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« The Yanomami in Light of Mauss, and Vice Versa »

English Version

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Catherine Alès

Marcel Mauss, who considered empirical data crucial in confirming the theoretical approach, endeavored to understand the phenomenon of destruction in gift-giving. In particular, he emphasized the agonistic aspect of the gift in “exchanges involving aggravated rivalry,” exchanges that might also be called “total services of an agonistic type.”¹ Mauss equally emphasized the relationship between “the war of blood” and the gift-exchange of goods: the potlatch is like the waging of “a war,” a “property war” in which “the property is killed.”² The gift-exchange therefore shares certain characteristics with war, which can be used as a metaphor to describe it. However, the case of revenge illustrates that this proposition can also be reversed. The example of the exchange of murders in societies engaging in vendetta wars thus enables a comparison to

1. Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: the Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. Translated by W.D. Halls. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1990), 7.

2. Mauss, *The Gift* [1990], 47. “Political status of individuals in the brotherhoods and clans, and ranks of all kinds, are gained in the ‘war of property;’ just as they are in a real war, or through chance, inheritance, alliance, and marriage. Yet everything is conceived of as if it were a ‘struggle of wealth.’” Mauss notes, “The opposition, the war of wealth, the war of blood, is to be found in the speeches made at the same potlatch of 1895 at Fort Ruppert” (1990, 140, note 137), and adds that, “To give is to destroy. . . As in war, masks, names and privileges of the slain owner may be seized, so in the war of property, property is ‘slain’ . . . The other motif is that of sacrifice. If property can be ‘killed,’ this means it must be ‘alive.’” (1966, 102, note 122).

be made between the gift-exchange and the destruction-exchange. It also shows that the obligation to engage in a relationship with others is involved equally in both hostile reciprocity and peaceful reciprocity.

*Relationships of Alliance and Hostile Relationships
in a Traditional Society*

In this paper, I will rely on data gathered from the Yanomami, an Amerindian population whose territory lies in Venezuela and Brazil, on either side of the dividing line between the waters of the Orinoco and Amazon River basins.

The Yanomami groups can be described as a series of nested “socio-spatial units”³ that maintain mutually friendly or hostile relationships. The friendly and harmonious relationships within and between communities are initiated, maintained, and renewed through visits, speeches, gifts of food and goods, invitations to festivals, intermarriage, as well as through economic, ritual, and political solidarity, which, in particular, is manifested in food production, ceremonies, combats and war expeditions. Hostile and discordant relationships between communities are expressed through various forms of combat and aggression, either tangible or hidden, mortal or non-mortal, organized on the basis of social and spatial distance/proximity, and result in and/or maintain a certain separation between the opposing groups.

Peaceful relationships within and between communities must be endlessly affirmed and confirmed at the risk of becoming undone and thus turning into hostile relationships. We have seen that these relationships come together in several forms. If one focuses on the traditional forms that continue to be practiced by the Yanomami, the gift-exchange does not so much involve the exchange of goods (which only existed in a limited form prior to the arrival of foreigners) as it does the exchange of gifts of food; marriage partners; visits; conversations and speeches; festivals; and funeral, shamanistic, and military services. Typically, there is what Mauss calls a

3. According to the terminology proposed by E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), 190.

“system of total services.”⁴ Mauss developed this notion when he observed that even non-exotic societies like the ancient Germanic societies were bound together by multiple reciprocities of services and obligations. Among the Yanomami, there is indeed “an incessant *circulus* of goods and persons mixed together, permanent and temporary services, honors, festivals hosted and hosted in return and those yet to be hosted in return . . .”⁵ Forms of exchange are practiced daily between co-residents and frequently between neighbors. These various services and obligations forge, maintain, and renew economic, political, and ritual solidarity, with this ritual solidarity displayed specifically during therapeutic shamanistic sessions or those involving economic shamanism, which promote hunting and horticulture. During funeral ceremonies, such solidarity is also expressed through the circulation of services between mourners and workers, the gift of gourds containing the ashes of a deceased person, and the gift of ceremonial food.

