

Life histories, blood revenge, and warfare in a tribal population.

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Life Histories, Blood Revenge, and Warfare in a Tribal Population

IN THIS ARTICLE I SHOW HOW SEVERAL FORMS OF VIOLENCE in a tribal society are interrelated and describe my theory of violent conflict among primitive peoples in which homicide, blood revenge, and warfare are manifestations of individual conflicts of interest over material and reproductive resources.

Violence is a potent force in human society and may be the principal driving force behind the evolution of culture (1). For two reasons, anthropologists find it difficult to explain many aspects of human violence. First, although ethnographic reports are numerous, data on how much violence occurs and the variables that relate to it are available from only a few primitive societies. Second, many anthropologists tend to treat warfare as a phenomenon that occurs independently of other forms of violence in the same group. However, duels may lead to deaths which, in turn, may lead to community fissioning and then to retaliatory killings by members of the two non-independent communities. As a result many restrict the search for the causes of the war to issues over which whole groups might contest--such as access to rich land, productive hunting regions, and scarce resources--and, hence, view primitive warfare as being reducible solely to contests over scarce or dwindling material resources (2). Such views fail to take into account the developmental sequences of conflicts and the multiplicity of causes, especially sexual jealousy, accusations of sorcery, and revenge killings, in each step of conflict escalation.

My theory synthesizes components drawn from two more general bodies of theory. One is the approach of political anthropology in which conflict development is analyzed in terms of the goals for which individuals strive, individual strategies for achieving these goals, and the developmental histories of specific conflicts (3). The second draws on several key insights from modern evolutionary thought (4). Specifically, (i) the mechanisms that constitute organisms were designed by selection to promote survival and reproduction in the environments of evolutionary adaptedness. This implies that organisms living in such environments can be generally expected to act in ways that promote survival and reproduction or, as many biologists now state it, their inclusive fitnesses (5). For humans, these mechanisms include learning and

mimicking successful social strategies. (ii) Because no two organisms are genetically identical (save for identical twins and cloning species) and many of life's resources are finite, conflicts of interest between individuals are inevitable because the nature of some of life's resources ensure that individuals can achieve certain goals only at the expense of other individuals (6). (iii) Organisms expend two kinds of effort during their lifetimes: somatic effort, relevant to their survival, and reproductive effort in the interests of inclusive fitness. Such life effort often entails competition for both material resources (for example, food, water, and territory) and reproductive resources (for example, mates, alliances with those who can provide mates, and favor of those who can aid one's offspring) (6, 7). (iv) It is to be expected that individuals (or groups of closely related individuals) will attempt to appropriate both material and reproductive resources from neighbors whenever the probable costs are less than the benefits. While conflicts thus initiated need not take violent forms, they might be expected to do so when violence on average advances individual interests. I do not assume that humans consciously strive to increase or maximize their inclusive fitness, but I do assume that humans strive for goals that their cultural traditions deem as valued and esteemed. In many societies, achieving cultural success appears to lead to biological (genetic) success (8).

In this article I focus on revenge killing, using data collected among the Yanomamo Indians of southern Venezuela and adjacent portions of northern Brazil (9-11). Blood revenge is one of the most commonly cited causes of violence and warfare in primitive societies (12), and it has persisted in many state-organized societies as well (13).

I am using the terms revenge and blood revenge here to mean a retaliatory killing in which the initial victim's close kinsmen conduct a revenge raid on the members of the current community of the initial killer (14). Although Yanomamo raiders always hope to dispatch the original killer, almost any member of the attacked community is a suitable target.

Yanomamo Conflicts: Homicide, Revenge, and Warfare

The Yanomamo have no written language, precise number system, formal laws, or institutionalized adjudicators such as chiefs or judges (15). Although there are customs and general rules about proper behavior, individuals violate them regularly when it seems in their interests to do so (16). When conflicts emerge each individual must rely on

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his own skills and coercive abilities and the support of his close kin. Most fights begin over sexual issues: infidelity and suspicion of infidelity, attempts to seduce another man's wife, sexual jealousy, forcible appropriation of women from visiting groups, failure to give a promised girl in marriage, and (rarely) rape (9, 10, 17).

