having been initiated and carried along by emotional impulses. The war begins when some men cannot resist the temptation to capture a vulnerable group of women, and it escalates to raiding because a headman is angry that most of the women were taken back. The war continues out of rage and desire for revenge, and it is complicated by a factional struggle within Bisaasi–teri that is motivated by a quest for social status.

My point, in contrast, is that all these events display a pattern—one consistent with the demonstrated pattern of all Yanomami warfare—in which actors employ force instrumentally in order to enhance their access to and control over Western goods. From my perspective, the Westerners themselves are significant political actors. I have focused on the role of Napoleon Chagnon, but only because he writes about himself. There is virtually no information—only the few crucial bits that I have noted here—about the activities of the missionaries or malaria workers. But I should emphasize here that the presence of the empty mission was itself probably as or more significant than Chagnon’s presence in affecting the course of events.

Material for this final chapter on the Yanomamo is rather untruly for narrative purposes, with weaker information about some of the main groups of previous chapters and substantial accounts about other areas. Some of the best description comes from more remote areas, probably because initial contacts with deep forest groups are more likely to be reported than are increasingly routine interactions with visibly acculturating people along the rivers. As all the different areas come momentarily into view, they provide a composite picture of increasing Yanomamo contact with Westerners on a regional level. Because of both the gaps in local histories and the evident connection of local events to regional processes, I have organized all discussions in this chapter around one unified chronology rather than discuss groups outside the Orinoco–Mavaca area separately, as I did in earlier chapters.

The Last Quarter-Century of Contact

From the middle 1960s onward, the Western presence on the upper Orinoco intensified and radiated outward. By 1965, an airstrip was being operated by the Salesian mission on the Ocamo—some 70 kilometers beyond the Esmeralda airstrip—and it became a gateway for more Westerners and supplies (Steinworth de Goetz 1969:8, 11). Ethnographic research continued. In late 1966, Inga Steinworth de Goetz (1969; Cocco 1972:101–102) began her sojourns along the far upper Orinoco, from the Raudal de Guajaribos all the way to the river’s source, and later
along the upper Ocemo. She returned to the region for months at a time into at least the 1970s. In January 1968, anthropologist Jacques Lizot began an unusually protracted stay among the Yanomami. He would live with the Karoiti-teri and Tayari-teri, with visits to several other villages, for much of the time until at least the late 1980s (Lizot 1971:32, 1976:6, 1989:34).

Napoleon Chagnon ended his original fieldwork in February 1966. He returned for one- and four-month visits to the upper Orinoco in 1967 and 1968, prior to the publication of *Yanomamó: The Fierce People* (Chagnon 1977:1). Since then, he has returned regularly to the area, except for a period from 1976 to 1985 (Chagnon 1992b:144), spending about 49 additional months with Yanomami (1992a:8). Except for an occasional comment or footnote, however, Chagnon has written little more about the political events he witnessed during his initial fieldwork. In terms of historical descriptions of war, the fifth edition of *Yanomamó* (1992b:182–238) remains substantially unchanged from the first edition (1968:97–137).

From late 1968 through 1972, Chagnon (1974, 1977:1, 152–54, 1983:30–41) extended his geographic research area, focusing on the Mishimitabowei-teri, one of the “enemy Shamatai” groups up the Mavaca. He often returned as part of fairly large expeditions that included biomedical researchers and a filmmaker (Asch 1972, 1979, 1988). On an expedition arriving in April 1975, he was accompanied by Robert Carneiro and William Sanders and by graduate students Eric Fredlund, Kenneth Good, and Raymond Haines (Good 1991:22). Good (1989:5, 1991) has maintained frequent contact with villages around and beyond the Ruald de Guajaribos up to the present.

Of far greater consequence for the Yanomamo, however, was the growth of missionary activity. In 1966, a Catholic brother named Iglesiias, operating out of Platanal, was dealing with groups in the forest beyond the Ruald de Guajaribos. He invited the Hasupwwe-teri “to move to a place closer to the Orinoco, so that they could thus enjoy the goods of civilization” (Steinworth de Goetz 1969:74). They quickly did so. By 1967, the Catholics already had begun taking a few Yanomamo children into a boarding school near Puerto Ayacucho and to their trade school in Caracas (Chagnon 1977:159), beginning an intensified direct assault on Yanomami culture. Although little is reported about life around the main mission posts, the march toward assimilation appears to have continued unabated. In 1971, the headdress of the Iyewei-teri—a leader among the Yanomamo in commercial farming of plantains—was even taken to Rome to meet the Pope (Chagnon 1977:144).

In what appears to be late 1967 or early 1968, New Tribes missionaries from the Orinoco trekked up to a savanna in the Patima highlands, where they cleared a landing strip. There they began a new mission in a previously “isolated” area (Als and Chiappino 1985:80–81; Jank 1977:20–23). A couple of years later, this mission served as anthropologist William Smole’s research base (Smole 1976). Developments in the areas of new direct contact will be shown to have followed familiar patterns. But in the areas of established contact with the river missions, the acculturation process would enter a qualitatively different and more destructive phase in the decade after 1965.

Looking back from the mid-1970s, both Chagnon (1977:145–51, 154–62) and Lizot (1976) provide scathing assessments of missionization. One indictment is the missions’ disregard for the epidemiological consequences of intensifying contact. Chagnon (1992a:240–41) tells of one incident—and Lizot (1976:25, 33) supports this account—when he was working with a biomedical research team in 1968, vaccinating groups in a race against a spreading and very lethal epidemic of measles. Chagnon passed through Platanal while the Mahekoto-teri were away, to discover a Brazilian employee of the mission sick with the disease. He urged the missionaries and the government Indian Commission physician to remove the man before the unvaccinated Mahekoto-teri returned. They didn’t, and the Westerners abandoned the village after the epidemic broke out, “leaving the Yanomamo to fend for themselves” (Chagnon 1992a:241).

The Mahekoto-teri lost 11 people, according to Cocco (1972:417), or about 25 percent of their population, according to Chagnon. Numerous other villages around the area of mission activity—including the Hasupwwe-teri and Shipariwe-teri—suffered in this epidemic, with death rates of 20 percent to 30 percent. Generally, in this and other epidemics, when Yanomamo at a mission became sick, more would recover through the missionary’s care than would survive in villages with only occasional outside contacts (Chagnon 1977:146, 1992a:241; Cocco 1972:176, 417; J. Dawson 1964:2).

Nevertheless, the missionaries’ attitude toward the Yanomamo remained about what it was in the 1950s: the Yanomamo were not quite human (Chagnon 1977:151, Lizot 1976:5). Most of the missionaries were determined to place religious conversion above all else. Chagnon
wrote (1977:151), “I once put a hypothetical question to a Protestant missionary as follows: Would you risk exposing 200 Yanomamo to some infectious disease if you thought you could save one of them from Hell—and the other 199 died from the disease? His answer was unequivocal and firm: Yes.”

Some improvement in medical care after 1968 is credited to the efforts of nursing nuns and the malaria service workers—including one of Helena Valero’s sons (Good 1991:43). On the other hand, the increasing number of outsiders in the region in the 1970s led to increasing respiratory infections, and severe malaria outbreaks occurred despite government efforts (Lizot 1976:24–26, 30).

Another charge is that the missionaries gave or loaned out shotguns, ostensibly for hunting, which actually were used in war. Although Chagnon (1977:122) once noted that “the missionaries are very cautious about loaning the Yanomamo firearms, knowing that these would be used in the wars,” more recently he has emphasized a history of missionary laxity and unwillingness to accept or act on reports of raiding using shotguns, a practice that the Yanomamo “assiduously conceal” from the missionaries (Chagnon 1992a:220). The missions, however, were not the only source of shotguns and ammunition; they were also given out by expeditions, scientists, employees of the government malaria station, and others (Misioneros 1991:28–29). Whatever their source, the proliferation of shotguns contributed to more violence.

The headman of Iyewei-teri was the first local Yanomami to acquire a shotgun, in 1957. No Yanomamo around Boca Mavaca owned a shotgun when Chagnon began his fieldwork in 1964 (Chagnon 1983:57), but borrowed shotguns were used in a fight north of Bisasasi-teri late during that fieldwork. Shotguns became more common from then on, coming from local sources and from trade out of Brazil, where they were frequently obtained from woodsmen (Chagnon 1977:149; Cocco 1972:189). By 1970, there were at least 25 shotguns in the area, which had been used in seven killings (Cocco 1972:189). By 1975, there were 40 shotguns (Chagnon 1983:57), and one man alone had used his to kill “at least three people” (Chagnon 1977:149). Around that time, the paths leading from Brazilian Yanomami villages through the Siapa to the upper Mavaca became known as “the trail of the shotguns” (Misioneros 1991:28).

The possession of shotguns dramatically tips the scales of military capability and can significantly lower the threshold for war. Chagnon goes so far as to say, “Some of the raids in which shotguns have been used were conducted only because the raiders had a new superior weapon and wanted to try it out—the possession of the gun caused wars where none previously existed” (1977:149). While I would question whether possession of a shotgun is ever the only reason for a raid, it certainly can be the deciding factor in a tense situation.

The first half of the 1970s saw a further intensification of the assault on Yanomamo culture, with major changes in government policy and mission activity. In 1970, the Venezuelan government announced its project CODESUR—Commission for the Development of the South or, colloquially, Conquest of the South—aimed at economic development, geographic integration, and cultural assimilation of its wild southern region, including the lands of the Yanomami (Zent 1992:chapter 3). In 1971, the CODESUR project cleared an airstrip at Planal (Chagnon 1977:148) and lengthened the one on the Ocamo to accommodate large planes (Cocco 1972:110). Census and border commission parties went up the Ocamo and part of the Siapa (Cocco 1972:110; Lizot 1974, 1988:110). This spurt of activity brought a “tremendous amount of goods and services” into southern Venezuela, but it was short-lived; CODESUR was “basically abandoned by 1975” (Frechione 1990:121).

