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 Kreibowei. 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 Shama-tari 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 (Ruvihiwe’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.

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 Manavihe and Ocamo rivers (see map 4). There she became the wife of Akanwe, 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 Uhepekio population block (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...
two narratives may be especially large, although, as always, it is invisible in the texts. One result is increased uncertainty about the accurate sequencing of certain events.\(^1\) On the other hand, more external referents become available now to establish some absolute dates.

Along with Valero's narratives, several other kinds of sources are available. Many Westerners came and wrote about general conditions along the river—especially members of the Franco-Venezuelan Expedition to the source of the Orinoco in 1951. Resident missionaries (Barker 1953, 1959; Cocco 1972) begin to publish material, including sociological descriptions of general relations between villages. Napoleon Chagnon, who arrived in the area in 1964, also provides a good deal of information about political relations in the 1950s. It should be noted with some emphasis that there are other major ethnographic accounts pertaining to this period written in German (Zetries 1964) and Italian (Biocca 1966), neither of which I can read. There is also more information about Yanomamo outside the Orinoco-Mavaca area, which I will discuss in the last section of this chapter. But I will start with an overview of contact history along the upper Orinoco as reported in outside sources.

The New Western Presence

In September 1950, the missionary James Barker and his colleague Hilker established the Platanal New Tribes Mission (NTM). Even though he and other outsiders had been providing the Mahekoto-teri and other groups with Western goods for some time, the founding of the mission assuredly would have been accompanied by a major distribution of presents.

Still, Barker spent his first half-year or so under substantial material limitation. When members of the Franco-Venezuelan Expedition arrived at Platanal in July 1951, they found the missionary without any possessions except the tattered shirt and pants he wore. The Yanomamo had taken everything else and sunk his boat, leaving him unable to travel. Barker felt in danger of losing even his clothing if he walked out of Platanal, and he had visited only one other village so far. At the same time, Barker was reportedly attempting to protect the Yanomamo from the woodsmen who continued to visit Platanal and occasionally robbed them or abused the women (Anduze 1960:42; Grelier 1957:114–15, 118).

The Franco-Venezuelan Expedition itself was a mammoth affair by local standards. Charged with finding the source of the Orinoco and running under military command, it was certainly the largest Western invasion of the upper Orinoco yet. Its initial airstrip cut travel time between San Fernando de Atabapo and Caracas from a month to four hours. The advance guard reached La Esmeralda in April 1951, clearing another airstrip and establishing a base camp. With DC3s making regular supply runs, personnel quickly climbed to 80 people, including military men, scientists, and many of the woodsmen of the region (Grelier 1957:47–60). The tales they told of Yanomamo attacks dating back to the rubber boom, along with Yecuana stories of recent wars, created an intense fear—a "Guaharibo psychosis"—contributing to the "legend of ferocity of the Waika" (Anduze 1960:41, 62, 190).\(^2\)

A few days after arriving at La Esmeralda, the expedition was visited by a small party of young Yanomamo who had come by canoe from the Padamo. They were given knives and machetes, and left. Three weeks later, a larger party arrived, and from then on many different groups of Yanomamo came and lingered around the base camp. They were given Western goods, which they sometimes demanded with arrows drawn. Some people from the Padamo were already in contact with Yecuana and had had previous dealings with New Tribes missionaries. Some visitors spoke of recent epidemics and wars. The animosity between groups was evident at the camp, and when one group was trading, the others would disappear (Anduze 1960:76–80; Grelier 1957:53–54, 76, 132; Ríosquez-Ibarra 1962:70–77).

The expedition began moving up the Orinoco in July and August of 1951. Exploration and associated activities lasted through November, although one small party remained until January 1952. During their passage upward, expedition members encountered many Yanomamo groups. The first, somewhere above the Ocana, came out of the forest calling "sbori" ("brother-in-law")—a gift-giving relationship. The Mahekoto-teri welcomed the explorers. Above Platanal, Yanomamo ran along the riverbank gesticulating for them to stop. They visited villages of some of the Mahekoto-teri's allies upstream. Their generally warm welcome owed much to their standard practice of giving each Yanomamo man a machete and knife, as well as other things such as razor blades, matches, and fishhooks.

The expedition established another base camp at the fabled Raudal de Guajaribos. For about 60 kilometers (linear distance) above the
Anduze does not specify the basis of his conclusions, but it seems likely that they derived largely from his observations around Platanal, where he shows some familiarity with the local political situation (1960:192). Certainly Platanal in its first year as a mission was a place of pervasive conflict.

Hilker (1950) reported intense political discussions going on around the missionaries from the moment they arrived, along with constant efforts to intimidate them out of their trade goods. By early 1952, Barker reported that the hundred or so people who lived around him had split into eight hostile factions, each demanding that he deal directly with it (Brown Gold 1952:9). The slaughter at Iwahikoroba-teiri occurred in February 1951, and Bisaasi-teiri refugees were staying at Platanal. Most significantly, the Mahekoto-teiri themselves were attacked between the time the Franco-Venezuelan Expedition first arrived at Platanal in July 1951 and the following November. One child had been abducted and another killed, and the Mahekoto-teiri had gone on alert (Grelier 1957:170). We will see later that this attack was followed by other hostilities. (Anduze [1960:127] makes only one specific allusion to war above Platanal, noting an empty palisaded shabono close to the Raudal de Guajaribos.)


The Mahekoto-teiri themselves became more mobile along the river, adopting the use of dugout canoes. In January 1952, they did not know how to use the one given them by the last party of the Franco-Venezuelan Expedition. By July 1952, they had and were using about a dozen canoes (Anduze 1960:156; Grelier 1957:183). This is a very significant development because canoe travel allows more mobility for trade. The first to adopt canoes in this area were the Iyewei-teiri, who learned about them from Yecuana in 1949. By 1954 several groups had them and used
them in commerce (Steinworth de Goetz 1969:134–35). Possession of
dugouts also expanded the possibility of fishing, and that is even more
important.

It is frequently observed throughout Amazonia that prolonged resi-
dence by a substantial village population leads to game depletion, which,
if continued, could lead to a deficiency of dietary protein (Ferguson
1989b). Elsewhere I have argued that game depletion is a consequence
of the anchoring effect of Western settlements among the Yanomami
(Ferguson 1992a:204–206). By the time of the Franco-Venezuelan Ex-
pedition, the Mahekoto-teri had been living around Platanal since 1946.
There are signs of subsistence resource stress.

Although Platanal was apparently never left empty, people came and went,
with total numbers fluctuating between 20 and 150 (Anduze 1960:
206; Grelier 1957:118). Chagnon (1973:139) refers to the early 1950s
as an unusually “nomadic” period, but seen in the perspective of Good’s
(1989) research on traditional subsistence practices, it seems more likely
that these absences from Platanal actually represented the Maheko-
teri’s effort to maintain their diet by a resort to trekking (Brown Gold
1952:9; Valero 1984:389; and see Grelier 1957:82, 112), and that it
was the later sedentism observed by Chagnon that was atypical for
Yanomami. Still, they came back to the same place, year after year.
At the moment when the Bisasa-teri were being slaughtered by Shamata-
ri (February 1951), many Mahekoto-teri had gone to visit the Bisasa-teri
because they were short of food (Barker 1959:152). Anduze (1960:203)
reports apparent malnutrition and states that their diet was largely vege-
tal and they ate even mosquitoes. In this situation, expansion of protein
resources by increased fishing may have been a nutritional necessity if
the Mahekoto-teri were to remain at Platanal.

To return to the chronology of contact, 1954 saw another substantial
increase in the Western presence around Platanal. Near the end of 1953,
after almost two years of uncertainty about its future, the New Tribes
Mission received permission to continue its work in Venezuela inde-
finitely. It quickly stepped up its proclaimed war against Satanic influence
among the savages. In September 1954 there were seven missionaries at
Platanal, with regular and adequate resupply, and a new base camp was
under construction above Tamatama (map 6). By 1956, two Mahekoto-
teri boys were receiving instruction at Tamatama (Gettman 1954; Landon
1956). From April 1954 until mid-1955, Platanal was also the base
for the first anthropologists to visit the area: the German Frobenius Ex-
pedition (Zerries 1955). In 1955 and 1956, a boundary commission was
again at work in the area (Steinworth de Goetz 1969:201).

