

The Feast



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These are preliminary study notes which will be replaced by a comprehensive study guide written by Napoleon Chagnon. At present, appropriate contextual material for this film can be found in Chapter 4 of Napoleon Chagnon's *Yanomamo* read in conjunction with Marcel Mauss' *The Gift*. The information and interpretations which follow are entirely the responsibility of the authors.

Synopsis

The Patanowa-teri had invited the Mahekodo-teri to a feast. The two villages had been allied until a few years ago when they fought over the abduction of a Patanowa-teri woman. Since both groups were besieged by hostile villages, they were desperate for allies. They hoped to renew their alliance with each other at this time. Rakoiwa was the headman in Patanowateri who organized the feast, perhaps hoping that through an alliance with a headman in Mahekodo-teri, he might eventually be able to leave Patanowateri

which was already too large for people to live together peacefully, and form a new village with some of the members of Mahekodo-teri. At the very least, the alliance of these villages would help to strengthen their position among the many hostile groups who were constantly raiding and threatening to raid them. This feast was a successful political endeavor because trading and good will highlighted the event. To further cement the alliance, both groups went off and raided another Yanomamo village, killing a woman.

Purpose of Yanomamo Feasts

Yanomamo feasts take place only when one sovereign group entertains the members of another allied group. Feasts, in brief, are political events. To be sure, economic and ceremonial implications are also significant, but these are relatively minor when compared

to the functions of the feast in the context of forming alliances. The chief purpose of entertaining allies is to reaffirm and cultivate intervillage solidarity in the intimate, sociable context of food presentations, thereby putting the ally under obligation to reciprocate the feast in his own village at a later date, bringing about another feast and great solidarity.

Structure of *The Feast*;

The filmmakers divide *The Feast* into two parts: first, slides with narration and second, film with subtitles. The first part introduces the characters, setting and event; the second part reproduces the event as it happened. Initially, the first part was 10 minutes and consisted of a cut-up version of the film spliced together with only those parts that had the original narration. We discovered it was too difficult for students to see the moving images and hear the narration so freeze frames from the actual film are used as a background for the narration so that one can focus one's attention on the narration and understand it better.



Outline of *The Feast*:

Part B

1. (Sequence 1) Preparing for the Feast
 - A. Cleaning the Village
 - B. Cooking Plantain soup

- C. Grooming and decorating
- D. Expectation among the host tribe

1. The Visitors Enter

- A. Asiawa enters Patanowa-teri
- B. Expectation of the host tribe
- C. The visitors enter in pairs or small groups
- D. All the visitors enter

3. Entertaining the Guests

- A. Hosts and guests feast
- B. Hosts display fierceness

4. Morning Activities

- A. Chanting
- B. Waldng Up
- C. Trading
- D. Discussing a future raid on another village

5. Afternoon Activities

- A. Further trading

- B. Departing

Part A: Slides and Narration

Footage Breakdown of *The Feast*:

Footage count begins at "2" on the Academy leader at 0000:00 The representations below xxxx:yy represent feet: frames.

Credits: See end of footage counts.

0040:16 - Map of South America

Narration: Over 10,000 Yanomamo Indians live in some 125 widely scattered, mutually

hostile villages in Southern Venezuela and Northern Brazil. This film shows the formation of an alliance between villages at a Yanomamo feast.

The village of Patanowa-teri has a population of about 225, too many people to live together peacefully. There is constant friction. Fights break out, frequently over women, but the village cannot subdivide because it has too many enemies. Patanowa-teri has been raided 25 times in the last 16 months, by several of its neighbors. Ten people have been killed. Surrounded by hostile neighbors, the Patanowa-teri need allies desperately. They have therefore invited the some 125 people of Mahekodo-teri who live a days walk to their west, to a feast.

0077:10 - Wide angle shot of Patanowa-teri Village from a 40' tree.