Even greater changes were in store on the religious front. In the competition for souls, the Catholic missionaries had the considerable advantage of acting, by contract with the government, as secular authorities for the area (Chagnon 1992a:217; Lizot 1976:22). Sometime between 1970 (Cocco 1972:26) and 1975 (Lizot 1976:36), the New Tribes Mission abandoned its post at Boca Mavaca, conceding the field to the Catholics. The New Tribes Mission did not retire, however; it built a new landing strip and mission (“Koyowe”) on the Orinoquía, a tributary of the far upper Orinoco, and continued its mission efforts in the Parima highlands (Ales and Chiappino 1985:80; Lizot 1976:36, 1988:577).

Around 1971, a new and more active administrator took over the Salesian mission at Planal. This priest embarked on a vigorous campaign to promote tourism and civilization with a passion that would have embarrassed the Conquistadores. A tour agent in Caracas soon had a fleet of sleek speedboats there and the priest kept him supplied with ample quantities of gasoline. He also built a number of guest houses to accommodate the visitors and soon the mission was a booming tourist center. Direct flights from Munich and other European cities were advertised in 1973, stopping briefly in Caracas for a
changeover to a small twin-engine craft that would fly them directly to the Yanomamo village of Mabekodo-teri on the Upper Orinoco, and into the Stone Age. (Chagnon 1977:148)

The tourism peaked between 1972 and 1974. In 1975, Chagnon found some forty Brazilians living at Platanal and working in support of the tourist operation. But some restriction of tourist entry began that same year.

In 1972, the Catholics opened a new boarding school at La Esmeralda (Lizot 1976:19). They aggressively recruited children down to age six or seven (Chagnon 1977:159). Lizot (1976:19) portrays the recruitment as nothing less than kidnapping. Parents, however, "were 'compensated' for their temporary losses by well-calculated gifts" (Chagnon 1977:159). Conditions and treatment at the school were provoking widespread avoidance of it by mid-1975 (Lizot 1976:20–22). But many stayed on. At the boarding school, the children saw their own culture undermined in various ways, and they were taught the basics of becoming non-Yanomami (Chagnon 1977:159–60; Lizot 1976:20–21). In 1975 Lizot (1976:16) wrote: "The great projected intention is to place at the head of these communities young Indians who have been educated in the religious boarding-schools and trained in obsience." In the 1980s, that goal would become a reality.

This direct assault on Yanomamo culture, however, was only the tip of the iceberg. By around 1975, some eight to ten villages in the area had regular, direct contact with Westerners (Chagnon 1983:57), and the people's lives were well on their way to transformation (Chagnon 1977:148–49; Lizot 1976:8–9, 13–18). New hunting patterns and larger populations had wiped out accessible game and even some fish. Trade, marriage and alliance patterns, material production, and internal leadership were by now obviously shaped by dependency on the Westerners. Communal residence broke down into nuclear huts as theft of Western goods became a major social problem. Thus the missions' teachings only contributed to what was a situationally inescapable crisis in values as Yanomami came to mine the nape.

In 1975, the Catholic missions went through an internal reform (Comité 1983:50–52; Peña Vargas 1981:14). Older missionaries, including Cocco, were replaced by a new breed whom Lizot (1988:577) found to be more open-minded about retention of aspects of Yanomami culture. Sister María Isabel Eguillor García describes Catholic efforts since 1976 as aimed at conserving the Yanomami's culture while pre-paring them to interact with and represent their own interests in the outside world (Eguillor 1991). But Chagnon—who in recent years has become involved in an open conflict with the Salesians—is critical of what he portrays as the assimilationist policy of the missions and their continuing efforts to induce remote groups to relocate closer to the missions.1 He illustrates the latter with an event from around the mid-1970s, when the Salesians at Boca Mavaca persuaded a segment of the Mishkimishabowei-teri to relocate farther down the Mavaca, where the Catholics established a satellite mission called Mavakita (Chagnon 1992a:223, and see Chagnon 1993b).

At this moment—1976—historical information about the Orinoco-Mavaca Yanomamo declines precipitously. One reason is that from 1976 to 1985, Chagnon, usually one of the best sources of contextual information, was denied permission in Venezuela to work with the Yanomami (Chagnon 1992b:144, and see 1983:204). I found almost no information for the years from 1976 until the early 1980s, and most of what there is pertains to one war against the Tayari-teri. One intriguing item, however, is a 1980 count of possessions among the Cinc-teri, an offshoot of the Bisaasi-teri named for their zinc-roofed houses (Eguillor García 1984:24–25, 236). It indicates that Western goods remained in short supply in the late 1970s: the quantities of key possessions (axes, machetes, knives, pots) are only slightly higher per family than they were in a relatively isolated interior group around 1969 (Lizot 1971:45).

The lack of information is even more complete for other Yanomamo areas. I found extremely little about conditions on the north bank of the Rio Negro, although it appears that mission-induced acculturation was proceeding apace, and by the mid-1980s animal trappers were entering Yanomamo lands (O'Hanlon 1990:147). Hames's (1983) reconstruction of Padamo Yanomamo history contains almost nothing about changing contact circumstances and ends in 1976. Two Protestant missions on the Padamo were still operating in the early 1980s (Comité 1983:48). In the Parima highlands, at some time prior to 1980, the New Tribes Mission established a second, occasionally staffed satellite post ("Parima A") to the southeast of the mission ("Parima B") they had created in the late 1960s. In 1982, the Venezuelan government began to establish its own presence, including medical stations, in this area (Alés and Chiappino 1985:81).

Somewhat more extensive information documents the erosion of the "isolation" of the Siapa River groups. Boundary commission parties, including Lizot (1974), had visited several villages near the river in 1972.

Around 1985, the adventurer O’Hanlon (1990:143–53, 164–65, 211–17) visited a Brazilian living at the juncture of the Siapa and the Casiquiare. A group of Yanomamo had relocated close by in order to trade, and their degree of acculturation suggests this was a relationship of some years’ standing. They knew how to use canoes and had traveled as far as La Esmeralda. O’Hanlon’s own journey brought him into contact—first contact, he believes—with a related group living on the Emoni, a tributary of the lower Siapa. Of course, along with these incidents of direct contact, all the villages around the Siapa had long-established lines of communication and trade that stretched to the Orinoco and the Río Negro (Chagnon 1992a:210; Lizot 1973:8–9; and see map 2).

Information about the Orinoco-Mavaca area picks up again around 1983. The Western institutional presence was now very substantial. Along with the malaria post, Catholic missions—each with an airstrip, dispensary, and school—continued at Platanal, Boca Mavaca, and Boca Ocamo, and there was a school at the satellite station of Mavakita (Comité 1983:48). Around Boca Mavaca, the center of the Catholic sphere of influence, the Yanomami population was growing and at the same time dividing into smaller clusters: 4 settlements in 1976 had grown to 7 in 1983, with a total of 422 people spread out over 7 kilometers of river shore (Sguillor García 1984:26–28, 44). In 1985, the number of settlements had grown to 12, and the population to around 500 (Good 1991:250)—more than double the 1968 population at Boca Mavaca (Chagnon 1992a:222).

By 1983, a web of administrative control was forming over the Orinoco-Mavaca area. In addition to the often imperious Yecuana govern- ment agents (Comité 1983:53), a new breed of Yanomamo, trained in the boarding schools, began to emerge as leaders. Backed by missionary and government officials and operating over large areas, these highly acculturated young men aggressively pursued their own self-aggrandizement (Chagnon 1992a:217–18, 224; Good 1991:182, 211, 225).

In the mid-1980s, the Salesians organized most of the river settlements into a cooperative: Shabonos Unidos de los Yanomamo del Alto Orinoco (SUYAO) (Börtoli 1991; Chagnon 1992a:218–19; Guzman 1991). SUYAO’s stated goals were to develop mutual assistance in production, commercial activities, acquisition of goods, transportation, and credit; to promote indigenous cultural values; and to encourage local capital formation (Börtoli 1991:52).

According to Chagnon (1992a:223–26), the Salesians continued their efforts to attract remote groups. In 1985 and again in 1987, these efforts prompted two Shamata groups to relocate farther down the Mavaca. Their new locations left these people more exposed to infections yet still too distant for effective medical care by the understaffed missions. A curve of mortality is apparent in recent epidemics, in which the intermediate groups have about four times the deaths of those who are under direct mission care and three times the deaths of those isolated from the missions. As of about 1990, however, according to one Venezuelan medical authority (Botto 1991:11), “probably no communities exist which are ‘uncontacted’ by viral, bacterial and parasitic agents.”

The late 1980s saw a new round of shotgun proliferation along the Orinoco. In 1989, SUYAO began stocking them. Chagnon (1993b) asserts that until 1991, it was Salesian “policy” to “attract converts by offering shotguns.” Chagnon links this policy to an increase in war in the late 1980s. Unidentified mission villages, well armed with shotguns and now having another tactical advantage in possessing motorized canoes, began attacking unspecified, more isolated groups (Chagnon 1992a:219–20). A similar increase in shotguns and shotgun killings is noted for Brazilian mission areas from the middle 1980s onward (Chagnon 1992a:221; O’Hanlon 1990:147).

The missionaries of the upper Orinoco, not surprisingly, tell the story differently. They claim that they tried to collect all the shotguns at one time, but the Yanomamo would not go along with the effort. Multiple sources of guns and ammunition, including Brazilian woodsmen, made control very difficult. And in repeated assemblies called by SUYAO, Yanomamo asked questions like, “All who come here have shotguns, they hunt . . . Why can’t we have them?” (Misioneros 1991:28–32).

In the area around Boca Mavaca, by the late 1980s, the missions’ separate areas of control had merged and overlapped into one continuous area. The increasingly fragmented local Yanomamo population was ever more thoroughly enmeshed in commodity production and consumption. A flow of Yanomamo strangers passed through to work, to beg, or to steal Western goods. Mission-trained Yanomamo political
leaders and teachers carried the missions’ influence into more distant villages. The Yanomamo around Boca Mavaca were becoming “peasantized” (Chagnon 1992a:209, 221–22).

