



Marlene Haring  
Anna Gonzalez Suero

# Equality, not Sameness

5 October 2017 at the Women's Art Library,  
Goldsmiths, University of London.

Sarah Diehl and Morna Finnegan were  
invited by Anna Gonzalez Suero and  
Marlene Haring to the second Art  
Research Seminar in two parts followed  
by an open discussion.

*Dear readers,  
Please find here the short announcements for the event, Gonzales Suero's account of the first part, the script for Haring's report of the Pregnant History Sorority and the text by Morna Finnegan, on which her talk was based, a recording of her talk and the conversations that followed with all speakers.*

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### **1st part: Unexpected Encounter with Sarah Diehl and Anna Gonzalez Suero**

We start by talking a little about the visual landscape of reproductive rights, focusing in particular on a few examples of antiabortion campaign imagery and tactics and a few things prochoice advocates have confronted in recent years. Why is it so difficult to find 'positive' images and symbols of abortion? (Petchesky 1987, 264) Is the visual an effective tool for prochoice? We will be thinking about prochoice imagery. Together, we will explore some approaches, following the idea 'that there is no single best view of pregnancy and thus no single best way to represent it' (Shrage 2003, 96).

### **2nd part: Giving Place with Morna Finnegan invited by Marlene Haring**

Most theories of human origins take little account of female reproductivity and explain the emergence of modern humans through male reproductive strategies or preoccupations with subsistence or warfare. A growing volume of research demonstrates that cooperative childcare, grounded in female coalitions, was an essential precursor to the 'emotional modernity' which defines our species. Why has this been largely ignored in recent debates on human evolution and cognition? I argue that systems based on contact and response, as opposed to control and command, are the ancient template for humans. What are the political and social implications of research into such systems among egalitarian hunter-gatherers today?

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## 1st part: *Unexpected encounter*

by Anna Gonzalez Suero

The first part of the art seminar was entitled *Unexpected Encounter*. It addressed the current visual landscape of reproductive rights. In what follows I provide a brief account of the first part for which I invited prochoice activist Sarah Diehl. Diehl is a journalist, filmmaker, and writer from Berlin, Germany.

I started by talking about how abortion is an everyday yet little openly discussed event in the lives of women. Unsafe abortion is a pressing issue yet remains one of the most neglected global public health problems. I spoke about Diehl's 2008 documentary film, *Abortion Democracy: Poland/South Africa*, and then introduced her 2014 book, *The clock that doesn't tick: Happy without children*, situating her research in relation to ongoing feminist work into women without children. I then turned to the work of Mardy Ireland who is widely recognized as one of the first scholars to approach the topic of childlessness as a valid form of research in her 1993 book, *Reconceiving Women: Separating Motherhood from Female Identity*. In her book, Ireland critiques how the term 'childless' assumes an absence for all women without children and proposes instead 'childfree' for women who are childless by choice. Another important work in the field which I mentioned is Madelyn Cain's 2001 book, *The Childless Revolution*.

Cain (2001) writes: 'I could find no college or university with a women's study course that explored the topic of childlessness, although many discuss motherhood'"(142). She suggests that childlessness is the invisible revolution of our time, however, in my view, what will make it a revolution rather than a phenomenon is still an open question. Although in recent years it has become a mainstream topic, the media tends to frame 'childfree' as a lifestyle choice without critically reflecting on the social and historical motives behind these choices. From Diehl's work in the field we learn that one main reason behind self-chosen childlessness is disidentification with the nuclear family model. For many, it is an act of refusal out of discontent with women's

situation. It is not a consumer choice but a call for change. From the position of 'childfree' we can critique the privatization of mothering, promote an ethics of coexistence, and envision alternative models of childrearing beyond the nuclear family.

The focus of the seminar then shifted to a few examples of antiabortion campaign imagery and tactics and a few things prochoice advocates have confronted in recent years. I also presented a range of prochoice imagery including the 1991 prochoice posters by artist Barbara Kruger that feature men with statements such as 'my girlfriend is seeing other guys and I just found out I'm pregnant. What should I do?' In the seminar I noted that the subject of childless women emerged in the early 1990s parallel to an expanding new reproductive technology industry and growing market for infertility services that has in turn intensified the mother ideal. The seminar moved from a discussion on new reproductive technologies to an illustrated presentation of the visual history of the fetus. I discussed the relationship between the socially constructed mother and the socially constructed fetus.

The seminar concluded with a discussion of feminist anthropologist Sarah Franklin's work, in specific her 1997 book *Embodied Progress: A Cultural Account of Assisted Conception*. According to Franklin, the biological model of conception begins to fall apart in Euro-American societies in the early 1980s. Most students in the 1950s learned that when a sperm meets an egg it produces an embryo that is an earlier version of him- or herself. These biological facts of personhood and of coming into being are part of our modern identity (Franklin 1997). However, the rise of new reproductive technologies has increased the public's awareness that the act of conception is not as naturally occurring as the medical institution claimed. For individuals experiencing fertility problems, the origin story ceases to be a strictly natural one, according to Franklin. In other words, the idea that intercourse results in a child is no longer seen as a universal truth. Instead, the act of conception is now viewed as one in need of intervention and assistance, as one

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in which anything could go wrong (Franklin 1997). As Franklin points out, research shows that although millions have been invested in infertility services, the success rates remain low. These procedures are invasive and emotional and at times there is no identifiably known cause for infertility. Today, more and more individuals are sharing their stories about coming to terms with unintentional childlessness.

At this closing point in my talk, I explained how the works which I presented relate to my own research. In particular, Franklin's insight that the Western origin story as a biologically determined story that has undergone a cultural redefinition is useful for the arguments in my thesis. My thesis calls attention to the medicalized discourse of preconception health as a new origin story that replaces the biological one. In order to make up for this social crisis and uncertainty around the origin story, medical experts are starting to tell a different story that rewrites the temporalities of pregnancy. Simply put, preconception health advocates argue that fetal development begins before conception and that the status of a woman's health before conception shapes the potential health of her future child. In other words, preconception health extends prenatal time backwards and lengthens the temporality of gestation. Toward the end of my talk, I concluded by stating that preconception health takes the unexpected into account and erases any former social expectations and assumptions around reproductive biology. The question of how the new origin story of preconception health will reconfigure abortion debates was followed and complimented by an open discussion with Sarah Diehl.

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## 2nd part: Giving Place

*Before the anthropologist Morna Finnegan, the artist Marlene Haring gave the following report to the Seminar group that gives a little insight into her PhD work:*

"Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues, comrades!

I have been sent to you by the Pregnant History Sorority.

They want me to read you their current report and they hope I will be able to answer your questions. Questions I can't answer, I will ask the Sorority and let you know what they say later.