As the Westerners moved in, the Yanomamo moved to meet them.
In 1954, the Iyewei-teri, who had been in direct contact with whites
since at least 1950, began to clear a new garden at the confluence of the
Ocamo and the Orinoco in order to increase their contacts with nape;
they moved to it the next year (Cocco 1972:114). By the middle of
the decade, several Yanomamo groups had moved near the rivers and were
in direct, if intermittent, contact with wood cutters, who hired them
as laborers and paid for plantains with steel tools (Barker 1959:165;

In July 1957, the Salesian missionary Luis Cocco received an enthu-
asiastic welcome from the Iyewei-teri at the mouth of the Ocamo. Despite
their warnings that he should go no farther lest the savage Waica kill
him, he traveled to other river settlements, distributing gifts at each of
them. He visited the Mahekoto-teri and the Tayari-teri, a Mahekoto-
teri division just then building a garden farther down the Orinoco. He
visited the Bisasa-teri, who at this point were living downstream from
Platanal on the south side of the river, and the Monou-teri, a splinter of
the Bisasa-teri residing a short distance up the Mavaca. Returning to the
Iyewei-teri, Cocco founded the mission of Santa Maria de los Guaiyac

Kindly, though paternalistic (see Peña Vargas 1981:12), Cocco and
his colleague Padre Bonvecchio quickly attempted to civilize the Yanom-
amo by dressing them and making them live in Western-style houses.
Anduze, in the area in 1958 to collect blood samples for genetic research,
contrasts the Salesians’ approach to Barker’s less obtrusive style. Anduze
found the Iyewei-teri and Bisasa-teri ill with influenza, and many chil-
dren had died. Already in that year, three tourists had come to see the
“savages,” and the priest’s assistant was locally notorious as an abusive
surprise that tensions developed between the missionaries and Iyewei-
teri. In 1959 the latter had gone into the forest, against the missionaries’
wishes, and the priests feared they would never return (Vareschi 1959:
161, 169).

But the Salesian mission had an attraction that the Iyewei-teri could
not resist. Unlike Barker at the founding of the Platanal mission, the
Salesians brought an incredible bounty of Western goods. In a letter
written in January 1965, Chagnon (1972a:66) reports that the mission
had given out “over 3000 machetes during the last eight years alone.” Of these, only about 30 remained in the village, the rest having vanished into their “immense trading network.”

By the mid-1950s, malaria had reached epidemic proportions (Chagnon 1966:62). In 1958, the Venezuelan government established a malaria control station at the mouth of the Mavaca (Boca Mavaca). The Bisaasi-teri were invited to move downriver to locate their village along-side the government post, which they promptly did, “hoping to gain access to steel tools” (Chagnon 1966:163).4 The next year saw an even greater advance—from the point of view of Bisaasi-teri—when the New Tribes Mission moved its main operation, the residence of Barker and an NTM colleague, from Platanal to Boca Mavaca. The evangelical missionaries continued to expand and intensify their activities, developing a circuit tour to prevent backsliding in scattered villages (Landon 1960). Platanal itself was not abandoned; the Salesian Bonvecchio established a mission there in 1958 (Comité 1983:46).

Sometime around 1959, the Bisaasi-teri divided into settlements on either side of the Mavaca—upper Bisaasi-teri and lower Bisaasi-teri—although the two continued to act together in most political matters (Chagnon 1977:78; Egüillo García 1984:23). Upper and lower Bisaasi-teri each had its own resident missionary (Chagnon 1977:151; Coccol 1972:99). The two Bisaasi-teri groups and Monou-teri constitute what I call the western Namowei.

I found no information about the reasons for this relocation of missions, but it seems probable that it had something to do with the developing competition between Catholics and Protestants for the Yanomamo’s souls (see Lizot 1976). Similarly, I found only a few references to the operations of Bonvecchio’s mission, which may have been a secondary post directed toward maintaining contact with other groups farther upstream. Chagnon (1977:148), however, characterizes the Platanal mission under Catholic supervision as “dormant” and “stagnating in the lethargy of its disinterested sequence of occupants” through the 1960s. If Platanal had been marginalized, Boca Mavaca now became the major site of Western presence on the upper Orinoco. By the end of the decade, several Western outposts were established on the upper Orinoco, all dispensing Western goods and often making visits to other accessible villages. The latter part of the decade is without reports of war.

This, then, is the general history of Western contact on the upper Orinoco from 1950 to 1960. Besides its specific events, it must be understood as a period of recurrent epidemics. Some idea of the toll being taken by new diseases during this period can be derived from Chagnon’s initial tally of causes of death among the Namowei up to the mid-1960s. Compared with 31 deaths from warfare, there were 58 caused by “malaria & epidemics,” 16 by “dysentery, diarrhea,” 15 by “sore, and” 3 by “chest infections” (Chagnon 1966:62). (The total population of the three major Namowei settlements at this point was 414 [Chagnon 1966:58].)

Such high mortality from disease, coupled with the fewer but still significant number of deaths in recent wars, necessarily implies major social disruption. I argue elsewhere (Ferguson 1992a) that the disruption attendant upon so many deaths, the prevalence of war in the area, the anchoring effect of Western contact points, and the subsequent depletion of game animals and decline of meat sharing all combine with tensions generated by unequal access to Western goods to create a relatively chaotic state in which instrumental use of violence becomes more normal in interpersonal affairs and the threshold for war is significantly lowered. For the Yanomamo, I see this process as having its roots in the 1940s but taking full effect in the Orinoco-Mavaca area in the 1950s. The following sections examine the political maneuvers and conflicts related to obtaining Western goods in specific times and places—politics that, in this supercharged atmosphere, frequently led to violence.

**Mahekoto-teri under Attack**

As we saw in chapter 11, the killing of 11 to 15 men at a feast with the Iwahikoroba-teri Shamatari was a stunning blow to the Bisaasi-teri, who already were losing a war of attrition with their eastern Namowei kinsmen.5 The Bisaasi-teri fled from their Kreibowei garden to Kobou, the site farther down the Mavaca where they had begun a garden. This position was untenable, and the Bisaasi-teri accepted an invitation to move in with the Mahekoto-teri (Chagnon 1966:159, 1977:103).6 But the Mahekoto-teri themselves were coming and going on treks, clearing gardens, and visiting allies, so the refuge Bisaasi-teri also spent time among neighboring groups such as the Puunabiwe-teri (Biocca 1971:302–305; Valero 1984:419–20, 433–34).

The Mahekoto-teri needed additional men. In the vanguard of contact with the outside world during the 1940s, the Mahekoto-teri at Platanal in 1930 were trading with woodsmen and being supplied by New Tribes missionaries downstream. As Helena Valero passed through on her flight from the eastern Namowei and Bisaasi-teri, she observed
their abundance of machetes and use of fishhooks (1984:389)—and also the terrible nuisance of mosquitoes along the river. But the Mahekoto-teri still lacked the military advantages of Western backing. Indeed, the men were still hiding the women against abductions by 

some men's tools (Valero 1984:390–392). Although their palisade was up (Valero 1984:389), they were still vulnerable to those seeking plunder or trying to chase them away or coerce them into providing more goods. There are suggestions that some of their allies were walking off with their women (Valero 1984:392–93).

Then in late 1950 came the big influx of wealth from Barker's arrival, followed in mid-1951 by the passage of the Franco-Venezuelan Expedition. With the new wealth came war. As noted earlier, between the first arrival of the expedition in July and another pass through in November, raiders killed one Mahekoto-teri child and abducted another. The Mahekoto-teri had gone on alert: cutting down the bridge over the Orinoco, reinforcing their palisade, clearing trees around the shabono, posting sentries along paths, and inviting unidentified guests to come feast. Barker "had thrown his shot-gun into the river to save him from having to take part" (Grelier 1957:170, my emphasis). The newly arrived Westerner was not being as much tactical help as he could be. The raiders are not identified, but the fact that the Mahekoto-teri cut down a bridge to the south bank of the Orinoco strongly suggests they were Shamaturi. The Shamaturi had scored a major victory the year before and may have been seeking to move more forcefully into the suddenly well-provided Orinoco area.

In what seems to be early 1952, Mahekoto-teri raided the Shamaturi. They were accompanied by Bisaasi-teri and Puunabwa-teri or Raharawe-teri, some of whom came along in the hope of capturing a woman. The raiders killed an old blind man and fled immediately, but Shamaturi defenders mortally wounded one attacker. A few months later, Shamaturi caught a gathering party on the south side of the river. They captured five women (two escaped) and killed two men, grossly abusing the corpses—the only instance I know of in which Yanomamo abused the enemy’s dead. Shortly thereafter, the Mahekoto-teri and allies went to raid again, but found no one home.

