

# Power and Revolution

Bruce Parry

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Here's a talk I gave at the wonderful Port Eliot Festival in Cornwall, in July (2019), about power, hierarchy, and egalitarianism. I try to offer an insight into a time before the domestication of plants and animals for food and the very different way of being that is our shared ancestry. I talk about vast groups of people who maintained equality and balance within their societies and the tools they use to do so. It is also an offering of how such ways of being came about in the first place, and what we can learn from the revolution that knew how to diffuse power and bring about equality.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nh0a8xqU06k>

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Thank you all for being here, 7 o'clock on a Friday is quite a slot.

I heard everyone laughing like raucously at the last guy. I'm afraid mine's going to be a little bit of a slower pace.

But I do feel I have something to share and the wonderful people at Port Elliott said, please come along, you know, say what you want to say.

I normally shy away from giving talks.

I find them really hard.

But I do feel that I'm carrying something.

I do feel that I've got something that I want to say.

So I'm sort of getting over myself and stepping on the stage and facing my fears and so here I am.

Thank you.

So yeah, the kind of the plan for this chat, we've got an hour, is I'd like to paint a picture if I can.

I'd like to try and try and give you an insight into something I feel I'm carrying.

It's like a seed of something that I feel that I've collected on my trips and of course, having had the privilege, for those of you who don't know me and my work, you know, I worked with the BBC for many years.

I had the great, extraordinary opportunity to travel the world and live with tribal people and as anyone can imagine having the opportunity to spend time with people who look at the world incredibly differently to the way we do.

You get an opportunity to see things very differently, but also an opportunity to reflect on your own life and society and I did that with the BBC for many years.

Then I did a trip down the Amazon looking at globalization, and then a trip around the Arctic looking at climate change, as well as many other projects.

But those three in particular gave me a deep insight into human nature, society, what we in our society are doing in the world and then what the ramifications of that are and how it might be coming back to us.

So it was a bit of a big deal to receive as an individual and it, of course, made me reflect very differently on myself, the way I live my life and how I can best be of service to what is increasingly becoming apparent is on the horizon and so On that journey, I was able to have some insights into things that I felt might be of service to us all to take and reflect on and that's what I mean by the seed and one group in particular really did that for me and so I'm going to talk about them and any of you who've seen the film that I made, when I left the BBC, I went and made a feature doc, which took its pound of flesh.

In that, I touched on this one of the themes that I'm going to talk about tonight and so if you have seen that film, don't worry, I'm going to go beyond that.

But just to let you know that some of what I'm going to talk about, I did bring up in this film called To Wai.

It's like a different paradigm that I am going to try and offer.

That's why I say I'm going to try and paint a picture, because for me, it took quite a long time for me to figure out exactly what this thing was and like a goldfish being out of order or like a person at peacetime trying to understand what it's like to be at war, these are very, very different concepts.

These are very, very different, like, mediums that we swim through and that's why I think it was really hard for me to figure it out.

But that's what I'm going to try and offer and And a different paradigm is a different paradigm, and it's like, it's very hard, so please bear with me.

It's going to take a little bit of time to contextualize.

But at the end of that, hopefully, we can see something together and then if I get my stuff together by the end, then we can try and unpick the lessons from that and see how we can apply them to our lives.

So you'll have to bear with me a little bit, because what I'm going to try and do when I paint the picture of this particular group or these particular groups is there could be a tendency for you to go, well, yeah, Bruce, yeah, but that was another time and another place.

I mean, how on earth can we apply that sort of wisdom and knowledge and way of being into today? And it's true.

It's not very easy to figure that out and some of what I'm going to offer is just this seed.

and maybe it's going to take shape and grow in your own heart and soul and I couldn't tell you what type of tree is going to come out of that, but I do believe that the seed is worth planting.

It's certainly changed my life, and I'm going to try and pick out some threads that we can all maybe agree on.

But actually how this thing might manifest for you individually and for us as a society is impossible for me to know.

It's not a direct, obvious thing.

But it is, and the reason that I've had the courage to get over myself and stand on these stages is because I do feel that it's a missing part of our narrative that we just don't know about.

It's like we have this understanding of our past and this thing that I'm hopefully going to share with you, it just isn't part of the cultural story.

It's actually, these days, much more acknowledged in academic realms.

In the anthropological circles, people are talking about this, and it's pretty well acknowledged.

Not everywhere.

It's still contested, but it is more and more not acknowledged, but it just hasn't reached the high street and I think we need to know this, because it totally shifts our understanding of ourselves and what's possible and who we are and what we're capable of as individuals and as society and as co-creators on this universe or this planet.

So I think it's vital and whether or not this information, even if it really spreads everywhere, is sufficient to turn the ship around of what I do believe is coming our way, I couldn't tell you.

