could not afford to get into a shooting war with the Namoweí. On the other hand, if the Sitoya-teri were forced away by such severe provocation, perhaps some Namoweí could move into position as “friends of the white men.”

For a few years after they took the Sitoya-teri women (1938–41?), the Namoweí remained very short on steel cutting tools (Valero 1984:161, 197). They continued to worry about the evil intentions of the Aramamise-teri and especially the Konabuma-teri. But then the Aramamise-teri had a stroke of luck: they were visited by anape who gave them tools, clothes, even hats (Valero 1984:167, 169). The Namoweí still had not met any anape face to face, but they wanted to. Fusiwe and Shamawe, the leader of the Bisaasi-teri, along with some others, set off on a long exploratory hunt closer to the Orinoco where the anape passed. Apparently they found a deserted camp or cache, obtaining some machetes but also contracting a nonlethal fever (Valero 1984:169–71).

Some time later, some Namoweí went on two long treks to the north side of the Orinoco, but they were frightened back to the south side when they encountered tracks of possible “enemies” (Valero 1984:197–201). As Valero later told Cocco, they went on these trips “with the decided intention of encountering the anape and asking them for machetes and axes, but they were also decided to kill them if they said no... They never encountered any whites” (Cocco 1972:376).

There are signs that internal tensions among the Namoweí also rose as the Western presence on the upper Orinoco began to intensify around 1940. About this time, two Namoweí divisions, the Yaminaweí-teri and Warinima-teri, had a club fight provoked by the theft of tobacco from a garden (Valero 1984:201–203). Other serious quarrels may date to this period.\[10\] Still, these tensions did not commonly lead to killings. In the 1940s, they did.

11

Maneuvering into War: The Yanomamo, 1940 to 1950

This chapter is the first to concentrate almost entirely on the Orinoco-Mavaca area. That area, as I define it, encompasses the Namoweí, the Shamate to their south, the Hasupuwe-teri allies to the east, and, north of the Orinoco, the Uhepiki bloc (Sitoya-teri and others) and the southern elements of the Ichewei and Padamo blocs. For the years from 1940 to 1950, there is very little information about any Yanomamo except those within this area. Virtually nothing is known about the southwestern Yanomamo overlooking the Río Negro or about those living in the Parima highlands, and the little information available about the Yanomamo to the north of the Orinoco-Mavaca area will be presented after the following reconstruction of local historical context.

Orinoco-Mavaca history is another story. The 1940s saw an unsteady but significant increase in the Western presence in the area, facilitated by the introduction of gasoline-powered motor launches (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 1943:13) that allowed much greater capacity for movement and supply. For the 1940s, more historical reports become available, anthropologists' reconstructed village histories become more complete and detailed, and above all, Helena Valero continues the story of her life among the Namoweí. Taken together, these sources reveal some of the complex maneuvering related to the intensifying Western presence and show how Yanomamo politics culminated increasingly in war.
Civilization Returns, Again

Although to visiting Americans the upper Orinoco economy still seemed moribund in 1942, there are degrees of moribundity. San Fernando de Arabapo was operating as a base for tappers of rubber, balata, and chicle, and, most recently, for palm-fiber collectors (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 1943:19). It had grown from about 60 residents in 1931 to 150 in 1940 (Gómez Picón 1978:118–19). Around 1940, Manuel Butrón came to the upper Orinoco and began to develop a timber trade, which would soon lead woodsmen deep into the Yanomami’s forests (Grelier 1957:51). In 1941, Félix Cardona Puig, probably the most experienced of all explorers in Yanomamo lands, traveled to the upper Mavaca (Grelier 1957:108) and, around that same time, to the headwaters of the Padamo and Ocamo (Anduze 1960:38).

Perhaps the most dramatic development, from the Yanomamo point of view, came when Silverio Level—part Yecuana (Cocco 1972:112) and presumably the son of Guillermo Level—and another man built homes near a rapids of the Manaviche River around 1940. They were attacked around 1942 by Yanomamo in perhaps two clashes that left one settler dead and netted the attackers substantial plunder (Cocco 1972:74). The Yanomamo version of this clash will be presented later.

Between 1941 and 1944, a frontier commission was active in the area (Grelier 1957:39), and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (1943) arrived to do a survey of the Casiquiare as a possible shipping route. Almost nothing is known about the activities of either group, but the arrival of the Army Engineers most likely represented the greatest infusion of material goods into the local economy since the rubber boom—the sort of largesse, by local standards, that led to cargo cults in other parts of the world. The engineers were supplied by the Rodríguez family enterprise among the Yecuana on the Venturí River, which at this time had 20 occupied houses along with electrical generators and even refrigeration (Hitchcock 1948:34). Thus 1942–43 represents a substantial, if brief, surge in the Western presence.

After the engineers left, the Rodríguez’s post continued to be active during the war years because of its ties to the Rubber Development Corporation (Hitchcock 1948:34). In 1943, international agreements established a high guaranteed price for rubber, but for various reasons this price did not create the hoped-for surge in production of South American rubber. In fact, aggregate production rose only slightly (Knoor 1945:181). I found no specifics for the upper Orinoco area. Whatever its impact, this support for renewed rubber tapping ceased with the end of World War II (Hitchcock 1948:32).

Thus the wartime rubber mini-boom—however many new tappers it directed into the forests—did not last long. Hitchcock found the area in the process of emptying out again in 1947, and in that context noted an increase of sightings of Yanomamo in the lowlands (Hitchcock 1948:35). But this was only to be a lull, not a repeat of the protracted withdrawal of the late 1920s. As the decade progressed, Western penetration increased along three lines.

First, timber workers penetrated deeper into the area’s forests. In 1946, Juan Eduardo Noguera, of the Tanatama Nogueras, began searching for valuable trees along the Orinoco, Ocamo, and Manaviche. That year he found an extensive plantain garden visible from the Orinoco and dubbed the site “Platanal.” This was a new garden established by the Maheketo-teri to secure regular Western contact, and it did the job. Noguera began buying plantains and employing Maheketo-teri men to work for him in his expeditions as far upstream as Raudal Pésascal. Noguera would be a crucial figure in developing contacts with Yanomamó, and he played an important role in all expeditions and mission findings at least into the 1970s (Cocco 1972:74–76; and see Good 1991:228).

Noguera was not alone. Manuel Butrón had many men working for him by 1950. They had frequent contacts with Yanomamó and even built a shack just above Platanal, where timber that had been floated downstream was cut into boards. Butrón had established a standard exchange rate with the Yanomamó—three bunches of bananas for one machete. The Western goods apparently were brought into the creole economy by a merchant named Fajardo who ran an extensive barter trade covering the entire upper Orinoco. And in 1950, at least one gold prospector was working in the area of Raudal de Guajaribos (Anduze 1960:77–78; Grelier 1957:42, 50–51, 78, 109, 113; Ríosque Ibarren 1962:145).

Not all contacts, however, were peaceful. Experienced woodsmen were well aware that they could encounter serious problems from Yanomamó seeking their trade goods (Grelier 1957:120). Through the later 1940s, Yanomamó would occasionally “steal from the white man but let him go unharmed” (Acebes 1954:217). Several small parties of woodsmen, and even one missionary and his wife, were robbed by Yanomamó and left to walk out of the forest nude (Acebes 1954:217–18; Anduze 1960:40–41; Cocco 1972:87). The Maheketo-teri did this to one Brazilian woodsmen in 1949 (Cocco 1972:374).
This persisting danger may explain why La Esmeralda itself remained uninhabited as late as about 1950 (Gheerbrant 1954:142), a time when San Fernando was a relatively bustling center of some 250 people making a living in balata and lumber (Grelier 1957:98). But apparently at least one creole settlement lay close to Yanomami lands: a few whites are recalled by the Yanomamo, but not by anyone else, as living on an Ocamo tributary in the late 1940s. Perhaps fugitives from the law, they left after clashing with Yanomamo around 1930 (Cocco 1972:73). One benchmark of the growing connection between the Yanomamo and creole society comes in 1950, when eight or nine men from Iyewei-teri were brought all the way down to Puerto Ayacucho to meet the governor (Cocco 1972:114). The Iyewei-teri had good ties to the outside world from 1950 onward, if not from even earlier.

