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TITLE OF PRESENTATION: Counting people

ABSTRACT OF PRESENTATION

An apparently banal oddity in the way people are sometimes counted leads to reflections on the implications of counting with people, that is with using the digits of hands and feet to arrive at diverse computations. This talk is based on material from old Melanesia (specifically parts of Papua New Guinea), where high order enumeration —as of wealth items— could be important. But there is more than politics to the presentation of numbers. What seemingly bears on mathematics is also a matter of cosmology, and the sociological resolution of the initial puzzle needs to be done through kinship and gender relations. In the way of socio-cultural anthropology, the narrative encapsulates something akin to an interdisciplinary exercise.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Marilyn Strathern is Emeritus Professor of Social Anthropology, and Life Fellow of Girton College, Cambridge University, and Hon. Life President of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth (ASA). She had the good fortune to begin her research career in Papua New Guinea, which led to work among other things on law, kinship and gender relations. In the UK she subsequently became involved with anthropological approaches to the new reproductive technologies, intellectual property and audit cultures. She is probably best known for *The gender of the gift* (1988), a critique of anthropological theories of society applied to Melanesia, which she pairs with *After nature* (1992), a comment on the cultural revolution at home. Her most recent book, *Before and after gender* (2016), is also one of her first, unpublished since the early 1970s. Her first departmental position was at the University of Manchester, UK. She is a Fellow of the British Academy (FBA), and received a national honour (DBE) in 2001; she was awarded the International Balzan Prize for Social Anthropology in 2018.