They chose me to write their tangled story, which they seemed to have thought would be an easy task, without really taking into account the amount of work involved in untangling their histories and weaving them back together on paper, or the finer work involved in sculpting the material, adding and subtracting. Some of them are quite obstinate when I am trying to cut bits out.

Anyway, most of you might not have heard of this Sorority as such before, as we now only hear of the great march where women and men marched together physically and in thought to achieve a society where we can be equal. The sorority never made a big fuss about itself. And the fact is, for a long time, its members hadn't heard of each other either. They are all sculptures depicting female bodies. They are sculptures of pregnant female bodies and their sisters pregnant with meaning. After years mostly standing still on their various plinths and pedestals or being left in the dark, they discovered they could hear people's thoughts around them. In their inanimate way, they slowly began to disentangle and decipher them and thus began to discern each others' thoughts, even across long distances. This is how they started to talk to each other, and other sculptures — sisters — started to join in.

As you know, now in 2068, we live in a fairly equal world, though some things still need achieving, of course, like the long task of

rewriting history. Of making the pictures whole, reflecting all the parts of society that have been omitted as part of the so-called natural order of those days.

But as we have learned again and again, nature has been used commonly to abuse whole groups of people.

Now, five decades after our last revolution, it is again made out that men had triggered it, as if it was they who had started the long great march. The Sorority has decided enough is enough, and their own history must also be written down for everyone to know, because otherwise everything will gradually return to the status quo ante, like before. And we do not want patriarchy again, do we?

How did it all start?

In the middle of a small country in Europe there was a statue high up on an obelisk, gazing toward the horizon, her arms outstretched, holding a bronze wreath. She had been put up there in 1923 on the initiative of citizens of Luxembourg who had collected money to have her erected in remembrance of the men who died fighting with the French and Belgians against the German invaders. The political left had supported her, while the conservatives and Catholics tried everything in their power to discredit and thwart her on account of her nudity, since she was covered only in thin, see-through, classical drapery. When the Germans invaded for the second time in that century, for strategic reasons, they said, they quickly started eradicating anything that suggested Luxembourg's connection to France, including our sister, Monument du souvenir. Despite considerable resistance, the statue was torn down.

Thus the Gëlle Fra, Golden Woman, as she was popularly called, acquired in her absence a different meaning, namely of resistance against the occupiers, of a nation united against the Nazis. Ten years after the war and the restoration of Luxembourg's independence, her broken parts were brought out and exhibited during a week of events celebrating the Resistance. Then she disappeared again from view and was only 'discovered', as they claimed, in 1981.

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We have not yet found out why she had been hidden under the grandstand of the national football stadium. It seems quite a few people knew about it but preferred not to reveal it, probably to spare themselves her nudity.

Citizens again collected money to have her and her obelisk put back in person and in public above the plinth that had already been restored, complete with its two classically draped — otherwise nude — men, one dead, one mourning, and new memorial plaques. Now remembering the fallen soldiers of WWII as well.

67 years ago, in 2001, a replica of the Gëlle Fra appeared on another obelisk within sight of our sister. She had a pregnant belly and her plinth was inscribed with the words MADONNA L'INDÉPENDANCE KAPITAL, VIRGIN LA LIBERTÉ KUNST. KULTUR LA JUSTICE BITCH, KITSCH WHORE LA RÉSISTANCE, repeated and repeated. Madonna, Virgin, Bitch, Whore! There was public uproar. While our sister's main aim had been to remember the women who hardly ever figure in war memorials or, indeed, in civil statues unless they are virtues, allegories or queens, she seems to have shaken the image of national unity that her not-yet-pregnant sister was made to stand for.

Gëlle Fra had already gradually been remembering her own history, piecing it together from what she had heard, back then before the second war, under the stands and now, for the last twenty years, up again on a windy perch.

Before the pregnant replica, Lady Rosa of Luxembourg, as she was called by her maker, Sanja Iveković, in memory of another sister we have not forgotten, disappeared from view, she and her sister started talking, and more and more sisters joined the conversation it's my job to write up.

Among the sisters are: a copy of Liberty Enlightening the World, a.k.a. the Statue of Liberty which stands in a Park in Luxembourg; and her big sister in New York harbour; Louise Bourgeois' Fragile Goddess, our winged friend Nike of Samothrace, a pregnant portrait of Alison Lapper by Marc Quinn, Degas' forever

fourteen-year-old dancer and Verity, the same dancer repeatedly impregnated and cut open by Damien Hirst.

I am trying to record their experiences in the manner in which they communicate. They talk and listen at the same time, therefore talking over each other. I think they understand that I have no such superpowers and you will understand that what discipline there is in my writing comes from untangling their strands of conversations.

Their story involves historic events, upheavals, inequalities, ideals, ideologies, findings and how to deal with them. As they have observed for such a long time they have become anthropologists. As they learned from each other they have become feminists. This is all important to explain how they finally came to step off their plinths and join the great march, to demonstrate, larger than life.

They have decided to resume their jobs and assumed their positions again after the revolution, and we do have an abundance of sculptures in public today that remind us of women and of course some men that added to our cause of equality through solidarity, balancing the huge overrepresentation of men of great deed of the decades and centuries before the revolution. We are happy that some are still in the making, as we are convinced that role models matter, a stance that one day may become obsolete, like the state we still inhabit, but we need to be patient and take matters step by step.

They want me to write for the younger generation who have no recollection of these events. They want fourteen year old readers to understand why historic representations matter, why indeed history matters. They want us to understand history as the transmission of those big events like the wars that left them high and dry on pedestals and obelisks, and the unspoken events that left them in pieces. But our history is not only women's struggle for recognition in public roles, and success in convincing everyone that omitting women from history is not sustainable, our history is also the knowledge lost when the potentiality of women's bodies, our potency,

the knowledge of pregnancy and birth, was turned into a private matter, how female bodies were disempowered and their offspring infantilised along with them.

You might ask, how is all this connected? It is connected through the earlier destruction and the subsequent, necessary re-creation of solidarity. When a patriarchal society breaks the respect, the bonds, the attachment, between men and women as equals, smashes the bond between mothers, between grandmothers and mothers, between parents and their children, between siblings, between generations, between people from here and people from there, between sexualities, genders, when it breaks this respect, only then can it fill up the gaps with other products.

