

Translated excerpt

Meike Stoverock
Female Choice.
Vom Anfang und Ende der männlichen Zivilisation

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Meike Stoverock
Female Choice. The Beginning and End of Male
Civilization

Translated by Alexandra Roesch

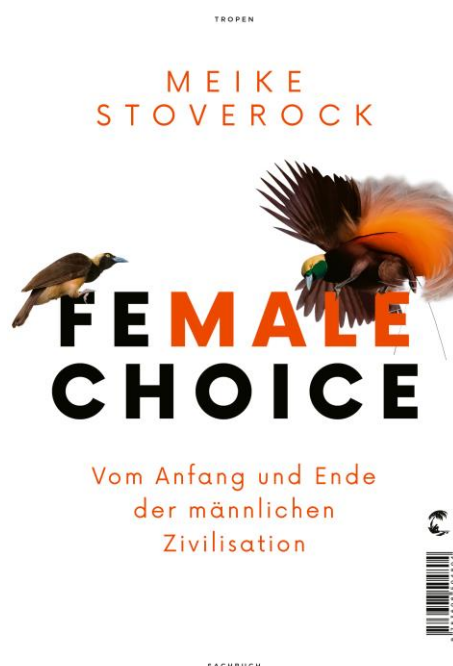


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Meike Stoverock

FEMALE CHOICE.

About the Beginning and End of Male Civilization.

How I use gender terminology

I do not consider gender to be a binary feature (see the chapter on 'The Dual System'). But still, sexual reproduction – the starting point of the female choice – is carried out as a heterosexual act between actors who are enabled by their physical gender to produce offspring together. That is why I look mainly at humans who either correspond to or live in alignment with the binary model. This includes cis men and women as well as transgender and non-binary people who have produced offspring by means of their anatomical gender.

Furthermore, we are looking at problems that are most virulent in Western and, partly, in Muslim cultures; therefore, my main focus is on the cultural origins, which the most likely theory puts in the region of the southeastern Mediterranean. From there, primary structures of civilisation found their way both to Europe and to Asia. I am a white woman and scientist who grew up in Germany. Everything I talk about in this book is founded on this socialisation, and numbers and examples refer mostly to Germany and Europe (some details are being adapted for an edition in another language). Thus, the focus of my account is Eurasian or Euro-centric, but I hope that you will quickly realise just how universal the foundational principles of the sedentary male civilisation are.

If you have followed the gender debate over the past few years even just now and then, you will have noticed how quickly it brings emotions to the boil. On Twitter, the phrase 'you lost me at...' means that certain trigger words will stop people from continuing to read the text. This book is practically made up out of trigger words, no matter what gender or political affiliation you have. Depending on what position you are leaning towards, you will see me as a feminazi or as an anti-feminist traitor. You will read sentences that you have so far only encountered in the context of insults and oppression. Sentences you will angrily want to deny as clichés. You will feel yourself and your values being attacked, it will feel as if someone has put a finger on your innermost trigger points and keeps drilling down. Often you will want to give up after half a sentence because you think you already know what argument I will offer – 'you lost me,' see above. In all those cases I am asking you, from the bottom of my heart, for your patience, even if it sets your teeth on edge. Because I am a feminist and I am working to bring about a world with justice for everyone.

Introduction:

Alpha and Omega

The world is shifting – can you feel it? Ancient, seemingly stable relationships have become wobbly, once-safe assumptions begin to crumble, existing power balances are coming under increasing pressure. Progressive movements such as Fridays For Future or Black Lives Matter raise the Western world's awareness of just how much its wealth is founded on exploitation and injustice. The #MeToo campaign finally puts the omnipresence of sexual violence in the dock. But at the same time, the situation becomes vastly more polarised.

Right-wing populists find their way into parliaments and governments. Groups from the extreme right as well as Islamists gain in strength, the number of assassinations and gunmen going on killing sprees increases, young white men gather in groups that propagate a crude mix of hatred of women, conspiracy theories, fixation on sexuality and contempt for non-white people.

The odd thing is that all sides claim the attitude of the heroic justice fighter. As if all these movements, conflicts and explosions of violence were about avenging long-suffered injustices. People who for a long time have felt like a community based on shared societal values suddenly seem to speak different languages. Have they all gone stark raving mad?

The answer is of course 'yes', to a degree, because the insecurity and sensation of being overloaded that the changes occurring in recent years have triggered bring with them irrational fears and extreme reactions.

A closer look at all these major issues over the past few years makes one thing apparent: both on a local and on a global level, it was mainly women who assumed progressive positions, while the majority of those occupying conservative and reactionary positions are men. Fridays For Future is associated with Greta Thunberg, #MeToo was kicked off by reports by women, and the so-called intersectional feminism does not fight for women as a uniform group but also for minorities that have long been neglected in discourses.

