Yanomamo: The Fierce People Study Guide

Yanomamo: The Fierce People by Napoleon Chagnon

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

Superstitions play a major role in the daily lives of the Yanomamo people. Infant mortality rates are high and it is generally accepted that all unexplained deaths are the result of evil spirits. More specifically, it is often believed that someone sends those evil spirits. To achieve revenge, tribe members send out evil spirits of their own.

Napolean A. Chagnon is an anthropologist who spends several years during multiple visits to the Yanomamo people of Brazil and Venezuela, then relates his findings in the form of this monograph. Chagnon reveals many aspects of the Yanomamo tribes, including details about two men who were important to his research. Kaobawa is headman of a Bisaasi-teri tribe of the Yanomamo people. He is a quiet, unassuming man who leads largely by example. When he needs his people to clear the weeds from a central area in preparation of a feast, he begins the task and is soon joined by others who do most of the work.

The other man who plays an important role in Chagnon's research is Rerebawa. Chagnon says that he considers the man his friend and that they make many trips together. On one of those, Chagnon takes Rerebawa on a trip to civilization.

The Yanomamo prize ferocity among the men. The young boys are taught to be fierce and are rewarded when they strike out at others, even adults. Young girls are considered an asset only in that they are able to take on many duties and do so at an early age. Girls have little say in their lives, are handed off in marriages that are beneficial to their fathers, brothers or male relatives, and are largely at the mercy of husbands. When their husbands are cruel, male relatives may sometimes rescue the woman, usually giving her in marriage to some other man. Because of this potential for rescue from a bad situation, women hate the thought of being taken captive or traded to some other village. Trading of women is fairly common as is being captured. When a village is being raided, women tend to take their young children with them whenever they leave the relative safety of the compound so if they are captured they will not be separated from their children.

Warfare, in various forms, is very common. From a duel known as chest pounding to outright raids, Chagnon says most people have lost a sibling, child or parent to warfare. The chest duel is a formal method Yanomamo use to avoid full-fledged war. In this, two men meet, one extending his chest and the other striking with his fist. The roles are then reversed.

Chagnon says he sees many changes occur among the Yanomamo people over the course of his research. The people obtain many possessions and that prompts many to stop living among the large tribal communities so that they have the ability to collect and retain those possessions. Many move nearer established missions to collect the benefits—including the fact that shotguns are sometimes provided as payment for work. There are also diseases introduced to which the Yanomamo have no natural resistance and which prove fatal.

Prologue, Chapter 1

Prologue, Chapter 1 Summary and Analysis

Superstitions play a major role in the daily lives of the Yanomamo people. Infant mortality rates are high; all unexplained deaths are the result of evil spirits, typically sent by someone. To achieve revenge, tribe members send out evil spirits of their own.

The Yanomamo are "thinly scattered," have a complex language, live in villages of forty to three hundred people, and typically dress only in scant attire. Plantains—a cooking banana—are their main dietary staple and they typically work only about three hours each day, usually in gardening, hunting, gathering or making baskets, hammocks, bows and arrows. They avoid rivers, though their northern neighbors, the Ye'kwana, have elaborate canoes. Life for the Yanomamo is dictated by two seasons—wet and dry. In the dry season, tribe members travel for trading or waging war. Violent death is common, especially for men. Leaders, or headmen, determine tribal relationships and must have the reputation of fierceness. Aggressiveness is an important part of the culture, with incidents ranging from "individual vindictiveness" to general bellicosity among tribe members.

The people freely share food and are are likely to show up days or even months later demanding repayment in kind. The people of the tribes are incessant and aggressive beggars. Theft, disguised as "borrowing," is common and Chagnon comes up with a method of recovering his items, which wins him respect with the tribe.

The Yanomamo people show respect for prominent people by eschewing their names. No one is willing to give their true name and instead they make up names, often ones with inappropriate connotations. Chagnon plans to collect genealogies in order to document marriage patterns, interfamilial relationships, and alliances. The people jealously guard the names of the dead. When in a disagreement, tribal members may say the name of their opponents deceased family members out loud. Members won't say the names of the dead out loud, and when Chagnon does at one point, one of the members flies into a rage. Simply compiling the census could be a lethal undertaking for Chagnon.

Chagnon works on the project for more than a year when Kaobawa, headman of the Upper Bisaasi-teri, offers to help, promising that he will not lie as others have done and pledges his services in exchange for a hatchet. When he does not know the answer to Chagnon's question, he quietly asks around until he discovers what he believes to be the truth. Kaobawa proves himself as a young man, meaning he is not under any pressure to be excessively assertive. He also has a large extended family who stand by him in the case of conflict.

The Yanomamo have three numbers—"one, two and more-than-two." When Chagnon begins his research, Kaobawa is about forty, and one of his wives is pregnant and is

also nursing a child. Kaobawa has two wives then, Bahimi and Koamashima. Bahimi is the older and his favorite, and the mother of two living children. Koamashima is younger, has a son, and Chagnon notes that Kaobawa has considered giving her to his younger brother who has no wife. Bahimi kills the infant because the child would have competed with the older child for milk, thus lessening the older child's chances of surviving childhood.

Rerebawa, with whom Chagnon develops a deep friendship, is nothing like Kaobawa, being arrogant and pushy. He has an affair with his brother's wife, beats his brother when confronted and introduces Chagnon to the man as "the brother whose wife I screwed."

Opportunities for first contact are dwindling as more research is done and there are fewer unknown tribes. Chagnon's purpose for the first contact is further research as it becomes evident that all tribes he initially visits are "splinters" of a larger group. Visiting other tribes is difficult because tribes are often at war with one another, so it is not always possible to find a willing guide, tribesmen are reluctant to allow Chagnon to leave because he has trade goods and they want to keep it all, and villages are often a great distance away with exact locations unknown. One of those is the Shamatari. Some of the splinter groups of this tribe have a history of warfare against the Bisaasi-teri. Chagnon unsuccessfully attempts to contact the Shamatari before making a successful trip.

The villages of the Yanomamo people interact and that social "politics" are at work just as is the case of more civilized communities. As is evidenced by the united forces in the attack against the Bisaasi-teri, tribes join together for battles and sometimes trade. People within a tribe may be related but it is sometimes difficult for a tribe to trust outsiders. The Bisaasi-teri splits into what is known as the "Upper Bisaasi-teri" and "Lower Bisaasi-teri." While they argue and cannot get along, they remain camped near each other in case of a raid.

