





FROM ISOLATED ISLAND AND FOREST PEOPLES, TO NEW YORK TOUGHS, THE PHENOMENON KNOWN AS TRIBALISM SEEMS AS STRONG AS EVER. WHAT MAKES A TRIBE? AND WHY DO WE KEEP FORMING THEM, ESPECIALLY NOW OUR INCREASING CONNECTEDNESS WOULD SEEMINGLY RENDER TRIBES REDUNDANT? IS THERE SOMETHING MORE AT PLAY HERE? CHRIS WRIGHT BRAVES THE FREEZING AND HOSTILE EXTREMITIES OF BULGARIA WITH A MODERN DAY TRIBE OF TRAVELLING FOOTY FANS, TO GET TO THE HEART OF OUR SEARCH FOR BELONGING, **EVEN IN A BORDERLESS WORLD**



In May, 2008, a series of photographs appeared on front pages and websites around the world. Clearly taken from a plane, it showed members of a tribe in a forest clearing, aiming makeshift wooden weapons at the sky as if to scare off the aircraft. There was a thatched roof and a small group of people — one with deep black skin, and two more, the ones bearing the weapons, apparently painted red. This, we learned, was an uncontacted tribe near the Peru-Brazil border people who had never had any interaction with the outside world.

MEN PAINTED WITH RED AND BLACK VEGETABLE DYE WATCH A BRAZILIAN GOVERNMENT PLANE FLY OVERHEAD (ABOVE AND RIGHT)
THE PHOTOS. TAKEN IN 2008 REVEAL A THRIVING, HEALTH COMMUNITY OF PEOPLE WITH BASKETS FULL OF MANIOO AND PAPAYA FRESH FROM THEIR GARDENS

t soon became clear that the photos had been planned and distributed by a man called José Carlos Meirelles. an expert on indigenous tribes employed by FUNAI, Brazil's National Indian Foundation, which is tasked with protecting the rights of people

such as these. Meirelles had planned the pictures in order to demonstrate to a cynical world that there are still tribes living, and thriving, in complete isolation. He did this in order to stop the steady encroachment into the Amazon jungle, which is gradually forcing these tribes into ever narrower pockets of land, and endangering them.

BEST LEFT ALONE

It seems strange, in our modern and connected world, to think of tribes like these, unaware of the existence of the rest of us, or of anything at all to do with the outside world. But Piers Gibbon, in his book Tribes: Endangered Peoples of the World, says that in the 21st century, at least 150 million people currently belong to tribes — and that more than 100 indigenous tribes are thought to live in complete isolation from other people.

Indeed, there may well be more than that. FUNAl in Brazil recognises at least 77 uncontacted tribes either within Brazil, or in the countries like Peru and Colombia on its northwestern borders. And West Papua, the Indonesian province formerly known as Irian Jaya, which takes up half of the island otherwise occupied by Papua New Guinea, still has around 44 uncontacted groups.

Indeed, they must remain uncontacted. FUNAI, or its predecessor the Indian Protection Service, used to make it a policy to contact isolated tribes in order to open up the Amazon basin. They even employed specialist explorers, a dangerous profession if ever there was one, for the job.

But the results were usually disastrous. "Contact with outsiders resulted in the deaths of thousands upon thousands of tribespeople throughout the region, who had no immunity to Western infectious diseases like flu measles and the common cold." writes Gibbon.

"Peoples such as the Matis of Brazil, who were first contacted in 1978, suffered from epidemics and many died; in the 1980s it was reported that there were not enough healthy Matis to bury the tribe's dead." Earlier contact was worse. It is thought that many tribes we today would consider uncontacted. are descendents of people who fled during the rubber boom in the Amazon from the late 19th century to about 1912 — during which indigenous people were massacred or forced into slavery.

"Around 90 per cent of the indigenous population are thought to have died, and survivors fled deeper into the forest to escape the violence. says Gibbon. "It is easy to understand why the people descended from these refugees might choose to reject contact with the outside world." For more than 20 years now, FUNAI's mandate has changed completely: locate tribes but leave them alone, protecting their land from encroachment.

The Brazilian authorities are not the only ones to reach this conclusion. One of the most remarkable group of



people on Earth must be the Sentinelese, who live on North Sentinel Island within the Andaman Islands in the Bay of Bengal, nominally part of India It is commonly said that this tribe has descended from a population that has lived on the island for 60,000 years, although what we know about them today is limited by the fact that contact is no longer permitted with them.