But it's still worth knowing, even if it's just to come out of the ashes of what comes after and I know that sounds pretty doom and gloom, but you have to remember where I've been sent by the BBC.

You know, the things that I saw were very real to me, and that's been a big driving force for me too.

It's like I do believe that these things that people are increasingly talk about are on the horizon.

They're coming our way.

So we need to find ways together to get through this.

So, yeah, indigenous people, wow, what a great privilege to have had opportunity to live with.

I've got one water and one beer, I'm going for the beer.

You know, and I could have stood here and talked about all the wonderful lessons that I've had living with tribal people, whether it's the blessings of living in community, whether it's the understanding of connection to nature, whether it's the understanding of the healing tools that they have, whether it's the understanding of different ways of bringing up children so that we're not all passing on the stresses in our nuclear families.

There's so much that I learned in my time with tribal people, but most of that stuff is being talked about in the healing fields and all these other places.

I mean, this is relatively well known now, and we're waking up to our society and some of the things that we've got wrong.

But this thing that I'm going to talk about is about actually how society has run itself and that was the thing that really I took away from.

You know, I could have gone to these tribes and just learned the skills and lots of the other stuff that the TV characters do is just get involved in that.

But for me, the thing that I really liked doing was sitting back and going, OK, what's going on here? how are you all interacting with each other and if I'm honest, I mean, in the three series that I did of Tribe, I did 15 different tribal groups and it was 14 of them, like up until the very last one, if you'd come to me and said, OK, what's your greatest learning? I would have probably pretty much said, well, actually, We're all pretty much in the same space.

they've got all these amazing blessings, and they're closer to nature and stuff.

But really, at the end of the day, we all live very similar lives.

We've all got our ups and downs.

We're all dealing with the problems that we know.

They're dealing with very similar problems and so, you know, it was a bit, what it is, it is.

They're just in a different space on that conveyor belt to where we're at.

Until I met the last group and it was them that made me go, oh my God, everything that I thought I knew, I have to completely change.

Everything I thought I knew, I have to radically reevaluate.

There's something absolutely, completely different going on here and if I had met that group first, I wouldn't have known it.

It's not obvious what it is that I found.

because they didn't seem that different.

But because I'd had the extraordinary privilege of having lived with so many other groups beforehand, when I met this last group, I was like, there's something completely different happening here.

It was like every other person that I've ever met in my life, every other tribal group that I've ever met in my life, every other nation that I've ever been to in my life, I could put on one side, and then this group in a completely different camp.

It was that real to me and yet, at the same time, I couldn't put my finger on what it was and at first, I was terrified of expressing this in the public realm because it felt so romantic.

It felt so like I was just being a bit of a romantic and I have to say here and now that I'm not a romantic about indigenous peoples.

I've seen all sorts of really difficult stuff.

You know, I've lived with groups who are destroying the planet.

I've lived with groups who are overgrazing.

I've lived with groups who are doing barbaric things to their own type, to their own people, and burning their own backyard.

I'm just not here as an advocate.

I am an advocate for indigenous peoples, and I think we have a lot to learn from them.

But I'm not a romantic that just thinks indigenous equals perfect.

Absolutely not and so, even so, When I met this group, I was like, Okay, I'm terrified.

This is something else.

So this group was called the Penan, and if you've seen my film Tawai, you will have come across them and you will have met them.

But I don't go into that much in the film, this thing.

So they are a nomadic hunter-gatherer group of people living in the forest of Borneo and they carry everything they own on their shoulders, and they wander around the forest, flowing with the rhythms of nature, following the bore as they migrate, going to the fruiting trees as they fruit, and they're just flowing in this small group of like, I don't know, they call it a band of people, maybe six or seven families, all living in these little stilted houses that they put up and put the slats upon the top in a little tarpaulin or leaf roof and No borders, they're all just living together in this little group and then moving relatively regularly with everything they carry on their backs and so I'd read about this group beforehand, and so I knew and I'd heard that this was a group that was kind of living before agriculture.

They were living before what they call the Neolithic Revolution.

They were living before the domestication of plants and animals for food.

I got that, and I knew they would be amazing, but that wasn't it and I knew that they had extraordinary sharing culture, but it made sense to me, and it's written in the anthropological text.

When you're carrying everything, it makes logical sense to share, because you can't carry it, you can't dry it, you can't store it, so share it, and then the next guy gets it, he'll share it, and on you go.

So yeah, they're a sharing culture, big deal.

That wasn't it either and I knew that they were peaceful and loving, but it's a small group of people, and so, I'd lived with relatively peaceful people before.

So what was it? Well, the experience of being with them was it was like there was a part of me that I had always brought whenever I met a new group of people that just didn't fit.

It was like it was a part of me that I was used to using an invisible part that I didn't understand that I couldn't use or lay bare into this group, and it was an invisible thing, and that's why it took so long for me to figure it out, and, like, it's not also that they... seemed like an ancient culture.

