

*Go quickly, run fast to look for the basket...*

*It must have been burnt in the fire.*

*Why do they take the sacred basket from us, leaving only the shells?*

*We tip them upon the flames, the smouldering claypan wood...*

*We leave them, so we may look for that sacred basket...*

*Why do they take it from us in stealth, like children playing?*

*...Why do they act like children, playing?*

*Why didn’t they ask us? Why did they do it?*

*They came sneaking along and stole our basket, quietly, without asking!’*

The sisters set off in search of the culprits:

*They hurried off, down towards the men. As they came running, the Djanggawul Brother and his companions looked up from their shade and saw them.*

*‘What shall we do?’ thought the Brother. He picked up his Jugulung singing sticks (stolen from the Sisters), and began to beat rhythmically upon them, while they all sang.*

*As soon as the Sisters heard the beat of the singing sticks, and the sound of the men’s singing, they fell down and began to crawl along the ground.*

The story concludes by confirming that what have really been stolen from the women are their symbolic ‘vaginas’ – or, to use the terms of the template, their rights to control their own sexual availability. The sisters, forced on to the ground by the power of the men’s songs, console themselves with the thought that at least their reproductive organs are still there:

*The men had taken from them not only these songs, and the emblems, but also the power to perform sacred ritual, a power which had formerly belonged only to the Sisters. They had carried the emblems and dreamings in their ngainmara (conical mats), which were really their uteri; and the men had had nothing.*

*The Two Sisters got up from the ground, and the younger one said to the elder, ‘What are we going to do? All our dilly bags are gone, all the emblems, all our power for sacred ritual!’*



*But the other replied, 'I think we can leave that. Men can do it now, they can look after it. We can spend our time collecting bush foods for them, for it is not right that they should get that food as they have been doing. We know everything. We have really lost nothing, for we remember it all, and we can let them have that small part. For aren't we still sacred, even if we have lost the bags? Haven't we still our uteri?'. And the younger sister agreed with her.*

*In this way, the Two Sisters left all their dreamings at that place.*

Among the dreamings left behind was the 'sacred fire dreaming' of the *Nara* ritual – fire whose source, we may recall, was 'the redness of the women's vaginae'.

A final detail is worth noting. The 'menstrual sex-strike' theory of human social origins<sup>25</sup> specifies that women used their solidarity in pursuit of distinctively female economic interests. The menstrual prohibition of raw meat compelled men to bring back whatever they hunted to women, so ensuring its proper circulation and distribution. We would expect, then, that the breaking by men of women's powers in this respect should also have economic consequences. It should imply that women can no longer use their ritual power to compel men to bring them food. In fact, given the transfer of women's ritual power to men, we would expect an economic inversion to accompany the other inversions, with men now using their 'stolen' ritual power to compel women to bring food for them.

Warner's version<sup>26</sup> confirms that

this is the native view. The defeated Sisters concede:

*'It is no good now for us to try to get those baskets. We must work hard now. We women must get the food for the men from now on', said the big sister to the little one.*



Yolngu in swamp, sketch from 1930s photo

*'Yes, sister', said the little one, 'we can't do anything now. It's our own fault.'*

*They went back to their camp and told all the women always to make plenty of food for the Narra time. Women do that now. The men who had stolen the ranga talked to each other. They said, 'It is a good thing we took this ranga from those women, because now they can get food for us.'*

*In the old times men used to get food for women and the women sat down on the inside and looked after the rangas....'*

Berndt's song version<sup>27</sup> succinctly expresses this same idea. The Brother Djanggawul declares, following his sisters' defeat:

*'Now they may grind the cycad nut for us, whitening their*

*hands in its flour: it is better that way!'*

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# Otto Gross – Anarchist Psychoanalyst

Mark Kosman introduces a forgotten thinker.



One of the most restrictive tendencies in academia is dividing knowledge into ever more specialisms. This not only leads to the various specialisms misunderstanding each other, but also means that scientific insights are less likely to inspire political and social change.

This was less of a problem in the past when radical thinkers like Marx could advocate a more holistic view of the world. While Marx could not be ignored, other wide-ranging radical thinkers could be.

One example was Freud's early disciple, Otto Gross. Despite his many flaws, Gross managed to combine interests in Stirner, Nietzsche, Freud, Kropotkin, 'sexual revolution', feminism and the German Communist Party. He was also an important influence on Jung, Kafka and Berlin Dada.

In David Cronenberg's film *The Dangerous Method*, Vincent Cassel recently played Gross. In one

interview, Cronenberg claimed that: 'Freud, at first, thought that Gross was ... the most brilliant of them all. More brilliant even than Jung — maybe even than Freud.'<sup>1</sup> This may be an exaggeration but Gross certainly argued the revolutionary potential of psychoanalysis, many years before other radical psychoanalysts such as Reich, Marcuse, Fromm or Laing.

As the following article shows, Gross also outlined ideas of a future revolution that will return humanity to the 'mother-right communism' of prehistory, long before today's renewed interest in grandmothering, matriliney and human origins — research to which several members of the Radical Anthropology Group have contributed.

