On Cannibalism, Yanomami Warfare, Temporality, and Production of Life

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In Amazonian societies, systems of revenge are generally constitutive of the social order and correspond to an institutionalized violence that differs from sporadic aggression. The set of organized violent practices serves to regulate conflicts and attacks that offend people's integrity, with the offending and offended people, the nature of the offenses, and the forms of the revenge being each defined specifically. Among the Yanomami, for example, revenge constitutes a central structuring element of social and political organization. Ranging from verbal to physical retaliation, the law of revenge constitutes one of the prime movers in the dynamics of social relations. After examining the moral and political forms of revenge as elaborated by this society, I will turn my attention to the ultimate symbolic meaning of retaliation murders and to the question of the articulation of the values expressed at the different levels, the one of practice and the one of representation. It focuses in this way on the critical importance of the issue of time in regard to vengeance systems. If in principle vendetta warfare is never-ending, nevertheless it stops in reality at one moment and gives place to latent or cold wars and also to periods of peace. The staggering of acts of vengeance over time permits us to comprehend how what appears initially to answer to a logic of destruction of persons corresponds to an operation that allows for the multiplication of life.

Relations of Alliance and Relations of Hostility

Yanomami society can be described as a series of nested "sociospatial units" that maintain among them relations of amity or hostility. Relations of conviviality and concord, within or between communities, are established, conserved, and reproduced through the exchanges of marriages, visits, dis-
courses, food, goods, and feasts, and also through solidarity in food production, ceremonies, and fighting. Relations of enmity and discord are encompassed within a set of fights and aggressive actions—tangible or occult, lethal or nonlethal—that are ordered in a significant way and which generate or sustain distance between opposed groups.

Relations of discord are but the other side of the coin of relations of concord. These practices are two sides of a single system, and neither can be analyzed as an isolate: the system of amity and hostility is constituted by the opposition of complementarity between relationships of solidarity and alliance and relationships of animosity.

Within communities and between allied communities (nöfí thé pé), hostile behavior (napémou) manifests itself on the social level by disputes, by fights, and by the practices of ordinary sorcery, and on the spatial level by the fission and separation of houses. Between communities that are declared enemies (napé thé pé) it corresponds to armed raids or lethal sorcery, which generally causes the relocation of houses.

With unknown other people (shomi thé pé), hostility is acted out through aggressive shamanism or attacks on the animal double that corresponds to each Yanomami. Each of these modes of regulation of conflict and aggression is defined in accordance with the degree of the offense and also the degree of genealogical, spatial, and sociopolitical proximity or distance between the parties. All forms of confrontation, verbal or physical, call for reciprocity. A fight performed in a village demands a fight accomplished in the opposite camp; a raid initiated by a group leads logically to another raid carried out by the attacked group (see Alès 1984, 1990a, 1990b, 2003).

Contrary to the idea given in the works of N.A. Chagnon (1968a, 1968b), a bellicose incursion is never carried out with the intention of capturing women. It occurs sometimes that one or more women are taken during a raid, if an opportunity presents itself, but in that case the capture is a secondary benefit—and the same can be said for acquiring goods by raiding. Nor are raids carried out to capture lands for hunting or cultivating (Alès 1984). Warfare always begins when a person, visibly or supposedly, is intentionally killed. Among the Yanomami, we are essentially in the presence of an ideology of revenge and retaliation.

This vengeance always takes the form of a sort of vendetta, fulfilled by means of attacks with bows and arrows or by means of various kinds of sorcery. As sickness and death are frequently attributed to occult aggression, they tend also to lead to lethal retaliations. All communities that are, or have been, at war and also those that practice, or have practiced, lethal sorcery upon each other are defined as "enemies." Such groups are generally distant,
and if they are not far enough they must move further away so their bellicose relations decrease.

It is important to clarify this issue. Intratribal warfare must be distinguished from formal fights. The latter never aim to kill the opponents, and they take place between friendly communities (nofi thé pé) to settle accounts for minor conflicts—including the seduction of married women. War—as lethal attack—is in most cases practiced in the context of a death having to be avenged, and thus it occurs between parties of de facto enemies (napé thé pé).

Ethics of Retaliation

In previous works (Alè 1984, 1990a) I have shown that, far from being engendered by or an effect of social structure and corresponding to a lack of institutional means to settle conflicts (see Chagnon 1968a, 1968b), war and chronic aggression actually generate that structure. In this kind of society, the revenge system itself can be defined as an institution that secures the existence and maintenance of a symbolic order that unites the different members of a group and the different local groups. As Raymond Verdier, a jurist and anthropologist who developed revenge studies in France in the 1980s, stresses, "Vengeance is at the same time a system of exchange and a control of violence" and a "part of the global social system": "the vengeance system is first of all an ethic that brings into the game a set of representations and values concerning life and death, time and space, person and his (her) properties; then it is a social code that has its rules and its rituals that are able to open, postpone or end revenge; finally it is an instrument . . . that allows for the identification and opposition of the social units, the revenge groups" (1980, 16, my translation).