Yes, they were living in this old way before the Neolithic Revolution, but I'd live with other guys who were naked and using stone tools or uncontacted people.

I've met all them before, and you'd think that they would be the ones who had the most ancient of ways, because that would be our natural understanding.

They're still using tools, therefore, ergo, old society.

But even those groups didn't have this thing.

So what was it? I guess I've done a little bit of deliberation now.

I'll probably get to the point, can't you get on with it, Bruce? After my beer.

Essentially, this was the only group that I'd ever come across that had found a way to pretty much eliminate all forms of competition from their society.

So much so that in the way that they were with each other and the way that they even spoke, was coming from a different place.

They were the only group that I'd ever been with that had no hierarchy, no chief, no shaman and again, I'd read that on the page, but the experience for me, having lived with all these other groups of suddenly meeting a group of people who hadn't give their individual power away to a chief, or a shaman or a goo or whatever, it's like everyone was fully empowered as an individual and everyone was respected as equal and held their own in that space.

That was what was different, but it was very, very hard to discern at first.

They were just themselves, fully and that was the thing.

No competition.

no hierarchy.

Every other tribe and every other nation and every other group of people I've been with swim in the world of entering into a space and it's like, where am I in the pecking order here? Where do I exist? Everyone else had a chief or a shaman or a nation-state or a church or politician.

Here, they had discovered, or they were living in a way where they understood that as power, if power in any way gets out of hand, or centralized in any way, it leads to misery for everyone else.

Guess what? We probably might be figuring that out for ourselves now and they knew it.

But the weird thing is that...

this group of people, I realized this is not just like the only group of people like this in the world.

There are other groups of people like this, and every other group of people who are living before the advent of the domestication of plants and animals who are still existing in Africa and Southeast Asia, they all have the same traits and that's why it's now fully acknowledged, or increasingly acknowledged, that this was how all of us were for the majority of our time on the planet and I say the majority.

We've been around as modern humans for 200,000 years.

Agriculture is, what, 10,000, 12,000 years.

Do the math.

95% of our time on the planet, we lived without hierarchy and we have been told and we believe that this is how it's always been.

Even some of the most famous people who are talking in the public space today, talking about how through the animal kingdom, there's always, from lobsters and all the way through, there's always been hierarchy, ergo, hierarchy, we have to deal with it and 95% of our time on the planet, people living who found ways to mitigate against it.

That for me was phenomenal and the experience of being with them was something that touched me so deeply.

I felt this has to come back into our cultural narrative.

This has to come back into how we see ourselves and understand ourselves.

So there's a number of things, there's a number of traits that these groups all have in common and the first one is, actually, this first one is subtly different between the groups in Africa and the groups in Asia.

But the groups in Asia, particularly the Penan that I was with, they're conflict adverse.

So they're incredibly peaceful and I remember an anthropologist anthropologists Jerome and Ingrid Lewis, who, if you've seen the film we're featuring in the film Tawai I made, they're the ones who basically gave me the courage to be able to say these things, because they are professors of anthropology at UCL, and they're like, no, Bruce, this is the case.

You can say this stuff and I remember when I talked to him and he does a bit of voiceover of the film, he says, like, you know, these are the most peaceful people on the planet and I'm like, Jerome, come on, mate, I'm making a film.

People are going to be watching this.

You can't just cover out these, like, \*\*\*\*\* like sweeping statements.

He goes, no, Bruce.

By the way by which we have been measuring these things in anthropological terms, these particular groups in Southeast Asia who are egalitarian groups come out as the most peaceful people on the planet time and again and have done for decades, by a mile and they're anarchists.

Where in our lexicon does anarchy and peace have any correlation at all? It doesn't. We've been led.

Our narrative is that left to our own devices, we all tear each other's eyes out.

That's what we all get told, all the big stories.

No, we can't do that.

We need strong leadership.

We need this and here are a group of people with no leader, no shaman, the most peaceful people on the planet and that's how it all was for us for 95% of our time on the planet, and I believe that.

That's pretty cool, I thought.

They're equals.

We get confused in our society about equality and sameness.

They're all very different, and the men and the women are different.

But no one is above the other.

They celebrate difference.

People can be different, but no one is allowed to be more.

The Penan, who I lived with, was this first group that really gave this insight to me and then I had the great privilege of going to meet another group in Africa called the Benjeli, who I'm going to talk a lot more about in the second-half of my chat and they are pygmy people living in the Congo and with them, you see the same traits,

but manifesting in subtly different ways and so this sense of equality and sameness is something I'm going to come to a little bit later as well.

No competition.

It's very weird being with a group of people who don't exhibit competition.

I remember I was with the Benjelli that I just mentioned in the Congo, and I was with the guys, and we were all running around huffing and puffing and flexing our muscles and being kind of masculine in the center of the village and then someone threw out a big stick, and half of us got one side and half of us got the other side and I was like, cool, we're gonna have a tug of war.

