The time frame of this chapter is shorter than those of the others because individual and collective aggression among Orinoco-Mavaca Yanomamo during these six years is described in such detail. That is due to the untiring efforts of Napoleon Chagnon, whose initial field research among the Bisaasi-teri in 1964–66 produced the widely read text Yanomamo: The Fierce People. I do not disagree with Chagnon’s assessment of the social significance of violence at this moment in time, but I do differ strongly about its relationship to the processes of Western contact.

In the preface to the second edition of Yanomamo, Chagnon (1977:xi) claims that the book portrays Yanomamo society “before it was altered or destroyed by our culture.” In the prologue or introduction to more recent editions, he asserts that the Yanomamo “retain their native patterns of warfare and political integrity without interference from the outside world” (1992a:1). In the fifth edition, retitled Yanomamo: The Last Days of Eden, Chagnon (1992b:xiv–xv) reaffirms that their intense warfare represents the violence of “our evolutionary past,” and that which is common among tribal peoples “prior to their contact with the outside world.” He dismisses the idea that this violence is a result of Western contact as “the ‘bad breath’ theory of tribal warfare.” (In the foreword to that edition, E. O. Wilson [1992:ix] suggests that “the Yanomamo way of life gives us the clearest view of the conditions under which the human mind evolved biologically during deep history.”) Similar statements are found in other of Chagnon’s writings (see Ferguson 1992a:199–200).

I assert, instead, that the weight of observations from diverse times
and places firmly establishes that there is, at a minimum, a temporal and spatial connection between Yanomami wars and changing circumstances of Western contact. However unaffected by Western contact the Orinoco-Mavaca Yanomami may have seemed to Chagnon in the mid-1960s, their movements and political relationships had been strongly conditioned by the presence of Westerners since the latest wave of contact began in the late 1930s.

By 1960, the Bisaasi-teri’s location at Boca Mavaca had become the center of Western presence on the far upper Orinoco. To recapitulate their most recent history, by the middle 1950s they had reestablished themselves as an independent group and had become important traders in Western goods. In 1958 they moved to Boca Mavaca to obtain the manufactures offered to them by the government malaria station. In 1959 they were joined by two New Tribes missionaries, one each for the upper and lower divisions of the Bisaasi-teri. The closely allied Monou-teri lived a short distance up the Mavaca, the three settlements together making up what I call the “western Namowei.”

Shortly after the move to Boca Mavaca, the Bisaasi-teri began to develop an alliance with a Shamatari group living farther up the Mavaca. In 1960, the western Namowei obtained the cooperation of these new allies in a treacherous attack on some old Shamatari enemies, the Mowaraobateri. Except for this incident, the political climate of 1960 was “quite serene” (Chagnon 1977:80).

In this chapter, I attempt to demonstrate that the wars and other conflicts of the middle 1960s—those made famous in Yanomami: The Fierce People—are directly connected to changes in the Western presence around Boca Mavaca, including the arrival of Chagnon himself.

Developing and Disintegrating Alliances, 1960 to 1963

The circumstances of Western contact described for the later 1950s continued without major change through 1963. There were now three missions in the area: the Salesians at the mouth of the Ocamo with the Iyewe-teri and at Platanal with the Mahekoto-teri, and the New Tribes missions along with the government malaria station at Boca Mavaca next to the Bisaasi-teri. I found no comment about the activities of forest workers at this time, but their contacts with Yanomami were becoming more regular and routine during the 1950s and probably continued as such in the new decade.

The Yanomami’s movements to be closer to the rivers and West-erners were even more pronounced throughout the 1960s than in the 1950s (Steinhart de Goetz 1969:24), despite the plague of mosquitoes and other insects close to the water. With more Yanomami living closer to the rivers, malaria was a serious health problem. Major outbreaks are reported for 1960 (Smolke 1976:50) and 1963 (Lizot 1977:503). Specifics are lacking, but generally with such diseases, people in close contact with Westerners and their medicines are less likely to die than those who are exposed to the pathogens and left to fend for themselves—an additional advantage of having a resident Westerner.

Three scientific expeditions passed through in these years, adding to the wide distribution of Western goods. In 1961, Inga Steinhart de Goetz made her initial visit to the Yabita-wa-teri near the Raulal de Guajáribos, although she would not establish regular residence there until late 1965 (Steinhart de Goetz 1969:54 91). That same year, Miguel Larrisse and Johannes Wilbert worked somewhere in the upper Orinoco, collecting 140 blood samples (Wilbert 1963:196). In 1962-63, Ettore Biocca led an expedition into the area, briefly visiting the Iyewe-teri, Witakaya-teri, Puunabiwe-teri, Bisaasi-teri, Monou-teri, and others (Migiazza 1972:390). Biocca, of course, was the first to record Helen Valero’s life history.

Thus the early 1960s were a time of relative stability in Western residence and of multiple sources of Western goods for those close to the major rivers. These conditions are conducive to local peace (although there may have been unreported wars involving more interior groups). However, new political trends had been set in motion that would lead to increasing tensions and sporadic violence, and, in 1964, to a new outbreak of intense warfare in the area.

The late 1950s and early 1960s saw the political fortunes of the Mahekoto-teri and Bisaasi-teri diverge. As the latter rose in prominence, wealth, and power, the former declined. Although Platanal remained a mission post, it was now secondary to Boca Mavaca. Compared with their situation in the middle 1950s, the Mahekoto-teri would have had fewer trade goods to provide to their more remote allies. Probably related to this change, and certainly compounding its impact, two factions split off from Mahekoto-teri in 1960 and 1961, following internal disputes. The new local groups, Shashanawe-teri and Tayari-teri, remained at peace with the parent village (Cocco 1972:399), but the loss of manpower represented by these defections would have significantly weakened Mahekoto-teri militarily.

Political relations between the Mahekoto-teri and Bisaasi-teri cooled
at this point, and the two ceased to participate jointly in feasts (Chagnon 1977:103). It is in their relationships with their respective upstream neighbors that the difference between the two becomes clearest. While the Bisaasi-teri were building new alliances, the Mahekoto-teri saw their alliance network fall apart into war.

Upstream from Mahekoto-teri, a series of conflicts developed in perhaps 1961 or 1962 (based on Chagnon 1966:76, 176). Virtually all that is reported is contained in one paragraph concerning the political relations of the Patanowa-teri (Chagnon 1966:156-57). As reported there, the Yabitawa-teri and Kasharawe-teri (segments of the old Watananami-teri, Maheko-teri's ally from the 1940s) killed a Boreta-teri man in a club fight. His sister was married to the Maheko-teri headman. (The Boreta-teri were Maheko-teri's enemies in the middle 1950s, but apparently they had ceded wives and established an alliance since then.) The Maheko-teri then began raiding the Yabitawa-teri, and in one raid killed a Patanowa-teri man who was doing bride service, thus antagonizing the Patanowa-teri. Then the Yabitawa-teri seized a woman from the Patanowa-teri, who in return began to raid the Yabitawa-teri, who took refuge with the Kasharawe-teri. The Hasupuwe-teri (formerly the great allies of the eastern Namowe) took the Yabitawa-teri's side and also attacked the Patanowa-teri. Only the Ashatowa-teri (formerly attached to the Hasupuwe-teri) remained friendly to the Patanowa-teri.

This sparse narrative can only suggest the deeper political currents at work here, and the details should not bear too much weight without other confirmation. But one thing is clear: a network of alliances was breaking down into mutual hostility. Except for the Boreta-teri, all these groups had been at peace with each other around the middle 1950s, and some of the alliances dated back into the 1940s or even earlier. From what we know about alliances in general, and about the Western contact situation around and beyond Platanal in the late 1950s and early 1960s, it is predictable that these groups would be bound by numerous marriage ties, each accompanied by strong expectations of a continuing supply of Western goods. As the supply of Western goods entering this alliance network diminished along with the diminished Western presence at Platanal, bad feelings, perceived insults, and conflicts over women all would have intensified dramatically.

Political relations upstream from Mahekoto-teri were very different from those developing up the Mavaca. Boca Mavaca in 1960 was a power center. Upper Bisaasi-teri, lower Bisaasi-teri, and Monou-teri each had its own political connections and interests, but the villages could and did act together for common cause (Chagnon 1966:127-29). The Bisaasi-teri had the malaria post and two missionaries—the heaviest concentration of Westerners on the river, at least above Iywei-teri. Very soon after the Western connection solidified, these western Namowe began to act like a power center.

New alliances developed almost instantly between all three western Namowe villages and a large Shamatari village up the Mavaca, Puriritawa-teri. After the Puriritawa-teri participated in the treachery against the Mowaraoba-teri, they fissioned and moved north to two new gardens they had already begun. The new groups, the Shamatari allies of the western Namowe, were called Momaribowe-teri and Reyabowewi-teri (Chagnon 1966:163-65, 173-74, 1977:78-79). The unequal, exploitative character of these alliances is described by Chagnon around 1966. The basic principles of village-to-village trade, monopolizing a Westerner, and passing along few and worn tools are all clearly operating.

