

# War in the Tribal Zone

*Expanding States and Indigenous Warfare*

*Chapter 9*



## A Savage Encounter

Western Contact and the  
Yanomami War Complex

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**T**HE lives of the Yanomami of the Orinoco-Mavaca river confluence of southern Venezuela have been presented in the works of Napoleon Chagnon as a kind of morality play. Embroiled in seemingly endless violence fueled by sexual competition, status rivalry, and revenge, the Yanomami are held to exemplify the Hobbesian condition of "Warre"—the chronic disposition to do battle, to oppose and dispose of one's sovereign neighbors" (Chagnon 1974:77; see Bennett Ross 1980). Moreover, their lifeways are said to represent "a truly primitive cultural adaptation . . . before it was altered or destroyed by our culture" (Chagnon 1977:xi). Their warfare is portrayed not as aberrant or unusual, but as the normal state of existence for sovereign tribal peoples, seeming atypical only because other war patterns have been suppressed by colonialism (Chagnon 1977:163). It is "an expected form of political behavior

and no more requires special explanations than do religion or economy" (Chagnon 1983:213). The conditions Chagnon describes are said to resemble those at the dawn of agriculture (Chagnon 1983:30). The Yanomami are "our contemporary ancestors" (Chagnon 1983:214); thus, understanding their "quality of life . . . can help us understand a large fraction of our own history and behavior" (Chagnon 1983:213). The same insecurities that create Warre among the Yanomami account for warfare among modern nation-states, and the same inference is to be drawn: "the best defense is a good offense" (Chagnon 1974:195).

Chagnon's portrayal is persuasive and has been widely accepted. In the Foreword to his *Yanomamö: The Fierce People*, one of the most widely read texts in the history of anthropology, the series editors write that the "sovereign tribal" politics of these Yanomami is "a product of long-term socio-cultural evolution without intervention from outside alien populations and life ways" (Spindler and Spindler 1983:vii). Even scholars who have been the most attentive to the violence-provoking possibilities of Western contact accept the Yanomami's relatively "pristine" character (Fried 1974; Service 1967). Students of the Yanomami have been more skeptical, many pointing out that the Orinoco-Mavaca area has undergone extensive contact-related changes (e.g., Bennett Ross 1971; Davis 1976; Good 1989; Lizot 1976; Smole 1976). None of the critics, however, has shown in any systematic way how those changes relate to observed patterns of violence.

The seminar for which this paper was written was intended to explore exactly those relationships, and to challenge the idea that any ethnographic case of indigenous warfare is fully understandable apart from the historical circumstances of contact with an expanding state. The Yanomami of the Orinoco-Mavaca area provide a crucial test of this assertion. I will not dispute that they are less disrupted and transformed by Western contact than most of the peoples for whom we have ethnographic information. Nevertheless, I will argue that after centuries of sporadic contact with outsiders, Orinoco-Mavaca society was undergoing massive change for some two decades prior to Chagnon's arrival, and that this process of change accelerated during the time period described in Chagnon's monographs (1964-72). His statement that "it is not true, as a few of my colleagues believe, that the Yanomamo were described at a particularly 'turbulent' period of their history" (Chagnon 1977:163) is unsupported. The "fierce people" immortalized by Chagnon represent a moment in history in which Yanomami culture was pushed into an extreme conflict mode by circumstances related to the intensifying Western presence. Their warfare and other conflicts are manifestations of this larger situation. Where Chagnon tells us that the Yanomami provide "an intimate

glimpse beyond history, whither we came" (Chagnon 1977:xii), I maintain that they will remain a baffling chimera until they are seen in the light of their own history.

This paper is one of two studies of Yanomami warfare. In them my objectives, though complementary, are quite different. My other study is a monograph (Ferguson n.d.a) that addresses a very specific question: how can we understand the occurrence and patterning of actual incidents of warfare, or why war happens? In that work, every reported case of actual or threatened war involving all Yanomami, not just those of the Orinoco-Mavaca area, is explained with reference to a general model that centers on the basic proposition that war among the Yanomami is a result of antagonistic interests regarding access to or control over trade in Western manufactured goods. That explanation of the occurrence of war is incorporated in the current essay (below, under "Political Organization"), but my focus here is on other aspects of social violence and Western contact.

In this chapter I look at war less as an act than as a condition or state of society, a total social fact that is shaped by and shapes other aspects of social life. To analyze such a "war complex," I use a model (Ferguson 1990b, n.d.b) developed for a previous School of American Research advanced seminar (Haas 1990a), which posits a nested hierarchy of progressively more limiting constraints. The model begins with infrastructural parameters of demography, ecology, and technology; moves on to structural factors of economics, kinship, and politics; and culminates in superstructural variables of psychology and belief. Indeed, this essay was conceived as a test of that model, and specifically of its ability to elucidate changes associated with contact (Ferguson 1990b:51-54).

In the context of the contact experience, this chapter will explore secondary contributing factors and various social consequences of war, along with parallel developments that further heighten or reflect the climate of interpersonal violence. All of these taken together affect the threshold where antagonism turns into combat, making a particular people "peaceable" or "warlike." This is relevant to the aims of my companion monograph explaining the occurrence of war (Ferguson n.d.a): in the Orinoco-Mavaca area, it took much less to start the blood flowing in 1966 than it did in 1946. However, the basic nature of the antagonisms remained the same, or at least within the parameters of the same model. For the current study, these contact-related correlates of war are used to explain the other manifestations of aggression that are so striking in Chagnon's descriptions. Although much interpersonal violence is set apart from the processes of

war, examining such belligerence enables us to understand the unusual "fierceness" of the Orinoco-Mavaca Yanomami.

Topics in this chapter which are detailed and documented in my longer monograph (Ferguson n.d.a) will be summarized here, without source citations. This applies mostly to discussions about Western goods, the exchange relations that grow up around them, and the application of force to affect exchange patterns; that is, to the elements of the explanation of the occurrence of war. The summaries will suffice to show how these factors connect to other elements of the war complex. Also detailed in the monograph is the political history of the Yanomami of the Orinoco-Mavaca area (n.d.a:part 3); the following very brief overview merely provides some context for subsequent discussions.

### LOCAL HISTORY

The ancestors of the Yanomami were raided by slavers, in varying intensity, from probably the mid-seventeenth century to about 1850. The raids drove them deep into the Parima highlands, although some still came down to the rivers to trade. The rubber boom of the latter nineteenth century reached into mountain areas and was accompanied by wars and migrations for the recent ancestors of the Orinoco-Mavaca people. The collapse of rubber production left the region more isolated from Westerners from around 1920 until 1940, a brief interlude which has been misconstrued as a primeval state. For the Orinoco-Mavaca people, this was a time of peace.

Sporadic, sometimes violent, contact began in the area around 1940 and intensified over the decade. The captive woman Helena Valero (Biocca 1971) was in this area, and she describes the intensifying conflicts as new tools and diseases began to filter in. In the late 1940s the Namowei-teri, the population cluster later to host Chagnon's field research, divided into hostile western and eastern (Patanowa-teri) groups. Then, in 1950, the establishment of the first mission near Mahekodo-teri on the Orinoco was followed almost immediately by the slaughter of a western Namowei-teri trading party by the more isolated Shamatarí. Interior groups continued to harry the wealthier villages around the Orinoco until, in 1955, the latter demonstrated their military superiority. During the relatively peaceful half decade to follow, a second mission was established by Iyewei-teri at the mouth of the Ocamo River. The Iyewei-teri are an important contrast to other local groups (see Cocco 1972): although only a few hours by launch downstream from Chagnon's field site, they had a more stable and wealthy Western power base than any upstream village,

and enjoyed almost unbroken peace while the upriver villages endured several wars.