Marriages are often arranged to further relationships between tribes or families. Girls are promised in marriage at a young age and failure to deliver can result in all-out war. The feud can escalate to the point that a tribe splits, with the two sections becoming sworn enemies. There are a shortage of marriageable girls, partly because of a general gender imbalance and partly because men have multiple wives. Alliances and friendships with other tribes mean there are additional women available for marriage, but alliances can disintegrate.

Chagnon writes of the "culture shock" of his first day in the field, his desire for acceptance and his preconceived notions of what he will find upon arrival, to help future anthropologists. He expects the full body of the tribe to rush forward, anxiously offering welcome and genealogical information. Instead, he finds many of the men blowing hallucinogenic powder into the noses of other tribesmen, the tribe in a general state of anxiety because of a raid the previous day and a pack of dogs snapping angrily around his legs. He is at first appalled by the fact that the men snort the hallucinogenic drugs then allow their noses to simply run or wipe the mucus on their hands, but later accepts

that they wear almost no clothing so there is simply no place to wipe their noses. Although repulsed by the stench, after a short time, he admits he "reeked like a jockstrap" from wearing the same clothing for a week at a time.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary and Analysis

The Bisaasi-teri tribe of Kaobawa live at the confluence of the Orinoco and Mavaca rivers. Nearly indescernable paths exist, often leading to gardens or neighboring villages. Traveling parties visit neighboring villages, often taking several days. Traveling is done only during the dry season—Sember through March—though footbridges are sometimes constructed to cross small streams during the rainy season.

Snakebite is a constant danger; many die and others lose limbs. Technology includes transitory vine and stick bridges over rivers, and clay pots made for feasts that break easily. Women are considered clumsy and are seldom allowed to use the pots. Weapons are bows, arrows, and brittle curare-poisoned "husu namo" points, used primarily to hunt monkeys. Other "poisons" including hallucinogens are also used, and sometimes the men scrape the darts and sniff it to get high. During the dry season, pools of fish become trapped and are a major food source. Men may also poison a stream, stunning the fish, which the women and girls then scoop up, biting the larger ones behind the head to kill them.

A splinter of a reed called sunama is used to shave the heads of the men and to trim bangs. The size of the tonsure depends on the tribe. Children are sometimes shaved, especially if lice become a problem. Children and adults sometimes delouse each other as a sign of affection. Both hisiomo, yakowana justicia are used as hallucinogens, typically by drying the bark, grinding it into a powder, using saliva to make it into a paste and then again grinding it into a powder. The powder is then loaded into a thin reed, placed in the nose while a fellow tribesman blows the powder up the nose.

The village is built around the shabono, a house that is actually the several small structures built together from trees, vines and leaves. If the village is moving to a new area, the site for the shabono is chosen based on the proximity to allies, enemies and gardening spots, and on the likelihood of flooding. The size depends on the number of people in the village but will be large enough to also accommodate visitors, meaning that villages of political importance must be larger than a village of the same population but with few expected visitors. Palisades are sometimes erected around the shabono, especially if the threat of a raid is high.

The Yanomamo eat an array of wild game, including alligator, monkeys, armadillos, deer, rodents, pig, and two large game birds that resemble pheasants and turkeys. Some large snakes are eaten but not particularly considered desirable, while crabs, tadpoles and many insects are highly prized. A particular type of grub found in the heart of a palm tree is gathered for food. Fruits include plantain, nuts, tubers, seed pods and the fruits of several kinds of hardwood. Palm hearts are a delicacy, as is honey.

Most of the food comes from gardens. Hunters typically find new areas to garden, and locations are stored away in memory until the tribe needs to move. Much of the clearing is done with steel axes. The influx of tools may be the reason for a population explosion. Manioc, ohina, and sweet potatoes are among the root crops preferred by the Yanomamo. Avocados, hot peppers and papayas are also grown for food. Other crops are not intended for consumption, such as the arrow cane used to make arrows and tobacco. The latter is considered a sign of wealth and the word for "poor" is literally translated "without tobacco." While tobacco is guarded jealously, it is also shared freely. Cotton is also produced in gardens, with the fibers used for yarn to make hammocks and clothing. The word "clothing" is open to interpretation, that both men and women wear little other than decorative strings, but that both are modest in their own way—a woman keeping her legs together when rising, for example.

Garden size depend on the number of people it will support. The headman contributes more than others to community feasts and often entertains, meaning he needs a larger space. A plot is used for about three years before becoming overgrown, then an area around it is expanded and the old part—called the "old woman"—falls into disuse. Some plants are transplanted into new garden spots while others, such as the plantain, occur naturally.

Arguments or war are among the chief reasons for moving villages or splitting groups. When raids are a constant threat, a village may pack up and move. When groups argue, one faction or even two may relocate. When this happens, there is the immediate problem of producing sufficient food. If those relocating have the option to return to their own gardens for plants and cuttings, they will likely begin work on a new garden fairly near by. If not, they may locate near a friendly tribe who are willing to give cuttings and plants. In both cases, the distance plants have to be carried determines the size and number of cuttings, and the time before the tribe will be eating a normal diet. Maize grows more quickly than plantains but is less desirable. It sometimes becomes a major food source in a new garden. Asking for help from a "friendly" village is seen as a sign of weakness and the requesting group can expect the men to seek sexual favors in return for aid.

The lowland people typically have larger tribes, there is less aggression among the men, more abducted women, and a higher level of organization in feasts and social structure. Groups that split historically follow three paths: They remain close together but form distinctly separate communities, thereby offering protection for each other while eliminating the conflicts that prompted the split; they are forced by war out of the lowlands into the less desirable regions of the highlands; or they move into previously unsettled areas of the lowlands.

As is the case with any group of people, the Yanomamo's culture and traditions are impacted by myth and historical happenings that "lie hidden" in the minds of those people. Villages may be located as near as a few hours' walk or as distant as a ten-day walk, with family relationships, animosities and alliances generally determining the locations.

All technology is readily made from available materials so every tribe can be self-sufficient. However, trade does occur between tribes. Also, there are cases in which the "personalities" of the various villages is evident, such as taste in food. Even tribes with limited or no contact with foreigners have matches, due to trade among groups.