## *Overcoming the cultural crisis, by Otto Gross<sup>2</sup>*

*The psychology of the unconscious is the philosophy of revolution: i.e., this is what it is destined to become because it ferments insurrection within the psyche, and liberates individuality from the bonds of its own unconscious. It is destined to make us inwardly capable of freedom, destined to prepare the ground for the revolution.*

*The incomparable revaluation of all values, with which the imminent future will be filled, begins in this present time with Nietzsche's thinking about the depths of the soul and with Freud's discovery of the so-called psychoanalytic technique. This latter is a practical method which for the first time makes it possible to liberate the unconscious for empirical knowledge: i.e., for us it has now become possible to know ourselves. With this a new ethic is born, which will rest upon the moral imperative to seek real knowledge about oneself and one's fellow men.*

*What is so overpowering in this new obligation to appreciate the truth is that until today we have known nothing of the question that matters incomparably above all others — the question of what is intrinsic,*

*essential in our own being, our inner life, our self and that of our fellow human beings; we have never even been in position to inquire about these things. What we are learning to know is that, as we are today, each one of us possesses and recognises as his own only a fraction of the totality embraced by his psychic personality.*

*In every psyche without exception the unity of the functioning whole, the unity of consciousness, is torn in two, an unconscious has split itself off and maintains its existence by keeping itself apart from the guidance and control of consciousness, apart from any kind of self-observation, especially that directed at itself.*

*I must assume that knowledge of the Freudian method and its important results is already widespread. Since Freud we understand all that is inappropriate and inadequate in our mental life to be the results of inner experiences whose emotional content excited intense conflict in us. At the time of those experiences — especially in early childhood — the conflict seemed insoluble, and they were excluded from the continuity*

*of the inner life as it is known to the conscious ego. Since then they have continued to motivate us from the unconscious in an uncontrollably destructive and oppositional way. I believe that what is really decisive for the occurrence of repression is to be found in the inner conflict ... rather than in relation to the sexual impulse. Sexuality is the universal motive for the infinite number of internal conflicts, though not in itself but as the object of a sexual morality which stands in insoluble conflict with everything that is of value and belongs to willing and reality.*

*It appears that at the deepest level the real nature of these conflicts may always be traced back to one comprehensive principle, to the conflict between that which belongs to oneself and that which belongs to the other, between that which is innately individual and that which has been suggested to us, i.e., that which is educated or otherwise forced into us.*

*This conflict of individuality with an authority that has penetrated into our own innermost self belongs more to the period of childhood than to any other time.*

*The tragedy is correspondingly greater as a person's individuality is more richly endowed, is stronger in its own particular nature. The earlier and the more intensely that the capacity to withstand suggestion and interference begins its protective function, the earlier and the more intensely will the self-divisive conflict be deepened and exacerbated...*

*It is understood from all this that such characters hitherto, no matter in what outward form they manifest themselves – whether they are opposed to laws and morality, or lead us positively beyond the average,*

*or collapse internally and become ill – have been perceived with either disgust, veneration or pity as disturbing exceptions whom people try to eliminate. It will come to be understood that, already today, there exists the demand to approve these people as the healthy, the warriors, the progressives, and to learn from and through them.*

*Not one of the revolutions in recorded history has succeeded in establishing freedom for individuality. They all fell flat, each time as precursors of a new bourgeoisie, they ended in a hurried desire to conform to general norms. They have collapsed because the revolutionary of yesterday carried authority within himself. Only now can it be recognized that the root of all authority lies in the family, that the combination of sexuality and authority, as it shows itself in the patriarchal family still prevailing today, claps every individuality in chains.*

*The times of crisis in advanced cultures have so far always been attended by complaints about the loosening of the ties of marriage and family life ... but people could never hear in this 'immoral tendency' the life affirming ethical crying out of humanity for redemption. Everything went to wrack and ruin, and the problem of emancipation from original sin, from the enslavement of women for the sake of their children, remained unsolved.*

*The revolutionary of today, who, armed with the psychology of the unconscious has a vision of a free, happy future for the relationship between the sexes, fights against the most primal form of rape, against the father and against father right. The coming revolution is the revolution for mother right. It does not matter under what outward form and by what means it comes about.*

In Otto Gross' view, the rape that established patriarchy was the true 'original sin' and 'the entire structure of civilisation since the destruction of the primitive communistic mother-right order is false.'<sup>3</sup> He also argued that 'the real liberation of woman, the dissolution of the father-right family by socialising the care of motherhood, is in the vital interests of every member of society, granting him the highest freedom.'<sup>4</sup>

Gross' poor record at parenting his own children rather discredits his opinions on childcare. But he certainly took the issue seriously at

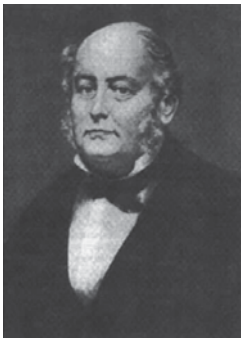
an intellectual level. Indeed, the last paragraph of his last article states: 'The mission: to make individual cells of the social body an object of agitation and sabotage. To initiate a fight against the principle of the family, that is, against the prevailing family of the Father Right, on behalf of the Communist Mother Right.'<sup>5</sup>