The Shamaturi danger made the Mahekoto-teri and Bisaasi-teri cease food gathering on the south side of the river, leaving the once contested Shihota garden site without any owners (Chagnon 1966:160; Valero 1984:433–34). If the Shamaturi did intend to clear the way to the river, they succeeded. But the presence of their mortal enemies on the north bank would still make it impossible for them to build a new garden close to the Orinoco.

At the same time, the Mahekoto-teri had to deal with danger from their north. A conflict developed with the Shipariwe-teri (then called Toraemipivei-teri), a branch of the Mahekoto-teri's own Uhepeke population bloc living in high country some distance to the north (Barker 1959:154–61; Chagnon 1966:160). The Shipariwe-teri had many ties to Ocanto-oriented groups such as the Leyewi-teri, and they also had trade and marriage ties to Mahekoto-teri (Barker 1959:155). But in January 1952, a party of men from Shipariwe-teri attempted to make off with a Mahekoto-teri woman. The young woman was subject to a tug-of-war. Finally the Shipariwe-teri men gave up and left, with the Mahekoto-teri shouting death threats after them.

Despite the threats and their loss in a test of strength, some small parties of Shipariwe-teri men continued to visit Mahekoto-teri. No further violence is recorded until October 1953, when the Shipariwe-teri raided. One Mahekoto-teri man was wounded with a poison arrow, but the missionaries successfully treated him. The raiders sustained two wounded. In December 1933, Shipariwe-teri raid again, this time with an ally, Komishibwe-teri (Barker 1959:156). But the Mahekoto-teri were unreachable: they had camped on the south side of the Orinoco. The missionaries met the raiders and pacified them with gifts.

Why did the Shipariwe-teri raid? This outbreak of war was preceded by a conflict over a woman, but it had occurred nearly two years before. During the intervening period, Barker was at Patanal, woodsmen were trading there, and the King Leopold Expedition had come through. The Mahekoto-teri were getting rich, and the Shipariwe-teri had other grievances besides women. Although they traded clay pots to those better connected to the outside (Biocca 1971:309), they were envious of others' supply of Western goods. In what appears to be late 1953—during a period when Helena Valero frequently moved between villages—a Shipariwe-teri shaman was attempting to cure her seriously ill son. As she recalls it (Valero 1984:455–56), the shaman said:

He will not die. When he has grown, he will be a nape. He will be owner of machetes, of axes, of loincloths. He will have much cloth. Then they will not be had only by the Leyewi-teri and Wakanawa-teri who receive them from the Makiritare and from the nape. Your child will bring them to us. We too will shine with
cloth while dancing. He will bring us machetes; bring us axes. We will make a path and he will come to bring us many trade goods. 'Do not talk that way,' said Posokomi.

I suggest that the Shipariwe-teri raids against Mahekoto-teri were somehow to improve their supply of Western goods coming from the primary Western post in the area, Platanal.

The war between Shipariwe-teri and Mahekoto-teri developed in late 1953. Although no warfare between the Mahekoto-teri and Shamatari is reported for 1953, otherwise it was a time of great tension in the region. This is illustrated by the map of political relations produced by Barker in 1953 (Barker 1959: between pages 436 and 437; and see map 5). Specific parts of this map will be discussed later, but considering it as a whole, some patterns are apparent. Foremost is the wide network of hostilities it shows, clearly reflecting a time of general political conflict.

More specifically, the Mahekoto-teri are connected without hostility to groups closest to them, and a conflict-free line joins them through intermediaries to the Iyewei-teri, the other source of Western goods. Barker (1959:316–19) and Valero (Biocca 1971:316–19; Valero 1984:389, 421, 462, 485) confirm close relationships and frequent visiting along this axis, with intermediate groups such as the Puanabiwe-teri being given Western goods by directly contacted groups as they became available. In contrast, the Mahekoto-teri, Iyewei-teri, and their neighbor-allies are all "hostile" or "very hostile" to villages that are relatively distant from contact points or are separated from those points by middlemen. Thus there is a variably drawn fault line dividing those with good access to Westerners from those without good access.

Consistent with this image of general tensions, 1953 was a "bad time" around Platanal (Barker 1959:153), despite the abundance of Western goods. There were food shortages, hostile factionalism within the Mahekoto-teri, and the danger of raiders. A fever killed several people (Barker 1959:153). With all these hardships, it is scarcely surprising that the Mahekoto-teri and Bisaasi-teri began to quarrel, or that the Bisaasi-teri began to suspect the Mahekoto-teri of plotting against them. And the Mahekoto-teri were trying to take women away from the Bisaasi-teri (Chagnon 1966:160, 1977:103; Valero 1984:434). Barker (1959:153) reports two violent confrontations over women, one involving a Mahekoto-teri woman misappropriated by Bisaasi-teri, and one the other way around. The former came close to being a shooting incident; the latter left one man with a serious arrow wound.

The Bisaasi-teri at this point had already begun new gardens (Chagnon 1966:159–60), and during 1953 they moved away from the Mahekoto-teri. In the process, the Bisaasi-teri fissioned into two groups. The smaller group, Monou-teri, will henceforth be a significant independent actor. The other Bisaasi-teri went to a site called Barawa, or Barauwa (Barker 1959:153; Chagnon 1966:160, 1977:103). This relocation, along with subsequent developments among the Bisaasi-teri and Monou-teri, will be discussed in a later section.

Thus 1953, a time of increasing, direct Western contact, was also a time of widespread disturbance. But at least one disturbed relationship was soon patched up. I noted earlier that the Shipariwe-teri raids of October and December 1953 pushed the Mahekoto-teri to the south side of the Orinoco. But Barker's 1953 map suggests that political relations between the Mahekoto-teri and Patawanawa-teri, their neighbors to the southeast, had deteriorated seriously since 1950, to the "hostile" stage—perhaps a highly strained alliance. Moving closer to such enemies would entail obvious risks. Perhaps the Shipariwe-teri's threat from the north in late 1953 made the Mahekoto-teri more generous with the Patawanawa-teri, to secure their good will. Anyway, something happened, for in September 1954 the Mahekoto-teri were "more or less friends" with Patawanawa-teri, even though the latter were still in a latent state of war with Mahekoto-teri's allies, the Bisaasi-teri (Barker 1959:157).

With Patawanawa-teri friendly and the Shamatari not heard from in two years, the Mahekoto-teri seemed secure on the south bank of the Orinoco. There they lived in 1954, across from Platanal, feeling safe and able to use the forest again without fear (Barker 1959:156–62). But then members of the Prohensius Expedition came to live at Platanal, from April 1954 to mid-1955. Working intensively with the Mahekoto-teri, purchasing large quantities of local crafts for an ethnological collection, and remaining in place even when Barker went downstream (Barker 1959:160; Zerries 1955:75–76), this expedition created another surge in the foreign wealth coming to the Mahekoto-teri—probably the largest, most sustained supply they had ever had. Predictably, those with a poor supply of Western goods responded quickly.

In September, Shamatari raiders struck without warning, killing one man, abducting four women, and retreating before being detected (Barker 1959:157–65; Chagnon 1966:160–61). It was only with difficulty that the Mahekoto-teri identified the raiders as Shamatari. This attack forced the Mahekoto-teri back to the north bank. There, in December 1954, the Shipariwe-teri raided again, wounding one man,
who recovered with medical assistance from the anthropologists. After yet another raid by the Shipariwe-teri in March 1955, the missionaries not only treated wounds but also gave the residents refuge in the mission house. Sometime during this period, the Mahekoto-teri were also involved in a series of unspecified clashes with the Boreta-teri (Valero 1984:462), another group in the highlands to the northeast.

The public reason for the Shipariwe-teri raids was that a young woman (from Punnabiwe-teri?) for whose family a Shipariwe-teri man had been providing game as bride service had been given to a Mahekoto-teri man instead (Valero 1984:506). Apparently the prior marriage agreement was broken in order to redirect a marriage alliance toward those with better access to Western goods. Although not mentioned by Barker, and perhaps concealed from him by his hosts, the Mahekoto-teri made at least two retaliatory raids on the Shipariwe-teri, killing one person on the first but doing no damage on the second. Their threat enraged the epidemic against the Shipariwe-teri by burning Western goods (Valero 1984:506). No raids are reported from the north after March 1955. The Mahekoto-teri appear to have won.

They returmed to the Shamatar problem: after relocating to the north bank of the Orinoco, the Mahekoto-teri called on allies to assist them in retaliating against their southern enemies. The Bisaasi-teri, including the Monou-teri, were now living on the south side of the Orinoco. Although on strained terms with Mahekoto-teri, they had their own interests in killing Shamatar, and they joined in the effort. In late 1954 and early 1955, several raiding parties made the long and dangerous journey into Shamatar country, only to return without having reached the enemy. Not only did the raiders risk death along the way, but their families were exposed to danger while they were gone. Indeed, the last of the Shipariwe-teri attacks—the one in which some of the Mahekoto-teri sought refuge in the missionaries' house—took place while the men were away seeking Shamatar. It is questionable whether they could have taken that risk without the now more formidable presence of the missionaries.