The Yanomamo, who live in the forest in what many would call primitive conditions, greatly enjoy camping out. They will set up a camp for several days, enjoying the different foodstuffs they can find away from their village and resting from the need to tend the garden and perform other normal chores.

Men of the Yanomamo tribes wear nothing but a string around their waists with the foreskin of the penis tied to it. It is something of a rite of passage when a young boy begins to tie up his penis. With the influx of trade, many men seem to prefer shorts.

One theory of the movement of various tribes is taken from the general premise that people need meat and that a scarcity of protein prompts movement. Chagnon and his research assistants set out to disprove the theory and one supporter of the theory suggested that thirty grams of protein—the equivalent of a Big Mac—would be sufficient to disprove the theory. Chagnon notes that the average intake was actually much higher. When he told members of the Yanomamo tribe that some believe the need for meat prompted fighting, they laughed and said that they like meat but like women more. Chagnon posits that most wars among the Yanomamo are fought over women.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary and Analysis

The Yanomamo language is complex; there is no written language. The Yanomamo people have a rich culture and storytelling is a favored pastime. Many of the storytellers take great liberties with the telling, elaborating in often funny and imaginative ways.

The Yanomamo people believe that everything can be classed either as "nature" or "culture." The difference is that things of the forest are "nature" while things of the village are "culture." The Yanomamo people have interesting ideas about cannibalism; any human may become a cannibal and that they must guard against the temptation. Many of their myths and legends revolve around the jaguar. In these he is typically of human form and his eating of man makes him cannibalistic in their eyes. In all the stories of jaguars, the animals are bumbling and stupid with man always easily outwitting the jaguar.

Sex is an important part of the Yanomamo myths and legends. A legend about twins, Omawa and Yoawa, who capture the daughter of a sea monster in order to copulate with her, provides instruction on how to copulate "discreetly".

The Yanomamo have a complex concept of the soul. Upon death, one part of the soul—the buhii—escapes "up the hammock ropes and travels to the layer above." The most important part of the soul—the moamo—abides in the body's thoracic cavity, likely in the liver. This part of the soul may be lured from the body which will result in death and shamans spend hours each day in chants to retain or recover lost souls. In addition to a soul, individuals have a "noreshi," an animal counterpart. The noreshi of men are animals that live in trees or fly while those of women dwell on or even under the ground. If a person is ill, so is their noreshi. If a hunter kills his own noreshi, he himself will also die. The male hekura—spirits—have glowing halos around their heads while the females have glowing wands protruding from their vaginas.

There are two basic "kinds" of cannibalism—exocannibalism which is the eating of other people and endocannibalism which is the eating of one's own people. In the case of the Yanomamo, endocannibalism of the "anthropophangy" type is practiced, meaning that the Yanomamo eat a portion of their own dead in a ritual manner. A dead person is cremated, and when the body is completely burned, the ashes are sifted to find all bone and teeth that remain. Those are then ground ceremonially in a hollowed log and most of the dust is placed into three gourds. The remainder is carefully washed out with plantain soup and "solemnly drunk as the assembled, squatting relatives and friends mourn loudly and frantically." The saved dust is used in a later ritual that may be attended by relatives from distant villages. If the deceased is a man who was killed in a raid, his ashes are kept until the eve of the revenge raid when only the women consume the ashes in soup. This process may take many years and remaining ashes are kept in the roof of a relative's home until all are consumed. If the deceased is a child, the

amount of dust from bone is much less and is usually consumed by the parents. In the case of many deaths, such as an epidemic, corpses are wrapped with bark and wood and placed in trees to allow natural decomposition. Then the bones are scraped and burned and the dust consumed as usual.

Many men in the Yanomamo tribes aspire to be shamans, called "shabori" or "hekura." A shaman in training goes through a year of fasting and avoiding sex, and most are skin and bones when they finish. This may be a ploy by the older shamans to lessen the conflict that arises over women and that having the younger men abstain offers the older men more opportunities. A skilled shaman has many hekura living inside their bodies peacefully. Most shaman converse with the spiritual world after snorting the hallucinogen ebene.

The Yanomamo believe that there are four parallel layers that make up the cosmos. Details vary from tribe to tribe but the consensus is that the upper once had a purpose but no longer is useful; the next is the "sky" layer and is basically the same as what is on earth; the third is where man dwells; and the bottom layer is inhabited by people called Amahiri-teri, who are cannibals. Upon death, the soul rises to the upper layer where he is questioned about his life—stingy people are directed down one path where fire awaits and generous people are directed to a tranquil place where they live a "semi-mortal" existence. There are some similarities to Christianity.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary and Analysis

The roles of men are vastly different from the roles of women. Girls begin helping with domestic chores such as caring for younger siblings and fetching wood or water at a much earlier age than boys begin working. Girls are typically promised in marriage at an early age. Boys, mostly because they marry later in life, often initiate the proposal and may even raise a prospective wife during part of her childhood. There is no word for "love", except to describe a feeling men hold for relatives, but not for wives. Women are largely at the mercy of cruel husbands and many men beat, cut, or otherwise harm their wives. If a husband is overly cruel, the wife's brothers may take her from him and give her to another. Women dread the thought of being married to distant tribes because their brothers will not be able to offer protection. In extreme cases, women may flee an abusive husband, usually running away to a neighboring tribe. It is dangerous for the tribe to take in a woman because the husband may rally his tribe to retaliate.

Younger women are frequently captured by raiders from other villages and typically take their young children with them when they go into the forest so that if they are captured they will have their children with them. Older women are respected but tend to have a caustic attitude. Women with older children are treated kindly by all, including their children, and are immune to attack or capture by raiders. They are frequently used as messengers or to recover bodies of men from their own villages killed in raids on other villages.

While women are chief caregivers, men teach little boys masculine behaviors. Boys are taught to be "fierce" and are rewarded for striking out—even when the victim is a smaller child or an adult. As soon as a young woman has her first menstrual cycle, she moves into her adult life with her husband. Women have menstrual cycles infrequently because they spend most of their adult lives either pregnant or nursing a child. The menstruating girl or woman is secluded in a hut behind a screen of leaves and is fed only sparingly. For boys, once people cease use of his given name, he has achieved status as an adult.