Gross derived these ideas from Johann Bachofen, the 19th century historian, who wrote: 'The end of the development of the state resembles the beginning of human existence. The original equality finally returns. The maternal element opens and closes the cycle

of everything human'.<sup>6</sup>

Inspired by Marx, Engels was also very interested in Bachofen's ideas, as well as those of Lewis Henry Morgan, claiming that: 'This re-discovery of the primitive matriarchal gens as the earlier stage of the patriarchal gens of civilised peoples has the same importance for anthropology as Darwin's theory of evolution has for biology, and Marx's theory of surplus value for political economy'.<sup>7</sup> Marxists such as Ernst Bloch, Walter Benjamin and Wilhelm Reich continued this interest in Bachofen, and Erich Fromm wrote about the 'materialist-

## In his last article Gross states: 'The mission ...To initiate a fight against the principle of the family, that is, against the prevailing family of the Father Right, on behalf of the Communist Mother Right'



Bachofen: a pioneer of research into sexual communism

democratic character of matriarchal societies'.<sup>8</sup> However, as the threat of social revolution continued into the 1930s, the anthropological establishment wanted to discredit all such ideas. Bronislaw Malinowski made his thoughts clear when he said:

*'A whole school of anthropologists, from Bachofen on, have maintained that the maternal clan was the*

*primitive domestic institution. ... In my opinion, as you know, this is entirely incorrect. But an idea like that, once it is taken seriously and applied to modern conditions, becomes positively dangerous. I believe that the most disruptive element in the modern revolutionary tendencies is the idea that parenthood can be made collective. If once we came to the point of doing away with the individual family as the pivotal element of our society, we should be faced with a social catastrophe compared with which the political upheaval of the French revolution and the economic changes of Bolshevism are insignificant. The question, therefore, as to whether group motherhood is an institution which ever existed, whether it is an arrangement which is compatible with human nature and social order, is of considerable practical interest.'*<sup>9</sup>

In recent years, however, evolutionary anthropological and palaeogenetic studies of African hunter-gatherers indicate that early human society probably tended to be matrilineal and matrilineal.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, in many simple hunter-gatherer communities, childcare is more collective, and women have more power, than in agricultural societies. Bachofen, Morgan, Marx, Engels and Gross may yet be vindicated in the teeth of the anthropological establishment of the mid-20th century.

It remains to be seen whether Gross' prediction of a 'revolution for mother right', or Marx's not dissimilar prediction of capitalism's 'fatal crisis [leading to] ... the return of modern society to a higher form of the most archaic type', will be fulfilled in this century.<sup>11</sup>

### Notes

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## Keep the Noise Down. *Rebel Cities* sleeping

Ian Fillingham reviews David Harvey's *Rebel Cities*.

Thursday July 5 2012. The champagne corks finally come to rest after ping-pong around the offices of the CERN laboratories the night before. Physicists wake up with hangovers and in that moment of reality suspension on waking, just as the headache arrives, they look at the universe around them and remember the new certainty they've worked so hard to bring about. Two of the top-dog physicists actually managed to get their corks to collide mid-air. That went down well. How comic and clever at the same time.

They haven't looked at the news for a while. The lingering financial crisis has become background noise, far away from their bigger concerns with understanding the nature of the universe. Capitalism will fix itself soon, it always does and now they've almost probably found the all-important trace of the mass-giving particle, all their funding will soon be seen to be worthwhile. What they didn't expect was to wake up to find that although they had proved their beloved Standard Theory of the universe to be correct, the traditional theory of banking had finally fallen apart.

Five years after the 'short term' fix of Quantitative Easing had been used to temporarily prop up the banking system until normal profitability resumed, The Bank of England issued another bundle. The European Central Bank (ECB) reduced its Deposit Interest Rate to 0%. Chinese rates were simultaneously lowered to ease the landing from their own imminent banking crisis caused by a deflating property bubble, much more massive than in the US in 2007. Financial commentators had been rumouring of Central Bankers

toying with the 'Twilight Zone' of negative interest rates, and although zero was just a step towards this, it signified the end of the old certainty of the banking investment model of capitalism. Money was eroding.

Most people think of zero as the lowest number. Apart from maths

good old healthy profitable banking was restored.

0%, and soon negative rates, means this narrative has to change. Banks and fund markets are permanently broken after 40 years of debt-based financing and unable to survive as capitalist entities without support,



David Harvey with Occupy Wall St, Mayday 2012

GCSE students, not many people have to deal with negative numbers. The idea of savers giving a bank £100 and getting £90 back a while later does not fit with the Standard Model of banking. The banking crisis has just turned a corner, and not the one expected.

The narrative up until the Higgs moment was of excessive profiteering (remember 125% mortgages?) by banks, leading to a liquidity crisis as the now questionable loans turned bad, and they couldn't find all the money deposited with them by savers when they asked for it back. To prevent the unthinkable collapse of the banking system, Government and Central Bank intervention was required to see them through until

which adds ever more debt onto the debt burden already many times bigger than global output. They have erased themselves from the capitalist map and may as well be fully nationalised as non-profit social institutions.