A second and ultimately more significant line of contact was the arrival of missionaries, who came into the area on the heels of the woodsman. In 1937, the Venezuelan government signed an agreement with the Catholic Salesian order to organize missions in the Amazonas Federal Territory, which covered the southernmost part of the country (Arvelo-Jiménez 1971:31). That year, the Catholics established the first mission in over a century among the Piaroa (Zent 1992). But in 1945, before the Salesians could reach the Yanomamo, Venezuela adopted a new constitution that protected religious freedom—thus ending the Catholic monopoly on missions (Thomas 1982:26).

In 1947 Sophie Muller became the first representative of the evangelical New Tribes Mission to reach the upper Orinoco. Others followed quickly. In September 1948 William Northrup, his family, and a Mr. H. Carlson left the new NTM base at San Fernando de Atabapo in search of “new tribes.” They were guided by two locals, Domingo Saavedra and Andrés Tovar, “a drunkard,” both of whom had declared themselves Christian almost instantly. Northrup and company encountered two parties of friendly “Gujaribo” traveling in canoes around the Padamo or the Ocamo. They then continued upriver for three days, at which time they were greeted by “Guaiлас” who, despite their dangerous reputation, took the missionaries to their village and gave them a warm reception (Johnston 1949:8; Northrup 1947:9, 1948:6–7). These were the Mahkoto-teri at Platanal (Miglianza 1972:384). In 1949 the NTM provided them with axes, machetes, knives, and fishhooks (Anduze 1960:225). In September 1950, James Barker and Carlton Hilker established a New Tribes Mission at Platanal (Chagnon 1966:20; Grelier 1957:115; Miglianza 1972:384). That same year, they made direct contact with Iyewei-teri on the Ocamo (Cocco 1972:114).

The founding of the Platanal mission merits special comment, for it is frequently portrayed as the first significant contact between Yanomami anywhere and the outside world. Obviously, that is not my view. (The family of Juan Nogue,m who named Platanal and helped the missionaries settle there, had been dealing directly with Yanomami since at least the 1920s.) But the creation of this mission does represent an important transition to a phase in which Western contact was more sustained, massive, disruptive, and “warrifying” than at any time since the rubber boom. It meant large initial gifts from the missionaries upon their first contact with any group—probably on the order of 25 machetes, 12 axes, and other goods (see Seitz 1963:193)—and then a sustained flow of payments for as long as direct contact persisted.

The third line of Western penetration in the 1940s was less direct but at times more significant: Western contact of varying forms mediated through the Yecuana. As discussed previously, the Yecuana’s economic role in the region had been expanding through the 1920s and 1930s. In the first half of the 1940s, the Rodríguez operations and other developments must have poured unheard-of quantities of Western goods into their local trade network. Some goods went to the Yanomamo.

The southward trade routes became very well developed by the late 1940s, as renewed Western activity put more manufactures in Yecuana hands. A visitor in 1951 (Grelier 1957:82, 86–87, 90) described an extensive trade network. The Yecuana themselves avoided going to San Fernando de Atabapo and dealt instead with traveling peddlers. Those who traded with peddlers then traded with more insulated Yecuana, who in turn traded with Yanomami. There were even “itinerant Guaharibo dealers [who] peddle from dug-out canoes” (Grelier 1957:83). In this way even the most remote Yanomami groups were said to receive some trade of Yecuana origin.

But of a broad range of Western goods dispensed by the peddlers, only “hatchets, machetes, knives, threads, and fish hooks . . . reach certain of the Guaharibo Indians, who, for their part, offer nothing but bows and arrows in exchange” (Grelier 1957:90). Not only bows and arrows, however, for according to one Yecuana, “the Waika exchange even women for axes and machetes” (Anduze 1960:225–26).

As in other situations of trade and alliance between Yanomami and Yecuana, the relationship came with the potential for violence. Around
1946, widespread fighting broke out that pitted “Guaharibos” (Yamomani north of the Ocamo), who were allied with Yecuanas, against “Guaicas” from the Ocamo onward (Acebes 1954:217). 1 Fighting continued at least until 1950, when it was reported that “wandering Guaharibo tribes often pillage the Makiritares’ plantations . . . and for their part the Makiritares are not above forcibly carrying off the Guaharibo women” (Grelier 1957:83). Some spoke of “perpetual war to the death” between Yecuana and “Waika,” even as other “Waika” were drawing close to the Yecuana and adopting their ways (Anduze 1960:41, 190).

There appears to be a strong spatial element to all this fighting. The conflicts around 1946 were reported to pit Yamomani north of the Ocamo against those who lived beyond the Ocamo (Acebes 1954:217). 2 Around 1951, all the Yamomamo of the Padamo and Ocamo were reportedly living at peace with their Yecuana neighbors (Anduze 1960:385–86). But the Yecuana could be neighbors only to people on the lower Ocamo, the upper reaches being exclusively Yamomamo. The “Guaharibo” raiders of the Yecuana, then, probably all came from either the upper Ocamo or areas to its south and west.

Violence among Yamomamo along the Yecuana Front

Much of this chapter is based on Helena Valero’s description of life among the Namowei during the 1940s. In 1950, Valero fled from the Namowei and wound up living with Yamomamo in the area between the Orinoco and Ocamo rivers. During her stay on the north side of the Orinoco, she learned about wars that had involved these more northerly groups during the 1940s. One war is very poorly described (Valero 1984:415–16); it involved Shipari groups up the Ocamo. Apparently they had several deadly clashes with unidentified enemies. Shipari violence reportedly was carried out by one exceptionally violent man, Kohawe, who went out to kill enemies all by himself. (He was finally wounded and caught hiding in a tree, where, roaring like a jaguar, he was shot full of arrows.) The other war is a more intelligible conflict involving the lyewei-teri.

The lyewei-teri had fissioned off from the Waka waka sub-bloc sometime in the 1930s, while they were all living in the highlands separating the Padamo from the Ocamo drainage (Cocco 1972:113; Hames 1983:410). Subsequently, the Waka waka-teri would continue on to the Matacuni, a Padamo tributary, and the lyewei-teri would head down a stream to the Ocamo. (Henceforth the lyewei-teri are not considered in Hames’s [1983] historical reconstruction.) One reason the lyewei-teri moved was “to avoid the bothersome contact with the Yepope-teri, who visited them continuously asking for machetes” (Cocco 1972:113).

In the late 1940s (Biocca 1971:293–94; Valero 1984:437), the lyewei-teri were in a location that gave them contact with Yecuanas. A man named Akawe, who would later be Valero’s second husband, joined with some lyewei-teri men who were going to attack two interior groups—first the Koparive-teri and then the Watupawe-teri. Two or three deaths are reported, one of them accidental. The lyewei-teri actions fit the general pattern of Yamomamo-allied-to-Yecuana conflict with interior Yamomamo. But Akawe claimed to have participated in this war to avenge his father, who had been killed by Watupawee-teri in the 1930s. His mother had saved the father’s ashes in order later to feed them to Akawe to cultivate his desire for revenge. Perhaps that is why Akawe, as we will see in chapter 12, grew up to be homicidal.

Piecing all the shreds of information together, it is evident that in the later 1940s there were major tensions leading to wars along the line that extended from the lower to the upper Ocamo. This was a major avenue from the Parima highlands into the lower country where steel was traded, and it was an arena of often violent conflict from the late 1930s through the 1960s. But the other northern Yamomamo—those who arrived in or near the Padamo basin around 1940—appear to have been spared the worst violence.

About these people, Valero (1984:158, 245) indicates that members of the northern sub-bloc were receiving Western goods from Yecuana and trading them to the Orinoco-Mavaca area as early as 1938. The southern sub-bloc received large quantities to trade around 1942. Perhaps these sub-blocs forestalled attacks by being generous with steel, buying off potential enemies, or creating buffers between themselves and interior groups. Or perhaps their long-distance relocations away from their former homes on the Ocamo had put them beyond the reach of envious highlanders, a luxury their lyewei-teri relatives did not enjoy. At any rate, Hames (1983:409–11) does not report the northern Yamomamo to have been involved in any war during the 1940s. They were, however, riven by intense internal conflict and factionalism.