Among the Yanomami, social control is enacted within the context of the continuous threat of retaliation, a threat that in practice allows them to contain transgressive behaviors. As with other societies, such as our own, the system of security of the Yanomami in a way is thought of in terms of dissuasion. Thus, it is in the frame of, and with regard to, this sociopolitical context that the behavior of the Yanomami is culturally drawn. Training for vengeance goes on a par with an unfailing experience of solidarity toward family and kinspeople and toward co-residents, allies, and friends. The logic of Yanomami social organization is to a large extent built on this principle of solidarity and one's collective involvement in the misfortune of others. To comply with the duty of solidarity and to relieve the anger of a single person, murders and revenges are taken over by the larger collectivity.
Revenge is considered in this way as a positive and essential quality that emerges as a duty of solidarity with and also as justice for kinspeople murdered by open attack or sorcery. Yanomami are duty bound to share emotions such as the feelings of suffering and anger (pufi hushuo) of their kinspeople and allies. When someone is sad or angry, the whole community is moved to appease the person’s suffering and to help him or her regain a state of peacefulness. The code of revenge and collective responsibility, which parents inculcate into their children from their earliest years, is directly linked to an ethics of care and solidarity (see Alès 2000).

When a Yanomami is offended or has lost one of his or her close relations, it is the responsibility of his or her kin relations, allies, and friends to carry out an act of revenge. The reaction has to suit the offense, the end being to impose a similar penalty against the opponent, indeed a little bit greater than the one suffered. Each blow, wounding, attack or death is taken strictly into account, and only equity is able to reestablish a relation of symmetry and put an end—for a time at least—to potentially infinite exchanges of reprisals.

The Yanomami resort to open and occult retaliation in order to settle their conflicts concerning adultery, food theft or plantation destruction, wife stealing, and the wounding and killing of people. They have at their disposal an extraordinary graduated set of means of prosecution—duels, pitched battles, raids, and sorcery—all geared to settling grievances, suffered damage, and losses and thereby rescinding the effects of anger. There is no third party such as a court or an assembly with power to punish or to arbitrate, nor is there the possibility of giving material compensation to interrupt the cycle of retaliation. This feature can be observed, to the contrary, in other Amazonian societies, such as the Achuar, where a gun is offered in restitution for a “blood debt” within the framework of an intratribal vendetta, or among the Wayuu.5

For the Yanomami, any damage—moral or physical—must be compensated by infliction of a similar moral or physical suffering. The difference between this system of retaliatory justice and a system of penal justice lies above all in the fact that, in the first case, the offended get revenge, then the offender becomes offended, avenging himself in return, and so on; in other words, the offended party becomes the offender party once reparation is obtained.6 In the second case, the offender gets a sentence as a punishment but cannot claim then to be the offended and ask further justice for the inflicted pain (which in general would close the conflict, unless he could prove the possibility of other judgment7).

Among the Yanomami such formal fights as duels (with fist, club, ma-
chete, or axe) operate as both judicial and revenge proceedings. When allied communities decide to fight (e.g., because a man has taken a married woman or because gardens have been raided), the inflicted blows and wounds are counted on each side in order to control violence and to watch over the balance of injuries. The compensation is fulfilled not so much in the form of a recovery but rather in the shape of destruction. In a club duel the offending person adopts the culturally prescribed position in order to be hit, presenting his skull to the offended individual. He accepts receiving the first blows and thus allows the offended person to express his anger and appraise the injury and the amount of reparation. Nevertheless, these duel fights are tournaments as well. If the offended camp begins hitting first, it has to receive as many blows as it gives, peers relieving the fighters of each side after they have given and received in general from one to three blows. The tournament is held under the supervision of the elders of the two parties, who ask for the cessation of the contest when they think a sufficient number of blows has been given.

In this model, both camps simultaneously can retain their honor. Notably, the principle of reciprocity is preserved between fighters in a tournament and also in taking the initiative for a tournament. The accused camp is in effect in a position to ask for a further tournament, at a later meeting, within its own community, to avenge the pains it has endured during the first fight (and this is true for fights of rhetoric, as well). The Yanomami system of formal fighting corresponds thus to the product of a mixed system that combines characteristics of a penal system (the punishment of receiving blows) with those of a system of revenge. The latter provides the possibility of giving back as many blows as one received as well as the possibility of provoking the accuser camp at one’s own house to engage in another combat to compensate for the fact of having had to fight in the first place.8

It is another matter when a person dies, either by arms or supposedly by sorcery. The two camps become enemies, even if they were previously friends or allies. It is then the case that bellicose incursions are planned against one’s foe. A coalition is mustered of various allied communities, the aim being to murder the designated homicide(s) or (by default) a person close to him or them.9

Theoretically, the members of a kindred or close allies do not kill each other. Affairs of war break out mainly between communities already distant. When an armed conflict occurs between close houses or inside the same house, one of the consequences of hostilities will be the delocalization of one of the houses or a part of the house to a more distant place. In such a casus belli, the links of political alliance are redistributed according to the consan-
guineal and affinal proximity toward one of the parties involved; a man can even renounce a marriage because his own kinspeople are involved in the conflict, and, as much as it can be done, he tries to stay outside all revenge actions. Generally, one avoids having to attack relatives or affines, and also attempts to protect them from the vindictive intentions of one's peers. These people with close relationships on both sides of the offense are the persons who, little by little, will take the lead in overturning the decision to attack, and thus manage to calm the hostilities.