If ECB chief Mario Draghi's experiment with the Twilight Zone does work, although the financial system survives, the banking model flips, banks stop investing and follow the corporate sector into cash hoarding. Whereas gold can sit in a vault acquiring value due to its intrinsic scarcity, money based on endless debt can't. Companies which have built up massive cash reserves face the prospect of seeing them dissolve. If it doesn't work, and Draghi has no century-old

Occupy.net

Einsteinian theory to guide him in his laboratory, the erosion of money will speed up, leading us to a rapidly expanding new universe no one in the capitalist West has so far imagined. A world without money.

So, as the physicists prove that the solidity in the surface of a coin is actually an appearance caused by the tiniest sub-atomic particle we have so far discovered, whizzing around so fast it's everywhere at once, the bankers seemed to have achieved the near destruction of the

work in exchange for shiny things – we haven't noticed the challenge to the existence of everything?

We recently passed the point where more of the world's population lives inside cities, and the complexity of capitalist resource distribution has wrapped us all in a fragile but damaging food chain. Massive companies have grown by extracting megaprofits from this chain of supply, causing huge ecological damage both to world habitats in the present and more

capitalist phases of urbanisation, striving to control our resistant forces of social movements, enabling capitalism to reproduce itself so effectively, absorbing capital surplus accumulation while spreading its tentacles as more and more people become hooked into its wealth-creating debt channels. The post-crisis phase of repossession is both a key means of wealth re-accumulation where those enticed into the pre-crisis debt bubble are dispossessed, and an opportunity to reurbanise for control: poor

## **A walk down the aisle of the train including a stroll through first class takes you past enough computing power to run a train network plus a few daily services to the moon, but most of it is used for playing poker...**

value of money using a similar trick with debt. They are now trading in a twilight world requiring a World War II scale of destruction of production capacity to realign their so far successfully socialised debt burden. But just as the surface of things has not actually changed, our everyday use of money is likely to continue, though clearly we're going to see less of it. In fact ex-Bank of England Monetary Policy Committee member and core rate-fixer, Willem Buiter, is currently touring his powerpoint to Central Bankers on the abolition of that problematic: anonymised cash in the post can-kicking negative universe. The compliant population will no doubt take to chip-and-pin-only transactions like a duck to decimalisation, but what about the rest of us?

A walk down the aisle of the train including a stroll through first class takes you past enough computing power to run a train network plus a few daily services to the moon, but most of it is used for playing poker, watching Hollywood action films, maybe emailing the office. Are we hiding in caves while the last of the dinosaurs slog it out down on the plain? Are we all so busy striving to prove the certainty of the eroding theory of our lives – meaningless

worryingly the future. Cities are expanding, not because they're an efficient habitat in ecological balance, but because they are now intrinsic to capital reproduction. Despite the current death throes of the traditional model of economic growth widely acknowledged by financial commentators, we have lived in commercialised cities so long that we seem to have forgotten our collective identities. Late capitalism's subjects seem to experience the collective effect of the downward spiral in isolation, without a cultural identity to understand the attack. The nature of capitalism is mistaken for human nature and therefore unchangeable. We have learned to fear our interdependence in chaos rather than celebrate our interdependent creativity and plan a rational means of making sure no one remains homeless, landless or hungry. How do we re-learn a collective identity that can be a foundation of a resistance forceful enough to establish a post-market society?

In his *Rebel Cities. From the right to the city to urban revolution*, David Harvey looks hard for an answer. He shows how a capitalist elite steers the reproduction of the city to feed capital and starve collectivity. He clearly lays out the role of the

neighbourhoods are remodelled for further wealth recreation as well as suppression of resistance. While capital's surplus is produced in the factory, it is reproduced with powerful effect in the cities. Harvey makes a good case for organising directly against this force of capital, especially at weak moments in its cycle – that is, around now – as an effective struggle against capital's control, though he fails to identify the killer tactic. Appealing to the left to adapt to the new terrain of struggle beyond the workplace, he describes resistance based on both workplace and community organisational forms around the world's cities and explores the scope for a collective fightback.

Harvey's book is actually a collection of articles mostly written between 2008 and 2011. Chapter 5, first published in *Socialist Register* in 2011, is called 'Reclaiming the city for anti-capitalist struggle'. Here he attempts to describe what form an anti-capitalist city could take. After a dizzying descriptive journey around the world and through history pointing out the symbiotic tides of urbanisation informing and informed by military control of restive populations, and the varying successes of urban resistance leading towards new



photo: Ben Dangl

Bartolina Sisa women's organization marches in support of Bolivia's new constitution. El Alto, Bolivia, February, 2009

terrains of struggle, he comes to rest on the 4000m plateau above La Paz in Bolivia. El Alto, a small village in 1903, now approaches a population of a million; after enduring harsh economic conditions in the 1990s, local, national and global forces of capital's neoliberal project were

of Morales by neoliberal forces, even after the El Alto resistance tide went out, there remained a city organised along insurrectionist lines. It comprised a mixture of neighbourhood assemblies providing collective local goods and conventional unions with a local,

*their strength from the domination of these particular political circumstances with much more long-standing processes of identification with the countryside and the construction of a collective sense of self.'*<sup>1</sup>

