

DAVID GRAEBER, DAVID WENGROW, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity*. Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, New York 2021. 692 pages, 7 maps and b/w figures, hardcover, ISBN 978-0-3741-5735-7.

The Dawn of (Almost) Everything: Sample with Care

Inspiring insights may be the outcome whenever qualified archaeologists and experienced sociocultural anthropologists combine intersecting interests and skills to reactivate an interdisciplinary cooperation that has become increasingly attractive again in recent years. The present volume is a contribution to these efforts, but at the same time, its title and its goals aim at much more – which has to be sampled with care.

Premises and Orientation

This book has quite rapidly found its way to the top of international non-fiction best seller lists. In part this is due to the popular reputation of its co-authors, a generalist sociocultural anthropologist (who died shortly after the book's completion) and a comparative archaeologist. In part, however, its market success also indicates an enduring public interest in topics related to the history of humanity – which seems to be greatly increasing in times of obvious global turmoil and crisis. This reviewer combines his basic appreciation for the present cooperation project, including an endorsement of its scale and some of its main orientations, with some scepticism regarding a number of serious conceptual and methodological flaws. In terms of scale, the authors indeed address crucial issues in humanity's history with focal periods between 9000 BC (in Eurasia) and 1400 CE (in the Americas). Since its early beginnings, sociocultural anthropology has been pursuing a special interest in common and diverse features of humanity's history in general, and the field has indeed benefited from such a grand scale in some of its practices. In recent decades, however, this element in sociocultural anthropology's record has been somewhat neglected. In a sense therefore, David Graeber, as the anthropologist of the two co-authors, has reactivated and continued a post-1945 legacy dating back to "The Savage Mind" by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1962),¹ to "Stone Age Economics" by Marshall Sahlins (1972),² or Jack Goody's "The Oriental, the Ancient and the Primitive" (1990).³ However, like the proverbial dwarf climbing on the shoulders of giants to gain

a better perspective, this endeavour remains somewhat limited. To an extent, this has to do with the book's main thrust and orientation. In most of its crucial aspects, this volume communicates older insights and results from sociocultural anthropology's research records to a wider public of non-academic readers and of neighbouring academic fields. There is nothing basically wrong in such an endeavour – particularly not if these efforts are simultaneously brought into a productive dialogue with archaeology as in this case. Hence acknowledging the popularizing and outreach aspects (with regard to anthropology) in this book project does not imply even a grain of criticism. In fact, both anthropology and archaeology would benefit from any good outreach efforts. Readers from the field of sociocultural anthropology have to be aware, however, that within these contexts of premises, orientations and purpose, the present publication does not contain much that is entirely new. In that sense, it surprises by its omissions rather than by what it spells out. In fact, this review will argue that Graeber's summaries of selected, well-known insights are neither comprehensive nor exhaustive enough. Nevertheless, a partial and fragmented effort to summarize anthropology's contributions to such a project is better than no contribution at all. So what is innovative from sociocultural anthropology's perspectives is that several crucial insights from the field are indeed made accessible for wider archaeological and historical reasoning: humanity is united by a basic mental and affective equipment including aspects of *homo ludens*, i.e. a pragmatic interest in experimenting with various alternatives; there was never just one condition of foraging in humanity's history; that the history of diversity can no longer be viewed as a one-way road towards more complexity, and so forth. David Wengrow's part in this co-authored volume appears somewhat more balanced than Graeber's. His self-identification as a comparative archaeologist already indicates a somewhat heavier reliance on actual empirical evidence, and a somewhat less passionate commitment to certain theoretical paradigms, as displayed in Graeber's bibliography, which includes "Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology".⁴ Moreover, Wengrow does integrate his own, first-hand archaeological experience (the ancient Near East) into