Some of your foremothers, great parents or even great great parents might have joined the march. It was when the Sorority had had enough of bullying culture resulting in psychological and sexual harassment, enough of continuous insecurities put on women's and men's bodies and minds, on children and adolescents. They had had enough of the prams, disposable nappies, plastic 'entertainment centres' and baby phones and all the baby paraphernalia that consumes the brains of the little ones and their supposedly responsible carers, the stuff that even shows up at the margins of art and even sometimes philosophy to claim justification from object oriented ontology. Well, the Sorority thinks this only serves to justify dependencies, and hinders the criticality they demand. In fact, the next time they will be leaving their pedestals and vitrines, to come together, marching down Whitehall, again trampling, bulging, birthing, they want to get the babies involved, as in their perception autonomy has not fully been reached and is threatened again.

Oh oh oh, to them, means out of order. And if need be, they are standing there, ready to break it again.

Thank you for listening."

Haring continued to introduce “our sister Morna Finnegan, who the sorority thinks is an exceptional thinker for shedding light on the anthropological roots of our species, what we are primed for and the contemporary political consequences coming through this knowledge. The sorority is deeply grateful to her and other anthropologists she will mention, to have put to paper what their bodies already knew.”

The following is a script for her talk adapted from a working manuscript for her forthcoming book. The copyright lies with Morna Finnegan. For the talk please listen to the audio.

## Complex Egalitarianism and the Art of Community

*People feel the strain of a way of life and a mindset that disallow all forms of improvisation and intuition...There is a common experience of something being wrong that may receive real illumination from a much more direct acknowledgement of rival forms of mind...This is where we can see a particular importance of hunter-gatherer societies: they have established and relied upon respect for children, other adults, and the resources on which people depend. If these relationships are not respectful, then everything will go wrong - Hugh Brody*

1.

The stories we tell shape us. Stories we tell about our lives, stories we inherit and live by, or strain against, events that defined us. Then there are the limits of stories, by which we also live and map our lives. Relationships we can't accept; places we can't go; borders we can't transgress. Realities we can't imagine, which harden cumulatively into the parameters of our world. Stories define who we are and how we act and react every moment of our lives. Invisible stories, written in the way we perform the smallest gestures. Currents of power trapped or released by our physical conduct in the world. Marx was right, of course. At origin, the material conditions of our lives determine the story, and not the other way around. But once a story is established, and is being sufficiently stoked, it assumes a life force of its own.

Recently – as in the last few thousand years or so – one story has been drowning out most of the others. And it's a bit of a bully, this story. In it, man the farmer, man the warrior, man the accumulator, has been the main character in our collective narrative, and even anthropology has become somewhat enchanted by his violence. His structural hierarchy, "complex" hierarchy, has come to seem like the only workable frame. Steven Pinker recently popularized this position in "The Better Angels", a book that received rave reviews in the New York Times and which makes the essentially Hobbesian argument that the modern State is the best hope we have for maintaining "civilized" society and advancing towards an increasingly less violent climate.

Telling an alternative story these days can be a subversive act. It can be quietly, diligently subversive. I'm not talking about the loud, glitzy shouting against power many of us are drawn to, but the patient commitment to assembling, as carefully and completely as possible, all the relevant details of the alternative story. And that's precisely what seasoned hunter-gatherer ethnographers such as Richard Lee, James Woodburn, Kirk and Karen Endicott, Nurit Bird-David, Hugh Brody, Alan Barnard, Megan Biesele and many others have been

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busy doing for the last 40 years. With so much high level speculation about the many, and inevitable, faces of domination, there's an integrity in the writing of those who have spent their careers working to understand and represent the alternatives.

Because what you find in the work of most hunter-gatherer specialists, wherever they started out, is a consistent interest in the political consequences of sharing. In what happens when power belongs to everyone, and therefore, to no-one. The entire moving matrix of relationships that represents a coherent social philosophy in situations where the abhorrence of privatization is the dominant impulse. The kind of sharing we're talking about, as the anthropologist Jerome Lewis underlines, is not simply a specialized form of reciprocity. It is a means of creating relationships and keeping society open. And there's a lot of emphasis on this quality of "openness" among African hunter-gatherers. The kind of egalitarianism supported by what's referred to as "demand sharing" is not lip-service to equality, but the ongoing, proactive pursuit of equality. Each person in these societies is, or was, taught from infancy onwards to expect to be seen and heard; to expect to be treated with respect by others; to expect equal access to whatever resources their neighbors and friends might have; and to expect others to expect the same. Combine the absolute social imperative to share with the ritual and political dynamo driving it, and you're talking about a whole lot more than a "mode of transfer".

Some people still ask: why study hunter-gatherer society? Small-scale, non-capitalist, communitarian, most often egalitarian. What could these groups have to tell us about large-scale industrial capitalist societies where buying and selling (things, territory, each other) has become the main occupation? Societies where other people, and most notably children, have slipped far down the scale of social relevance and are now generally less valued than material commodities and territory. *The things we care most about – our loves, passions, rivalries, obsessions – are always other people*, David Graeber reminds us.

He goes on: *In most societies that are not capitalist, it's taken for granted that the manufacture of material goods is a subordinate moment in a larger process of fashioning people. In fact, I would argue that one of the most alienating aspects of capitalism is the fact that it forces us to pretend that it is the other way around.*

Why study those societies where people still matter more than things? "Having a knowledge of sharing among hunter-gatherers" writes Professor Alan Barnard "gets us closer to a *theory* of sharing. Comparing hunter-gatherers with non-hunter-gatherers advances that theory". Just as focusing our attention on "the boundaries between egalitarian and non-egalitarian societies, for example, gives us insights into egalitarianism, sharing and morality". The bigger picture. Moreover, developing a theory of sharing, of why people would agree to share in the first place, and of how anyone could live a fulfilling life without "stuff", also turns up some uncomfortable insights into societies premised on the alternatives. Compulsively non-sharing; compulsive and habitual non-morality, non-connectivity, and anti-egalitarianism. Ourselves, basically. Why study hunter-gatherers? Hugh Brody sums it up: *There are lessons to be learned from the hunter-gatherer world that go to the core of who we are as human beings. These are lessons about the nature of history, the way in which those who dominate the world have achieved their ends, and the extent to which language is inseparable from the identity and well-being of any people. There may also be lessons and explanations...for some of the malaise and sense of inadequacy that afflict so many of us.*

Brody's passionate account of the worldview underpinning hunter-gatherer systems exposes a vital fact: Here is a rival mind, a rival story, which potentially exposes the claims of the alpha-story presented globally by elite power. This mind, this alternative narrative, non-linear and diffusive by nature, is our shared legacy. Furthermore, Brody argues, it is safe and well even within societies dominated by the agricultural, industrial mentality. It is inherent in our own constant questioning,

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our refusals to submit, our longings, and our acts of resistance. It is embodied by the multitude of local community, anarchist and environmentalist groups working constantly against corporate propaganda and political scare-mongering.