Finally the Mahekoto-teri and their allies located the Shamatar. They destroyed a garden, and then they found what they had been seeking: Rikowwe, the Iwahikoroba-teri headman, bathing in a stream with his family. For this incursion, the raiders had recruited Valero's husband, Akawe, who at the time was acting as a bow for hire. Akawe fired a fatal shot into Rikowwe. The raiders captured at least one of Rikowwe's children, a son, before fleeing. (He was later killed by his captors, for revenge.) The Shamatar pursued, killing one of the raiders but losing two more of their own. After this attack and their serious losses, the Iwahikoroba-teri apparently moved out of the area (Barker 1959:158-65; Biocca 1971:316-17; Chagnon 1966:161; Valero 1984:469, 485-87).

In sum, the Mahekoto-teri were plunged into intense, violent conflict during the time they hosted the Frobenius Expedition. But the presence of the Westerners now was adding a new dimension to war—an advantage for the mission village that the Shipariwe-teri quickly recognized. An old woman visitor from Shipariwe-teri told Barker: "In her village they didn't like the foreigners, because they were always curing people. When the village wounds someone, they want them to die" (Barker 1959:163). Presumably, the resident Westerners also made the Mahekoto-teri men feel more secure about leaving their women and children to go on retaliatory missions.

Despite their losses, the Mahekoto-teri had won major victories. They had demonstrated that, with their allies, they could successfully strike back over long distances, despite repeated setbacks. Although attacked simultaneously from two directions, they had held their position alongside the nape and vanquished their attackers. Militarily accomplished, secure to their south, protected and healed by Westerners, the Mahekoto-teri now had significant advantages over any would-be raiders.

These new circumstances were favorable for the hegemony of Mahekoto-teri. I expect that Mahekoto-teri trade and marriage relations with more isolated groups turned exploitative at this point, but there is no information about those relationships specifically. Active raiding appears to have ceased after 1955, and there would be little collective violence along the Orinoco for nearly ten years. This passage from intense conflict to peaceful coexistence is also seen among groups along the Ocamo, on the northern edge of the Altamira-Mavaca area.

**War and Peace around the Ocamo**

Information for this area up to 1956 is provided by Valero. She portrays three local groups—Iyewei-teri, Witokaya-teri, and Punnabiwe-teri—as tightly bound together and continually intermingling. The three groups, however, had different origins. The Iyewei-teri were a branch of the northward-moving "Iyewei-Padamo" population bloc, most of which was now in the Padamo basin. The Iyewei-teri had been moving down...
toward the lower Ocamo for many years, and by at least 1950 had made
direct contact with creoles and missionaires, as well as having estab-
lished connections to the Yecuana. That year, several iyewe-teri were
brought to meet the governor in Puerto Ayacucho. Thus the iyewe-
terí start the 1950s with exceptional connections to sources of Western
goods (Valero 1984:429).

The Puunabiwe-teri and most of the Witokaya-teri were closely re-
lated divisions of one branch of the Uhepekí bloc (Lizot 1988:523).
But the Witokaya-teri were led by a non-Uhepekí man called Hashowe
who, with some followers, had made a succession of moves down from
the highlands, staying with intervening groups until they could estab-
lish their own gardens. By 1950 this leader had strong marriage ties to
Iyewe-teri and Puunabiwe-teri (Valero 1984:402–404). The Witokaya-
teri are also reported to have picked up people from Wakawaka-teri
when that group fissioned around 1947.

In addition, this “triple alliance” of Iyewe-teri, Witokaya-teri, and
Puunabiwe-teri had strong connections to the Mahekoto-teri and the
Raharawe-teri, another Uhepekí group located between Puunabiwe-teri
and Mahekoto-teri. All together, a chain of strong alliances stretched
between the two main areas of contact, Platanal on the Orinoco and
the Iyewe-teri on the Ocamo. These alliances were marked by visiting,
feasting, trade, intermarriage, and sometimes military support.

When Valero arrived among the Puunabiwe-teri in 1950, the three
allies were in fear of raiders from the interior called Ihiteri. There is some
question about the raiders' identity, but they were people living up the
Ocamo and at higher elevations. This is the same configuration of vi-
able as that of the later 1940s, when lower Ocamo and Padamo groups,
receiving new quantities of goods from Yecuana allies, fought with
people up and beyond the Ocamo. (One war, it will be recalled, pitted
Iyewe-teri against Watupawe-teri and Kopariwe-teri around 1947.)
Under these tense circumstances, it is expectable that the iyewe-teri’s
direct contacts of 1950—with NTM missionaries and Puerto Ayacu-
cho—would have violent repercussions. When Valero joined them in
late 1950, the Puunabiwe-teri were preparing to be raided by the Ihiteri
(Biocca 1971:291).

The conflict brewing at this moment well illustrates how chang-
ing access to Western goods can produce conflict over both women
and moral principles, and how the resulting actions share characteris-
tics of both war and law. In the shorter version (Biocca 1971:292), the
Puunabiwe-teri simply seized two Ihiteri women, and the Ihiteri were
seeking revenge. But in the longer version (Valero 1984:404), the dis-
pute (pleito) is not that simple. The Puunabiwe-teri had long promised
two young daughters to men from Ihiteri. The betrothed men had been
dutifully providing game to the girls’ families for years. But the parents
refused to hand over the girls upon demand, and instead gave one of
them as a bride to the son of Hashowe, the Witokaya-teri leader. That
was why the Ihiteri were angry.

From the perspective of my model, the underlying reason for this
dispute is clear. During the time when Western penetration of the area
remained limited, the Puunabiwe-teri had contracted to give women to
groups living farther in the interior on higher ground. But approach-
ing 1950, the benefits for Puunabiwe-teri of a direct Western connec-
tion became much more substantial, and that meant ceding women to
Witokaya-teri. The immediate contest was “over a woman,” and no
doubt the Ihiteri, and probably the Puunabiwe-teri as well, felt morally
justified in their actions—but it is the changing contact situation that
explains why the conflict arose. Comparing the two versions of this
dispute also illustrates how a report of an “abduction of a woman” may
actually conceal a more complex reality.

But the Ihiteri did not attack—not right away (Valero 1984:404). It
usually takes time to go from alliance to war. Some months passed, as
the Puunabiwe-teri developed a new garden closer to the nape, ate more
manioc, wove hammocks, and got ill (Valero 1984:407–409). Then the
Ihiteri attacked, wounding two or more people who were caught out-
side the palisade, receiving some wounds themselves, and fleeing.
The attack appears to have occurred after the Franco-Venezuelan Expedition
arrived at La Esmeralda and the new wealth began to flow. In retaliation,
Akafe claimed to have stalked up to the raiders’ village and fired a
killing arrow inside (Biocca 1971:293; Valero 1984:419–21). In this
action, Akafe may have been following a local model, for a solo killer
was reported in this area some time earlier—Kohawe, whom we met
in chapter 11. At any rate, he was building his reputation as an accom-
plished killer.

The year 1951 was a violent one all over the Orinoco-Mavaca area.
But the lower Ocamo, after this one burst of violence, settled into a kind
of routine during the next three years or so (late 1951 into 1955). The
Iyewe-teri, Witokaya-teri, and Puunabiwe-teri developed new gardens
close to the Orinoco, trying to distance themselves from the Ihiteri and
draw closer to nape. They even cleared paths to the Orinoco to attract
Westerners. And Westerners did come to trade and hire workers. A few
Iyewei-teri and Witokaya-teri became particularly associated with outsiders, such that one man came to be called “Nape” and to feel the envy of others.

The three groups kept up their alliance with frequent feasting and visiting. And of course, they experienced more illnesses, of varying strengths. No more raiding is reported until 1955, but in a time of such tensions, it would not be surprising if unreported wars took place (Biocca 1971:313; Valero 1984:421–26, 430, 434–36, 442–43, 459–60, 486, 491, 494–95, 499, 503–505).

We now come to the Frobenius Expedition of 1954–55. The anthropologist Otto Zerries, a member of the expedition, actually visited the new Witokaya-teri garden, guided by local woodsmen up a trail to the Orinoco that the Yanomamo had cleared to attract nape. Although some of the Yanomamo talked about attacking the visitors for their goods, they settled for trading plantains for machetes. Many men were given machetes, and they were very happy. Most of these machetes were quickly traded on to Shipariwe-teri and Raharawe-teri (Biocca 1971:312–13; Valero 1984:459–60).