After a period of hostility, peaceful relations between opposed communities will gradually take place when mediators of both parties—first influential women, then influential men—visit and exchange discourses of reconciliation.10

Peacemaking

When vendetta wars occur, women often make possible the opening or the resumption of peaceful relations. Such appeasement can only happen after a period of latency in the hostilities. Seizing the opportunity of a kindred relation, the elder women pay a visit to a house of the opposite camp and plead in the course of a loud-blaming discourse for the cessation of aggressions and establishment of peaceful relations. Then they will visit this village many times, first taking with them some young men (who were too young to have taken part in the war) to open amicable relations with other adolescents of the community. As a consequence of the peaceful relations set up by the young men, now everyone knows that the elder men will follow the same course. The younger people transmit the message that the elders too are invited to visit, and with the security of not being attacked.

During this visit, the elder men will exchange formal dialogues of peace. In their speeches they will proclaim their friendship and attest that they will never shoot arrows again. They give assurances that they are tired of living with fear and being at the mercy of an attack. They finally claim that they are hungry and want to sleep in peace. Making war is, effectively, synonymous with hardship. Hunger—which occurs with the diminishing of production, because of the loss of freedom in walking to the gardens and the forest—is a powerful argument in favor of cessation of hostilities. Since paths and gardens are propitious for ambushes, men cannot go outside the house and work during the periods of intense raids. Both parties, then, generally suffer a lack of food. It is thus from the moment when the elders visit each other and utter the conditions of an armistice that hostile relations can give way to a resumption of peaceful relations.
However, the family of the non-avenged dead (or deads) will remain unsatisfied. Here revenge remains suspended; it will take the form of occult aggressions destined to provoke sickness and death in a designated victim, or also later take the form of a raid.\textsuperscript{11}

This point is important and allows us to see that Yanomami people have a pluralistic view of these matters. Their system provides space at one and the same time for individual opinions and decisions and for collective decisions. These may well be eventually contradictory. So, in the process of decision making within a community about the participation to an expedition, where key actors will be the young men who will fulfill what the elders (pata) wish, the latter may not necessarily all express the same opinion. Some may be in favor of war, from a sense of duty toward one of their people whom they have to revenge, while others may be against it in order to protect particular kinspeople or allies who belong to the targeted camp. The residents opposed to the raid—and there may be only one—will veto the targeting of certain close people, and this position will generally be respected.

But such persons will not run counter to the enterprise of the raid itself in order not to contradict their co-residents when they have some vengeance to fulfill or have to provide military help to others. Meanwhile, as raid follows raid, little by little the opponents will harden their position against the war and obstruct the plans for new incursions. Nevertheless, the raids will continue as long as their peers feel compelled, in their turn, to grant their demands, and first one of them, then several of them, will set themselves against the furthering of the hostilities. It is the will to make concessions on both sides that will allow for the maintenance of consensual relations within a house where interests have become divergent.

When this type of compromise is not possible because of inflexibility stemming from the direct involvement of some parties in the conflict, one side will separate from the other and leave to live elsewhere. Co-residence, while preserving the freedom of choice and opinion, requires acceptance of the other's choices in wartime, each co-resident being the possible target of counter-raids.

This system thus absorbs internal differences and allows for plurality of decisions. On the other hand, there is no unanimity of opinion, strictly speaking, among the Yanomami that would aim for the conflict to end. The consensus, both in the direction of pursuing or stopping the conflict, always includes an element of compromise.\textsuperscript{12}

In contrast to many other societies, the ending of quarrel and cessation of violent reciprocity occur, as we saw, without any material compensation in exchange. The emphasis instead is upon the radical vindictive conception
of injury; however, the way of settling conflict does channel the violence. The system of reparation encloses emotions in such a way that it constitutes finally a means of mediation in the service of the collective interest at the same time (through a massive and relatively constraining expression for the collectivity) it complies with individual suffering. Moreover, we observe both that there is an egalitarian ideology of the confrontation and that the two parties of the antagonistic couple are not always radically antithetical, with the victory of one leading to the disappearance or domination of the other.

Revenge Murder, Cannibalism and the Symbolic Production of Life

The different features of the retaliatory system of Yanomami people thus established, it remains to consider the symbolic aspects associated with the practices of revenge. A question in particular that appears to me as essential is that of comprehending how the two levels of action and symbolic representation, or of practice and ideology, are articulated.