This is why knowing hunter-gatherers is fundamental: because knowing them, we have direct evidence of organic egalitarianism at work. There's a reason so many of us are starving for rest and connection; a reason our brains and bodies are suffering in the synthetic relational climate cultivated by consumer society; a reason things feel wrong. We evolved over millions of years of emotional refinement to be inherently prosocial animals, yet we're now being compelled to live essentially anti-social lives. The more we study egalitarian hunter-gatherers, then, the better we understand the influence of what John Bowlby famously termed "the Environment of Evolutionary Adaptedness": the complex set of conditions under which humans successfully evolved, and within which our physiological, reproductive, cognitive and emotional needs are best met. With the knowledge that there are clear parameters inside of which humans generally feel good and function well, we can begin to broaden the frame around our potential. We can also consult the rival cosmology as a map. Here is a sophisticated formal philosophy directly contradicting the agricultural/ industrial apparatus.

Big Brother is not the best we can do.  
There is another story.

A few of the questions raised by this story are: How do people go about resisting domination while never themselves becoming the oppressor? How do you collectively resist methods of violent coercion while not sliding into retaliatory violence, and then make this the ongoing basis for society? What would kids born and raised in these non-competitive, contact-rich cultures look like? How is it possible to maintain a strong emphasis on personal autonomy hand in hand with an intense communitarian ethos? The old Durkeimian riddle of finding but never losing oneself in the social body.

So many of these questions, of course, both arise because of and find answers in the literature on African hunter-gatherers, among the Mbendjele, the Hadza or the Ju/hoan. Yet the movement known as "revisionism" would have us believe that people like the Mbendjele or the Ju/hoan are simply squatters on our political peripheries. Sitting in the university stacks a decade ago, with my notes full of exclamation marks, and astonished capitals, and long verbatim quotes, I began to question this. The accusation of romanticism or primitivism levelled against those who think we have something to learn from hunter-gatherers has the convenient side-effect of making these societies seem, collectively, like some dusty old artefact gone out of vogue centuries ago. Vibrant living cultures can be dismissed as doomed exceptions.

In fact, a focus on the bigger picture when you're dealing with the Southern African Ju/hoan, or Central African hunter-gatherers, is dizzying. Nowhere else does "society" appear more alive. Not only are you forced to notice networks and constellations of power, but here, everything is moving, all the time. You begin to pick up on the low crackle of motion as people slip continually in and out of roles, relationships, perspectives. There's a perpetual oscillation back and forth between concentrations of social power, so that all the patterns which become apparent are occurring through flux. Coming from a political training in our society, where everything is pinned down, fenced in, and walled off, there's a sense of vertigo. The Khoisan trickster figure, as well as the corpus of Central African forest spirits, embody that vertiginous quality. Crazy shape-shifters and anthropomorphic comedians who continually tilt the balance of the normal, yet stay firmly planted at the religious heart of the communities they belong to.

The trickster, prime representative of Southern African hunter-gatherer religion, is, according to Guenther, "the embodiment of ambiguity". This is a figure – the figure – who presides over the cosmology of diverse Bushman groups throughout the Kalahari.

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A complex brain-twister of a deity, with multiple personalities “ranging from lewd prankster to divine creator; goblin to god; human to jackal”. References to him by Bushman peoples are “maddeningly vague, inconsistent, kaleidoscopic”. Like the classic Zen koan, the more you try to understand him the less sense he makes. And he is deeply irreverent, crude, hilarious, ridiculous. Not an icon for those used to submitting, or being bought, or offering their children as sacrificial lambs. He is /Kaggen for the Cape /Xam, Pate and Pisamboro for the Nharo and G/wi of Botswana, Kaoxa for the Botswanian and Namibian Ju/hoansi, Haiseb for the Nama and Damara. In the vast series of stories around him, he represents a kind of yes/no, up/down, will/won’t, push/pull world, where bodily parts – especially the genitals – are always detaching themselves, being eaten, and then reconstituting themselves. Where people can become animals, and animals gods, and gods fools, and fools heroes.

Everything you think should be stable in a deity is put in flux by the trickster. This is very different to the medieval joker, who survived on the fringes of stratified society, getting wheeled in for big ritual moments to “symbolically” challenge the elite. This is liminality as god. Rather than being sanctioned by the centre, the trickster here is the centre. Instead of the crucified Jesus with his down-turned mouth, reminding us on alters across the world of what happens to revolutionaries, these people have, or had, gods who are fools, shape-shifters, comedians par excellence. Remember the question of how we begin to understand the story beyond our own version of events? That’s a question necessary for those raised within the static ego-self characteristic of farming, where the person is fenced in early on. This cosmology, porous and shifting by nature, encourages people from infancy onwards to continually take up other perspectives, to slip back and forth between apparently opposing categories, forms, and realities, without the slightest sense of conflict.

Here we have contradiction, paradox, and laughter as founding principles for social and religious experience. If this is human

society in its liberated state, as those who have lived and worked with African hunter-gatherers for a life-time insist it is, then we should all be taking a good hard look. *This* is what we look like when we stay connected. *These* are the gods we produce when we’re allowed to keep laughing. This is the only kind of “system” that works where power has remained a live element in the hands of each individual. Those ethnographers of hunter-gatherer society who have persisted in extending their insights into other disciplinary domains, therefore, make us think hard about what it is we miss when we arrive from an essentially static political framework. They also raise questions about why so many academics choose to ignore or attack research arguing that social egalitarianism is the likely template for the human species.

There has been a lot of talk within anthropology about “complex” hierarchy as the auto-setting for our species. The ranking and grading of human beings into classes of worthiness or unworthiness as the most sophisticated way of organizing. Monuments, spectacles and weapons. Egalitarianism, by contrast, is sniffed at dismissively, being seen as somewhat simple, sentimental, and possibly even a little boring. No warriors. No kings. No mass bloodshed. But if we hold up the incredibly complex web of virtual structure characteristic of so many African hunter-gatherers, this continual process of increase and contraction, entropy and growth, the sheer levels of inter-subjective fluidity and control, against the rest of us, we look positively clumsy by comparison. Brutish even. “Hierarchy” loses its heat and becomes what it is – a phenomenal lack of imagination.

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Around 60,000 years ago, the story goes, coalitions of early modern human mothers were beginning to form in response to increasingly severe environmental changes. In the period preceding this, the intensified costs of encephalization – with cranial capacity expanding from 1200 to 1500 cubic centimetres between 500,000 and 100,000 years ago – would have meant a substantial leap in female reproductive costs relative to male. Now unable to source nutritiously rich vegetable foods, and prevented from hunting consistently because of reproductive demands, women needed to elicit more help from partners in order to survive and keep their children alive. The story is practical. A problem arose that needed an urgent, collective resolution. How could women compel their mates to bring back meat? How could they argue a symbolic monopoly on the flesh of prized large game animals? A conceptual correlation had to be made between these and women's own bodies. Female blood and game blood needed to be set in a relationship of correspondence (in the sense that they were now equivalent) and antipathy (in their potentially cataclysmic relationship with one another), creating a kind of push/pull movement between substances.