The Bisaasi-teri would obtain machetes from foreigners like me or the missionaries. When these were worn out, they would pass them on to the first Shamatari group, the Momaribowe-teri, who would wear them down even more before passing them on to their neighbors, the Reyabowewi-teri. By the time the tools reached Sibarariwa's village (the Mowaraoba-teri), they were usually unrecognizable as machetes. Most of them were broken into two or more pieces, and none of them had handles. The Bisaasi-teri did not want me to give my tools directly to the Momaribowe-teri when I went there to visit, and the Momaribowe-teri did not want me to take my tools past them to the Reyabowewi-teri.

Each group wanted a monopoly. (Chagnon 1974:11)

In exchange for Western goods, the Shamatari provided the Namowe with spun cotton, curare arrow points (Chagnon 1966:95), clay pots (1977:100), arrows, baskets, hammocks, and dogs (1983:6).3

The Namowe villages came to exhibit an inordinate proportion of village-exogamous marriages—53 percent (Chagnon 1972b:272)—and most of these represented women marrying in. By 1966, the two Bisaasi-teri settlements had "managed to acquire two dozen or so women from the Shamatari while having given or promised only a half-dozen in return" (Chagnon 1977:80). (The Bisaasi-teri at the time numbered 136 people [Chagnon 1966:58].) The chain of trading partners demonstrated a "cline in the sex ratio from Reyabowe-teri to Bisaasi-teri":
Bisaasi-teri, 0.8 males per female; Monou-teri, 1.1; Momaribowe-teri, 1.2; and Reyahobowe-teri, 1.6 (Chagnon 1966:57–58).

Bride service requirements were similarly skewed. "The [Bisaasi-teri] men who have obtained Shamatari wives have, as well, managed to cut short their period of bride service in the Shamatari village. Conversely, Shamatari men who have been promised women of Kaobawa's group are pressed into very lengthy bride service, sometimes up to three years" (Chagnon 1977:79).

The bride service required of Shamatari men seems to have been particularly difficult. One young man from Momaribowe-teri "was doing bride service to his father-in-law, the headman of the lower group of Bisaasi-teri. . . As a Shamatari [he] was subject to a considerable amount of ridicule and harsh treatment. . . . Wakarabawa's father-in-law was particularly unpleasant to him. He denied Wakarabawa sexual access to the girl while at the same time he allowed the young men of the natal village to enjoy these privileges" (Chagnon 1974:13–14).

Chagnon does not attribute these inequalities between Bisaasi-teri and the Shamatari to the Bisaasi-teri's relative monopoly over the sources of steel tools. He alludes to a connection between the two at the very start of his dissertation, but later (Chagnon 1977:78–79) he explains this marital inequality as resulting from the vulnerability of the Shamatari allies after they had participated in the western Namowei's attack on Mowaraoba-teri in 1960. (Their participation in that attack itself needs to be explained. I argue, of course, that the Shamatari cooperated in order to improve their access to the western Namowei's trade goods.)

Whatever the case, the kind of marital imbalance reported along the Mavaca is not unusual. Similar imbalances were described elsewhere, in most detail around the Macajai mission (Early and Peters 1990; Peters 1973) and in terms of Yanomami–Yeucuana relations, but also wherever there is information about exogamous marriages by groups who monopolize a good source of Western goods. The extraction of women by strong trade controllers is the normal pattern.

The Paruritawa-teri's complicity in the western Namowei attack embroiled them in a war with more remote Shamatari. They were "relentlessly raided" (Chagnon 1977:79); they fissioned and moved closer to the Orinoco. The western Namowei provided some unspecified support in this conflict, but it was the two offshoots of the Paruritawa-teri who sustained the losses (Chagnon 1977:80). No other details are provided, but again we see a common pattern reported in many other situations: the villages one or two steps out from new Western settlement are embroiled in wars with more isolated groups.

The Context for War

By 1964, Yanomamo society in the Orinoco-Mavaca area was thoroughly oriented to the Westerners. More than a quarter of a century after napo began to reenter the upper river, and nearly fifteen years after the establishment of a resident Western presence, in the face of increasing numbers of woodsmen, scientists, and tourists, all the native groups in the vicinity of the rivers have come dependent, directly or indirectly, on Western providers. While most river groups probably had attained an acceptable minimum of basic possessions, we will see later that even steel tools remained extremely scarce among at least some of the more interior groups (see Steinforth de Goetz 1969:24, 29).

This dependence was exacerbated in 1964, when local Yanomamo experienced a catastrophic series of shocks. "During eight months of the year 1964, the Yanomama villages missionized by the Salesian fathers and the colleagues of the New Tribes suffered a famine without precedent. Hunger made felt its terrible pangs" (Cocco 1972:176). This hunger came during a memorable drought, which was followed by a flood. The flood led to a major outbreak of malaria, apparently at its worst in August and September (Cocco 1972:481). As Cocco (1972:176) tells it, only massive quantities of mission aid prevented a human disaster.

At Boca Mavaca, Barker was on "furlough," but Derek Hadley and Wallace and Margaret Jank (later to establish a mission in the Parima highlands) were hard at work. By mid-1964, they could see a major impact on the Bisaasi-teri, although not as much as they would have liked.

Some in this village have shown a real change in their lives recently and the effects of the Gospel are vividly seen in them. This tribe, which was naked and monolingual when our missionaries first arrived among them, has been a difficult one in which to work. Many in this village are still naked and hold to their old culture and superstitions. (Johnston 1964:3)

Sometime during or shortly before 1964, another major event occurred. The Salesians founded a new mission on the Orinoco across from the Mavaca under Pedro Uiterwaal (Comité 1983:46). Apparently
no Yanomamo came to reside at the mission until 1966, although the missionary was actively trying to lure them. Unfortunately, there is very
little information about this mission; much of it is contained in one comment
by Chagnon (1977:151): "There was a Salesian (Catholic) mission
across the river from Kaobawa's village all during my initial research,
but there were no Yanomamo there. It was easy to ignore them at that
time for they had no impact on the Yanomamo."

From my perspective, perhaps nothing could be more disruptive
even of established intervillage political relations than the arrival of a new,
beckoning mission. But—I repeat for emphasis—we know little else
about this mission and its relationship to the Yanomamo. Both Chagnon
described the crude competition for souls carried out between Catholi-
cs and Protestants, and the assaults by missionaries on Yanomamo
religion and culture. All the specifics in their descriptions date to 1967
or later, but it is fair to assume that some of these disruptive practices
were going on around 1964. Indeed, they were reported as early as 1959
for the Salesians at Santa Maria de los Guacac (chapter 11), and the
New Tribes missionaries' own writings reveal a frightening equation of
Yanomami culture and Satanic influence (e.g., Bou 1956; Brown Gold
1952:9).

Thus 1964 was a time of great change and widespread, multifaceted
social disruption. Into this context, in November 1964, stepped the
young graduate student, Napoleon Chagnon. For 13 months, up through
February 1966 (subtracting time spent in Caracas), Boca Mavaca would
be his primary residence (Chagnon 1977:1). Although he was intro-
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nionary's hut, Chagnon was largely on his own for his first three
months in the field because Barker left and did not rejoin him immediate-
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Fortunately for this analysis, Chagnon has been extraordinarily
forthcoming and candid about his personal dealings with the Yanom-
amo. In the following discussions, I will interpret the political and
military patterns he describes as being manifestations of an ongoing
process of Western contact. Chagnon himself was one agent of that
contact, and his presence and actions had a major impact on the course
of events. This point is made not to criticize the fieldworker but to explain
the warfare. Indeed, I do not know that Chagnon did anything differ-
ent from any other fieldworkers, except to tell us about it. But in the
complicated political context into which he unknowingly stepped, his
presence became a factor that cannot be ignored if one wishes to un-
stand the patterning of violence.

Chagnon writes disarmingly of his own naive hopes as he first
entered Yanomamo country: "Would they like me? This was important
to me; I wanted them to be so fond of me that they would adopt me into
their kinship system and way of life, because I had heard that success-
ful anthropologists always get adopted by their people" (1977:4). But
To Chagnon's distress, his main significance from the Yanomamo point
of view was as a source of steel tools, other items, and various kinds
of assistance. Speaking of the isolation and loneliness of fieldwork, he tells
of seeking friendship among the Yanomamo.