In 1958, a government malaria control station was set up at the mouth of the Mavaca River. The Bisaasi-teri, the larger of the western Namowei-teri groups, accepted an invitation to settle by the post. (The other western group, the closely allied Monou-teri, was located a short distance up the Mavaca.) Almost immediately, the missionaries at Mahekodo-teri moved their main operation to Bisaasi-teri. The Bisaasi-teri and Monou-teri then set out to establish beneficial alliances with Shamatarí groups up the Mavaca, and in one instance demonstrated their willingness to use force against potential adversaries. For the next several years, Bisaasi-teri would be the metropolitan center of the far upper Orinoco, especially in late 1964 to early 1966, when Chagnon lived there, and when another mission was attempting to establish itself directly across the Orinoco. But those years also saw the western Namowei-teri beleaguered by internal factionalism and external enemies. This was the extraordinary fighting described in *Yanomamö: The Fierce People* (1968). Information is limited after 1966, but it seems that in the next six years, violent conflict diminished and moved away from Bisaasi-teri to more active contact fronts farther up the Orinoco and the Mavaca. After the early 1970s, very little historical information is available at all.

### INFRASTRUCTURE

Western contact brings epidemic diseases. In the Orinoco-Mavaca area, epidemics began to occur around 1940, and they continued with devastating frequency (Chagnon 1966:153; Chagnon and Melancon 1983; Ferguson n.d.a:chaps. 9, 10; and see Ramos and Taylor 1979). A major outbreak of malaria in 1960 killed an estimated 10 percent of the area population (Smole 1976:50), and another outbreak is indicated for 1963 (Lizot 1977:503). Chagnon's initial census established the cause of death of 240 individuals: 130 are attributed to malaria and epidemics, and another 25 to "sorcery" (Chagnon 1966:62). A measles epidemic swept through the area in 1968 (Chagnon 1977:146-47; Cocco 1972:176, 417). Among deaths recorded by Chagnon for 1970 to 1974, 82 (69 percent) were due to all infectious diseases (including "magic") (Melancon 1982:42). In a different sample gathered at Mavaca for 1969 to 1979, 53 (39.6 percent) were due to malaria (Flores et al. in Colchester and Semba 1985:26).

A single influenza epidemic that hit three remote villages in 1973 shows how terrible the impact can be. One hundred six people died,

27.4 percent of the combined population (Chagnon and Melancon 1983: 59–61). One village lost 40 percent (Chagnon 1977: 147). In this epidemic, and presumably in all of them (Cocco 1972: 481), the young and old died in disproportionate numbers. The contagion apparently was transmitted by men coming back from a trip downstream to obtain machetes (Chagnon 1977: 147; and see Chagnon et al. 1970: 343–44).<sup>1</sup> Added to these are war deaths, which take mostly adult men. In Chagnon's (1966: 62) original census, 37 adults had died in war. In a later estimate, 25 percent of adult male Namowei-teri died in war, and 30 percent of adult male Shamatarí (Chagnon 1983: 79). Lizot (1989: 30) reports a comparable figure, 24 percent of adult male deaths in war, in his sample just east and north of Chagnon's. These figures are much higher than those reported for other Yanomami areas (Cocco 1972: 393; Ken Good, personal communication, 1989; Lizot 1989: 30).

In sum, in the Orinoco-Mavaca area, a great many families were disrupted by death during the contact period. Only about one-quarter of the children there have both parents alive and coresident by the time they reach the age of 15 (Chagnon 1982: 299). For the Yanomami, family, economy, and polity are one, and this many deaths tears at the fabric of society. The immediate consequence of observed epidemics is disruption of the system of provisioning, and hunger which can cause more deaths than the infectious agent (Chagnon and Melancon 1983: 69–70; Cocco 1972: 176; Neel 1973: 172–73; and see Colchester 1985: 65, 69; Rice 1928: 355). The longer-term consequences are described by Chagnon and Melancon (1982: 73):

Disruption of village life and the resulting coalescence or fusion shatters the social organization and creates chaos, conflict and disorder in the newly-constituted village(s). This is so because whatever integration and order existed in the independent local villages before the epidemic, was enmeshed in the kinship, marriage and leadership patterns. The development of these kinship ties and marriage alliances takes years of inter- and intra-group social promises and actual exchanges, and is a complex, difficult process in even the most demographically advantageous circumstances. Forging a new order out of the chaos generated by epidemics and depopulation is all the more difficult in composite villages, and what emerges is usually quite a different system entirely.

A second major impact of Western contact is ecological depletion (see Colchester 1981). The posited linkage between game depletion and warfare is examined elsewhere (Ferguson 1989a). Evidence from numerous

Amazonian populations shows that a sizable village population will indeed deplete game in its immediate vicinity, but this problem is typically dealt with by relocation rather than war. Less acculturated Yanomami maintain an adequate protein intake by extended deep-forest hunting treks and relocation of villages (Good 1989; Lizot 1971: 40; Ramos 1972: 36–37). Among some Yanomami of the Orinoco-Mavaca area, the movement option is greatly reduced by the political imperative to remain close to the sources of Western manufactures, and the missionaries actively discourage people from absencing themselves for extended hunts (Lizot 1976: 12). Whereas visitors to relatively remote villages frequently find them completely empty (Good 1989: 6; Ramos 1972: 18; Smole 1976: 86), there is no suggestion that Bisaasi-teri or Mahekodo-teri is ever left vacant. The Salesian mission village Iyewei-teri is noted as not having gone on a hunting trek for at least a decade (Colchester 1984: 299).

The situation is complicated by the unknown dietary contribution of mission-provided food (Cocco 1972: 176); an increased danger of catastrophic crop failure in large, sedentary river villages (Cocco 1972: 176, 419; Lizot in Colchester 1984: 299); and the use of new (for the Yanomami) river resources (Cocco 1972: 174, 378; Colchester 1984: 299; Good 1989: 64; Lizot 1977: 509). Nevertheless it is clear that game depletion has occurred over the contact period. Lizot (1976: 13), writing from the perspective of 1975, observes that

over a decade, the Upper Orinoco, the lower and middle Mavaca and the Ocamo have witnessed the irrevocable disappearance of animals which used to populate their banks. Species which move around only a little are exterminated; such has been the case with some large birds, hogs, agoutis, tapirs and pacas, these animals represent an important part of those habitually eaten by the Yanomami. Other animals, terrified, move further away.

Chagnon (1977: 148), commenting about the same time, noted that even the remote upper Mavaca had been "turned into a near desert. Now, not a single otter can be seen along its entire course, and many other species of common game animals are almost nonexistent."

Both Lizot and Chagnon are emphatic in attributing these depletions to conditions associated with the resident Westerners.<sup>2</sup> Given what we know about ecological adaptation in Amazonia (Ferguson 1989a), they are undoubtedly correct. But the anchoring effect of Western outposts goes back to the 1950s or even earlier, and research throughout Amazonia (Ferguson 1989a: 188–91) and in several other Yanomami areas (Colchester and Semba 1985: 17; Good 1983: 7–9; Good 1989; Saffirio and Hames 1983: 37–38; Saffirio and Scaglioni 1982; Shapiro 1972: 57;

Smole 1976:181) indicates that depletion would have begun soon after villages located permanently near the Western outposts. As Chagnon (1977:33) himself wrote, prior to the development of the protein controversy (see Sponsel 1983:206), "Game animals are not abundant, and an area is rapidly hunted out."<sup>3</sup> Lizot (1976:27) acknowledges that by 1975 some villagers may have been experiencing dietary protein deficiency.<sup>4</sup> It seems this was a problem for some time. Records of deaths at Mavaca beginning with 1969 show two deaths from malnutrition in both 1969 and 1970 (Flores et al. in Colchester and Semba 1985:26).