Her account is probably the closest we get to understand how an anti-capitalist city works. She concludes:

*'citizenship in the indigenous city of El Alto involves a mix of urban and rural, collectivism and individualism, egalitarianism and hierarchy. The alternative visions of democracy that are being produced have reinvigorated national and regional indigenous movements by the ways that they combine class-based and nationalist concerns with identity politics, through contestation over the ownership of the means of social reproduction and the nature of the state.'*<sup>2</sup>

While El Alto clearly has particular conditions in its mix of traditions and indigenous culture, providing

## **Altenos speak of becoming conscious after 500 years of oppression. They have re-occupied their collective identity and regularly give it coherence and force through turning their streets over to carnival.**

derailed in 2003 by an effective resistance movement. Following the success of the 'water wars' in Cochabamba in 2000 where multinationals Bechtel and Suez were turfed out during their attempt at privatisation, an effective rebellion in El Alto, organised through a mix of indigenous communitarian tradition and assembly-style mass mobilisations forced the resignation of the neoliberal president in 2003 as well as his successor in 2005. This paved the way for the election of the first indigenous president Evo Morales in December 2005.

Despite the consequent recapturing

regional and national organisational structure intact, despite 30 years of neoliberal assault. To explore the particular and universal conditions that gave rise to this anti-capitalist city, Harvey quotes anthropologist Sian Lazar, who returned to El Alto after the rebellion. Taken by surprise after not seeing it coming on her earlier visit in the 1990s, she points to the circumstances of neglect by the Bolivian state that led Altenos to self-organise in the face of economic hardship:

*'The protests of September and October 2003 and subsequent years derive*

a foundation for a revolt that persisted, there is much that is universal especially in the assault on organised workers and their displacement into precarious work through deindustrialisation and privatisation. Their adaptation to the new conditions, finding solidarity networks in the face of an economic need for competitiveness, clearly produced a collective force strong enough to dissolve the market forces they faced. The key here is in the reproduction of collective identity, as Harvey points out:

*'there is something else at work in El Alto...Underlying*

*values and ideals are particularly strong, and are often upheld and articulated through popular cultural events and activities – fiestas, religious festivals, dance events – as well as through more direct forms of collective participation, such as the popular assemblies.’ (p.148)*

It may be that Altonos’ pre-capitalist, indigenous cultural identity – traditional social relations that persisted despite immersion in the market forces that drove them from their land – was the vital extra ingredient. Their response to economic downturn is not unique, but their survival is. El Alto is organised by a participatory popular administration which engages all of the city’s residents in multiple, counterbalanced associations of assemblies, both neighbourhood and work-based. Whatever particular characteristic enables them to endure, expressing the solidity of their unifying values through popular cultural events such as fiestas, enacts a collective identity discovered through uniting and mobilising to struggle. Altonos speak of becoming conscious after 500 years of oppression. They have re-occupied their collective identity and regularly give it coherence and force through turning their streets over to carnival.

While capitalist states tolerate carnivals, and even encourage the tension release as a useful means of maintaining ultimate control, fundamentally they know the nature of the threat they represent, not just in the moment in transforming

the immediate function of the city, but in the long term, allowing an autonomous identity to be shared and grow. We have used carnival tactically to temporarily dissolve the power of the state to control the city. But in the El Alto case, carnival is all-embracing. It’s not enough to celebrate a sub-cultural identity, as we’ve tended to. We need to bring the whole working, debt-servicing, compliant but seething population with us. We *are* the city

Harvey ends his ‘Reclaiming the city’ chapter with the endlessly unresolved question of the ‘higher-scale generality... the hugely important jester in this otherwise rosy-looking scenario for the development of anti-capitalist struggle’ (p.151), and ‘The question of the state, and in particular what kind of state (or non-capitalist equivalent) cannot be avoided even in the midst of immense contemporary scepticism.’ (p.153)

But he doesn’t need his hugely self-important theoretical jester distracting us with a false, or at least unproven necessity. Unless we take the first step towards freeing ourselves from our dependence on market forces, the question of the state is academic. Harvey seems unable to escape some deep-left structure in his thought that puts an assumed need for a state above autonomous communities. He claims Murray Bookchin’s concept of non-hierarchical confederation of municipalities requires some higher governance to ensure fair distribution of goods, decision-making at some higher scale to manage democratically such things

as the common wealth. But surely we have to get to autonomous collectives first to find out how they will negotiate.

His idea here seems contaminated with an assumption of self-interest that we would surely leave behind on the path to autonomy; how can we achieve collectivity held back by ideas conceived under the influence of self-interest? Despite this homage to a tired debate that can be shelved until some ground is taken, Harvey makes a good case for staging a fight for the cities. As the Olympic golden tide flows out, training for the contest over the means of social reproduction begins.

His survey of resistance pulsing through time and space, arising in particular conditions, fighting a universal struggle with common values of social justice, does a good job in reminding us that despite the appearance of the solidity of things in the capitalist universe which may or may not be crumbling, expanding, shrinking or about to explode, creative human collectivity wakes up every day all over the planet and asserts the underlying phenomena of solidarity, co-operation and a refusal to live lives reduced to money.