All my friends simply used my confidence to gain privileged ac-
cess to my cache of steel tools and trade goods, and looted me. I
would be bitterly disappointed that my "friend" thought no more
of me than to finesse our relationship exclusively with the inten-
tion of getting at my locked up possessions, and my depression
would hit new lows every time I discovered this. The loss of the
possession bothered me much less than the shock that I was, as
far as most of them were concerned, nothing more than a source
of desirable items; no holds were barred in relieving me of these,
since I was considered something subhuman, a non-Yanomamo.
(Chagnon 1977:8)

After repeated visits into the 1970s, Chagnon (1974:164–65) again
discusses the Yanomamo's incessant demands upon him and the implic-
tions of extortion and generosity for personal status. He confirms
that efforts were made to monopolize him: "Each group wanted me to
visit them and only them and resented the fact that I took posses-
sions to other Yanomamo . . . They publicly defended and justified their
desires by accusing their neighbors of chicane and thievery, in some cases
while visitors from the villages so denounced were actually present. 'Bu
noshi omabou!' they would say to me—'we want you all to ourselves!'"
(Chagnon 1974:164).

It should be kept in mind that when Chagnon arrived in the field in
November 1964, he "did not speak a word of their language" (Chagnon
1977:5)—and for the first three months or so, neither of the Protes-
tant missionaries was around to help him (1977:151). In later years, his
no Yanomamo came to reside at the mission until 1966, although the missionary was actively trying to lure them. Unfortunately, there is very little information about this mission; much of it is contained in one comment by Chagnon (1977:151): “There was a Salesian (Catholic) mission across the river from Kaobawa’s village all during my initial research, but there were no Yanomamo there. It was easy to ignore them at that time for they had no impact on the Yanomamo.”

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Yanomamo friends would reminisce about how easy it was to trick or intimidate him into giving away "vast quantities of valuable goods for almost nothing" (1977:xii).

It seems clear that the Bisaasi-teri were adept at extracting political advantage from his presence. From a letter written while on a visit to Caracas in late February 1965, we learn:

The village I'm living in really thinks I am the be-all and end-all. I broke the final ice with them by participating in their dancing and singing one night. That really impressed them. They want to take me all over Waicaland to show me off. Their whole attitude toward me changed dramatically. Unfortunately, they want me to dance all the time now. You should have seen me in my feathers and loincloth! They were so anxious to show me off that they arranged to take me to the first Shamatai village so that I could dance with them. (Chagnon 1972a:67)

Dancing in another village is part of politics—one way of displaying strength. The participation of a white man in feathers and loincloth, virtually declaring his identification with Bisaas-teri in intervillage relations, would represent a major coup. And it was during these first months of Chagnon's fieldwork that the Bisaas-tieri's conflicts with Shamatai and Mahekoto-tieri transpired, as we shall see. A month or two after Chagnon wrote this letter, events began to unfold that would lead to his becoming a more independent political agent during the later part of his fieldwork. These events were related to difficulties Chagnon encountered as he pursued his genealogical research.

Chagnon's research objective required the collection of accurate genealogies (1977:10–13, 1992a:19–25). This work was so important that he describes it as a "full-time task [that] left very little time for intensive study of other aspects of Yanomamo culture" (1966:17). Yet collecting genealogies was an exceptionally difficult thing to do, because of the Yanomami's strong aversion to using the name of a living person and their strict taboo against speaking the name of the dead. Chagnon could have been in danger if he inadvertently mentioned the name of someone recently killed, because the Yanomamo "were unable to understand why a complete stranger should want to possess such knowledge unless it were for harmful magical purposes" (Chagnon 1966:17). Chagnon paid informants well for their help, however, so many wanted to cooperate.

What they did was make up comic names and construct ludicrous genealogical relationships. "They invented false names for everybody in the village and systematically learned them, freely revealing to me the 'true' identities of everyone," then "roaring in hysterical laughter" as Chagnon tried to repeat the names (Chagnon 1992a:20). After some five months of this, the deception was revealed to Chagnon during a visit to one of the Shamatai allies, the Momaribowei-teri. Five months of work had to be discarded.

He changed his research methodology, working in private with selected informants and testing and cross-checking responses, and finally he succeeded in developing a core of genealogical relations. Some informants, however, continued to deceive him about the names of the dead, including one old man whose seeming cooperation led Chagnon (1992a:21) to pay him "quadruple the rate that I had been paying the others"—a pay increase that led to an inundation of would-be informants. But the old man was lying, using the names of deceased ancestors of a village far away. Chagnon learned this from Rerebawa, a young man doing bride service with the Bisaas-tieri, who was to become one of Chagnon's main informants and friends. Rerebawa revealed the deception at a moment when he was angry at the Bisaas-tieri and in a mood to insult them.

When Chagnon learned of this deception, he changed his research method a second time (1977:12):

Thereafter, I began taking advantage of local arguments and animosities in selecting my informants. . . . I began traveling to other villages to check the genealogies, picking villages that were on strained terms with the people about whom I wanted information. I would then return to my base camp and check with local informants the accuracy of the new information. If the informants became angry when I mentioned the new names I acquired from the unfriendly group, I was almost certain that the information was accurate.

Chagnon (1977:9) also describes the way he approached the other villages he visited, in a discussion of the constant demands to provide Western manufactures:

I made regular trips to some dozen different villages in order to collect genealogies or to recheck those I already had. Hence, the intensity of the begging and intimidation was fairly constant for the duration of the fieldwork. I had to establish my position in some sort of pecking order of ferocity at each and every village.

For the most part, my own "fierceness" took the form of
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I made regular trips to some dozen different villages in order to collect genealogies or to recheck those I already had. Hence, the intensity of the begging and intimidation was fairly constant for the duration of the fieldwork. I had to establish my position in some sort of pecking order of ferocity at each and every village.

For the most part, my own “fierceness” took the form of
shouting back at the Yanomamo as loudly and as passionately as they shouted at me, especially at first, when I did not know much of their language. As I became more proficient in their language and learned more about their political tactics, I became more sophisticated in the art of blurring.

Chagnon tells us, "I had to become very much like the Yanomamo to be able to get along with them on their terms: sly, aggressive, and intimidating" (1977:9). But while he was behaving more like a Yanomamo big man in his interpersonal relations, his other actions—his quest for the taboo names of dead ancestors, his moving back and forth between antagonistic villages, and, above all, his being the source of Western goods that every village wanted to monopolize—created a very different and "un-Yanomamii" context for his behavior. Chagnon thus became something of a wild card on the local political scene. (Probably the same could be said for the resident missionaries, but their activities are not described.)

During Chagnon's first fieldwork, the group that monopolized him most of the time—the group regularly in position to relieve him of his trade goods—was the Bisasi-teri. In addition to Chagnon, the Bisasi-teri also dominated access to the government malaria station and the two NTM missionaries. One can understand why, with all these sources of Western goods already at hand, the Bisasi-teri might not want to relocate to the "vacant" Catholic mission across the river. (As soon as Chagnon left, however, some did move across.) But the Bisasi-teri could hardly be indifferent to another group's moving in. Such an event might involve the loss of a dependent ally, and it could lead to the creation of a strong competitor for Western favors. The Bisasi-teri had an effective veto over prospective residents: it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to establish a garden right across the river from hostile neighbors who had long since learned how to use canoes.

The Bisasi-teri taken as a whole were a fairly large group, about 136 people (Chagnon 1966:58). They probably could field 40 fighters on a good day, and more with Monou-teri (population 66) added in. This would be a good-sized force, yet it could have been easily matched by the larger groups such as the Patanowa-teri (population 212) or by an alliance. Although they did have the advantages of resident Westerners, the Bisasi-teri at this time did not have any shotguns of their own (Chagnon 1983:57). Thus their superlative trade location was out of proportion to their military strength—although their wealth gave them the means to enlist allies. Altogether, the Bisasi-teri were in a very favorable position but not immune to intimidation.

The preceding discussion provides context for the three distinct conflicts involving the Bisasi-teri. These conflicts are of particular importance because they constitute the bulk of the violence detailed in all five editions of Chagnon's Yanomamö. They are the Yanomami wars that everyone knows about. By far the most serious of the three was a shooting war with the Patanowa-teri, along with related factional maneuvering, that spanned the entire time of Chagnon's fieldwork. Because of its complexity, I will discuss it last. The other two conflicts were more episodic: one involving enemy Shamatari up the Mavaca, the other a severe club fight with the Mahakoro-teri. Both transpired within Chagnon's first months in the field.

The Shamatari Conflict

In the vicinity of the upper Mavaca in early 1964, there were four Shamatari villages. Two of these, Mornaribowei-teri (population 85) and Reyabobowei-teri (population 77; Chagnon 1966:58), were subordinate allies of the Bisasi-teri and Monou-teri—the ones who helped them attack other Shamatari in 1960. The other two Shamatari groups were old enemies who had slaughtered Bisasi-teri in 1951: the Iwahikoroba-teri and Mowaraoba-teri. The latter, who around this time began to be called Mishimishimabowiei-teri, had been victims of the western Namouwei in 1960.