Long before it got this bad, game depletion would have had serious social consequences. Among the less sedentary, forest-dwelling Yanomami, wide sharing of meat is a fundamental basis of village solidarity (Good 1983:12-14; Good 1989:131-40; Peters 1973:79; Taylor 1972), as is the case all over Amazonia (Ferguson 1988b:144). Good (1989:135-40) finds that failure to share leads to gradually widening social rifts, culminating in village fissioning. Helena Valero describes strict rules of sharing among pre-mission Namowei-teri (Biocca 1971:159-60; and see Cocco 1972:62), but I could find no indication of this generalized sharing among the Namowei-teri of Chagnon's time. Instead, game seems to have been kept and consumed within individual families (Chagnon 1977:91-92). In the Iyewei-teri, according to Cocco (1972:365), the community has no claim to a share of meat or fish, which is kept or distributed according to the whim of the procurer.<sup>5</sup>

Although game scarcity seems largely inadequate as an explanation of warfare (Ferguson 1989a), it does seem reasonable to conclude that increasing game scarcity has led to diminishing reciprocity between families in settled villages throughout the contact period. As Malinowski observed (1982:23), daily reciprocity is an important basis of social control. Less well bound by sharing, these villagers are primed for atomization and anomie, and for the instrumental use of interpersonal violence.

A third major infrastructural consequence of contact is technological change. Of paramount importance is the introduction of steel cutting tools (for details and documentation, see Ferguson n.d.a:chap. 2), which are up to ten times more efficient than stone.<sup>6</sup> As with other Amazonian peoples (Ferguson 1990a), Yanomami have gone to great lengths to obtain these tools, relocating villages, sending trading parties on long and hazardous journeys, and raiding vulnerable possessors of steel. All known Yanomami had obtained some metal tools long before any anthropologist visited them, yet these highly valued items remained scarce until very recently. And steel tools are only the beginning. New needs develop rapidly for a range of Western manufactures, in a process that can lead to

assimilation into the lowest stratum of the expanding state. In the Orinoco-Mavaca area, those with greatest access to Westerners are seen by other Yanomami as having "turned white" (Cocco 1972:377).

Machetes, axes, and knives are unlike anything in the indigenous economy. At least at first, their utility and scarcity makes them more precious than items of native manufacture. Furthermore, they are unequally available, their sources restricted to a few points of Western presence, so procurement is the key problem. It is commonly acknowledged that Yanomami villages have moved out of the Parima highlands in order to provide closer access to sources of steel, and that in the Orinoco-Mavaca area, this is why Yanomami moved from the highlands to the insect-infested rivers. And there is more to it than movement.

Thus there grew up two types of community—those holding manufactured goods acquired directly at source, and those (isolated ones) which were deprived of them. The entire map of economic and matrimonial circuits, along with political alliances, was transformed and flagrant imbalances appeared. Gradually, though scarcely within twenty years . . . the economy was disrupted, the society menaced at its roots, and dysfunctional attitudes developed. (Lizot 1976:8-9)

In later discussions, I will describe how contradictory interests in the quest for manufactures lead to violence.

Other significant technological changes are the introduction of shotguns and of medical treatments for wounds (Ferguson n.d.a:chap. 2). Hassig, Law, Whitehead, and Abler (this volume) have shown the limited effectiveness of early firearms, but in this regard the Yanomami more closely resemble the Papua New Guinean situation described by Strathern: shotguns clearly confer a great advantage in combat. Villages with shotguns, even if they are possessed only by the resident Westerners, are more secure against attack and more effective in retaliation. The spread of shotguns since the mid-1960s led to a rash of new killings. If an outpost village does engage in war, the medicine and medical care provided by the resident Westerner means that more of the wounded will recover (Barker 1959:163). Furthermore, outpost villages have more cutting tools and thus find it easier to construct palisades and clear forest around the settlement, both of which are important defensive tactics; and canoe transport provided by resident Westerners can aid in maneuvering, as can traded canoes provided by missionaries. The result of all these technological changes is that outpost villages have major tactical advantages over more isolated villages.

These advantages combine with the primary benefit of access to Western manufactures to anchor outpost villages in place. As noted above, this is what leads to problems with game supply, but there is another even more important consequence of this anchoring. One of the most significant factors acting to prevent or minimize war in Amazonia is the fact that most peoples are able and willing to move, to relocate their villages, when they are raided or even threatened (Ferguson 1989a:196). Settlement around Western outposts eliminates this pacific option.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to the anchoring effect, the primary social implications of the infrastructural changes associated with contact can be summarized as follows: deaths from disease and war scramble existing social organization; game depletion weakens social cohesion; and access to Western technology provides a new source of conflict, a new principal for ordering society, and a significantly enhanced ability to wage war for outpost villages. In the next section, we will follow some of the violent ramifications of these basic changes.

## STRUCTURE

The structural effects of contact on war are here separated into three conventional topics: economics, kinship, and political organization.

### ECONOMICS

A central problem for all Yanomami economies is how to obtain Western manufactured goods (Ferguson n.d.a:chap. 2). In different Yanomami areas, these have been obtained by hunting for pelts, traveling to work as farmhands, or producing manioc flour or bananas for sale or trade. In the Orinoco-Mavaca area, the way to obtain Western goods has been to work for the Westerners who come there to live or visit. Missionaries and other resident Westerners regularly give away substantial quantities of manufactures. They make large presentations on special occasions, such as visits to more remote villages, but normally give the manufactures as payment for goods (garden products, meat, firewood), for services (as guides, ground clearers, housebuilders, translators, maids, informants, etc.), and in some instances, for local manufactures with external sale potential. Very few details are available about employment and payments, but one obvious point has important consequences for understanding patterns of conflict: to work for the Westerners in most of these capacities requires that one live close to them.

Before following out the implications of this spatial inequality for un-

derstanding war, another aspect of working for Westerners should be mentioned, which will be significant for a later discussion of male violence against women. Most of the work done for Westerners is done by men, rather than women. This applies even to the production of garden products, as the Yanomami are unusual among Amazonian cultivators in that men do most garden work (Chagnon 1977:90; Good 1989:48; Smole 1976:106). Other changes are evident concerning the relative labor contribution of women. Firewood, an absolute necessity for the Yanomami, becomes depleted around the outpost settlements, and women spend many hours each day finding and carrying firewood. That and hauling water appear to be their main procurement tasks (Chagnon 1977:81-82, 91; Chagnon 1983:68). By contrast, Shirishana Yanomami women start gathering wood late in the day, and find most of it in the vicinity of the settlement (Peters 1973:79); and among the mobile Yanomami just east of the study area, wood gathering requires an average of only 0.6 hours per day (Good 1989:49, 122-23). The latter population illustrates another change: among mobile Yanomami, gathering done by women provides crucial foods during the time when new gardens are being established (Good 1989:120). This task ends when villages become anchored to Western outposts. Wood gathering and water hauling are essential tasks, but they are not subject to the same concern and respect that goes to male specialities of hunting, war, and procuring Western manufactures.

To return to the question of access to Western manufactures (see Ferguson n.d.a:chap. 2), the Yanomami generally make great efforts to monopolize access to the Western provider, using pleas, threats, and deceptions to keep the distribution of goods within their local group. Beyond the source point, Western manufactures are passed along from village to village through networks of kinship. Often the people in one village use a tool for some time, then pass it along to the next village when they get a new one. The quantities in exchange can only be guessed, but that guess must be high. An incomplete listing of goods distributed from the Catholic mission at Iyewei-teri for 1960 to 1972 includes 3,850 machetes, 620 axes, 2,850 pots, 759,000 fishhooks, and large quantities of other items (Cocco 1972:378). Most of these goods were traded to more remote villages.

Nevertheless, some villages separated from Western sources by two or three intervening villages are reported as receiving only poor remnants of manufactures. The Shamatari village Mishimishimabowei-teri, about 12 days and three middlemen south of Bisaasi-teri, in 1968 had broken blades that were "usually unrecognizable as machetes" (Chagnon 1974:35) and "two of the most miserable 'axes' I have ever seen . . . worn down

by years—perhaps decades—of heavy use” to a third of their original size (Chagnon 1983:39).