Some time later, around April 1955 (compare Barker 1959:165 and Valero 1984:470), Punabiwe-teri and others visited the Mahekoto-teri to get more machetes, and there they found that the nape had constructed zinc-roofed houses. After loitering around Platanal for about a month, the Punabiwe-teri returned to their garden. About two weeks later, Ihiteri raiders struck, wounding two (Valero 1984:471–76). Thus the Punabiwe-teri suffered their first reported raid in four years, just weeks after their second major acquisition of Western goods. Several months later, the Ihiteri made another sortie, without causing any casualties. This was to be their last attack during Valero’s stay (Valero 1984:494).

The Shipariwe-teri played a role in this conflict. They had been intimidating the Punabiwe-teri and their allies, taking a woman at a feast. A party of the allies accepted a feast invitation from the Shipariwe-teri but backed down from their plan to challenge the hosts to an ax fight. The Shipariwe-teri dissuaded the challengers by invoking the specter of Ihiteri raids (Valero 1984:484). Ihiteri raiders had to pass close to Shipariwe-teri and thus were vulnerable to interception; after the second Ihiteri raid, the Shipariwe-teri told them not to raid again. The three allies needed to keep the Shipariwe-teri’s good will. Even so, they all made new gardens closer to or actually along the Orinoco, farther away from both Shipariwe-teri and Ihiteri (Valero 1984:495).

Other conflicts between allies in 1955 were far less muted than this one. Two wildly spreading fights broke out among the three allies, one triggered by a dispute over a woman, the other over meat distribution. Both ended with everyone’s going away angry (Valero 1984:496–98). In 1955, a conflict broke out between Witokaya-teri and its allies against Bisasi-teri/Monou-teri, but that will be discussed in the next section.

Early in 1956, a deadly fever swept outwards from Mahekoto-teri to many of the local villages, including Valero’s. But that did not stop the increasingly routine contacts with nape, who frequently came to trade and hire Yanomamo workers. Several Iyewei-teri, Witokaya-teri, and Punabiwe-teri people went to visit the New Tribes base at Tamatama and even to San Fernando de Atabapo (Valero 1984:498–99, 503–505, 508, 524, 527). A violent conflict developed at this time between Shipariwe-teri and Raharawe-teri, the close ally of the Mahekoto-teri. It appears to have involved competition between Shipariwe-teri and Raharawe-teri over who would receive most favored treatment by the Punabiwe-teri, who at this time were flush with recently earned trade goods (Valero 1984:506–507).

Just around the time of the fever, another conflict developed that suggested some of the new, although transient, tensions that developed among Yanomamo who were reorienting to river trade. In March 1956, the Bisasi-teri traveled by canoe to the mission base of Tamatama. The Iyewei-teri were incensed that the Bisasi-teri passed by without stopping—bypassing the middleman—and they set out in pursuit. When they met at Tamatama, the two groups were on the point of violence, but Barker interceded and disarmed them. The next day they left; after the Iyewei-teri traded hammocks and bows to the Bisasi-teri in exchange for machetes, cloth, matches, and other items (Barker 1959:166–67). This event is something of a milestone in the political resuscitation of the Bisasi-teri, which we will come to shortly, and it illustrates how monopolization of Westerners by control of passage is much more difficult when travelers use canoes on a broad river.

Helena Valero’s final observation for this area—about the circumstances of her escape—provides an unusual glimpse into the way moral values can be manipulated to incite people to war, deliberately concealing a hidden agenda of gaining more Western goods. In this case, unlike all the others, the hidden agenda had to be made known to Valero (1984:517–18), because the scheme revolved around her. Her husband, Akawe, had many enemies and feared some of them were planning to kill him. He also had a frequently displayed desire to obtain Western
goods, and he knew that his wife was hoping to flee to the nape the first chance she got. So he cooked up a plan.

He addressed the Wotokaya-teri and Punnabiwe-teri, calling them cowards because they had only retaliated once for several lhiteri raids over the years. His exhortations worked. Men from the two villages joined in preparation for a raid, but Akawe dallied, remaining behind. Late in the day before the raiding party was to set out, he arose, and, in an apparent rage, painted himself black for war. "What are you going to do now?" I asked. 'Look,' he told me in a low voice. 'The men from here are gone. Let us escape!' (Valero 1984:518). And they did: on October 15, 1956, they were brought to San Fernando de Atabapo by Juan Eduardo Nogueria (Biocca 1971:319–24; Valero 1984:518–25).

At this point Akawe embarked on a remarkable career on the frontier of interaction between Yanomamo and nape.

At San Fernando, Valero met Padre Luis Cocco (Valero 1984:529). The priest sent Valero, her children, and Akawe to the Río Negro, where we will see them again. Back on the Orinoco, one year to the day from Valero’s final flight, after making a tour of all the river villages, Cocco founded the mission of Santa Maria de los Guaiacis alongside the lyewe-teri at the mouth of the Ocamo. Lyewe-teri is only about three hours by launch from Boca Mavaca (Anduze 1973:304), whose residents in 1964 would be called “the Fierce People.” Yet the lyewe-teri do not register a single war death from 1957 to 1972 (Cocco 1972:481). Nor is there any indication of their participating in a raid at any time, although they were involved in some confrontations. In short, the lyewe-teri provide a striking, peaceful contrast to the Yanomamo with whom most people are familiar. Why have the lyewe-teri avoided war? Three factors explain it.

First, superior military capability. When Padre Cocco arrived at lyewe-teri in 1957, the headman was growing rice with the intention of using it to buy a shotgun (Cocco 1972:108). He brought the rice when he accompanied the missionaries to Puerto Ayacucho later that year, and there he purchased the weapon (Cocco 1972:119). By 1970, the lyewe-teri had nine shotguns (Cocco 1972:189). Possessing shotguns when no one else had them, or owning them in superior numbers, gave the lyewe-teri a military edge—one that would be amplified by the medical care and security provided by resident missionaries.

Second, an unparalleled abundance of Western manufactures allowed the lyewe-teri to be generous with others. The Salesians were competing with the New Tribes Mission for influence along the river (Lizot 1976), and they gave out astonishing quantities of goods.15 With an assured supply, the lyewe-teri made no attempt to restrict the flow of these goods. At one point, Cocco asked a mission man why he so rapidly traded away the goods Cocco gave him. "You can get more," was the reply (Peña Vargas 1981:64).

The lyewe-teri earned a reputation among local Yanomamo for being both rich and generous, even allowing visitors from distant villages open access to the missionaries. The lyewe-teri did enjoy the benefits of having their own source of Western goods—they received women from other villages and a multitude of native manufactures—but they apparently did so on “easy terms.” Their generosity removed a major reason for fighting and created for them a network of supportive allies (Cocco 1972:210–13, 376–79).

The third factor explaining the lack of war among the lyewe-teri is the stability of their contact situation. The missionaries settled with a people who had been a point of contact since at least 1950. The mission would remain in that location, and no other major Western residence would be established close to it, for almost two decades. Military dominance and perceived generosity in a contact situation of unusual stability all combined to bring about an absence of warfare directly involving the lyewe-teri.

But as we have seen in other mission situations, this peace did not extend outward indefinitely. In 1959 or 1960, the Nahibowie-teri, a Wakanawa sub-bloc group living far up the Matacuni, attempted to establish an alliance with Wotokaya-teri and Auwe-teri. The Auwe-teri at this time may have lived on the Buuta-u, a tributary of the middle Ocamo (see Smole 1976:58), and were related to the Wotokaya-teri (perhaps through the Hashowe subdivision).14 In the 1940s, those who would become the Nahibowie-teri were bitter enemies of the Auwe-teri. Why were they now willing to become friends?

The answer, I would argue, is that the Auwe-teri were receiving a share of the Salesians’ machetes. But at the feast held to formalize the alliance, the Wotokaya-teri demanded that the Nahibowie-teri give them two women. When the latter refused, a club fight ensued in which several Wotokaya-teri men were injured. The Wotokaya-teri/Auwe-teri then raided, killing several men and abducting the two women. Soon afterwards, in 1960, the Nahibowie-teri accepted an invitation to move 30 kilometers west to live next to a New Tribes mission at the confluence of the Matacuni and Padamo (Flames 1983:406, 409–11).