Narration: The two villages had been allies until a few years ago when they fought over the abduction of a Patanowa-teri woman. They hope to renew the alliance through feasting and trading, knowing that Mahekodo-teri also needs allies. Many of the Patanowa-teri still regard the Mahekodo-teri as enemies. They are fearful, as are their guests, because they know that many feasts end in violence through treachery or through sudden flaring of tempers.

0096:34 - A young kinsman cooks plantain soup.

Narration: While his younger kinsman cook the plantain soup and peach palm fruit...

0106:30 - Krishisiwa's wife picks lice from Krihisiwa's hair.

Narration: Krihisiwa rests and calculates

the distribution of food: his hunters have done so poorly that he must make the meat go further than it should.

0112:38 - Krihisiwa gives Asiawa a gourd filled with hot plantain soup.

Narration: Asiawa, son of the Mahekodo-teri headman, is the first visitor to enter; his co-villagers wait outside the gate. In a formal chant, Asiawa accepts the invitation on behalf of his father's village. Krihisiwa gives him a gourd of hot plantain soup which he must drink in one draught.

0126:00 - Krihisiwa loads food basket on Asiawa's back.

Narration: After a polite wait he is given a basket of vegetables and smoked meat which he will share with his co-villagers as they finish decorating themselves. Many of them will wear white buzzard down to indicate

their peaceful intentions.

0134:37 - Man examining arrow

Narration: Meanwhile, the hosts finish preparing trade goods. Frequently trade items include: clay pots, hammocks and hallucinogenic drugs. The trade goods help to bind the alliance by creating obligations which the visitors must discharge at a return feast.

0147:33 - The hosts run to their living area because the visitors approach.

Narration: Excitement grows as the feast nears. Groups of hosts and guests shout back and forth. At last the visitors signal that they are ready to dance and the hosts retire.

“Surrounded by hostile neighbors, the Patanowa-teri need allies desperately.”

0155:26 - A visitor after entering the village makes ritualistic threats.

Narration: The visitors enter in pairs and display themselves before the hosts, making ritualistic threats. After each visitor has performed...

0161:02 - Visitor dancing with a spear

Narration: (cont.)... they enter en masse, circle the village, and parade to the center to assume their visitors' pose.

0166:04 - Visiting wives enter the village.

Narration: The visitors' wives carrying possessions in large pack-baskets join their husbands inside the village. Women are rather inconspicuous in political events such as these.

0172:38 - In the center of the village, hosts invite visitors to their hammocks.

Narration: Krihisiwa's group excitedly circles the visitors; each then invites a visitor to his hammock.

0177:34 - Hosts threaten visitors who lie stoically in hammocks.

Narration: The visitors remain motionless in the hammocks while Krihisiwa's dancers try to intimidate them. Everyone knows that this is the point when treacherous hosts could murder their guests.

0184:33 - Visitor in hammock, unflinching and stoic when threatened by host.

Narration: (cont.)... but the guests must not show any emotion or fear for true men,

Yanomamo, are fierce.

0189:35 - Dusk. Visitors and guests dance in the plaza.

Narration: The dancing ends at dusk. All night long, pairs of hosts and guests chant together asking for and promising goods.

0195:38 - Krihisiwa's bearded brother Kumaeiwa, the most powerful headman Patanowa-teri and Shinahokawa, the headman for the visiting Mahekodo-teri, chant together.

Narration: The next morning the primary headmen of each village Krihisiwa's bearded brother and Asiawa's father - chant with one another, endorsing the political event they had largely ignored until now.

1204:06 - Rakoiwa trading arrows ' with a guest.

Narration: The rest of the morning is spent visiting, planning a conjunctive raid and examining each other's possessions. Rakoiwa wants some of the bamboo arrow points belonging to Asiawa's younger brother. This is significant since Asiawa shot Rakoiwa on a raid last year, the giving and receiving of goods is an assurance of their friendship.

0218:22 - Trading outside Krihisiwa's house.

Narration: Later in the day the visitors gather before Krihisiwa's house to trade.

“Everyone knows that this is the point when treacherous hosts could murder their guests...but the guests must not show any emotion or fear for true men, Yanomamo, are fierce.”