None of it would have been framed this way. Those babies whose mothers were able to band together to demand equal rights to meat would simply have stood a better chance of survival. Knight (1991) points out that the ethnographic record is replete with references to such demands, couched as the "hunter's own-kill rule". The own-kill rule states that *no hunter can claim ownership of his catch*, particularly big game animals. This should be returned to the community for distribution among in-laws and kin. Indeed, in almost every known context there are ritual proscriptions stating that until meat has been cooked by women it remains dangerous to hunters. Further, strong taboos exist in all known hunter-gatherer societies drawing equivalences between women and game animals, menstrual blood and meat. Somebody somewhere had an

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interest in setting these substances and relationships into a symbolic field that cries out “dangerous”.

Was it likely to have been men?

This has long been the conclusion as scholars assumed that the great care taken around particular kinds of bodies and fluids was to do with a fundamental negative: women were being coded as dangerous to suggest they were somehow less. It doesn't add up. Danger, for a start, is power. And who benefits from the taboo on a material level? Knight (1991) has a theory. Women in those first communities were able to capitalize on a lunar clock (the mean menstrual cycle corresponding exactly with the mean lunar cycle) in order to schedule periodic “strikes”: moments of collective withdrawal from their mates that would have signaled a demand for paternal investment in the form of meat. He views cross cultural evidence of menstrual symbolism and taboo as another aspect of this “clock” or collective signal generated by women. Unlike previous theories about human origins, Knight's model draws on recent research from the fields of archaeology, primatology, evolutionary ecology and biological anthropology, to support his idea of female kin-coalitions as a feasible possibility prior to and during what he calls “the human symbolic revolution”. With his colleagues Power and Watts, Knight has put together a compelling story about our early human history.

An extraordinary thing appears to have happened. That frazzled single mother, doing everything for herself and ten others, found a way to enlist the muscle of all the other single mothers around her. They would make a statement to the males about camp, who until then had probably been showing up every now and again waving a few bones. For the first time in our species' history, female kin coalitions began to crystalize around vulnerable infants. Women began to communicate. And in communicating, they seem to have come to the conclusion that the charmer with the bones wasn't going anywhere until he absolutely *had to*.

Why should he invest in one baby when he could be making twenty more? Except now, for the first time, he couldn't. Because every other woman and girl in camp was also unavailable. Not only that, they were painting themselves red (witness the ancient ritual deposits of red ochre), sticking antlers on their heads (witness the first rock art), and dancing towards him in a most threatening manner. The fact that this was likely the archaic foundation for now is very relevant. Because over the subsequent 20,000 years or so, as the archaeological record explodes into evidence of human symbolic activity orbiting the use of red pigments, and language begins to flourish, that maternal body continued to refine itself into a loud, sophisticated network of ritual and cosmological power.

Fast forward to March 2005, and I was getting on a plane to the Republic of Congo for eighteen months of fieldwork with a community of Mbendjele Yaka hunter-gatherers based in the Northern forests. I had made detailed maps of the Likouala area where I planned to carry out research, and I'd identified a potential community close to the Motaba river. After several interminable weeks in Brazzaville waiting for research permits, my husband and I travelled to Pokola, a small logging town cut into the Northern forest. From there, we organised enough supplies for six months of forest living, and an interpreter who would also assist with the journey into the forest towards the Yambe village of Bangui-Motaba. At Bangui-Motaba, after a lot of discussion with villagers, we negotiated an entry to Mboule, a semi-permanent Mbendjele Yaka camp about a kilometre into the forest North of Bangui. The Mbendjele agreed to give us a small shelter in their community, and there was an air of festivity as we pitched our tent and unpacked our rucksacks, people gathering around to have a good gander at the incoming entertainment.

Finally, after months of travel and organisation, we had arrived with the community I wanted to learn from and about. I could begin to observe the women's dances which were then taking place on an almost daily basis.

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This was going to be “a bio-cultural study which will fuse information on women’s community dances with emerging ethnography on cooperative parenting”. Basically, I wanted to understand the relationship between these last egalitarian societies and the women’s collectives so active within them. It was only when the bouts of nausea and pressure headaches I’d been experiencing for weeks began to intensify that I suspected pregnancy. One night, on the cusp of the first storm of the rainy season, I had a dream. My sister had phoned from Ireland to wish me a happy birthday. As we spoke someone lifted another extension and the voice of a small child intervened abruptly in our conversation, addressing me directly: ‘*Do you want me or not*’ the voice said? It took two more weeks to arrange an exit from Mboule and travel back down to Pokola, where I was advised by a doctor that I was pregnant, that my blood pressure was dangerously low, and that returning to the forest would almost certainly jeopardize the eight-week pregnancy he’d just confirmed. Biological anthropologist Nadine Peacock writes about the energetic costs Efe women hunter-gatherers balance against the kind of labour they choose to do. It is not, she points out, that they are incapable of large game hunting, for example. It is that on a pragmatic level the costs of choosing to do so would be too high. It’s not a popular viewpoint with a feminism used to arguing against the reproductive body.

Yet ironically (or appropriately), I found myself faced with the same choice. During those first weeks at Mboule I had watched women going about their daily labour activities. Tramping out of camp into the early morning forest, returning at noon every day with baskets full of tubers and leaves; squatting around their fires in the evening crushing palm nuts; erupting into spontaneous, inexplicable bursts of singing and dancing. And it became clear that what I had read prior to Congo – that almost everything Yaka women do is done as a collective – was true. It seemed obvious that maintaining this degree of social cohesion would be crucial to the loud political presence they command in the society.

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What I hadn’t expected and was struck by even then was the way women continually distributed care of infants and small children. Babies were passed from lap to lap, from breast to breast, in an ongoing loop of contact. One night I watched a wiry old granny hop up to take part in a dance; as she passed a young mother with a miaowing baby she grabbed the infant, slung it onto her back, whipped a bit of cloth around it, and broke into the dance circle, all in one fluid movement. She was by far the most accomplished dancer there that night, the bemused baby bobbing along behind her. Teenage girls, always a presence where older women clustered, competed to hold and entertain young babies not yet walking. But teenage boys weren’t exempt. They routinely appeared jiggling babies up and down camp in shoulder slings. Meanwhile this sprawling, multi-limbed body chattered around camp in an echoey polyphony of music and speech; an auditory web at the centre of which babies and small children were cocooned. The sheer physicality of the network I was seeing threw into question an academic feminism founded in the reaction *against* physicality, and grounded in the language of subordination, repression, and privatisation. The psychology of scarcity is inherently agricultural and territorial in nature. Something else was happening here.