#### Notes

1. Lazar, S. 2010. *El Alto, Rebel City*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, p.260, cited by Harvey, p.149.
2. Lazar, p.260.

*Rebel Cities. From the right to the city to urban revolution*, by David Harvey, Verso Books, 2012, pp.208.

**Ian Fillingham** worked with London Reclaim the Streets in the mid 90s, and linked struggles with the Liverpool Dockers in 1997. He founded *Rhythms of Resistance* Samba Band which helped shut down the IMF/ World Bank Summit in Prague 2000. Currently chasing precarious work, he is paying far too much interest on an unsustainable amount of debt in exchange for a far too quiet existence in Hebden Bridge



# ***Weaponizing Anthropology: Social science in service of the militarized state*, by David H. Price**

A review by **Simon Wells**

James Cameron's 2009 film *Avatar* was, unusually for a blockbuster, about anthropology. Its plot turned on concerns that many anthropologists today have about the uses of their discipline for military gain. David Price's book scrutinizes those concerns.

Price's academic homepage tells you that his new book continues a history of the linkages between anthropology and military intelligence agencies. It brings that debate up to the current period



from an American perspective. This book should also be read by all who are concerned about the fate of our academic institutions. Along with Roberto Gonzalez, Price is the leading researcher in this area, a contributor to *Counterpunch*, a radical journal covering American foreign policy, and a member of the Network of Concerned Anthropologists.

Price demonstrates the linkage between the military establishment, anthropologists and the university campus. The Human Terrain System (HTS) is the practical outcome of these linkages: a system providing frontline army personnel with knowledge of the areas they

are occupying and the 'enemy' populations they are combating. This system was the tool used by US imperialism post-9/11 when George Bush announced, 'you are either with us, or with the terrorists'. But this new war on terror, unlike the terrorism of the US war machine in Central and South America during the 1980s, required a softer approach on indigenous and minority peoples, struggling for human rights and political recognition. These struggles include non-violent action such as taking part in banned religious ceremonies, where the asymmetric balance of power is weighted towards interests favoured by the hegemonic states.

that 'anthropologists should not withhold research results from research participants when those results are shared with others'.<sup>2</sup> This is one theme that Price shows has most damaged anthropology as a discipline.

The war on terror and the use of HTS bring to the foreground debates that have been ongoing since the beginning of the 20th century. Historically, anthropology has been concerned with indigenous people; the information provided by indigenous cultures through a process of informed consent is framed by ethical considerations as to its uses. British anthropology

## **Franz Boas warned against prostitution of scientists as spies.**

Price details the flawed approach of HTS, and the use of anthropological research to further the aims of the 'war on terror'.

American anthropologist Franz Boas was censured by the American Anthropological Association (AAA) when he wrote that the actions of anthropologists in the First World War had 'prostituted science by using it as a cover for their activities as spies'.<sup>1</sup> The AAA were worried that Boas' comments would hinder the ability of other anthropologists to do fieldwork. And this has been a problem for anthropology where political and economic priorities come first. Although the activities of Ruth Benedict, Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead contributed to the World War II war effort, this was a less cynical use of anthropology. Price describes the AAA's symbiotic relationship with the establishment. Not until quite recently did the AAA revise its code of ethics to restore the prohibition against secrecy,

originated from a fuzzy haze of funding for colonial administrators trained in ethnographic methods to anthropologists who secured funding to address colonial aims. Bronislaw Malinowski, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and Raymond Firth emerged during the period leading up to World War II. British anthropology secured itself as a scientific discipline fulfilling the practical needs of an Empire that was being challenged during the inter-imperialist conflict. Whereas 20th century anthropology involved quite overt uses of the knowledge it produced, Price shows that 21st century anthropology has become the victim of a much more systematised and covert war machine. In prosecution of the war on terror, with HTS as a frontline weapon, ethical concerns have all but disappeared.

Colonial administrators and willing anthropologists of the last century did the job to consolidate

the Empire. However, inquisitive anthropologists in the field could not be relied upon to provide anthropological service to their paymasters once they had been supplied with funding. Price shows nowadays that the CIA, FBI, the Defence Intelligence Agency and Homeland Security deliberately recruit and place students in universities that tie them to those intelligence agencies. Programs such as the National Security Education Program (NSEP) and the Pat Roberts Intelligence Scholars Program (PRISP) provide students with funds to study in areas of national security interest. In a period of austerity and reduced funding to universities from government, programs such as NESP and PRISP determine and direct the areas of study which bring in funding. Always the case to some extent, this has accelerated during the war on terror, bringing with it tensions in the academic establishment. And what of the students? They receive a wealth of funds but with harsh payback penalties if they don't make themselves available to vacancies the military establishment needs to fulfil its imperial ambitions.