The more southerly Waka waka sub-bloc (Hames 1983:410–12) underwent a bitter fissioning around 1947, but there was no killing. At issue was what attitude to take in relations with the Witokaya-teri, and the dispute reached the point of witchcraft accusations. One faction stayed close to the Witokaya-teri, developing strong ties to them. The
other, more aggressive faction moved farther down the Matacuni River to Wakawaka.

In the northern, mid-Padamo sub-blocs, intense factionalism led to the killing of the headman of one division in 1945. That event led to fissioning, as the killers’ group split off immediately and moved close to a Yecuana village. Their leader “quickly arranged an alliance with the Ye’kwana to protect them from [their former coreidents] by marrying two of his daughters to the Ye’kwana headman” (Hames 1983: 412). Thus these Yanomami experienced destructive rivalries but few deaths. They were “tame Guaharibo” — traders, not fighters — and probably were among the “itinerant Guaharibo dealers” noted by Grelier.

The overall picture for the northern Yanomamo resembles that previously described for the Sanema and Ninam. Chains of trade lead outward from the Yecuana, who use their superior access to Western goods to extract women from Yanomami. Occasionally violence flares between Yanomamo and Yecuana, but more commonly, at a time when the Yecuana are flush with shotguns, it pits Yanomamo who are allied with Yecuana and so possess Western goods against more interior, deprived Yanomamo.

New Tensions along the Orinoco

We left the Namovei around 1940, about two years after they had taken some women from the Sitoya-teri, who had come to feast. Valero had fled into the forest at that moment, but soon she was back with the Namovei. In the next few years, after hearing new reports of nape passing along the Orinoco, the Waniwina-teri and Biwasa-teri made long exploratory hunting trips in search of nape from whom they could get steel by trade or plunder. Although they did find some tools, they still had not achieved direct, much less regular, contact with outsiders. The next event occurs in 1941, a year established with certainty by the first airplane overflights of the new boundary commission (Cocco 1972:78; Valero 1984:207).

One day an emissary came from the Sitoya-teri to invite the Namovei to a feast (Biocca 1971:171; Valero 1984:207). The Sitoya-teri by this time had moved their village to a new site nearer to the Orinoco and had taken the name Mahekoto-teri. There they again met nape passing upstream, who promised them machetes on their return. The Namovei were suspicious of the Mahekoto-teri’s feast offer, fearing it to be a ruse to set them up for revenge for their taking of the Sitoya-teri women. The emissary sought to reassure them: “There will not be war on account of women. Women are everywhere; young girls who grow up. Why must we fight for women who are worthless?” The young man continued to speak for a long time; he said: “The Mahekoto-teri want to be friends with you again; you have killed no one, they have killed no one. They are sending to tell you to keep their women” (Biocca 1971:171). But Namovei suspicions persisted, and they did not accept the offer right away.

About a month after this invitation, other people arrived from the north side of the Orinoco. They were Watanami-teri, allies of the Mahekoto-teri. The Watanami-teri had been raided by Tukwhe-teri, old enemies of the Namovei. The raiders had killed a man and two boys and left the Watanami-teri in such fear that they dared not remain on the north side of the river even to grind the bones of the dead. (This was not the first time Watanami-teri had been attacked by people farther from the Orinoco [Valero 1984:410].) The Namovei took them in for about two months (Valero 1984:207–208).

In this incident we see a tactical element that will be manifested again in several later situations: a group along the north side of the Orinoco, threatened by enemies from the high country farther north, must be able to move to the south side of the river for protection, and that requires being at peace with those who live there. The Mahekoto-teri, too, had such northern enemies, and presumably the Namovei became aware of this situation. Thus the Mahekoto-teri’s offer to forswear revenge had a good reason behind it: they could not afford to have enemies to their south. But a few more months passed before the Namovei all joined and traveled slowly toward the Mahekoto-teri village (Valero 1984:209).

The journey was eventful (Biocca 1971:171–76; Valero 1984:209–13). Along the way, one Namovei man killed another with a club, after catching the young man with his wife. Apparently no repercussions followed, showing that a group will not always fission after a lethal club fight. Then another young man sickened with a fever (malaria?) and died. Sorcery was suspected, with the Shamatari as the likely culprits. This death would have major ramifications later. Finally, shortly before the Namovei reached Mahekoto-teri, they were intercepted by a delegation from Kashawara-teri, a subdivision of the Watanami-teri (Valero 1984:136) living upstream from the Mahekoto-teri. The Kashawara-teri asked the Namovei to come to a feast in their village instead. Their petition suggests how badly the people along the north shore of the Orinoco needed allies. But the Namovei continued on to the Mahekoto-teri.

On arrival, the reasoning behind the Mahekoto-teri’s sincere invitation became clear (Biocca 1971:176–78). The Mahekoto-teri feared
that they would be raided by two villages to their north, Shipariwe-teri and Hayata-teri. They also feared these enemies would try to ambush the Namowei—a sensible course for those trying to prevent an alliance. Once safe within the Mahekoto-teri walls, the Namowei were greeted with joy. The headman made sure to prevent any incident involving grievances over the captured women, and he spoke of his desire to be friends.

Fusive, a Namowei leader, made it quite clear why he had risked coming: “I have come to you, for you have a machete from the white man; give me a machete that I may carry it with me, for it is very hard work for me to break the tree-trunks with my teeth to make my shabono. You, who are a friend of the whites, have received those necklaces from them; put them round my neck, that the young ladies may say: ‘He has been there, where the white men’s friend is; on his neck is a beautiful necklace; he has a lovely thing in his ears; he too is becoming a friend of the white men’” (Biocca 1971:178).

From this point on, the Namowei were friends of the Mahekoto-teri and their allies along the north bank, although the relationships still manifested some serious strains (Valero 1984:219–23). Thus the Mahekoto-teri and others eliminated a potential enemy and gained an ally instead. More specifically, they created the possibility of dealing with their northern adversaries by moving to the other side of the Orinoco—a move they would indeed make in response to raids in the 1950s. Such a move would have been impossible while they were on hostile terms with the Namowei.

Around this time—about 1942—two events occurred that cannot be placed in a definite sequence vis-à-vis other events. One involved the Sitoya-teri/Mahekoto-teri, or an offshoot that in later times came to be called Karohi-teri. It was they who attacked Silverco Level’s settlement on the Manaviche River around 1942 or 1943 (Cocco 1972:74). In later years, Lizot’s informants recalled how they encountered these rubber tappers: “We would watch them through the leaves. In those days we had no metal axes, though a few of us owned some miserable pieces of machete fastened to wooden handles with bowstring. But the foreigners used machetes, axes, and knives: We had never seen so many” (Lizot 1985:3).

At first they bartered with and worked for the nape, but this failed to provide enough steel. At the same time, several people died from mysterious new ailments that the Yanomamo attributed to the smoke from the boiling kettles of rubber.

We couldn’t stop thinking about the metal tools. . . . We judged them to be miserly with their possessions, and that irritated us. Previously, at night, men of influence and feared warriors had addressed us at length to incite us to stealing: We shouldn’t be afraid of these few miserable foreigners, they said. And besides, those vile kettles cause death. (Lizot 1985:4)

This passage is noteworthy for its transparent conversion of material interest into moral terms: the nape with Level were stingy; they caused illness; those who did not want to attack them were cowards. These hangarues apparently went on for some time, with speakers for both war and peace. Finally, emboldened by the arrival of some Watanami-teri allies, a group of young men decided on direct action. An attempt to make off with nape machetes led to a Yanomamo’s being shot, but he did not die. A short time later a Yanomamo ambush killed one of the tappers. After this clash, the nape—Level and his fellow tappers—withdraw.

The other event is described in both of Valero’s narratives as occurring after the Namowei’s rapprochement with the Mahekoto-teri, although the two books (Biocca 1971:139–62; Valero 1984:243–47) differ in placing it just before and just after the killing of Ruwahine—which we will come to shortly. (To me, this event seems more likely to have been one of the circumstances leading up to Ruwahine’s death than to have occurred afterward.) Whichever was the case, news came to the Namowei one day that “the Wakawakateri had many machetes” (Biocca 1971:158). The Wakawaka, of course, were one of the groups followed by Hames (1983). At this moment, they were living on the lower Matacuni and “had frequent relations with the Maquiritare and the whites” (Valero 1984:245). Their sudden influx of steel could have come from the boundary commission, the Army Engineers, or both. The Biasaati-teri and additional men from three Namowei subdivisions quickly decided to make the long trip through unknown territory to ask for machetes.

