



Trump Tarriffs and BRICS
"I'M JUST A GIRL"
A POEM FOR THE ANTHROPOCENE
A Comment on Diversity
IRISH ELECTIONS
Ukraine & Trump
Inequality & Politics
HUNTER-GATHERER ONTOLOGIES

Editors note

The Free Forum began in 2024 in order to provide an easily accessible outlet for students to engage with political themes. Through poetry, opinion pieces, and a variety of artistic forms, the pamphlet covers a range of contemporary issues and allows contributors the freedom to approach topics of personal interest. Lacking any sort of editorial intervention, the Free Forum provides a unique and eclectic array of content.

Established at the University of London's Institute in Paris (ULIP), the first edition came together with the vital support of professors and the dedication of a number of students. The inaugural edition included submissions from students, refugees, and charities. Returning with our second edition, the pamphlet has expanded with the participation of students from three different institutions spread between London and Paris. This includes ULIP, as well as University College London, and The London School of Economics.

Our first edition, published at the end of the 2024 academic year opened with a number of submissions related to Palestinian resistance. We would like to recognise that a little

over half a year later, the Palestinian people find themselves returning to a homeland terrorised by the Israeli government and IDF. Despite the recent ceasefire, new challenges are presenting themselves. Above all else, the calls for further ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people and colonial conquest in the Gaza strip by the leader of the so-called free world represent an intensification of genocide, rather than deescalation. We remain in solidarity with the struggle of the Palestinian people, and hope for the demise of the murderous regime of Netanyahu which will do much to bring peace to both Israeli's and Palestinians.

While this edition does not directly address the current situation in Palestine, the following pages remain reflections of the past year that bring forward questions for the future. Typifying this is *I'm Just a Girl* by Nell Davies, a short piece on the Gisèle Pelicot case (p. 5). In many ways, this case resonated with women from all backgrounds, the themes of rape and sexual assault being those that are all too familiar. Despite this, the scale and particular nature of the abuse shattered all understandings of what was possible. As Nell explains, the perpetrators involved in the mass rape of Mme Pelicot were 'normal'. They were

firemen and nurses: husbands and fathers.

The past year has challenged our assumptions on 'limits' broadly conceived. Both the limits on, and the limitations of, democracy. The limits of international international law and institutions. The limits of human rights. The limits of the climate and the natural world. And, the seemingly limit-less nature of capitalism, inequality, and neoliberal ideology. To varying extents, each piece in this edition tackles these issues and questions the maleability of these limits.

Finally, The Free Forum cannot exist without the help of a number of people including student contributors, proffesors and our copy editor. We would like to thank everyone for their participation for this edition and encourage others to get involved with this project in the future.

Hugo Jamison

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I'm Just a Girl

Amongst debates around left or right, this side or that, the case of Gisèle Pelicot is one which seems to have created a unanimous statement of horror and condemnation. The normality within it is what makes it feel so damning. A firefighter, nurse, plumber, electrician... "We are not monsters, we are men like any others", said one of them. 51 men convicted. "He treats me like a princess", said the girlfriend of another. 23 men remain unidentified.

Corseted dresses and neatly-but-toned suits seem to have been replaced, generally and in our everyday, with t-shirts and jeans. Gender is less defined; she, her, he, him, they, them... I've started just throwing them all after my name, a friend recently told me. To make a point, because I don't feel the need to label myself with any of them. I'm just me.

When a woman is raped by a man, though, a red light labelled "gender" begins to flash. It is undeniable.

Whilst recently home, I went for a walk with my brother. It was dark, as in winter half the day seems to be, and although home for me is a place where front doors are always left

open and everyone knows everyone, it was scary.

"Boo!", he said, "what would you do if someone just started chasing us- imagine!".

To be able to walk outside alone at night, without the "text me when you're homes" and the "just in cases", seems to be like some kind of superpower.

It isn't just women. It isn't all men. It also isn't limited to rape. It's "look at the arse, the tits, on that". It's "she's asking for it". It's the wife of one man who raped Gisèle Pelicot saying, "I think because I refused him all the time, as a man, he had to look elsewhere".