Yanomamo conflicts constitute a graded sequence of increasing seriousness and potential lethality: shouting matches, chest pounding duels, side slapping duels, club fights, fights with axes and machetes, and shooting with bows and arrows with the intent to kill (10). In all but the last case, fights are not intended to and generally do not lead to mortalities. Nevertheless, many fights lead to killings both within and between villages. If killing occurs within the village, the village fissions and the principals of the two new groups then begin raiding each other (17, 18). The most common explanation given for raids (warfare) is revenge (no yuwo) for a previous killing, and the most common explanation for the initial cause of the fighting is "women" (suwa ta nowa ha) (9, 10, 17, 19).

At first glance, raids motivated by revenge seem counterproductive. Raiders may inflict deaths on their enemies, but by so doing make themselves and kin prime targets for retaliation. But ethnographic evidence suggests that revenge has an underlying rationality: swift retaliation in kind serves as a deterrent over the long run. War motivated by revenge seems to be a tit-for-tat strategy (20) in which the participants' score might best be measured in terms of minimizing losses rather than in terms of maximizing gains.

If gain (benefit) is associated with revenge killing in the primitive world, what is gained and precisely who gains? Casting these questions into evolutionary terms, where gain (benefit) is discussed in terms of individual differences in inclusive fitness, might shed new light on the problem. Losing a close genetic relative (for example, a parent, sibling, or child) potentially constitutes a significant loss to one's inclusive fitness. Anything that counterbalances these losses would be advantageous. Yanomamo data suggest two possibilities. First, kinship groups that retaliate swiftly and demonstrate their resolve to avenge deaths acquire reputations for ferocity that deter the violent designs of their neighbors. The Yanomamo explain that a group with a reputation for swift retaliation is attacked less frequently and thus suffers a lower rate of mortality. They also note that other forms of predation, such as the abduction of women, are thwarted by adopting an aggressive stance. Aggressive groups coerce nubile females from less aggressive groups whenever the opportunity arises. Many appear to calculate the costs and benefits of forcibly appropriating or coercing females from groups that are perceived to be weak (10, 17). Second,

men who demonstrate their willingness to act violently and to exact revenge for the deaths of kin may have higher marital and reproductive success.

The Yanomamo Population

The Yanomamo number some 15,000 individuals and are subdivided into approximately 200 politically independent communities. During the past 23 years I have visited 60 villages on 13 field trips and have spent 50 months living among the Yanomamo. Warfare has recently diminished in most regions due to the increasing influence of missionaries and government agents and is almost nonexistent in some villages. Here I summarize the roles that killing and revenge play in the lives of the members of some dozen villages in one area of the tribe who were actively engaged in warfare during the course of my continuing field research (21). The current descendants of these communities (and their immediate historical antecedents) were studied more intensely than others between 1964 and 1987 (9). The population was distributed among 12 villages and numbered 1394 as of April 1987. Approximately 30% of deaths among adult males in this region of the Yanomamo tribe is due to violence (9, 22). This level of warfare mortality among adult males is similar to rates from the few other anthropological studies that report such data. Warfare mortality among adult males is reported as 25% for the Mae Enga, 19.5% for the Huli, and 28.5% for the Dugum Dani, all of Highland New Guinea (23, 24).

Life Histories, Killers, Kinship, and

Revenge Motives

In order to understand why avenging the death of a kinsman is such a commonly reported cause of warfare in primitive societies, one needs to document the vital events in the lifetimes of all or most individuals, recording marriages, abductions, genealogical connections, births, deaths, and causes of death (9). These data must then be put into the historical context of specific wars whose origins and development are described by multiple informants. Finally, native views, explanations, and attitudes have to be taken into consideration, particularly on topics such as vengeance, legitimacy of violent actions in particular circumstances, and societal rules and values regarding principles of justice.

The Yanomamo are frank about vengeance as a legitimate motive for killing. Their very notion of bereavement implies violence: they describe the feelings of the bereaved as hushuwo, a word that can be translated as "anger verging on violence." It is dangerous to provoke a grieving person no matter what the cause of death of the lost kin. It is

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common to hear statements such as, "If my sick mother dies, I will kill some people."

Vengeance motivation persists for many years. In January 1965, for example, the headman of one of the smaller villages (about 75 people) was killed by raiders in retaliation for an earlier killing. His ashes were carefully stored in several tiny gourds, small quantities being consumed by the women of the village on the eve of each revenge raid against the village that killed him. According to the Yanomamo, women alone drink the ashes of the slain to make raiders hushuwo and fill them with resolve (25). In 1975, 10 years after his death, several gourds of his ashes remained, and the villagers were still raiding the group that killed him, who by then lived nearly 4 days' walk away.