Evidently they saw the possibility of violence in this encounter. One man who was too afraid to enter the Wakawaka-teri’s shabono heard their shouted greeting, panicked, and fled all the way home. He told everyone that all the visitors had been killed. Many believed him and were discussing the possibility of a retaliatory raid when the expedition returned, unhurt and loaded down with presents: “many machetes, axes, heads, hammocks, balls of cotton, three aluminum pots . . . they were the first pots which appeared there. Some even brought shirts, white shirts, and they wore them. How funny! One even had a hat.
"Everyone look. I am a nape," they say Hesikakiwe said" (Valero 1984: 247). This extraordinary generosity on the part of the Wakawakati toward a distant, unrelated group is a good example of the "buying off" of potential enemies.

The Plot against Ruwahiwe

Around 1942—months after the rapprochement with the Mahekoto-teri—the first rumblings of a very serious conflict were felt among the Namowiei (Biocca 1971:185–201; Valero 1984:223–40). Visitors arrived who passed along a rumor that the man who died from fever on the trip to Mahekoto-teri had been the victim of sorcery by Ruwahiwe, leader of the Matakuwe-teri, also called the Konabuna-teri Shamatari. (We last saw Ruwahiwe in chapter 10, leading raids against the Kohoroshiwe-teri and Karawe-teri on the Río Negro watershed in the middle 1930s.) Shortly thereafter, three of Ruwahiwe's agnates from an offshoot village arrived. They approached Fuswe and told him the same story. They also claimed Ruwahiwe had recently killed three or four of their own people and that he openly mocked the Namowiei. Then they came to the point. "It was he," said the Shamatari, 'and now you must kill him, kill him, kill him.' . . . He repeated that word so many times: 'Shere, shere, shere'" (Biocca 1971:186). The visitors forswore any intent to take revenge if Fuswe did kill their brother.

The internal politics of the Shamatari cannot be ascertained from this tale, except to note that they had become highly conflicted just at this moment of increasing Western presence. But one can perceive the visitors' subtext in getting close to Fuswe and the Namowiei. They told Fuswe that they had been able to convey this news only by telling Ruwahiwe that they were going to the Namowiei to ask for machetes with which to clear a new garden, and indeed, they were given three machetes to take back with them (Biocca 1971:188; Valero 1984:225–26). They also asked for and received permission to come and live with the Namowiei after the deed was done. Thus they had obtained steel to carry home and the promise of better supply in the future.

Short-tempered Fuswe believed their story and agreed to do the killing. He told the visitors to tell Ruwahiwe to come for a feast, and that if he brought dogs to trade he would be given machetes and axes and beads. Along with Fuswe's own Wanitima-teri, the plot was joined by some Bisaasi-teri, led by the equally aggressive Rashawe, and some Tetehei-teri, both of which groups were tightly allied with Fuswe at this time. The plotters concealed their intentions from the other Namowiei. Ruwahiwe, on receiving the invitation, feared treachery but decided to risk the trip in the hope of actually getting the precious steel. The Namowiei subdivisions all gathered at the great shabono at Patanowa to receive the expected guests.

Ruwahiwe arrived with up to twenty others, mostly men. He was greeted warmly by Repowe, the old and peaceable headman of Patanowa-teri. Repowe at this time had two Shamatari wives, and as the glowing Fuswe began openly to provoke the visitors, Repowe and other men tried to calm tempers. Despite the palpable tension, the Shamatari continued asking for things and began the formal trading of dogs for machetes—but with Repowe, not Fuswe. Repowe handed over two machetes and promised an ax as soon as the Watanama-teri gave him one they had promised him.

As the Shamatari squatted in trading, followers of Fuswe and Rashawe came up behind them. When Ruwahiwe moved to take the second machete, one of the plotters struck him in the head with an ax. In an instant, five other ax wielders struck five Shamatari. The ax blows did not kill, and the plotters opened fire with curare arrows, chasing the Shamatari as they fled into the forest. Ruwahiwe, lurching and staggering, "drunk with curare," was hit with countless arrows of all types. In all, about six Shamatari died. One woman and a child were taken captive.

The assault on the Shamatari visitors outraged those Namowiei who had been unaware of the planned treachery. Even his own father condemned Fuswe. Repowe, furious, came over shouting: "Now you are happy. . . . You killed Shamatari. You never said anything to me. Why did you kill them? Huh? Because they did not give you a dog. That. Because they only gave to me and my son, you killed them out of envy" (Valero 1984:237). Repowe repeated the accusation that Fuswe killed because he was left out of the trading, but Fuswe forced him to back down, insisting he had acted only to avenge the sorcery. The Namowiei subdivisions then scattered, angry at each other and anticipating Shamatari vengeance.

Repowe's accusations provide a clue about the underlying motives of the Namowiei assailants. Repowe was in an excellent position to bring prosperity to his closest kinsmen by acting as a trade middleman. He was on good terms with Mahekoto-teri and Watanama-teri and anticipated more deliveries of metal tools from them. Fuswe's Wanitima-teri may not have enjoyed such close relations, since Fuswe had been the instigator behind the taking of the Mahekoto-teri's women a few years
before. Even if that unprovoked assault had been “forgiven,” it is to be expected that Mahekoto-teri men would deal more willingly and favorably with other Patanowa-teri men than with Fusiwe. So the Patanowa-teri were in a good position to receive a share of future presents handed out by nape on the river.

As for the Shamatari, we saw in chapter 10 that they had recently sent word to the Namowiei that they wanted to forget old grievances and become friends. “Apparently, trading visits increased in regularity and frequency” in the years just before the slaughter (Chagnon 1992a:2). “Several marriage alliances were developing between the Namowiei-teri and one of the Shamatari villages (Konabuma-teri)” (Chagnon 1966: 152–53). The reason for the Shamatari’s new interest in alliance is obvious: the Namowiei were obtaining steel, and they sat between the Shamatari and the source of the new goods. But with which Namowiei group were the Shamatari establishing these marriage ties?

While Fusiwe had no Shamatari wives, Repowe had two (Valero 1984:161, 232)—although when and how he obtained them is not said. As he demonstrated during the fatal feast, Repowe was prepared to deepen a trading relationship in which steel would be exchanged for hunting dogs, a standard exchange in future years. Fusiwe, in contrast, had led the failed raid against the Shamatari a few years before. Thus we can understand why, as Repowe’s accusations imply, Fusiwe might have been left out of this developing trade and alliance. (Fusiwe seems to have concentrated his personal efforts at building trade and marriage bonds with the Hasupuwe-teri [Valero 1984:167, 151, 238, 245], a fact of some significance later.)

Since the Konabuma-teri (Matakuwe-teri) lived close to the headwaters of the stream along which the Patanowa-teri were located (Chagnon 1992a:167), Fusiwe and his allies had reason to fear them as potential competitors for the still very limited supply of steel entering the area. A stronger alliance between the Patanowa-teri and the Konabuma-teri would send Western goods south, away from the Wanitima-teri and Bisaasi-teri, and would at the same time send women to and reinforce the relative political strength of the Patanowa-teri. Even worse, the Konabuma-teri might use this friendship to move into the area. On the other hand, if the plot worked as planned, the connection between the Patanowa-teri and the Konabuma-teri would be severed, and it would be Fusiwe’s people who gained the advantage of having Shamatari allies—the plotters and their kin—and probably women too. But the plot only half worked: the result was a severing of all trade links between Namowiei and Shamatari for several years.

I do not believe, however, that trade interests were the only factors at work in this instance. The Namowiei had just experienced their first death(s) from a new, mysterious illness. While the Yanomami quickly came to recognize the nape as the source of new ailments, the earliest deaths were most likely interpreted in terms of traditional ideas about sorcery (see Albert 1988). Fusiwe and others probably believed it when they were told that Ruwahive was trying to kill them with magic, especially if they were already primed to believe the worst of him.