As a woman in 2025, on your own in the dark or even in broad daylight, suddenly any power has the potential to be instantly snapped away. You're just a girl. I think that's terrifying.

Nell Davies

Trump Tariffs and BRICS

How Will the West Respond to the Growing Alliance

Amid political turbulence and economic uncertainty in the West, the expansion of another bloc may be shifting the global balance of power Eastward. Although not yet full members, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand have recently been welcomed into an ever-expanding BRICS alliance. Prior to their inclusion, the BRICS comprised around 45% of the world population and over 35% of its GDP. With the addition of these three Southeast Asian countries, this adds close to 400 million people and almost 2.3 trillion USD to the BRICS' GDP share. For the West, and the global financial institutions it dominates, this could present bad news.

With one of its express aims being the reduction of global reliance on the US Dollar, the BRICS have already implemented measures to this end. Their New Development Bank has been proposed as an alternative to the IMF and World Bank – institutions who, since their establishment post-WWII, have come under scrutiny for their imposition of stringent “structural adjustment programs” and quasi-inescapable dollar-denominated debt cycles on developing countries. A recent development has been interpreted by some as a

watershed moment; Argentina paid off an instalment of its IMF debt in Chinese Yuan (renminbi) instead of US Dollars for the first time.

The new CIPS payment system, where transactions are denominated primarily in renminbi, has also been touted as an alternative to SWIFT, where the US Dollar still predominates. This would particularly benefit Russia, who have been excluded from SWIFT since their invasion of Ukraine.

Of particular concern to Western leaders should be the remarkable growth of the BRICS' economies. Whereas G7 – BRICS' Western counterpart – comprised a slightly higher share of global GDP in 2022, they are projected to be overtaken by the BRICS by the end of 2024. Similarly, whereas the Dollar's share of SWIFT transactions has declined precipitously since 2016 and the Euro's has stagnated, that of renminbi has grown steadily.

One individual who is well-aware of the potential implications of this ever-expanding alliance is president-elect Donald Trump. It has been the topic of continuous speculation what a second – albeit non-consecutive – Trump presidency will mean for the world's econom-

ic trajectory. Particularly, what the proposed “Trump tariff” regime will mean for “kitchen table issues”, and the global economy more broadly.

Trump, who has made it no secret that he intends to take a combative approach to a rising China – and BRICS more broadly – has proposed a 10% tariff on all goods entering the United States, with this rising to 100% on all Chinese goods. With some version of this tariff regime likely being the path America will take, it has been speculated that domestically this will act as a regressive tax, hitting poorer citizens hardest. Findings predict that the bottom 20% of Americans will experience what amounts to a 5.7% increase in their taxes if Trump’s proposed tariffs are implemented, whilst the increase for the ultra-wealthy will be around 1.4%.

Globally, this tariff regime would imply a significant contraction in American demand for imported products. This is, of course, bad news for countries and sectors who depend on selling to American markets, such as the European and Chinese automotive and electric vehicle industries. Recent research has indicated that Trump might be drilling more holes in his own sinking ship here, whilst also bringing down others with him. It is estimated that these proposed tariffs will result in a -0.64% decrease in American GDP, -0.68% in China, and up to -0.23% in some EU countries such as Ger-

many, who have a large automobile export industry.

It is clear that the BRICS’ expansion is an issue which will be at the forefront of Western political agendas in the upcoming years. The question which remains unanswered is how we will choose to approach this dynamic. Will the West be able to cooperatively reposition itself in an economic order whose centre is shifting? Or will Trumpian confrontation take precedence, in a desperate attempt to hang on to the current order?

Luca La Cava



War or Peace

Land for Peace, Protection, or Restbite?

January 20th. Donald Trump's inauguration. Nearly three years of war in Ukraine. So far, radical promises of a rapid resolution have been made. Repeatedly, Trump has pledged the end of the Russo-Ukraine war within 24 hours of his inauguration. However, further details have not been provided. What will this look like? Is it feasible? What are the political implications of this occurring?

“Trump’s campaign promises may have reopened an avenue for a possible diplomatic solution.”