That's what guys do when it's like something separating between us and sure enough, we pushed and pulled and flexed our muscles and made all sorts of sounds.

But at no time did anyone try and show up or outdo the other and it was just moments like that just struck me, because I could feel it in the ether all the time.

But it was really evident moments like that I was just like, this is just completely different and what Jerome said to me when I asked him, and it's in the film, I said, how How are they, is this egalitarianism? Is it innate? And he goes, no, Bruce, it requires a lot of work on all sorts of different levels, political, social, spiritual.

This is a bubbling, active way of being.

This isn't just our natural state and I'll come to that in a bit.

But the sense of competition is something that they're working on the whole time.

When you see the Penan, they're very passive and very chilled, and it looks like it's innate.

But actually, when you go and see the Benjeli in Africa, you can see this work that has to happen for them to maintain this balance.

There was another time when I was with the Benjeli, and again, I was with the guys, and they pointed at a dude on the other side of the village, and they say, You see that guy over there? He's the best hunter.

We all know it.

Like, we hunt elephants.

He's the guy with a big wooden stake that runs out first and sticks it in and we all come behind him with the spears and the knives.

But like, he's the man.

But a couple of years ago, he started showing off that he was the man and so obviously we had to stop going hunting with him because we can't have that \*\*\*\* here and the women stopped cooking his food because we all get that Cool, man.

You can be the leader.

You can be the guy we follow, but you can't get extra for it.

You can't get credit for it.

You can't show off about it, because that just leads to it all falling apart.

How cool is that? No ownership.

So I'm going to have to get another one.

They believe that everything in nature is for nature, for us all to share and have, and abide in, and the whole idea of accumulation and drawing lines in the sand and all that sort of stuff is an anathema to them.

The Penan have this way about ownership and sharing, which is that they feel very much like they need to be giving to the group and so they're all working endlessly to be sharing and the Benjelli, they have a different type of sharing because they're a lot more exuberant and like buoyant as a group.

It's sort of fun to be with, but it's a lot trickier and they have to work much more keeping this sort of like bubbling pot level.

They have a thing called demand sharing.

So if you're not using it, I'll just take it.

It's the same trait at the end of the day, which is why anthropologists can say there's no ownership.

and there was sharing, but they're different, subtly different forms of it.

But still, the end result is the same, that these people don't have a concept of material possessions in the same way that we do and I thought that was interesting, too and the last one that I'm going to talk about is a sense of coercion.

So no one is telling anyone what to do.

You can advise, you know, even parents to children, as soon as your child can walk. He's a fully functioning individual within society.

Now, these, if you remember earlier, I said, bear with me when I share some of this insight, because it's going to be really hard to discern how that is going to be applied to our lives here today and this is a particularly complex and difficult one, because you're like, there's no way I could do that with my kids.

You know, I get that.

But if you bear with me, We'll maybe have a moment at the end to be able to sit with these things a little bit deeper.

But just to let you know what it's like for them, no coercion.

So a parent can ask their kids and advise their kids, but you'll never find them telling their kids and if a kid doesn't want to come home that night and he wants to go and live next door because mum and dad are having a nightmare, he'll just go next door because that's where he'd rather be and that's totally understood within society.

No one's forcing anyone to do anything and on that note, it's quite interesting that they do grow up into this relatively...

I'm going to come to that bit later, because that's a really big one.

So the other thing that actually the film that I made, Tawai, dwells on as well, that might have some insight into how it is that these people are like that, is that the form of hunting and gathering, I believe, does something to you as well, to your inner workings and to especially the way we use our brains and our minds and bodies and senses is something happening and this, for those of you who've seen the film, I'll do it quickly.

But the analogy that we make in the film is that when you go hunting, You have to be fully in your body and in your senses to get the monkey.

If you're drifting off in your mind to another time and another place and an abstract thought, you'll step in the twig and you won't catch it.

You've got to be so focused in the here and now to get the monkey.

Likewise, when you go foraging, Like, when I go for a walk, I'm whistling along.

My dog is watching the horizon.

I'm all over the place.

It's like, you know, I'm just going for a walk.

But for them, when they're going for a walk, they're fully in tune to the birds singing that tells them that the fox is coming, that tells them that this and that.

Everything is complete awareness and alertness at all times and where are things growing? Where are they naturally growing? They're not rows of food.