Fusiwe’s personality must also be taken into account. Even by Yanomami standards, he was an excessively violent man. As we have seen, the slaughter he orchestrated was condemned by most of the Patanowa-teri, just as some had criticized his earlier assault on the Mahekoto-teri. (When Ruwahive’s people arrived to trade, even Fusiwe’s own wives tried to warn them about his intentions.) Another man might not have agreed to kill Ruwahive, which is probably the reason Fusiwe was sought out by the Shamatari plotters.

Individual fierceness is one of the elements I believe determines the political character of intergroup relations. In the concluding chapter, I will say more about the theoretical significance of one man’s violent disposition. Here it is enough to refer back to my general characterization of treacherous slayers like this one: they usually involve a coalition of groups acting against the interests and wishes of others who benefit more from trade than from war. It may also be worth reminding the reader that my theoretical model does not suggest that antagonistic interests in Western manufactures lead to war on the basis of pure economic calculation, but rather that those interests shape moral evaluations and emotional dispositions in a way that rationalizes economically self-serving military action.

Events following the death of Ruwahive are not clear. The Namowiei went separate ways, so Valero witnessed only some actions (Biocca 1971:202–204; Valero 1984:241–45); her account differs considerably from Chagnon’s (1966:153–54, 172) reconstruction. Both Valero and Chagnon agree that after the death of Ruwahive, his Shamatari kinsmen attempted retaliatory raids. Chagnon has them killing one person—a Konabuma-teri who was performing bride service among the Namowiei Valero (1984) has the two Shamatari raids turn back without making contact, once because of bad omens and once because they found no one home.

Either way, the Shamatari response was weak. As one of his own people said to Fusiwe: “What would they do?” said an old woman. ‘All the Shamatari today are afraid of the Namoweti and are saying that they
are about to join up with the Karawetari, for fear of you. You have killed the tushana [leader], who was the most wairari; how can you be afraid of them? Only that timid brother is left behind.”  (Biocca 1971:202).

But the Namowei also heard that Ruwahiwe's place as Shamatari war leader had been taken by an able man named Riikowei, leader of the people now called Iwahikoro-teri (Valero 1984:241). And Ruwahiwe's brothers, Hohosiwe and Sibararea, remained a potential threat (Biocca 1971:201).

According to Chagnon (1966:172), the Shamatari did indeed abandon Konabuma at this point, driven away by raiders from three groups: the Aramamise-teri, the Paruritawa-teri—a recently fissioned segment of the Shamatari (perhaps involved in the plot)—and the Namowei. Valero would have had no direct knowledge about the first two, but she knew about the Namowei, and her account mentions no raids on the Shamatari following the killing of Ruwahiwe. My suspicion, noted in chapter 10, is that the raid Chagnon places in this sequence—a raid in which several Shamatari women were captured—is the same raid that Valero describes as taking place sometime around 1931.

The slaughter of the Shamatari occurred at just the moment—1942 or 1943—when the amount of steel coming into Yanomamo trade networks suddenly surged. It was a time when, as we saw earlier in this section, violence and the fear of violence throughout the Orinoco-Mavaca area reached a level unprecedented in recent decades. But the intensified Western presence deflated to a more moderate level during the next few years—when there would be few, if any, killings in the Orinoco-Mavaca area. Nevertheless, during that time political divisions deepened, setting the stage for even more extensive violence near the end of the decade.

**Toward War among the Namowei**

During the next four years or so—a lull in Western penetration—some Western goods continued to come into the area, but nothing like the sudden surge of the early 1940s. The Wakawaka-teri still provided goods to the Mahekoto-teri, now including red cloth (Valero 1984:281). Other cloth reached the area from Brazilian boundary commission activities on the Demin (Valero 1984:276). Occasionally a *napé* would pass along the river, giving machetes and knives to those he met (Valero 1984:300). Valero (1984:307) suggests an unusually long absence of any *napé* around 1945–46, just about the time when the least contact would be expected.

The Namowei regularly met with Mahekoto-teri, Watanami-teri, and others from the north bank of the Orinoco to trade. The Namowei gave dogs, which they obtained from Hasupwe-teri, and cotton and hammocks, which they specialized in producing, in exchange for axes, machetes, bead necklaces, cloth, and even scissors. On one trading visit, a Mahekoto-teri leader gave Fusive his only axe, expecting to get another from the *napé* soon. At this time, many Watanami-teri men had machetes, but others continued to use the *baowé* made from a broken machete blade (Valero 1984:249–50, 252, 281, 284, 301, 311).

But tensions arose in this alliance as the supply of Western goods began to decrease. Around 1944, "the Watanami women began to say that the Mahekoto-teri had many things, many machetes, but that they didn't give them away, that when they came, they ate so much and their stomachs were never full... Fusive answered: 'It is not true; you women always talk like that, but they have always given us the machetes they had. With those machetes we have cleaned our *shapunus* and prepared our *zocas*' (Biocca 1971:206). Such complaints, unheeded, can eventually lead to war, and on this occasion the visiting Mahekoto-teri quickly returned home.

The need of the militarily exposed groups on the north bank continuously to reaffirm their alliance with gifts was illustrated when the Watanami-teri visited the Namowei during the brief period around 1945 when no *napé* passed by. The visitors failed to bring the expected machetes, yet they asked for dogs anyway, on the promise of future machetes (Valero 1984:307). "The women said, 'Do not give them dogs. They are not going to bring anything,' You like to eat game from my dog," said Fusive, "but you do not give anything." The Watanami-teri got a little angry. 'We are not going to come again,' they said. 'If you do not come, better,' responded the women" (Valero 1984:307). This incident shows how a retracting Western presence can generate disputes over unfulfilled expectations in the exchange of Western goods. But in this instance, the retraction was quickly reversed, and so war was avoided.

The middle 1940s were also a time of increasing illness. Fevers, probably malaria, began to strike frequently (Biocca 1971:211–13; Valero 1984:261, 270–72, 308–10). At first only a few among the Namowei died. The Yanomamo now understood that the new illnesses had been introduced by the *napé*, and they developed a standard response of fleeing into deep forest or onto high ground at the first word of an epidemic. Unfortunately, those who carried that word usually brought the pathogen with it. The first really deadly epidemic occurred in what may
have been 1945 (Valero 1984:287–300). It spread from the nape to the Wakawaka-teri and then to the Mahekoto-teri, and it killed some two dozen or more people among the Namowei.

In chapter 3 I argued that a large number of deaths caused by disease disrupts the social fabric and thus contributes to a climate of instrumental violence in social affairs. Fusise's father died in one epidemic (Valero 1984:261); a few years later, when Fusise was being provoked to war, he commented, "When my father was alive, he always used to say to me: 'Do not kill.' Now the old man's no longer here" (Biocca 1971:220). When Fusise later seemed hell-bent on starting the killing, people said, "He no longer listens to advice" (Biocca 1971:228). Multiply this rupture of restraining influence by dozens of relationships, and one can appreciate the destabilizing impact of so many deaths.

Yet for the moment (c. 1944–47), no war is reported in the area, although the fighting along the Ocamo River, described earlier, may have begun as early as 1946. Under prevailing political conditions, and with very limited quantities of goods coming in, the accumulation of an outstanding quantity of trade goods was unlikely (as is illustrated by the account of the Mahekoto-teri man who gave Fusise his only ax), and the passage of nape was unpredictable. Thus, the incentive to raid was limited.

Nevertheless, there were rumors and physical signs in the forest that made the Namowei believe Shamata raiding parties had entered the area, though they never actually attacked (Valero 1984:260–61, 270, 284). Their lack of action suggests they were not trying very hard. The true intentions of the Shamata cannot be ascertained. The slaughter of their people remained unavenged, but they also remained isolated from sources of Western goods. Any passes they made to the north, toward the Orinoco, may have been for the purpose of seeking out any opportunity they could find, much as the Wanitima-teri and Bisaasi-teri had done in their explorations a few years before.