Tempers are on edge; many of the Patanowa-teri are not enthusiastic about entertaining old enemies.

0225:33 - Kumaeiwa points threateningly at the man who demands his dog.

Narration: Accusations of stinginess and broken promises punctuate the event. The visitors ask for tobacco, hammocks and dogs.

0231:07 - More trading

Narration: The hosts are reluctant to give, fearing the visitors will not reciprocate, even though there is a strong obligation to repay each item with a different one at a later time.

0238:11 - Krihisiwa and a guest exchange bows.

Narration: Finally visitors begin to leave. Those who remain make last-minute exchanges giving, for example, a palm-wood bow for a palm-wood bow: the value of the item is irrelevant, since the purpose of the exchange is to create mutual obligation.

0247:28 - Kumaeiwa (close up)

Narration: Krihisiwa's bearded brother is distressed that the visitors claimed his dog. He will demand something valuable at the next feast and, as a visitor, will not easily be refused.

Part B

Sequence 1: Preparing for the Feast

0230:20 - Wide angle shot of Patanowa-teri, a Yanomamo village
Subtitle: a) PATANOWA-TERI b) March 3, 1968, 2:30 P.M.

A. Cleaning the Village

0268:13 - Kiihisiwa sweeps the village plaza with his machete

Subtitle: "All of you there. Come help clean the plaza."

Comments: The Patanowa-teri prepare for the feast by cleaning the village plaza. Krihisiwa initiates this activity (since he has arranged for this feast) by raking debris in the plaza with his machete. He cannot order anyone else to clean the plaza but must encourage this activity by his example.



B. Cooking the Plantain Soup

0300:05 - A young kinsman makes rasha soup.

Comments: A young kinsman makes rasha soup. The main staple of the feast is plantain soup. Rasha (a

red palm fruit rich in nutrients which tastes like hard summer squash when boiled) can supplement this base when it is in season. A special hunt is also organized by the headman who initiates a feast in order to obtain meat. Only meat from certain animals can be used. It would be unthinkable to prepare a feast without being able to offer some meat to the guests.

0308:30 - A young kinsman stirs plantain

soup.

Comments: Plantains (similar to bananas) hang above the living areas of the village (usually above the headman's house) and become ripe in a week. They are boiled in metal pots and then poured into troughs, pounded and broken up with swizzle sticks.

0314:15 - Young Kinsman tend the fire by fanning it.

Comments: The Yanomamo arrange the log of a fire in spoke-like manner. As one end of the log bums, it can be pushed towards the center, and this feeds the fire.



0317:35 - A young kinsman has removed the pot of soup from the fire and now stirs the soup.

0326:05 - A man inspects a trough filled with soup and cleans off dirt in soup

Comment: The troughs constructed to hold the plantain soup originate from the bark of the arapuri tree. A section of the bark is cut, bent up, and sewn on the main trough at a 45 degree angle. This serves as an end to the trough.

0330:19 - Bubbling hot plantain soup (close up)

0331:37 - A man dips into a pot of soup and licks a gourd.

0334:37 - A different man stirs his pot of soup.

0399:12 - Man pours soup into a trough and then a man drinks from the trough with a gourd.

C. Grooming and Decorating

0378:34 - Krihisiwa's wife picks lice out of Kihisiwa's hair.

Subtitle: "Shaki (Chagnon), are you my older brother? Tell me you are my friend."

Comment: Kihisiwa's wife refers to Napoleon Chagnon by his statement. She jokes with the anthropologist while being photographed. Grooming for lice is a common pasttime for the Yanomamo. They consider



the salty lice a delicacy.

0386:28 - Boy painted black decorates a younger boy's hair with white buzzard down.

Comment: Cotton and buzzard down are often used ornately by the Indians. A woman

puts on her face ornamental decorations (i.e., decorating with bamboo sticks, flowers and cotton) just like a woman does in America with eye shadow, rouge, earrings, lipstick, etc. The flower, cotton or stick can be pulled through pierced lips or pierced ears. The boy paints himself black which symbolizes death. He may wish to impress others that he is fierce. He rubs charcoal on his skin to make it black.