3.

I was raised on a council estate in North Armagh. Like everybody in the North who grew up with armored cars purring past, I knew about repression. Feminism made sense to me before I could articulate why. It was only in London that I began to clarify the relationship between political domination and misogyny. The root structure that connects these two complexes to their best friends – corporate exploitation, homophobia, racism (in short hatred of sensuality and freedom in any form) – is complex and well documented. What began to matter to me was the possibility of alternatives.

Once you begin to look closely at the type of society referred to in anthropological parlance as “immediate return” it is not only the material alternatives that are compelling. You begin to see how our whole orientation to life is largely antagonistic, or pessimistic, or both. If Mbendjele women are asserting the value of the physical work they do through dance, they’re asserting it that way for a reason. It’s a fundamentally positive statement: joyful, sensual, optimistic, and often hilarious. Now here I was, in a position to finally ask questions I couldn’t find answers to in the literature, and I was facing the prospect of having to turn around and leave. And yet there was something timely about the fact that what was clarifying itself theoretically – the dense somatic solidarity commanded by Mbendjele women, with roots in the procreative body – was assuming a personal resonance as my own body began to change. I was becoming a mother in one of the last societies on earth that still gives a social voice to the maternal body.

Across the Central African ethnographic record we find a collective body of women which is remarkably vocal on a social, ritual, and political level. Very few people outside of African hunter-gatherer studies seem to be aware of this. It’s egalitarianism with a capital “E”, and a lot of shouting. The commentary we have from women themselves is still mostly through their own song lyrics, delivered during ritual dances. It is a condensed, graphic language that draws

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the eye back to the procreative body: '*Eloko tembe ya polo, a mou wa lai!* – The penis is no competition, it died already!' '*Eneke ganye!* – The vagina wins' (Kisluik, 1998)! 'The penis gives birth to nothing, only urine!' '*Mapindi ma mu bola!*–Their testicles are broken' (Lewis, 2002)! In one pared down, expertly rendered choreography which excludes men, the lone word '*Dumana!* – Let's fuck!' (Kisluik, 1998). These are ideological taunts. They're meant to be offensive. The intention is to instigate a theatrical argument with men, and they work.

But it's only when you've gone through nine months of pregnancy, followed by fifteen hours of labour, and are in the second month without sleep, that you begin to get the reasoning behind them. These songs – continually reiterated by women – keep the issue of reproductive labour *and the value accorded to it*, live. They also animate and foreground a collective body which is key in choreographing ritual exchanges with men. This "body" of women, constantly reforming despite a large degree of community fission and fusion, maintains a public, ritual conversation with men. Think of it as a kind of pendulum that swings power back and forth between poles continually. Think of it beside our own political systems, typically static entities, hemmed in by law and force, clumsy and violent by contrast. This other type of system offers politics as a living, molecular possibility. The politics of the body itself as it moves through a vast criss-crossing network of commitments.

Clearly this is not the 'gender' we're used to. This is ritual; political; loud; and crucially, as the anthropologist Colin Turnbull repeatedly pointed out, it's fun. During dances like 'Ngoku' or 'Elande' women emphasize the physicality of the collective female body in the most graphic terms. They ridicule male virility ruthlessly. I began to be interested not so much in the symbolism in which these rituals are embedded, but in the *politics* of this physicality, and of the presence of the female reproductive anatomy in the most public of contexts and debates. Like wheeling a giant vagina through the House of Commons on a daily basis. It began to dawn on me that the political and philosophical implications of

this way of managing power – the way the power-field is kept plane by the mutual work of the sexes – are enormous. These are communities where social energy is being produced through the continual assertions and counter-assertions of ritual coalitions. It is not simply that the body is translated into symbolic capital through ritual (the traditional analytical approach). The body, crucially, remains itself. There is a physicality to these dances and their lyrics that remains unrefined. Needless to say, this is not the sexual duality that has long been the bane of Western feminism. Among egalitarian societies like the Mbendjele or the Mbuti sexual duality is being invoked to create a ritual frame for the redistribution of power.

Once you get a glimpse of this system it's impossible to stop seeing it. You stand back from the entire history and literature of Western politics, with its strong currents of coercive force, control, and closure, and you take a deep breath. You realise you are looking at something incredible. Human society as a fizzing, rippling creature, free of the fences and walls most of us would feel naked without. Complex beyond the compass of our theory. Delicate, yet sinewy enough to have been evolving and refining itself for millennia. This system seems (where it has been left alone) to have been strengthening itself while we, for all our technological kudos, have been skidding deeper and deeper into crisis. That's what's funny about recent revisionist analyses claiming hunter-gatherers are just disenfranchised nomads pushed to the periphery of 'complex' State and agrarian societies. Yet if we understand complexity not as territorial and economic growth, or technological development, but as the emotional and social complexity characteristic of egalitarian society, then we are the nomads, pushed to the fringes of the last complex human societies.

Which of course is not an original observation. From Rene Rousseau to Pierre Clastres through to ethnographers like Hugh Brody, people have been pointing this out for some time. What they have not, however, been pointing out is the centrality of the women's collectives running like an

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engine under this system. There are voices increasingly honing in on that too: Megan Biesele's wonderful ethnography of the Kalahari San is worth reading just for the tit-for-tat sequences between the trickster Koaxa and his brilliant wives. Scott and Karen Endicott have worked for years to highlight the anthropological blind spot of sexual egalitarianism. Chris Knight's lifelong work on the origins of culture puts women's coalitions at the heart of the 'human revolution'. Sarah Hrdy tackles the subject from an evolutionary perspective. But it's still hard to find sustained analyses of the political repercussions of gender egalitarianism, or attempts to really open the discussion to non-academics.

Germaine Greer, in her excoriating analysis of feminine 'beauty', opened a window on the horrendous psychic and emotional damage done to both women and men by the cultural repression of the actual female body and voice. I think now that what I experienced at Mboule is what happens when you take the lid off that collective female body. There's a rush of kinetic, sexual, and creative energy which you immediately feel at places like Mboule, coming in from the outlands where women's physical energy is still trapped in the male aesthetic. Which brings to mind a point made by the French philosophers Deluze and Guattari in their classic 'Capitalism and Schizophrenia'. The energy of Eros was not simply being repressed by capitalism, they cautioned: it was being used.