In 1964 the Mishimishimabowiei-teri moved from the Sia region to the Mavaca headwaters (Chagnon 1966:173, 1974:14). As we have seen in many previous cases, a move to a headwaters is often a prelude to a move downriver toward a source of Western goods. (A division of the Mishimishimabowiei-teri did just that about a decade later [Chagnon 1992a:222–23].) What is more, Mishimishimabowiei-teri was "staggeringly large by Yanomamo standards," with about four hundred people around 1967 (Chagnon 1977:153). It would have been a formidable military power. Sometime during 1965, "rumors reached the Bisasi-tedi that Iwahikoroba-tedi had split into two factions, both moving down the Mavaca River" (Chagnon 1966:169). Thus, both enemy Shamatari groups appeared to be moving closer to the rich sources of Western goods at Boca Mavaca, even though that meant moving toward danger.

Why take the risk? Both the enemy Shamatari groups were in desperate need of steel, to judge from what Chagnon found when he finally
made contact with them a few years later. In 1968, one subdivision of Mishimishimabowei-teri—some eighty people—had "two of the most miserable 'axes' I have ever seen. They had been worn down by years—perhaps decades—of hard use and were about one third the size they had been when they were manufactured" (Chagnon 1983:39). Even later, the Iwahikoroba-teri were using one "extremely dull and badly worn machete of a type that I had seen only in Brazil: their steel tools came from Brazilian villages via a long trading network" (Chagnon 1974:176-77). This combination of material need, group size, direction of relocations, and past record of attacks must have made the Shamataris expansion down the Mavaca a worrisome prospect for the western Namowei around Boca Mavaca.

When Chagnon made contact in 1968, the Mishimishimabowei-teri knew all about him, down to minute details. They had sent messages to him in 1965 and 1966, asking him to come visit. They wanted the steel tools he gave as gifts (Chagnon 1977:79, 1983:38). Although Chagnon apparently never received those messages, he made the first of several unsuccessful attempts to contact these villages in September 1965 (Chagnon 1966:169). In fact, it was Chagnon's intent "from the very beginning" of his fieldwork to go on from Boca Mavaca to study the less directly contacted Shamataris (Chagnon 1974:6). The Bisaasi-teri reaction to this intention was thoroughly predictable: "The Bisaasi-teri were justifiably aggrieved that my objective to live with the Shamataris would ultimately lead to a lack of supply of steel tools, so they incessantly advised me not to go to the Shamataris, villages" (Chagnon 1974:7). They used every stratagem possible to thwart Chagnon's efforts to ascend the Mavaca to the Iwahikoroba-teri or Mishimishimabowei-teri (1966:169, 1974:11-15, 1977:152-53, 1983:32). They told him the Shamataris would murder him, they refused to act as guides, or they simply turned back once a journey had begun. These tactics successfully obstructed Chagnon's plans until 1968.

Thus, in 1964-65 the western Namowei faced two dangers: that powerful enemy Shamataris would come down the Mavaca, and that Chagnon would go away up the Mavaca. Both possibilities gave the Bisaasi-teri and Monou-teri reason for antagonism against these Shamataris. (Remaining feelings of revenge for the 1951 slaughter would make killing them feel justified and good.)

The interests of the Reyabobowei-teri and Momaribowei-teri seem more complicated, and perhaps divided. Given their recent history, they certainly had some reason to fear the approach of the Mishimishimabowei-teri. Both were against Chagnon's traveling to visit them: "Most of the men in the two contacted Shamataris villages tried to prevent me from going by telling horrible tales of the treachery that awaited my visit, describing how the Shamataris will kill me. The truth of the matter is that they know that I will bring the uncontacted Shamatai machetes and axes that might otherwise be given to them" (Chagnon 1977:79).

Quite in tune with that opposition, both groups were themselves acting as middlemen in trade with the Mishimishimabowei-teri, providing them with "a small, but constant trickle of badly worn steel tools" (Chagnon 1974:9-11). The Reyabobowei-teri especially were in the process of renewing better relations with the other Shamataris, something the Bisaasi-teri tried to prevent by "chicane, threat, and intimidation" (Chagnon 1977:79).

Military action came in two reported events. The first took place soon after the Mishimishimabowei-teri moved to the Mavaca headwaters: "Monou-teri and Momaribowei-teri sent a raiding party against them at this location about the time I started my field work, and killed one man" (Chagnon 1966:173). The second event followed shortly. In mid-January 1965 (Chagnon 1972a:63), some Reyabobowei-teri had reestablished good ties with the Mishimishimabowei-teri, whom they invited to a feast. When this became known, men from Bisaasi-teri, Monou-teri, and Momaribowei-teri prepared to ambush the feast party, in cooperation with other Reyabobowei-teri. Friendly Reyabobowei-teri, however, warned off the approaching Mishimishimabowei-teri, and no violence occurred (Chagnon 1966:174, 1977:79, 104). As usual, planned treachery at a feast involved divided interests within the host village and the cooperation of allied groups.

This attempted ambush illustrates the military advantages of having a resident Westerner. The Reyabobowei-teri village was far from Boca Mavaca. The planned attack would require most of the Bisaasi-teri men to leave their village and families for some time—which could be dangerous, with old rivals such as Witokaya-teri just down the river. Chagnon describes the situation:

The men were gone almost two weeks. All during this time, those who remained behind flocked to my mud hut at dawn and remained in it the whole day, not permitting me to leave. Every hour or so they asked to see my shotgun. I soon discovered that they were frightened and suspected that the Widokaya-teri were going to raid them to abduct women.... I, unknowingly, guarded
the women and children by day with my shotgun, while the [few remaining] men did the same at night with their own weapons. (Chagnon 1977:104)

(The true nature of Chagnon's duty was unknown to him at the time because he had been misled about the nature of the Bisaasi-teri expedition. In a letter from the field dated January 22, 1965, he explains: "About ninety percent of the men are inland trading with the Shamataaris. There go all my axes and machetes!" [Chagnon 1972a:65].)

In sum, the enemy Shamataari, in desperate need of Western goods, posed a threat to the western Namowei and at least some of their Shamataari allies: they threatened their dominance of the lower Mavaca, their established trade relationships up the Mavaca, and their monopoly of Chagnon as a source of the desired goods. With this raid and attempted ambush, the western Namowei and their allies demonstrated their resolve and capacity to project force at a distance against the enemy Shamataari. The latter would risk their lives if they started a garden farther downstream. The western Namowei had reemphasized an effective state of war, the perception of which persisted for a few years without any further violence (Chagnon 1977:101). By taking these aggressive measures, the western Namowei and their allies successfully forestalled direct contact between enemy Shamataari and Westerners until 1968.

Chagnon (1966:174) sees these actions as a continuation of western Namowei efforts to obtain revenge for the 1951 slaughter. I see the raid and the planned ambush of the Mishishimabori-teri as directly related to the immediate contact situation. These acts served to protect the western Namowei's privileged position in the trade of Western goods, and the attempted ambush—at such distance and with so many men—was made possible by Chagnon's having recently returned to Boca Mavaca with his shotgun.

The Clash with the Mahekoto-teri

The second major conflict that took place during Chagnon's initial fieldwork developed just as the Bisaasi-teri were trying to pull off their ambush, and it involved tensions among the groups located along the Orinoco itself. In it, the Mahekoto-teri applied muscle to upper Bisaasi-teri—the village headed by Kaobawa, where Chagnon spent most of his time (1977:13). The men of upper Bisaasi-teri were supported at critical moments by men from lower Bisaasi-teri (1977:110, 113). The Monou-teri apparently did not provide support in this case. Their main worries, as we shall see, were up the Mavaca and east to the Patanowa-teri, not along the Orinoco.

Upper Bisaasi-teri was also supported by the Karo-teri, "a small but dependable ally" (Chagnon 1977:105). The Karo-teri, a branch of the Uhepeki bloc who, in the 1950s, were called Rahara-teri (Lizot 1988:523) and were closely allied with Bisaasi-teri, lived on the Manaviche River, easily accessible from the Orinoco just above Boca Mavaca. They began to receive direct visits from missionaries and scientists after about 1963 (Lizot 1971:40). Karo-teri was the natal group of Rerebawa, a young man who was doing bride service in Bisaasi-teri and who became one of Chagnon's principal informants and friends (1977:11-12, 16-17, 93). Rerebawa continued to visit Karo-teri, no doubt bringing with him substantial amounts of Western goods. Thus the Karo-teri had a community of interests with Bisaasi-teri.