Village life begins before daylight as people rise to stoke fires and go to the toilet—outside the village perimeter. In times of war, most will not leave the village until full daylight, and then under armed guard. Younger children remain close to their mothers but older ones have freedom to run around and play. Men sometimes organize practice raids with the youngsters using an effigy made of leaves. Children learn about nature at an early age and are able to identify varieties of plants, animals and insects.

"Brother" is a term used for actual brothers and parallel cousins and that all are competitors for the same women. Actual brothers are generally cooperative regarding women but distant brothers compete. As villages grow and fission—often because of

conflicts arising over women—family lines are distributed among the new, smaller villages.

In general, women have about twenty years of reproductive life while that of men is much longer. The result is that there may be many years difference between the oldest and youngest children of a man though the generations have different mothers. About twenty percent divorce, meaning children live with only one of their biological parents. Other children are orphaned because of the high mortality rate.

Men are more apt to know his relationship to a particular person without having to calculate that degree of kinship and are likely to reclassify that relationship in order to bring women of marriageable age into a particular realm.

As much as three or four hours of a woman's day is spent gathering wood. A "wealthy" woman has a machete or hatchet and the steel tools make gathering much easier. Although Chagnon has noted that the Yanomamo spend only a few hours each day at work, he seems to have been referring only to the men, because after the three to four hours most days gathering wood, the women still must carry water, cook, and work in the garden.

The soul of a child has not yet been established as part of his body, meaning it might escape. Women are quick to hush crying babies as the soul might readily escape while the child bawls.Women may recover the soul by sweeping the ground in the area where it escaped while calling to it. Chagnon notes that he once helped with this process—and that he gave the child a dose of medicine for diarrhea.

The village is usually quiet by dark, but there are exceptions, such as if someone is sick, the shaman may chant long into the night, or if a dispute erupts between a husband and wife, many may offer opinions. Sometimes, a particular person may give a "nocturnal speech" of sorts, extolling his plans or his views on the world.

Chagnon explains that there are social rules that are followed that he gradually came to understand. Among those were the fact that it is acceptable to marry certain cousins, but not others. The Yanomamo word for these specific cousins—the daughters of their father's siblings and their mother's siblings—is the same as for wife. Similarly, the word for mother-in-law is the same as that for "father's sister" or "grandmother." However, the rules are different. A man is not to even look upon the face of his mother-in-law because it is considered incest but he need not avoid others called "yaya." Other "rules" include that men called "shoriwa" are brothers of women you have married, plan to marry or even may marry and that the term is a sign of affection; that descent through the male line is more important than that through the female line; and that men generally must marry outside their father's lineage group.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary and Analysis

There are three main reasons alliances form among Yanomamo tribes—feasting, trading, and exchange of women. If tribes are allied only by feasting and trading, there is little chance of warfare, but also weak bonds that mean one tribe may not fully depend on the support of the other in times of need. Tribes that do exchange women are leery, always hoping to gain more women than are ceded. Trust is slow to build and typically begins with feasting and trading.

An item is given in trade but the return item is usually not presented until much later—a reason that visiting continues among the trading allies because one is always owed something by another. With the exception of items brought in from outside, each village is capable of sustaining itself. Only frequent visiting prompts strong alliances and trade provides a reason for those visits. Food is not part of the trading network, but may be loaned or borrowed to meet shortages or special needs.

Hunters play an important role in the feast by providing meat for the event and having their success be a direct reflection on the village. Hunters who are gathering food for a feast are not allowed to eat the choice foods but may eat anything else they kill. The hosts of a feast must provide both meat and vegetable—one of the social rules governing such events. That means that the men of the village, who traditionally do most of the cooking for feasts, spend many hours preparing plantain soup.

When a visitor or visiting tribe arrives, one enters the village and "strikes a pose," waiting for the host tribe to accept or deny their presence. Chagnon says that more than one visitor has been killed at this point and that he himself was often nervous as he stood in this position. There is always a potential for violence during feasts and trading expeditions simply because of the tendency toward violence.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary and Analysis

There are three alternatives to outright war among the Yanomamo people. Chest pounding, side slapping, and club fights each have specific rules and each provides a way to end hostilities without outright warfare. Though the use of spears is not common, there are cases in which two tribes are too angry for the dispute to be settled with duels so agree to use other weapons. The most common reasons for outright war are the theft of women, theft of cultivated food, or witchcraft. An unexplained death is often "explained" as resulting from sorcery from a nearby village. For this reason, villages in close proximity typically must either be allies or eventually find themselves at war. Though women and children are sometimes taken during the course of a raid, stealing women is not typically the reason for the plan.

Some forty percent of adult males kill or participate in the killing of at least one person while more than half of those kill only once. About a quarter of all male deaths are the result of violence and two-thirds of all adults age forty or older have lost a parent, sibling or child to violence. This explains the reason so many people are bent on revenge. Men who have killed—called unokais—are more likely to have multiple wives and to sire more children than a man who has not. This may be because the unokais hold a place of honor among their people and are rewarded with additional wives. Many people fear this is a universal trend—that people reward killers, although Chagnon dismisses the idea, saying that it is a case of social stature and that all who stand up for what is best for their people are considered "warriors," and are thereby rewarded for their prowess. As examples, he cites the powerful men who have attributes that society deems important and notes that they are commonly elected to political office.

Larger villages are more prone to club fighting, usually erupting as an argument over a woman. Larger villages offer greater opportunity for clandestine affairs that are almost always eventually discovered. Another important point is that the greater the number of club fights, the greater the likelihood that the tribe will eventually fission. Kaobawa explains that a raid is considered successful only if none of his own men are killed. This is true regardless of the number of people the raiders themselves kill.

While there is significant ceremony prior to leaving on the raid, the reality is that everyone knows that the men are literally marching into danger. Wives and mothers warn the men to be safe. Many boastful men who are actually afraid find reasons to return over the course of the first day or two. As the raiders approach the enemy's location, they refrain from using fire, which leaves them cold and uncomfortable but also vulnerable to attacks from jaguars and malevolent spirits. During this final night, many young men search for a reason to leave the camp and it is up to the older, more experienced warriors to keep the forces intact.