Fundamentally, the exchanges of murders between groups of enemies among the Yanomami correspond with a figurative cannibalism and with the incorporation into the murderer of the vital principle (puñi) of the victim. Identified with the cadaver of his victim at the start, the murderer undertakes a long ritual that permits him in the end to incorporate the enemy without succumbing to this trial. However, he stays haunted by the indigestible assimilation of the absorbed enemy even after a successful homicide ritual—in reality, until he himself dies. In effect, apart from the fact that he will remain all his life a designated target for the enemy, the most experienced informants state that a murderer will always die from his homicide sooner or later.

Generally speaking, revenge appears as a system for compensation of a previous murder by the achievement of another murder. However, the Yanomami system of vengeance is not expressed in terms of recuperation of the "soul" or the qualities of the close kinspeople previously killed by the enemy (in this it differs from the general model proposed by Lévi-Strauss [1984, 141], where the counter-murder consists of the reincorporating of the kinspeople properties that the enemy itself ingested previously). Only the personal soul of the victim is incorporated into the murderer. The formerly captured souls of his kinspeople go definitively when he dies (and if the victim killed four persons in the past there will be four counter-murders). It is thus a new process of incorporation that begins. Killing an enemy is a
compensation in the sense that the warriors identically deprived the enemy group of one of its own lifeblood, of a soul and the competencies attached to it. Yanomami informants say that: “They send back to the enemies the ‘credit’ of blood”—the revenge to be accomplished—that they hitherto held and which the enemies will from now—the revenge having been carried out—possess against them. What is noticeable is that at the very moment the murder is committed, the positions are reversed. The homicide becomes a latent victim, and the victim and his peers are potential homicides.

There are two parties in vengeance, each one occupying alternatively the position of victim and of homicide, in a perpetual back-and-forth movement. What is permanent is this movement, not the composition of enemy groups, which itself evolves according to the way events develop. There is a game of alternated reflection, the camp of the victim acting as homicide as soon as a murder has been committed against it, the corpse of the deceased (the soul of which is supposed to be making the homicide succumb by return) being the intermediary (Alès 1984). The parallel ritual performance of the process that is carried out in different places—ritual treatment of the corpse of the victim made by his camp, and ritual of the homicide in his own—underlines well the opposition of complementarity between two enemy groups. To accomplish one or other of the operations (and each one in turn) is to signify the paired nature of the unfolding process. It is this mirrored construction, where each one depends of the other, that ensures the perpetuation and the efficacy of the vengeance system.

The principle of memory and perpetuation of the revenge is supported by the fact that the ritual treatment of the ashes of a deceased relative who has to be avenged remains incomplete for as long as retaliation is not carried out. Close kinspeople always keep some ashes in a funeral gourd in order for them and also for the children of the dead person to remember that revenge still remains to be performed (Alès 1984). It is the grandparents who will report to the grandchildren the name of their parents’ assassins in order to awaken the dormant anger inside their souls: becoming then aggressive, they will shout their desire of revenge and go at war. Kinspeople possess a “credit” of revenge, a suffered damage the value of which remains on hold (noa thapou), and their anger will calm down, they will find appeasement, only when a retaliatory armed raid or a lethal sorcery attack is successful.

This is why the Yanomami will activate their alliances and implicate their military partners until they succeed in such an enterprise. The same principle can be found elsewhere with different modalities. The opposite operation to the preservation of the ashes of the dead by the relatives of the victim, as among the Tupinambá the preservation of flesh of the enemies—where it
was kept for ulterior anthropophagic feasts in order to mark the memory of the revenges still remaining to be accomplished against them and to confirm the enemy groups—played an identical function (cf. da Cunha and Viveiros de Castro 1985, 198).

The Yanomami myth that explains the origin of retaliation and the homicide ritual associates death, funeral rituals, and warfare. The tale narrates the story of the killer who assassinates a very beautiful young woman. He commits this crime at the command of her husband, who was full of rancor after his wife's departure at the side of another man. After this murder, there follows the whole process of the funeral rituals, in particular the ceremonial feasts, where allied communities are gathered in order to form a coalition for pursuing the homicide. The Yanomami ancestors had to endure many unsuccessful attempts at raids before succeeding in killing the assassin after an epic chase. In the place of his death, all of the warriors who were present painted their bodies with his blood or his brain and, according to the color of the substance they used, transformed themselves into different birds and others animals that populate the forest.

Another Yanomami myth relates the story of a murderer who explicitly died as a result of the ingestion of his victim. This second narrative establishes a fundamental link between the blood of murder and menstrual and parturition blood, and beyond this, the general prolificity of the environment (see Alès 1998). Ever since these original events, when Yanomami launch a bellicose offensive, they "imitate" the "image-soul" of their ancestors who were the first ones to pursue an assassin. Since that time, homicide blood constitutes the symbolic condition of the existence of menstrual and obstetrical blood. That is why vengeance killings ensure not only the survival but also the fecundity of the Yanomami: if they did not perpetuate murders periodically, this world would be parched; the Yanomami could not reproduce themselves. The fruits of the trees would not grow; the animals would not have offspring.