Mahekoto-teri, it will be recalled, had been the major contact center on the Orinoco since the late 1930s, but had declined relative to the Bisaasi-teri after 1958. During the 1960s, the once strong alliance between the two cooled to occasional trading (Chagnon 1977:103). Mahekoto-teri had also lost strength through village fissionings and had lost allies in fighting upstream around 1962. Yet it still was a relatively large group with at least one small but dependable ally—its former enemy, the Boreta-teri (Chagnon 1977:105). Though relatively strong, the Mahekoto-teri's access to Western goods was limited. After the Catholics replaced the Protestants at Platanal, the mission "lay dormant for a number of years, stagnating in the lethargy of its disinterested sequence of occupants until about 1970" (Chagnon 1977:148). That is the context, now to the event.

In mid-January 1965, while the men from Bisaasi-teri were away trying to ambush the Mishishimabori-teri and Chagnon was left guarding the women, an unidentified party of Yanomamo men arrived at Bisaasi-teri "hoping to trade" (Chagnon 1977:104). When they learned that few of the men were present, they became exceptionally demanding. Chagnon treated the men for malaria and colds, ferried them across the river, and made arrangements to visit their village. These visitors spread the word about the situation at Bisaasi-teri, and a few days later a large party of men left Mahekoto-teri for Bisaasi-teri (Chagnon 1972a:66).

The Bisaasi-teri men returned to find that the Mahekoto-teri and some Boreta-teri had set up camp nearby. Faced with this fact, upper Bisaasi-teri invited them to feast. The guests arrived, a hundred strong,
a week early and expecting to be fed—the first of several obvious provocations (Chagnon 1977:104–109). After the feasting, as is the custom, trading began. Each side felt the other was taking advantage (1977:111–12). The Mahekoto-teri were not happy, and they proceeded to violate etiquette by not leaving when they were obliged to. The Bisaasi-teri served notice that if they did not leave, they would face a chest-pounding duel. After more maneuvering, that is what transpired (1977:113).

The two sides were about evenly matched, with either 60 (Chagnon 1977:113) or 25 to 30 (Chagnon 1972a:67) men each. But Bisaasi-teri had fierceness problems: many of its men were not joining in. That put more strain on those who did meet the challengers, and it soon became clear that Bisaasi-teri was losing. The match escalated to more painful side slapping. The hosts’ position deteriorated as more men were disabled by injuries. Finally, the desperate Bisaasi-teri were thrown back into their living quarters, with their arrows ready to fire at the oncoming Mahekoto-teri. Chagnon, at this point, was actually in the house structure, crouched behind the line of bowmen. Having thus beaten their adversaries, the Mahekoto-teri slowly withdrew (Chagnon 1977:113–17).

There were additional violent clashes involving some of these same groups, but the timing and identity of opponents is often unclear. With so much uncertainty, about all that can be said is that for the Bisaasi-teri by late 1965, these additional conflicts contributed to a deteriorating political situation and reduced military support from some allies.

As to why this particularly brutal confrontation and the later clashes occurred, the sources are limited. One missionary at the time believed that the Mahekoto-teri set off to capture Bisaasi-teri women while the men were away (Chagnon 1977:104), but there is no indication that any such attempt was made or that any other conflict over women took place. Chagnon himself (1977:117) seems to see this duel as a routine test of strength that just happened to get out of hand.

From my perspective, the underlying interests in this clash are more obscure than in the case of the enemy Shamata. The contrasting trade positions of Mahekoto-teri and Bisaasi-teri are clear, but there is no information on the direction, intensity, or terms of trade between the two prior to the club fight. How the western Namowei were using their superior trade position in relation to the Mahekoto-teri is unknown. Still, the timing of the conflict strongly suggests that it was stimulated by the new source of wealth represented by the still empty Salesian mission and the arrival of Chagnon. The clash was set up when the Mahekoto-teri heard that it was momentarily possible to approach Chagnon without Namowei interference; the violence itself was triggered when the Bisaasi-teri tried to make them leave.

**Alliance and War with the Patanowa-teri**

The only actual shooting war observed by Chagnon began the very moment he arrived at Boca Mavaca in November 1964 and continued with varying intensity for the duration of his stay. “This particular war got started the day I arrived in the field, (cause: woman stealing), and it is getting hotter and hotter,” wrote Chagnon (1972a:68) on April 17, 1965. The initial clash occurred at the feast so dramatically portrayed in the opening of Yanomamó (Chagnon 1977:5). This was a protracted and complicated conflict involving the interaction of war (described in Yanomamó [Chagnon 1977:124–37, 1992a:191–204]) and internal factionalism (described mainly in Chagnon’s thesis [1966:183–88]).

The initial feast was intended to be a major occasion—the culmination of a new alliance between Patanowa-teri and Kaowawa’s village, upper Bisaasi-teri. This was the first time one had hosted the other at a feast since their antagonistic split around 1948, although their state of war had lapsed after both participated in a Mahekoto-teri feast in 1955. After 1955, the Patanowa-teri secured an alliance with the Monou-teri by ceding women to them (Chagnon 1966:176, 1977:125). Why cultivate Monou-teri? As will be demonstrated in two incidents described below, the Monou-teri controlled the trails by which the Patanowa-teri could approach Boca Mavaca. This spatial hegemony, I argue, enabled the Monou-teri to operate as an exploitative middleman. Thus it is no surprise that Monou-teri did not join in when the Bisaasi-teri feasted the Patanowa-teri: if the two established a new relationship, it could enable the Patanowa-teri to bypass the Monou-teri middlemen.

The Patanowa-teri at this point were already involved in wars with their eastern and northern neighbors in the decaying network of alliances farther up the Orinoco. They needed allies (Chagnon 1966:176, 1977:125). But the Bisaasi-teri were too far from that fighting to be of much help in combat. Furthermore, as we will see, the prospective alliance with Bisaasi-teri carried with it the risk of serious trouble with the Monou-teri. All together, this prospective alliance would be of questionable military value to the Patanowa-teri if they remained in their current location.

The timing of the feast suggests that it was related to the establishment of the Salesian mission across the river (not with the arrival of Chagnon, who actually came the day after the conflict began). The
Patanowa-teri may have been seeking Bisaasi-teri cooperation in a move to that mission, or they may have been seeking to move in with upper Bisaasi-teri. Either move would have augmented the military manpower of the Bisaasi-teri and probably given them additional wives, and would have placed the Patanowa-teri out of striking range of their eastern neighbors. (A group of Patanowa-teri did move in with Namowei at Boca Mavaca less than two years later.) It is also possible that the Patanowa-teri were simply negotiating a standard, dependent trade alliance with Bisaasi-teri, although the lack of unimpeded passage between their villages makes that seem less likely. In any possible variation, the general character of alliances makes one thing certain: more Western goods would be going to the Patanowa-teri via the Bisaasi-teri.

Such a change would represent a threat to Monou-teri interests. If a substantial number of Patanowa-teri relocated to Boca Mavaca or managed to circumvent Monou-teri as a supplier of Western goods, it would reduce Monou-teri's middleman advantages, as well as reducing Bisaasi-teri's need of them as an ally. Thus the Monou-teri had good reason to sabotage this incipient alliance, and they seized an opportunity to do so (Chagnon 1966:176–77, 1977:125).

Some Monou-teri men “discovered a group of seven Patanowa-teri females outside the main village and could not resist the temptation: They forcefully took them back to Monou-teri” (Chagnon 1977:125). The Patanowa-teri went after them, armed with clubs, and recovered five women. Then the Monou-teri threatened to ambush the Patanowa-teri on their way home, demonstrating their geographic control of the approaches to Boca Mavaca. The Patanowa-teri had to leave immediately to avoid ambush, but before leaving, they pledged to continue their efforts to develop stronger ties with the Bisaasi-teri, regardless of what developed with the Monou-teri. Thus the threat to Monou-teri’s position persisted.

Indeed, the threat may have gotten worse. Around this time, the Patanowa-teri began to cultivate the old garden site at Shihota (Chagnon 1966:181–83, 1977:127). This was the location once fought over by Fusiwe and Rashawe, from which the Bisaasi-teri around 1949 developed trade to the Shamatari and subsequently jumped to the Mavaca. A repeat of either development by the Patanowa-teri would be consistent with their deepening ties to upper Bisaasi-teri, and either would weaken the position of the Monou-teri.

The Patanowa-teri were also encouraged to move west to Shihota because that would distance them from their eastern enemies—the Hasupuwé-teri and others. A move to Shihota would thus follow the standard practice of moving away from one’s enemies and at the same time getting closer to the source of Western goods. If the Patanowa-teri succeeded in establishing themselves at Shihota, the Monou-teri, outnumbered by Patanowa-teri males by three-and-a-half to one, would be hard pressed to oppose them. The Monou-teri prepared for war, clearing a new and more defensible garden across the Mavaca (Chagnon 1966:178).