According to statistics, the percentage of Ukrainians who wish for the concession of territory has drastically risen from a mere 10% to 32%. Though Volodymyr Zelensky proclaimed that “there will only be peace once Crimea is returned”, a Russian-occupied territory since

2014, Trump's political advisors re-tort that “Crimea is gone”. With this mindset, Trump is pushing for the concession of territory as a means for a quick resolution. However, Crimea is not the only territory on the table because of Vladimir Putin's revanchist policies—policies aiming to retaliate and recover perceived lost territory from the fall of the Soviet Union. In this manner, Trump's push for the concession of Ukrainian territory may very well be the first step to inadvertently playing into Putin's hands. One must remember that since 2014, over 17 ceasefires have been agreed upon between Ukraine and Russia, all of which have been ignored. What proof is there that Putin's appetite for sovereign states will be appeased through the concession of territory?

Nonetheless, with casualties on the climb and North Korean troops now in the mix, Zelensky is seriously considering ceding some land temporarily in exchange for protection through NATO.

However, as it stands, Russia controls Zaporizhzhya, the largest power plant in Europe. Furthermore, approximately 80% of Ukrainian coal deposits including all of its anthracite are situated in regions occupied by Russia. This means that any

concession of territory will severely weaken Ukraine.

Nevertheless, Miriam Kosmehl rightly puts it that in the grand scheme of things, Zelensky's dilemma in deciding whether to concede land or not has nothing to do with the exchange of land for peace, but rather with the people who live there suffering atrocities and human rights violations since 2014.

Russia demands that NATO cease all ties with member states from Eastern Europe, insisting on the banning of Ukraine and any consequent former Soviet state seeking to join from ever ascending. Despite many former Soviet bloc states already being NATO members at the time of this being said in 2021, Russia stands firm in its demand to prevent Ukraine from ever joining NATO.

Even though Zelensky presses for an "immediate invitation" to join NATO, politically this would be a precarious offer, something that Trump's administration understands. Therefore, political advisors stress that Trump's 24-hour peace plan does not include Ukraine's ascension into NATO.

However, Trump's campaign promises may have reopened an avenue for a possible diplomatic solution. Though 24 hours is simply too constricted a time frame to conjure up a stable and meaningful solution,

the fact that concessions are on the table suggests an end may be sluggishly approaching.

Nevertheless, the United States' push for an end to the war, using land concessions as a diplomatic option, may place Ukraine on a platter, legitimising and perhaps even further enabling Putin's unlawful war of aggression. This is because not only will it weaken Ukraine severely, but it will also provide ample opportunity for the US to stop providing weaponry to aid Ukraine in this fight for its people and its sovereignty.

Though the future is uncertain, two things are clear. Russia's invasion is immoral, and it is illegal. A ceasefire is necessary to end the suffering of people on all sides of the conflict. It is improbable that Trump's campaign promises will be the seeds of the Laurus Delphica, planted as a path to meaningful peace, but they symbolise a shift in international policies surrounding Ukraine.

Jennifer Wendorff



Russia's multifrontal war

Poem for the Anthropocene

Final bow
Sinisterly beautiful a sight
the Anthropocene revised,
reclaimed by nature.
The greed of man
woefully extinct,
enveloped in sterile soil.
Indefinitely resting
following a scenic ending.
The fireworks
were such a splendour!
Velvet, silk or iron,
the curtains all fall
as do buildings
and bridges and walls.
This was the final performance.
A loan cockroach applauds
and hides inside a crevice.
Old habits die hard.
If only ours had died sooner
we might have had time
to rehearse a different play.
Alas, the dramaturgist
was on holiday.

Yana Koleva

The Irish Republic

Elections '24

The Republic of Ireland went to the polls in its latest general election on the 29th of November 2024, and as the final results trickled in, my thoughts turned to the last election.

It was held on the 8th of February 2020, and I was working on the south coast at the time. We were for several months employed in the port of a small city there, and on the matter of politics, the men were engaged.

The crew I had found myself in (known affectionately as the Tal-laght-ban, in deference to the area of West Dublin they came from) had worked manual labour jobs for most of their lives, and they largely backed Sinn Féin, with the occasional People Before Profit sympathiser.