On the other hand, men are in the majority among those who support coal and combustion engines, who are against feminism, vegetarianism and offering shelter to refugees. The revival of right-wing forces traces back above all to men, for example when Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro or Boris Johnson were elected into office.

This contrast in attitudes and behaviour indicates that men and women's needs differ, and it suggests that this might have to do with their respective genders' roles in society. In debates that focus on the future, the current consensus is that diverse needs – like most other differences – are due to societal influences. There's no need to relinquish this consensus. But assume for just a moment that in addition to socio-cultural imprints, there are evolutionary-biological factors which result in certain behavioural patterns that can be observed along gender lines.

Now let's spin this further and assume that the evolutionarybiological factors which results in different genders having diverse needs played a crucial role in the origin of

sedentary civilisations and therefore also of culture. Humans became sedentary approximately 10,000 years ago when they discovered farming and livestock breeding. The civilization that grew from this – and this is the decisive point – was designed exclusively by men. And while doing that, they suppressed and controlled a principle that previously had been valid for millions of years: the original biological principle of choosing one's partner, which said that the decision of which male got to have sex was made by the female – the female choice. This suppression is the foundation upon which all contemporary states, political systems and cultural circles are built. And before you ask: sorry, this really is as big as it gets.

I can sense you rolling your eyes at the mention of an evolutionary and biological explanation for gender differences. I am aware of how much of a minefield this topic is. Much too frequently so far, debates have forced biological circumstances into statements containing value judgments rather than accept them for the objective facts they are, usually in order to assert white or male interests. That is why these days, any mention of biological aspects is often met with a defensive reaction, understandably so. So the first thing we should do is distinguish between the facts and the way they are abused by a civilisation shaped by men. Join me in returning to a valuenetral description of certain characteristics of the human species.

Mathematics can help us. Many samples that can be measured follow a stable distribution, the so-called standardised normal distribution. Simply put, in this distribution model the majority of individuals correspond to the average value of the sample in question, while there are two smaller minorities above and below this average. Their distribution allows us to make statements regarding the group as a whole without referring to each and every individual.

How does mating work within the system of the female choice? The most relevant feature for our purposes is that the males have to offer something; they basically hand in an application for the chance to have sex, and the female chooses. This choice is not always an active one and therefore we may not immediately recognise it, but the sexual act always depends on the stipulations of the female partner.

Almost all sexually reproducing animals follow this principle. This female choice is the result of entirely different reproduction strategies employed by the two genders. Just because it is required that male and female have sex in order to procreate does not mean they're on the same team. On the contrary: to put it bluntly, the male goes for quantity, trying to copulate with as many females as possible. The female, on the other hand, goes for quality and mates only with the best males. So the male has a lot of seducing to do, and the female a lot of warding off. The competitive factor in selecting a partner plays out among the males. The consequence of these different strategies is a conflict between the genders that cannot be resolved, sexuality moving in diametrically opposed directions.

Imaginative biologists have labelled these opposed reproduction strategies sexual conflict. This makes it sound as if evolution has dealt males and females a nasty hand, but actually it is by far the most widely distributed and successful procreation model in the animal kingdom. It is both the tool for and the source of evolutionary

adaptation, and it is the switch that decides whether an individual or a species is successful. That's why sexuality functions along the same lines for simple creatures and for highly developed mammals; the differences between the species are mere variations of the same theme.

Until humans became sedentary, this system also worked for them. Cultural and regional differences in how we treat sex may suggest that sexuality is something highly individual that defies generalisation into patterns. And anyway, sexuality is a private matter; who knows what goes through someone's head (or genitals) behind closed doors?

But actually, one would have to search for quite a while in order to find a natural phenomenon that is as stable as the female choice. However, the principle of female choice is hugely time-consuming, particularly for the males, because for them it means constant competition and takes up so much capacity that they have barely enough time left for the bare necessities: find food and a place to sleep.

But humans want more than that. A man who wants to improve his own life and increase his survival chances - by creating something, inventing something, cultivating his environment – first of all has to free up the capacity that would normally go into all that sexual competitiveness. In simpler terms, man must have free access to sex (and thus procreation) in order to be able to aim for progress.

Restricting the principle of female choice was the one of the most important steps men took about 10,000 years ago when humans transitioned to a sedentary lifestyle. Farming and the concomitant possibility to amass belongings gave man the means to control the resource sex almost completely. Men denied women the right to own anything, relegated them to the narrow confines of the private home in order to raise the children, thus excluding them from the public sphere, and established marriage as an institution, which rendered women almost entirely dependent. All this was made even easier by the fact that women had no access to contraceptives and therefore no means to prevent pregnancies. Now the decision how and with whom women would procreate lay with the men. On the other hand, the structures of the external world which to this day are the foundation of our society – trade, commerce, politics, work – were created by men for men: our civilisation is androcentric (from the Greek *andrós* for man).