Most reports indicate that the exchange of Western manufactures is usually without overt contention. A request for an item is made, and that item is given, on the promise of some future compensation. On the other hand, Lizot (1985:184) reports that “the bargaining, however, does not proceed without bitter disputes. The partners stay at the brink of rupture.” Even the smooth transactions may mask tensions, and the major trading that occurs at feasts is often preceded or followed by violent confrontations. Veiled and not-so-veiled threats are made, as when a man “named the men he had killed on various raids—just before demanding a machete” from Chagnon (1974:1). “In some communities, to declare, ‘I will not give anything’ or ‘I will not give what you are asking’ is to risk a clubbing” (Lizot 1985:184). Both parties to an exchange generally express dissatisfaction with its terms. Dialogue reported during trading contains insistent demands for machetes. The Namowei-teri complain generally about the “extravagance and sharpness” (Chagnon 1974:165) of Shamatari requests. If most exchanges go smoothly, it is only because a man generally will ask only for what he can expect to receive. The terms of trade are understood.

In exchange for Western manufactures, more isolated Yanomami make and trade local manufactures. Consistent with the earlier quotation from Lizot, this has led to a clear division of labor between Yanomami communities. All the villages around missions have specialized in the trade of Western items; residents of villages without such access have become specialists in producing specific local commodities, which they trade to the mission villages. Thus in Iyewei-teri, men obtain Western goods by working for the mission, then exchange these goods for bows, quivers, curare arrowpoints, cotton, hammocks, manioc strainers, manioc cakes, tapioca, plantains, and other items, from a total of 12 villages (Cocco 1972:376–78).

But does this general pattern apply to the Bisaasi-teri? Admittedly, it would be difficult to infer its existence from reading *The Fierce People*. Cocco (1972:205), however, like Lizot, describes the pattern as applying to all mission villages in the area, which would include Bisaasi-teri. In a letter written during his initial fieldwork, Chagnon (1972a:66) reports the same pattern: “Some villages specialize in making one or another object, others who have special sources of access purvey axes or machetes and pots to the rest.” The pattern is also suggested by the captions of two photographs from the same trading session: “Kaobawa trading his steel tools to Shamatari allies” (Chagnon 1974:11), and “Kaobawa . . . trading

with his Shamatari allies for arrows, baskets, hammocks, and dogs” (Chagnon 1983:6); and it is implied in a passing mention of “steel tools and aluminum pots” being the trade specialization of “several contacted villages” (Chagnon 1977:100). But Chagnon follows this point immediately with a discussion that downplays the utilitarian aspect of trade in local manufactures, arguing that trade specialization is to be understood as a gambit to create political alliances. People “forget” or “remember” how to make certain things in order to create a basis for reciprocal exchange (Chagnon 1967:121; Chagnon 1977:100–101).

I have been unable to locate a report of such collective amnesia in any other ethnographer's writings on the Yanomami. Moreover, the material interest in Bisaasi-teri trade is apparent in regard to cotton and hammocks. Woven by men in this area (see Ramos 1972:36; cf. Peters 1973:196–97), cotton hammocks are scarce and very valuable. They are traded widely, even into the Parima highlands (Biocca 1971:108; Chagnon 1983:66; Smole 1976:30, 124, 225, n. 110).

The Bisaasi-teri obtain much of their spun cotton and curare arrow points from their Shamatari allies. It takes considerable time and labor to accumulate these items. When the Shamatari are visited by the Bisaasi-teri, the latter make known their desire to have these items, and their hosts promise to produce them. When the items are accumulated, the Shamatari visit the Bisaasi-teri to inform them their cotton and arrow points are ready. A feast is arranged and the items are given over to the Bisaasi-teri after the celebration terminates. The Shamatari then request specific items from their hosts, and the cycle continues. (Chagnon 1966:95)

The Bisaasi-teri export this cotton yarn to another ally, and it is then “brought back in the form of manufactured hammocks, the importer merely contributing labor to the process” (Chagnon 1977:101). In other words, the Bisaasi-teri come to possess a quantity of a very valuable trade item without expending any labor in its production. Curare arrowpoints, not incidentally, are listed by Cocco (1972:378) as the item Bisaasi-teri uses when trading at Iyewei-teri.

In sum, Yanomami with direct access to sources of Western manufactures make great efforts to monopolize them, sharp tensions surround the exchange of Western items, the quality and quantity of Western manufactures diminishes markedly at each step in the exchange network, and outpost villages acquire large quantities of various local, labor-intensive manufactures. My inference is that those groups who control sources of

Western manufactures exploit more isolated peoples who depend on them for metal tools. This inference is reinforced by the more obvious exploitation by middlemen in the realm of marriage relationships, discussed in the next section. Later, we will see how all these factors generate warfare.

### KINSHIP

The main focus of this section is marriage patterns and the much-debated "fighting over women." But first, there are issues to be considered concerning village composition and size. Both are strongly affected in the Orinoco-Mavaca area by the intensity of war during the contact period.

Throughout Amazonia, postmarital residence is influenced by combined circumstances of production and conflict (Ferguson 1988b). In the case of the Orinoco-Mavaca Yanomami, production is essentially neutral in regard to residence. Absent are those conditions, such as commercial manioc flour production, which elsewhere favor cooperative female work groups and uxori-locality. (Other Yanomami who do produce farina demonstrate a strong tendency toward uxori-locality [Barandiaran and Walalam 1983:108, 193; Ramos 1972:32, 57].) Also absent is the conflict situation that favors uxori-locality: external war against collective enemies.

What is present in this area is intense local conflict. Hostilities which pit neighbors, even coresidents, against each other make uxori-locality difficult to maintain. At the same time, the substitution of Western manufactures for bride service (discussed below) makes it easier to keep married sons at home. The result is a strong virilocal tendency among the Orinoco-Mavaca people (Chagnon 1977:68; Lizot 1971:39). This is in marked contrast to other Yanomami areas, where bilocal or uxori-local residence are most frequent (Barandiaran and Walalam 1983; Peters 1973; Ramos 1972). Even in the nearby community of Iyewei-teri, an absence of warfare is accompanied by uxori-locality (Cocco 1972:215).

The facility with which Orinoco-Mavaca Yanomami mobilize as conflict groups is consistent with fraternal interest group theory (Otterbein 1977). What is unanticipated by that theory (see Ferguson 1988b:140), however, is the fact that mobilization is not along strictly fraternal lines. Instead, it involves two intermarrying lines of brothers, sometimes lined up against their own agnatic kin (Chagnon 1966:104; Chagnon 1977:66). This variation can be attributed to the basic Dravidian organization common to all Yanomami (Peters 1973:71; Ramos 1972; Shapiro 1972:72-82) and indeed most northern Amazonian peoples (see Arhem 1981; Riviere 1984).

Village size is also affected by the intense conflicts of the contact pe-

riod. The danger of war sets a minimum size for a viable village, which Chagnon estimates at 40 people, or 10 to 15 warriors. Above that minimum, there is strength in numbers, and villages in the Orinoco-Mavaca area are much larger than those in areas with little war, with an average of 76 (versus 53) inhabitants, and a maximum of 250 (versus 100) (Chagnon 1973:134-35).<sup>8</sup> In this area, the largest villages, such as Patanowateri and Mishimishimabowei-teri, are located inland, and as noted earlier, their people are relatively mobile. The villages along the Orinoco are considerably smaller (Chagnon 1974:136; Chagnon 1977:74). The ecological limitations described above put a cap on the size of the more sedentary river groups: "The jungle simply does not produce enough wild foods to sustain larger groups, and the threat of warfare is such that smaller groups would soon be discovered by their enemies and exterminated" (Chagnon 1977:98).

But this relationship has an additional twist. As argued elsewhere (Ferguson 1989a:185-86; and see Ross 1978:5-8, 31), village size is a major factor determining whether or not local hunting will lead to game depletion. Small residential groups remain in one place for long periods without wiping out their meat supply, so the decimation of local game noted by Lizot and Chagnon is due not only to new Western hunting techniques and increased sedentism, but to the war-influenced size of local villages.