From this perspective, war appears as an essential ritual for the production of living beings. Enemies are necessary since they constitute the exchange partners of vital substance, the blood of fecundity, for a general reproduction of life. And this symbolic structure unites all the Yanomami groups. In this context the Yanomami know they will have to provide death to other humans in order that humanity may survive. But this "total social fact" does not consist only in giving death and in giving back death; it also implies receiving death. Therefore this configuration does not correspond so much to a matter of predation being necessary for life; rather, it constitutes a reciprocal obligation to kill and to be killed.
The general schema of relations mobilized here would not be so much one of predation "with a permanent denial of reciprocity," as Philippe Descola (2005, 471) defines it, but rather one of exchange. In this sense, men going on a raiding party are fully conscious that they will necessarily be the next targets in the reprisals game. A village that forms a coalition with a community organizing war parties has the full knowledge that it will become the object of the raids of the enemies as well, especially if one of the assaults in which it participated is successful. And the men who take part in murder, either alone or collectively, accept the fact that they will be the preferential mark of the dead person's relatives and allies. Sooner or later the latter will undertake to eliminate them. And in any case they are unfailing prey of their victim's avenging specter that haunts them inside themselves.

**Temporality and Revenge Ethics**

Thus among the Yanomami there is, on the one hand, an ethic and value of retaliation, perfectly codified, in order to compensate for the anger and sorrow that are associated with death and with duties toward the dead, and which are generative of a strong ethic of solidarity. On the other hand, there is a symbolic meaning of homicide as it enables the generation and fecundity of human beings, plants, and animals.

However, the question is: What is the logic that permits such a justice system—retaliation system—that is based on a compensatory system by the destruction of persons, this system being characterized by a process of strict, indeed restricted reciprocity of a "one death for one death" type, to be coherent at the same time with a symbolism of the production of lives and, better still, with a system of the multiplication of lives? How can destruction and the principle of reprisal, infinite per se, be compatible with the symbolic meaning of the assassinations and the success of the murder ritual?

To answer such a question it is necessary to analyze the relation to time involved in the vengeance process, and beyond that, within the whole retaliation system. In particular, Yanomami ethnography can help us to understand better how this issue of time is linked to revenge. We shall see that the cycles of revenge are staggered and spread over time in different ways.

First, a latency period separates a murder from the murder committed in return. From the Yanomami perspective, the contemporary Yanomami still "imitate" their ancestors. They avenge murders in the same way as occurred in the myth of the reprisals, noted above, which had its source in passion and jealousy. However, it is notable that the story of the original feud includes the principle of a period of latency between the first murder and the return
murder. The mythical hero Opossum, whom the Yanomami pursue, represents a very special kind of homicide, since after he committed his crime he was a successful survivor. His enemies needed to form coalitions and embark on innumerable occasions on raiding parties, since they were unable to hit their target. They stalked Opossum for a long time in the forest, but he was so well hidden that he managed each time to fly from his pursuers.

The tale thus unfolds in the shape of the assassins' never-ceasing quest. It was only after numerous attempts that they ended up destroying him. Now the crucial point to be stressed in this narrative is the fact that the murderer evaded the revenge actions for a very long period before finally suffering retaliation for his deeds. The long-lasting inability of his pursuers to achieve vengeance is precisely why Opossum is seen as a successful murderer. As a particularly skilled person in eluding the endeavors to kill him, he is a very good model to imitate. In surviving for a long time before becoming the victim of the retaliation, this ancestor personifies the paragon of the brave combatant, of what a waitheri person is, and his "image-soul" remains the ideal image for all warriors today.

Second, a period of latency also occurs after a cycle of open, armed raids. Generally, a long time passes after a series of homicides on both sides. This period of latency is the time necessary to be sure of the efficiency of the armistice and to establish the diplomatic relations that will permit a reversion to a quiet life. Open conflict is more likely to cease when a parity of murders is achieved, since each side has the need to cultivate their gardens and to go to the forest to gather and to hunt without fearing the attacks of their enemies.

However, that means that at least the last dead person in the cycle of vendetta is not avenged. The kinspeople of the victim will then keep a part of the ashes for a long time, sometimes as long as it is necessary for the children of the deceased to grow and to be able to lead the revenge. One of the other reasons to put reprisals on hold is also to lead the enemy into thinking that one has forgotten that there is a revenge to fulfill. This "dormant" state of revenge, and consequently of the enemy's vigilance, is part of the Yanomami war strategy; it is in effect quite impossible to succeed in killing a warrior who is aware and alert. To let time elapse is in this way a deliberate policy of the reprisal system, and this policy is conceived as such by the actors.

In this pattern of vengeance, the time factor is central; it is probably the most crucial element of it. The interval of time between a murder and its revenge and between two cycles of murders has extreme importance, as the time elapsed between the one and the other corresponds to a mechanism that allows for the reproduction of the groups. Delayed vengeance is in effect
the proper model of Yanomami revenge, since it makes possible the growth and production of children while the retaliation is suspended.