The year 1989 was a critical one for the Venezuelan Yanomamí. Medical care, despite fine plans, suffered from a pronounced lack of support. Malaria cases in the encompassing Venezuelan federal territory of Amazonas jumped dramatically—nearly fivefold by 1990, compared with the 1984–88 average. Infection with onchocerciasis (African river blindness) stood at 90 percent in some Parima communities and 49 percent at Platanal. Many other medical problems were severe (Botto 1991; Hoariwé 1991; Landaeta 1991; Mondolfi 1991; Perret and Magris 1991; Urdaneta 1991). But that was not all.

A gold rush that had begun in Brazil in 1987 began to spill over the border as thousands of garimpeiros crossed into Venezuela. The main point of penetration was around the Orinoco headwaters—a short hop from the Macajal and Catrimani rivers, where the Brazilian gold rush was most intense. Some prospectors—how many is not clear—entered the Siapa basin.

Caracas began to worry about its southern border and soon made a major governmental about-face. After ignoring for several years a proposal by pro-indigenist organizations to establish a protected area for Venezuelan Yanomamí, just after the garimpeiro invasion a new government “eco-development” agency began work on a proposal for an Upper Orinoco–Casiquiare Biosphere Reserve. On August 1, 1991, President Carlos Andrés Pérez signed a decree setting aside a reserve of some 32,000 square miles (Arvelo-Jiménez and Cousins 1992:10, 12; Briceño 1991; Chagnon 1992a:211, 215).

In January and February 1992, Venezuelan armed forces made extensive efforts to remove Brazilian garimpeiros from Venezuelan Yanomamí territory, and the government announced plans for new military bases along the border (Brooke 1992). It is not clear how many bases have been established, but in 1992 there was a National Guard contingent at Platanal (Chagnon 1992a:231) and at least one other in the Parima highlands (Bórtoli 1993). The future role of the military, along with most other policy dimensions of the Biosphere Reserve, remained to be defined as of early 1992 (Arvelo-Jiménez and Cousins 1992:13; Chagnon 1992a:215). It is on those details that the Venezuelan Yanomamí’s future hangs. As I noted in chapter 8, governments polishing their international image have learned to manipulate ecological and indigenist rhetoric to cloak plans of military and commercial development.

A final historical event once again involves Napoleon Chagnon. In 1990 and 1991, using Venezuelan air force helicopters, he led multidisciplinary scientific teams into the Siapa basin. In the field for a total of six months, the expeditions visited several Siapa Yanomamí villages, and plans exist for continuing research in the area (Brooke 1991; Chagnon 1992a:81–82). These most recent research visits produced important new information on variations in Yanomamí warfare, which I will discuss in the last section of this chapter.

This work also led to a very public controversy over access to the Yanomamí, which has grown more heated in the wake of the 1993 massacre of Yanomamí by Brazilian garimpeiros. Chagnon (1992a:217–43, 1992b:255–89, 1993a) portrays this conflict as mainly between himself and the Salesians. Elsewhere (1993b), he accuses the Salesians, anthropologists, and others of opposing him because of their prejudice against sociobiology. The Salesians (Bórtoli 1993; Misioneros 1991) and the Venezuelan press (in a packet of articles distributed anonymously at the 1993 meetings of the American Anthropological Association) portray the controversy as pitting a broad coalition of Venezuelans and others not primarily against Chagnon but against his associate in the Siapa project, the politically connected Charles Brewer Carías. Brewer Carías is, among other things, a gold miner, and his opponents maintain that it is inappropriate for him to be in a position of power in the Siapa basin.

This conflict colors information about military developments among the Yanomamí, especially from the late 1980s on. But for now, my narrative returns to 1966 and the Patanowá-teri war that we left at the end of chapter 13.

The Bisasi-teri: 1966 and Beyond

In the previous chapter, I described how an attempted alliance between Bisasi-teri and Patanowá-teri led to a war between Monou-teri and Patanowá-teri and to related factional maneuvering around Boca Mavaca. By late 1965, the Patanowá-teri had neutralized the danger once posed by enemies to their east, and they were intensifying pressure on the Monou-teri. In response, perhaps three raids were launched against the Patanowá-teri by a heterogeneous lot, including some recent defectors from Patanowá-teri itself. In early 1966, the body count was two or three Patanowá-teri killed versus one death for the Monou-teri.

When Chagnon returned to visit the Monou-teri, apparently in early 1967, he wrote, “The war was still being conducted, but on a lesser
scale" (1968:137). If any raids had occurred after early 1966, they did not produce any deaths on either side, and the score remained two or three to one against Patanowa-teri. "Hence, the Monou-teri, at least for the time being, came out ahead" (Chagnon 1968:137).

If, as many have suggested, Yanomami warfare is truly carried out for the sake of vengeance, the implications of this imbalance in deaths are clear. Near the end of the 1968 edition of Yanomamö, Chagnon makes a testable prediction about the role of revenge: "The Patanowa-teri will not cease raiding them until they kill at least one more Monou-teri, but then the Monou-teri will be obliged to avenge this death when it occurs" (1968:137).

I have found no indication in any source that active raiding in this war continued beyond 1967. In the next edition of Yanomamö, (Chagnon 1977:137), Chagnon adds a footnote to his prediction that reverses the blood debt: "The Bisasi-teri were still trying to avenge Patanowa's death in 1975 and were actively raiding the Patanowa-teri." In the most recent edition, Chagnon (1992b:238) has deleted the statement about the Monou-teri's coming out ahead and the Patanowa-teri's being obliged to raid for revenge.

The wars ended because the situation at Boca Mavaca had changed in many ways. Paruriwa's faction from upper Bisasi-teri had moved into the once empty Catholic mission shortly after Chagnon left—thus filling the political vacuum and eliminating a major source of instability. Whether the Patanowa-teri continued to negotiate an alliance with Kaobawa's group is unknown. By 1966, however, the Patanowa-teri had been weakened by their internal fight and fission and by the stepped-up raids by Monou-teri and its allies. My suspicion is that these events, along with the weakened position of Bisasi-teri, put an end to the alliance plans. At any rate, the Patanowa-teri were about to focus their alliance intentions on the Mahekoto-teri.

The Bisasi-teri were weak for several reasons. Kaobawa's rival, Paruriwa, had become an independent, mission-supported headman, thus splitting the upper Bisasi-teri forces. Chagnon no longer lived with them, taking away a major source of upper Bisasi-teri's wealth, military security, and status. After 1968, the Bisasi-teri had no choice but to accept Chagnon's deepening relationship with former "enemy Shamatari." Upper and lower Bisasi-teri were on worsening terms, although what is not indicated. "Just before I returned," Chagnon writes, "there was a club fight involving all of the villages: The Upper Bisasi-teri and Reyabowei-teri fought, as a group, against the Lower Bisasi-teri and Momaribowiei-teri." (1977:80).

The Bisasi-teri still had external enemies, too. In 1966, they were involved in a pounding match while attending a feast given by Witokayati-teri (Cocco 1972:399). The hosts brutally pummeled the visitors with stones hidden in their fists. A few months later, the Bisasi-teri invited the Witokayati-teri and some Iyewei-teri to a feast, where they did the same thing to their guests. Fortunately, Cocco tells us, this conflict dissipated without other, more serious fighting.

The severely divided and still threatened Boca Mavaca people had become more reliant on their respective Shamati allies, who thus gained political clout. When Chagnon returned in 1967, "the situation had changed appreciably. There were many more Shamati men living in the group because they had been given women; that is, the exchanges were more balanced" (Chagnon 1977:80). This change shows up in data on the intervillage migration history of people living around Boca Mavaca in 1983 (Equillor García 1984:56). Of those who arrived between 1959 and 1968, 66 were male and 78 female. Of those who arrived between 1969 and 1983, 47 were male, and 34 female. After around 1967, it seems, the Bisasi-teri were no longer able to demand women from would-be trade partners. In this deteriorating political situation in 1968, Monou-teri broke up, and its members became part of the Bisasi-teri villages (Chagnon 1974:127).

Thus, between 1966 and 1968, the empty mission was occupied, the western Namowei blockade keeping nape away from "enemy Shamati" was broken, the Bisasi-teri no longer monopolized such an extraordinary fount of Western goods, and their middleman relationship with "ally Shamati" had turned less exploitative. In addition, new supplies of Western goods were reaching villages along the Orinoco farther upstream. All together, other groups had less reason to fight the Bisasi-teri, and the Bisasi-teri were less able to impose their interests on others.

As Boca Mavaca went into relative decline, the center of hostilities apparently shifted up the Orinoco. Unfortunately, information about these obviously complicated conflicts is so limited that understanding of them remains very poor.

One serious conflict centered on the Tayari-teri and Mahekoto-teri (Cocco 1972:399–400). As Cocco describes it, the trouble began in 1967 when a pounding match between Mahekoto-teri and Tayari-teri resulted in the deaths of two young men from the latter group. Tayari-teri called on its allies, the Karohi-teri and Makorima-teri, and together they raided Mahekoto-teri. (It will be recalled that the Mahekoto-teri suffered terribly during the measles epidemic of early 1968, and that sometime that year, Karohi-teri became Lizot's main research site.) The
raiders managed to wound the Mahekoto-teri headman, but his son then killed the Makorima-teri headman with a shotgun blast.

Over the next year or so, the Tayari-teri alliance, now also supported by Wtkotaya-teri, raided Mahekoto-teri perhaps three times. Mahekoto-teri was supported by its allies, Shashanawe-teri, Boreta-teri, and Patanowa-teri. But this alliance did not actually raid Tayari-teri until 1969, when six close kin of the Mahekoto-teri headman ambushed and wounded the Tayari-teri headman. He too recovered, and this is the last reported incident in the war.

About the same time as this conflict, the Mahekoto-teri and Patanowa-teri became involved in another, one phase of which was caught on film. In early 1968, the Patanowa-teri were living at an inland location “to escape its myriad enemies.” They were reached by Chagnon’s colleague, the filmmaker Timothy Asch, accompanied by a young missionary and three guides. By radio, Chagnon persuaded the Patanowa-teri headman “to move back to an old garden near the Orinoco River where the genetics expedition could work with them and we could take film” (Asch 1972:11). Chagnon and Asch wanted to film a feast, and after about two weeks with the Patanowa-teri, they got one when the Mahekoto-teri came to visit (Asch 1972:7, 11). This event is the subject of Chagnon and Asch’s film, The Feast.