Exchanges of goods take place on the occasion of festive inter-community gatherings, or else during visits that people conduct on their own initiative in a friendly community. This makes it possible to choose when or where to go in order to request a good when non-hostile relationships allow one to do so. The request is generally made by the visitor to one of the members of the visited community. The visitor either brings a good with him or commits to providing one. But that does not ultimately change the nature of the exchange: there is an obligation to give, which is also an obligation to receive, immediately or later on, and an obligation to give in return for what one requests and to give back for what one has requested and received. Once the exchange partnership relationships have been established, each partner will in turn present his arguments as to why he needs the good requested of the other, and the requester asks the donor to give it to him, “without consideration,” in the same way as he had previously likewise given “without consideration.” The obligation to give is therefore inescapable; one cannot refuse to give a visitor what he has requested without seriously offending him, which is equivalent to a refusal of alliance and therefore a

4. Marcel Mauss, *Œuvres, tome III* (Paris: Minuit, 1969), 47. [All quotations from this work translated from the French by the translator of this paper].

5. Mauss, *Œuvres, tome III*, 47.

declaration of hostility. Receiving visitors poorly is a *casus belli* in the Yanomami region where I work; this is a perfect illustration of the obligation to receive and to exchange, as highlighted by Mauss in *The Gift*.⁶

It is interesting to point out that needs or goods can be devised so as to have a reason for visiting unrelated and/or previously hostile communities. These visits fall within the scope of neighbor alliance strategies and are even an absolute necessity in the Yanomami world because of the hostilities that might otherwise emerge. As soon as an opposing front opens up in one direction, the players seek to activate or develop their former alliances and to establish new ones in other directions. Thus there are “local specialties” which are artificially created for certain villages in order to gain possible access to this or that community. This gives them a motive for being able to visit Yanomami who had thus far been visited infrequently or not at all and to thereby build relationships.

The changes introduced by the arrival of metal tools developed the practice of exchanging goods, and the increase in the contact undoubtedly intensified it. The exchanges of this type are unilateral, but they cause a chain reaction, starting with the exchanging villages close to the supply center. In this sense, this type of exchange is not fundamentally different from the exchanges produced by the creation of “local specialties.” Here again, the exchanges respond more to the need for socializing than to the need for utilitarian goods. Although exchange of goods relationships provide the opportunity to obtain rare products, or those declared to be so, these relationships serve primarily as an opportunity to create and maintain political and matrimonial alliances. The exchanges take on a more formalized appearances if they involve distant and different groups.

Besides these forms of exchange, the Yanomami practice various forms of formal combat and physical aggression, either conspicuous or hidden, in order to respond to the disagreements that occur within and between communities. Each of these methods of regulating conflicts is defined according to the degree of the offense and also the degree of social and spatial proximity/distance of the parties

6. Mauss, *The Gift*, 24. “To refuse to give, to fail to invite, just as to refuse to accept, is tantamount to declaring war: it is to reject the bond of alliance and commonality.”

concerned, while familial and friendly relationships are a restraining factor. All of these forms of confrontation, whether verbal or physical, take place under the auspices of strict reciprocity. Even formal combat occurs in a balanced manner: the number of strikes carried out by one side are returned in equal number by the other. Such a combat must be further counterbalanced by another combat, the return fight being waged in the opponents' village. In the same way, an armed raid initiated by one camp logically results in another raid being led by the group attacked initially. Each strike, each wounding, each assault on homes, and, of course, each death is strictly accounted for and will be the subject of an equivalent reciprocal action on the part of the opposing camp. The same holds true for verbal jousting, during which scores are settled. Derogatory comments addressed to an ally will result in the ally issuing a pay-back during a return joust, which this time is carried out in his own community, so as to balance out the damages equally. These are intermediate formulas, between friendship and hostility, which are intended to preserve friendly relationships, with a group suspected of witchcraft, for example, but which can also escalate, provoke duels, and, if a bad blow were to be inflicted, tilt the balance in favor of hostile relationships.⁷

The etiology of warrior confrontation practiced among the Yanomami basically falls within the scope of revenge. Contrary to a notion put forth in the works of Chagnon,⁸ warlike incursions are never conducted with the intention of capturing women. Taking women is not the specific motive of the raids, and the abductions that may occur during a war-like incursion are only a secondary benefit, which likewise applies to the goods that may sometimes be carried away. However, these events remain rare. Likewise, raids are not undertaken in order to gain fertile land or hunting territories. Nor is it a matter of wars waged for the purpose of conquering populations, or war-like raids carried out for the purpose of gaining territories, women, or metal tools, even though these ecological, materialistic, historical, or sociobiological arguments