In parallel to the retaliations that are staggered over time in different ways, the ceremonial funeral feasts organized for a dead person are multiple and also spread over several months and very often over several years. First, the bones crushed after the incineration of the body are divided into several urns, and those are shared among several kinspeople, affines, or friends. Later the ashes in each of these gourds are divided, to become the motive of several distinct feasts. All of these particular ritual treatments of the corpse follow a specifically ordered and codified succession. The ceremonies are staged in an ordered fashion in both time and space, several communities—located at different distances—participating in each one in its turn in this long-term ritual process. The multiplication of the "body" of the dead—through its division into several gourds, themselves fragmented into several sections of ashes giving rise to several festivals—presents then a striking analogy to the multiplication of the Yanomami people through the carrying out of murder.

In effect, in many respects the periodicity of the murders is comparable to the periodicity of menstruation and birth. We have seen that if the Yanomami did not kill humans, the women would have no blood for menstruation and for giving birth. When an assassination is committed, it is also said that it is a source of fecundity for the one who killed. It remains to understand the articulation of the whole process from the male killing to the female blood and pregnancy. In fact, the murder blood—contained into the victim's body absorbed by the homicide—permits first the densification of the sperm. Now we know that among the Yanomami the male substance, which also constitutes the amniotic liquid and the fetus, is essential for the female blood to appear (see Alès 1998, 2003). That is why homicides enable the production of menstrual and obstetrical flows. More specifically, to kill favors the development in quality and in quantity of all the male and female substances necessary for procreation.

Considered in its totality, the figurative cannibalism corresponds to a double capture. On the one hand, it produces an income of substances, the blood—the body—of the enemy, purveyor per se of sperm and fecundity. On the other hand, it comprises also an incorporation of qualities, the competencies of which the captured soul is endowed with, potential supplier of animal preys, favoring densification of the sperm and fecundity. The inrush of blood, of which the assassin profits only once he succeeds in surviving the confrontation with the incorporation of the body of the victim, renders him fertile, as the capture of the capabilities of the soul of the victim makes him a
good hunter. All those who surround him in this manner appreciate him very much. In effect, he will not be the only person to benefit from it. It is not only he and his wife (or wives) who will have babies but also all the people of his village, and the surrounding villages as well—all those in reality who participated in the coalition. If, on the contrary, in less favorable circumstances, he fails and dies from the internal effects of the murder he committed, the benefit of fecundity comes back to the opposite camp—which noticeably becomes homicidal in turn. The increment of blood carried by the victim is primordial in the sense that blood flows inside the bodies and, this way, exists in a sufficient quantity. “If they didn’t kill humans, there would not be very much blood. The trees would be without fruits, the humans without descendants, game animals without babies. The forest would be taken over by dryness, blood would start to disappear.” The essential point developed by this theory is certainly this process of regeneration engendered by murders that allows blood to exist in sufficient quantity, a process that itself ensures the possibility of fecundity for the male by densification of sperm, this also in turn entailing fecundity for the female by fluidity of blood of menstruation and parturition.

It is also noticeable that births are markers of temporality. They provide a cyclic rhythm to time passing and are seen as an ordered sequence. In this sequence, not all children will have a warrior soul. The Yanomami state that, in a sibling set, one child receives a warrior competence, while another is shy, another shows himself to be a shaman, another proves to be a coward, and then, finally, a warrior, a shaman, and so on are born again. Not all Yanomami are bold (waiteriti); this personality configuration, in which a person is endowed with a martial character, happens only periodically.

We observe, then, that the notion of ordered intervals between the births of warriors in a sequence of children is analogous to the staggering of the murders over time. In other words, if there were only bellicose personalities, the Yanomami would no longer exist. Moreover, if a homicidal warrior kills an excessive number of persons, this surplus will not be beneficial and may even be damaging for him and for his descendants as well. A Yanomami must kill to regenerate fecundity, but to assassinate without restraint would have the opposite effect. That concept signifies that a form of continence has to be adopted in this activity of killing, that there is a sort of control on the number of murders a person can productively accomplish. This is as specified by informants: “When a Yanomami assassimates another Yanomami he does not usually murder again immediately (or he will be killed). He keeps home for a while; he fathers a child and does not return to war. Only after reestablishing a quiet and healthy life does he go to kill again.” After the first
murder, the homicide recovers a beautiful soul, but if he still continues to go to war, then he dies.” Finally, under the grip of the victim’s cadaver and the repeated anathema and funeral rituals made by the revengeful enemies, the multi-murderer gets ill, his soul deteriorates, he no longer can successfully complete the homicide ritual. His wife gives birth to a dead baby and cannot give birth anymore. His corrupt soul is projected into the souls of his older children, who consequently die. The destiny of the warrior who is always in a temper and goes continuously to war, such as Geronimo, is always to end up alone.