The year 1946 is a benchmark for the renewal of Western penetration. And it was in that year that Juan Noguer found the new garden the Mahekoto-teri had made along the mosquito-infested bank of the Orinoco. As Cocco (1972:74) reconstructs it, this garden was established after the parent group fissioned and its other division had moved north toward the Ocamo, where it became known as Puunabiwe-teri. (The Puunabiwe-teri were involved in the wars along the Ocamo in the later 1940s, described in a previous section.) The Platantal garden was designed to attract nape, and it did. Valero (1984:318) reports one gen-

eroius nape's visiting the Mahekoto-teri around 1947. Both external historical sources (Cocco 1972:91) and Valero's narratives indicate regular commerce between nape and Mahekoto-teri and others along the river thereafter. The details of this commerce relate to a developing conflict that had its roots in the early 1940s.

At some point, perhaps in late 1943 or early 1944, there was a serious confrontation at a feast hosted by Fusise's Wanitima-teri (Biocca 1971:207–208; Valero 1984:252–53). In Biocca's version, this was the occasion at which the Mahekoto-teri were scared away after complaints about their stinginess. After they left without trading, and perhaps related to that rupture, an ugly quarrel started among the gathered Namowei when children began throwing firebrands. The Bisaasi-teri guests were already angry because, they said, they had been slighted in the distribution of maize and meat. Adults were drawn into the children's quarrel; Fusise's temper was again a major factor. The Namowei subdivisions angrily went separate ways.

This incident appears to mark the beginning of the conflict between Fusise and his Wanitima-teri against Rashawe and his Bisaasi-teri, although it would be years before this ill will led to war. Because of its start in a dispute over the distribution of meat, along with developments yet to be described, this war is one that could support the argument for game depletion as a cause of war—which I will discuss further in the concluding chapter. But other triggers are also reported for this conflict: Chagnon (1966:154) has the split start in a bad club fight over a harvest of peach-palm fruit in an old garden. Subsequently, he wrote (1977:76): "This split was caused by constant bickering within the group and club fights over women." All these diverse disputes can be seen as manifestations of a more fundamental conflict of interests—one that was tearing asunder old ties of kinship and amity, so that any issue could be the start of a quarrel. But what was the source of the antagonism?

Fusise's violent disposition had not only made him enemies, it had also cost him supporters. Many went to other groups after the killing of Ruwhawi, leaving him with about thirty male backers (Biocca 1971:201). Now, after the firebrand fight, some of his closest male relatives went off with the Bisaasi-teri (Valero 1984:268). Fusise said he never wanted to get back together with the other Namowei (Biocca 1971:209), and he took the Wanitima-teri off to visit the Tetehei-teri, an unusual splinter group of Namowei who, many years before, had gone off to live apart (Biocca 1971:209; Valero 1984: 255–58). They still maintained relations with other Namowei and with
Fusiwé in particular, because his senior wife was Tetèchei-teri (Valero 1984:161). The Tetèchei-teri lived in high, flat land west of Patanowateri. Their unusual mix of crops, including avocado and bitter manioc, suggests Yecuana influence.12

The Tetèchei-teri showed Fusiwé a choice garden site about three days' walk away (Biocca 1971:209–10; Valero 1984:258, 300). Because of its thin trees, this appears to have been an old garden, but no Yanomami had been known to live in the area before. The garden became known as Shihota, and the Tetèchei-teri contributed labor and cuttings to get it going. The Yanomami are always making new gardens, but this one was to be especially important. Shihota, as located by Chagnon (1992a:167), was in the upper reaches of Caño Auguy, about 20 kilometers west of Patanowa. This made Fusiwé's people the westernmost of all the Namowei, bringing them almost parallel to the Mahekoto-teri (see map 5). The Shihota site is very important in subsequent political history.

Shortly after starting the garden, Fusiwé opened a direct path down to the Orinoco near Platanal, a trip that could be made in just one [long] day. He and his brothers built a bridge to the other side, and they made the journey to Mahekoto-teri three times during the short period they made use of Shihota (Valero 1984:302, 388). Fusiwé at this time was still calculating how to establish direct contact with whites, and this location put him in a much better position to do so.13 Not only that, but at Shihota he would also have the potential of becoming a middleman in trade to Shamatari groups. It is this exceptional location for trading, I believe, that made Shihota unusually valuable.

Still, Fusiwé had not severed his ties to other Namowei, and over the next year or so (c. 1943), he would join with them—including the Bisaasi-teri—for major feasts (Valero 1984:268, 275). (Feasting would intensify over the 1940s because proper mortuary custom required collective consumption of the burned and powdered bones of all those who were dying in epidemics [Valero 1984:275, 301].) The Hasupuwé-teri also joined them at one feast, a sign of their deepening alliance with the Namowei. Even though some Mahekoto-teri were also in attendance, the Namowei on this occasion still interceded as middlemen in trade between them and the Hasupuwé-teri (Valero 1984:284).

At the time of these feasts, Fusiwé was openly conciliatory toward the Bisaasi-teri (Valero 1984:268). But the Bisaasi-teri had other plans. Sometime in early to middle 1946, they began clearing a garden for themselves within shouting distance of the Wanitima-teri settlement at Shihota (Valero 1984:301–302). They publicly justified this move by claiming that it was farther away from potential Shamatari enemies, although that reason alone would hardly explain why they went to this particular location. Fusiwé, his men greatly outnumbered by the Bisaasi-teri, kept cool even when he found they had taken cuttings from his garden without asking permission and that they had hunted out all the game along his new path down to the Orinoco. Perhaps a year went by, during which Fusiwé's people and the Bisaasi-teri spent much of their time on trek in the forest, as usual. When Fusiwé returned to Shihota and found that the Bisaasi-teri had again taken food from his gardens, he actually offered to help them with more (Valero 1984:313, 317).

Then the Bisaasi-teri turned to open, flagrant provocation, stealing the Wanitima-teri's tobacco and destroying other crops. When Fusiwé set up a pounding match to clear the air, the Bisaasi-teri men came painted black, as if for war, and conched staves in their hands when they struck. The match escalated to side slapping with the flat sides of axes, and the older peace leaders had to intervene to urge calm and a return to friendship (Valero 1984:319–21).

The Hasupuwé-teri seized this moment to assert themselves in their alliance with the Namowei groups that now had to worry about the Bisaasi-teri. They contributed to the Namowei's sense of vulnerability by warning Fusiwé that the Shamatari were preparing to attack, at a time when many of his men had not recovered from the pounding match. When some Namowei later went to feast with the Hasupuwé-teri, the hosts took several of their women, although all but one quickly escaped. In their present circumstances, the Namowei were in no position to retaliate (Valero 1984:322–23).

But to return to the central conflict: the Bisaasi-teri did not want to be friends with the Wanitima-teri. They stepped up their provocations and vandalism of Fusiwé's garden. At first Fusiwé's wrath was turned by old Repowe, who reminded everyone about the bad old days and the terrible costs of fighting.14 But when Fusiwé returned to Shihota on another occasion, he found new Bisaasi-teri destruction. Then they shot arrows into his shabono—arrows with fresh curare. This attack was serious, although the arrows were unlikely to kill anyone when fired at random. When the Bisaasi-teri attempted to enter the shabono, an enraged Fusiwé led a charge that drove them back—demonstrating that one exceptionally dangerous man can prevail over greater numbers (Biocca 1971:218–23; Valero 1984:323–32).

Now the Bisaasi-teri shouted out their demand: "You must go away; you must leave us this roca [garden]; here we must live. Go and live
with the Patanweteri; we must be masters of this place" (Biocca 1971: 224). Greatly outnumbered and virtually unable to leave the confines of the shabono, Fusiwe did leave Shihota under an escort sent to bring him to Patanowa-teri. Some months passed without incident (Biocca 1971: 225–27; Valero 1984:332–35). "The Bisaasi-teri never came to bother us. What they wanted they had gotten; to be owners of our garden" (Valero 1984:335). The conflict seemed to be over.

Then the contact situation changed. In September 1948 the New Tribes missionaries visited Platanal. The Mahekoto-teri came to tell the Namowei that many whites had visited and left axes, machetes, and cloth. They invited the Namowei to a feast (Biocca 1971:227; Valero 1984:335). The arrival of the missionaries in the area signaled the beginning of a much more substantial supply of goods to Mahekoto-teri and others along the river—a supply that, in the perspective argued here, made the Shihota location much more valuable.