7. For further detail, see Alès (1984, 1990a, 1990b, and 2003).

8. Napoléon Chagnon. "Yanomami Social Organization and Warfare." In *The Anthropology of Armed Conflict and Aggression*, eds. Morton Fried et al. (Garden City, NY: Natural History Press, 1968a), 109–159; and Napoléon Chagnon. *The Fierce People* (New York: Holt, Rinehard & Winston, 1968b).

were often the most frequently used in debates about Yanomami warfare, particularly in the United States. Contrary to the arguments of those who maintain these theories, the hostilities always begin when a person is clearly or presumably killed intentionally.⁹ The so-called “violent” practices among the Yanomami correspond to a judicial system for resolving conflicts and for compensating for damages incurred. This involves an institutional justice system which is practiced collectively, without the intervention of a third party. In other words, unlike in modern penal systems, conflict arbitration does not occur through the intervention of a third party, whose judgment must be accepted by the defendants and plaintiffs alike,¹⁰ but rather includes the participation of all members of the communities involved in both camps.

In this type of society, the system of revenge is a constituent part of the social order and corresponds to institutionalized violence, which differs from occasional aggression. From a legal and moral standpoint, the war of revenge system can be interpreted as being a legal system that enables counteraction against a violation of the physical integrity of persons.¹¹ Among the Yanomami, the system of revenge war along with formal combats and rhetorical combats, falls within a graduated continuum. Formal combats, which assume the form of duels and collective battles, serve to regulate conflict between allies that has been triggered by offenses that did not result

9. See Ales, 1984 and 2006, 15–17, footnotes 2 and 3.

10. According to the Yanomami, any damage, whether moral or physical, must be compensated for by inflicting a similar moral or physical suffering. The difference between a revenge-based system of justice and a criminal justice system lies primarily in the fact that, in the first case, the offended one obtains revenge, and then the offender becomes the offended once the reparation has been made. In the second case, that of criminal justice, the offender receives a sentence as punishment but cannot then seek justice for the penalty applied. This generally results in putting an end to the dispute, unless it can be proved that other judgments are possible (see L. Boltanski, *L'amour et la justice comme compétences* [Paris: Métailié, 1990], 139). It is interesting to note recently introduced (April 2005) legislation in Albania which restricts (while still including) the Albanian vendetta system (*kanun*) to a single person in the case of a “blood debt,” which is a measure designed to protect a murderer’s family members from revenge that might otherwise be exacted upon them.

11. For a comparative approach to revenge-based systems, see the Introduction by Raymond Verdier and the four volumes that he has edited on this subject. Raymond Verdier. *La vengeance. Vengeance et pouvoir dans quelques sociétés extraoccidentales* (Paris: Cujas, 4 vols., 1980–1984), Vol. 1, 13–42.

in death. Rhetorical combats are carried out between allies in the framework of ceremonial dialogues and enable conflicts to be controlled without resorting to physical blows. In fact, verbal jousting, while being a place where violence can occur verbally in order to hold the adversary accountable, is part of the procedures implemented to enable anger to be appeased. In particular, ceremonial speeches always take place after physical combats or war-like hostilities, thereby enabling the players to leave the relationship-based field specific to the hostility and to enter that of the alliance.

If a person dies in formal combat, or falls victim to an attack by arrows or witchcraft charms, his death will be the subject of revenge, thereby resulting in a cycle of murder. In principle, every death will be avenged by another death in the enemy camp. During war, an armistice can be reached when there are an equal number of deaths on each side. Acts of revenge that have not been carried out are then left pending for a while, until the children of the victims grow up and in turn conduct their own raids.

Thus, it is noted that revenge-based practices are at the heart of the social dynamics of the Yanomami communities. It also remains to be seen whether the revenge-based system itself relates to a much broader and more complex symbolic system. At the level of the sociocosmic “whole,” the revenge system operates like a system dedicated to the preservation of humanity and life within the universe. The example of the Yanomami thus makes it possible to show that, far from simply focusing on the past, the system of revenge likewise relates to the future.