The sum of these constructions permits us to understand that murders do not need to be achieved in an “unreasonable” proportion and that a period of time between the different performances of revenge is essential. They lead us to comprehend that if time constitutes a necessary condition before destroying again, it is in order to be able to create again.

The revenge model as a principle for the perpetuation of humanity

As we have seen, the latency period within a system of (perpetual) reciprocity of reprisals appears as a key for reproduction. Two murders in opposite camps cancel each other out but also call for retaliation: the ashes are kept long enough that people begin to forget that the revenge of the last homicide(s) has (have) not been achieved. Then, after several years have passed, when the sons have grown up and when other children have been generated, it is possible to kill again. From a global point of view it is an operation of multiplication that has been realized.

Passage of time, intervals, and delays in revenge can be interpreted as an ideal means for producing a generation between two retaliatory wars. It is thanks to these intervals in time that Yanomami feuds are not wars of extermination. To the contrary, revenge wars permit the survival and specifically the multiplication of human beings and partake of the perpetuation of humanity and its environment. They are at the conceptual level the possibility of a future for the Yanomami.

In this system of revenge, several levels can be considered. The first concerns discourse. It describes the level of the immediate reaction. When a person dies, the close relatives and affines will say, “When the enemies kill one of my side, I give them back three dead people! Four of them!!!” For one death, they declare themselves willing to give back a greater number of deaths than is possible. The Yanomami discourse of anger in mourning a dead person is an inflationist discourse of destruction.14
In practice, hostilities and bellicose raids unfold in a different way. At this level we observe that revenge follows a "one for one" model, with a strict accounting of the attacks and dead people received and given, as there is a strict accounting of the reciprocity of blows, feasts, disputes, and accusations. It also can be noticed that the intensity of hostilities inverts when fights, verbal disputes, and killings have been sufficiently enacted on both sides. The politics of appeasement then is based on a principle of balance, on a principle of equity (a death for a death), which corresponds to a relatively short time.

After the enactment of open bellicose hostilities, the relationships enter into a state of latency, participants being neither overtly hostile nor amicable. Some of the antagonists of each camp—but not the whole collectivity—are willing to continue revenge actions; this is the period during which occult sorcery attacks typically occur (these corresponding more to the time that precedes and follows a period of intensive raids). The remainder now wish a truce on open hostilities and try to initiate peaceful communication little by little with the agonistic communities with the goal of establishing an armistice. The latency period and the relative peace that becomes established after the occurrence of open raids, when only occult sorcery operates (which finally induces logically the principle of endless reprisals), refer to a middle time.

Temporality is a crucial dimension for the comprehension of the inversion of opposite practices that operates in a retaliation system. There is a time of open vengeance, then the change to a latency period, which looks like peace but in fact corresponds to occult revenge, until a denunciation or an evident attack occurs that will lead once again to open armed conflict. The latter will yield afterward to a period of relative peace and so on, in perpetual movement. Viewing this over the long term, we can describe this system as chronic warfare or as infinite reprisals. For the Yanomami it constitutes the proper human condition.

However, the nature of the vengeance should not be understood as one that allows for recuperating the lost lives or substances, souls, or identities. Rather, it is an eminently creative process.

As in every structure of exchange, the taking into account of diachrony appears essential to the analysis. It permits us also to understand vengeance as a value, or an "idea-value" according to Dumont (1983). The diverse levels of facts and values, which refer to different temporal periods (immediate term, short term, middle term), translate the conceptions contained in the retaliation schema—extermination, equity, and reproduction. These diverse configurations are sustained by different logics and decisions (as hard-line-
policy; reprisals; and cessation of the quarrel and conciliation)\textsuperscript{15} that are all subordinate to a superior value, that of generation.

The model of retaliation is consistent with the establishment of the periodicity of murders—in other words, with the fact that enough time passes to allow for the begetting of new persons.\textsuperscript{16} It responds to the question with which we started: How can a principle of multiplication proceed from a principle of destruction? The general idea is that revenge systems are systems of compensation for vital energies. However, we see that they can be thought of not only in terms of systems of compensation for but also of systems of multiplication of vital energies. In many cases, the compensation, which appears to be following a restricted reciprocity of "one for one," is conceived of at the symbolic level, that of ideology and representations, as an exchange of the "one for the many." Ethics of reprisals and ethics of solidarity are encompassed by the value of survival/production of persons, conceived as the future, which constitutes a superior value. It is this latter value that is characteristic of Yanomami social morality. It embodies the value that allows for the perpetuation of humanity.