The Census of India records them having an official population of 39, based on the 2001 survey, yet that was conducted by researchers peering from a boat positioned offshore. More likely is that there are in fact several hundred of them. They have tended to act with hostility towards any attempted visitor and when several researchers were killed in other islands in the Andamans while attempting to make contact in the 1990s. the decision was made to leave them alone forever.

They are not altogether isolated from technology: they're known to have made tools from metal, after ships were wrecked on nearby reefs. Yet even so, they are considered to be about as remote as it is possible to be on this planet. "They are commonly described as 'Stone Age', a term that has angered many campaigners who believe it denigrates the achievements of tribal people," says Gibbon. "And the tribe is often presented as an example of man living in a natural, pristine state."

TRIBAL YEARNINGS

So what exactly makes a tribe? It's an inexact term, and some think, an offensive, colonial one. Generally, people belong to a tribe if they share the same customs and language and are descended from the same ancestors. Or, and perhaps this is the crucial point, they think of themselves as a tribe, as a collective and defined group of people acting together.

It is hard to be precise about it. As anthropologists have noted, the Amba tribe of Uganda speak two different languages, but consider themselves one tribe. The Dorobo of Kenya hunt and live with the more famous Masai and Nandi, yet consider themselves a completely separate individual tribe. While no definition will quite be right for everyone, it is the sense of separateness from other groups and ways of life that seems to make a tribe.

piercings increase

in number, and

ornaments become

larger (earrings up

to five centimetres in

diameter) over time,

signifying seniority

in the tribe

Lately though, it seems that we in the developed world have been fascinated by tribes — and even perhaps yearning for some of their value systems. "The sad



MEMBERS OF THE MATIS TRIBE STAND WITH THEIR BLOW-DART WEAPONS DURING THE CLOSING CEREMONY OF THE XII ANNUAL INDIGENOUS GAMES IN PORTO SEGURO, BAHIA STATE, BRAZIL. ABOUT 1,100 MEMBERS OF 42 irony is that even as we destroy these tribal cultures, now is the time when we need them more than ever," writes Bruce Parry, the anthropologist and journalist who knows more than most about tribal behaviour, having lived for periods of months at a time with 15 different tribes when researching a TV series.

"Rather than wrecking the planet, we could be listening and learning from their long-standing knowledge about how to lead a more sustainable life and how to protect the environment. They have lots to teach us," he says.

Others point towards the recent wistfulness in parenting manuals towards tribal upbringings, which are

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considered to be more childcentred and communal, with less separation between parents and child, than they see as being the case in the West. If you've ever heard the proverb: "It takes a village to raise a child," that too comes from a tribe, the Yoruba from Nigeria.

In reality though, there's no sense in romanticising the realities of tribal life. "All too often people from the 'developed' world put tribal cultures on a pedestal, seeing them through rosetinted spectacles as pristine and gentle with perfect environmental credentials and a great sense of community," says Parry.

"This may contain some truth in comparison to our own culture, but to sweepingly

brand such societies as idyllic is deeply patronising." For his part. Parry has witnessed the extreme end of tribalism too — cannibalism with the Kombai in West Africa: female circumcision with the Daasanach in Ethiopia; warfare with the Suri and Nyangatom in Ethiopia; inebriation with the Sanema in Venezuela; and the violent abuse of women with the Hamar in Ethiopia. Sure, tribal people may indeed have lessons for us, but these practices are likely not among them.

Perhaps our modern fascination with tribes has to do, for some least, with a loss of our sense of community. It is now completely normal, whether you're in London, Singapore, Taipei, New York or New Dehli, to spend years in an apartment without ever knowing your neighbours' names. Sometimes, you won't even know who they are.

While we are connected to everybody through technology, we're also increasingly individual, and selfish too. It's almost as if there's a feeling. planned or otherwise, that we somehow don't help each other now in ways that we once did. We put our elderly into nursing homes instead of helping them ourselves, and look at an iPhone instead of passing the time of day in a conversation. In short, we don't want to be dependent on anybody else — and don't want anyone else to depend on us.

Perhaps that makes us look with envy upon what we perceive as the more simple lives of tribal people, uncluttered by tax returns and phones that won't sync and the internal politics of whichever family to spend Christmas or Chinese New Year with. We admire their inter-dependent sense of community — because it doesn't exist anymore in our society. Or does it?

OFF WITH THE REDS

It is 3am on a late November Tuesday, when *Discovery* Channel Magazine sets off for Liverpool John Lennon Airport ("Above us only sky") to catch the official Liverpool Football Club supporters' flight to Sofia, the capital city of Bulgaria.