This feast suggests that the Patanowa-teri by 1968 had reoriented their alliance hopes from the Bisaasi-teri to the Mahekoto-teri, their enemies only few years earlier. More than just becoming friends, at this feast the two groups discussed a raid on a common enemy whose identity is not provided. In the film, we are told that this raid did occur. From Asch’s (1972:17) description, the raiders were set out immediately after the feast itself. After that raid, it seems, another clash occurred, for Chagnon reports that one of the Patanowa-teri leaders seen in The Feast “had his head blown off with a shotgun shortly after we completed the film” (1977:149).

Although the target of the Patanowa-teri/Mahekoto-teri raid is not identified, I suspect it was the Hasupuwe-teri, who in 1967 had relocated close to the Orinoco to attain greater contact with the Platana missionaries and Steinworth de Goetz (1969:74, 87). Lizot (1985:154–55) provides an undated report describing a joint raid against Hasupuwe-teri by Mahekoto-teri and Patanowa-teri. One Hasupuwe-teri man was killed, after first being wounded by a gun that had been given by a missionary to a Mahekoto-teri man. Prior to this, it is said, the raids against Hasupuwe-teri had “practically ceased” [see chapter 13]. Lizot’s informants predicted revenge raiding by both sides, but no lethal violence is reported along the river for several years after 1968.

This sequence of conflicts appears to be as complicated as that of 1964–66, but there is far less information about it. Basic chronology is murky and detailed analysis impossible. To sum up and speculate: in 1967, the Mahekoto-teri were aggressively trying to elevate their political position, acquiring for themselves a reputation as the most politically shrewd and militarily formidable group in the area (Cocco 1972:400). The killing of two Tayari-teri men in the pounding match during 1967 was one step along that path.

Early in 1968, brought together in cooperation with the Chagnon expedition, the Mahekoto-teri and Patanowa-teri joined as allies in war. Their target may have been the Hasupuwe-teri, who at this time were enjoying the favors of newfound Western friends and drawing off Western goods that otherwise might have been given to Mahekoto-teri and its allies. Then the Mahekoto-teri were hit by measles. Thus weakened, and with enemies to their east, the Mahekoto-teri became momentarily vulnerable. The Tayari-teri and their allies—perhaps bolstered by the arrival of Lizot, although the date of his arrival is uncertain—pressed their raids against the Mahekoto-teri, their rivals and enemies of 1968. By 1969, the Mahekoto-teri had recovered enough strength to retaliate.

After the Mahekoto-teri’s raid on the Tayari-teri, Cocco (1972:400) notes a decline in tensions. This observation is supported by a tabulation of deaths kept at Boca Maraca starting in 1969, in which no war deaths are recorded for 1969 through 1972, two war deaths appear in 1973, and then none again for 1974 and 1975 (out of a total of 73 deaths during this time) (Flores et al., cited in Colchester and Semba 1985:26).

According to Lizot (1971:41), in 1969 the village of Ihirubi-teri, a relatively isolated group farther up the Orinoco and several hours’ walk inland, suffered the “only deadly raid in the region.” Around the time of this raid, Lizot was working with the Ihirubi-teri in order to make a comparison with the more acculturated Karo-teri with whom he lived. He notes that the Ihirubi-teri had to move from camp to camp around their two gardens because they feared enemy raids. Lizot does not provide other specifics, but the connection between visits by a gift-giving Westerner and attacks by other Yanomami who are not so favored is a suggestive coincidence.

After 1968, no major changes in the Western presence are recorded for a few years. My theoretical expectations are that a new accommodation to the contact realities would take place, and war would
diminish or cease, just as it did after the middle 1950s. In addition, this was the time when Western influence began to become more pervasive and controlling along the upper Orinoco. Western goods had become more common and were available from multiple sources. The missionaries had also become more involved in attempting to mediate conflicts (Cocco 1972:400), although it is not clear what impact they had (see Cocco 1972:398).

These years of peace did not signal the end of violence along the rivers once and for all. But later conflicts began to look very different from "traditional" Yanomami warfare. Nor did this period signal the end of war in some interior areas where Western goods were still rare. In the next two sections, I will deal with conflicts attendant upon the contact experience in more remote areas, before returning the narrative to the Orinoco-Mavaca area in the middle 1970s.

Up the Orinoco and into the Parima

This section deals with two distinct areas: the stretch of the Orinoco above the Raudal de Guajaribo, and the area around the New Tribes mission in the Parima highlands. The first is known through the work of Steinworth de Goetz (1969), who began her periodic investigations on the far upper Orinoco in November 1966. She quickly met the Haspuwe-teri, who had moved closer to the river at the encouragement of the missionary, Brother Iglesias. She distributed many Western goods, and the Haspuwe-teri soon began work on another garden even closer to the river (1969:87).

In early 1967, farther upstream, Steinworth de Goetz met the Guaricoawe-teri, a seemingly timid and relatively isolated group. They had heard of beads but did not possess any. The Guaricoawe-teri were reputedly "enemies" of other groups downstream, and only a man from even farther downriver would agree to guide Steinworth de Goetz to them. She gave them many axes and machetes, and the Guaricoawe-teri did not want her to leave. They refused to guide her upstream, where they said other enemies lived (Steinworth de Goetz 1969:90–92, 108, 110, 113). It is not clear from her account, however, whether these "enemy" relationships reflect active warfare, strained alliances, or simply efforts to detain the party. In this situation, any possibility would fit with antagonism over access to Western goods.

It seems that tensions were high along other river passages up into the highlands. In what appears to be early 1968, New Tribes missionaries set out on foot to reach highland villages with measles vaccine. On the way they passed through a palisaded village whose inhabitants seemed prepared to kill them for the goods they carried (Jank 1977:12–18). But this hike is more significant for what happened next. Reaching a savanna in the Parima highlands, the missionaries cleared an airstrip. Shortly thereafter, Derek Hadley, Wally and Margaret Jank, and others returned by plane to begin the new Parima mission. The nearest Yanomamo gave them a big welcome (Jank 1977:10, 20–25).

Some time after the mission was established, William Smole (1976) arrived to begin his fieldwork in the area. His work describes something of the social history and current situation as of the late 1960s. This part of the Parima highlands was extremely remote, from an outsider's perspective, but certainly not entirely insulated from the outside world. Steel tools had been filtering in since the 1920s (Smole 1976:237), and the inhabitants certainly would have begun receiving more since the Western presence on the Orinoco and Ocamo picked up after 1950. Substantial Western contact was established with some savanna groups several years before the mission got there (Jank 1977:10)—perhaps in 1964 (Smole 1976:236)—when some otherwise unidentified Brazilians built an airstrip on the savanna, thinking it was located in Brazil (Alés and Chiappino 1983:80). They departed before the missionaries arrived.

One group on the savanna when the missionaries arrived was the Niyayoba-teri, residents of the general area for several decades. Before the arrival of the mission, they had received steel tools from their kinsmen the Yoreshiana-teri, another interior group located between them and the Orinoco. Around 1961, the Niyayoba-teri moved from the forest to the edge of the savanna. (Yanomami generally do not establish villages on the resource-poor savannas.) While there, they became involved in a war with several other groups. In what may have been 1966, the Niyayoba-teri and three other local groups—a 500 people in all—moved into one large _shabono_ on the savanna itself, for purposes of defense. This settlement, called "Jose's village" by Margaret Jank, would be the group with the closest ties to the mission (Jank 1977:10, 25; Smole 1976:74, 92–93, 102).

Across the savanna were the Jorocaba-teri, or "Miguel's village." They too had long lived in this general area. Unlike the Niyayoba-teri, they had "not been involved directly in warfare for a generation" (Smole 1976:76). There is one report of strained relations with the Yoreshiana-teri—the middlemen to the Niyayoba-teri—around 1964, but that had been patched up a few years later (1976:93–94, 236). In the next valley to the southeast was a group of villages, including one called Mayoboteri, that had not been involved in any war since around 1955. These
“Balaflili Valley” groups (Jank 1977:8) had kinship ties both to the Niyayoba-teri and to other groups farther to the southeast. The more southeastern groups had been the Niyayoba-teri’s enemies in the mid-1960s war. When the missionaries arrived, animosity between the two remained high, but the Mayobo-teri and their neighbors were neutral in the conflict (Smole 1976:90, 93–94, 235).

That is the basic geopolitical layout at the moment of the founding of the mission. With only this information, there is no way to understand the conflicts that apparently took place in the middle 1960s. It is known that a substantial Western presence—an airstrip—came and went sometime during this period. It could well have been a factor in the wars, but the information is so vague that no even a temporal link can be established. What happened after the New Tribes mission was established, however, will be familiar to anyone who has read this far.

As the missionaries saw it, the Yanomamo were practically jumping for joy at their return, shouting: “My brother has come to live with me! My brother has come to give me things! Axes to chop trees! Machetes to clear my garden! Clothing in which to dance!” (Jank 1977:25). Immediately the newcomers were bombarded with an unending stream of demands, thefts, and intimidations (1977:29–32). The Niyayoba-teri cluster quickly established its monopoly over the Westerners and their goods. This maneuver is dramatically illustrated by one missionary’s account of what happened when the threat of raiders forced the Niyayoba-teri cluster to go on trek.

Our contact with Miguel’s people [Jorocoba-teri] had been sporadic because of a vague animosity that existed between his village and the people on the big savannah, but once they realized we were alone, they began to appear with increasing regularity. They apologized for having neglected us, and they explained that José had warned them against coming too often. The problem did not seem to be entirely because of the hard feelings between the two groups. Apparently, José had filed a claim on us! . . . [He claimed] undisputed ownership of us all. We did our best to persuade them that we were public property. (Jank 1977:50)

Soon afterward, a man from the Balafili Valley appeared at the mission. He stayed for two days, trying to arrange a way for his relatives to come work in exchange for knives or machetes. He left as soon as the Niyayoba-teri returned, but the Niyayoba-teri still became angry that the missionaries had entertained outside visitors (Jank 1977:52–54).