This case is telling in another way as well. When the headman was killed, his death so demoralized the group that for about a year its members refused to conduct revenge raids, thereby acquiring the reputation of cowardice. They sought refuge and protection among several neighboring groups whose men grew bolder in direct proportion to the visitors' cowardice. These neighbors openly seduced the visitors' women and appropriated a number of them by force, predicting, correctly, that the visiting men would not retaliate. The group later regained its dignity and independence after embarking on an ambitious schedule of revenge raids (10).

Revenge is also sought for the deaths of individuals who are alleged to have died as a consequence of harmful magic practiced by shamans in enemy villages. As is widely found in other primitive societies, an astonishingly large fraction of deaths are considered to have been the result of human malevolence: sorcery in the form of stealing souls, blowing lethal charms, stealing someone's footprint, or directing one's personal spirit associates (hekura) to cause a snake to bite someone fatally or a tree to fall on him. Few deaths are considered to be natural. Infant mortality is high and invariably attributed to enemy shamans. Long, bitter wars can be initiated when a visitor from a suspected village is killed by the bereaved of the dead infant (10). None of the deaths attributed to magic are considered in this article as violent deaths caused by human malevolence.

Unokais: Those who have killed. When a Yanomamo man kills he must perform a ritual purification called unokaimou, one purpose of which is to avert any supernatural harm that might be inflicted on him by the soul of his victim, a belief similar to that found among the headhunting Jivaro of Peru (26). Men who have performed the unokaimou ceremony are referred to as unokai, and it is widely known within the village and in most neighboring villages who the

unokais are and who their victims were. Recruitment to the unokai status is on a self-selective basis, although boys are encouraged to be valiant and are rewarded for showing aggressive tendencies (10).

Most victims are males killed during revenge raids against enemy groups, but a number of killings were within the groups (9, 22, 27). Most of the latter have to do with sexual jealousy, an extremely common cause of violence among the Yanomamo, other tribal groups, and our own population (28).

Raiding parties usually include 10 to 20 men, but not all men go on all raids and some men never go on raids. An enemy village might be as far as 4 or 5 days' march away. Many raiding turn back before reaching their destination, either because someone has a dream that portends disaster, or because the enemy group is not where it was believed to be. In all but the most determined raiding parties, a few men drop out for reasons such as being "sick" or "stepping on a thorn." Some of these dropouts privately admitted to me that they were simply frightened. Chronic dropouts acquire a reputation for cowardice (tehe) and often become the subject of frequent insult and ridicule, and their wives become targets of increases sexual attention from other men.

The number of victims per raid is usually small--one or two individuals--but occasionally a "massacre" takes place resulting in the deaths of ten or more people (6, 29). On the eve of a raid the warriors make an effigy (no owa) of the person they most want to kill; but in fact, they usually kill the first man they encounter. When a raiding party strikes, usually at dawn, as many raiders as possible (but almost never all members of the raiding party) shoot the victim or victims from ambush with their arrows and hastily retreat, hoping to put as much distance as possible between themselves and the enemy before the victim is discovered. Everyone who has shot an arrow into the victim must undergo the unokaimou ceremony on reaching home. Most victims are shot by just one or two raiders, but one victim was shot by 15 members of the raiding party.

The number of (living) unokais in the current population is 137, 132 of whom are estimated to be 25 or older, and represent 44% of the men age 25 or older (15). A retrospective perusal of the data indicates that this has generally been the case in those villages whose unokais have not killed someone during the past 5 years. I have recorded 282 violent deaths during 23 years of studies of villages in the region under consideration (21), deaths that occurred sometime during the past 50 to 60 years (15). These include victims who were residents of villages in this area or victims from immediately adjacent areas killed by residents or now-deceased former residents of the

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groups considered here. Of these 282 violent deaths, the number of victims of living unokais is 153. These victims were killed during approximately the past 35 years (9). All the unokais come from the villages under discussion, but not all of the victims do; some are from villages in adjacent areas beyond the focus of my field studies.

Individual capacities of unokais. Most killers have unokaied once. Some, however, have a deserved reputation for being waiteri (fierce) and have participated in many killings (Fig. 1). One man has unokaied 16 times. The village from which he comes is considered to be, by its neighbors, a particularly waiteri group: 8 of the 11 men who have unokaied ten or more times come from this one village. In this village, 97% of the 164 members are related in at least one way to 75% or more of the other residents of the village (Table 1). The "village" in this case is almost synonymous with "kinship group."