Liverpool FC is set to play the team PFC Ludogorets Razgrad. a minnow of European football whose home stadium, with a capacity of 6.500 seats in a forested region of northeastern Bulgaria, is so small that tonight's Champions League football game must instead be played in the country's national stadium. As we speak, about 2,000 Liverpool fans are making the trip.

The mood at the gate is grizzled, but convivial. Most of the 150 people on this particular plane know somebody else here. by sight if not by name. Once we're on board, the air crackles with local "Scouse" accents, and an endless stream of anecdotes about past adventures following the team around Europe.

WHILE WE ARE CONNECTED TO EVERYBODY THROUGH TECHNOLOGY, WE'RE ALSO INCREASINGLY INDIVIDUAL. WE DON'T **WANT TO BE** DEPENDENT ON ANYBODY ELSE — AND DON'T WANT ANYONE ELSE TO DEPEND ON US

"D'va remember when we went to Santiago de Compostela when we got Celta Vigo in the '98 Uefa Cup?" You really haven't lived until you've heard a Scouser say Santiago de Compostela.

This is, by any standards, an inconvenient and expensive trip. European games fall on working weekdays, so we are flying early on a Tuesday morning, for a game that will take place on Wednesday night in a roofless, facility-free stadium in minus four degrees — before being shepherded back to the airport to fly straight home and land at 4am on Thursday, in most cases to go back to work having

already surrendered two days of annual leave.

The cost is about £500 (US\$780) per person in a place where the average weekly wage is £473.50 before tax, and that's without considering the twofifths of working age people in Liverpool who don't have a iob. But for this hardy crew. the suffering is part of the fun

of it all — mini tortures to be harvested for stories to be told in pubs ahead of future games, across equally far-flung parts of Europe and the world.

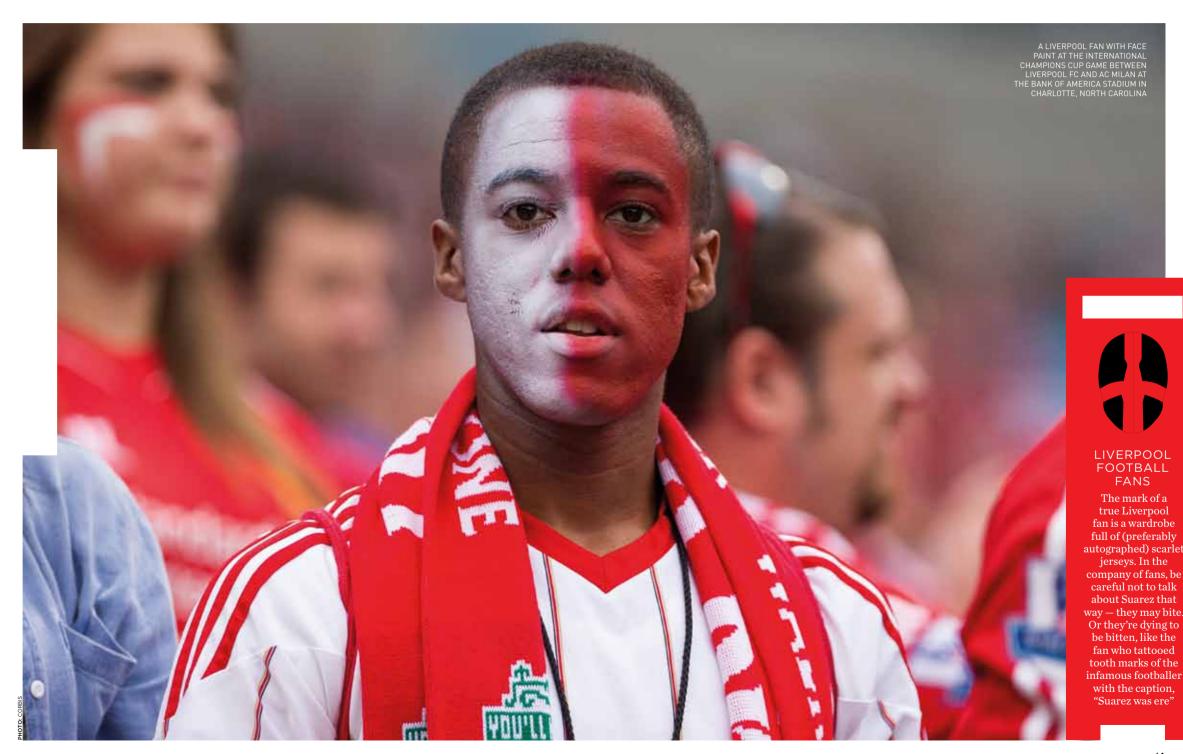
DCM is sitting next to two die-hard fans, Mick and Pete, who demonstrate the curious mix of demographics involved among the most tribal of football fans. Mick is 54.