When humans became sedentary, this was the beginning of a unique transformation that eventually led to their prominent position in the animal kingdom. This system has brought wealth, medical care, education, culture and privacy to Western countries. But it has also pushed the planet to the edge of an abyss, triggered armed conflicts, plunged countless people into poverty and exposed women in particular to all kinds of physical and psychological violence. This is because from day one, men have designed civilisation to ensure that first and foremost, their own needs and desires resulting from the sexual conflict would be satisfied.

And therein lies the rub. In most known animal species, there are differences between the genders regarding physiology, behaviour, instincts and needs. But if a civilisation is designed exclusively by one gender, the other loses out. What the world

is currently grappling with is the realization that civilisation works well basically only for one type of human: the male.

Women have only recently (in terms of evolutionary biology) gained the capability to control their pregnancies, such as by taking the pill. And since then, they have been making major inroads into the androcentric 'system'. What we see today is a settling of scores by the suppressed party in a one-sided civilisation. Which in turn is very painful for the men. Not only do they probably experience this as witnessing the destruction of what they have built and declared as just and proper over millennia, but they also increasingly lose control over a resource that is of existential importance to them: sex.

Sociology classifies human needs in five categories, from the essential basics such as food and clothing up to luxury requirements such as self-fulfilment. This model is called the Maslow hierarchy of needs. The level of aggression with which humans will fight for the fulfilment of a need depends how essential it is.

The problem with this model is that it is built on the assumption that all humans are more or less the same. But in this hierarchy, the needs of different humans, and in particular those of men and women, do not occupy the same level. Due to the different sexual strategies employed by the genders, sexuality is at a more basic level for men than for women – and therefore more urgent. Correspondingly, men react far more aggressively to the risk of losing control over this resource. The invention of the pill was already a major restriction to their access to reproduction, but as long as women are bound in life-long loyal partnerships, the men can at least still count on having sex. Thus, it is hardly surprising that the conservative parties in particular, being dominated by men, want to preserve marriage and the nuclear family as a tradition.

Social debates rarely deal with the influence of sexuality on the design of our civilisation and thus current conflicts, or they exclude it categorically. Discourse in the bio-physical sphere in general shows this strange gap. As if humans weren't physical beings but only intellectual. And biology is reduced to the role of ideological scapegoat. There is some justification for that: over the course of human history, the abuse of biological and medical knowledge has resulted in truly horrific crimes.

The racial ideology of the Nazis is the most blatant example of such abuse, just like the arrogance displayed by European colonial powers who saw the indigenous people in the countries they subjugated as nothing more than animal-like slaves, born to serve. In the gender debate, the so-called masculinists justify the inferior social position by alleging that women are born intellectually inferior. They never tire of claiming that today's balance of power between men and women is a consequence of evolution, the natural order of things. Biosciences don't seem compatible with a progressive and just society, which is why they are usually not even considered.

Apart from the fact that as a biologist, I am offended by this disregard for my trade, I also consider it negligent. Turning a blind eye on biological patterns means ignoring the physical foundations in our discussions about how to design society. That's like planning to build a house without paying attention to the available building material.

Behind all this lurks the century-old discussion about whether it is evolution or culture that has made humans what they are today. In other words, are humans the result of biological predispositions (nature) or socio-cultural imprint (nurture)? The nature approach is propagated by biologists and determinists. They believe that all structures in human societies are the result of our predisposition at birth, which determines our path in life. They use the physical features of a human to justify his or her position in society: if you're at the bottom, it's because you have inferior genes. Only the ultimate alpha makes it to the top, bursting with energy and the will to win no matter what the cost, the human embodiment of the super DNA. This biology-centric world view neither allows nor requires any intentional changes of existing structures because they are already in a sort of natural equilibrium.

On the other side of the discussion, the nurture side, are the culturalists and sociologists. They acknowledge only culture and society as valid imprints on humans and their behaviour. The culturalists seem to view mankind as if it had one day jumped from a bush, fully formed, entirely isolated from history. It may just be a coincidence that the Central European homo culturalis is exactly the same age as the religious creationists' Adam: about 6,000 years. And just like creationism, culturalism refuses to put humans into an evolutionary context. Sedentary, civilised human beings rise like phoenix from the muck of their pre-cultural existence in an act of creation, giving themselves the breath of life. They define themselves as humans through free will, they are their own omnipotent god. For a culturalist, evolution is nothing more than the dirty, lecherous, immoral past of its own Uebermensch, now purified.

This elevation of culture is also the result of a deep-seated rejection of a nature that does not assign values. Biology describes a world where birth and death exist side by side with an irritating equanimity. Human beings, however, principally tend to see death as bad while life is something good. An equivalence of these opposites is therefore unbearable; humans need a world to which they can assign moral values. And thus, the culturalists live in a world where mankind is good – and where it isn't, it can be turned into something good.