This awareness of a fundamental theft puts a more sinister spin on what we might be tempted to code as simply bad luck for the female body. It's not that institutional patriarchy doesn't quite appreciate what we are. Nor that our bodies and what they do are an inevitable handicap. All the evidence suggests that patriarchy does very much appreciate the energy peculiar to the female procreative body. But only insofar as it can exploit that energy for its own ends. By this reasoning, and contrary to a lot of recent academic feminist theory, the release from the embarrassing surplus of blood, wombs, and milk will not liberate us. Quite the opposite. Only the absolute, collective re-taking of those deep somatic and erotic

fields will liberate us into the full range of possibility. This is so because the whole social architecture changes as soon as the collective female body goes public.

What we choose to highlight as a society, what we choose to *communalise*, says a lot about us. Throughout an increasingly monochrome world the dominant tropes are all about corporate power, resource exploitation, industrial capitalism, and war. But there are societies, well known to anthropology ("a discipline terrified of its own potential" according to David Graeber") in which the loud, public debates all orbit the cultural power of desire and the procreative body. Children are socially central in such societies, and women's collectives dominate the ritual and political landscape. The entire community keeps a close collective eye on the state of the relationship between the sexes. But while the procreative *body* has a loud political/archetypal presence, this is bigger than individuals.

The brilliance of the ritual system active in pockets like Mboule is that the symbolic energy of fertility is being continually circulated among women, men, and children. Everyone benefits from a public arena in which relationship and inclusion are routinely prioritised over ownership and exclusion. As Knight and Power have insisted, the blood is shared. Fertility, by this reasoning, has never been women's problem. It is vastly undervalued fertility tethered to *domesticity* that causes the distortion. It's the separation, domestication, and privatization of female bodies that leads to all the subsequent "misery" Greer laments.

Think now about those lines of women at Mboule. Painted, beaded, their breasts lengthened to highlight an aesthetic in which the marks of female fertility are status symbols and objects of desire. Stamping the dust, linking arms, singing in that eerie, hair-raising polyphony that "the vagina wins". And then the corresponding men's line, also oiled and painted, also drawing energy out of the collective male body, growling and stamping back at them across the space. And here is the great achievement, noted so

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easily by ethnographers like Colin Turnbull or Jerome Lewis: Nobody wins. There are no winners, and consequently, no losers.

When groups of men get together, especially in ritual contexts, there's a lot of muscle. A lot of power. In order for that energy not to get too loud, too dominant, you need a *counter-voice*, a *counter-force*, equally loud, equally compact, asserting power in its own way. Set these two bodies in motion, in a ritual arena where they can work on each other safely, and power becomes a live element, barreled along by rhythm, song, and the raucous laughter that keeps the prospective bully in check. Among forest hunter-gatherers, this element is never allowed to settle in any one set of hands. You have equality without sameness.

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4.

The anthropologist Jerome Lewis lived with and studied the religious life of the Mbendjele Yaka for three years. In one of the most detailed and sensitive discussions that exists on the religious life of forest hunter-gatherers, he describes the polysemic cultural concept *Ekila*. The Mbendjele use this term to refer to the most potent and valuable substances and relationships in their universe. It has a strong correlation with the Ju/hoan substance *N/om*. *Ekila* runs like a web through Mbendjele ritual and cosmological fields, back and forth between men and women, hunting and birth, menstrual blood and spirits, game and sex, danger and power. So Jerome was questioning an Mbendjele informant about this. What is *Ekila* about, he asked? What does it mean? And the man, struggling to explain the complexity of the term while keeping it comprehensible, offered eventually: *It is all about children.*

Because that's what you have to give up if you insist on an equality based on sameness. You have to give up the children. The milk. The blood. The hormonal dance that reinvents you overnight. So it's back to normality with this big gaping tear in your world. Your body is pumping blood out of one end, milk out of another, and you're falling apart every time anybody looks at you. But it's only biology. It doesn't mean anything really. From Simone De Beauvoir through to Judith Butler, a huge amount of energy has gone into proving that women are not born but made. Which of course on a level is true. The history of feminist thought is rich trail of critical expression; some of the most original voices in the last century come from women writers with a point to make. And in the context of what women have needed to resist, these voices are oxygen. There's also the reality that cultural diversity encompasses a huge spectrum of possibility. But it still goes pear-shaped when you extrapolate from there to the entire reproductive body, and try to argue for that as a figment of our collective imagination.

As both a mother and anthropologist I find the sameness-as-equality argument, ostensibly so radical, deeply depressing. And yet it has fundamentally altered the feminist project. We have, by and large, stopped questioning the terms. Stopped querying the story, and started trying to squeeze ourselves into it. Even where it is conceded that the female body may not be a universal problem, people set about devising elaborate theories for how gender can be ritually multiplied or erased. Essentially, you're not trapped in your sex. You're not stuck with your blood and your milk. When I came to the literature on forest hunter-gatherers in Central Africa, I was already suspicious of this approach. The deconstruction, or dismissal, of the body is based on the assumption that female biology is problematic. Facing the alpha-male on his terms, essentially. But what about those contexts where it is not only not delimiting, but is actively empowering people? What then of the well-meaning academic feminist whose remit is to theorise the body out of existence?

I mention this because I think it is directly connected to the road academic feminism has taken regarding the body: It's part of a deeper cultural aversion to biology. Even as it is implicitly used against us, to grade and degrade, there seems to be an aversion to anything suggestive of the body; of mess, mutability, contact. The blurring of lines between bodies. The response I met when I carried my child rather than using a pram, co-slept rather than leaving her to cry, and breast-fed beyond the socially acceptable first year, is telling of our general ignorance about basic developmental and evolutionary psychology. But I think it's also telling of a deeper, more complicated discomfort regarding the body – the messy, knowing, animal body that has sunk down below cultural awareness into a dark place we'd rather not go. Because so much of what we routinely do to the earth depends on our safe ontological distance from it. We are not soil and shit and blood and pus and snot and milk. We don't smell. We refer to "animals" as though we weren't included in the category.

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But what if we could get back to a *non-Cartesian* understanding of body and world? What if it were possible to learn from a society, or cluster of societies, in which Descartes has never even been heard of? In which Christianity never trundled through, with its crucifixes and Virgins? What if we could get a perspective on societies which have developed without the whole corrosive venture that is large-scale agriculture? What if the greatest source of power possible is to be found in the socially articulate body? Which is why anthropology contains such radical seeds. It offers us alternatives. We begin to think habitually outside the box. It is the most potentially radical approach to understanding the world you could take: think it from multiple vistas, and then see if you can still paint things black or white.

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5.