“They resented the fact that we had extended visiting and trading privileges to other people. . . . The jealousy of some drove them to test our loyalty by impossible demands for time and attention, and it resulted in bitter accusations that we always had time for other people, but not for them. Others repaid our infidelity by stealing everything they could lay their hands on and shouting insults” (Jank 1977:54–55).

Similar scenes were repeated anytime the Niyayoba-teri cluster went on trek—something the missionaries discouraged because of the “thievery, gossip, and immorality” into which they lapsed outside the mission environment (Jank 1977:85). “On one occasion, they returned to find that their gardens had been raided. Knowing that visitors often moved in to claim our time and trade goods in their absence, they laid the blame on Miguel’s people” (Jank 1977:86). To settle things, they invited the Jorocoba-teri to a feast, at which a rather severe pounding match passed from fists to machete and ax slapping (1977:86–87).

On the other hand, when the Niyayoba-teri later hosted new friends from another area, the Jorocoba-teri came and harangued and intimidated the visitors all night, making them leave the next morning (Jank 1977:157–58). And when a relatively distant group did begin to receive direct visits from missionaries, that group resolutely attempted to prevent the missionaries from dealing directly with any group farther on (1977:72).

The people with direct access to the missionaries actively developed new trading connections to villages around them, with the missionaries’ encouragement (Jank 1977:88–90, 156, 193–95). No information is presented about balances in trade, but it is clear that those located at the mission had a decisive advantage in marriage arrangements. About half the men had more than one wife, even though fights over women were common. The Niyayoba-teri cluster had 44 adult males to 54 adult females, a rather extraordinary “surplus” in contrast to the Jorocoba-teri, who had 20 males to 20 females (Smole 1976:72, 174–78).

About a year after the founding of the New Tribes mission, a war developed between the Niyayoba-teri and groups to their southeast—enemies from the conflict of the mid-1960s. Raiders, ostensibly seeking revenge for a witchcraft death, wounded two, but had two of their own killed as they fled. Constant fear of raiders made life miserable for the Niyayoba-teri group near the mission, compelling them to go on trek in the forest. Hoping to establish peace as well as spread the gospel, a missionary made an initial visit to the neutral groups between the raiders and the savanna but could not reach the enemy villages. Shortly after
his return to the savanna, raiders struck again, killing one man who was out hunting (Jank 1977:41, 47–49, 72–74). Apparently, this was the only death suffered by the Niyayoba-teri cluster during the period from mid-1968 to mid-1970 (Smole 1976:74, 233).

In response, the Niyayoba-teri sent out a raiding party that killed one man. Soon afterward, the missionaries succeeded in visiting the enemy village, whose residents urged them to return with more goods. Within a few months of that visit, raiders hit the Niyayoba-teri two more times, wounding two teenagers in one attack and killing a guest from another area in the second. But during this same time, the missionaries were continuing their efforts to establish regular, direct contact with the enemies and other nearby groups. By late 1969, their persistent effort had broken the Niyayoba-teri cluster’s monopoly, and visiting back and forth started to become routine. Once guaranteed access to Western goods, the enemies immediately accepted the missionaries’ proposal that they stop the war. The Niyayoba-teri palisade fell into disrepair (Jank 1977: 68–69, 80, 84–85, 87–90, 92–93, 131–33, 160–67, 195).

Only scraps of information are available about this area after 1970. A second NTM mission (“Parima A”) was established farther to the southwest, near the Niyayoba-teri’s former enemies. Otherwise, the Western presence in the area was very stable: “From 1968 to 1980 . . . the mission centre was the only point of contact with the outside world for a large number of the Yanomami of the central Parima” (Alès and Chiappino 1985:80–81). Anthropologists Catherine Alès and Jean Chiappino take credit for breaking the NTM’s local monopoly with their arrival in 1980, and that monopoly was further undermined in 1982 by the founding of a major government health center with “abundant cargoes of food and goods” (1983:81).

In 1980, groups from the Parima A area went to war against groups such as the Niyayoba-teri around the Parima B mission. The war began over food theft, which led to a club fight where one man died. The war claimed three victims over the next two years (Alès 1984:103). The apparent coincidence of a new Western penetration accompanied by renewed warfare is suggestive, but without better information, no more can be said.

Contact and Conflict on the Upper Mavaca

It will be recalled that from the start of his fieldwork Chagnon had intended to travel on to live in the Shamatari area and had made his first effort to reach it in 1965. This and subsequent efforts were stymied by the Bisaasi-teri and other groups between Boca Mavaca and Mishimishimabowie-teri, who did not want to give up the advantages of possessing Chagnon and acting as middlemen. When he finally made contact in 1968, he was guided by a twelve-year-old boy—“something of an outcast”—born in Mishimishimabowie-teri and raised in Momaribowie-teri, who was visiting Bisaasi-teri (Chagnon 1974:18ff.).

There is no indication of violence between Mishimishimabowie-teri and the Boca Mavaca groups after the events of late 1964 and early 1965. Nevertheless, relations had been so bad up to this point that any rapprochement would seem to have been impossible (e.g., Chagnon 1983:31). Not so. Once Chagnon had established contact with the Shamatari, men from Bisaasi-teri would regularly accompany him when he went upstream. Despite Mishimishimabowie-teri’s being the home of the main attackers in the slaughter of Bisaasi-teri in 1951, Chagnon’s companions “were able to ignore these men as individuals when they developed friendly ties with Moawa’s group” (1974:172).

When, in 1972, however, Chagnon announced that he would not return to Mishimishimabowie-teri after a fight with its headman, Moawa, Chagnon’s companion, Rerebawa, grew to “hate Moawa overnight, recalling the treachery of 25 years earlier when Moawa’s village had tricked the Bisaasi-teri and had killed, among others, the brother of his wife’s father. Now he remembered these things well and decided, after all, that the Shamatari were a bunch of unmitigated bastards, treacherous to the core” (Chagnon 1974:194). One could not ask for a better illustration of the political flexibility of revenge.

Mishimishimabowie-teri and Iwahikoroba-teri both remained desperately poor in steel at this time, possessing very few and extremely worn blades obtained via chains of middlemen from Boca Mavaca or Brazil. The former group had been sending invitations to Chagnon since 1965 (Chagnon 1974:35, 176–77, 1983:39). By 1968, Chagnon had become an even wealthier provider of Western goods than he was during his initial fieldwork. Working now in collaboration with a multidisciplinary biomedical investigation, he had to be able to visit remote villages and very quickly collect blood samples.

One unfortunate consequence for my continuing anthropological interest in many of the villages was that I was identified by the Yanomamo as an inexhaustible fount of goods. Thus, to assure the complete cooperation of entire villages for some of
our studies I had to give goods to men, women, and children. The positive effect was that the “team” could visit villages like Mishimishimabowie teri with me and in three days have all the material and data they came for. The negative effect was that all my subsequent visits to this village were disappointments to the Yanomamo because I did not come with equivalent quantities of goods. (Chagnon 1974:165)  

Thus, to the Yanomamo, Chagnon must have seemed not only rich but also erratic. Perhaps this perception explains the increasingly direct physical measures they applied in efforts to control Chagnon’s distributions of goods.

Mishimishimabowie teri was in the process of fissioning in 1968. Just before Chagnon made contact, the gargantuan old village had divided in two still large villages—about 250 and 150 inhabitants, respectively—located a few hours’ walk apart. For the next several years, village size and composition fluctuated as individuals and small groups moved back and forth between the two villages or went off on their own (Chagnon 1981:491–92). There are no indications of any major confrontations between the subdivisions during the first few years of Chagnon’s field work with the Mishimishimabowie teri. That situation changed in 1971.

In that year, while Chagnon and his film colleague, Asch, were staying in the main village, people from one of the recently fissioned segments were visiting and refused to leave when they should have (Chagnon and Bugos 1979:218–21). The visitors were closely tied to a faction within the main village. These kinsmen encouraged the visitors to stay permanently. Because increased numbers would give them greater leverage over everything that went on in the village, this encouragement constituted a challenge to the dominant factions, of or allied to Moawa. A tense situation came to a head as a minor quarrel over some plantains escalated chaotically. It almost turned deadly when two men appeared ready to attack with an ax and a machete. But when more and older men joined in, it settled into a hostile standoff. Some of the visitors left the next day. (This is the incident seen in the film The Ax Fight.) 7 As we will see shortly, a similar confrontation occurred the next year.

Also in 1971, Chagnon attempted and finally succeeded in making contact with the other Shamatariri village, Iwahikoroba-teri (1974:172–73). Predictably, both the Bisaasi-teri and the Mishimishimabowie-teri—even though the latter were allied to Iwahikoroba-teri—were eager to prevent this contact and, as usual in these situations, told Chagnon he would be killed if he went there. Chagnon decided he would have better luck leaving from Bisaasi-teri. On his first attempt, he was guided by an old woman who had been captured from Iwahikoroba-teri many years before. They could not find the village, and turned back. Having thus established the seriousness of his intentions to reach Iwahikoroba-teri, Chagnon had to leave the area for “the next several weeks” to assist his colleagues in the Ocamo River basin.

When he returned, the political leaders of Bisaasi-teri seemed to have had a change of heart (Chagnon 1974:174–75). Now Rerebawa and three other men agreed to guide him. After progressing about a day’s journey beyond where he had turned back with the old woman, they began to see signs of Iwahikoroba-teri activity. But that day, Chagnon “began to react violently to an insect bite, or to a toxic plant, or wild food that I had eaten.” He became too ill to move, and the expedition halted. The next day, his camp heard the sounds of Iwahikoroba-teri hunters nearby. His guides spoke in whispers, but Chagnon called out and drew the hunters’ attention. The men asked if he was Shaki (Chagnon’s Yanomamo name), and when told that he was, they helped bring him to their village.