Unit of analysis: Village or kin group? It is customary for anthropologists to use the community as the natural unit of analysis in their studies of primitive warfare because war, by most definitions, is lethal conflict between members of politically distinct groups. The Yanomamo village, however, is a transient community whose membership changes by migration, emigration, and fissioning (10). As a result, unokais who now live in different villages, and may be mortal enemies, may once have been residents of the same village and collaborators in raids. It cannot be assumed that their violent activities can be understood as actions taken on behalf of a village since any given unokais is likely, at some point in time, to be attacking members of a village among whom he once lived. It is more accurate to view Yanomamo revenge raids as actions promoted by prominent men to benefit themselves or close kin and to view the village as a set of kin groups that form around individual leaders, each with selfish interests.

In order to understand why blood revenge is such a powerful motive among the Yanomamo and other tribal groups organized by kinship, one must first understand how complex and pervasive kinship relationships are in such communities and that the major fount of the individual's political status, economic support, marriage possibilities, and protection from aggressors derives from kinsmen. One of the most important functions of kin groups is to pool resources and reallocate them to needy members. In the corner of threats or coercion by others or of potentially violent encounters, group members cooperate for mutual protection and use their collective skills and abilities to this end, including the capacities of group members to act violently if necessary (30).

All Yanomamo villages have several (unnamed) patrilineal

descent groups: males and females of all ages who are related to each other through the male line of descent. Members of these groups must find their spouses in some other patrilineal descent group, preferably within the village. Reciprocal marriage exchanges between such groups over several generations mean that the members of any one descent group have close relatives in other descent groups.

Each descent group has one or more patas ("big ones") who are the political leaders of that group (10). The leader of the largest descent group is invariably the headman of the village, but if the village has two descent groups of approximately equal size it will have two (or more) leaders who, because of past marriages between their groups, are often first (cross) cousins and married to each other's sisters. Political leaders, therefore, usually have, on average, many more kinsmen in the village than do other men of comparable age.

Headmen are usually polygynous, and over a lifetime a successful man may have had up to a dozen or more different wives, but rarely more than six wives simultaneously. One result is that some men have many children. In the sample considered here, one man (now deceased) had 43 children by 11 wives. Needless to say, nuclear and extended families cannot only become very large but their respective members, because of repetitive intermarriage, are related to each other in many ways.

The village, then, is composed of large kin groups: people who are related to members of their own lineal descent group through male links and related to members of other lineal descent groups through consanguineal marriages and matrilineal ties. If someone in the village is killed, the probability is very high that he or she will have many bereaved close kin, including the village leader or leaders who have more kin than others; the leaders are the very individuals who decide whether killings are revenged. All headmen in this study are unokai. If as Clauzewitz suggested, (modern) warfare is the conduct of politics by other means (31), in the tribal world warfare is ipso facto the extension of kinship obligations by violence because the political system is organized by kinship.

With the passing of time and generations, adult male members in each village become more remotely related to each other. Their fathers may have been brothers and first cousins, but they themselves are divided into sets of brothers and sets of second parallel cousins or second cross cousins. The sons of these men, in turn, will be even more remotely related, third cousins. Fission produces two new villages in which the coefficients of relatedness among members is higher in the two new groups than what it was when both were members of the same, larger,

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village (9, 16, 32).

Not all individuals are able to remain with the closest of kin at fission, usually because they are married to a person whose kin group elects to leave, and they have to go along or dissolve their marriages. A war between their new group and the old one puts such individuals in an ambiguous position. Such men often refuse to participate in raids against the group whence they fissioned, pointing out that they wish their close kin no harm. No stigma is associated with this, nor is such a man considered a legitimate target of vengeance by members of his current residential group. If one of his close kin in the original group is killed on a revenge raid by members of this current residential group a man may be moved by grief to the point of deserting his wife and rejoining his original group with the intent to retaliate. Or, he might remain in his current group, filled with smouldering resentment and a concealed hatred of those co-residents who participated in the killing of his kinsman. In the next village club fight, he would most likely support those who are contending with his kinsman's killers. This underscores the difficulty of interpreting Yanomamo warfare as a phenomenon that pits all the members of one political community against all the members of a difficult political community and makes clear why the village is not the most useful unit with which to analyze warfare in many tribes.