It was a curious election. Sinn Féin, a much-maligned party by their various opponents in Ireland (both in The Republic of, and Northern), won the popular vote following a period of immense dissatisfaction with the incumbent Fine Gael government (the reasons for which are not discussed here). Fianna Fáil, however, beat them to the most seats (by a majority of one) and were entitled to form the next Dáil, the lower house

in the Republic of Ireland's parliamentary system.

On the 5th of March 2019, less than a year before the election, The Irish Times released polling to indicate that 30% of voters supported the Fine Gael government, up from the 25.5% of votes they received to win the previous election in 2016. The same poll indicated that 21% of voters backed Sinn Féin, putting them in third place behind Fianna Fáil at 24%.

Even three weeks before the election Sinn Féin remained an outside chance. On the 18th of January 2020, again The Irish Times polled them in third place with 21% of the vote, but by then Fianna Fáil were the favourites over Fine Gael, polling 25% and 23% respectively.

The election itself returned 24.5% of votes for Sinn Féin, 22.2% for Fianna Fáil, and 20.9% for Fine Gael, resulting in 37, 38, and 35 seats respectively; 81 seats were needed for a majority.

Despite losing out on the chance to form the next Dáil, the election was celebrated by Shinnars (a derogatory term for the Sinn Féin hardcore) throughout Ireland as a great victory. The wave of support they received

was far greater than anticipated, and many suggested that had they fielded more candidates, they would have easily won the election; this is almost certainly true.

My personal suspicion of Sinn Féin (a party with overt and covert links to paramilitary organisations) leads me to think many within the party and its electorate were ecstatic at being legitimised as the most popular party in the country, while relieved that they would inherit no real responsibility by having to enter government, and could continue to enjoy their party's status as scrappy underdog.

Nevertheless, Fianna Fáil formed the next Dáil, deliberately excluding Sinn Féin (who we will come back to) and invited the outgoing Fine Gael to join them as junior partners in a coalition government. However, even when working together for the first time (one or the other has been the dominant party in the Dáil since partition was implemented in Ireland), they lacked enough seats to form a government.

Thus, after talks with party leader Eamon Ryan, they invited the Greens to be the third partner, and on the 27th of June 2020, the 33rd session of the Dáil Éireann began.

Many of Ryan's party members rallied against the decision to enter government in 2020; less than a month after the Dáil was formed,

Saoirse McHugh, one of the well-known faces of the Greens and a former MEP candidate, left the party. Rob O'Sullivan, who was head of the Queer Greens faction of the party resigned as well.

This may seem like an unnecessary amount of context regarding the previous election, for an article that ostensibly seeks to interpret the results of the latest one, though I assure you there is a purpose.

On the 29th of November 2024, the Green Party was mercilessly punished by the electorate for its collaboration, and left with only one seat in the new Dáil.

This is not the first time a collaborating junior party has been rebuked at a subsequent election. We can look at Labour, who lost half their seats in '97 after joining Fianna Fáil for a term in government following the '92 election.

We can look at the Progressive Democrats, who joined Fianna Fáil as junior partners for several terms (excluding when Fianna Fáil relied on Labour's votes) during the two decades between 1989 and 2009; ultimately the party was dissolved, returning less than 3% of votes in their last election (2007).

A large minority of voters seem willing to entertain alternative parties, though ultimately the two-party sys-

tem proves hard to break. In some way or another, since the Republic was established, Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael have led the government; in 2020, “or” became “and/or”.

After the 29th of November 2024, “and” is back, stronger than before. Sinn Féin regressed to third place with 19% of the vote, having lost the momentum that gave them the moral victory in 2020. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael (FFG) came in first and second respectively, but this time their combined seat total brought them to a mere two seats shy of a majority.

As a result, they do not need the support of one of the minority parties or to bend to elements of another party’s manifesto and at the time of writing, are finalising negotiations with the Regional Independent Group (a forum of independent Teachtaí Dála) and the Healy-Rae Brothers (don’t get me started) to find support for their programme for government.

This leaves Irish politics in a sorry state. Some of these independent TDs may be punished at the next election, but the effect will feel less significant than the casting out of a single party, à la the Greens. It seems unlikely that the FFG coalition will implode; they’ve managed to make it through the last four years alright.