In sum, the basic parameters of coresidence respond to the exigencies of violent conflict, and because of that, coresidents are easily and rapidly organized into effective fighting forces. In the following discussion, I will argue that the formation of families is shaped by access to sources of Western manufactures, and so family units are very sensitive to changes in their availability. This brings us to the subject of marriage, and to another discussion which summarizes topics detailed and documented elsewhere (Ferguson n.d.a:chap.2).

One of the paramount concerns of a senior man is to find wives for his sons, younger brothers, and other coresident agnates. These men comprise his political supporters. But marriage makers are also vitally concerned with the question of bride service. In terms that are negotiated in advance, a groom is required to live with and labor for his wife's parents for a certain period after marriage, usually one to four years in the Orinoco-Mavaca area, before returning to the husband's village. The main duty of a son-in-law is to hunt, but other obligations are involved, including support of the father-in-law in war. The centrality of marriage arrangements is summed up by Lizot (1985:143): "The highest cleverness consists in acquiring wives for one's sons by negotiating the briefest possible marital service and in seeking for one's daughters husbands who agree to settle permanently in the community."



Negotiation of marriage arrangements is made far more difficult by the circumstances of Western contact. In the Orinoco-Mavaca area, there is a well-known scarcity of marriageable females. I argue elsewhere (Ferguson 1989b:253–55) that current evidence supports Chagnon's (1972b:273–74) original observation that the intensity of female infanticide is associated with the intensity of warfare, despite his later assertion that sex ratio is skewed at birth (Chagnon, Flinn, and Melancon 1979). The local scarcity of marriageable women is aggravated by the relative predominance of polygyny. The actual incidence of polygyny is unclear. Some of Chagnon's generalizations, such as "a successful man may have had up to a dozen or more different wives, but rarely more than six wives simultaneously" (Chagnon 1988:239), appear exaggerated. Lizot (1989:31), in contrast, reports that only one in ten marriages is polygynous, and that it is rare for a man to have more than two wives at once.<sup>9</sup> At any rate, it is clear that polygyny is more pronounced here than in some other Yanomami areas, where polyandry is commonplace. Again, the local intensity of war seems to be a contributing factor: particularly aggressive men clearly do sometimes appropriate women as wives, as both Chagnon and Harris have always maintained (see Ferguson 1989a:180, 195).

This relative scarcity of women would make finding a mate for a young man very difficult, and choosing a mate for daughters very political under the best of circumstances. The Yanomami do not live in the best of circumstances. As noted earlier, marriage arrangements are built up over years of negotiations, and they are reduced to chaos by the death waves of epidemics. Many disrupted families must be reconstituted, and arranging new marriages becomes even more difficult when the youngest generation of women dies off (Chagnon and Melancon 1983:74).

Simultaneously, the new ordering principle of access to Western goods enters in. Studies of some eastern Yanomami demonstrate a partial substitution of gifts of Western manufactures for actual bride service (see Ferguson n.d.a:chap. 2). The exchange is not a one-time payment. A man who has access to Western goods is expected to obtain them regularly for the wife-giver family. Although most marriages are village-endogamous, intervillage marriages are the firmest basis of alliance. Intermarriage, trade, and political support are all woven together. As noted earlier, the entire map of matrimonial, trade, and alliance networks was redrawn after the introduction of Western manufactures. The basis for this transformation is clear: women flow toward mission and other Western outpost villages. Among the eastern, Brazilian Yanomami, Peters (1973) and others describe a dramatic increase in village exogamy, with women going to the mission residents who could make bride payment with Western manufac-

tures. In the northern reaches of their territory, Yanomami seeking Western manufactures from their well-supplied neighbors the Yekuana, gain access by a one-way ceding of women as brides or sexual partners.

All these general changes hold true for the Orinoco-Mavaca area. In 1969, Karohi-teri, with regular access to Westerners, had 23 males to 23 females, while a more remote village had 30 males to 21 females (Lizot 1971:42). Cocco makes the generalization that "the increase of women in mission villages is an incontestable fact" (Cocco 1972:210, my translation). The case of the Iyewei-teri headman shows how this occurs. At the founding of the mission, he had one wife. The next year, he obtained another, making an initial bride payment of one hatchet, one pot, and one machete. A third wife was obtained later, from a father who wanted to move to the Iyewei-teri village (Cocco 1972:212–13).

The alliance between Chagnon's main field location, Bisaasi-teri, and its Shamatari trade-partners to the south is perhaps the best illustration of this general pattern. In the four or five years after it moved to the government malaria station, Bisaasi-teri managed to obtain from the Shamatari "two dozen or so women . . . while having given or promised only a half-dozen in return" (Chagnon 1977:80). The chain of trading villages leading out from Bisaasi-teri exhibits a "cline in sex ratios": 0.8, 1.1, 1.2, 1.6 (Chagnon 1966:57–58). Bisaasi-teri has an unusually high rate of exogamic marriages, 53 percent, compared to 15 percent in Patanowateri (Chagnon 1972b:272); and the majority of exogamic marriages in at least one of Bisaasi-teri's two divisions are through alliances, while most of Patanowateri's are through abductions of women (Chagnon 1977:73).

Bisaasi-teri has been equally privileged in terms of bride service.

The men who have obtained Shamatari wives have, as well, managed to cut short their period of bride service in the Shamatari village. Conversely, Shamatari men who have been promised women of Kaobawa's group are pressed into very lengthy bride service. (Chagnon 1977:79; and see Cocco 1972:211)

The bride service of these Shamatari seems particularly difficult. Chagnon (1974:13–14) describes one young man who was "expected to do all manner of onerous tasks . . . [and] was subject to a considerable amount of ridicule and harsh treatment." His "father-in-law was particularly unpleasant to him. He denied Wakarabewa sexual access to the girl while at the same time he allowed the young men of the natal village to enjoy these privileges."<sup>10</sup>

Viewing access to Western manufactures as the key to obtaining women from allies is a different perspective than that argued by Chagnon,

who has consistently attributed success in obtaining wives to physically aggressive measures (e.g., Chagnon 1966:6-10, 198-99; Chagnon 1977:98; Chagnon 1988:239). The relevance of the Western manufactures-for-women connection is, however, indicated in a brief comment at the start of his thesis: "the disposition of desirable trade goods may affect the balance in the exchange of women between two villages" (Chagnon 1966:6). Also, in a coauthored article based on team research in another Yanomami area, Chagnon et al. (1970:343) note that control over steel tools gives Makiratare (Yekuana) the ability to "demand and usually obtain sexual access to Yanomama women," both in affairs and as marriage partners.

#### POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

Having examined the unequal trade and marital relationships that develop on the basis of unequal access to steel tools and other Western items, we can now understand the nature of the antagonisms that lead to war and other political conflicts in the Orinoco-Mavaca area. Steel tools are essential means of production. In the Orinoco-Mavaca area during the period under discussion, they were available from a few source points. Compared to villages dependent on Yanomami middlemen, those with monopolistic access to Westerners received: (1) more Western items, (2) better quality Western items, (3) many local manufactures, (4) more wives, and (5) better bride service terms. Furthermore, as noted in the infrastructure section, those located at the Western outposts enjoyed, if after some time, heightened military security.

How is force applicable in this context? (See Ferguson n.d.a:chap. 3, and parts 2 and 3.) The most direct application of force is that aimed at obtaining Western manufactures through plunder. That has been done by Yanomami, as by many Amazonian peoples (Ferguson 1990a:243-45), but it is a high-risk endeavor, and unusual within the Orinoco-Mavaca area. Force is more routinely applied to affect the flow of Western items beyond their source points. This occurs in several ways. Ambush or the threat of ambush is used to discourage travel that would circumvent a middleman village, or raids and surprise attacks at feasts are used to make a village relocate. The latter course can be used by a trade controller against a village that is attempting to move closer to the source of Western goods, and by those without good access to Westerners, in an attempt to make the controlling villages abandon their monopolistic position. Finally, club fights and other violent confrontations are used within established exchange relationships in order to direct the distribution of scarce

items, and (more hypothetically) to influence the implicit rates of exchange of Western goods for other valuables.