1 LÉVI-STRAUSS 1966.

2 SAHLINS 1972.

3 GOODY 1990.

4 GRAEBER 2004.

this book's main arguments, while Graeber's ethnographic experience (in Madagascar) is not explicitly apparent. Be that as it may, both researchers have a shared authorship in all of the book's key premises, chapters, main arguments, methodological procedures, and results. As for the book's key rationale and purpose for specialists and non-specialist readers alike, this is focused on a clear and convincing criticism of conservative evolutionist bestsellers of recent years. That cluster of influential treatises ranges from Stephen Pinker's book on violence⁵ to Jared Diamond's works related to the emergence of agriculture.⁶ Explicitly rejecting these popular, almost paradigmatic narratives of an evolutionist worldview in sociocultural matters (while simultaneously not leaving out their progressive counterparts), Graeber and Wengrow basically argue (in my wording) that historical *possibility* is never identical with historical *necessity* in the human experience. In these discourses, as addressed by the authors, possibilities largely refer to socio-political and ritual relations whereas necessities more often than not entail environmental, demographic and/or economic constraints. Possibilities, the authors insist, have always included the playful trying out of alternatives, of pursuing some of them to an extent, and of retreating and withdrawing from them again for various reasons before trying again, or trying out something else.

In addition to schismogenetic processes (according to Gregory Bateson's terminology), some of humanity's diversity between groups thus was unavoidably also caused by the *possibility* of simultaneous alternatives. These pragmatic, experimental and at times playful dimensions in human existence are completely ignored by the evolutionist uni-directional, teleological meta-narratives of progress, from one necessity to the next, without any alternatives other than failure. "You can't simply jump from the beginning of the story to the end, and then just assume you know what happened in the middle. (...) That's one reason why imaginative in-filling is necessary." How the authors thereby⁷ sum up their main methodological approach also clarifies that their own "imaginative in-filling" intends to be complementary to some of the remaining, valuable insights of evolutionist reasoning.

Indigenous Critique

A basic rationale for the volume's agenda of rewriting human history between the foraging ("beginning") and early

state ("end") societies is provided by the narrative framework of its first and last chapters. That narrative frame presents today's evolutionist paradigm as the offspring of European Enlightenment discourses addressing humanity's development from its origins to the present. In their pessimistic version through Thomas Hobbes, and in their optimistic version through Jean-Jacques Rousseau, all those discourses maintained a focus on the secularized biblical theme of expulsion from Paradise. According to this argument, humanity had left *one original* condition of "equality" behind, when it entered into the alleged origins of "inequality". By continuing several previous debates on the same topic, Graeber and Wengrow argue that these European Enlightenment discourses had emerged, in part at least, as a defensive reaction to what is called the indigenous critique. The term primarily refers to representatives of native North American communities and to their reported statements about European lives and societies as they experienced them on both sides of the Atlantic by the early 17th century and thereafter. For this book's co-authors, the indigenous critique primarily focused on the prevalence of obedience and the absence of freedom among the European communities and representatives whom native Americans encountered. Freedom rather than inequality had thus been at the core of the indigenous critique; it was addressing political conditions rather than social distinctions. The narrative of one original egalitarian condition had hence been introduced as a defensive Eurocentric, post-biblical fiction to counter, and to marginalize, those very political issues raised by the indigenous critique.

Today's research therefore has to depart from this Eurocentric evolutionist legacy, according to Graeber and Wengrow, by leaving behind the search for any "origin of inequality". By taking the indigenous critique seriously, the diverse forms of freedoms should become a new focus of, as the authors phrase it, when and how humanity lost them ("How did we get stuck?"). Recent participants in this debate have pointed out that European thought also cherished ideas about humanity's egalitarian conditions before and beyond biblical influences, i.e. long before the Enlightenment. Graeber and Wengrow are aware of this argument, and the way they address it strengthens their main point that reactivating earlier traditions does not exclude but indeed assists contemporary challenges. Another set of criticisms concerns source materials. The authors' use of original sources for this debate has been questioned by several prominent reviewers, including Kwame Anthony Appiah.⁸ In particular,

⁵ PINKER 2012.

⁶ DIAMOND 1987. – DIAMOND 2012.

⁷ p. 274.