This new turn to a smarter war is encapsulated in the U.S. Army and Marine Corps *Counterinsurgency Field Manual* published in 2006. In the forward to the manual, U.S. Army Commander David Petraeus, now Director of the CIA, notes

that 'You cannot fight former Saddamists and Islamic extremists the same way you have fought the Viet Cong...all insurgencies, even today's highly adaptable strains, remain wars amongst the people'. Furthermore he adds, that soldiers and marines 'must be prepared to help reestablish institutions and local security forces and assist in rebuilding infrastructure and basic services. They must be able to facilitate establishing local governance and the rule of law'. This raises the fears of anthropologists for the struggles of indigenous peoples when the manual was being sold, to use Price's words, as a 'dream of cultural engineering'. Price reveals the manual to be nothing more than plagiarism of the first order, lifting texts without attribution from brilliant anthropologists such as Victor Turner. This reflects scant regard for anthropological ethics and academic integrity.

Bush's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan opened the gates for many anthropologists to enter the 'smarter war' viewing ethics as a luxury. Price is withering about anthropologist Montgomery McFate whom he sees as the architect of militarising anthropology and HTS. Her fieldwork on British counterinsurgency operations against the Irish Republican Army provided the model for military conquest. It is McFate, Price contends, who has betrayed basic

ethical standards that protect the interests of the studied populations. There was an excuse in World War I and II when there were no professional ethical standards. The AAA only formalised a code of ethics in 1971. Although the use of anthropology may signal a new softer turn in wars abroad that appeals to the liberal minded, Price calls this an anthropological abomination.

To return to the war on terror, the answer to George Bush's question, is not yes or no. There is another answer. Anthropologists, students and concerned others – like the ethnographers in *Avatar* – should side with the struggles of indigenous populations and demand the recall of occupying forces.

#### Notes

1. Boas, F. 2005. *Scientists as Spies*, In *Anthropology Today* 21 (3): 27: <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/toc/anth/24/v1> Originally published in *The Nation*, Dec 20, 1919.
  2. See e.g proposed changes outlined on <http://blog.aaanet.org/2008/09/24/proposed-changes-to-the-aaa-code-of-ethics/>
- Weaponizing Anthropology: Social science in service of the militarized state*, by David H. Price. AK Press/Counterpunch, pp. 208.

**Simon Wells** is an activist and anthropology graduate.

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# The Utopian Promise of Government

Artist Andrew Cooper responds to Melanesian cosmology of the global banking system.

The drawing (on the back cover) comes from listening to Chris Knight and Camilla Power speaking about the Government of the Dead<sup>1</sup> which

*'...derives from an idea common to many cultures across the world. Those who live in the world, eating, drinking, having sex, are necessarily corrupt, being susceptible to the temptations of the flesh; only once dead, as ancestors, can they be trusted.<sup>2</sup> To join the Government, you must be dead. Lattas describes how in East New Britain 'government, ...its projects and promises of sovereignty, civilization, and development, is displaced and re-mediated through the world of the dead'.<sup>3</sup> The villagers have a strange belief: there must be justice somewhere in the world. The institutions of the living – governments, law-enforcement agencies, corporations and banks – are manifestly unjust. This is clearly observed as all the Cargo people produce flows the wrong way, from their villages towards the wealthy consumer world. Therefore justice can only be expected from the Underworld, which operates with perfect mimetic logic – a mirror reflection of business in the world above – ensuring Cargo flows back the right way, and justice is done.'*

They referred to a time when the people of Papua New Guinea would build runways for the dead as they were being so exploited that they thought the dead would want to come back and sort things out. They also thought the Europeans were so unfair in their business dealings there must be another office beneath the office run by the dead where the living were mimicked and things were just.

A number of connections formed. John Russell<sup>4</sup> gives a 'corpse-eye-view' of the limits between living and dead:

*'The frisson of excitement experienced is the flirtation with annihilation. That is, if art is pitched at a wider (mainly non-art) audience then it risks losing its art status and visibility as art and its differentiation from the chaos of other non-art messages – 'everything else'.*

This poem is an attempt to provide a condensed door of words and images to expand the drawing. It is about the common making itself felt, this link, although potentially productive of strange difference goes against the grain of a lot that is in our culture at the moment, which is about conformity through a paradoxical demarcation of specialness without limits. The dead do not demarcate themselves, as part of the common body they are the body from which difference grows like tubers or strange fungus. I was also thinking of Hamlet's ghost speaking a truth from under the ground, the worthy pioneer, the old mole, an image picked up by Marx. This is after all a dead relative.

Maybe the title would just be

## Re emergence

A common time lapsed seething-  
roots,  
worms,  
seaweed and tubors  
unowned idiosyncratic flowers  
–hope

The corpse's embrace imparts the worm  
very small and destructive  
Mimicry and laughter  
You are?! You are?!

What?

The artiste politician chose to work with the 'non' for the purpose of research productive of marketable identity...

The mimicking laugh comes from the ground from the long dissolved parent  
You are?! You are?!

What?

Repeat...