The Yanomami do not appear at all unusual in this patterning of violence. Very similar considerations shape warfare on the Pacific Northwest Coast (Ferguson 1984b), and also may be discerned in several of the other studies in this volume. Conflict over access to Western manufactures fosters intense political conflict not just because of the importance of steel, but because unequal access creates a structured, collective conflict of interest between villages or factions. One man may benefit by capturing a wife, but a whole community benefits by an enhanced flow of machetes, axes, and pots. But turning a community of interest into an action group prepared to do violence is a difficult task, requiring great leadership skills. That brings us to the topic of leaders, and how they too have changed in the circumstances of contact.

Leadership among the Yanomami (Chagnon 1966:43-44; Chagnon 1974:137, 161-67; Chagnon 1977:14-16, 93-96; Lizot 1985:61, 142-43; and see Barandiaran and Walalam 1983:97-98; Peters 1973:144-45; Ramos 1972:78-81; Smole 1976:69-70) falls squarely within the general pattern for all recently described Amazonian societies (Ferguson n.d.c). The headman represents his coresident kin, either a separate settlement or a recognizable cluster of families within a larger village, in interactions with outsiders. He is more likely than other men to be polygynous, and his status relative to other headmen largely depends upon the size of his kin group. In a sense, the group makes the leader, but the leader also makes the group. By his manipulation of marriages and other movements of people, he can gain or lose followers. The headman is the capstone of coresidential group organization, and those groups often dissolve on his death.

Leadership also responds to the changes associated with contact, however. Headmen are the main recipients of Western goods, especially in the more remote villages.

There was a characteristic pattern regarding the relationship between me, trade goods, and the members of any given village. At first contact with the new village I would bring a quantity of assorted trade goods for the known leaders and important men in the village. In this I followed Yanomamo precedent. (Chagnon 1974:164)

The impact of this practice may be guessed from the one case for which Chagnon provides figures. The very remote village of Iwahikoroba-teri had one "dull and badly worn" machete when he arrived. On his departure,

Chagnon gave the village headman 25 new machetes, "earmarking one of them for . . . the leader of a splinter group" (Chagnon 1974:177, 180; and see Rice 1928:351-52; Seitz 1963:136, 144, 165, 193). Over time, Chagnon (1974:165) notes, he would establish relationships with more men and give out tools more widely. But the intensifying conflicts he encountered while working with the Shamadari were due to the unrelenting efforts of Moawa, the Mishimishimabowei-teri headman, to possess all of Chagnon's trade goods, or at least direct their distribution to his followers exclusively (Chagnon 1974:165-71, 185-93).

The role of headmen in channeling Western manufactures in outpost villages is less clear, but there are indications that they continue to have special access (Chagnon 1974:167; Chagnon 1977:13). To the east, at the Catrimani mission, each mission payment to an individual had to be approved first by the headman (Shapiro 1972:31). Furthermore, headmen often enjoy the very substantial benefit of explicit backing by resident Westerners (Lizot 1976:16; and see Saffirio 1985:168; Seitz 1963:165). Ultimately, however, the changes introduced by the Westerners undermine the traditional bases of leadership, as has occurred in more acculturated Brazilian Yanomami communities (Peters 1973:115-17, 146-50; Shapiro 1972:31). It is not clear if that had begun in the Orinoco-Mavaca area prior to 1972.

Another contact-related factor affecting the status of headmen is the intensity of conflict. Increasing danger of war brings an immediate, palpable increase in the authority and jurisdiction of headmen (Chagnon 1966:44; Chagnon 1974:162; Cocco 1972:387; and see Migliazza 1972:415). In a politically charged environment, a leader can be peremptory, even tyrannical, using violence against those who do not obey his orders (Chagnon 1974:161-62).

During peaceful times, the need for leadership is limited, but during war and other periods of high tension, the headman has two major responsibilities. One is tending to the necessities of combat, such as organizing raiding parties or checking village perimeters for signs of raiders (Biocca 1971:30; Chagnon 1977:96, 126; Lizot 1985:4-5). This is not an easy job. Despite the Orinoco-Mavaca Yanomami's reputation for ferocity, their efforts to organize war parties meet with resistance, counterarguments, and a high rate of "deserters" (Biocca 1971:218; Chagnon 1977:115, 130; Lizot 1985:182-83).

The other responsibility is managing alliances. During peaceful times, political alliances between villages are of limited development and importance. During wartime, they are essential. Allies are needed for survival and success in war, providing both warriors on raids and vital places of

refuge (Barker 1953:475; Chagnon 1967:120; Chagnon 1977:77-80, 97-99; Chagnon 1979:92). There are often substantial tensions between allies, which the headman must keep under control. Management of alliances has two aspects of concern here.

One aspect of managing an alliance is sponsoring feasts. Feasts are the main political event, where alliances are cemented and understandings created (Chagnon 1977:97, 101-17; Cocco 1972:326, 339). Feasts occur among other Yanomami (Barandiaran and Walalam 1983:225-26; Smole 1976:96), but without the intensity evident in the Orinoco-Mavaca area (Chagnon 1967:114). Less-contacted and more peaceful villages just east of the study area attended a feast an average of every 17 months (Good 1984:5), whereas the Bisaasi-teri were involved in at least three major feasts in less than four months (Chagnon 1977:4-5, 104-5). The protection of a resident Westerner may allow more of the men to leave the village to attend a feast (Cocco 1972:339).

Feasts require a large amount of food, and sponsoring frequent feasts extends headmen's control into the area of subsistence production. Headmen have larger gardens than other men (Chagnon 1967:114; Chagnon 1977:34, 96, 107; Chagnon 1983:67; Lizot 1985:142; and see Migliazza 1972:397; Saffirio 1985:69). They also must have men who can be sent on deep-forest hunts to procure meat (Biocca 1971:53-54; Chagnon 1966:184; Chagnon 1977:105-7; Cocco 1972:341-42; Lizot 1977:507; Lizot 1985:142-43; and see Migliazza 1972:401; Shapiro 1972:147-48). Both requirements rely on male labor.<sup>11</sup> Heightened feast activity thus represents an intensification of production. Intervillage distribution of game taken in deep-forest hunts may enhance dietary standards in the Orinoco-Mavaca area. (Eating meat seems to be one of the main interests of those attending a feast [Chagnon 1974:189-91; Chagnon 1977:102].) Sharing here is not just symbolic, it creates a significant community of interests. However, the driving imperative behind feasts is not ecological but political. And in sponsoring these feasts, the headmen of the Orinoco-Mavaca area come to seem more like incipient big-men.

The other aspect of alliance is managing chest-pounding matches (see Ferguson n.d.a:chap. 3), which often take place during a feast. These duels are reported all over Yanomami territory, and clearly have an ancient basis in Yanomami culture. But the duels reported for the Orinoco-Mavaca area differ from the others in that the matches are primarily confrontations between large groups, rather than between a few individuals, and in that they have a pronounced tendency to escalate to more serious forms of violence.

Chest-pounding matches and more serious confrontations such as

club or axe fights are precipitated by a variety of offenses concerning gossip, food, trade, women, and so on. The possible role of pounding matches in establishing terms of trade has already been noted, and their significance as a form of status testing is discussed later. Here the point is that headmen play a major role in the conduct of pounding matches. They stand aside, cajoling the reluctant young men to take part, but ready to intercede if things get out of hand. A well-managed pounding match is an important part of a feast, clearing the air of petty animosities and making a stronger alliance. Without the heightened leadership of Orinoco-Mavaca headmen, it is doubtful that such collective confrontations could be used so constructively.