The Exchange of Murders

Generally speaking, revenge appears to be a system for offsetting a previous murder by carrying out another murder. Killing an enemy is an offset in the sense that the warriors deprive the enemy group, in equal measure, of one of their own vital forces, of a “soul,” and the skills associated with that soul: “they return the blood credit”—the revenge that is yet to be carried out—that they held in their possession up until then, and which the enemy group—the revenge having been carried out—will then hold against them.¹²

12. What is notable is that, from the exact moment when the murder was committed, the positions are reversed. The killer is transformed into a potential

The explicit purpose of capturing a soul from one's enemies is to bring home the souls of close relations who were previously stolen by the enemy but not yet avenged. In this context, it is not a question of reincorporating for oneself the qualities of previously dispossessed souls, but of freeing them so that they can return to their descendants. The return of souls to their "place of origin"¹³ is the victory attributed to the murders perpetrated by the warriors. This retaking of a dispossessed soul is the motivating principle behind their actions and provides them with moral satisfaction. This satisfaction is for themselves as well as for all of their close relations and friends, who will be able to rejoice. This is especially true of women closely related to the deceased who, as a sign that their sorrow has been comforted, literally exult with joy once the raid has come to a favorable conclusion.

Nevertheless, another less pleasant process occurs during a murder. The warriors have *de facto* captured the soul of the enemy (whether or not the latter possessed the previously dispossessed soul of a close relation), and this soul will cohabit with their own souls until their own deaths. Their deaths will occur as a result of revenge being carried out, either by exterior or interior means. In the first case, the close relations and allies of the enemy/victim will make use of arrows or deadly charms. In the second, the very soul of the enemy/victim will kill the warriors inside their own bodies during the homicide ritual or even later, if they succeed both in surviving the ordeal and in escaping unharmed from the enemy's

victim, and the victim and his close relations become potential killers. There are two parties in revenge, each in turn occupying the place of the one killed and that of the killer, in an endless back-and-forth cycle. What is permanent is this movement, and not the composition of the enemy groups, which changes over time as events unfold. There is an alternating game of reflection, the victim's camp itself acting as a homicide as soon as a murder has been committed against it, while the very body of the deceased, whose soul is supposed to make the murderer succumb, becomes the means to that end. The parallel ritual staging of this process, which is carried out at different locations (ritual treatment of the victim's body by his own camp and the ritual of the murderer in the enemy camp) is a good illustration of the opposition of complementarity that structures the relationships between the two enemy groups. To accomplish either operation (and in turn), is to signify the paired nature of this process. It is this mirrored structure, wherein each party depends on the other, which ensures the perpetuation and effectiveness of the revenge-based system. See Alès, *Yanomami, l'ire et le désir* (Paris: Karthala, 2006), 289.

13. According to the expression by Hertz, as cited by Mauss in *The Gift*, 16.

reprisal.¹⁴ The accumulation of souls is not therefore the primary sought-after goal of the raids. On the contrary, it is a heavy burden to bear: it will make the murderer the preferred target of revenge and torment him for the remainder of his life, until he ultimately succumbs to it. However, this self-sacrificed individual will benefit from this supplementary soul. He will be even more combative and a better hunter (unless he shoots his arrows into a poor hunter, something which he will seek to avoid) and have vigorous children, as long as he does not carry out too many assassinations. The excessive accumulation of the souls of victims does in fact end up turning against the person accumulating them, to the extent that his children fall ill and die.

The exchange that occurs through the exchange of murders includes a cumulative number of souls but also a capturing of “blood,” which also penetrates, not the body, but the soul of the murderer. It is this capturing of a vital substance that makes it possible to further understand the link between the exchange of murders and the creation of life.

Mythology does in fact make it possible to establish a fundamental link between the blood of murder and the blood of menstruation and childbirth, and, beyond that, the overall fecundity of the environment. Revenge for murders does in fact ensure that the Yanomami will continue to reproduce because, without homicides being periodically perpetrated and without the blood associated with them, the forest would be dried up, the trees would not bear fruit, fauna would no longer have any progeny, and humans would no longer reproduce.¹⁵

14. Basically, the murders exchanged between the Yanomami enemy groups correspond to a figurative form of cannibalism, and to the incorporation of the active principle (*pufi*), the victim's soul into the body of the murderer. The assassin, who is identified from the beginning with the victim's corpse, initiates a long ritual, which ultimately enables him to incorporate the enemy without being overcome by the ordeal. However, even after having successfully concluded the ritual of the murderer, the assassin remains haunted by the indigestible assimilation of the enemy he has absorbed, and in fact remains so up until his own death. As a matter of fact, beyond the fact that a killer will, for the remainder of his life, be a designated target for his enemies, the most experienced informants maintain that, once one has committed a murder, one will always die from it one day or another. See Alès, *Yanomami, l'ire et le désir*, 288.