This is like we're out and we're looking for the mushrooms and we're looking for the berries and we're looking for the plants and so you have to be in your body alert and in your senses in order to do that and the analogy that we make in the film to why, because I then head off to India to try and learn how to use my mind in a similar way and of course, those two types of activity that I've just described are essentially forms of meditation and anyone who has been on like a 10 day Vipassana retreat or any form of meditation retreat, quite often you'll find that one of the things that people describe about the difference between you going in that and coming out of that is you feel more connected and this is what we talk about in the film, is that these people on a daily basis were exercising their minds and bodies on a daily basis, which allowed them to feel more balanced in their hemispheres.

more in their body senses, in their hearts and stomachs, and through that, being able to have this empathic connection to that which is around them and empathy being at the heart of how it is that their behavior is derided.

Your pain is my pain when I have an empathic connection to you.

The wellness of nature and the wellness of the environment is the wellness of me and my society when I'm empathically connecting to it and I think that this daily meditation of hunting and gathering was at the heart of how it is that they were able to feel and experience and perceive the world in a different way and as we've moved to agriculture, yes, you can be a deeply meditative agriculturalist, but you don't have to be and so maybe in the last 10,000 years, as we've shifted into this different way of being, is it any surprise that we've now seen ourselves as the masters of nature, because we're controlling it, and that as we've gone away from having to be present, this more loud side of our brain has taken over, and all that cares about is abstract thoughts, abstract times and places and that's running the show, so much so that we've seen ourselves now as superior to and above nature and in no way connected to it and I think anyone who's really thought about this can see that that's one of the biggest problems that humankind is facing in the planet today.

So that's what the film *To Wai* went into, is like this connection and how we need to feel this connection once again.

Because when you conceptualize the same as nature, it does one thing and it's great, but actually when you feel it, something else emerges.

When you feel it, then you have a greater capacity to love it and care for it and we need to learn how to feel connected once again.

But the trouble with that is it's a bit of a difficult journey because you start going on that journey of like being present, all of the stuff comes up and we are carrying a lot of trauma.

This is actually off piste now, but I'm going to go for I think I'm going to be all right.

sometimes having gone on that journey a little bit myself, I've realized that actually one of the reasons I was so happy to be running in my addictive way and drifting off was because actually the process of being with myself was really quite hard because stuff comes up and is it any wonder why we're all rushing buying shoes, shopping, taking drugs, whatever it is, to stop ourselves from being still to feel what it's like to be inside ourselves and of course, the thing I mentioned earlier about these groups is that their way of society probably allows for a lot of the traumas that we carry because of our childhood having very nuclear families and nowhere to hide when mum and dad are having a hard time.

We spend most of the rest of our times on the couch getting over our childhood.

Whereas these people, because the kids can go next door and they're very much a community, it's all disseminated out into the group and so they're probably carrying a lot less trauma, if I'm honest and therefore, it's easier for them also to be present.

So the healing aspect of it is another one.

But is it So the other thing we say in the film is that maybe then, as we've drifted away from hunting and gathering into these more domestication and agricultural practices, maybe this is why societies and civilizations over the...

...eons, have created these tools that we now think of as going back forever, but have created these tools for allowing for a deeper connection.

Meditation, yoga, chanting, plant medicines, all these sorts of things are potentially tools that have come about as a result of our separation and a way for us to go back into the deeper connection that we once had.

The trouble is you get caught up in all sorts of stories that go with that.

Quite often they remain quite human-centered, but those people back then, they realize that it's not about humans.

Humans are on a par and equal to all the other species on the planet and that was the other thing that I think we lost, is we suddenly saw ourselves as the dons, which were hubristic and clearly quite a mess.

So that was my off-piste bit.

I'll come back.

So what are these tools that these groups, going back now to the early egalitarian groups, what tools did they have for maintaining this balance? Well, I told you a little bit about the guys saying to the hunter, come down.

They knew intuitively inside themselves that the society is better when everyone's unequal and that means that bringing the person down, but also bringing others up and they all work individually to try and bring that about.

It's not going through a centralized body that's organizing that.

It's something that every single person is fully empowered as an individual to be working from that place and what that means is that they've all bought into a story.

They've all bought into a narrative.

They understand intuitively that's the best way to be.

But the question I've always wondered is, how did they get that? And if you think—no, I missed a bit.

I'm looking at my notes now.

Yeah, OK, let's move on.

So How did they get that? It's like every single person in the group knows that we're all better when we hold on to this story that we're all better off as equals.

That's a deep narrative that they're all holding in their hearts and they're understanding as individuals.

They probably don't have to relive that with experience every time.

Certainly the Penando.

There's no evidence of them having to deal with someone getting out of hand.

They just all carried that as a narrative and then it got me thinking, I think the book Sapiens is really good on this.

It's like narratives are actually the most powerful tools that humankind have probably ever had.

Like, money is a narrative.

Clearly, money doesn't mean anything other than it's an agreement that we all agree on and yet, look at the power of money.

It's immense.

It doesn't even relate to gold anymore.

It's like, it's just a social agreement that we've all got.

Religion a more complex one, but religions, you could say are similar.