Given the role of the headman as the capstone of the coresidential group, and his centrality in relation to the practice of war and alliance, it is easy to understand a tactic of Yanomami warfare: targeting the headman. Headmen are frequently reported as the intended targets or actual victims of raiders (Biocca 1971:37, 56, 185, 194; Chagnon 1977:122; Cocco 1972:112, 398-400; and see Saffirio 1985:66; Seitz 1963:185). The effectiveness of this tactic is illustrated by the plight of Monou-teri in 1965, when the killing of their headman by raiders left them adrift and dependent on the leadership of self-interested neighbors (Chagnon 1977:126-37).

### SUPERSTRUCTURE

Consideration of the beliefs and attitudes associated with violence in the Orinoco-Mavaca area begins with the related topic of status; specifically, with differences in the status of men and women. Chagnon (1977:81) reports that "Yanomamo society is decidedly masculine." Women have little say in political affairs and are frequently brutalized by their husbands, who frequently club them and may even cut off their ears or shoot them with arrows (Chagnon 1966:189; Chagnon 1977:81-84; Cocco 1972:213, 216; Lizot 1985:71). This extraordinary, almost casual brutality is one of the most striking images in Chagnon's reports. But woman's lot as described by Helena Valero for the 1940s is less miserable—women resist the assaults of men, and they play an active role in political decision making (Biocca 1971:114-15, 132, 157, 161-62, 168-71, 176, 219, 243, 273-74, 306; and see Smole 1976:70).

Four factors, already explained in this paper as related to contact, can be identified as contributing to the remarkably low status of women in Chagnon's descriptions. First is the division of labor. Motherhood notwithstanding, the wood gathering that takes up so much of women's time

is not likely to generate the same respect as the hunting, warring, and Western-goods procuring that men do. Second is the marked local virilocality (after bride service), which keeps fathers and brothers together, separates women from their natal families, and facilitates the incorporation of female captives (see Ferguson 1988b:149-50). Third is the unusual number of inmarried women in Bisaasi-teri, Chagnon's main base of observation, and other Western outpost villages. A woman who marries into a village away from her brothers has no one to defend her, and is far more likely to be subject to abuse (Chagnon 1977:69, 83; and see Shapiro 1972:116-19, 180-82).

A fourth factor is the intensity of warfare. As Chagnon (1972b:180-82) notes and Divale and Harris (1976) emphasize, war increases the value of men, especially aggressive men. The latter authors (and see Harris 1977:42-43, 63-64) also argue that sex is employed socially as a reward for aggressive behavior, and Chagnon (1988:989) does assert that warriors (*unokais*) (cf. Albert 1989; Chagnon 1990) have more wives than less aggressive men (and see Barandarian and Walalam 1983:101; cf. Lizot 1989:31). Even women have a stake in this system, which increases their security against outside raiders (Biocca 1971:162; Chagnon 1977:83-84; Lizot 1985:155-56). The low status of women engendered by these four factors underwrites the capture and use of women as political pawns by men, which in turn reinforces their low status.

Another point at which status differences enter into conflict patterns is in relations between different groups. Chagnon, after describing escalating tensions during his work in Mishimishimabowei-teri, asserts that they were not really about material possessions: the "real reasons" for fighting "have to do with the status system" (Chagnon 1974:194). In the reported confrontations, however, what was at issue was the distribution of Western manufactures (see Ferguson n.d.a:chap. 12). I do not see material and status considerations as opposed here, or even separable.

Two factors are involved in status differences between political groupings (see Ferguson n.d.a:chap. 2). One is access to Western manufactures, which in itself confers status (see Peters 1973:143, 151; Saffirio and Hames 1983:26; Soares Diniz 1969:4). "In addition to having real, practical value, the trade goods often, but not invariably, reflected, when they passed from one person to another, a kind of pecking order and hierarchy" (Chagnon 1974:164; also see Lizot 1985:184). The other factor is ability to apply force. Those who cannot match force with force are treated with open contempt (Chagnon 1977:128; and below). The chest-pounding matches and other confrontations that occur so frequently are public demonstrations of the ability to use force.

These two factors come together in the contrast of "generosity" and "extortion." A valuable gift freely given raises the relative status of the giver and creates an obligation to him. The same valuable obtained by intimidating its owner lowers his status and makes future abuses more likely (Chagnon 1967:132; Chagnon 1974:164). As Peters (1973:138-39) observes in reference to the exchange of Western items, "the article itself is often considered an extension of the personality of both the giver as well as the owner." So I can agree with Chagnon that in one sense fighting is about status, but understanding how and why that is so requires placing the status contests into the contact situation.

A second superstructural concern is the etiology of belligerence. As Chagnon observes in the third paragraph of his famous monograph, "The thing that impressed me most was the importance of aggression in their culture" (Chagnon 1977:2). It must be stressed that this is truly an extreme case. For example: a man comes home to find that his son has eaten some of his bananas without asking permission. The father rips a pole out of the house and begins to pound on the son. The son does the same, and soon others join in on both sides (Chagnon 1977:119). One can search the literature on Amazonia and find little that compares to this. Why are the Orinoco-Mavaca Yanomami so violent?

Our answer begins with the infrastructural changes described earlier. Disease and war break up many existing families, and game depletion decreases reciprocity between families, thus creating tendencies toward social fragmentation and atomization. At the same time, the introduction of Western manufactures eliminates the traditional way of dealing with social conflict—moving away from it—and creates a new and extreme kind of competition, which we have seen manifested in all aspects of social organization. With all this, one should expect a breakdown in social control, an anomic situation evocative of the Hobbesian war of all against all.

In such an environment, security against the depredations of others may come from one's reputation of using force, of being *waiteri* ("fierce") (Chagnon 1966:109; Chagnon 1967:124-26; cf. Ramos 1987:286). Individual fierceness is socially encouraged. Male children are taught to be aggressive, to strike out (Chagnon 1967:130; Chagnon 1977:84, 132; Lizot 1985:74), and a young man who establishes his fierceness gains respect and women (Biocca 1971:66; Chagnon 1972b:274; Lizot 1985:183). Some exceptionally violent men rise to great political prominence, such as Moawa of Mishimishimabowei-teri (Chagnon 1974:162-66, 196). But this emphasis on fierceness should not be overestimated. Another exceptionally fierce man, Helena Valero's husband Fusiwe, ultimately

found himself isolated and abandoned by kin because of his aggressiveness (Biocca 1971:196-244). As noted earlier, efforts to organize war parties meet resistance. "Some men never go on raids" (Chagnon 1988:987), and 38 percent of the men over 41 years old in Chagnon's sample had never participated in a killing (Chagnon 1988:989). Even those who do kill appear to feel a deep ambivalence, manifested in what in our society might be called neurotic symptoms of internal decomposition (Biocca 1971:63-66; Lizot 1985:5; and see Barandiaran and Walalam 1983:102-3).

Fierceness is embodied in a commitment to take revenge, in cultivating an image that retaliation will follow any killing (Chagnon 1967:130-32; Chagnon 1988; Lizot 1985:74, 155-56). As Fusiwe reportedly told potential enemies: "We are in this world to avenge ourselves; if you do it to me, I will do it to you" (Biocca 1971:158). This image has obvious defensive value. In a climate of ongoing wars, the failure to retaliate for a hostile act creates the appearance of weakness, and this can encourage future attacks (Chagnon 1977:41; Cocco 1972:398-400; Lizot 1985:123, 183). But it is necessary to distinguish the tactical value of retaliation from the idea that wars are propelled forward by sentiments of blood revenge (see Ferguson 1984b:308; Ferguson 1988c:ii-iii). In a recent publication, Chagnon (1988:985-87) places great emphasis on blood revenge as a factor itself responsible for raiding and other violence. In a commentary on that article, I argue that the vengeance motivation itself is highly malleable, manipulated to suit political needs (Ferguson 1989c:564).