a grandfather, and a father of a baby. He used to run a scaffolding business, now operates a taxi, and lives so close to the airport that today he walked to check-in from his house. Pete, about the same age, is a plasterer. These are neither the youthfully fervent (who can't afford it) or the highflying wealthy (who are too busy working) that you might have expected. Chiefly, they are bluecollar labourers with the ability to set their own working hours, and for whom trips like these constitute a considerable part of their income.

Mick and Pete have seen the world by following their beloved Liverpool team from city to city. Mick has been to nine of

Liverpool's 10 European finals since the 1970s. hitchhiking to Rome for the first of them at the age of 17. His attendance has covered the defining twin disasters of 1980s football. Heysel and Hillsborough. And through the prism of random cup draws, he has discovered Europe too. He's been to Auschwitz, but only because

of "that time we drew Lech Poznan in the European Cup". He really liked the architecture of Budapest, which he visited "because we had that firstround game against Debrecen in 2009. One-nil, it was." I will later meet someone who has never been on an aircraft except to follow Liverpool in European football.



DISCOVERY CHANNEL MAGAZINE

MEET THE TRIBESMEN

OLD AND NEW TRIBES

OLD

LADAKHI

The people of Ladakh (which means land of the passes), live in starkly beautiful valleys in northern India. Ladakhi women are just as striking, clad in robes of heavy Chinese silk studded with pearls, turquoise stones, coral and amber. Women from less well-off families will wear robes made of coarse home-spun wool.

GAUCHOS

There is room to roam in the Argentinian pampas, or rolling land of grass and herbs. Today. though, few gauchos wander the praries. Before the 19th century these skilled cattle tenders and horsemen were masters of the domain, but as time progressed commercial cattle ranchers eked them out of existence.



NEW **LARPERS**

LARP or Live Action Roleplay encompasses a whole universe of merry geeks who act out their fantasies. There are those who grimly recreate historic battles, fantasy fans who dress as wizards and orcs and quaff pints of mead, and Trekkies who pay homage to episodes of Star Trek, to name just a few. LARPING was born out of Dungeons and Dragons tabletop games in the 1970s, and has become a global obsession.

THIRD CULTURE KIDS

As it becomes ever more common for families to uproot themselves from their home country for work, Third Culture Kids become increasingly common. TCK's therefore grow up outside their traditional culture, with, for example, a "Japanese" expat growing up in Kenya, studying in Canada and eventually working in Paris.

NORMCORE

Normcore grew as a direct response to eyecatching fashion trends such as hipsterism. Put simply, it revels in unpretentions, average clothes — think vanilla, not mint chocolate chip with sprinkles. Jerry from Seinfeld is pretty much the patron saint, with his comfy jeans, plain sweatshirts and sneakers.

"I think," says Mick, "that I am more important to this club than Steven Gerrard," he notes, referring to the revered Liverpool captain, "Not just me. People like the ones on this plane." Gerrard himself, who understands the people who support him, might well agree with this. Without the lifeblood of committed fans, these clubs are not nothing exactly, but would be much reduced in stature and global reach.

This will be the 103rd ground that Mick has visited, but evervone is always looking up at somebody else who has shown even greater dedication. One famed fan has been to 70 of

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Liverpool's last 71 away games in Europe. He only missed the other one because he had a heart attack on the way to it. and the plane had to be diverted en route to Romania. The legend is cemented by the fact that he is not known ever to have had a legal job. "I do a bit of driving," he says, almost conspiratorially.

Having arrived in Sofia and been transferred to a hotel, attention turns somewhat inevitably to the location of the nearest Irish pub. Mick and Pete have researched this at considerable length and settled upon one that they think will be fit for purpose. Then, hundreds of Liverpool fans converge there as one, speaking earnestly not

just about the (lamentable) recent state of the team, but about recent travels, favourite moments, songs, stories and memories. The club for them is community, holiday and context. Their wives and partners can't understand it — there are an awful lot of stories about failed marriages — but it just has to be done. "This will sound weird," says Mick, "but I don't even like football. I'm just a Liverpool fan."