The Iwahikoroba-teri were willing to let Chagnon’s colleague take blood samples and otherwise cooperate. Chagnon was working with previously compiled genealogies when he learned that, “as luck would have it, the husband of the second person on the list had been killed by Bisaasi-teri raiders only a few weeks before my visit, and the Iwahikoroba-teri were very angry that I knew their names” (Chagnon 1974:177). Bad luck, indeed.

People from Bisaasi-teri and Iwahikoroba-teri had not met “eye to eye” for “many years” prior to 1970 (Chagnon 1974:173). That year, a number of Bisaasi-teri men accompanying a party of Mishimishimabowie teri ran into Iwahikoroba-teri hunters. Rather than fight, they exchanged goods, and the Iwahikoroba-teri extended an invitation for them to visit. Yet a year later, after Chagnon had demonstrated his determination to reach Iwahikoroba-teri, the Bisaasi-teri raided them. From the perspective of the model, this raid seems to have been an attempt to drive the Iwahikoroba-teri away and thus foreclose the possibility that Chagnon would go live with them.

But since Chagnon had made contact, and the Iwahikoroba-teri had cooperated, if sullenly, the problem for both the Bisaasi-teri and Mishimishimabowie-teri remained. Chagnon did not go back to Iwahikoroba-teri, however, because of what he was told when he returned to the field the next year (Chagnon 1974:178–79). His friend Rerebawa
told Chagnon that he had been told by Dedheiwla, a leader of one of the Mishimishimabowiei-teri groups, that while Chagnon was sleeping in Iwahikoroba-teri, its headman and two of his brothers had been creeping up on Chagnon’s hammock. They intended to crush his skull but were scared off when Chagnon shined his flashlight around the village. Since then, they had vowed to kill him the next time he came. Chagnon was “shaken badly” by this tale and decided not to go back to Iwahikoroba-teri.

Back in Mishimishimabowiei-teri in 1972, trouble was brewing (Chagnon 1974:167–72, 1992b:38). Over the course of Chagnon’s visits, there had been a “gradually accelerating feeling of strain with Moawa” (1974:168), the very aggressive headman of the main village, who Chagnon claims “had killed twenty-one people” (1992b:38)—an incredible number. At issue was the distribution of the anthropologist’s Western goods. Chagnon describes in great detail Moawa’s increasingly belligerent efforts to have them or at least control their distribution. He wanted them all, even to the point of demanding all of Chagnon’s eye medicine (Chagnon 1974:169). Other villagers complained, but Moawa was fierce, and the leader of the largest faction.

Matters finally came to a head in 1972 (Chagnon 1974:183–86). Chagnon had returned up the Mavaca temporarily short of trade goods. His plan was to pass through the Moawa’s village of Mishimishimabowiei-teri and collect blood samples in the split-off village led by the old headman Sibarariwa. But when he arrived, Sibarariwa’s entire village was visiting the main village for a joint mortuary ceremony—normally a moment of great solidarity among participants. When Moawa greeted Chagnon, he saw that Chagnon had only 15 machetes and few other items. Chagnon told him that all of these were to go to Sibarariwa’s village. Moawa opened up the bundle and began examining the machetes.

His face turned solemn at the third repetition of his intended disposition of the machetes he was examining; he looked at me coldly and then, bluntly, informed me that the machetes were to be distributed to the men he designated, and none—repeat, none—to be given to people in Sibarariwa’s group. They were thieves and liars, he said. (Chagnon 1974:186, emphasis in original)

The mortuary service was held the next morning (Chagnon 1974:188–91). Chagnon planned to begin his work in the afternoon. Tensions rose. Screaming fights broke out among the women, the hosts yelling at the visitors to go home. The men were deep in their drug states, but they still staggered forth to keep the women from striking each other with firewood. “It was one of the most volatile situations I have ever been in,” wrote Chagnon (1974:189). Deciding to take the blood samples as quickly as possible and leave, he set up his equipment and “was surrounded by about 200 pushy, impatient, angry, shouting people, each determined to get a particular item of which I had very few to distribute” (1974:191).

While Moawa watched, Chagnon began taking blood samples from men Moawa had designated. When the headman went away, Chagnon switched to those Moawa had sought to exclude. He explains that he had to select these men “very carefully”:

From my knowledge of past fights and disputes in the group when Sibarariwa and his section lived in the same village with Moawa, I knew who the men were that had stood up to Moawa and defied him. I began calling them, in turn, knowing that Moawa would be less able to prevent me from giving my machetes to these men without a fight . . . I quickly sampled the important men and paid them with machetes very quickly. I was down to one machete when Moawa learned what I had done.

He trotted over in a rage and stared in disbelief at the single machete. He glared at me with naked hatred in his eyes, and I glared back at him in the same fashion . . . He then raised his axe to strike and I saw how white his lips and knuckles were. Moawa hissed again: “Either you give that machete to that man over there, or I’ll bury this axe in your head.” (Chagnon 1974:192–93)

Under the circumstances, Chagnon complied.

Chagnon finished his work and left the next day. He had resolved never to return to Mishimishimabowiei-teri “so long as Moawa lived there” (1974:193), but he did not say so at first.

Only after I returned to Mavaca did I let my feelings be “officially” known. I told the Bisaasi-teri that I planned never to return to Moawa’s village. Nor would I go to visit the Iwahikoroba-teri. I was tired of having people threaten to kill me. I was alarmed at how close some of them had come. I told them that I would do “the same” to Moawa as he did to me, should he ever venture to come to Mavaca to visit. By the time this information got to him
it undoubtedly had acquired embellishments and exaggerations that characterize the growth of Yanomamo and all other rumors. I hope this was the case, and that Moawa will think twice about coming two weeks by trail to visit the villages at the mouth of the Mavaca River. (Chagnon 1974:195–96)

Only the broad outline of events is known for some Shamatari from this point onward. In 1972, the Momaribowe-teri, spurred by the increased tensions in the upper Mavaca, made a very long move to the mission center at Tamatama on the Casiquiare, although they later moved back. (In 1964, Piaroa Indians had moved several hundred miles up the Orinoco to settle alongside the New Tribes missionaries at Tamatama [Johnston 1964:11].) The Reyabobowe-teri similarly made a long move, five days to the south (Chagnon 1974:14, 27, 32, 181–82). In the mid-1970s, the Salesian missionaries persuaded a segment of the Mishishimabowe-teri to break off and move down the Mavaca river, where they became known as Haoyabowe-teri. The Salesians then established a satellite mission post ("Mavakita") close by, and from this base began extending their own direct contacts to other Shamatari upstream (Chagnon 1979:123, 1992a:222–23).

This increased contact with groups who were still too far from the main mission to receive medical care led to a great increase in mortality. An unidentified Shamatari village that began sending men down the Mavaca “to obtain machetes” in 1972 was struck in 1973 by an upper respiratory infection carried back by a trade party. Forty percent of the village population died, including virtually all the children (Chagnon 1977:147). The largest village in the area, presumably the main Mishishimabowe-teri village, was also hit by this epidemic (Chagnon and Melancon 1983:59). The missionaries say they first heard of the deaths in Mishishimabowe-teri a few months after Chagnon left there, suggesting that Chagnon’s party was as likely a source of the infection as any other (Misioneros 1991:21).

Besides the epidemic, some shooting wars were going on somewhere during the early 1970s. Chagnon’s mortality data for 1970 through 1974 indicate nine war deaths among all the people he studied (Melancon 1982:42). Since the Orinoco appears to have been mostly quiet at this time, presumably most deaths were among the Shamatari. It is consistent with my model for wars to continue longer in the more remote areas that were just beginning to experience direct contact.

From the Mid-1970s Onward

Along the Orinoco, the relative peace that had prevailed since 1969 came to an end in the mid-1970s. In 1975, the Bisaasi-teri were “actively raiding the Patanowa-teri” (Chagnon 1977:137), and “at least two Patanowa-teri were killed with shotguns, including Komaiewa, the headman” (Chagnon 1983:189). In the mortality statistics kept at Boca Mavaca, one war death is reported for each of the years 1976, 1977, and 1979, and three for 1978 (Flores et al., cited in Colchester and Semba 1985:26). Kenneth Good also witnessed a war at the start of his fieldwork in 1975.

Good went to the field with two other graduate students of Chagnon’s. After a month in another village, and accompanied at first by a senior colleague, Robert Carneiro, Good went to live with the Hasupwe-teri on April 1, 1975 (Good 1989:4, 1991). There is little information about the Hasupwe-teri from about 1968 to 1975. In the early 1970s, a violent internal fight led some people to move to another village. Around 1973, Chagnon visited the Hasupwe-teri. Around 1974, they fissioned, and those who continued to be called Hasupwe-teri retained 119 people. At the time of Good’s arrival, they were located some 15 to 20 linear kilometers above the Raudal de Guajaribos and were developing a new garden about a half-day’s walk from the river (Good 1989:4, 6, 1991:24, 206). Although they were occasionally visited by a malaria team (Good 1991:28) and others, they remained comparatively isolated in 1975 relative to the situation from Patanal downriver.

In his initial fieldwork, Good stayed with the Hasupwe-teri for two years, during which time he accompanied them on travels south and began his research on the Siapa River groups. Good would return on nine separate visits up to 1988, for a total of 68 months in the field. He spent most of his time near the Orinoco but several months in the Siapa area, and he eventually married a Yanomamo woman (Good 1984:1–2, 1989:4–5, 1991). Good has only begun to publish his extensive research findings, however, and both contact and war histories are limited in his currently available works.

Good’s description of his relationship with the Hasupwe-teri reveals the texture of such contact situations. He and Carneiro were warmly welcomed: “Having an outsider come to live with them was regarded as a kind of windfall from heaven, an endless source of trade goods—machetes, cloth, aluminum pots, fishhooks, axes” (Good 1991:
28). They quickly became the center of attention—the subjects of unremitting scrutiny and never-ending demands for trade goods. “The strangers had an incredible amount of material things, most of which they had never seen before, a simply astonishing collection of exotic goods. . . . Bob Carneiro and I were the biggest attraction they had ever seen” (Good 1991:31).

Good was gradually assimilated into the social order of the village, becoming a fictive consanguine to one of its two divisions and an “affine” to the other. But jockeying for his trade goods never ceased (Good 1991:79–80, 120).