15. See Alès 1998; 2006, 290, 293–294.

From this perspective, revenge-based war appears to be a ritual that is essential to the production of human beings. Enemies are necessary insofar as they are partners in the exchange of a vital substance, the blood of fertility, in order to ensure an overall perpetuation of life. This is an exchange structure that symbolically and socially unites all of the Yanomami groups to one another.

In Maussian terms, agonistic reciprocity can be expressed as the “obligation to ‘give’ death, to receive death, and to repay death with death.”¹⁶ Another way of saying this could be “the obligation to give life, to receive life, and to repay life with life.”¹⁷ This is both the same thing and not exactly the same thing, in terms of understanding the morality and sociality of the practice of agonistic reciprocity. In the second formula above, the idea of “repaying life with life” goes back to the idea of “receiving death” in the first formula. This is undoubtedly why it is more akin to the Maussian formula of the gift-exchange and better illustrates the involvement of murders in the social relationship.

In the first formulation, where the exchange does not relate to an object, spouse, invitation, feast, or speech, it is the fact of “receiving”—receiving death—which seems to pose the biggest problem. Some authors think that confrontation is not an exchange. For Philippe Descola,¹⁸ for example, this sequence can only be characterized by a “permanent denial of reciprocity.” The reasoning for this is based on the idea that no one can intentionally desire his or her own death; it would therefore be a matter of “predation” and not “exchange.”¹⁹

The Yanomami are fully aware that they will bring death to other humans, and the wisest of them know that it is under this condition alone that humanity will be able to survive. However, this does not

16. “L’obligation de donner la mort, de recevoir la mort, et de rendre la mort.” See Alès 2006, 291.

17. “L’obligation de donner la vie, de recevoir la vie, et de rendre la vie.”

18. Philippe Descola, *Par-delà nature et culture* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 471.

19. The actors maintain that, even though conscious of the risks involved, they do not think about them when assassinating a victim (this is what serves the rationalities relating to the capturing of the *soul* stolen from the previous victim). They are not at all unaware of the return murder that will certainly be carried out, but that is in no way sufficient reason for them to abandon to carry out the revenge. In any event, any murderer is a “dead living” person tormented by the “living dead” person who is his victim. There is an implicit “self-sacrifice” that is consented to.

only consist “in giving death and in repaying death with death” it also involves *receiving death*. Therefore, this configuration is not so much a matter of predation,²⁰ necessary to life, but rather an obligation to kill and be killed.

The obligation for warriors to “receive death” exists in many societies, including in our own. For example, an officer of the French Army recently made the following comment about the death of a soldier in Afghanistan:

We are all terribly saddened, but this is nevertheless part of being a soldier. A soldier must be capable of killing but also ready to accept death. Therefore, we are all saddened, but that is part of our military life.²¹

In this sense, men who take part in a military raid are fully aware that they will necessarily be the next targets in the game of retaliation, whether they desire to be so or not. Yet when a group of warriors leaves for battle they are not focused on this idea, but rather on the goal to be accomplished, namely destroying the enemy.

Revenge is a form of sacrifice turned back onto the enemy—onto this other self—and alternately, what *de facto* ends up as sacrificing oneself. This is Mauss’s formula for the gift-exchange: “Yet it is also because by giving one is giving *oneself*, and if one gives *oneself*, it is because one ‘owes’ *oneself*—one’s person and one’s goods—to others.”²² This can equally apply to the exchange of murders.

The notions of reciprocity and exchange only describe the mechanical motion, in other words, the empirical form that solidarity and alliance relationships or hostile relationships can take. Conceptually speaking, systems are constituted by the distinctive opposition between two terms, which Dumont²³ emphasizes in connection with the opposition between consanguinity/marriage. In this case, I propose that we apply the opposition between friends/enemies. In other words, autonomously functioning relationships

20. Even though, in Amazonia, this obligation is frequently stated as such by those involved, or can be deduced as such.

21. Interview broadcast on January 11, 2010 on the *Soir 3* newscast on the France 3 channel.

22. Mauss, *The Gift*, 59.

23. Louis Dumont, *Introduction à deux théories d'anthropologie sociale* (Paris-La Haye: Mouton, 1971), 131–133.

of friendship and harmony do not exist on one side while similarly functioning relationships of animosity and discord exist on the other. Instead, they form the two terms of a single system in which neither of the two configurations can be analyzed independently of the other.