From my perspective, it seems that

the only chance for disruption is if Sinn Féin (whom I again stress my wariness of) manages to use the next four years in opposition to effectively undermine the government in public. If they could soften their nationalism (which Shinnners might say they have already made sufficient compromises on) even just a little, they might make themselves more appealing to voters in other parts of the Irish Left.

Other than that, an alternative to the continuing dominance of Fianna Fáil and/or Fine Gael seems quite impossible.

Henry Hughes

The Politics of Inequality

Walking anywhere in Central London, it is difficult to disregard the tufted sleeping bags atop cardboard beds under the great and grand buildings of the nation's capital. Along Euston Road, I saw a man of about twenty-four, wrapped in layers upon layers, who couldn't even find a clean coffee cup for passersby to throw change into. Not six feet across the footpath were individuals of extraordinary grandeur, gilding, and opulence, arriving in exceptional form out of exorbitant cars and into the grandiose St. Pancras Hotel. As a keen reader of Charles Dickens, it is difficult for me not to make comparisons here with his descriptions of Victorian London. It might be thought that things haven't changed since then; that this is the natural order of things; that there have always been homeless people like this young man, salivating at the wealthy as they take no notice of him. But this is not the case. This is not a continuation of, but in fact a return to the extreme levels of wealth inequality seen not only in London but across the developed world.

A recent analysis by Ben Tippet and Rafael Wildaur from the University of Greenwich has estimated that by 2035, the wealth of the UK's rich-

est 200 families will eclipse the entire country's GDP. At present, the wealthiest 50 families in the UK own an equal amount of wealth to half of the country's population – 33.5 million people. We cannot take this substantial inequality to be a 'good' or 'bad' thing based simply on morals, for this leaves the issue in limbo: arguable based on one's opinions or ideological leanings. It is infinitely more important to highlight how extreme inequality is inherently and economically hindering growth and therefore the living standards of the vast majority of the population.

So what do I mean? Well, large levels of inequality, like that which we see today and indeed saw to a large extent in Dickensian England, can impact a variety of factors that in turn lower the living standards of everyday people. In short: the more capital one has, the more stable and consistent the return on that capital will be – permitting further accumulation. For example: if I inherit an estate (net of tax) of £10 million (assuming a 5% annual return), I will naturally see an income of £500,000 per year. If I own my own house and have no debt, I do not have to pay a mortgage or interest on loans – so my liabilities are all but negligible (unlike regular families who often pay half of their income on housing). Even

given a consumption of £100,000, I will still have £400,000 remaining to invest in other ventures – accumulating the assets that the average household used to own. This leaves less wealth-producing capital for the middling classes (as they are usurped by the very wealthy), leaving these groups to sell their labour alone; and what has been true throughout history, is that the return on capital has almost always grown faster than wages. Considering how middling families also have large debts (which the rich don't have), how then are they to move up the socioeconomic ladder? The only

way it seems is to be born again and hope you land in the arms of wealthy parents.

Extreme capital accumulation and thereby its corresponding loss from working families is heading toward levels not seen since the time of Dickens. This oncoming era will be to the detriment of regular hard-working people and will exacerbate the number of us left with little to nothing. While it is the subject for future writings, the only way to remedy the forthcoming is to rethink politics and our attitude to the redistribution of wealth.

Conor Hatfield



“Have you tried spending less on coffee?”

We Are All Going to Die

In January 28th the Doomsday Clock, maintained by the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, reached 89 seconds to midnight – the closest it has ever been. In theory, since its inception following WWII, the clock aims to demonstrate how near we are to imposing “irrevocable harm to humanity”. Now, the calculations of such are beyond me and as far as I can tell consists of discourse between PhD enabled, fourth dimensions seeing scientists, who pluck the number out of thin air. Influencing this number are quoted concerns of nuclear war, environmental degradation, and AI. However, are things that bad? Or are we falling victim to our own behavioral fallacies?

“Never before has a generation been so pessimistic about the future as it is now?”