As I got to know the village situation better, I realized that there was a kind of subtle competition for my friendship between the two sublineages that made up the Hasupuweteri—the winners of course thinking they would have an easier time getting trade goods from me. . . . At the beginning [the leader of one division] had tried to bully me, demanding goods, not just for himself, but for visiting headmen, as if I were his private resource. He stopped that soon when he saw that I could be just as aggressive as he was. Before long we became friends, though it was a friendship built on respect rather than on good chemistry. (Good 1991:79)

Good has strongly criticized Chagnon’s image of Yanomami “fierceness.” In his long experience in the field, he instead “was struck by how harmonious Yanomama life actually was” (Good 1991:69, 327). One war, however, did break out against former allies, very soon after Good and Carneiro arrived (Good 1991:44–46).

At first, Good was living in a hut along the river about a third of a mile from the Hasupuw-teri shabono. Every morning people would come down the trail to begin their day’s observation of the anthropologist (Good 1991:29–30). In mid-April, the villagers were walking down the path to Good’s hut (he had just been joined by a malaria team) when they were ambushed by raiders from Kasharawe-teri. One man was lethally wounded.

The Kasharawe-teri were a downstream group long associated with the Yabitawa-teri, who had contacts with nape dating back to the 1940s. “Until recently the Hasupuweteri and Kasharaweteri had traded and visited with each other, enjoying friendly relations” (Good 1991:45). But then the latter had gone to a feast hosted by the Hasupuw-teri, where they became insulted by the relative paucity of food prepared for them. Arguments developed, and some of the hosts “hid their guests’ canoes” (Good 1991:46). (The Hasupuweteri, above the Ra‘udal de Guajarábos, had not adopted canoe travel when groups farther downstream did. In 1975 they still lacked even a single canoe [Good 1991:29].) It was these insults that the raiders intended to avenge.

No doubt the Kasharawe-teri did feel insulted. But the timing of their attack suggests an ulterior motive: to separate former trade dependents from their new source of wealth. Further details are lacking, but this first raid appears to have initiated a flurry of raiding and counter raiding (Good 1991:46). Good remained in close contact with the Hasupuweteri, however, and judging from his general descriptions of Yanomami peaceableness, it seems that this was the only war for some time.

The same early 1975 expedition that brought Good to the Yanomami brought Eric Fredlund to the middle Ocamo village of Hotoba-teri, which would be his base for about 15 months (Fredlund 1982:37, 45). Fredlund (1982:32) found that the relocation of villages down from headwater areas toward the rich source of Western goods at the mouth of the Ocamo, which had begun, according to him, after 1954, was continuing in the 1970s, even though it brought greater exposure to malaria. The village of Auwei-teri, mentioned in chapter 12 as an ally of the Wítokaya-teri, made a particularly long move downstream (compare maps in Smole 1976:56 and Fredlund 1982:34; Fuentes 1980:6).

Fredlund provides almost no information about his fieldwork situation or political relations among the local Yanomami. The Shitari bloc he studied had been insulated from direct contact with Westerners until recently. Consistent with that insulation, Fredlund contrasts the “relatively little warfare reported in the Ocamo River Basin over the past 100 years” with the situations described by Chagnon for the Namo-wei and Shamatari, and he notes that comparatively few middle Ocamo people had died in war (Fredlund 1982:37). This statement, however, probably refers to conflicts between groups within the area, since, as I described in previous chapters, middle and upper Ocamo groups were raiding lowland groups from the late 1940s onward.

On the other hand, Fredlund does note signs of conflict in the area during his stay. While the men of Hotoba-teri were out hunting, two men from a neighboring village attempted to rape a Hotoba-teri woman and were only prevented from doing so by Fredlund’s intervention. The people of Hotoba-teri were attributing illnesses to sorcery by a more distant Shitari village. Sometime in 1975, the first village north of the Hotoba-teri raided another village farther to the north, killing one man (Fredlund 1982:34, 37, 42, 70). All these events are consistent with
often-observed patterns subsequent to the establishment of a new Western presence in an area.

The third graduate student of Chagnon's to begin work with the Yanomamo in 1975 was Raymond Hames. Hames, whose historical reconstructions I have cited extensively, worked in the Padamo area among Yanomamo connected to Yecuana villages. No lethal violence had been reported for those groups since 1960 or even earlier. But there too, tensions rose during the 1970s. In 1972, one village in the Wakanawa sub-bloc fissioned after several members died of malaria (Hames 1983:411). Sorcery accusations that “implicated the missionary in the witchcraft” were accompanied by other rearrangements; and in 1976, one village fused with another in anticipation of an attack by a third.

Among the villages of the middle Padamo sub-bloc, relations were also growing strained at this time (Hames 1983:413–14). In 1975, a club fight held in one village somehow led to the deaths of five men, including two participants from Awewei-teri and the headman of one of the sub-bloc villages. As of 1976, several villages were living in fear of raids (Hames 1983:414–15; and see Chagnon and Hames 1979:912). The 1975 fighting around Hasupuwe-teri and in the middle Ocamo appears similar to conflicts described in so many other situations of increasing conflict in remote areas. The sudden intensification of tensions and violence in the Padamo area is more problematic. Certainly there were important changes in the Western presence in that area from the early to mid-1970s, which could account for a rise in antagonisms—the growth of mission schools, the reorganization of Salesian mission policy, the development and then collapse of CODESUR.

The problem is that these Yanomamo had already gone so far to adapt to both Westerners and Yecuana that it is questionable whether my model, developed to explain war among relatively “traditional” Yanomami, can be applied to them. Good and Lizot (1984:134) discuss the situation at Hames's main field site, Tororo-teri, and conclude that “the conditions at this community (as well as its extreme geographic marginality) have so drastically altered this group of Yanomami that they cannot legitimately be represented as Yanomami society.”

A similar caveat should apply to the shotgun attacks launched by Bisaasi-teri against Patanowa-teri in 1975, which I noted at the start of this section. The intensifying changes of the first half of the 1970s affected all those directly exposed to the missions and other Westerners. It was around 1975 that Kaobawa of the Bisaasi-teri moved his group away from the missions to their old garden site (Barawa) on the Ori- noco because there were too many foreigners around the mission trying to control the daily life of his people (Chagnon 1977:160). Malaria was also rampant at this time, with 33 deaths attributed to it at Boca Mavaca for 1975–76 (versus a more usual 6 deaths from 1977 through June 1979) (Flores et al., cited in Colchester and Semba 1985:26). In unknown ways, the genesis and practice of violence in areas of high contact from the mid-1970s onward may no longer fit the model developed in this book.

The social panorama at Boca Mavaca continued to change during the late 1970s and early 1980s, as described by Sister María Isabel Equiullor García of the Catholic missions (1984:26–28, 54–56, 93–95, 233, 236). Around 1982, the Western settlement there consisted of about a dozen buildings and an airstrip. New Yanomamo leaders emerged, local groups fissioned and fused, and Yanomamo from distant places appeared in increasing numbers. One telling indicator of change is a pronounced shift from virilocl to uxorilocal postmarital residence. Yet despite the increased Western presence, the number of Western goods possessed by an average family at the local village of Cinc-teri, according to Equiullor García (1984:236), remained only slightly greater than that of the isolated village of Iriubi-teri and well below the number owned at the village of Karo-hi-teri around 1969 (see Lizot 1971:45).

That all of these changes were producing commensurate changes in social conflict is illustrated by the last well-described war in the Orinoco-Mavaca area (Chagnon 1988:991, 1990b:98–101; Equiullor García 1984:25–26; Lizot 1989:28–29). The principal opponents were the Bisaasi-teri and the Tayari-teri. Chagnon had not been in the field at Bisaasi-teri since 1975. Tayari-teri was Lizot’s current location. The two anthropologists differ considerably, and with feeling, over what occurred in this fight, but it is Equiullor García who provides the most complete account. She dates the start of hostilities to November 1977, when a fight during a feast hosted by the Wtokaya-teri resulted in the deaths of some Karo-hi-teri and Tayari-teri. The Musiu-teri, one of the groups into which the Bisaasi-teri had divided, were implicated.

For the next two years, tensions remained “half latent” (Equiullor García 1984:25), manifested in verbal and some physical abuse between Bisaasi-teri and Tayari-teri people. Lizot (1989:28) describes the building tension as a “product of impertinent speeches, insults, brickbats, provocations, garden thefts, and the arrogant attitudes of certain leaders of Tayari.” When a group of Bisaasi-teri were camping near the Tayari-teri and went to ask them for plantains, the village children pelted the
headman with mud balls and sticks, while their parents stood by. Shortly thereafter, when Tayari-teri came to see the Salesians at Boca Mavaca, they in turn were pelted with chunks of concrete (Chagnon 1990b:99).

In March 1979, the two groups met at Tayari-teri, intending to settle their animosity with a pounding match. But events got out of hand, and two Tayari-teri men were killed. Quickly, the Tayari-teri raided and wounded or killed one Bisaasi-teri person. In November, they caught a young man from Bisaasi-teri out fishing and left him riddled with arrows (Chagnon 1990b:100; Eguillor Garca 1984:25; Lizot 1989:28). During the following weeks, the Bisaasi-teri made several attempts to attack the Tayari-teri, but the latter had temporarily moved inland (Chagnon 1990b:100). At the same time, the Tayari-teri consolidated their alliances with “all descendants of the Sitoya-teri group” (which would include the Mahekoto-teri, although this is not specified); and “in their pride that they could not be defeated,” they attacked an upper Ocamo group called Klawi-teri, burning their shabono and abducting five women (Eguillor Garca 1984:25).

Up to this point, the fighting does not seem to be unusual. But what happened next is without precedent. A great alliance of fourteen local groups—the six current divisions of the Bisaasi-teri, four Shamarti allies, the Klawi-teri, the two lyewe-teri divisions, and the Witokayateri (Eguillor Garca 1984:25)—planned coordinated attacks on the proud Tayari-teri. They came by motorized canoes on two consecutive days, about 150 men each time, with shotguns and gasoline to set fire to the Tayari-teri residence (Lizot 1989:29). Never before had Yanomami mounted such a massive, overpowering assault. In the fierce battle, six (Lizot 1989:29) or seven Tayari-teri men were killed and about a dozen wounded, one woman was captured, and the village was completely looted. The survivors fled to nearby allies, including the Mahekoto-teri, and “Tayari disappeared from the Yanomami geographic map” (Eguillor Garca 1984:26).