How do swathes of people who've never met each other before over vast areas in different parts of the world all agree on similar value systems because they've all bought into a similar narrative? Likewise with nationalism, it's just a line in the sand, but people are willing to go to war and die for it because we believe that this flag equals me and all the rest of it.

It's just a narrative.

They're just human constructs and likewise, these people had a narrative that allowed them to maintain this idea, this belief that we're all better off together.

But then you think, well, how did that come? Because if it's true that we came from apes, well, every other ape species apart from the bonobo that if I have time we can talk about, are all alpha male, hierarchical, aggressive, high-reme type societies and yet, now we're saying that 95% of our time on the planet, we lived as equals.

Well, how do we get from that to that? And what's really bonkers is that when I was with Jerome and Ingrid and we went to visit the Ben Jelly, there was an insight we had.

Now, I'm entering into this last little bit of the talk, which is a little bit more conjecture, a little bit more theory and of course, I can't prove any of these things.

But having had the opportunity to meet these people, I'm going to bring to you what it is that I'm feeling and what it is that I've had an insight into and then you can take it or leave it, but I hope you're OK with me just offering it.

Because one, two areas are a little bit cloudy, but I still feel worthy of sharing them, if that's OK.

So the Benjelli are pygmy group living in the Congo who alongside the San Bushmen of the Kalahari are probably the longest unbroken lineage of people on the planet.

So if we did come from Africa, especially southern Africa, these are the groups who probably have had the least outside influence and are still carrying the oldest kind of memes and ways and rituals of all peoples on the planet and that's pretty, I guess that's pretty much accepted and the guys of the Kalahari have probably been influenced much more because they're out in the desert, but the people in the Congo have been relatively hidden and so the Benjeli are an interesting insight into something very, very ancient and I had the great privilege with Jerome and Ingrid to beat the Benjeli, and one of the rituals that we did was a ritual called Ejengi and Ejengi was what the Benjeli said, this is our oldest ritual.

This is the song and the dance and the ritual that tells us about how it is that we became human.

This is the ritual about how we created society.

That's their words and what you have when you see this ritual is this Ajengi spirit, which the women say, this is the male spirit by which we all became once pregnant and this spirit is like this very leafy being, entity, spirit, they say.

that comes out of the forest and dances around and it's very phallic, like it goes up and it comes down, it spins around and it's like a big leafy \*\*\*\* running through the forest and what happens in the ritual is that you have the men all in a line trying to keep this thing away from the women who are behind and what Jerome and Ingrid thinks, which is based to a degree on the works of Chris Knight and Camilla Power from the Radical Anthropology Group, amazing work, is that this potentially offers an insight into that moment.

I mean, how extraordinary that even today, it's like, to me, it's like that Sistine Chapel of the two fingers touching.

It's like at this time in history when we're so confused about where we are, who we are, and where we're going, there's this possibility of touching this moment that was

our earliest, earliest moment and what this theory says is that here is a reenactment of the time when the women came together and said no to the alpha male and invited the other men in, provided that they came and lived without aggression and competition in their hearts and that's a really big thing, I think and the theory around that as well, which again, now we're really entering into theory, and this is very much Chris Knight and Camilla's power work, is like, why is it that humankind wanted to do that? Presumably it served us at some stage quite well to just have the biggest buffest dude and we'll have his offspring, thanks very much.

Why is it that they wanted to go through this transition? Now, of course, there's no way of knowing.

It happened a long time ago, but the theories around this are kind of curious and one of them is, of course, that as we stood upright as a species, hips narrowed, our heads expanded, we had to give birth very early to our offspring, and those offspring, unlike many of the other primate offspring, ours come out, humans come out very, very helpless.

You know, we should have been in the womb a lot longer where it's actually very like protected, but we have to give birth early because we're now narrow and big heads.

So out come these helpless ones, whereas previously other apes might have been able to use both hands and suddenly you're kind of occupied and it's like big guy over there preening yourself, having occasional fights, mate, it's not enough.

We need a bit more.

So maybe there was a motivation for them needing a bit of help and you have to think, well, these theories then enter into another space.

It's like, what would have helped them? What would that would have been like for them to challenge that alpha male? That's a really big deal and you imagine one person saying no, he would probably get overpowered.

But one or two of the other things that are very interesting about humankind that maybe adds some credibility to this theory is, firstly, that compared to other species, we show much less when we're in ostracis and the other one is that when femalekind of our species come together, they often synchronize and when everyone's together and you're saying no together, that's a much more powerful thing than doing it one at a time.

That's just theory, but either way, all of these things add up to something when I was there, you see, and it's like, wow, maybe that ritual is one of the ways that they keep the narrative alive.

Because that's what it's doing.

It's like the narrative that matters.

It doesn't really matter what happened, but it's just theory, but the fact is they're keeping the narrative alive, and that's what's important and then the last tool that I'm going to talk about that they have in their toolbox is two other rituals.