Over a period of time, the hostilities continue. One night, Chagnon watches a ceremony in which ten arrow points are taken from the slain Matowa's quiver. Chagnon never learns for certain whether the points are merely Matowa's possessions or if they are taken from his body. He says that on that night, his attitudes about the Yanomamo change. When someone asks why he is not making a nuisance of himself with his camera and tape recorder, he tells them that his heart is sad. He says that the Yanomamo attitude toward him changes at that moment, declaring that he has finally become more human. While he does not elaborate on the decision, he says that it was then he "gave up" on the idea of collecting genealogies. The following day, he carries Hukoshikuwa, brother of Matowa, to a point on the river from which they will launch a revenge attack. Chagnon notes that Hukoshikuwa is a victim of the society in which he lives, that he does not want to go on this raid, but that he chastises others for their cowardice and determines to lead the raid anyway. They do not located the Patanowa-teri on this raid but over the course of the next year two of the Patanowa-teri tribe are killed as hostilities continue. The Monou-teri eventually rejoin the Bisaasi-teri.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary and Analysis

The Mishimishimabowei-teri tribe is also known as "Sibarariwa's village." Other Yanomamo groups refer to them as "Bosikomima's village"—"plugged asshole's village." In a comparison of the Mishimishimabowei-teri and Kaobawa's people, Chagnon notes that they have generally migrated along parallel paths, though their hostilities toward each other have repelled the groups to keep them a militarily safe distance apart. Chagnon then compares Kaobawa with the Mishimishimabowei-teri leader, Moawa. He says Moawa was much more of a dictator but that his role as the headman of a larger tribe—with the inherent problems of running a larger organized group—required that he be more domineering. Moawa has the distinction of having killed twenty-two people, most of them single-handed. Everyone hates Moawa because of his aggressiveness and brutality. Chagnon conducts research in this tribe but eventually leaves due to Moawa's intimidation.

As Chagnon begins the process of study, he is accompanied by Rerebawa, who is eventually given a message requesting Kaobawa's presence as a gesture of friendship and potential alliance between their two tribes. Chagnon notes that he believes it to be foolish for the two tribes to attempt peace, considering their mutual history of raids and killing. Kaobawa accepts the offer. Kaobawa warned him, during his initial contact with the Mishimishimabowei-teri, that they might pretend friendship and murder him in his sleep. Among the men Kaobawa chooses for the trip are his brother, a skilled warrior and orator, Rerebawa, because he has already established contact and been invited to return, and Hukoshadadama—brother of an important man of the Mishimishimabowei-teri people. Chagnon says that Hukoshadadama has the right "genealogical" connections to the headman, Dedeheiwa, to make an impression.

Once in the village, there are some notable absences. Wadoshewa—a warrior who was shot in the hip by Kaobawa and still limped—is not among those welcoming peace. Leaders of both tribes then stand, taking turns telling elaborate stories of past peaceful relations. Chagnon says they are all lies, but necessary to create a situation in which both could accept peace without losing face. Chagnon notes that his research would have been "lopsided" had he not spent time with other tribes of the Yanomamo people.

The fact that the Yanomamo do not use names is a hindrance when meeting long-lost relatives. They manage the identification process by using relatives and explaining the relationships. In the case of Kaobawa's people approaching the Mishimishimaboei-teri, there is the added danger of inadvertently mentioning the name of a relative killed in the battle between the two tribes some two decades earlier.

When Chagnon returns for more research in 1985, he is told that Moawa died some years earlier, probably of a respiratory infection. He is also told that one of the important men of the Mishimishimabowei-teri, Dedeheiwa, proclaimed Chagnon a new name—

Mishimishimabowei-ter. Chagnon says the significance is that he and the village are one and it is the highest honor the Yanomamo can give.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary and Analysis

Chagnon cites some of the changes prompted by contact between foreigners and the Yanomamo, such as weapons being among the items offered to the Yanomamo in trade. The most important event that impacts the Yanomamo people is the gold rush. Airstrips to accommodate the need for mining supplies spring up overnight and clashes are inevitable. Despite reports of rape and murder, Brazilian officials ignore the problem. Chagnon estimates that "as many as one thousand, one hundred Brazilian Yanomamo may have died from new sicknesses introduced by miners or from traditional maladies that became epidemic following the influx of so many miners."

Chagnon is absent from Yanomamo culture for several years in the 1970s and 1980s, and returns to discover that Kaobawa remains an important man in his village but that missions are becoming more powerful, recruiting young men "groomed" for leadership positions and given opportunities for travel outside the Yanomamo territories. Some have goals other than the well-being of their communities. There is a new tendency among the Yanomamo people—that of families living in individual homes rather than with tribes. He says that tribes seem to fission at smaller numbers as well. Chagnon attributes this chiefly to the fact that Yanomamo are now in a position to own possessions. By living alone, they are not required to share with their own community. They are also not in a position to have large numbers of visitors from other tribes who will beg for the items.

Upon his return to the Yanomamo people after the absence, Chagnon discovers that some have learned to read. One young man reads computer files over Chagnon's shoulder, angrily hissing that Chagnon has the names of his dead father and other relatives "in his machine," and then verifies other genealogical records. Chagnon notes that there is an emerging awareness of the outside world and one particularly "cosmopolitan" man asks Chagnon about the atomic bomb.

Chagnon notes that foreigners introduce health issues and now are under obligation to provide medical care. He says this is one case in which the Yanomamo would be well-advised to depend on Western culture. Chagnon closes with the note that Kaobawa's most beloved child, Ariwari, died shortly before 1985, victim of a disease introduced by outsiders.

Missions urge Yanomamo tribes to move nearer mission outposts. The larger these settlements grow, the less they are able to support themselves and the more they must depend on outside sources for subsistence. The combining of the tribes mean there are fewer individual tribes and only a very few with no regular outside contact. Chagnon says that the fact that villages have become acculturated since his initials visits is accepted, but the fact that some remain pristine is "astonishing." He notes that the willingness to move nearer the missionaries is in part due to the safety because those

tribes who trade with and deal with missionaries are more likely to have shotguns—a definite advantage in raids when the opponent has bows and arrows. The missionaries admit that they know the guns are likely being used in violence but say they are not going to question the Yanomamo for fear they will have to confiscate the guns. They say the Yanomamo people contend they will move away from the missions if their guns are taken.

Chagnon notes that the Yanomamo are promised medical help if needed but that several epidemics and health issues go untreated. There is a lower mortality rate for those near the missions, but Chagnon attributes that to the fact that the Yanomamo who live near the missions have been in constant contact with foreigners and missionaries for many years and have developed some level of immunity to the diseases.