The Boca Mavaca groups prepared for retaliation by the survivors and their allies, which came in two raids in early and mid-1981. One person was wounded in the first, and Kaobawa’s daughter and son-in-law were killed in the second (Chagnon 1990b:101; Eguillor Garca 1984:26). These three or Bisaasi-teri casualties in this war are the only war fatalities reported for the Boca Mavaca groups since before 1968 (Eguillor Garca 1984:33). Although Kaobawa’s followers wanted revenge, they could not get others to go along. Eguillor Garca (1984:26) observed of the situation: “Some begin to get tired. Others are already fed up with fighting and satisfied with what they have gotten. There is discord, and not even the ashes of the young couple, divided between the allies, brings unity to the discussions.”

Lizot (1989:30) notes a “brusque descent of warlike activities, based on a strong activation in the process of acculturation” since around 1983 (although Chagnon 1990b:101 reports that some Bisaasi-teri a few years later still hoped to attack the Mahekoto-teri for revenge). By the end of the decade, the acculturation process had proceeded so far around Boca Mavaca that many local Yanomamo had given up communal living, partly because of problems of theft, and were well along the road to “peasantization” (Chagnon 1992a:221–22).

Farther up the Orinoco, in areas more removed from the center of Western activity, violent conflict continued to run high during the 1980s. Near the end of that decade, Lizot (1989:29) notes that some time before, the Patanowa-teri were involved somehow in a massacre at the Kashorawe-teri village, in which a “great quantity” of men were killed and women captured. He attributes this act to revenge for a killing long ago, and he notes that the Patanowa-teri fissioned soon afterward. (Eguillor Garca [1984:54] mentions that a large number of Patanowa-teri moved to Boca Mavaca around 1982, but it is not clear whether this is the fissioning referred to by Lizot.)

Good (1991:208, 247, 298, 322) refers to growing tensions above the Raudal de Guajaribos in 1984, which broke out into reciprocal raiding involving the Hasupuwe-teri and a related group against a downstream enemy known as Konaporepiwe-teri, apparently in 1985. In the summer of 1985, Good (1991:287) encountered some Poreweteri (Steinworth de Goetz’s Porepoi-teri?) who had been moving down toward the Hasupuwe-teri area. Recent raids on them by unnamed enemies had killed several, causing them to split up and flee. Lizot, living among the Kabori-teri in 1988, observed that “at the moment in which I write these lines, all of the communities of the mountains are at war against each other” (1989:32). While it is expectable in terms of my model that war would pass to once relatively isolated groups as the effects of a deepening Western presence spread outward from the Orinoco-Mavaca center, I would again enter a caution here. By the 1980s, so much had changed and so little information is available about the impact of those changes that unanticipated factors may be involved even in the conflicts farther up the Orinoco.

Political relations and conflicts up the Mayaca River during the 1980s show a similar mix of “standard” and new elements. Missionary
inducements to relocate led a large division of the Iwahikoroba-teri to move closer to the Haoyabaywei-teri and the Mavakita mission around 1984–85, where they became known as Washawe-teri. In 1987, the Kedeabowei-teri, a group closely related to the Mishinishinabowei-teri, were persuaded to move downstream and begin commercial production of manioc. The missionaries established a school among them, and in 1988 a young man was killed in a club fight “over accusations of theft of the ‘school food.’” (Chagnon 1992a:222–23). Both these groups subsequently suffered very high mortality from diseases: they were close enough to the missions to catch illnesses, but still beyond the ability of missions to provide critical medical care (Chagnon 1992a:223–24).

In the late 1980s, men from the more acculturated mission villages suddenly began attacking some of the more remote groups. The proliferation of shotguns among the former now combined with possession of motorized boats to give the mission groups the ability to travel far to raid others and to outflank anyone who dared to raid them (Chagnon 1992a:219). Once again, the political manipulation of revenge is evident: “Significant numbers of Yanomamo in the remote villages are being shot and killed by raiders from mission villages who, now that they have an arms advantage, invent reasons to get ‘revenge’ on distant groups, some of which have had no historical relationships with them” (Chagnon 1992a:220).

Some of these raids occurred up the Mavaca. Around early 1990, a remote group called Hiomota-teri was raided by “friendly” neighbors who had just formed an alliance with a shotgun-owning mission group. Two men were killed and seven women abducted, because, as it was explained, the Hiomota-teri had “failed to deliver dogs they had promised” (Chagnon 1992a:220). Judging from the date and the number of people killed and captured, this appears to be the same incident Chagnon mentions in a separate footnote, in which “a splinter of the Patanowa-teri” (the “friendly” neighbors?) joined with raiders from the Boca Mavaca mission to attack a “remote village that was becoming friendly with the Patanowa-teri” (Chagnon 1992a:190). Later that year, “two more Hiomota-teri youths were shot and killed in broad daylight while visiting a village near the Salesian satellite mission at Mavakita” (Chagnon 1992a:220), probably the village of the Washawe-teri (1992a:225).

While Chagnon was visiting the Washawe-teri in early 1992, a rumor spread that the Yanomamo comisario from Mavakita was planning to raid them with shotguns. Chagnon believes his own presence and shotgun may have scared off the attackers. Instead, the comisario went to harass the Kedeabowei-teri, recently weakened by an epidemic that killed 21 people, before returning with his followers “to his mission re-doubt at Mavakita” (Chagnon 1992a:224–25).

With these few facts, in-depth analysis is not possible. But along with the new elements—fighting over mission food stores, motorized canoe transport, and the structured military inequality associated with unequal possession of shotguns—an old theme can be discerned. Those who have stronger connections to the mission posts at Boca Mavaca and Mavakita, along with their allies such as the Patanowa-teri splinter group, direct violence at others who are attempting to get closer to the missions—the Washawe-teri, the Kedeabowei-teri, and the Hiomota-teri.

The new bout of raiding apparently extended even into the remote Siapa basin. As I discussed in the historical overview earlier, direct but sporadic contact with some Siapa River groups began in the 1970s and continued during the 1980s. It is not clear to what extent the Siapa groups experienced direct contact with garimpeiros after 1987, but a substantial Western presence was established in the area during 1990 and 1991, when Chagnon and other researchers were transported in by Venezuelan air force helicopters (Chagnon 1992a:81).

Chagnon was struck by the “startling difference” in warfare and violence from that in the Orinoco-Mavaca area. The relatively isolated Siapa people were “sedate and gentle,” with smaller villages, less elaborate alliances and feasting, and fewer abducted women (Chagnon 1992a:85–87). Chagnon attributes this contrast to ecological differences—a hypothesis I will come back to in the concluding chapter. I attribute it to the historical absence of Westerners in the area and to the fact that the Siapa basin, since the 1950s, had been a low-contact zone between two high-contact zones, the Orinoco and the Negro. There were no more isolated” people to attack them from behind as they received Western goods via well-developed exchange networks.

This peaceful existence was being threatened, however. Along with his general observations, Chagnon (1992b:6) also notes that war was “still common” in the Siapa area. And after discussing the killings of the Hiomota-teri men near the Mavaca, he adds the following paragraph.

I was further angered and depressed to discover a number of recent shotgun killings in yet other extremely remote villages I have recently started working in, villages that are many days’ walk from the mission groups that are now raiding them, the traveling distance being greatly reduced by the use of motorized canoes
for at least some portions of the trip. Particularly disturbing is
the large number of shotgun killings of Venezuelan Yanomamo
in isolated villages in the Siapa Basin by Brazilian Yanomamo
who have obtained large quantities of guns from mission posts
like Abaruwa-teri. The circumstances surrounding these shotgun
killings are well outside the traditional patterns of Yanomamo
warfare. (Chagnon 1992a:220–21)

In September 1991, Chagnon’s colleague Charles Brewer Carfas told
a New York Times reporter that during the preceding year, 21 “wild
Yanomami” had been killed by shotgun-using “mission Yanomami”
(Brooke 1991).

In these recent wars, the impact of Western contact is obvious on
the face of it. That mission Yanomamo attack villages where Westerners
are trying to develop a new presence is consistent with the explanation
of warfare developed in this book. But beyond that broad observation,
much remains unknown. We have no information about the economic
and political relationships between aggressors and victims. The situa-
tion is unique: a major new Western presence suddenly drops from the
sky, and there are seemingly unprecedented long-distance strikes out of
the missions. Moreover, the polemical character of Chagnon’s recent
writings about mission activity cannot be overlooked. Because of all
these factors, it would be imprudent to say more.

15
Explaining Yanomami Warfare:
Alternatives and Implications

In this book I have attempted to compile what is reported about Yan-
omami history and explain its main events by reference to a coherent
structure of theoretical propositions. One overarching proposition is
that the Yanomami’s practice of war—along with such political mat-
ters as long-distance migrations, the splitting of population blocs during
those moves, and the interrelated domains of trade, intermarriage, and
political alliance—is primarily determined by local articulation with
agents and aspects of European expansion.

As the Yanomami entered known history in the middle of the eigh-
tenth century, they were keeping to the high country, surrounded on all
sides by hunters of humans to feed the colonial slave markets. With the
formerly complex societies of the region obliterated, and with no travel
route passing through their homelands, the Yanomami remained less ex-
posed to the ravages of Western contact than were peoples of lower and
more accessible terrain. After mid-century, episodic expansion into the
region by a semblance of colonial government mitigated the slave hunt-
ing, although in places it continued for at least another century. But
now there also were peaceful contacts and opportunities to trade, and
through them, to obtain steel tools.

After the mid-1700s, the Western presence waxed and waned. It col-
lapsed in the decades around the turn of the nineteenth century, returned
at low levels during the century’s middle decades, and then exploded
during the rubber boom. The collapse of the boom by 1920, followed