Well, one in particular, and this is one that I find hardest to talk about and so please forgive me if I'm entering into areas and I stumble my words and I don't hold

this with the respect or the sensitivity that I should, because it's a hard one for me to talk about, but I feel I need to because it was so clearly a tool that they used that was really important for them and we can pick it apart later, if you will.

But the biggest, well, not biggest, but one of the other huge tools that they used to maintain balance, other than the narrative, was actually a play between the different forces and energies and powers within society and in their particular type of society, there was a huge difference between the masculine and the feminine energies and they were relatively divided and embodied between the men and the women.

Now, that's obviously a very different way that we look at the world today.

That's a very binary perspective of sex and gender, and we're heading in a direction where we're for all sorts of reasons, not looking at the world in that same way and it's not for me to say what's right or wrong, or whether we're going in a great direction, or whether we're missing something.

I don't know, and it's not for me to say, but I do want to offer you what I experienced when I was with these people and let's not forget, I said earlier, there's no coercion in these groups.

So no one is saying, you have to wear a skirt and you have to wear a pair.

That's not going on.

These are not coercive groups.

These are groups that people are generally moving into these two different categories and holding different qualities within and I need to say at this moment that I'm not saying that these people aren't conditioned.

Of course they're conditioned.

Nature is their conditioner.

They are being held and limited by the natural forces around them, but it doesn't seem to be very human-pushed.

It seems to be something else and so these two groups are appearing, and they have very different qualities and so when you have these two rituals I'm going to talk about, the first is show, which is the men, and the men run around the village.

This is with the Benjeli in Africa, run around the village, and they're like buffing and gruffing and flexing their muscles and doing all sorts of stuff and having a pretty good time, actually, and just being themselves, and that's great.

But when the women come out, something very different happens and what you'll find is that in this particular group, the way they would, I hope I'm not putting words into their mouths, but the feeling you get and the sensation you get, and I think what a lot of the anthropologists are saying about this now is that if there was a tendency towards more aggression and competition, it may well come probably more from the male sector.

Now, that's not in any way to say toxic masculinity or anything like that.

It's not.

It's like the men and the women in these groups love each other dearly, and they are equal.

Remember, they're seen as equal.

But there are different qualities within them and what the women do when they come out is that the women of old and young come out and they are there to highlight any occasions that certain activities may have got out of hand.

So the women come out together in an incredible display of power in solidarity, all of them together, and point out you've been a lazy lover.

You've been a bit aggressive in the home.

You've been like showing off, whatever it is and that's held by the women who do it in an incredibly playful, joyful, laughter, song and dance, but incredibly powerful, strong group together and it's very sexual and like old ladies and young girls all performing in a relatively sexual way and at the bottom of the whole thing is this sort of like Not so much calling out, although maybe calling out, but it's like holding to account that contract that they made when they first invited the men in, by all means come in, but provided that you leave at the door, these types of qualities and so this is like a reenactment of that as well, if you will and at the bottom line, and this is unsaid, but the experience that I had being there with them was like, misbehave.

us all together, you're not getting any and that was the biggest threat of all, I think, the sex strike, the threat of the sex strike.

So, moving on.

So, you can see why I struggle with that one, because it's complex, but I think Rather than trying to say we need to emulate that, what I want to do in the last few minutes is just try and pull out a little bit of what I have sort of sat with and contemplated as to what we can learn from all of these things that I've brought to you today.

I will see what I can do as far as summing that up.

But like I said earlier, what I hope I've done is offered you a seed, and you can find for yourself what this means to you.

can find for yourself what type of plant or tree this grows into.

But maybe if I offer a couple of my own thoughts, that might help us along the way, because it's certainly not clear how that story can be applied to today.

I do think that their understanding of power getting out of hand is a pretty valid one.

we live in a time almost like the pharaohs of inequality and disenfranchisement and all the rest of it.

It's like, it's clearly at hand.

I don't know what, I mean, the statistic changes every week about how many people own half the world's wealth and all the rest of it.

Clearly, we're in a place where we think we're living in a meritocracy whereby the harder you work, the better your life.

But actually, the rules have completely shifted and what they knew back then was when power gets out of hand and when power gets centralized, it always leads to corruption.

It can't help itself.

It just can't help itself and what I like about that story of the Ijengi is that it's quite possible that was the only time in history we've had a revolution that really worked.

You think about every other type of revolution that's happened, Even the most well-meaning group of people coming in to try and overthrow the tyrant, nearly every time you've seen like replaced with like and what the women understood is that if they tried to challenge the men, when the men were being aggressive or being hierarchical or whatever it was, with the same quality of power, that they knew that they would just be up against it and that they would they probably wouldn't win, and it would just be very messy and likewise, they knew that even with the strength and power they had when they came into the middle of the room or the middle of the village, that they understood that if they stayed there and held on to that power, then they would just be as bad as the thing they're trying to overthrow.