In this most recent decade fear is on the rise. Never before has a generation been so pessimistic about the future as it is now. I mean hell, 30 years ago *The End of History* and *The Last Man* was published. In retrospect this seems insane. But it demonstrates a strong example of how our perceptions have shifted. As humans we are trained to see the worst, and the internet has enabled us to see plenty of it. All the while there are plenty of good things to be seen, and yet we ignore them.

Once titled the dismal science, economics (in a twist of irony) has become the most optimistic of the social ‘sciences’. Why? Because it studies easily observable statistics (when done properly). And statistics don’t get caught up in the labyrinths of our brains.

To demonstrate this here are some figures sourced from the World Bank data base. Poverty (defined as less than \$2.15 a day) is on a dramatic decline having gone from 29.3% of the world in 2000 to 9% today. The mortality rate for children under five in the past 25 years has gone from 76 for every thousand to 37 for every thousand. Furthermore, the beginning of the century saw 14% of parliamentary seats held by women. Today that number

is 27%. Now yes, the state of these variables isn't perfect and in many areas progress is needed. Despite this, we should focus on the dramatic improvements we have experienced in the past twenty years. We are trending upwards!

This likely won't be your first or last reminder to focus on the positives but it's still a reminder and I hope you give it some thought.

And finally, this is a chance for me to advertise a book I find does a good job discussing these topics. It's called Factfulness and explores many of the behavioral pitfalls and spirals we get ourselves stuck in when assessing the quality of the world. If you feel overly pessimistic, I promise there is something for you to get out of it. To finish, I assure you that were not all going to die, I promise we've been through worse, simply look at to the Toba Caldera eruption.

Cooper Lawrenz

Headlines of the Week

Exposing the undercover satirists in the media this week.

The Arctic: climate change's great economic opportunity

(The Economist)

Bernie Ecclestone: 'Donald Trump is the best thing that could happen to the world'

(The Telegraph)

A perfect first week for President Trump (with an asterisk)

(Fox News)

Duchess of Sussex was dubbed 'Mystic Meg' by Palace staff due to her 'woke' and 'new agey' beliefs, royal book claims

(The Daily Mail)

How to Build an Inclusive Society

In my university, we have a Student Union department dedicated to “Diversity and Inclusion”. Their role is to spread awareness about the experiences of different cultural ‘communities’ in order to make everyone feel included. This reasoning is an example of what I call the ‘Diversity Doxa’, a thought process according to which exposure to difference builds tolerance in a society.

It is most popular among people of the same sociological group as myself who grew up in internationalised social contexts. We went to bilingual or international schools and many of us spoke with an ‘international school accent’. We attended ‘Culture Day’ where all are to dress according to their ‘ethnic background’ as we celebrate our differences. We are what David Goodhart calls ‘Anywheres’ as we were raised with a cosmopolitan view of the world.

I would argue that the Diversity Doxa has been proven wrong. Where the majority of the European population once seemed supportive of an Anywhere type of inclusion, the rise of the *Rassemblement National* in France and *Fratelli d'Italia* in Italy seems to indicate a push-

back. Additionally, the heightened ethnic and cultural tensions in the Anglosphere, where I would argue the Diversity Doxa is most prevalent, indicate a decrease rather than an increase in inclusion.

The reasons for its failings are twofold. Firstly, Anywheres’ lack of rootedness doesn’t allow them to see how the Diversity Doxa alienates people. In his book *De-meure* (translated as *Dwelling*), François-Xavier Bellamy focuses on the titular notion of dwelling. Like Heidegger before him, he argues that a dwelling is much more than a place one inhabits. A dwelling is a place that is familiar through its sights, smells, and sounds. It is in a country, the cultural norms derived from heritage that make that country particular. The Diversity Doxa encourages a form of multiculturalism that erodes what is familiar to rooted inhabitants through cultural dilution. I contend that this only creates pushback in the long term if not xenophobia.

Secondly, the Diversity Doxa directly creates exclusion and self-exclusion through its reproduction of cultural and ethnic ‘communities’. Through its emphasis on diversity and thus difference, it reproduces and reinforces the differentiating

factors between 'communities'. People's sense of identity thus increasingly develops into sub-nationalist tribalism as they express loyalty to their particular 'community' rather than to their country and identify with their group more than they do with their individual selves. They thus prefer to stay within and 'defend' their 'community' which necessarily leads to exclusion. The Anglosphere, unfortunately, has some of the worst examples of this, with one University of Virginia student claiming her campus' 'Multicultural Center' was "a space for people of colour", reusing the language of segregation.