Characters

Napoleon Chagnon

An anthropologist and the author of the book. Chagnon spends several years over the course of several visits with the Yanomamo tribes of Brazil and Venezuela. He notes that it is an acceptable anthropological practice to spend a year or more with a single group of a tribe and then to report on them as representative of the entire people. He says that it is unusual for a single anthropologist to return to other tribes of the same people as he did, or to split the time among several groups, which he also did.

Chagnon spends his time documenting the genealogies of the Yanomamo tribes but makes many observations about the people themselves. Chagnon's job is made very difficult by the fact that the people believe speaking their names or that of deceased relatives is taboo. He admits that he wastes months gathering incorrect information only to trash it all and start again. There comes a point in his research when he finds himself greatly moved by the people he is researching. He says that some ask why he is not "making a nuisance" of himself with his camera and tape recorder and his answer—that he is sad—moves the people who say he has finally become human.

Kaobawa

The "headman" of the Upper Bisaasi-teri tribe, he is described as a shy man—unusual among the Yanomamo. As it turns out, he proved himself a fierce man in his youth, meaning there is less pressure on him now to assert himself. He also has a large extended family—brothers and cousins—who back him up. Chagnon notes that Kaobawa describes himself as poor and trades genealogical information for a hatchet. He promises that he will tell the truth but requests no questions about his close ancestors. Chagnon notes that he is wise and tends to question things others may accept at face value—explanations given in myths, for example.

Kaobawa has two wives and his children include a son, Ariwari, who is almost four during the time of Chagnon's initial research trip. Kaobawa is planning to accompany Chagnon on a trip to a city to see how "foreigners live," but Ariwari begins crying and Kaobawa decides to forego the trip citing the fact that his son would be sad by his father's absence. He is astute politically and socially and often manages to avert trouble before it gets out of hand.

Rerebawa

One of Chagnon's closest friends who spends time with him on trips to other villages. He is an outsider of the Bisaasi-teri tribe, having married the daughter of a tribesman. He is promised another daughter but she carries on an affair that she does not bother to hide and then marries another. Rerebawa is in his early twenties, lives with his wife's

family though he wants to return to his own village, is arrogant and sometimes abusive. When he leads Chagnon into his own village, he introduces his brother as the "brother whose wife I screwed" and gets away with it because of a beating he gave his brother. Rerebawa lives in the village where Chagnon does most of his research because it is where his wife's parents live. However, he does not make a garden because he contends that he does not want to remain but wants to return to his own village. His in-laws want him to stay because they have no sons to provide meat for them. Rerebawa hunts for his family and his in-laws and has technically fulfilled his duties as son-in-law. Whenever he and his wife visit his people in the distant village, his in-laws insist that at least one of the children remain with them knowing that their daughter will not be able to separate from her children and will eventually return to them, which is exactly what happens.

Shihotama

Wife of Rerebawa. Her parents have no sons and want Shihotama and Rerebawa to remain with them to care for them in their old age. Shihotama sometimes visits the village of her husband's people but her parents always insist that she leave at least one of her children with them because they know that she will not be able to remain separated from the child forever and will always return, bringing Rerebawa with her.

Ruwahiwa

A prominent member of the Konabuma-teri tribe who visits a neighboring tribe and is executed because the tribesmen believe members of the Konabuma-teri tribe have sent evil spirits, causing the deaths of several children. The death of Ruwahiwa and the resulting warfare provides reason for hostilities among the various tribes and families for many years.

Hontonawa

A member of Kaobawa's tribe who wants to be headman. He is a braggart who boasts of ferocious deeds but seldom allows himself to be in any real danger. He tells Chagnon to refer to him as "headman" and seems to have at least some followers, but is overly hot-headed and frequently at the center of discontent and arguments. Chagnon notes that Hontonawa has fewer brothers than Kaobawa and therefore fewer followers. The few he has are often recruited because Hontonawa has promised his unborn daughters as wives to these men as long as they follow his lead. Some do so on the basis of that promise.

Bahimi

The wife of Kaobawa. She is the older of his wives and his favorite. Chagnon says that she is as much friend to him as lover, and is the mother of two of his children. When she

becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son while another child is still very young and still nursing, she kills the infant rather than weaning the other child. She explains that the infant would have competed with the older child for milk. Bahimi hangs her hammock near Kaobawa's in their hut as a rule, but when there are many visitors and extra space is needed, she hangs her hammock under her husband's so she can get up during the night to tend the fire.

Koamashima

The younger of Kaobawa's first two wives, she is the mother of a small boy when Chagnon begins his research. Kaobawa sometimes allows his brother to have sex with this wife, but only if he asks first.

Ariwari

Son of Kaobawa and Bahimi. He is almost four years old as Chagnon is conducting his research among the tribesmen and at that time is still nursing and sleeping with his mother. Chagnon notes that children sleep with their mothers for fear they will wander into a fire at night. They nurse for several years as the mothers seek to give them the best possible start in life. Ariwari is taught to be "fierce," and is rewarded by the adults whenever he strikes someone—even an adult. Chagnon notes that Ariwari, Kaobawa's "most beloved" son, dies shortly before 1985 from a disease introduced to the Yanomamo people by the Westerners.

Sharaaiwa

Kaobawa's younger brother. Sharaaiwa helped Kaobawa build his house and lives there as well. He also shares Koamashima, who is Kaobawa's younger wife.

Karina

The young boy who was kidnapped by members of the Shamatari tribe and who agrees to lead Chagnon into the Shamatari village for the first time.

Claude Levi-Strauss

A famous anthropologist who is quoted at length by Chagnon. Levi-Strauss, according to Chagnon, is author of a famous work, "Elementary Structures of Kinship," which Chagnon cites as offering solid themes of solidarity, applying those ideas to marriage patterns and kinship in general among primitive tribes of people.

Objects/Places

Amazonia

Where the Yanomamo tribe live, near the border between Venezuela and Brazil.

Mavaca River

The headwaters of this water way is where Chagnon did the majority of his research. The Mavaca empties into the Orinoco.

Bisaasi-teri

The tribe Chagnon lives with for most of his research. The tribe is a "splinter" of the Patanowa-teri tribe.