They knew that if they stayed there, then it would become a matriarchy, and a matriarchy is just another form of hierarchy, and they had the wisdom to step back and say, okay, over to you guys now and it's the play between the two qualities of power that was the thing that maintained the balance.

With love, it's like, yeah, we're holding you out, but your turn now, because we love you.

Come and show your muscles and do your stuff.

It's all good and they also knew that they were all involved.

It wasn't this men, bad, toxic.

It was like, we're all involved in this.

Likewise, the mate I choose and this is conjecture now, of course, I don't know, I didn't spend time talking to them, but it strikes me that it's very likely that unlike us, who we like to choose, the alpha male in our society.

We want to choose the winner, we want to choose the strongest, and they may well be maybe making choices in their partners that aren't driven by the same motivations.

Maybe they're choosing people who are actually better team players, and that's okay because they all get the story.

So it's not about the guys just being bad, it's about everyone being involved.

It's not one side bad, one side good, it's not.

It's like the whole society needed to hold on to this theory and understanding and narrative and I found that to be really interesting.

So when it comes to the type of revolution, if we're going to have a revolution of sorts, or try and challenge the power base, If we try and challenge the power base using the same type of quality of power that the power is holding, we stand a very good chance of either it being incredibly aggressive and ugly, and even if we were to be successful, just replacing the same again.

These people understood that all centralized power is a problem, and what they did was they disseminated.

It was a decentralized power structure.

You're not giving your power away to anyone, be it king, be it leader, be it guru, be it anyone.

We need to We empower ourselves individually, and likewise, when it comes to challenging it, don't challenge it, try and diffuse it, figure out what those women figured out.

It's like, okay, these guys are only doing that because they want to \*\*\* \*\*\*\*.

So if we threat that, that's enough of a threat in its own right.

How can we figure out what is the driving force of the power base in our society today and diffuse it rather than try and challenge it? And so things like propping all these corporations up by the fact that we spend the money on them is creating another type of life where you're living in a more simple way without having to buy into that, will in its own right, if we all chose to do it, diffuse those power bases anyway and I know it's not as simple as that because there's a lot of corruption and it's all revolving doors and it's all tied up and it's very hard to do that.

But just think the theory, it's like, don't get angry and try and challenge the power.

Try and remember those women and the wonderful wisdom that they have and let's do something else.

Let's have a different quality of power that we can hold on to that either challenges it or also diffuses and I think that was kind of where I got to that with that and I think this idea of decentralization is fascinating, too.

Like I said earlier, when did you ever hear of anarchy and the most peaceful people on the planet being in the same sentence? But that's what the evidence says.

So when we think decentralization, that's a buzzword I think we should hold on to.

Anything that's challenging the central power to allow for a diffusal out into the masses is something that I personally am now very interested in.

I don't have time now to go into it, but things like direct democracy, we can even have apps where we all vote without even a need for a parliament.

I mean, there is loads and loads of stuff that's going on now using the technologies of today where we can literally diffuse the central power.

At the moment, what we vote people in every four years and look at the mess they make because they don't even listen to us, they don't care.

We think, we've been led to believe, we've been led to believe that left to our own devices will make a mistake and yeah, okay, we're pretty bad at it and Brexit was a bit of a mess, but even so, that's only because we've been so disempowered for so long, we're so disenfranchised, we're so underinformed.

If we were to get our power back, if we were to come together and be more inclusive in all of the decisions, I believe that we would find ways of reconnecting to that and give ourselves so much more joy and connection in the process and the last one, I think, is just know in your hearts, just know in your hearts that at the depths of who we are is something beautiful.

The Penan, the most peaceful people on the planet.

There's another group in Southeast Asia I haven't been to yet who see any form of violence as a type of mental illness.

I mean, it's just bonkers.

We have our world leaders telling us we need to go to war with a certain country because there's an axis of evil, and the other side of that, they're just evil.

We're like, where's the axis of evil in a whole civilization where people have no violence at all? It's like when you take on board fully what living, what an egalitarian society can be like, it makes you question what is our, what is human nature? And I think that what I've learned is that is that actually we're extraordinary beings and we're capable of the most amazing things and if we just believe that, deep beneath these layers of conditioning is something very beautiful, it might inspire us to go on that journey of healing so that we can feel more deeply, can feel more connected, and come together again in societies.

But when we're fearful of going on that journey, because we've been told that going in only leads to badness, Because actually, genetically, some people are just bad, and I might be one of them, so there's no way I'm going to go there.

It's just terrifying.

Clearly, we're not going to be able to get through.

We have to learn how to feel more, and we have to go on that inner journey so that we can connect.

But the first step of that is believing that, as a species, we're amazing, and we are amazing.

So let's give it a go.

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