I contend that both these problems can be solved with a strong national common culture. Instead of focusing on differences, national culture includes all by emphasizing similarities. In *The Uses of Pessimism*, Sir Roger Scruton recounts how his school housed students of several different faiths but managed to create cohesion through a shared sense of Britishness. The common culture favoured should be the one that has historically existed on a given land. This minimises the risk of pushback from those who feel rooted in their native soil as the assimilation of newcomers, as well as the prevention of counter-culture, preserves the cultural norms they are familiar with and thus minimises difference.

In the United Kingdom, the solution may start with the cultural reaffirmation of the monarchy. By the grace of God, King, Defender of the Faith, His Majesty is rooted like an oak in British cultural heritage. Yet, he also represents a figure all can unite behind by virtue of his constitutional role as head of state, but not of government. Thus, His Majesty the King, his heirs, and successors are the start of a path to regain the inclusion Sir Roger referred to in his book. Let us therefore not trade this opportunity for arbitrary egalitarian considerations. Loyalty to King and Country will bring back inclusion.

God Save the King!

Tinahy Ramamonjiarisoa

Evil instigators. Perfect perpetrators.
Falter in your praise? Cracking whip, crashing mace.
Cruelty in concert! Coercive composers.

Tracing out traditions according to their whims,
their doctrine gathers pace through all of time and space;
“Discover us new lands! [en]S[I]ave those all within!”

Thus follow hollow oaths to distribute the crops,
then they of golden lace vanish without a trace.
The trickle never comes. Not a drip. Not a drop.

They deny wrongdoing and dare to feign surprise
when we defend our case from such blood-sucking wraiths.
So, as we depose them, we must stare in their eyes,

As for their new epoch they’ve dared to lay the blame
false at those feet displaced whose futures they’ve erased.
Continents they hopscotch somehow devoid of shame:

Consumed by these horrors, these repetitious wrongs,
I silently spectate. Lines deepen in my face.
Pray their crimes are finite; our justice, boundless songs.

Henry Hughes

Hunter-Gatherer Ontologies

It's never usually a good sign when a professor assigns you a 35-page reading of their own work, but this one did not disappoint. Jerome Lewis was the professor, and his paper, *Ekila: Blood, Bodies and Egalitarian Societies*, was the reading. The questions we were tasked to explore were: Why do people share? What kinds of sharing do people engage in? What is the difference between donor-organised sharing and recipient-organised sharing? Is sharing just about material things? Is taboo a useful political device to avoid authority figures? Where does women's power lie in society? How is gender egalitarianism maintained?

I had never questioned sharing before, perhaps because it has always been positively reinforced, expected, and—perhaps selfishly—it feels nice. “Say thank you, Martha!” I can imagine my parents saying this when a barely recognisable relative would visit, bearing gifts. Sharing often appears to be initiated by the supposed generosity of an individual and sometimes as an obligation tied to ceremonial events, such as birthdays—or the birthday of Jesus. I grew up loving the act of gifting and sharing, reveling in the reciprocal joy it brings, especially when I

spent £0–£10. Anything more, and the recipient had better be thrilled to make it feel worthwhile. These rituals of life and sharing have been instilled in me since birth.

Perhaps the ultimate real-life example came when my sister was gifted a doll so she, too, could sit like my mother did with a newborn baby—feeling included, comforted, and, most importantly, sharing in the experience of motherhood. But what if we didn't have to curate these moments, smiles, and ceremonies to share in people's emotions? We feel that sharing is an important aspect of social life, yet most of the time, we don't share. We wait for an opportune moment or for someone else to feel like giving. We accumulate cash in our banks and give only to those who really need it. But what if everyone, simply by existing, automatically demanded a share?