The upper Bisaasi-teri then took a step that clearly displayed their feelings in this conflict. They took one of the abducted Patanowa-teri women away from the man who claimed her, with the understanding that she might go back with the Patanowa-teri the next time they visited. In the face of this open affront, the Monou-teri had little choice but to challenge the upper Bisaasi-teri men to a club fight, in which Monou-teri was “thoroughly trounced” (Chagnon 1966:178–79).

It was in this context that Monou-teri took a risky and ultimately costly step: “After they had cleared the large trees from their new garden site, they raided the Patanowa-teri in the last week of January 1965, and succeeded in killing Bosibiri” (Chagnon 1966:178). According to Chagnon (1977:125) the reason for this raid was that the Monou-teri headman, Damowa, “was angry because the Patanowa-teri had recovered so many of their women.” I believe there were more strategic considerations involved.

By raiding the Patanowa-teri at this moment, the Monou-teri hoped to deter them from moving to Shihota. The Patanowa-teri were harried by old enemies to their east and north, so the Monou-teri could reasonably expect that they would avoid a new war to their west. If they followed standard practice, the Patanowa-teri would move away from all their enemies, southward toward their only active ally in the area, the Ashatawa-teri. That is exactly what the Patanowa-teri did, but only temporarily. They also kept visiting Shihota (Chagnon 1966:182, 1977:127). And what the Monou-teri obviously did not anticipate was how swift and deadly Patanowa-teri retaliation could be. In the first week of March, Patanowa-teri raiders crossed the Mavaca. They found Damowa, the fierce Monou-teri headman, outside his new garden and killed him with a volley of arrows (Chagnon 1966:179, 1977:126). (Although Damowa was accompanied by his two wives, the Patanowa-teri made no effort to capture them.)

The killing of Damowa left the Monou-teri without military leadership. When Damowa’s wives reached the Monou-teri camp with word
of the attack, the others fled into the forest rather than give pursuit. "For a while there was no leadership whatsoever in Monou-teri" (Chagnon 1977:126). A headman is the capstone of a residential group. The killing of Damowa at such a crucial moment created a complex and unstable political situation—a real crisis. Dealing with that crisis involved all the other political conflicts going on at the same time, and it is at this moment we see most forcefully how complex—how "unprimitive"—Yanomami politics can be.

Damowa was killed in early March. Recall that by early February, the Bisaasi-teri had to contend with threats from both enemy Shamatari up the Mavaca and belligerent Mahkoto-teri up the Orinoco (see note 6). They were in need of any military supporters they could get. So it is understandable that the upper Bisaasi-teri headman, Kaobawa, stepped into the leadership vacuum (Chagnon 1966:179–80, 1977:126). Apparently "furious" about the killing of his classificatory brother, he assumed the responsibility of organizing a revenge raid (Chagnon 1977:126). The recent rift between his group and the Monou-teri was patched up, and in late March the Monou-teri were allowed to move into Bisaasi-teri for protection while they continued to develop their new garden. An incipient line of fission within upper Bisaasi-teri also closed up in this dangerous time, as all moved into a new, well-fortified shabono that the Monou-teri helped construct (Chagnon 1977:127). Thus Kaobawa made himself the leader of a large number of men, well prepared for war.

Now Kaobawa faced a delicate political situation. He had accepted public responsibility for avenging Damowa, but his political interest up to this point had been to develop a relationship with the Patanowa-teri. As will soon be seen, that interest did not change. Only some rather exceptional luck allowed Kaobawa to follow through on both accounts.

Kaobawa prepared to raid the Patanowa-teri but delayed until just before the rains began, to minimize the chance of retaliation. The warriors left Bisaasi-teri on April 21, 1965, returning on May 2 (Chagnon 1966:180–81, 1977:128–33). If Kaobawa were to participate in killing any Patanowa-teri, an alliance with them would be much more difficult to accomplish. Thus it was fortunate that after the raiding party set out, pains in his lower torso forced him to turn back, with his brother, before reaching the Patanowa-teri. Arriving home, they "staggered into the village, nearly dead from exhaustion." Who could blame them for turning back, being hardly able to walk? It was another stroke of luck that while returning, they happened to find a dugout canoe that Kaobawa's son-in-law happened to have concealed along their route (Chagnon 1977:132–33).

After Kaobawa turned back, the raiders continued on their mission. They encountered a Patanowa-teri at the Shihota garden and killed him. Retreating, they were overtaken and ambushed by Patanowa-teri, who severely wounded one of the raiders. Chagnon helped nurse him back to health (1966:181, 1977:133).

With this raid, "Kaobawa felt that he had satisfied his obligation to avenge Damowa's death. The Monou-teri, however, wanted to prosecute the war further and continue raiding" (Chagnon 1977:133)—even though they were now ahead in the body count, two to one. The two groups had different interests because the Monou-teri were still threatened by the Patanowa-teri, while upper Bisaasi-teri still wanted to develop ties to them.

From after the killing of Damowa in March until late April, the Monou-teri had been living largely off of others' gardens. They had failed to pursue the raiders who killed Damowa or to raid on their own, and they were standing in the way of the alliance that Kaobawa was intent on developing. Soon they were "being treated like pariahs by their allies" (Chagnon 1977:128). So, just after the raid Kaobawa organized, the Monou-teri returned to their own garden, "as the jungle separating their village from the Patanowa-teri is inundated at this time of the year and cannot be traversed" (Chagnon 1966:180). But if the Monou-teri did not take decisive action soon, their viability as an independent group would be in real jeopardy. They had the high-water time of May and June to think about it.

Fortunately for the Monou-teri, before the 1965 rainy season came to a close, Chagnon discovered the genealogical frauds perpetrated by the Bisaasi-teri and moved into his more aggressive and independent phase of fieldwork. Around the end of the rainy season—which probably means around mid-June (Chagnon 1966:181)—a small Monou-teri raiding party, only ten men, prepared to raid the Patanowa-teri (Chagnon 1977:134–37). Chagnon was staying at Monou-teri at the time, and his presence would give the village some protection while its men were away.

But he was a more active participant than that. The night before the raid, during the ceremonial mourning for the slain Damowa, Chagnon writes, "I allowed them to talk me into taking the entire raiding party up
the Mavaca River in my canoe. There, they could find high ground and reach the Patanowa-teri without having to cross the numerous swamps that lay between the two villages" (1977:135).

This assistance gave the Monou-teri a significant advantage. Because of the impassable swamps, the intended victims would not be taking the precautions of a village expecting raiders. Canoe transport also allowed the raiders to start the trip with an "enormous supply of plantains" (Chagnon 1977:135). This was "the only time Yanomamo ever expressed gratitude to me," wrote Chagnon (1977:135).

As it turned out, the raiders could not locate the Patanowa-teri, and they returned in about a week. Altogether, the Monou-teri did not change anything with this raid, except perhaps to lessen their reputation as cowards. But equally, it demonstrated that they would scarcely be able to carry on a war with the powerful Patanowa-teri all by themselves. They would need allies, despite Kaobawa's unwillingness to fight. On June 20, the Monou-teri moved back into Bisaasi-teri (Chagnon 1966:181). At this point, the internal politics of upper Bisaasi-teri come to the fore.

**Factionalism and War**

Prior to this conflict, upper Bisaasi-teri had been divided into two factions living in separate *shabonos* a few yards apart (Chagnon 1966:129, 183-84, 1977:127). Kaobawa, "who had many relatives in both Patanowa-teri and Monou-teri," led the larger faction; Paruriwa, "who had no consanguineal relatives in Patanowa-teri, but many in Monou-teri," led the smaller (1966:184). As head of the largest kin group in the village, Kaobawa was the "acknowledged leader of the entire upper section of Bisaasi-teri, including Paruriwa's group" (1966:184), although the latter was a man of some influence. When Kaobawa refused to lead any more raids, he left "a political vacuum within Bisaasi-teri, as the Monou-teri were demanding military aid from them. Paruriwa seized upon this as his opportunity to advance his prestige, and after the middle of 1965 initiated several raids against the Patanowa-teri without the support of Kaobawa" (1966:184-85).

The rivers fell early in 1965, and Paruriwa's first raiding party left Bisaasi-teri on July 10. His men were accompanied by Monou-teri men and some others from Momaribowei-teri and Reyabowei-teri. They found that the Patanowa-teri had gone to stay with their allies, the Ashatowa-teri, and decided to turn back, to the displeasure of the Monou-teri (Chagnon 1966:181-82, 1977:133-34). Paruriwa would lead raids, but his heart was not in it. "As Paruriwa was not related to the slain Monou-teri headman (consanguinely), his participation in the war is best seen as an expression of his attempt to advance his status" (Chagnon 1966:185).

Commensurate with his new leadership role, Paruriwa began to act like a headman.