In his Thesis XII on the philosophy of history, Walter Benjamin observes:

*'Social Democracy thought fit to assign to the working class the role of the redeemer of future generations, in this way cutting the sinews of its greatest strength. This training made the working class forget both its hatred and its spirit of sacrifice, for both are nourished by the image of enslaved ancestors rather than that of liberated grandchildren.'*

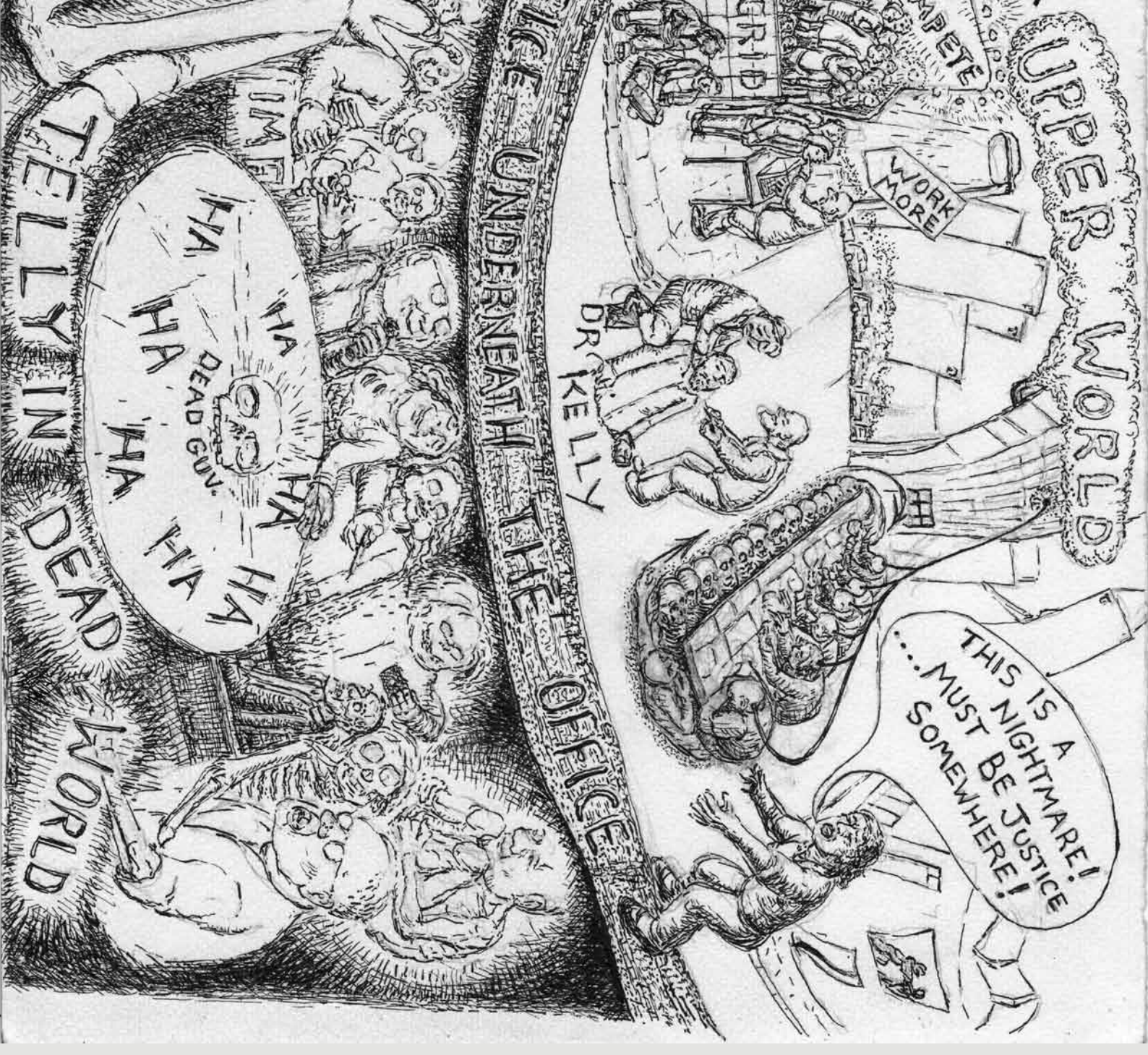
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1. Power, C., and C. Knight 2012. Arrest for attempted street theatre. *Anthropology Today* 28: 24-26.
2. Lan, D. 1985. *Guns and Rain. Guerrillas and spirit mediums in Zimbabwe*. Oxford: James Currey.
3. Lattas, A. 2006. The utopian promise of government. *J. Roy. Anthropol. Inst.* (N.S.) 12: 129.
4. Russell, J. 2011. Dear living person. *Mute* 3 (1) Double Negative Feedback. (Accessed on Aug 9, 2012) <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/dear-living-person>
5. Benjamin, W. 1999 [1940]. Thesis on the Philosophy of History (XII). In *Illuminations*. Pimlico, p.251. See <http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ThesesonHistory.html>

For an archive of Andrew Cooper's work please see <http://andrewcoopers.blogspot.com>

HUGE T.V. OF LAST JUDGMENT

IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA THEY WERE SO EXPLOITED THEY BUILT A RUNWAY SO THE DEAD CAN RETURN



UPPER WORLD

TELLY IN DEAD WORLD

THE OFFICE UNDERNEATH THE OFFICE

THIS IS A NIGHTMARE! ... MUST BE JUSTICE SOMEWHERE!

HA HA HA  
HA HA HA  
HA HA HA  
DEAD GUN.  
HA HA HA  
HA HA HA

DUPLICATE & CLIP

COMPLETE

WORK MORE

GRID

DR. KELLY