⁸ APPIAH 2021.

the validity of some of the materials from which proponents and contents of the indigenous critique have been teased out so far has been contested quite convincingly. This is an ongoing debate, primarily to be pursued by historians including historians of philosophy and literature. Graeber and Wengrow deserve credit, however, for having made some of the crucial aspects of the indigenous critique audible and visible to a wide readership, including at least the partial impact it had upon European academic thinking. This narrative framework constitutes a slender third of the entire volume, basically communicating and outlining the authors' empirical priorities for a focus on historical possibilities that underlay alternative options for agency with an interrelated interest in freedoms. At a conceptual level in this regard, the authors specify three primordial freedoms:⁹ the freedom to move away, the freedom to disobey, and finally, the freedom to create new and different forms of social reality. These "primordial" freedoms, it should be noted right away, are phrased in a remarkably gender-neutral wording, while at the same time, these gender-free freedoms from the outset are not conceptualized in any interaction with constraints, as if possibility could ever exist *per se* without any necessity, e.g. environmental factors. In fact, a search for the presence or absence of these three primordial freedoms (with the conceptual limitations just indicated) is very much at the core of the authors' interest in "world history",¹⁰ the "overall course of human history",¹¹ the "broad sweep of history"¹² and so forth. This informs and legitimizes the authors' general empirical priority for political freedoms related to their three necessity-free and gender-neutral criteria.

Foragers and Farmers against the State

More than a third of the book discusses such foraging and farming societies that were not integrated into any kingdom or similar state-like constellation. Ethnographic and archaeological findings are much more productively combined here than elsewhere in the volume. The authors' argument persuasively builds on seasonality as the crucial factor not only for regular fusion and fission processes but, even more importantly, for the widespread coexistence of correspondingly different ways of life. That seasonal coexistence of different ways of life thus represents a crucial referent for the authors' interest in the simultaneity of alternatives. Seasonality, with ensuing contraction and dispersal, may have

represented a basic overarching feature for these societies, yet otherwise they never represented only one "type" or setting but several of them. In historical terms, this diversity between the Upper Palaeolithic and pre-colonial periods is discussed by also including corresponding ethnographic examples from more recent decades. Based on regional criteria, well-documented cases from native histories in the Americas, from sub-Saharan Africa and from indigenous Australia are taken into account to illustrate the main points. In addition to seasonal rhythms, interregional and even cross-continental connectivity through ritual, social relations and exchange always embedded foragers within wider networks in which small bands were often an exception rather than the rule. Seasonal contractions and their ensuing, extended periods of settlement could allow for a whole range of large-scale activities, including rich burials and grand monuments, as the authors already outlined in an earlier influential lecture and article.¹³ The archaeological site of Poverty Point (1600 BC, Louisiana) and its interconnection with sacred geometry is convincingly associated with the seasonally settled contractual dimensions of comparable settings.

Eventually, the authors argue, humans' movement out of Africa in biologically much more diverse forms than is evident today¹⁴ had been encouraged by the rich environmental diversity, especially along coasts and riverbanks.¹⁵ Hence corresponding ethnographic examples are taken to be more representative of the "broad sweep of history" than those surviving in unfriendly and remote conditions as small bands.¹⁶ While populations thereby tended to become larger in overall demographic terms, most foraging groups preferred to live their lives on ever-smaller scales, primarily by processes of inter-group schismogenesis (or contradistinction, as Edward E. Evans-Pritchard called it).¹⁷ This is when Graeber and Wengrow turn to the ethnography of native American foraging and fishing populations along the northwest coast of America, famous for their dramatic social and linguistic diversity, including fortified settlements, slavery, and competitive prestige rituals. These short portrayals and interpretations of native American lives along the northwest American Pacific coastlands are fairly

⁹ p. 426.

¹⁰ p. 8.

¹¹ p. 9.

¹² p. 137.

¹³ GRAEBER, WENGROW 2015.

¹⁴ p. 82.

¹⁵ pp. 258–259.

¹⁶ It may be noted in passing that this is one of the few instances where the authors indeed bring environmental factors into their argument, in addition to the Fertile Crescent's role in the historical emergence of agriculture.