After the middle of the year, Paruriwa began to emerge as leader in his own right, and began duplicating many of the activities normally the prerogative of the village headman. Thus, when Kaobawa initiated a feast for members of an allied village, Paruriwa duplicated his efforts by sending out his own hunters to provide meat for the guests, and furnished an equal amount of cultivated food, which he disposed of from his own section of the village. Normally, the headman sends out the hunters and disposes of the cultivated food from his own house. Paruriwa, by duplicating Kaobawa's efforts in these activities, announced that he was a headman. (Chagnon 1966:184)

He had little success, however, in getting others to accept his claim: "Visitors from other villages consistently sought out Kaobawa as Bisaasi-teri's headman during the feasts and the trading after the feasts, no matter how much effort Paruriwa spent in emphasizing his own role in the feast" (Chagnon 1966:185). Could it be that Kaobawa had more Western goods to trade?

Paruriwa also sought Chagnon's recognition. "He wanted to be the village leader and privately told me to address him as the headman" (Chagnon 1977:94). "He constantly reminded me that he was a 'big man', as if I would fail to notice this" (Chagnon 1966:185). But there was a great difference between Chagnon's close relationship with Kaobawa—"the wise leader" (1977:14)—"the quiet unpretentious headman" (1983:125)—and his antipathy for Paruriwa, "a very cunning, treacherous fellow" (1977:94). Kaobawa is portrayed as "unobtrusive, calm, modest, and perceptive," while Paruriwa is "belligerent, aggressive, ostentatious, and rash" (Chagnon 1977:96). In time, Kaobawa became one of Chagnon's principal informants and friends (1977:13-14). Chagnon's association with Kaobawa would have important consequences in the next event in this sequence.

In July 1965, Kaobawa sent his brother-in-law to the Patanowa-teri to inform them that his group did not intend to raid them anymore
(Chagnon 1966: 186-87, 1977: 93-94). The emissary returned with two older Patanowa-teri people—a sign of trust. They carried the message that a delegation of men would follow, and it arrived a few days later. Paruriwa’s group was visiting the Witkaya-teri at this time. When he heard about the meeting going on at Bisaasi-teri, Paruriwa and a group of Monou-teri men rushed back, “intending to murder the three visitors” (Chagnon 1966: 186). Kaobawa warned Paruriwa that he was prepared to defend the visitors with force.

A crisis developed out of this situation, and for a whole day Paruriwa and his Monou-teri supporters debated the wisdom of their plan. Finally, Paruriwa decided to desist from the murder. . . . The Monou-teri who were to participate in the murder of the three visitors were enraged because Paruriwa failed to execute the plan, and they returned to Monou-teri to recruit a raiding party, hoping to intercept the visitors on their way back to Patanowa-teri. (Chagnon 1966: 186-87)

“Their plan failed,” Chagnon adds in a footnote, “as I took the Patanowa-teri back to their village part way in my boat, and we went the remainder of the way on a trail the Monou-teri could not reach” (1966: 187). He did this after Kaobawa, realizing the danger of ambush on the return trip, “visited me that night and asked me to take the visitors back to their village” (Chagnon 1977: 94). (Chagnon had wanted to visit the Patanowa-teri anyway.) Without in any sense implying that Chagnon should have let these men be ambushed, it must be recognized that his action was a significant political event. In a crisis, Chagnon had sided with Kaobawa in his effort to develop ties to the Patanowa-teri, and he had provided a means of transport that neutralized the Monou-teri’s trump card, their dominance of the footpaths between Boca Mavaca and Patanowa-teri.

Before continuing the narrative of events at Boca Mavaca, I must digress to the strategic situation of the Patanowa-teri at this moment. When the travel season began in July 1965, Patanowa-teri found itself besieged from all directions but the south (Chagnon 1966: 182, 1977: 41, 127). After the Monou-teri and Bisaasi-teri raided them, their three old enemies to the east began to raid with increased intensity, although their interests in doing so are opaque. The western Namowe’s Shamatari allies and several other unspecified groups also sent raiders, until the number of enemy villages reached about a dozen.

Many of them joined the hostilities because they knew that the Patanowa-teri could not defend themselves against a host of enemies. The new belligerents, therefore, stood a good chance of abducting women while being relatively immune to punitive raids. They could also discharge obligations to their allies by supporting their raids against the Patanowa-teri without exposing themselves to great danger. (Chagnon 1977: 41)

In this instance, my perspective does not differ from Chagnon’s. The costs of joining one of many raiding parties were unusually low. Young bachelors dreaming of capturing a wife, encouraged by their fathers who saw the political benefits of participation, no doubt swelled the number of raiders. But it should be noted that this was an extremely unusual level of hostility for the Yanomami. With one late exception discussed in chapter 14, I know of no other case in which so many villages raided one village at the same time. The Orinoco-Mavaca area was an extraordinarily violent place in 1965.

The raids against Patanowa-teri reached high intensity by July, the month in which Paruriwa led the aborted raid and the Patanowa-teri emissaries visited Bisaasi-teri (Chagnon 1966: 182-83, 1977: 127). Overall, the Patanowa-teri were raided “at least twenty-five times while I conducted my fieldwork” (Chagnon 1977: 127). They suffered about eight deaths. Nevertheless, strategically they were winning the war.

They managed to drive the Hasupwe-teri across the Orinoco in July, and they continued to raid it until “their fierce ones were all dead, and nobody was interested in prosecuting the war any further” (Chagnon 1977: 127). Another factor encouraging the Hasupwe-teri to move away from the war may have been renewed outreach by an order of Catholic brothers who, in early 1966, were urging the Hasupwe-teri to settle closer to the river in order to “enjoy the goods of civilization” (Steinworth de Goetz 1969: 74). In any case, as time passed, the war in the east died down. This left the Patanowa-teri, who had continued to use the Shihota garden site, free to concentrate on the Monou-teri.

That brings us back to Boca Mavaca, in July of 1965. Paruriwa had made a claim to be the village headman but had backed down from Kaobawa. Chagnon had sided decisively with Kaobawa and the Patanowa-teri. The next few months are rather murky, but they were not good ones for the Monou-teri. It seems that they undertook no raids from Boca Mavaca against the Patanowa-teri between the one led by Paruriwa on...
July 10 and the following November. After the July raid, the Monou-teri alternated between their old village, their new garden, and Bisaasi-teri. The Patanowa-teri began stepping up their incursions to the Mavaca, and "signs of the Patanowa-teri raiders were found numerous times at the old site of Monou-teri" (Chagnon 1966:182). Although there is no indication that the Monou-teri were actually attacked by Patanowa-teri raiders, the prospect of a Patanowa-teri move to the Mavaca was now all the more credible.

While the Monou-teri were fearfully trudging from place to place, Paruriwa, at upper Bisaasi-teri, embarked on a new course of action. Because of his political defeat by Kaobawa, "Paruriwa decided to move away from Kaobawa's group" (Chagnon 1966:186), and he began to build a house on the other side of the river. But he did not move away until Chagnon had gone: "Shortly after I left the field, Paruriwa and his group separated from Kaobawa's and moved across the Orinoco" (Chagnon 1966:185). In a chapter added to the 1977 edition of Yanomamó, Chagnon (1977:151) adds a crucial detail: "The Salesian priest across the river had taken advantage of the fact that a faction was developing in Kaobawa's village and that Paruriwa . . . was emerging as a strong leader in the dissident faction: he lured Paruriwa and his group across the river with generous gifts of outboard motors, shotguns, and other desirable trade commodities." Thus fissioned upper Bisaasi-teri.

I reconstruct Paruriwa's changing interests this way: Before being faced down in July, he hoped that by putting himself at the head of the Monou-teri, in addition to his own Bisaasi-teri faction, he could replace Kaobawa as leader of upper Bisaasi-teri and he treated accordingly. Then he would dominate several rich sources of Western goods: the resident NTM missionary, the malaria station, Chagnon, and the unoccupied Catholic mission across the river. After backing down from Kaobawa and in the process both losing the Monou-teri's allegiance and seeing Chagnon act in support of Kaobawa, he knew his plan would fail. At this point he began work on his house by the mission, but he held off moving while Chagnon remained in upper Bisaasi-teri, in the meantime allowing the priest to make him generous gifts.

But Paruriwa's interests would still be jeopardized if the Patanowa-teri vanquished the Monou-teri and followed through by moving toward Boca Mavaca. Thus Paruriwa rallied available forces against Patanowa-teri, inviting the Monou-teri to come and stay in his section of Bisaasti-teri (Chagnon 1966:187). "By early November, the Monou-teri had begun raiding the Patanowa-teri with great frequency, supported by members of Paruriwa's group. Paruriwa himself sent three raiding parties against the Patanowa-teri between November and February, all of which included men from Monou-teri" (1966:187). (Since Chagnon [1977:134] elsewhere tells us that the Monou-teri and Bisaasi-teri launched a total of six raids during his time in the field, and this narrative has already discussed four, I take it that three was the total number of raids sent against the Patanowa-teri during this period; see note 8.)