Shamatari

Another Yanomamo tribe, with a history of "bitter warfare" against the Bisaasi-teri tribe.

Sukumona ka u

The "River of Parakeets" and home to the Shamatari tribe led by Sibarariwa.

Orinoco River

A river near the Yanomamo's encampment where Chagnon does the majority of his research.

Parima Mountains

A range of small mountains located to the east of the Yanomamo village where Chagnon does most of his research.

Husu namo

A dart, dipped in curare poison. It is shaped like a pencil and used primarily for hunting monkeys, though it may also be used in warfare.

Shabono

The center plaza, including a house that is a permanent structure of the village. The shabono is actually a series of houses put together and is replaced every couple of years.

The

What the Yanomamo people call the garden that has been used up. The term refers to the fact that it is unable to produce any more.

Kreibowei-taka

The location of Kaobawa's group in 1950.

Amiana-taka

The garden of a Shamatari village about two-days' distant from Kaobawa's group in 1950 and where Kaobawa's group goes for a feast.

Themes

Variances of Admirable Traits

Chagnon notes that there some major differences between the cultures of Western civilized people and the Yanomamo tribes. He talks at length of the fact that the Yanomamo admire ferocity in their males. This is so true that young boys are rewarded for their displays of anger. They are often teased until they strike out, and then are applauded. It does not matter whether the child strikes out at another child or an adult, the reward is forthcoming. While this may seem to be in definite contrast to what would be considered an admirable action of young men in Western culture, Chagnon points out that there are some similarities in the desired outcome.

The adult men of the Yanomamo tribes must defend their people. This means the men in leadership roles tend to be able to handle themselves in battle situations and to exhibit leadership qualities admired by their people. Chagnon points out that this is really no different than in Western civilizations. As he notes, people regularly choose men and women who exhibit admirable traits and elect them to offices of leadership in Western culture. The Yanomamo are really no different in this aspect. The difference is that the traits seen as "admirable" have a different outward appearance. However, seen at a deeper level, it seems reasonable that the same men who are leaders among the Yanomamo culture might be exalted to leadership positions among other cultures, if they grow up in some other culture.

While the ability to defend against warring tribes and to lead into raids is necessary, Chagnon notes that one of the headmen he most admires—Kaobawa—is also a diplomat. When Kaobawa's people are invited for a feast by a tribe they have been at war with for decades, he accepts. Chagnon says he does not believe there is any chance of peace, but is proven wrong.

Social Etiquette

The Yanomamo people have social rules that may seem strange to more civilized or technologically advanced cultures, but Chagnon notes that the rules tend to be adhered to by all. Chagnon goes into detail about a number of the rules and behaviors expected of the Yanomamo people. One of those is that a feast must include vegetables and meats and that the meat is wrapped in large leaves, tied with string, and presented to the guests as a "going home" gift. The guests must then depart. For this reason, hosts may throw a feast for unwelcome guests. It is an effective tool for informing the guests that they are not welcome to stay. Guests, on the other hand, seem to have no choice but to leave once they are presented with the gift of meat.

Chagnon writes about two tribes at war with each other for decades. One invites the other for a visit and, to Chagnon's surprise, the invitation is accepted. When the visiting

party from Kaobawa's tribe meets a hunting party from the host tribe, one of the men—knowing that social etiquette requires he offer the guests food but having none available—digs a hole, layers in leaves to form a bowl of sorts, squeezes a fruit to remove the pulp, adds water and beats it to a froth. He then serves the guests in a cup made of a large leaf, thereby fulfilling his duties as host and earning the respect of the guests. Chagnon notes that the man even quickly ascertains which of the guests should be served first.

Chagnon notes that with the influx of outsiders, the lives of the Yanomamo are quickly changing. It seems reasonable that this would include the rules of social ettiquette

Details of Research

Chagnon begins his research with some specific ideas and goals in mind and notes that it is a shock when he is actually in the field and dealing with the realities. One of the points he continually makes through his writing is that the field work is demanding and that many young anthropologists who begin such work are not fully prepared. He seems to be offering his own views in an effort to help others who are about to undertake a similar task. One of Chagnon's points is that it is a lonely life. He says the separation from family and friends is a constant ordeal and that he attempts to overcome the loneliness by making friends among the Yanomamo. The problem is that the culture of the people is very different from Chagnon's home culture, meaning that he—and this "friend"—have different expectations. He says that he was constantly disappointed when his new friend steals something from his hut or otherwise acts as a true friend would not.

Chagnon also talks of his methods and the problems he encounters. For example, he does not know until he arrives that the Yanomamo people are offended if someone used his or her real name. Chagnon attempts to work around this problem by "paying" informants who offer up information only to discover much later that the information he has gathered is totally incorrect. His limited understanding of the language contributes to the situation and he notes that he much later discovers that his genealogies list names such as "fart breath" and "eagle shit."

Chagnon does say that he is eventually caught up in the lives of the people he studies. He talks of the death of a headman and the symbolic preparation of the man's kin as they prepare for a raid to avenge his death. He says that night he simply lies in his hammock and someone asks why he is not "making a nuisance" of himself with his tape recorders and cameras. He admits that he is so moved by the ceremony that he simply feels sad.

Style

Perspective

The book is written in first person, totally from Chagnon's point of view. The view is limited completely to Chagnon's impressions and observations, which is the only method available to this author. The purpose of the book is to chronicle Chagnon's observations and the details of his research. The book is based on his time among the Yanomamo tribes of Brazil and Venezuela. The majority of the book is written in exposition. The brief sections of dialogue provide the reader with a glimpse of the conversations that occurred between Chagnon, the author, and the members of the Yanomamo tribes he studied.

The book was first published after Chagnon's research trips in the 1960s. The most recent edition—the fifth—was published after return trips by Chagnon and the added chapter at the conclusion of the book notes the changes among the Yanomamo tribes over the course of his research. However, the reader should keep in mind that the final chapter was added in the 1990s and that it is reasonable to expect that additional changes have occurred among the Yanomamo tribes since that time.

Tone

Chagnon, the author, is an anthropologist. As such, he sometimes tends toward words and phrases of his profession. These will likely not inhibit the average reader's understanding, though there are sections of the book that offer more details of his research than others. The reader who is looking for a storyline based on the lives of the Yanomamo people will be disappointed. The details of the book are split between research methods and findings that come from these methods, and details of the lives of the people studied. Though Chagnon relates several events and incidents, there is no true "storyline."