Another conflict around the same place and time shows striking parallels. This one involved theYepopei-teri, another group of the middle
Ocamo (see Fuentes 1980:6). In 1960, they took a woman from a more remote group, the Hopehi-teri, and otherwise insulted them. But the Hopehi-teri managed to kill the Yeropo-teri headman, despite medical care given to him by a missionary. Hostility between these groups would continue through the 1960s (Cocco 1972:398). Both of these cases illustrate again a pattern discussed in relation to the Mucajáí and Catrimani missions: how middlemen one or two villages out from the point of contact, supplied with Western goods but without the protection of a resident Westerner, become involved in violent conflict with more remote groups, while the mission village itself enjoys relatively undisturbed peace.

The Rise of Bisaasi-teri

Elsewhere in the Orinoco-Mavaca area, the fortunes of the western Namowe—-the Bisaasi-teri and their offshoot, the Monou-teri—were beginning to rise. From their low point after the slaughter at Iwahikoroba-teri, the Bisaasi-teri were back on the road to becoming a major power. It will be recalled that in 1953, the Bisaasi-teri left their tense refuge in Mahekoto-teri and fissioned in the process. The splinter group settled on the Mavaca and became known as Monou-teri. The other Bisaasi-teri moved to a site called Barawa, down and across the river from Mahekoto-teri. Cocco (1972:18) mentions the Bisaasi-teri in his listing of people who established gardens along the river at this time in order to attract Westerners. As demonstrated by his own tour in 1957, the strategy worked.

According to Chagnon (1977:124), the Monou-teri’s fissioning off was the result of a club fight over a woman. Nevertheless, the Monou-teri and Bisaasi-teri “remained on good terms with each other” (Chagnon 1966:163) and were actively allied until the reabsorption of Monou-teri into Bisaasi-teri in the mid-1960s. (Villages that divide after club fights over women may remain close allies.) Behaviorally, the movement to two separate gardens represents alternative choices for making independent contact with Westerners. The Monou-teri site was located at some distance from old Shamatari enemies, it could be developed using the garden at Kobou as a base, and it offered control of movement on the Mavaca. Developing the garden at Barawa, which was farther from Kobou, entailed spending more time relying on the dubious good will of the Mahekoto-teri (Barker 1959:153), but it did put the Bisaasi-teri into a position along the Orinoco itself. The ideal choice for acquiring and controlling trade in Western manufactures would have been the juncture of the Orinoco and Mavaca—the later location of Bisaasi-teri—but that was much farther away from both the Kobou and Mahekoto-teri gardens.

The Monou-teri and Bisaasi-teri now began to secure their positions in intervillage politics. They participated in the Mahekoto-teri’s successful raid against the Shamatari. Their relations with Mahekoto-teri experienced some tension, but the Mahekoto-teri still joined the Bisaasi-teri at feasts (Chagnon 1977:103). Although active raiding by or against the eastern Namowe and their allies had ceased after 1950, in 1954 those groups were still reputed to be enemies of the western Namowe (Barker 1959:157). In 1955, however, men from both groups attended a feast at Mahekoto-teri (Barker 1959:160). The Patanowateri made overtures of peace to both Monou-teri and Bisaasi-teri, and some visiting began after 1955 (Chagnon 1966:76). Marriage negotiations also commenced, and one Monou-teri man “was given two wives by the Patanowa-teri” (Chagnon 1966:175).

The western Namowe experienced new tensions related to their improving condition. In April 1955, some Monou-teri went to visit Valero’s people near the mouth of the Ocamo, for the first time being able to bypass Mahekoto-teri by traveling from their new location. They left for home, two of Akawe’s wives fell with them to escape his brutality. (Barker [1959:163] reports simply that the Namowe “had taken” a woman.) Some Witokaya-teri and Puanabiw-teri men came after them, and a club fight or a threat to send an epidemic by burning Western goods, or both, made the Monou-teri hand over the women. Bad feeling persisted after the clash (Barker 1959:165–66; Valero 1984:469–70).

About a year later, the Bisaasi-teri were bolder and more mobile, as they passed by the Iyewe-teri in canoes, bound for Tatamatana, in the incident described earlier. The transaction at Tatamatana demonstrates that by this time, the Bisaasi-teri had become receivers and traders of Western goods, perhaps even better supplied than the Iyewe-teri were before the arrival of the mission the next year.

In 1958, a year after Iyewe-teri’s elevation as a mission post, came a comparable advance for the Bisaasi-teri. The government malaria post invited the Bisaasi-teri to move to Boca Mavaca, where they were joined in 1959 by New Tribes missionaries down from Platanal. This rearrangement marks the beginning of western Namowe ascendency and a corresponding decline in the fortunes of Mahekoto-teri—a shift that would lead to violence in the mid-1960s.
But for a time, peace continued along the Orinoco. No lethal violence is reported along the major rivers after 1955. One cannot rule out that some unreported attacks occurred in this still fluid situation, but there is no suggestion of widespread violence like that associated with the year of the NTM's arrival and the Franco-Venezuelan Expedition, or the year of the Probenius Expedition. According to Chagnon (1977: 80), “in 1960, the political milieu was quite serene.”

The serenity of 1960, however, was interrupted by one act of war (Chagnon 1966:164, 1977:78, 1992a:168). Immediately after the Bisaasi-teri acquired their Westerners, they resumed middleman activity and began developing a new alliance with a Shamatari group, the Paruritawa-teri, who lived on a tributary of the upper Mavaca. The unequal, exploitative character of the alliance will be discussed in chapter 13. For now, the issue is the Paruritawa-teri's cooperation with the Bisaasi-teri in violence against another Shamatari group, the Mowaraoba-teri.

The Mowaraoba-teri were one of the two Shamatari groups that participated in the slaughter of Bisaasi-teri in early 1951. The Paruritawa-teri were not involved in that attack. In 1960, the Bisaasi-teri “persuaded” their new allies to cooperate in a treacherous attack on their Shamatari relatives. The Paruritawa-teri invited the Mowaraoba-teri to a feast, where Bisaasi-teri and Monou-teri men were waiting for them. They killed three of the five Mowaraoba-teri men who came, and abducted all four Mowaraoba-teri women.

Militarily, this attack had terrible consequences for the Paruritawa-teri. “All their other neighbors, allied to the victims of the treacherous feast, relentlessly raided them” (Chagnon 1977:78–79). This raiding made them even more dependent on the Namweli of the lower Mavaca. “By participating in this treachery, the Paruritawa-teri subordinated themselves to the Bisaasi-teri and Monou-teri” (Chagnon 1966:164).

Why would the Paruritawa-teri side with very new friends against their own kin, thus incurring the wrath of their neighbors? Chagnon (1977:78) says no more than that the western Namweli “succeeded in getting them to participate.” In terms of my model, the answer is, for the same reason the Paruritawa-teri were developing a new alliance with the western Namweli in the first place: in 1960, the Bisaasi-teri could offer the Paruritawa-teri a regular supply of Western goods, at a time when steel was still extremely scarce among the Shamatari. Of course, in the Paruritawa-teri’s discussions preceding the violence, their material interests were probably translated into moral terms invoking sorcery, cowardice, or revenge.

In keeping with expectations, this treacherous attack appears to have involved divisions among those hosting the feast. Some of the Paruritawa-teri continued to supply the Mowaraoba-teri with worn-down steel tools even after the slaughter, and later they actively tried to restore peaceful relations between the groups (Chagnon 1974:8, 1977:79). Perhaps this was a situation similar to that surrounding the killing of Ruwahive, in which one subdivision's success at developing a middleman relationship with a more distant group was destroyed by the treachery of another subdivision. In any case, the outbreak of hostilities up the Mavaca was similar to events happening around the same time up the Ocamo, where the upstream allies of the mission villages became embroiled in war with those farther out.

But what were the interests of the Bisaasi-teri and Monou-teri in this attack? In Chagnon's description, there is no ambiguity: they sought revenge for the slaughter of 1951. Elsewhere I have criticized the concept of revenge as an explanation for war (Ferguson 1989d:564, 1992a:223–24). In this case, however, the western Namweli had lost 11 to 15 men, which provided an incentive for revenge to an unusually large number of families. Although I suspect there were other considerations involved—as there would be in a similar conflict four years later—I have no trouble accepting that the western Namweli planned this attack in large part for the sake of revenge.

Before moving on to events in other Yanomamo areas, one comment is in order. The reader will have noted the prominence of conflicts over women in the preceding discussions. Such conflicts were unusually prevalent during the 1950s. They occurred within almost every political context and with almost every possible consequence, from quickly forgotten flare-ups between good allies to lingering reasons for vengeance against mortal enemies.