In every known culture there were once strong ritual prohibitions and prescriptions surrounding the postpartum period. This was later rewritten under patriarchy as a punishment inflicted on women for the offensive volatility of the female body. But look at any hunter-gatherer society and you'll see what the ritual caution is all about. No-one is in a state of greater potency than the girl who has just begun to menstruate, signaling the transition into fertility, or the mature woman who has just brought another person out of her body. There are myriad beliefs about this – the danger of the body now opened and in flow; the care taken around the person who has just come through; the peril for hunters whose mates have recently given birth; the general cosmological chaos waiting to unfold should uterine blood mix with the blood of game animals, or rain, or arrow poison, or with any other powerful fluid. It's hard for us to imagine a scenario in which the female body could *be* a source of such profound cosmological, ritual, and by extension, social power. So we have tended to shrink all that complexity to the slightly ambiguous label of "taboo". This makes sense when you reflect on how deeply habituated most of us are to the mundane domestic life of the body. From birth onwards we are very carefully trained towards singularity. Although there has been a visible shift in the last two decades in favor of responsive parenting (more political than many of us realise), the establishment approach to infants is still to leave them in cages with bars high enough to prevent them getting to us. In the process of "sleep training" people are encouraged to plug newborns with plastic nipples, turn the T.V up, and hope for the best. It's all about routine, discipline, independence, and of course, the sacred marital relationship. So here you are: a fully-fledged individual, all those weeks and months of crying out for contact buried in you like layers of shale. Enclosed in your particular body and name. You have your birth certificate, and your national insurance number, and your bank account. You are a discretely bounded individual, and that individuality is much lauded and encouraged. The body

– and we can carve it up into its biological and physiological components – is sealed against the world, and against all those other bodies (human or nonhuman) with which you will come into contact. Sex, which rarely appears without the romantic gloss, is the only place you might stand a chance of transgressing the boundaries of individuality, but this too is private, monogamous, and preferably heterosexual. Essentially, you are intact.

Who is in a better position to challenge all this than the person who has just, quite literally, been turned inside out? In the days and weeks following childbirth there is the distinct sense of the body as having assumed a liquid quality. The world, and the way of experiencing it, which the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin described a century ago is oddly aligned with this new, boundary-less terrain. In 'Rabelais and His World' Bakhtin identifies the point in European history where the collective, maternal body was still actively resisting the new paternal law. The po-faced, repressive gravitas of a politico-religious front whose mission was to exterminate once and for all "the great generic body of the people". When we examine what many hunter-gatherers are actually doing in their forest camps, it begins to seem like a macro-system for the mother-child continuum. The impulse toward continuity rather than closure. The absence of fences. The fragility of "the subject", and the cultivation of a shared, diffusive personhood.

In the weeks and months following the birth of my first child, I was struck by the way in which my sense of personal ownership had evaporated. Babies simply will not permit us to privatize ourselves in the way we're accustomed to without doing them violence. I started to refer to myself inwardly as "the mother ship": Everywhere I moved in the world, there was this other profoundly dependent body. She fueled herself through me, she landed on me, she rested in me, she orbited me through consciousness and sleep. The great revelation of Bakhtin is that he gives that shocking openness of maternity a deep political twist. His writing suggests that it represents an alternative order, one crushed under the heel of patriarchal

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religious and political zeal. The body that emerges through his work is archetypal. It is the bloody, mutable, irreverent body of the hag-mother. He depicts State terror in confrontation with it. The way order crumbles in its glare. It flows and dances through medieval market places and festivals, slurping up the posturing of elite power, spitting it back out again as the clown, the trickster, the mad woman. And low and behold: its language (some would say its poetry), is visceral, scatological, bawdy. The 'great generic body of the people' is all about menstrual blood and milk. Semen and pus and saliva. Everywhere that the body is capable of leaking or overflowing, it speaks. The language of the "lower bodily stratum" is the direct, guttural language of the body. Which is also the language of carnival. The language of festival. The lexicon that exists before and after State-made time and order. An experiential field injected with the potency of menstrual blood and what it does.

Now here's what's really interesting. Ethnographers working with hunter-gatherers throughout Africa and Amazonia consistently describe precisely this kind of ritual language between the sexes. In that insistent drawing back of the collective eye to the anatomical nature of power, in that very paring down of the self to the raw material of the genitals and reproductive organs (which are no longer anyone's private property), the increase happens. The 'biological' body explodes out into a collective, political body.

Barbara Ehrenreich in her exploration of ecstatic rituals notes that *'we alone are gifted with the kind of love that Freud was unable to imagine: a love, or at least affinity, holding people together in groups of more than two'*. Collective dance, generating the kind of collective ecstatic experience she describes, flows easily out of and through that maternal loop so visible in contemporary hunter-gatherer communities. So while the catch-phrase for structural hierarchy could be summed up by the American military obsession with 'control and command', the catchphrase for these cultures would be more like 'contact and response'. Touch each other. *Be touched by each other.*

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## Bios

**Sarah Diehl** is a novelist, filmmaker and writer from Berlin, Germany. International reproductive rights have been her main research topic and her books (The clock which doesn't tick) and films (Abortion Democracy - Poland/South Africa). Sarah is countering negative stereotypes of aborting women and women who choose not to be mothers. She co-founded together with prochoice activists from Poland the network Ciocia Basia, who supports women in Poland to come to Berlin for accessing safe abortions in a friendly setting.

**Anna Gonzalez Suero** is a visual artist based in Cologne, Germany. Anna studied at the Copper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art in New York and received her BFA from Gerrit Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam. She has exhibited in international locations such as Alpha Nova Galerie in Berlin, Diana Stigter in Amsterdam, and Angels Gallery in Barcelona. Anna is currently a doctoral candidate in the Art Department at Goldsmiths. For more info see: <http://annagonzalezsuero.com> and <http://notmyscan.com>.

**Morna Finnegan** began with women's studies (UEL) and got her PhD in social anthropology (Edinburgh) on women's political position among egalitarian hunter-gatherers in Central Africa in 2009. She has since published several papers (Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute, Hunter Gatherer Research). She is currently combining motherhood with work on a monograph based on her doctoral thesis, which will focus on the reproductive politics among egalitarian hunter gatherers. She has recently co-edited \*Human Origins: Contributions from Social Anthropology\* (2017)

**Marlene Haring** studied Art at Chelsea College of Art and Design (1998) and the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna (MA 2005). In her performances, interventions and installations, she deals with the social construction of places and events. She reflects and intervenes on the site-specific regulations and conventions which govern relationships and behaviours. She is currently writing a book from the perspective of sculptures of female bodies in public places, some of them pregnant, who, discovering amazing powers of endurance and memory, the limits of their patience, their sisters and their sisterhood, come down from their pedestals joining the march for equality. Documentation of work and CV: [marleneneharing.info](http://marleneneharing.info)

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