The book, overall, is written in a straight-forward style, though it is sometimes difficult to remember that Chagnon follows no real timeline, meaning there is no "building process." He sometimes relates details and later returns to reiterate or present additional facts on that topic. The book must be taken as a series of facts in order to be fully understood.

Structure

The book is presented in eight chapters. There are about fifty photos, more than twenty diagrams and genealogies and five maps. The chapters range from more than fifty pages in length to only about twenty. Each chapter is devoted to a particular topic. Those are an overview of "Doing Fieldwork Among the Yanomamo"; "Cultural Ecology"; "Myth and Cosmos"; "Social Organization and Demography"; "Political Alliances,

Trading and Feasting"; "Yanomamo Warfare"; "Alliance with the Mishimishimabowei-teri"; and "The Acceleration of Change in Yanomamoland."

There is no chronological structure to the book. While it is understandable, some readers may find that the book has a disjointed feel. For example, Chagnon talks about the importance of plantains in the diet of the Yanomamo, but later returns to the subject and tells how the plants are cultivated. He repeats the fact that the plantains are a vital part of the diet of the Yanomamo people and then goes into other food stuffs. While it is easy to justify his decision to lay out the book in this manner, it is somewhat distracting at times. There are times when it seems as if Chagnon tries too hard to make the book read like a novel when it is actually a book of facts. For example, in chapter three, myths and the cosmos are the topics. He begins the chapter by discussing the Yanomamo idea of their cosmos—that there are four "layers" with people living on the third. When they die, they go to an upper layer called "hedu." After the discussion of the cosmos, he turns to some of the more common myths, then moves to a discussion of the spirits and the role of the shaman. He writes about the fact that many shamans use ebene—a hallucinogenic powder—to prompt their visions but that its use sometimes gets out of hand. He then abruptly inserts a final paragraph of the chapter referring back to the Yanomamo idea of the cosmos with information that has already been delivered effectively.

Quotes

"My own habits of personal cleanliness declined to such levels that I didn't even mind being examined by the Yanomamo, as I was not much cleaner than they were after I had adjusted to the circumstances. It is difficult to blow your nose gracefully when you are stark naked and the invention of handkerchief is millennia away," Chapter 1, p. 13.

"Many amused Yanomamo onlookers quickly learned the English phrase, 'Oh shit!', and once they discovered that the phrase offended and irritated the missionaries, they used it as often as they could in their presence," Chapter 1, p. 14.

"We will learn more about political leadership and warfare in a later chapter, but most of the time men like Kaobawa are like the North American Indian 'chief' whose authority was characterized in the following fashion: 'One word from the chief, and each man does as he pleases,'" Chapter 1, p. 27.

"I suddenly realized the absurdity of my situation and the magnitude of what I was doing. Here I stood, in the middle of an unexplored, unmapped jungle, a few hundred feed from a previously uncontested group of Yanomamo with a reputation for enormous ferocity and treachery, led there by a 12-year-old kis, and it was getting dark. My only marks of being human were my red loincloth, my muddy and torn sneakers, my hammock, and a bow with three skinny arrows," Chapter 1, p. 38.

"A new shabono is a pleasant place to be. It is clean, smells like fresh-cut leaves and has a generally cozy, tidy appearance. It is like living in a new, very large wicker hamper," Chapter 2, p. 59.

"One must have a fairly generous interpretation of the last word, since Panorama 'clothing' is largely 'symbolic' and decorative. Indeed, some well-dressed men sport nothing more than a string around their waists to which they tie the stretched-out foreskins of their penises," Chapter 2, p. 68.

"The vegetation that begins to grow up in maturing gardens is dense and usually very thorny, and therefore very unpleasant and tedious to clear and burn. This must be done by people who wear no clothing, and if you ever have to make your way through such vegetation in the buff, you will immediately understand the wisdom of avoiding such brush," Chapter 2, p. 72.

"The word shaman is a word from the Arctic tribe, the Siberian Chuckchee, and has been widely used to describe men and women in any tribal society who manipulate the

spirit world; cure the sick with magic, sucking, singing or massaging; diagnose illness and prescribe magical remedy; and generally intercede between humans and spirits in the context of health versus sickness," Chapter 3, p. 116.

"The child's soul can be recovered by sweeping the ground in the vicinity where it most probably escaped, calling for it while sweeping the area with a particular kind of branch. I once helped gather up the soul of a sick child in this fashion, luring it back into the sick baby. One of the contributions I made, in addition to helping with the calling and sweeping, was a dose of medicine for the child's diarrhea," Chapter 4, p. 128.

"Any Yanomamo feast can potentially end in violence because of the nature of the attitudes the participants hold regarding canons of behavior and obligations to display ferocity and because of the long-remembered incidents of the past," Chapter 5, p. 183.

"A rare form of fighting, however, does involve the use of weapons. It is a formal contest in the sense that the fight is prearranged and the participants agree beforehand to refrain from using their bows and arrows. Fights such as these take place when the members of two villages are not angry enough with each other to shoot to kill but are too furious to be able to satisfy their grudges with chest pounding or club fighting," Chapter 6, p. 189.

"They were now separated by only thirty yards of jungle, but aware of the twenty years of war that had kept them at greater distances," Chapter 7, p. 219.

Topics for Discussion

What are some of the main reasons for warfare among the Yanomamo people? What are some of the ways outright war is avoided? Why is this important?

Describe four of the individual people Chagnon encounters. What are their attributes? Weaknesses? Why do you believe this person made sufficient impression on Chagnon for inclusion in his book?

Describe Kaobawa's family. What happens to the infant born during Chagnon's research term? Why did Kaobawa's wife say she killed the infant? Is this reasonable behavior among the Yanomamo?

Describe some of the instances of superstition or supernatural belief that impact life for the Yanomamo. Describe their idea of the cosmos. What are some of the things the Yanomamo most fear?

What difficulty does Chagnon encounter as he is working on genealogies? How does he get around this difficulty?

Describe some of the social taboos of the Yanomamo? What are the attitudes regarding men and women? What are the differences of their roles? What attributes are considered positive among the Yanomamo people?

What happens when material goods are handed out to the Yanomamo people? What other changes do outsiders bring?