The 1950s have shaped our ideas about the prevalence of fighting over women among the Yanomami. Barker, the man who introduced Chagnon to the Yanomamo, was so impressed by it that he developed his own typology of conflicts over women (1953:474–78). Many incidents from Barker’s early years in the field were later recounted by Chagnon to illustrate his argument that the reason Yanomami men fight is competition over women. So I must stress that the kind of conflict reported in this chapter is definitely not “normal” for the Yanomamo. It is greatly
in excess of that reported for other Yanomami areas and even for the Namowei before the arrival of the whites. What happened to generate such conflict?

First, the suddenly expanded and intensified Western presence lowered the threshold for violence and made the use of force more common in interpersonal relations. At the same time, so many deaths from disease and war meant that many marriages (including betrothals) had to be rearranged. In the case of the Bisaasi-teri after the killings at Iwahikorobateri, a large number of marriage ties had to be constructed all at once in a situation where previous political arrangements had been severely shocked, if not demolished. For a while, then, brute force became a prominent instrument in deciding which women would live where. Chagnon (1966:160) even seems to confirm this interpretation when he writes that “considerable fighting took place among the men when the widows of the Shamatarra victims were redistributed to survivors.” As I noted in chapter 11, a similar chain of clashes occurred over Fusiwe’s widows.) And along with fights related to demographic disruption, we have seen that some of the most prominent conflicts over women happened when a man who had been doing bride service lost his betrothed to somebody else with a suddenly improved supply of Western goods.

Women are the highest political currency between Yanomami groups, and intermarriage is the highest form of alliance. Increasing strain in intergroup relations can become manifest in many different ways, but prominent among them is conflict over women. Yet such conflicts stand in no uniform relationship to war. Many fights over women do not lead to war; many wars occur without prior conflict over women. To understand both the conflicts over women and the wars, both must be put in historical context—and that means relating both to the intrusive Western presence.

Other Yanomamo during the 1950s

Leaving the Orinoco-Mavaca area, we have information in varying levels of detail about groups to its north, east, and south. For the northernmost Yanomamo, we turn again to Hames’s histories. The northern, or middle Padamo, sub-bloc were, by this time, within the Yecuana sphere of influence (Hames 1983:406, 409, 412–13). During the 1950s, their political behavior fell into a pattern that would persist into the 1970s—one of quarrels, fear of attacks, fissions, and movements, all involving attempts to establish ties to Westerners, Yecuana, or other Yanomami attached to Yecuana. No raids or killings are indicated. Disputes and tensions are inherent in unequal exchange, but the greater availability of and options for obtaining Western goods reduced the potential for war between Yanomami. The situation had become similar to that between Sanema and Yecuana at this time (see chapter 6).

In an earlier discussion of groups living along the Ocamo, one division of the Wakawaka sub-bloc, the Nahibowiei-teri, was described as getting into a fight with the Witokaya-teri around 1959, then moving to a New Tribes Mission post on the Padamo in 1960, where they became known as Koshirowa-teri. (New Tribes workers had been dealing with Yanomamo on the Padamo and its tributaries since 1956 [Bou 1956; M. Dawson 1960; Johnston 1957]). The Koshirowa-teri would live in peace from the time they moved to the mission (Hames 1983:411). A missionary’s account suggests how this peace was bought.

One day in 1960, people from three other subdivisions of the middle Padamo bloc arrived at the mission. They were angry because the mission Yanomamo refused to hand over a bride they had once promised to a man. An escalating confrontation was interrupted by the distribution of mission food but soon boiled up again in a tug of war over, and other brutalization of, the disputed woman. The violence was again suspended when the missionaries handed out matches and fishhooks.

Then they started a begging session with the folks of our village. The folks from the raiding [sic] villages ask for possessions from the village they go to raid. If they receive them everyone is friendly again. If not, they leave offended and the next time they come the battle is much worse, until it turns into a war with bows and arrows. (M. Dawson 1960:10

In this case, the visitors got what they wanted. Only the frustrated groom and his brother “left fuming and fussing”—while the disputed bride received first aid from the missionaries. These two men had a legitimate grievance, but the Koshirowa-teri were able to buy off their supporters.

The other Wakawaka division was Wakawaka-teri itself, the group that had obtained so many machetes in the early 1940s. The Wakawaka-teri began the 1950s on the lower Matacuni, an affluent of the Padamo (Hames 1983:406, 409–11). Most of the decade passed for them, as it did for the Nahibowiei-teri, without noteworthy event. They began to strengthen their alliance with Yanomamo on the middle Padamo, a well-traveled highway. At the same time, they came to fear both the sorcery of the Kobari far up the Matacuni and the possible bad intentions of the
Witokaya-teri and Auwei-teri. This combination of push and pull culminated in a move to the Padamo itself in 1961.

For the area east of the Orinoco-Mavaca area, little information is available. A windfall of steel had been given out by the Franco-Venezuelan Expedition in late 1951. Since then, woodsmen and perhaps an occasional missionary kept up contacts around and beyond the Raudal de Guajaribos, and long chains of Yanomamo middlemen also brought some tools to the highlands (Smole 1976:102). But steel must have remained scarce—perhaps rather as it was for the Namovei in the late 1940s. Barker's map (1953; see map 5) indicates peace among those with unobstructed access to the Orinoco but hostilities between them and a couple of groups in higher land to the north. Perhaps even farther into the highlands lived some Yanomamo groups whom we last heard about in chapter 10, when they were chased by war into remote headwaters around the 1920s. Smole's (1976:90-93) historical comments, not intended to be complete, suggest that these groups enjoyed continuing peace through the 1940s and into the 1950s, although at least one local group was involved in war around 1955. Nothing definite here, but nothing that looks unusual.

The best information available is about the southern Yanomamo. It consists of reports written during the early phases of missionization in the middle 1950s, and a second glimpse around mid-1962. Because these two views together illustrate the impact of the missions, and because very little information is available for the years after 1962, I will deal with the southern Yanomamo beyond this chapter's usual cutoff point of 1960.

We left off discussion of the Río Negro in chapter 10, where, by the late 1930s, Westerners had abandoned the north bank because of Yanomamo attacks. I found no information suggesting any return of Westerners during the 1940s. At the start of the 1950s, the middle Negro and adjoining Casiquiare remained largely uninhabited, with very little local commerce (Acebes 1954:209, 231-37; Gómez Picón 1978:61-64). For a few years in the early 1950s, boundary commission expeditions along the Sipana made contact with Yanomamo. Some meetings were peaceful, but in others, the Yanomamo took all the expedition members' possessions (Cocco 1972:87, 374).

It is not known with certainty when Westerners first reentered the middle Negro tributaries such as the Cauaburi, Marauí, and Paduari. As recounted by Seitz (1963:75, 86, 90), it seems that the Salesian missionary Antonio Gois was the first to renew contacts with Yanomamo, on the upper Cauaburi in 1954, but this rather heroic portrayal may overlook earlier forays by woodsmen. There is little question, however, that Westerners' fears of Yanomamo had persisted since their raids of the 1930s, and penetration by woodsmen came later here than on the upper Orinoco.

Gois's first contacts were with the Kohoroeshi-teri—the group that had captured Helena Valero two decades before. The Kohoroeshi-teri immediately wanted to move down to settle at Gois's new mission at Tapurucuara, on the Negro below the Marauí, but Gois insisted that they first develop gardens at that site. For two years, they descended the river to Tapurucuara to work on their gardens, and Gois went up to visit them. In 1956, Gois learned of other Yanomamo in the nearby Marauí basin. Although now known by different names (Mokarishio-teri and Shamata-teri), these were the old Karave-teri who had abducted Valero from the Kohoroeshi-teri. The Kohoroeshi-teri tried to prevent Gois from contacting the Karave-teri groups, for they did not want him to give them presents. When they saw that he would not be deterred, they acquiesced, and Gois made initial contact in 1958 (Cocco 1972:96).

In January 1957, Helena Valero and Akave arrived at Tapurucuara on the doleful journey that was her life after escaping from the Yanomamo. Many Kohoroeshi-teri women and children were living and going to school there. Several months later, two adventurers—Georg and Thea Seitz—came to the mission, drawn by news stories about Valero. They accompanied Padre Gois on a trip up the Cauaburi, where other Westerners were also beginning to penetrate, and they stopped at a village of Gois's "friends" called Araraibo—probably the Kohoroeshi-teri on the Ariabo tributary. This was a large village, and Gois told his guests how these Yanomamo had expanded it and their gardens with the steel he gave them. Already, there are suggestions of game depletion and a breakdown in meat sharing. Intense alliance building is suggested by Gois's comment that "their brides...are always fetched from another village" (Seitz 1963:21-22, 90, 96, 100, 141-43, 150, 165).