¹⁷ EVANS-PRITCHARD 1940.

accurate if assessed in terms of how sociocultural anthropology was taught in the 1930s or the 1950s. Graeber and Wengrow elaborate conventional insights about indigenous lives in the region by arguing that local elites preferred to recruit slaves from captives because they could not impose slavery upon their resident freemen,¹⁸ which they see as corroborating their reasoning about “primordial freedoms”. Otherwise, the authors largely rely on findings by US anthropology’s founding father Franz Boas and his immediate two generations of students. In part, this is also responsible for the authors’ somewhat surprising yet coherent admission that what are called cultural areas do play a certain role in comparable historical constellations, although the concept had been repeatedly discarded as obsolete in post-1945 anthropology. In one of its original forms, Boas had brought it across the Atlantic from his native Germany. The concept hence does experience a minor renaissance here, through Graeber’s and Wengrow’s plausible emphasis on simultaneous alternatives, playful diversity, and even more importantly, on inter-group schismogenesis. While this deserves some acknowledgement, the authors largely ignore research results that have emerged about the Pacific Northwest ever since the Boas school. This does not just concern important insights into precolonial and early colonial regional history. More importantly still, within their general reluctance to absorb several decades of more recent research in those regional constellations, the specific topic of gender relations and of women’s lives is conspicuous only by its complete absence in the authors’ summaries, here and everywhere else when discussing foragers. Since Graeber and Wengrow nowhere care to explain this, readers are left puzzling: are gender-related topics not relevant enough for the authors’ “imaginative in-filling” about the dawn of “humanity’s” history? Do gender topics, in the authors’ view, still lack enough empirical evidence to be sufficiently substantiated (a claim that would be difficult to defend)? Do these topics simply stand in the authors’ way of pursuing their search for “free societies” based on the criteria of their “three primordial freedoms”, without sufficient consideration of gendered inequalities, or freedoms? We shall return to this at the end of this review.

In addition to the book’s strong points that there never was just one foraging constellation in human history and an indication of some non-environmental, systemic reasons for a corresponding diversity, the authors achieve another substantial point in these sections. They convincingly demonstrate that transitions to farming were never as radical as

previous research (including Diamond’s publications)¹⁹ had assumed. In fact, a so-called Neolithic revolution never happened as a revolution, but instead as protracted, multiple, and complex processes over several centuries, if not millennia. In this case, the insight may be less surprising for regional experts among archaeologists than for other readers. Graeber and Wengrow convincingly summarize how experimental, diverse and pragmatic the first modes of integrating farming practices into other existing forms of subsistence actually were. Through a choice of very convincing examples and arguments, they discuss how often these modes were abandoned again for long periods, and how long it took from first integration until plant domestication became dominant – about 3000 years in the Middle East, for instance. The case examples presented in these contexts range from Stonehenge, as a ritual and observational focal site for a wide spectrum of groups that often seem to have abandoned first farming experiences again, to the Nambikwara native inhabitants of the Amazon region with their seasonal pendulum rhythm of switching from foraging to farming and back. Through a careful reconstruction of the Fertile Crescent as the earliest region of agricultural origins, the authors show that enduring transitions may have occurred where more permanent settlements allowed for the pursuit of other activities in the same region, such as foraging and exchange. Again, the authors coherently argue that the pragmatic freedom of experimental possibility played a greater role in these processes of “play farming”²⁰ than any direct constraints or necessities. As for related political forms, the authors consistently argue that “play chiefs”, “temporary kings”, and similar versions of limited sovereignty were possible and existed in various foraging and early farming settings of seasonal contraction, albeit not in all of them. Yet the strength of these three primordial freedoms, the authors maintain, did not allow for any enduring stability.

This part of the authors’ argument is somewhat twisted, since it prefers one class of evidence while ignoring substantial testimonies pointing to alternative possibilities. For instance, the influence of gerontocratic councils (as testified for native Australian and American groups), and of Great Men and Big Men positions (as known from Melanesia) is strangely but not coincidentally ignored whenever the authors discuss these matters. Similar to the authors’ insufficient discussion of the Pacific northwest coast record, this would have required a more comprehensive consideration

¹⁸ p. 267.