One of the raiding parties, apparently the last one, made up of Monou-teri, some Patanowa-teri defectors, and presumably some of Paruriwa's followers, finally managed to kill a Patanowa-teri man (Chagnon 1966:189). This is the first reported death in the war since April, and apparently it was the last.10 By sending raiders at them, Paruriwa demonstrated to the Patanowa-teri that they would still be risking their lives to come to the Mavaca and gave himself breathing room to follow through on his plans.

After so long at war, tensions and factionalism were high among the Patanowa-teri (Chagnon 1966:188–89, 1977:120). It will be recalled that the Patanowa-teri were made up of a few major divisions (the eastern Namowe) that had united for defense. The alliance was now coming apart. A month before Chagnon left the field, a fight developed over a woman. It escalated out of control until the headman killed another man by spearing him with a sharpened club. The dead man's faction was then "ordered to leave the village before there was further bloodshed" (Chagnon 1977:120).

The Patanowa-teri headman was a close agnatic kinsman of Kaobawa, and so presumably his faction was involved in the negotiations for an alliance. The faction that was ordered to leave went to live with its relatives in Monou-teri and with the Bisaasi-teri (those linked to Paruriwa's faction?). From there it participated in raids on its former co-residents, the Patanowa-teri. "The hosts, of course, took several women from the refugees" (Chagnon 1977:120). Shortly after the defectors' arrival, Chagnon left the field, and Paruriwa moved his followers to the mission.

This lengthy discussion of the politics involved in the war with the Patanowa-teri has relied entirely on data provided by Chagnon. Our narratives have been different: he presented data as ethnographic illustrations of many different points, while I have brought them together into one unified political history. We have little or no substantive disagreement about what happened. Where we differ is over why these events occurred when, where, and how they did. Chagnon explains the war as
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.

Chapter 13

1. Partly because of the shorter time period covered by this chapter, there is very little to report about other Yanomamo. In the south, as noted in chapter 12, Brazilian Yanomamo armed with shotguns were raiding more isolated villages in Venezuela—an expectable development in that extending contact situation. In the north, villages in Hames's (1983:409-14) middle Padamo sub-bloc continued their tense but not violent shuttling around Yecuana country. The New Tribes missionaries (M. Dawson 1961; Dye 1962; Johnston 1964:3) also reported much sublethal violence, often directed against women. They had opened a new mission on the Cuntamano, and in 1962 the local groups around them were in hostile confrontation. In 1964 a severe malaria outbreak caused many deaths throughout the area. One missionary (J. Dawson 1964) speculated that the epidemic was sent by God in answer to missionary prayers, to make the Yanomamo, who were becoming increasingly indifferent to Bible teachings, lose faith in their shamans and trust the missionaries who cured them.

One violent incident to the north of Bisaasi-teri is reported by Chagnon, involving two unidentified villages, both with strong connections to different missions (1977:120-22). The fighting was triggered when a woman fled her cruel husband, and it escalated even though she returned to him. This clash includes several unusual elements: it went from clubs to a spear fight; the "home" side was driven from the village, after which the "visitors stole all the hammocks, machetes, and cooking pots they could find" (1977:122); and each side had borrowed, under false pretenses, a shotgun from the missionary. One headman was shot in the face—the first such use of a shotgun reported for the area. With many months of care by the missionaries, the headman recovered.
2. Chagnon (1977:161), noting the Yanomamo’s traditional avoidance of the large rivers and their recent movement toward them “because of the allure of exotic trade goods,” comments: “No Yanomamo would tolerate the discomfort of living near the bug-infested rivers unless there were powerful incentives, such as trade goods, to attract them there.”

3. I have been unable to locate in Chagnon’s essays any explicit statement that Western goods go in one direction in this alliance, and indigenous products, in the other. He implies that this is so, however, in a published letter written a few months after his arrival in the field: “Some villages specialize in making one or another object; others who have special sources of access purvey axes or machetes and pots to the rest” (Chagnon 1972a:66). The two-directional relationship is also implied in the captions of two photographs from the same scene: “Kaobawa trading his steel tools to Shamaturi allies” (Chagnon 1974: facing 11), and “Kaobawa, headman of Upper Bisaasi-teri, trading with his Shamaturi allies for arrows, baskets, hammocks, and dogs” (Chagnon 1983:6). Furthermore, Coccio (1972:205, 376–78) and Lizot (1976:8–9), each with long experience in the Orinoco-Mavaca area, describe this economic specialization as characteristic of exchange involving villages with direct access to sources of Western manufactures. Chagnon is by no means unusual in not providing specific information on this point. On the contrary, it is rare to see it discussed by anthropologists unless the work is focused specifically on the process of acculturation.

4. The text of this comment reads: “In some cases, the disposition of desirable trade goods may affect the balance in the exchange of women between two villages. In general it may be said that, when one village is allied to another which can provide it with more military assistance and desirable trade goods than the former can give to the latter, an imbalance in the exchanges of women will follow” (Chagnon 1966:5–7). Note that this comment does not specify Western trade goods, and in context, the stress is placed on the military rather than the trade dimension.

5. On the other hand, the perception of him as the source of coveted goods is what enabled Chagnon to work in so many villages. As he describes his first meeting with the headman of the previously uncontacted village of Mishimishimobowe-teri in 1968:

I called to him: “Father-in-law! I have come to your village to visit you and bring madohe [trade goods]. Is it true that your people are poor and in need of machetes?” I could hear the whispers of excitement around us after I spoke. “Yes! We are poor in machetes.” . . . I concluded by telling him that I would give him the cooking pot I had with me and one of the knives in the morning, and that I would bring him a big gift on my next visit. This visit was primarily to discover if they were friendly and if they were in need of steel tools, as the rumors said—a story I always tell when I visit a village for the first time. One must always imply that he has many more possessions back home and intends to bring them on his next visit, provided the people are friendly. (Chagnon 1974:29)

6. “Shortly after” the Maheko-teri’s assault on the Bisaasi-teri, the latter’s Kario-teri allies lost two men in a pounding match with some unidentified enemies who concealed stones in their fists (Chagnon 1983:167). The Karoho-teri also became enmired in a protracted conflict with Maheko-teri, involving some raiding, but its timing and connections to other events are unclear (Lizot 1983:81, 141). Such problems would leave the Karoho-teri less able to offer military support to anyone else. Also, sometime in 1965, the Bisaasi-teri had another chest-pounding duel with the Tiyuriri-teri (Chagnon 1990b:99), allies of the Maheko-teri. Finally, a “club fight” in an unidentified village in 1965 somehow brought the Bisaasi-teri and Maheko-teri close to a state of war. Some time after that clash, the two would have a rapprochement and begin trading again, albeit on strained terms (Chagnon 1977:117).

7. The date, again, is January 1965, not January 1966 as given in all five editions of Yanomamo (e.g., Chagnon 1977:125, 1992b:222).

8. This conclusion is based on Chagnon’s statement that “the Monou-teri and Bisaasi-teri raided against the Patanowa-teri six times while I lived with them” (1977:134). My count is seven: the first raid by Monou-teri in late January 1965; the raid organized by Kaobawa in late April; the solo raid by Monou-teri, tentatively dated to June; the raid led by Parariva in July; and three more attributed to Parariva between November and February 1966 (Chagnon 1966:187). Whatever the reason for this discrepancy, it indicates that no raids by Monou-teri or Bisaasi-teri occurred between July and November.

9. The continuation of this quote demonstrates plainly that the support of a Westerner and control of his trade goods were the basis of political success.

I saw Parariva in 1967 when I stopped to greet the priest: he was proudly bearing a presumptuous Spanish title, bearing his chest with his fist, urging me to pay attention: “Me Capitan! Me Capitán! Me Capitán!” He swaggered off after I acknowledged that he was a leader now, carelessly shouldering a rusty 16-gauge shotgun, barking commands to his followers in the three or four Spanish words he had learned during the year, a shadow of the man I had last seen, dwarfed in the raggy and tattered pants that marked his new status and guaranteed in that status by his monopoly on the priest’s trade goods. (Chagnon 1977:151, emphasis in original)

10. Looking back on the war, apparently from the vantage of early 1967, Chagnon observes that the Monou-teri had killed two men and captured two women, while the Patanowa-teri had killed only one, Damowa (Chagnon 1977:137). But with the two Patanowa-teri losses in the January and April raids, this last killing would make three Patanowa-teri deaths. I cannot explain this discrepancy. The two women apparently are those taken at the feast in November. No other women are reported captured in the raids.