Agonistic exchanges can be interpreted as one form of the exchange, as a practice specific to humanity (as a “total social fact”). In this interpretation, agonistic exchanges are part of the social order rather than elements exogenous to the gift-exchange of goods or total social services which, according to Mauss, would be a means of moving beyond agonistic relations.²⁴

Besides the taking of blood, the exchange of murders assumes the taking of a soul and the recovery of a value, namely the soul of an assassinated kinsman or friend stolen during a previous murder. If one considers that the human soul to consist of ancestral spirits who inhabit it or are attached to it, and that these spirits constitute the supreme value, as is the case with the Yanomami, for instance, then the systems of revenge (which include recovering the blood debt, taking souls, and returning souls to their place of origin) are built around exchanges of values: the souls, which are made up of ancestral spirits. These values become comparable to the currency characteristic of other exchange systems, in particular the Melanesian systems where currency represents ancestors. The exchange of murders thus becomes part of the analysis proposed by Dumont in which currency is like a “general equivalent” on a global level.²⁵

24. Camille Tarot, *Sociologie et anthropologie de Marcel Mauss* (Paris: La Découverte, 2003), 57–58. Tarot also draws attention to Mauss’s idea of the gift-exchange as a means of overcoming violence: “Maussian analysis paves the way for the exchange, as a practice specific to the humanity of man, to achieve the most universal and therefore permanent conditions enabling its existence. These conditions include violence, which is expressed in the gift, while, at the same time, the exchange is a means of moving beyond violence towards an order yet to be established.”

25. “The function of currency as a ‘general equivalent’ is known, however one has hardly ever wondered, on a global level (I mean as on a level of the global society and its current global representations), what conditions were necessary to the existence of currency as a ‘general equivalent.’ That being said, if we acknowledge that the shell currencies of some Melanesian societies are not to be deemed anything other than currencies, we find that these societies have an answer to our question. As a matter of fact, as already stated by Leenhardt and Hocart, in these societies, money represents quite simply, or above all, life, or that which is roughly the same thing,, namely ancestors. This is indeed what is universal in the sense as meant by

The exchange of murders and the exchange of gifts, which can be combined differently and with or without sacrifice, constitute variations of a single structure. This ensures the existence of ordered social relationships between individuals and groups. The case of the Yanomami and other similar cases make it possible to put aside the view of violence as something beyond the scope of social relationships and the establishment of social order. Institutional violence, which differs from individualized and criminal cyclical violence, binds allies together. Adversity is a factor that promotes solidarity and serves as a powerful element of coalition, with the common good taking the upper hand over personal or collective internal conflicts. Adversity likewise unites enemies in the sense that their recognition of each other as enemies is mutual, and in that they share a certain number of codes, rules and representations. Therefore, agonistic reciprocity creates a legal relationship and, beyond that, a social bond, between both enemies and allies. It is a factor in handling internal disputes which flourish and are reinvigorated in times of peace, and it is the keystone of reciprocal services and ritual ceremonial practices.

Institutional violence or vendetta war is likely to produce the social bond and social order brought to light by Mauss with regard to the gift-exchange. This may not be a matter of “sociability” or “conviviality,” but it is indeed a matter of social relationships. Humans are united by war and not only by the gift. Revenge is a social relationship which creates an exchange relationship and therefore communication between two groups.²⁶ Sociality, a recognition of “being similar,” occurs among groups that practice visible or invisible aggression towards one another. In this sense, revenge can be defined as an institution that ensures the existence and continuation

these societies, i.e., what exists everywhere as a value . . . where the symbol derives its capacity as a general, or virtually general, equivalent.” See Dumont’s preface to *La grande transformation: aux origines politiques et économiques de notre temps* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), XVI–XVII.