Then the Seitzes (1963:190, 193) accompanied the missionary when he contacted a new village along the Maia, a middle Cauaburi tributary. These people were called Shamatari but consisted of two groups, the Wawanawateri and the Herowe-teri (see Salazar 1967:map), who were moving down from the Maia headwaters. At this first contact, they were virtually without steel. The missionary gave them 24 machetes, 12 axes, 20 aluminum cooking pots, and many other items, and he promised to send more (Seitz 1963:190, 195, 197). Perhaps coincidentally—but probably not—a party of Araraibo men arrived at the Shamatari village seeking women while Gois was there (Seitz 1963:199).

As we will see shortly, it was this priest's deliberate plan to make
the Yanomamo dependent upon mission gifts in order to compel them to give up their “sinful” way of life. Seitz provides a detailed account of his dealings and attitudes—an account made all the more disturbing by the author’s unconcealed admiration for the man of God. For example, the Padre told the Seitzes: “You see, they are not really human beings—yet” (Seitz 1963:77). Perhaps that belief is what enabled Padre Gois, if the Seitz account is to be believed, knowingly to expose the Araraibo to a man with an active case of measles (Seitz 1963:115, 119, 173–74).

Gois reached these Yanomamo at the end of some twenty years of their isolation. Consistent with the theoretical model, those twenty years seem to have been decades of peace. According to Gois’s fellow Salesian, Padre Cocco (1972:96), Gois found his efforts to go from Kohoroshwe-teri to Karawe-teri impeded by animosities, but these were lingering grudges from the earlier wars described by Valero, now being rekindled by the Kohoroshwe-teri’s fear of losing some of the missionary’s trade goods. Photographs of villages taken by Seitz in 1957 show no palisades, but brush growing right up to the house structure (Seitz 1963); these are not settlements on war footing. Seitz gives no indication of any active warfare in the area, with one exception, and that involves Valero’s husband, Akawe.

From his flight with Valero until his death from pneumonia in 1967, Akawe traveled widely by canoe (Valero 1984:536–537). Early in 1957, the Kohoroshwe-teri at Tapurucuara mission offered Akawe a wife if he would help them attack the Karawe-teri.18 (This was during the time when the Kohoroshwe-teri were trying to prevent Gois from making contact with their old enemies.) Loaded down with goods he had received from the "napa," he went off, leaving Valero (Valero 1984:532–33). Not too long after that, Akawe showed up at the mouth of the Marauá River, leading about a score of Yanomamo who wanted to go to the mission. Apparently he had moved around between villages up in the headwater country, and the group he was now leading was a section of a larger group that had lost its headman to raiders (Seitz 1963:184–85). Since this group is not identified, little more can be said, other than to note the now familiar pattern in which war breaks out soon after the Western presence increases.

The relatively pacific situation witnessed by Seitz in 1957 did not last. The years from 1960 to 1962 saw clashes with boundary commission parties, missionaries, and others (Salazar 1967:16, 38, 40, 140). The Demini and Araça area, east of the Marauá, became a particular trouble spot. Although it is far from clear, it appears that a German ex-

pedition, apparently including Zerries, was working in that area in 1961 or early 1962. By mid-1962, so much fighting had broken out there that the government closed it off to all outsiders (Salazar 1967:31, 38, 183, 224). Around this time, the Kohoroshwe-teri were “studied” by “Schultes and Holmstedt” (Cocco 1972:100). Most intriguing of all, a “chief” obtained “some shotguns” and chased some missionaries out. This chief was said to be one of Valero’s sons (Salazar 1967:40, 93).

In mid-1962, Fred Salazar (1967) toured the same area visited by Seitz. Salazar is an interesting observer, almost a proto-hippie. Many of his assertions are questionable—perhaps misunderstandings, perhaps exaggerations for effect. The latter applies to his claims to be the first to contact villages that in fact had been visited by Seitz. But much else seems entirely consistent with what we know about Yanomami in such contact situations. And he provides a more critical evaluation of the missions’ activities than does Seitz.

Although the Salesians had by this time become more careful about spreading infectious diseases, a new wave of prospectors and fugitives had begun to enter the forests. The Tapurucuara mission was competing with a Protestant mission across the river, but the Protestants were not as well provisioned as the Catholics. Many Yanomami children were at the Catholic boarding school (Salazar 1967:63, 72, 114). Salazar (1967:71) comments that the mission “was the perfect place to watch the transition of the Indians from primitive jungle dwellers to caboclos who would eventually populate the miserable river villages and the floating city of Manaus.”

By mid-1962, the Salesians had two mission posts in Yanomamo territory: a small one on the Cauaburu and another begun in 1961 on the Marauá, where Gois now worked out of a two-story building. (There were also a few mission-encouraged Brazilian settlements on these rivers.) At the Marauá mission, three distinct bands of Yanomamo had settled. The area was already hunted out, and some of the rapidly acculturating Yanomamo lived largely on food provided by the mission. After his initial dispensation of gifts, Gois required his flock to attend mass and either work or trade for his goods. Because there was a marked imbalance of trade goods even among the resident Yanomamo, theft was a serious problem, and several fights with machetes were observed (Salazar 1967:75–76, 128, 133, 138, 213, 222–23, map).

Salazar also visited several Yanomamo villages that demonstrate the variable impact of mission proximity. On the Cauaburu tributary, the Maia, the composite group called Shamatari that was first contacted by
Gois and Seitz about five years before had by now extensive ties to the outside world. They were regularly visited by the Salesians, had many people down in the main mission on the Negro, had hosted the German scientific expedition some six months before, and sometime recently had relocated alongside a government Indian service post. Compared with the Kohoroshiwe-teri, the Shamatai were well provided with cloth and machetes (Cocco 1972:97; Salazar 1967:183, 188). Also in contrast to the Kohoroshiwe-teri, women here “did most of the hard labor and were more subservient. What’s more, there were plenty of them. The village was rich in women, the commodity that many of the other villages lacked, the prize for which one village raided another” (Salazar 1967:188). But no one was attacking the powerful Shamatai, “the lords of the upper Maia” (Salazar 1967:189).

The other group with greatest connection to the missions was the Shamatai-teri, one of the two Karawe-teri groups. A day’s walk from the Marauia mission, visited by Gois, and having a sizable representation at Gois’s mission, the Shamatai-teri too were a “strong and prosperous nation” with a relative abundance of women and many young men from other groups residing there (Salazar 1967:222, 228, 230–31).

In contrast to these two groups with solid Western support, the Kohoroshiwe-teri village on the upper tributary of the Cauaburi (probably the group Seitz called “Araraibo”) was not doing so well. Despite their head start in contacts with Gois, they were now some distance from the newly established Western outposts. An exceptionally large number of people had consolidated there out of fear of raiders from the north. Their enemies are not identified by name but are said to be those who had previously chased the Kohoroshiwe-teri out of the mountains, back in the time when the current headman was a young boy. (There is no suggestion, however, that they were still at war with Karawe-teri groups who were now associated with the Marauia mission to their east.) The village was palisaded, and forest had been cleared all around to prevent surprise attacks. The leader had a shotgun, but apparently no ammunition. The children looked sickly and underfed, and one man died of a respiratory problem while Salazar was present. Also during his stay, some kind of violent clash occurred not far from the village, although what really happened cannot be discerned (Salazar 1967:143–44, 148, 152, 154, 158–59, 166–69, 190, 204).

Even farther up the Cauaburi system was another group, the Amarakawebute-teri, who were said to have been “decimated” by recent raids. Near the Marauia, beyond the prosperous Shamatai-teri, lived the other Karawe-teri group, the Mokarishiobe-teri, who were also being raided, and beyond them, Salazar saw the burned out shabone of another group that had just been hit by raiders (Salazar 1967:200, 235, 237). In sum, not only did war break out in this region shortly after the arrival of the missionaries, but the region also quickly fell into the typical pattern of prosperity and security for those closest to the Western outposts and war for those villages one or two steps removed from the Westerners.

In this chapter, building on chapter 11 and all that came before, I believe I have been able to establish quite firmly that Yanomami warfare is tightly connected to changing circumstances of Western contact. The connection is both temporal and spatial. Not every single case of war, but the great majority of cases occur shortly after a major change in the Western presence and involve those who have better access to Western goods fighting those who are more removed from Western sources. Repeatedly we have seen permutations on this pattern. In the next chapter, we will be able to examine more closely the advantages of being a middleman in the Western goods trade, and how those advantages sometimes translate into antagonism and war.