Chagnon's cases provide ample evidence of the malleability of the need for revenge. Bisaasi-teri's need to avenge itself against Mishimishimabowei-teri for its participation in a slaughter in 1950 was genealogically manipulated out of existence when Chagnon began to travel regularly between the two villages, and it was suddenly "remembered" when Chagnon decided not to return to the Shamadari village (Chagnon 1974:70, 172, 194). The main shooting war during Chagnon's fieldwork began when Patanowa-teri succeeded in retrieving, without any shooting, five of the seven women that Monou-teri had abducted the day before. When Monou-teri raided Patanowa-teri some time later, it was allegedly because "Yanomamo canons of ferocity dictated that this loss would have to be avenged" (Chagnon 1966:177): that is, getting only two women instead of seven called for revenge.<sup>12</sup> The case used by Chagnon (1988:986) to indicate the long duration of revenge motivation, of one village raiding another in 1975 to avenge the killing of a headman in 1965, becomes quite problematic when one looks at earlier writings on that conflict. The headman of

the raiding village had declared himself avenged after a retaliatory killing back in 1965 (Chagnon 1983:186). Moreover, according to the body count from that conflict, it was the village being raided, not those doing the raiding, that had an outstanding blood debt to pay (Chagnon 1983:189). The list could be extended. Revenge simply does not explain variations in the actual practice of violence.

A final topic to be considered here is the cognitive effort to make the tragedy of intense warfare more intelligible. This effort occurs on both general and specific levels. On the general level, the Yanomami of the Orinoco-Mavaca area have an origin myth in which the falling blood of a wounded moon explains their propensity to violence (Chagnon 1977:47-48; Cocco 1972:468). A similar myth is found among Sanema Yanomami to the north, who also have experienced a great deal of recent warfare (Barandiaran and Walalam 1983:9ff.). The myth is not found in other, more peaceful areas of Yanomami territory (Chagnon 1967:127; Migliazza 1972:426-27).

In regard to specific conflicts, intensifying hostility between political groups is conceptualized in terms of spirit battles, controlled by their respective shamans. An accusation of witchcraft often precedes combat, so that it may appear that these beliefs are the cause of war (Chagnon 1977:49; Cocco 1972:386; Lizot 1985:114-23; Lizot 1989:31-32; and see Albert 1988; Barandiaran and Walalam 1983; Migliazza 1972:416; Saffirio 1985:66, 94; Smole 1976:50). But it has been a consistent finding of witchcraft studies in other parts of the world (Marwick 1970) that accusations of witchcraft express existing hostilities rather than cause them. Here too, bad relations lead to suspicions of sorcery (Chagnon 1977:118), and villages "linked by trade and feasting ties . . . rarely accuse each other of practicing harmful magic" (Chagnon 1977:98). Barandiaran and Walalam (1983:103) provide a nice illustration of this, in which the diagnosis of witchcraft that precedes an attack follows a breakdown in the flow of Western trade goods. However, a partial exception to this generalization may be needed in a particular circumstance: the unprecedented catastrophe of first experience with epidemic disease (see Albert 1988:95). It is certainly believable that the killing of a visiting man soon after the first epidemic was encouraged by suspicions of witchcraft, as the Yanomami informants explain (Chagnon 1966:153).

The sources cited above indicate that the attribution of a death to sorcery is accompanied by a felt need for blood revenge. It may be that witchcraft and revenge are two sides of a coin. Witch beliefs confirm the malevolence of particular outsiders ("them"); vengeance beliefs emphasize

the solidarity of the local group ("versus us"). Together, they make up an effective ideological system for the difficult task of mobilizing people for collective violence.<sup>13</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

This paper has examined the multiple, interacting effects of Western contact on the war complex of Yanomami of the Orinoco-Mavaca area. Contact both generated war, primarily through conflicting interests in Western manufactures, and led to pervasive reorganization of society and culture, such that all of life became oriented toward violent conflict. Comparing these Yanomami to Yanomami elsewhere, one cannot doubt that they share a fundamental cultural identity. But the "fierce people" represent Yanomami culture in an extreme conflict mode, a mode that is clearly attributable to the exogenous factors of Western contact. These people cannot be taken as "our contemporary ancestors." They do not represent a phase in sociocultural evolution.

No one can say if the Yanomami ancestors made war before they felt any effects of European contact. But their *known* wars are clearly products of the contact situation, and more specifically, of the infrastructural changes wrought by contact, played out through a changing structure and superstructure. If villages were not anchored to outposts but were able to move freely, if long-established marital alliances were not disturbed by massive mortality, if communal sharing of meat were still the norm, and above all, if necessary technology were widely and equally available, my theoretical expectation is that there would be little collective violence among the Yanomami.<sup>14</sup>

This essay has been an application of a theoretical model which attempts to explain a war complex as a total social system, in interaction with agents of another social system, at a particular moment in history. But it is only a moment, a brief quarter century. The history of Yanomami interaction with Western agents and other indigenous polities goes back for centuries at least (Ferguson n.d.a:chap. 4; Whitehead, this volume), and it continues beyond 1972. The period discussed here is one of great disruption and often violent internal divisions. But it is also a period of ethnogenesis, when the regionally diverse Yanomami came to be generally recognized as a single cultural entity (Chagnon 1966:26-29, 45-49; Migliazza 1972:5-9, 352-447; and see Ferguson n.d.a:chap. 4).

In the 1990s, the Yanomami are under assault, especially in Brazil, by combined economic and military interests (*Cultural Survival Quarterly*

1989). The outcome remains uncertain. Physical or cultural extinction of many regional village clusters is a frightening possibility. But it is also possible that the interests will be checked by worldwide political pressure. If greater social stability were made possible by a general availability of those Western goods which the Yanomami deem necessities, and by medical care sufficient to prevent massive mortality, the Yanomami might develop political institutions of unification and representation, capable of defending their culture and interests (see Yanomami 1989). Some day soon, the Yanomami could become a tribe.

——— Notes ———

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1. These data support arguments by Whitehead and Abler in this volume that the spread of Western diseases in nonresistant populations is not an automatic process, but is shaped by the character of the contact situation.

2. Lizot (1977:508–12) has solid data indicating adequate protein intake at one point in Karohi-teri.

3. It is not clear how long after Karohi-teri's founding in 1968 (Lizot 1971:41) Lizot measured its game intake, but it already took the residents of that village roughly one-third more time to locate game than it did the residents of a more interior village (Lizot 1977:508).

4. Colchester and Semba (1985:17) report protein deficiency as a major problem in other areas.

5. Saffirio and Scaglione (1982:39–41) document a major decline in meat sharing between families in villages along the Brazilian perimetral highway (and see Seitz 1963:141–43).

6. Moreover, there is some question whether all pre-steel Yanomami even had stone axes (Ferguson n.d.a:chap. 4).

7. Chagnon (1973:136) has extended Carneiro's (1970:735) concept of "circumscription" to the case of the Yanomami, arguing that they are "socially circumscribed" by surrounding enemies. While this may apply to some Yanomami, most of the villages described by Chagnon are located at the very edge of Yanomami territory, next to unoccupied forest (Ferguson 1989a:196). If these groups are socially circumscribed, it is by the nature of the Western presence.

8. When the threat of war markedly diminished around 1984, all of the larger villages in the area fissioned into at least two parts (Lizot 1989:29–30).

9. I have not found any actual observation of a man with more than five wives at one time (Biocca 1971:129).

10. Chagnon (1967:123) also notes, but without specifying place, that headmen of particularly strong villages "may even have the bride service waived."

11. Apparently, women make little special contribution to the preparations for a feast (see Shapiro 1972:153).

12. I explain this raid as a result of sharply contradictory trade interests (Ferguson n.d.a:chap. 11).

13. The fact that witchcraft suspicions so frequently precede raiding suggests the potential for combining witchcraft and warfare studies.

14. It must be added that changing circumstances in later contact periods can lead to new forms of interpersonal violence—see chapter 1, endnote 19; and Strathern, this volume.