26. And this likewise includes groups who do not know one another, because they do not visit one another but acknowledge each other’s existence, whether real or presumed. It is in this sense, due to the recognition of the other within a single social whole that such recognition presumes, that the attack of “animal doubles” between Yanomami groups that do not know one another (and which, operating on the generalized exchange model resulting from revenge-based practices carried out by animals) must be integrated into the social field.

of a symbolic order bringing together various individuals and local groups, whether they are friends or enemies.²⁷

A parallel between the Yanomami and Mauss's work with the populations of New Zealand and Melanesia reinforces the idea that the exchange of murders produces a social bond. The Yanomami mixing of souls between a murderer and his victim resembles the mixing of things and souls Mauss noted in the New Zealand and Melanesian data, a mixture by which Mauss explains the totalizing operation performed by the exchange within society.²⁸ Regarding gifts, Mauss stated, "In short, this represents an intermingling. Souls are mixed with things, things with souls. Lives are mingled together. This is how, among persons and things so intermingled, each emerges from their own sphere and mixes together. This is precisely what contract and exchange are."²⁹ This same formula might be used again to empirically describe the exchange of murders. Clearly, the Yanomami do not focus so much on things as on persons; however, "an intermingling of lives and souls" is understood to occur (in the literal sense) between murderers and victims, since the killers are invaded during the act of killing by the "souls" of the deceased and possess their attributes until they also die.

Additional notable points emerge when Mauss's analyses on the gift are paralleled with revenge. The issue of time, as it concerns carrying out services and counter-services;³⁰ the link between

27. Alès, "Violence et ordre social dans une société amazonienne," 111 and Alès, "Yanomami, l'ire et le désir," 47.

28. "Yet this intricate mingling of symmetrical and contrary rights and duties ceases to appear contradictory if, above all, one grasps the mixture of spiritual ties between things that to some degree appertain to the soul, and individuals, and groups that to some extent treat one another as things. All these institutions express one fact alone, one social system, one precise state of mind: everything—food, women, children, property, talismans, land, labour, services, priestly functions, and ranks—is there for passing on, and for balancing accounts. Everything passes to and fro as if there were a constant exchange of a spiritual matter, including things and men, between clans and individuals, distributed between social ranks, the sexes, and the generations." Mauss, *The Gift*, 17–18.

29. Mauss, *The Gift*, 24–25.

30. "Time is needed in order to perform any counter-service. The notion of a time limit is thus logically involved when there is question of returning visits, contracting marriages and alliances, establishing peace, attending games or regulated combats, celebrating alternative festivals, rendering ritual services of honour, or 'displaying reciprocal respect' (Tlingit expression), and all the things that are exchanged at the

gift-exchanges as a sacrifice made to increase productivity, as referred to by Mauss³¹; and, in some way, the increased wealth of these societies resulting from the multiplication of exchanges³²; and the notion of credit or loans are also found among the Yanomami in the delayed exchange of revenge and cyclical murders, which enables the multiplication of lives and the proliferation of plants and animals.

It should be borne in mind that the vicious circle of revenge is broken over time and is something virtuous because it promotes the production of life. Revenge is suspended in favor of a period of peace, thereby enabling forces and individuals within the opposing groups to be refreshed. Thus, there is a benefit in the exchange of murders: reproduction. For our part, we must recognize that the growth in the number of persons or the multiplication of life resulting from this exchange is a positive exchange. In those cultural contexts where it develops, revenge is a creative process ensuring the succession of generations and the perpetuation of society. Admittedly, this is a process motivated by the past, but also focused on the future, in terms of both actual practice and ideology.³³ In traditional societies, the present often revolves around preserving and reproducing the past for the future. The present does nothing more than ensure the extension of a single time for the future of the group. As we learn from the Yanomami, and more generally other societies, rather than understanding revenge as being focused on the past, we must further understand the exchange of murders in its various forms as a condition of the future.

same time as other things that become increasingly numerous and valuable, as these societies become richer." Mauss, *The Gift*, 45–46

31. Marcel Mauss, *Sociologie et Anthropologie* (Paris: PUF, 1968), 166.

32. Mauss, *Sociologie et Anthropologie*, 167.

33. There is likewise a before and after in revenge; one does not go back to zero and, due to the codification, ritualization, and temporal dimension of revenge, the infinite principle of reprisal can be mastered and is not in and of itself a danger to the survival of society. It does not imply the extermination of the population but rather its safeguarding (the opposite case would be the absence of murders, which would result in the annihilation of society based on a different world view from our own).

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