¹⁹ DIAMOND 1987. – DIAMOND 2012.

²⁰ p. 246.

of the ethnographic record – but in that context, also of the works by Marilyn Strathern and Maurice Godelier, with their far-reaching relevance for understanding gender, exchange, and political hierarchies. Instead, in this regard for their theoretical interpretations Graeber and Wengrow follow the work of Pierre Clastres, the well-known anarchist author of “Society against the State”,²¹ and their intellectual hero James C. Scott.²² Along the lines suggested by Clastres and Scott, the authors argue that something like early states were always within the reach of these specific foraging and incipient farming societies, but they never fully pursued these options because, in the authors’ view, the freedom to disobey remained more important to them. This is a point where (again, if we remember the absence of gender-related topics) the authors’ theoretical interests seem to override a substantial part of the ethnographic record. Are authoritative gerontocratic and Great Men decision processes *not* forms of limited political sovereignty? Do only “play chiefs and play kings” indicate the dawn of “everything”? Under these limited premises – with uneven care for detail – the authors then discuss how agriculture spread into various other parts of the world, including the Nile Valley, central Europe, and Oceania, and how it spread in the Americas.

Gender, City, State

After they have largely avoided addressing women’s lives and gender relations among foragers, the authors almost fall into the opposite extreme when they discuss settings in which agriculture prevails. They rightly emphasize women’s role in the consolidation and development of agriculture, domestic crafts and related specializations. Yet apart from their lack of acknowledgement of previous research to that effect,²³ they unnecessarily exaggerate the argument. Their counter-intuitive return to the matrifocal thesis for Neolithic East Mediterranean village life by Marija Gimbutas is not sufficiently well substantiated.²⁴ This would have required a much more detailed assessment of regional diversity²⁵ than the two authors were apparently aware of, precisely in view of the recent findings to which they frequently appeal. Their subsequent praise for ancient Crete as a more recent survival of an East Mediterranean post-Neolithic legacy of balanced gender relations has to be treated with similar caution, as

German sociocultural anthropologist Karl Heinz Kohl has aptly observed.²⁶

In empirical terms, the book’s final sections discuss cities and states, which the authors claim should not be called states but kingdoms, empires and so forth. In the authors’ opinion, the term “state” always by necessity implies definitional features of modern (Euro-American) states. This may be a small terminological issue of little sophistication. Yet to my mind, the argument has a Eurocentric taste, as if indigenous peoples in pre-modern times were not capable of building any states in their own manner.²⁷ More important than this irrelevant definitional matter (on which the authors spend far too much text), however, is the fact that the section on cities and states is also the book’s weakest part in terms of interdisciplinary logic and coherence. Throughout long sections, this is an enumeration of more or less detailed summaries about various archaeological findings, yet without corresponding ethnographic case examples to substantiate the points to be made. As if urban anthropology never counted, ethnography and sociocultural anthropology are therefore not sufficiently employed for any productive dialogue with archaeology in many of these sections – except when it comes to divine kingship and its relevance for states-that-should-be-called-something-else.

Somewhere in between their discussions of seasonal and permanent agriculture and its possible but not unavoidable transitions to city life, the authors insert a far too brief reflection about what is called the Hopewell Interaction Sphere (in today’s Ohio, 100 BC – AD 400 but dating back to preceding centuries around 1000 BC), to demonstrate the far-reaching and cross-continental effects of regular gathering areas. These included large earthworks, innovative mathematical reasoning, and supra-local social relations that may have comprised possible effects for widely shared native American clan names. This specific discussion would have deserved a much clearer distinction between facts and theory. Moreover, it would also have benefited from integrating more recent historical and ethnographic research, including probable interactions with urban centres in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica.²⁸ Cities, the authors then elaborate, required the sustained production of agricultural surpluses as their indispensable logical and historical prerequisite – but again, it took centuries and millennia to get there while trying out various alternatives. There was no built-in teleological arrow inherent to these processes. The authors

²¹ CLASTRES 1989.

²² See, e.g., SCOTT 1985. – SCOTT 2009.

²³ For example, Jack Goody by his synthesis of the earlier work of authors in German, see GOODY 1990.