At this point, Fusiwe’s youngest and favorite wife began taunting him for being afraid of the Bisaasi-teri. When the Namowei left for the feast at Platanal, Fusiwe announced that he would stay home (Biocca 1971:227–29; Valero 1984:335–37). "Ask for a machete for me too," he said. When Repowe asked if he would leave the Bisaasi-teri alone, Fusiwe replied: "I have no further thought of challenging the Pishaan-seteri.” “But it was a pure lie,” adds Valero (Biocca 1971:228).

A Time of Killing

When the Patanowa-teri left home to go to Platanal, Fusiwe and a few of his followers went to a small settlement near the Bisaasi-teri, where a brother-in-law lived. He misled his host about his true intentions, but his plan was to leave his women there for safety while he went to kill. His own brothers, however, would not accompany him on this deadly mission, so he set off with just four inexperienced nephews and his son-in-law. As they drew near to the Bisaasi-teri at Shihota, they were almost discovered. Fusiwe decided to shoot the first man he saw, and he did—even though it happened to be a young man toward whom he felt very paternal. Fusiwe’s companions fled instantly, and they all worked their way back through trackless forest. The youth shot by Fusiwe died (Biocca 1971:227–334; Valero 1984:338–42). Thus began the war among the Namowei—the most serious war involving these people since the rubber boom. It started within weeks of the first mission contact.

The Bisaasi-teri followed the raiders back to the small settlement from which they had launched the attack (Biocca 1971:234–43; Valero 1984:343–49). They shot at a man who went out to collect honey, then remained for about two days, firing at anyone they could see but only wounding one person. Shortly after they ran out of arrows and went home, an emissary came from Patanowa-teri, telling Fusiwe “that you are too few to be able to fight against the Pishaanseteri, who are so many. Our father sends to tell you to come and live with us, in our shapu.” (Biocca 1971:241). They returned to Patanowa-teri to hear a long scolding by old Repowe. Repowe was Fusiwe’s father’s brother (Valero 1984:262), and by extending protection, he was fulfilling his avuncular obligations. But other Patanowa-teri had had enough of Fusiwe and the fights he started. Other Patanowa-teri had decided that Fusiwe must die.

Shortly after Fusiwe rejoined the Patanowa-teri, they all received an invitation to a feast at Hasupuwe-teri (Biocca 1971: 243–47; Valero 1984:350–54). Fusiwe feared he would be killed during the trip, and he was right. Some Patanowa-teri conspired with the Bisaasi-teri, letting them know when and where they would be traveling. The Patanowa-teri made camp apart from Fusiwe’s family and pointed them out when Bisaasi-teri raiders arrived. Early in the morning, Fusiwe was helping his son fix a vine to a basket. Without warning, he was hit in the belly by an arrow with a long bamboo blade, and in the shoulder by a poison arrow.

The tushawa did not utter a shout, only the small boy was shouting with fear. He was standing upright; from that great wound in his stomach, made with a bamboo arrowhead, protruded the long intestine with that yellow fat. He walked a few steps, tried to stand up, but fell. “This time they have killed me!” he murmured. (Biocca 1971:247)

The assassination of Fusiwe did not end the fighting, even though it should have more than satisfied Bisaasi-teri needs for revenge. Instead, the fighting continued for about two years (Biocca 1971:259–65; Valero 1984:364–65, 369–70, 376). The Wanitima-teri, after Fusiwe’s death, melded into the other Namowei groups: Yaminawe-teri, Rashawe-teri, and, especially, Patanowa-teri. (In future discussions, I will refer to this cluster of local groups as eastern Namowei, as opposed to the western Namowei of Bisaasi-teri and its later subdivisions.) These eastern groups received strong support from the Hasupuwe-teri. Perhaps two months after Fusiwe died, the Bisaasi-teri ambushed and killed a Yaminawe-teri man in the forest. A few days later, a large party of Hasupuwe-teri arrived, ready for war. The Hasupuwe-teri headman—whose interests in
all this are far from clear—said that he personally would kill Rashawe. About fifty men assembled, with all the ritual characteristic of a classic Yanomami war expedition. With the allied Namowei groups, they set out to attack Bisaasi-teri in two coordinated raids.

Unfortunately for my discussion, at this moment Helena Valero became convinced that her life and the lives of her children were in danger because her dead husband had left so many enemies among the Namowei. She fled, along with another of his wives, who, to Valero’s distress, deceived her and took her along trails to join the Bisaasi-teri (Biocca 1971:265–79; Valero 1984:371–78). Not surprisingly, Valero felt unsafe with them too, and she soon continued on to Mahkekoto-teri and beyond. We will follow her odyssey in the next chapter. What it means for now is that we lose her detailed observations about the Namowei.

Judging from Valero’s account, as far as it goes (Biocca 1971:277; Valero 1984:376, 380, 384–85, 390, 409, 411, 419–20), and from Chagnon’s (1966:154–56) reconstruction, it seems that about seven raids occurred altogether, including the first one by Fusiwe, and that about eight men were killed and one woman captured. The eastern Namowei with their Hasupuwe-teri allies had superior numbers, and the Bisaasi-teri were losing the war of attrition. Some of them began seeking temporary refuge with groups north of the Orinoco. The Bisaasi-teri were being forced to abandon Shihota. In 1949, they moved west to a place close to the middle Mavaca known as Kreibowei (see Chagnon 1992:167). “Raiding between the two factions ceased after 1950” (Chagnon 1966:175).

How can we understand this war over a garden site, when everybody knows that the Yanomami do not fight over land? The first visit of the missionaries made the Shihota location much more valuable in terms of access to Western goods. But what did Fusiwe hope to accomplish? That was something even his closest relatives pondered. He seemed actually to want to create a situation in which war between the Bisaasi-teri and eastern Namowei was inescapable. Valero reports a comment made by Fusiwe, followed by her own observation at the time of the raid: “All the Namoetari live apart; I want to kill the Pishaamseteri so that I can see whether all those who live apart join together for fear, in one single shatpuno.” Perhaps he wants to go back to being chieftain of them all?” (Biocca 1971:232–33).

This Machiavellian strategy makes sense. The combined forces of the eastern Namowei and their Hasupuwe-teri allies did indeed prove to be more than a match for the Bisaasi-teri. It would have been a very different situation if Fusiwe’s Wanitima-teri had been left on their own—and perhaps the Bisaasi-teri were hoping for that. But with the eastern Namowei allied to Hasupuwe-teri, and with Fusiwe’s extraordinarily aggressive war leadership, there was good reason to imagine that the Bisaasi-teri could be driven away quickly. In war, however, things do not always work out as planned.

Without Valero’s firsthand observations, it is difficult to reconstruct the objectives behind the continuing raids and counterfeit raids. Certainly it seems significant that the period during which they transpired (1949 and much of 1950) was the time when the New Tribes Mission was sending supplies to the Mahkekoto-teri (Anduze 1960:225). And it is noteworthy that in 1949, the Bisaasi-teri at Shihota had already begun acting as trade middlemen to some Shamataris. But it is not my intention to suggest that every single raid must have an ulterior economic motive. With the first killing by Fusiwe, a state of war had been created. It is very difficult to live close to people who may be planning to kill you. Raid and counterfeit followed elementary military logic until the smaller antagonist, Bisaasi-teri, moved out of striking range. As it turned out, they moved into even worse trouble.

The Bisaasi-teri began clearing the Kreibowei garden around the same time they ambushed Fusiwe (Biocca 1971:281–84; Valero 1984:384–89). At a three-day round trip from Shihota, they thought Kreibowei was safe from raiders, although at least one Patanowari-teri party did reach it and kill a man. But the Bisaasi-teri did not—could not—completely abandon their Shihota garden. In early 1950 they were back, waiting for the peach-palm harvest. While at Shihota, they were visited simultaneously by people from the Mahkekoto-teri and Iwahikoroba-teri, a Shamatai group to their south. By this time, Barker and others had come to spend time at Platanal, although they had gone back downstream with a promise to return. Other nape were now regularly trading machetes for plantains. Thus, well provided but still fearing people to their north, the Mahkekoto-teri were actively courting both sides in the Namowei war.