What I learned from Lewis's paper and the ways he spoke about the Mbendjele is how the basic components of a good life are shared, as shown through their practices of good and bad *ekila*. I was fascinated by the ways *ekila* managed the relationships that make up their entire environment. From birth to death, spirits, animals, people, and the forest all embody *ekila*. This sharing

within one environment and one life creates sacred connections between all things. It can be seen as what other anthropologists have called a relational epistemology, where “getting to know” the world one lives in becomes the foundation for forming a distinct ontology. Or, as Lewis quotes, *ekila* reflects what A.F. Robertson describes as “a mediating process that relates the formation of human bodies to the formation of human ideas”.

In the beginning of the paper, Lewis includes excerpts from an interview—such as one with Emeka—where Emeka tries to explain to Jerome what *ekila* is, where it comes from, how it arises, and how to avoid it:

“*Ekila* is the same as mobeku. That’s the name of the medicine God (Komba) sent women when women put in the moon [menstruate]. The business of *ekila* was first with them. It is all about children. You can see women’s tummies swell up at this time. It’s the wind. They have to expel their wind as *ekila* [blood]; this cleans out their wombs... If she doesn’t do *ekila*, then she has to do *ekila*... Women’s biggest husband is the moon.”

“If I’m a hunter, I don’t sleep around with different women. If I slept with her, then her, and then her, all the animals would know. They would smell my smell and know “that

hunter has ruined his own *ekila* [ruined his hunting]”. Some will come with great anger. Others, you shoot them, but they won’t die. You are very surprised. When you shoot at an antelope from close range and it doesn’t die, we call this *ekila* ...”

“Animals have *ekila*. They caused suffering to our fathers: buffalo, bongo antelope, black-fronted duiker [all are red animals] and sitatunga – but only the red coloured females, not the dark-coated ones. They thought that the red sitatunga looked like a bongo antelope... The bongo has a huge and dangerous *ekila*.”

Emeka, 48 year-old Mbendjele man from Ibamba, June 1997.

A hunter failing to provide meat ruins his *ekila*. Similarly, a hunter failing to share his meat also ruins his *ekila*. The only exception to this rule is if he is the sole man in the camp. Additionally, if a hunter’s wife is menstruating, he cannot hunt because he has *ekila* and the spirits will smell him, sabotaging the hunt. As Lewis emphasises, the sharing element of *ekila* is central to its “egalitarian ethic” and practice: “even laughter should be shared properly. Laughter shared between people in camp during the evening makes the forest rejoice, whereas laughing at hunted animals ruins the hunter’s *ekila*.”

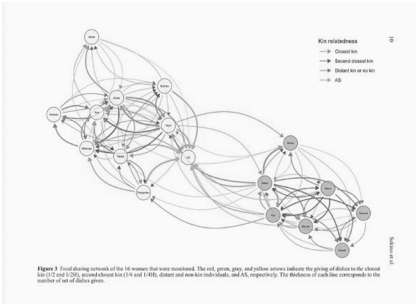
There is no such thing as an individual existing outside the influences of others. The egalitarian ethic of *ekila* is structured around a sharing ethic governed solely by external forces. Success and failure are attributed neither to the (in)adequacies of human skill nor to the environment. Sharing is inescapable unless one wishes to be shunned for their ruined *ekila*. Responsibility is equally inescapable, as the consequences of ruined *ekila* ripple through the community—sabotaging hunts, straining relationships, and leaving children without food.

This interconnectedness was vividly illustrated during the lecture when we were shown a slide that appeared to have been scribbled over with numerous lines. The image comes from Ayako Sekino’s research among the Baka people in Cameroon, another egalitarian hunter-gatherer group. Jerome explained that she had used a mapping technique to demonstrate how often and between whom food was shared during mealtime. It was striking for the sheer quantity of sharing

documented, as well as the clearly visible kin relationships among camp members. Even the researchers were recipients of shared food on multiple occasions.

I imagined the scene behind this map: laughter, talking, eating, and of course, smiles. But not the same forced smile I was compelled to give when receiving a present from someone I didn’t know, nor the smile of gratitude for an unexpected gift from someone I love. Instead, it was more of a relaxed, crooked kind of smile—the kind that comes when a gift is expected all along.

Martha Cosgrove



[contactthefreeforum@gmail.](mailto:contactthefreeforum@gmail.com)