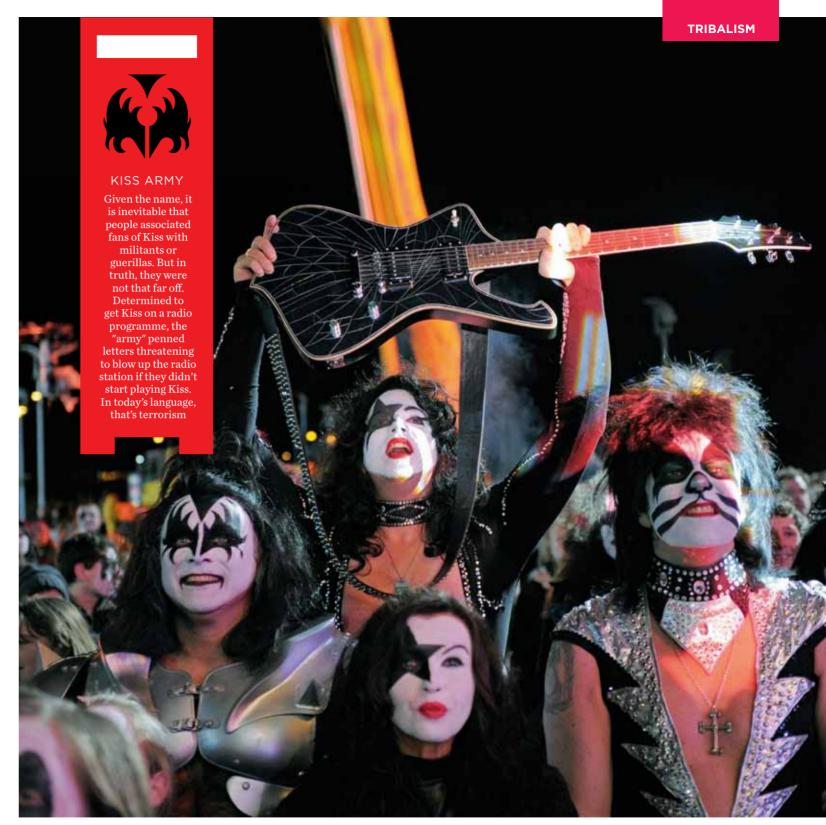
I am mugged while in Bulgaria. It's no big deal — five voung men set upon me and my friend. I am hit and kicked, but not with any conviction. They just want my bag, and after a

brief consideration of what's in it. I let them have it. Other Bulgarians are swiftly with me though, apologetic and concerned. And within minutes. extraordinarily, they have gotten my bag back, with nothing missing but, somewhat strangely, my Liverpool scarf.

Shaken though. it is now admittedly disconcerting to keep walking through Sofia's darker thoroughfares and underpasses near the stadium, in a city and surrounded by a language that

I don't know. And it is soon with great relief, that I see the familiar reds of scarves and hats, the familiar accents. and am enfolded back into the community of away fans who occupy a sectioned-off corner of the ground. This is for now, for want of a better word, family. Even so far from home, all is suddenly familiar and embracing, and especially so as the songs start ringing out: "You'll Never Walk Alone"

A community of people, thinking largely the same thing and talking with the same accent — looking after their own and projecting a shared cultural love. So what is this, if not a new type of tribe?



IN FRONT OF THE FAIRGROUND HALL IN ERFURT, CENTRAL-

FANS OF US ROCK BAND KISS POSE

DISCOVERY CHANNEL MAGAZINE DISCOVERY CHANNEL MAGAZINE

TRIBAL NUMBERS

150,000,000

THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE STILL LIVING IN TRADITIONAL TRIBES, ACCORDING TO SURVIVAL INTERNATIONAL, A CHARITY DEDICATED TO PRESERVING THESE VULNERABLE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, WHO FACE DESTRUCTION AND EVICTION FROM GOVERNMENTS, LOGGERS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

60

COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD WITH A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF TRIBAL PEOPLE

100

IT IS, OF COURSE, NOT EASY TO ESTIMATE HOW MANY UNCONTACTED TRIBES REMAIN ON THE PLANET. REBECCA SPOONER, A MEMBER OF SURVIVAL INTERNATIONAL, ESTIMATES THERE ARE ABOUT 100, MOSTLY IN AMAZONIA AND NEW GUINFA

3 YEARS

TIME IT TOOK FOR PHOTOGRAPHER JIMMY NELSON TO VISIT 44 COUNTRIES DOCUMENTING 35 TRIBES FOR HIS BOOK *BEFORE THEY PASS AWAY.* NELSON'S MOST MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES INCLUDE:

ACCIDENTALLY PEEING HIMSELF ON A PARTICULARLY COLD DAY BECAUSE HE WAS UNABLE TO REMOVE EIGHT LAYERS OF WINTER-PROOF CLOTHING. HE WAS THEN CHASED BY REINDEERS SEARCHING FOR SALT IN HIS URINE

SEARCHING THE SIBERIAN PLAINS FOR WEEKS, DRIVING A RUSSIAN TANK IN MINUS 50 DEGREES CELSIUS, LOOKING FOR A TRIBE WITH 60 PEOPLE LEFT

REALISING THE PACE OF CHANGE: "THE WORLD IS CHANGING RAPIDLY, ESPECIALLY THE LAST FEW YEARS, THROUGH DIGITILISATION AND THE CONNECTEDNESS OF PEOPLE. SOME TRIBES WILL HAVE FOUR WHEEL DRIVE JEEPS IN A FEW YEARS."

659 MILLION

NUMBER OF FANS MANCHESTER UNITED CLAIMS TO HAVE WORLDWIDE. IT ALSO BOASTS THAT ANY TIME ONE OF THEIR MATCHES IS ON, ONE IN TEN OF THE WORLD'S SEVEN BILLION PEOPLE WILL BE FOLLOWING IT IN SOME FORM

THIRD

IF ALL OF MANCHESTER UNITED'S FOLLOWERS LIVED TOGETHER, THEY WOULD BE THE THIRD MOST POPULOUS COUNTRY ON THE PLANET, BIGGER THAN INDONESIA, BRAZIL AND PAKISTAN COMBINED



There is a school of thought that we as humans have never moved away from tribalism, we now just express it differently. We might not live in individual communities the way that some indigenous people still do — but we're all still part of tribes. A football club is just one example of our desire to belong to a defined group, with a similar outlook and ideology.

The French sociologist Michel

The French sociologist Michel Maffesoli pioneered the term neotribalism, or modern tribalism — the idea that human beings, even in our modern mass society, will nevertheless gravitate to tribal norms, taking the form of social networks.

In some respects our local identification has broken down. We commute ever-longer distances to work, we move around to seek new jobs or new experiences, and we are connected to the world through media and internet, which inevitably diminishes the focus on small-scale friendships and community. But neotribalism simply argues that, in the absence of those things, we seek to find the same patterns and connections in other ways.

One obvious example of this is the idea of belonging to a gang. Many examples of this are criminal — such as the Italian Cosa Nostra ("Our Thing"), or mafia, the Chinese triads or the Japanese Yakuza — who come together not only through organised crime but, particularly in the Italian case, for a sense of belonging to an ideology — and

experiencing protection through membership of it. That sure sounds like a tribe.

Other gangs are much more about a sense of identity, rather than lawlessness for the sake of it (though the two do tend to go hand in hand). Think of the Jets and the Sharks of *West Side Story*; or the mods and rockers of 1960s British youth. Or biker gangs such as the Hells Angels. They are tribes too.

Music, too, can be tribal. Many people like a certain style of music not only because they like how it sounds, but because they identify with it and feel that it speaks to them, or is an expression of their own lives. Hip hop is perhaps the most potent modern example of this, growing out of local roots (the underprivileged and marginalised South Bronx in New York) and globalising from there.

In its early days, hip hop was an artistic variation of the competition between street gangs, and a welcome one at that, turning tension into expression. It was out of this idea that Afrika Bambaataa, a pioneering hip hop DJ, formed the Zulu Nation, whose original intention was to take reformed South Bronx gang members and organise them into dance and musical movements. Everything about Zulu Nation, including its name, suggests the welcoming commonality of a tribe.

TRIBALLY WIRED

THE YAKUZA

Full-body, intricate

tattoo art, is the

most iconic of

the Yakuza, but is

perhaps the most

difficult to identify

unless you're half

naked in an onsen

resort or public bath

A more effective way

to tell if someone is

Yakuza is to check

if a part, all or both

pinkies are missing

due to yubitsume

or punishment by

chopping off a part of

one's own digits

So, as the Sentinelese and the uncontacted Amazonian Indians go about their daily lives, no doubt wondering about the aircraft and boats they sometimes see but are otherwise remote, perhaps there are elements of their lives that we can not only learn about, but that we already have without realising it. That no matter how complex and interconnected modern life becomes, we will always gravitate to a sense of shared belonging. To a tribe.

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