²⁴ GIMBUTAS 1982.

²⁵ See, for example, CVEČEK 2022.

²⁶ KOHL 2022.

²⁷ GINGRICH 2021.

²⁸ Christian Feest, personal communication, April 4 2022.

spend some interpretative effort to then demonstrate that the earliest cities did not feature any clear indications of central rule or sovereignty. Hence, they argue, early cities such as in Çatalhöyük or Uruk, may very well have represented “free” conglomerates of more or less loosely associated co-residents. This is a valid hypothesis, but not much more than that at this point. In this argumentative context, in his widely acclaimed review, Appiah has raised the question of whether the authors sometimes tend to introduce what he calls a “fallacy fallacy” argument: the “absence of evidence routinely serves as evidence of absence” – as in the case of Uruk. “A naked ‘what if?’ conjecture has wandered off and returned in the three-piece suit of an established fact.”²⁹ Here, as much as in the case of Trypillia megasites in the Ukrainian forest steppe, the “Dawn of Everything” could have avoided some of these weaknesses if fewer archaeological examples had been integrated with more substantial ethnographic cases – including ethnographic examples that do indeed correspond to the archaeological settings discussed (i.e. without leaving any specific traces of sovereignty). In short, more ethnography and less archaeology would have strengthened the argument in these sections where the authors’ valid hypotheses might have deserved it.

At long last, Graeber and Wengrow thus arrive at the topic of the state-that-should-be-called-something-else, which leads readers to Pharaonic Egypt and pre-Columbian Meso- and South America. To make a long story very short, the authors highlight divine kingship as a common denominator at the root of these developments. This was also the topic of a separate and useful book by Graeber, co-authored with his erstwhile PhD adviser Marshall Sahlins.³⁰ Empirically, the ethnographic case of enduring sovereignty by the Great Sun monarch among the Natchez (in today’s Louisiana) is skilfully brought in to make the point that the ruler or sovereign is the divine’s first representative among the people. This combines well with the authors’ earlier argument that, from the outset, central religious values have always been something that is mentally set aside as unreachable and untouchable. Nevertheless, whether this was the one and only road to political subordination remains questionable. Graeber and Wengrow, however, thereby arrive at some (Weberian) answer to their original question about how primordial freedoms were lost (“How did we get stuck?”): whenever royal or imperial sovereignty managed to attain an enduring position, beyond charisma and central

religious knowledge, this was accomplished by establishing a bureaucracy at its service.

Methodology and Summary

This review concludes slightly less negatively than Arjun Appadurai’s.³¹ Instead, it combines an explicit scepticism about a number of grave flaws with an appreciation of certain merits and strengths. To begin with the latter, sociocultural anthropology indeed has a task to pursue not only in contemporary but also in wider historical matters. At a time when representatives of various academic fields ranging from evolutionary psychology to human biology pose as the only providers of relevant master narratives, it is high time that archaeology and sociocultural anthropology joined forces to contribute towards more pluralist debates and discourses, including public outreach efforts that are clearly based in the humanities. This contributes to an agenda of intellectual resistance against illiberal determinism, teleological evolutionism, and biological reductionism. Within such premises of intellectual scholarly resistance, an outline of crucial periods and phases in premodern human history that is based on an assessment of archaeological and ethnographic records is both necessary as well as fundamentally useful these days.

Regarding biases, mistakes and limitations, a certain number of them is almost unavoidable inasmuch as any project of such a scale has to be selective, and the case examples themselves by definition always will remain vignettes and summaries. Moreover, some of the inconsistencies mentioned (such as a weak interaction between archaeology and ethnography on most topics related to cities and states) in fact have less to do with the authors than with the fields they come from. After years of ignoring these issues, sociocultural anthropology, for instance, is not all too well prepared to re-engage with this good and productive legacy of research in wider historical topics. Apart from feminist anthropologists, any other internal disciplinary debates, among the field’s main journals for instance, from which an author like Graeber could have benefited more extensively, have in fact been infrequent. So in my view, in addition to the co-authors’ public and outreach contribution, Graeber in particular also deserves credit with regard to internal matters and fashions within sociocultural anthropology – for contributing to a subfield that had been too marginalized, and for far too long at that.