Notes

1. Following Evans-Pritchard's (1968, 228) terminology.
2. Each individual has an animal double as an alter ego that lives far away in an unknown part of the territory. The death of an animal double provokes simultaneously that of the corresponding Yanomami, and vice versa. If a local group attributes the death of one of its members to the killing of his animal double by a Yanomami, this will lead to retaliation in its own region against an animal that is supposed to be the double of another distant Yanomami (see Alès 1984, 1998).
3. See also Alès 1993, 75-76 nn. 2 and 3.
4. B. Ferguson (1995)—for whom warfare is supposedly recent among the Yanomami and the result of the introduction of metal tools by strangers, and for whom none of the "anthropologists in the field pressed informants about materialist interests involved in war" (12)—dismisses this point (11) to the extent of suggesting that the Yanomami "informant may be manipulating the anthropologist, who is perceived primarily as purveyors of trade goods" (13). When this thesis was explained to some Yanomami, they complained about "falsities" being spread and questioned the author's right to write about the Yanomami without having worked with them.
5. The jivaroan vendetta is carried out on the basis of a death for a death when within the same group, and it is distinguished from head hunting, the aim of which is to take the maximum number of heads from another group; however, it is possible to compensate a death with the gift of a gun when it occurred between local groups belonging to the same territorial area, which cannot be realized between
groups spatially and socially distant (cf. Harner 1977; Taylor 1985; Descola 1986, 1993a, 1993b). Among the Wayuu of the Guajira the spirit of vendetta is still present both in discourse and in practice, including in the case of murder. A system of compensation through the offering of goods is possible within the framework of conflicts that touch the integrity of persons or personal goods, cattle being generally demanded and offered in such cases in reparation by an intermediary (other goods or, more recently, money can be part of the compensation) (see Petullo 1937; Perrín 1986; Picon 1996). The Wayuu system, which could have taken different forms in the past before the adoption of pastoralism, is closer, according to Picon, to the systems existing among pastoralist groups (Nuer, Bedouins, etc.), where the circulation of goods is important, than to the Amazonian systems. Picon underlines the point that the existence of compensation should not be interpreted as a substitution for vengeance as an anterior practice: vengeance and compensation coexist and are parts of a single system (1996, 315). The system of material compensation to put an end to the cycle of murders is also found elsewhere in the world (see Coppet de 1970; Verdier 1980).

6. It is interesting to notice the recent judicial legislation of April 2005 restricting (but still including) the Albanian vendetta system (kanun) only to a sole person in the case of the “blood debt,” a measure that is intended to protect the members of a murderer’s family from the extension of the revenge to each of them.

7. In this case we have again a justice that is unable to settle the dispute definitively. Boltanski and Thévenot (1987) show that justice treats the dispute by relating it to a general equivalence and by subjecting the parties to a trial in reference to this equivalence, but that the trial can always be relaunched relying on the support of another equivalence (cf. Boltanski 1990, 139).

8. The pitched battles with clubs generally occur only after asking for the return of the seduced wife and/or challenging the ravisher to fight in a duel form. If the latter has already escaped and his camp refuses to restore the wife, the two parties will have a pitched battle, and eventually several of them over time. The quarrel stops when the offended party abandons the fight, the wife comes back to her husband, or the offending party accepts duels in order to assuage the anger of the injured party.

9. Before starting the warlike raid, the belligerents shout for vengeance. They metaphorically compare the enemy with animal prey that will be devoured. They scream that they are hungry for meat, asserting that they are absolutely certain of the success of their hunting party.

10. In this kind of society without centralized institution of authority, formal speeches are an essential path to social mastery (see Alès 1990b, 2003).

11. Armed raids or practices of lethal sorcery are also implemented when a new death is understood to be due to a sorcery attack by an enemy. According to this intentionality conceived in death and sickness, the Yanomami live permanently at a very high level of anxiety. The fear of being the subject of occult aggression also curtails free movement. Areas of movement, visits to other communities, or their avoidance by individuals are always determined in terms of relative security, so it
is not uncommon for visitors to turn back before reaching the community they are making for. This configuration particularizes the mobility of each individual and community within the territory (Alès 1984, 2000).

12. It is in this measure that only the recognition of conflict and the acceptance of disagreements appear capable of generating a contract, a compromise between the social actors. This necessary compromise integrates conflicts within itself and is not a utopia aiming to construct a harmonious society.

13. The link between murder and fecundity can also be found, for example, among the Tupinambá, where warfare cannibalism was associated with the first paternity (cf. Cuñha da and Viveiros de Castro, 1985, 194). It seems also present in the head-hunting practiced by the Jïvaro (Taylor 1985, 161; Descola 2005). The many analogies that can be established between the Yanomami, the Jïvaro, and the Tupinambá (and others as well)—three emblematic societies that illustrate different modalities of warfare in the lowlands of South America—enable not only the understanding as a sole configuration of the diverse shapes taken by the ritual cannibalism, be it figurative or literal (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1984, 142), but also the relativizing of the distinctions sometimes introduced between vendetta or intratribal warfare, intertribal war, and exocannibalism.

14. When a Yanomami is murdered, the vengeance owners announce that the dead person will have the value of three or four deaths: "enaha [four fingers are shown] a ano kuapê" (in this way / [number shown by four fingers] / determine value / it will have).

15. In other words, the idea of excessive destruction (to a degree that will lead to massive destruction); that of balanced destruction as form of punishment and of compensation, reparation, and defense of the rights and integrity of people; and that of renewal of the forces through the conservation and development of the living people and production of new persons.


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