Kinship Relatedness and Loss of Kin by

Violence

Number of relatives. Few published anthropological accounts give statistics on kinship relatedness among all individuals in tribally organized communities, which may in part explain the anthropological tendency to ignore blood revenge as a cause of warfare in tribal world (2). Table 1 provides statistics on relatedness among members of each of the villages. A person is considered to be related to another if at least one genealogical connection between them exists. Most individuals, however, are related to their kin in multiple ways. In most villages well over 80% of the members are related to more than 75% of the village (see fourth quartile).

Closeness of kinship relationship. Table 1 presents statistics on closeness of relationship among village members (33). These data show that in most villages, members are related to each other more closely than half-cousinship (relatedness to a half cousin is 0.0625), and, to just their actual genetic kin, approximately as first cousins (relatedness to a first cousin is 0.1250) (34).

Kinship density and the will for revenge. The quantitative dimensions of kinship relatedness in Yanomamo

communities can be referred to as kinship density, which is a combination of the numbers of kin each individual has, how closely related the individual is to these kin, and the obligations and expectations that are associated with particular kinds of kinship relatedness.

A kinship density factor appears to be involved in revenge raids. It is difficult for a small or heterogeneous Yanomamo group to put together a raiding party. The risks are high and men are willing to take them in proportion to the amount of mutual support they receive from comrades and where unwillingness to do so is condemned and ridiculed. Lone raiders do not exist. The higher the kinship density in a local community, the greater is the likelihood that a large number of mutually supportive individuals will take such life-threatening risks and that retaliation will occur if one of the members of the group is killed. Included is the support of the women, who alone consume the ashes of the slain in order to put the raiders in a state of frenzy and strengthen their resolve. The existence of a tradition of revenge killing promotes kinship density by encouraging individuals to remain with close kin when new communities are formed by fissioning. High levels of relatedness also makes it likely that almost every violent death will trigger revenge killing, for most of the members of the victim's community will be close genetic kin.

Measuring levels of societal violence: Numbers and kinds of kinsmen lost by individuals. Anthropology has no generally accepted measure for describing and comparing levels of violence and warfare cross culturally. With a few exceptions (23, 24), much if not most, of our knowledge about tribal warfare is based on fragmentary reports by untrained observers or on information collected long after the tribes studied had been decimated by introduced diseases and their political sovereignty taken from them by colonial powers. If the data contain numbers, one never knows the universe from which the sample is taken.

This presents a problem in interpreting Yanomamo violence and placing it into a comparative framework. Are the Yanomamo more or less violent than other tribesmen of the past or present? What should be measured or counted to compare levels of violence in different societies? I suspect that the amount of violence in Yanomamo culture would not be atypical if we had comparative measures of precontact violence in other similar tribes while still independent of colonial national states (24).

One potentially useful measure of the amount or level of violence in tribal societies (or even modern nations) is the fraction of the population that has participated in the deliberate killing of one or more members of his own or some other community. Another useful measure might be

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the extent to which violence affects the lives of all (or a significant sample) of society's members in terms of the numbers and kinds of close kinsmen each person has lost through violence (24, 35). As individuals age, more and more of them lose a close genetic kin due to violence (Fig. 2). Nearly 70% of all individuals (males and females) age 40 or older have lost at least one close genetic kin due to violence, and most (57%) have lost two or more.

Reproductive Success and Unokais

The deterrent effect of vengeance killing might not be the only factor driving and maintaining Yanomamo warfare. Men who are killers may gain marital and reproductive benefits.

A preliminary analysis of data on reproductive success among unokais and non-unokais of the same age categories indicates that the former are more successful (Table 2). The higher reproductive success of unokais is mainly due to their greater success in finding mates (Table 3), either by appropriating them forcibly from others, or by customary marriage alliance arrangements in which they seem to be more attractive as mates than non-unokais (36).

Discussion

A number of problems are presented by these data. First, high reproductive success among unokais is probably caused by a number of factors, and it is not clear what portion might be due to their motivation to seek violent retribution when a kinsman is killed. I can only speculate about the mechanisms that link a high reproductive success with unokai status, but I can cast doubt on some logical possibilities. For example, it is known that high male reproductive success among the Yanomamo correlates with membership in large descent groups (32). If unokais come disproportionately from these groups, that might explain the data: both could be caused by a third variable. But unokais do not come disproportionately from larger descent groups. The three largest patrilineal descent groups among the Yanomamo considered here include 49.4% of the population, but only 48.9% of the unokais. The four largest descent groups include 55.9% of the population but only 55.5% of the unokais.