The Bisaasi-teri were positioned between the Mahkekoto-teri and the Iwahikoroba-teri. The Iwahikoroba-teri visitors invited the Bisaasi-teri to a feast, and not for the first time. Even before the killing of Fusiwe, Bisaasi-teri “already went at times to feasts of the Shamatai” (Valero 1984:377). Valero believes some of them were already planning treachery against the Bisaasi-teri at this point (Biocca 1971:274; Valero 1984:360). Perhaps so, but that treachery, when it did occur,
would be a split decision. What seems certain, in this pattern of visiting, is that by 1949 the Bisaasi-teri had begun to act as middlemen in the trade of Western goods to the Shamatari, perhaps even before driving the Wanitima-teri from Shihota. Indeed, Chagnon (1977:102) writes that before the treacherous feast to come, the Bisaasi-teri were only on trading terms with the Iwahikoroba-teri. Shortly after this meeting at Shihota, Valero moved north of the Orinoco, and her further reports about the ensuing carnage are based on what she heard.

In September 1950, Barker and Hilker established their residence at Platantal. At the time, the Bisaasi-teri were residing at Kreibowei, close to the Mavaca River. From there, in February 1951 they went to a feast at Iwahikoroba-teri, their third since Valero had been with them—a number that indicates very active trade. On February 3, according to one missionary (Acebes 1954:242), the Bisaasi-teri guests were set upon by attackers both within and around the Iwahikoroba-teri village. Rashawe was slain, along with ten to fourteen other men. Six or seven women were captured, although most of them later escaped back to Bisaasi-teri (Barker 1959:151–52; Biocca 1971:302; Chagnon 1966:158–59, 1967:144, 151, 1977:102–103; Valero 1984:432). This is the largest reported killing ever for any attack on Yanomami by Yanomami.

The Iwahikoroba-teri were not united in this plan. “A few of the Iwahikoroba-teri refused to participate in the slaughter and even helped some [Bisaasi-teri] escape” (Chagnon 1977:103). And the Iwahikoroba-teri did not act alone. In on the assault were also some Shamatari from the village led by the slain Ruwahiwe's brother Sibarariwa, along with some Hasupuwe-teri and even some Patanowa-teri (Biocca 1971:302; Barker 1959:151; Chagnon 1966:158; Valero 1984:432). Just after the killing of Fusiwe, Valero had heard the Hasupuwe-teri leader propose enlisting the Shamatari in an attack of this nature (Biocca 1971:283; Valero 1984:360). Thus, in a sense this attack at Iwahikoroba-teri was the final and most successful by the eastern Namowei alliance against the Bisaasi-teri.

But why would the Iwahikoroba-teri go along with this plan against their new trade partners? Revenge for Ruwahiwe's death some eight years before has limited explanatory value for their actions. Although the map published by Chagnon (1992a:167) suggests that Iwahikoroba-teri was a direct outgrowth of Ruwahiwe's people at Konabuma, his other writings (1966:172–73, 1974:9, 86, 1977:102–103) indicate that Ruwahiwe's people formed a different group, led by Sibarariwa, called Mowaraoba-teri (and more recently, Mishimishimabowei-teri).

(Of course, it would be quite normal for people to move between these two entities.) Chagnon (1966:158) says that Sibarariwa's people “persuaded” the Iwahikoroba-teri headman—a man of Aramamise-teri origin (Biocca 1971:281)—to agree to the treachery.

I acknowledge that the killing of some six kinsmen in the 1942 slaughter could have been seen as sufficient motivation for Sibarariwa's people to attack, even though they would be killing the people who killed Fusiwe, the organizer of that earlier slaughter. But in my view, the Iwahikoroba-teri would not be persuaded to take such an extreme step, both severing a trade connection and involving themselves in warfare, unless they themselves had something important at stake. What were their interests at this time? More specifically, what had changed to make them shift from trade to war?

First, the Bisaasi-teri had moved from Shihota to Kreibowei next to the Mavaca River. The Mavaca was a major avenue for commerce in the nineteenth century, and it was the scene of the rubber tapping during the boom. Its headwaters were explored by Cardona Puig in 1941, and although there is no specific report of nape on the Mavaca in the late 1940s, it seems likely that woodsmen and perhaps even missionaries had visited it by 1950.

So, like the Mahukito-teri before them and many others after, the Bisaasi-teri moved to Kreibowei not merely to get away from their enemies but also to approach a major river, which put them in position to make direct contact with whites. Moreover, from Kreibowei they could circumvent the swamps found in the right-angle southeast of the Orinoco-Mavaca juncture (Chagnon 1977:135) as they moved down the Mavaca toward the Orinoco, where they would surely meet nape. Indeed, at the time of the slaughter they were already working on another garden at a place called Kobou farther down the Mavaca (Chagnon 1966:159, 1977:103).

The Bisaasi-teri's movements clearly posed a threat to the Iwahikoroba-teri, who were “located on the Mavaca River” (Chagnon 1966:158) far upstream. The Mavaca is very narrow in places, and ambush is easy (Chagnon 1974:191). As we will see later, whoever controls the downstream areas can control passage upstream. Thus a successful Bisaasi-teri move to Kreibowei or Kobou would effectively eliminate the chances for the Iwahikoroba-teri to make direct contact with whites. And of course, the stakes for all parties took a tremendous leap only a month or two before the slaughter, when the New Tribes Mission was established.
By killing the Bisaasi-teri headman and so many of his men, the Iwahikoroba-teri could reasonably expect the Bisaasi-teri to flee, leaving the Mavaca open. Chagnon (1977:103) describes the Bisaasi-teri predicament: “Kobou was still too new to support the group, and hunger forced them to return to Kreibowe. As this location was well known to their treacherous allies, they wished to abandon it as soon as possible, knowing that their enemies could easily kill the rest of the men and abduct the remaining women.” As I will describe in the next chapter, the Bisaasi-teri did abandon the Mavaca temporarily and move in with Mahekoto-teri and others. But they soon returned to the Mavaca, where they effectively prevented any nape from traveling up to Shamatari country for nearly twenty years, and where they benefited tremendously from their position as middlemen.

Looking back, the end of the 1940s was a remarkably violent period for the people of the Orinoco-Mavaca area. Tensions had been growing since the nape began coming back in 1946, but without lethal violence. Then, in slightly more than two years between 1948 and 1951—beginning some weeks after the NTM missionaries’ first visit to Mahekoto-teri and culminating a few months after the establishment of their permanent residence there—some 8 men died in the Namowei raiding and 11 to 15 more in the slaughter at Iwahikoroba-teri. These are the first reported Namowei war deaths (Ruwhahiwe’s people were not Namowei) since the one reported around 1931. The striking atypicality of this toll of 19 to 23 deaths is revealed in Chagnon’s (1966:62) first tabulation of mortality among the Namowei, in which a total of 31 Namowei males are reported to have died in war. In later chapters, we will see that nearly all the remaining Namowei war deaths are accounted for by violence that occurred during the period while Chagnon himself was in the field.

The Yanomamo and the Missionaries: 1950 to 1960

In the decade following the founding of the New Tribes mission at Platanal, the Western residential presence on the upper Orinoco went through many changes, but generally it expanded and settled in. For the Yanomamo, the first half of the 1950s were disrupted and violent, but the latter half saw a decline in active warfare. Our understanding of these years is, as always, shaped by the nature of available sources, and these require some preliminary discussion.

When we last saw Helena Valero, after the death of Fusiwe and the outbreak of war between the Bisaasi-teri and the eastern Namowei alliance, she had just fled for her life from the eastern Namowei. She stayed briefly with the Bisaasi-teri and the Mahekoto-teri and then went to live with the Puunabiwe-teri, whose main village at the time was between the Manaviche and Ocano rivers (see map 4). There she became the wife of Akawe, another exceptionally violent man. She lived in this area until her final escape in 1956. Valero continues to provide some information about the groups south of the Orinoco, but her perspective now shifts to its north.

The politics of this area are different from those south of the Orinoco. More villages lie closer together; most of them are divisions of the Uhepeki population bloc (see Lizot 1988:522). Moreover, there was considerable population flux during the time Valero was there: rapid relocations of villages, splits, fusions, trekking, and extended visiting by individuals and families. So much was happening, roughly simultaneously, that any storyteller would find it difficult to arrange all the events in a linear narrative. Here the role played by the editors of Valero’s