Society is split in debates between these two poles. The culturalists deny biological circumstances, the biologists pretend that every injustice is predetermined by nature. It goes without saying that each faction is ready, at any time, to deviate from their fixed position provided it serves their own view of the world. This conduct is not conducive to insights and not only presents an obstacle to progressive societal discourse but actively works against it. On top of this, it is also completely pointless, as there are no absolute answers in this debate.

Our knowledge of the boundary between evolution and civilisation, between genetic disposition and cultural influences, is way too thin and vague for us to make any definitive statements about them. True, evolution in the biological sense always has to do with genes, but genes do not always have anything to do with evolution. According to recent research, early childhood imprints, i.e. external events that we would classify as socio-cultural influences, seem to get etched into our DNA.

Teratogenic substances can lead to sick and disabled babies. In other words, a disposition 'at birth' is not necessarily due to evolutionary factors. And 'after birth' does not necessarily mean it is due to socio-cultural factors.

So the question of nature vs. nurture seems to encompass a spectrum where only the end points are clearly distinguishable, while there is a vast grey area in the middle where both influences intertwine to a large degree. However, while there is plenty of research at the socio-cultural end of the spectrum and the awareness for the impacts of language, family relationships and educational methods is slowly growing, biological factors are still locked away in society's poison cabinet. In my eyes, this is a huge mistake, as it leaves physical circumstances entirely to biologists. And the past few centuries offer ample proof that they use this kind of information only for the worse, never for the better.

Our physiology provides the framework for our actions. Within that, we do have quite a lot of leeway, but in the end, we can only do what our muscles allow us to, become aware only of what our senses recognise, and feel only what an athletic cocktail of neurotransmitters yields. We can no longer pretend that body and mind are no unit, as if one had nothing to do with the other.

There are only few voices that try to integrate physical processes into culture. One of these is the Canadian psychologist Jordan Peterson. He realised that our civilisation became possible only through the abolition of patterns of evolutionary biology. If you have already heard of Jordan Peterson, you are probably taking a sharp breath now: some people think he is one of the most far-sighted thinkers of the 20th and even the 21st century, others see him as a semi-fascist misogynist. These extreme reactions make it difficult to cast a neutral look at his assumptions. As is always the case in debates about gender, we must separate description from evaluation, biophysical facts from their interpretation, because a value-neutral fact will open possibilities while an evaluation will limit them. I myself disagree with almost every single one of Jordan Peterson's conclusions, but I think that the biological patterns on which he bases his arguments are accurate. This makes it hard for me to digest him and his views. But for me as for you, the journey I am setting out on with this book is a process during which I must learn to accept that things are not black and white, not good or bad, not right or wrong. And it is precisely because of Peterson's influence on the biological discourse that I believe it is necessary not to leave this field to those who try to use it to further their own purposes.

It is time to inspect human biology and its consequences for our society from a feminist perspective and while doing so, to understand how male civilisation is constructed and to learn from their achievements and their mistakes. Preliminary findings for example in the realm of online dating seem to show that women – partly thanks to feminism – are returning to the primary principle of choosing their partner for biological reasons. As a consequence, the number of men who get access to partnership and sex is shrinking. It is probable that the violence and online bullying perpetrated by aggressive young men are just harbingers for what we can expect from the so-called 'incel movement' (involuntary celibates).

I am thus not pleading for a return to the principle of female choice in its purest form, because as of a certain point, progress, peaceful cohabitation and a high level of sexual competition are mutually exclusive.

Rather, it's time to start thinking about a new civilisation that takes male and female requirements into consideration to the same degree. An androgynous civilisation, if you like, that questions and mitigates the obviously detrimental consequences of the male reproductive strategy – such as aggression or competitive thinking – just as much as the less obvious ones, the ones we do not connect with sexuality at all, such as hierarchies and monetary economy. A civilisation where physical differences between humans do not lead to suppression and exploitation, but instead open possibilities.

However, this can only be possible if we manage to agree on shared patterns, to identify shared needs, and to enter into new and shared negotiations about how to fulfil these. If natural sciences and humanities manage to bridge the gap between them. This requires a broader and less ideological understanding of the fundamental role that the principle of the female choice played in the design of the male civilisation. And it requires increased focus on how this is what it's all about, at the core, when diverse actors – especially female ones - all across the world engage in renegotiation of human cohabitation.

A lot is at stake. Our civilisation was built on the premise of suppressing the female reproduction strategy, and nobody can predict what consequences to expect if we put an end to this suppression. We must bring socio-cultural as well as evolutionary-biological arguments into the discourse so as to prevent the path to tomorrow from leading us through hordes of zombies and cannibals.

You think I am being ironic? You won't once you have finished reading this book.