Second, it is possible that many men strive to be unokais but die trying and that the apparent higher fertility of those who survive may be achieved at an extraordinarily high mortality rate. In other words, men who do not engage in violence might have a lower risk of mortality due to violence and produce more offspring on average than men who tried to be unokais. This explanation would be supported by data indicating that a disproportionate

fraction of the victims of violence were unokais. The data do not appear to lend support to this possibility. Of 15 recent killings, four of the victims were females: there are no female unokais. Nine of the males were under 30 years of age, of whom four were under an estimated 25 years of age. Although I do not have the unokai histories of these individuals, their ages at death and the political histories of their respective villages at the time they were killed suggest that few, if any of them, were unokais. Also, recent wars in two other regions of the study area resulted in the deaths of approximately 15 additional individuals, many of whom were very young men who were unlikely to have been unokais.

Third, additional variables not fully investigated might help account for the correlations in Tables 2 and 3. For example, there might be biometric attributes of unokais and non-unokais not readily apparent to the outside observer, such as differential skills at concealment, agility in moving through dense forest on raids, athletic ability, or other factors. Personal, long-term familiarity with all the adult males in this study does not encourage me to conclude at this point that they could easily be sorted into two distinct groups on the basis of obvious biometric characteristics, nor have detailed anthropometric duties of large numbers of Yanomamo males suggested this as a very likely possibility (37).

Fourth, there is the issue of the deterrent effects to swift, lethal, retaliation and whether or not it can be measured. A logical assumption would be that if unokais deter the violence of enemies, they would lose fewer close kin than non-unokais. In actual fact, they lose about as many close kin due to violence as non-unokais do. Two factors complicate the measurement of the deterrent effect. One is that village membership changes chronically and fissioning redistributes individuals in such a way that unokais will have some close kin living in distant villages. An unokai in one village cannot, by this actions, have much effect on the safety of a close kinsman in another village. Another is the fact that if unokais deter the violent designs of others, all members of their kin group benefit, including the non-unokais and their dependents.

The last problem suggests that the argument that cultural success leads to biological success (8) among the Yanomamo might be the most promising avenue of investigation to account for the high reproductive success of unokais. Indeed, the Yanomamo frequently say that some men are "valuable" (a nowa dodihiwa) and give, among the several reasons, that they are unokai, avenge deaths, or are fierce (waiteri) on behalf of kin. In short, military achievements are valued and associated with high esteem, as they are in many other cultures, including our own (38). Until recently in human history, successful

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warriors were traditionally rewarded with public offices and political power which, in turn, was used for reproductive advantage (39). Among the Yanomamo, non-unokais might be willing to concede more reproductive opportunities to unokais in exchange for a life with fewer mortal risks and fewer reproductive advantages (40).

Some Yanomamo men are in general more responsible, ambitious, economically industrious, aggressive, concerned about the welfare of their kin, and willing to take risks. Becoming an unokai is simply one of a number of male characteristics valued by the Yanomamo and an integral component in a more general complex of goals of which ambitious men strive. All the characteristics just mentioned make some males more attractive as mates in arranged marriages and dispose some of them to take the risks involved in appropriating additional females by force. Both paths lead to higher reproductive success.

Jacoby's (13) study of revenge in modern societies makes a compelling case that the desire for *lex talionis* is widespread, even in societies with law and formal judicial systems and that justice everywhere has an undeniable element of retribution. It is difficult for us to imagine the terror that might characterize our own social lives in the absence of laws prohibiting individuals from seeking lethal retribution when a close kinsman dies at the hands of another human, be it premeditated murder or the consequence of an irresponsible accidental act, such as a drunk driver causing the deaths of innocent people. A particularly acute insight into the power of law to thwart killing for revenge was provided to me by a young Yanomamo man in 1987. He had been taught Spanish by missionaries and sent to the territorial capital for training in practical nursing. There he discovered police and laws. He excitedly told me that he had visited the town's largest *pata* (the territorial governor) and urged him to make law and police available to his people so that they would not have to engage any longer in their wars of revenge and have to live in constant fear. Many of his close kinsmen had died violently and had, in turn, exacted lethal revenge; he worried about being a potential target of retaliations and made it known to all that he would have nothing to do with raiding (41).