²⁹ APPIAH 2021.

³⁰ GRAEBER, SAHLINS 2017.

³¹ APPADURAI 2022, 2: “The history is wrong in crucial regards, but the fable is compelling.”

Content-wise, the volume's major merits build on this productive cooperation between the two fields where it actually is carried out in practice. As ensuing strong points, this review has highlighted, first, an emphasis on systemic diversity in human history regarding foraging societies, as opposed to the myth of just one foraging condition, and relating that diversity to two non-necessary factors, namely schismogenetic processes including cultural areas, and to the simultaneity of alternative options of agency, including "play chiefs" and similar forms. Moreover, discarding the idea of a Neolithic "revolution" and demonstrating the long-lasting relevance of multiple ways of integrating farming into diverse other activities without any built-in teleological arrow pointing to the emergence of domesticated plants as the prevailing subsistence activities may have been clear for archaeologists, but is now bound to also enter the canon of all neighbouring fields as well. In addition, I also tend to view the focus on divine kingship as an important transition towards exclusive sovereignty, in addition to being a well-deserved tribute to the late work of Sahlins.

The book's major flaws have been identified, first, as a preferred focus on possibilities that often leaves out their interactive relation with actual necessities, and a consequent reluctance to adequately consider environmental history, let alone climate history, as an intrinsic part of human history. This is not only bizarre but strangely old-fashioned at a point in time when senior and junior non-academic and academic persons around the globe are increasingly engaging in considering environmental challenges profoundly and acting accordingly. Second, ignoring women's lives and gender relations under foraging conditions has been addressed as an unacceptable weakness in this volume. The point has been made abundantly clear by a global leader in feminist anthropology. In her review, Nancy Lindisfarne said: "Because they hold that inequality has always been with us, Graeber and Wengrow have next to nothing to say about the origins of gendered inequality among humans (...) There is a striking feature of the historical, anthropological and archaeological record. In almost every case, where people lived in economically and politically equal societies, women and men too were equal. And wherever there have been class societies with economic inequality, there too men have dominated women."³² I endorse this critique: the avoidance of gender topics among foragers in Graeber's and Wengrow's volume is neither an omission nor a mistake – instead, this is a systematic outcome of their basic conceptual and theoretical approach.

I would like to end with a few methodological points that emerge from this main critique about neglecting major environmental factors and ignoring gendered topics among foragers. Within any legitimate academic pluralism, Graeber's and Wengrow's theoretical preferences are as valid as any others. My first methodological critique therefore respects their theoretical orientation without sharing it, but argues that the authors too often bend their empirical evidence according to their theoretical orientations. When, for instance, they ignore gerontocratic or Great Men forms of political influence, this comes close to manipulating the overall ethnographic record in such a way that it fits their theoretical assumptions. My second methodological critique builds on the first. "Imaginative in-filling" should better remain limited to those instances where and when no other methodological procedure is available. Otherwise, authors tend to be carried away by their theoretical (and ideological) assumptions without addressing and explaining the actual evidence at hand. Thirdly, I remain sceptical that any joint treatise by archaeologists and anthropologists can be sustained if it remains focused on the "broad sweep of history" alone, without being very well based on detailed examinations of exemplary phases in regional, cross-continental, and intercontinental history.³³ As long as archaeologists and sociocultural anthropologists use regional examples merely as illustrations for the generalized points they want to make about humans in world history, the methodology remains flawed and the danger of ideological distortions is ever present. Unavoidably, any outcome of such a methodological orientation will have to be sampled with highly critical care.

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32 LINDISFARNE, NEALE 2021.

33 See, e.g., KÜMMELER, MAJOROSSY, HOVDEN 2021.

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Andre Gingrich
Institute for Social Anthropology (ISA)
Austrian Academy of Sciences
Hollandstraße 11–13
1020 Vienna
Austria
andre.gingrich@oeaw.ac.at
 orcid.org/0000-0003-2922-0552

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