0399:02 - Young kinsmen decorates his arm with feathers and buzzard

0404:04 - Lice picking (cont.)

0409: 10 - Boy completes decor by adding an arm decoration to his other arm (cont.)

D. Expectation Among the Host Tribe

0404:30 - A small group of men talk about the upcoming feast.

Subtitles: “The visitors must have moved quickly to get here.”

Comments: (0404:30, cont.) The tension in the air culminated while the host tribe waits. ‘Me preparations have been made and now they must wait for the arrival of the envoy from the visiting tribe.

Sequence 2: The Visitors Enter

A. Asiawa (painted black) enters Patanowateri

Subtitles: a) “You think our dialect is odd, but when we chant tonight we will show you otherwise.” b) “Get out of the way, my son!”

Comments: The dialects spoken by the various Yanomamo tribes vary a great deal.

Jokes and insults result from these differences in dialect.

The visitors, the Mahekodo-teri who are camped outside the village send their representative, Asiawa to receive food which traditionally initiates the ceremony. Krihisiwa greets Asiawa upon his entering and presents him with a gourd of hot plantain soup which he must drink in one draught. Krihisiwa then gives him meat and vegetables to take back to the Mahekodo-teri because it is the responsibility of the host tribe to feed the visitors.

0434:32 - Krihisiwa fills a gourd with plantain soup and presents it to Asiawa

Subtitles: “Accept this morsel of food.”

04-41:35 - Asiawa drinks the soup in one draught

0461:29 - Asiawa waits while Krihisiwa prepares food for the visitors

Subtitles: “Add that smoked meat to the vegetables.”

Comments: The feast meat earmarked for the guest include: monkeys, armadillos, wild turkeys, wild pig, tapir and sloth. The hosts often have to settle for second best: deer, small birds, a small species of wild turkey, insects or fish. The guests eat the most prized game-because the host wants to display their affluence to the guests.

0480:14 - Krihisiwa loads the food onto Asiawa’s back.

Subtitles: “Don’t worry about his black paint. Let’s give them a real welcome.”

B. Expectations of the Host Tribe

Comments: After Asiawa leaves, the hosts must wait again for the arrival of the whole

tribe. The visitors will eat the food Asiawa carries back and then break camp. They arrive at the outside of the village and begin their ritualistic entrance.

0495:30 - A host woman waits (she is decorated with sticks which attach through the holes in her lower lips and earlobes.)

0498:01 - Man working on his arrows

Comments: There has been much manufacturing of trade goods for this feast by the hosts during the past 3 weeks: arrows, baskets, hammocks, etc.

0503:26 - Woman and baby playing in hammock

0506:06 - Man with tobacco in lower lip

Comments: Both men and women place large quantities of tobacco between their lower lip and gums.

0510:36 - Woman with stick decor (cont.)

0515:28 - Wide angle shot of hosts standing in center of village with spears in hand

Subtitles: “They are ready to come in and dance. Let’s give them a real welcome!”

0527:00 - Hosts run to their huts, expecting the entrance of the guests

Subtitles: A) “They’re coming!” b) “Tie the dogs so they won’t bite the dancers.”

C. The Visitors Enter in Pairs or Small Groups

0539:30 - First pair of visitors enter

Comments: The visitors show their fierceness through ritualistic threats and actions. After entering, the two visitors go in opposite direction dancing around the village

and passing each other on the opposite side midway around. They often stop at a hammock and display their fierceness. When they dance back to the entrance they meet and eat and a new pair enters. The following shots are of different visitors making this traditional entrance.

0541:21 - Man with palm fronds

0547:21 - Another man with palm fronds

Subtitle: “This guy is a real killer.”

Comments: The hosts often comment on the visitor’s display

0550:18 - Man in shot 0541:21, cont.

0556:03 - First two men pass at opposite side of the entrance

0560:15 - Visitor dancing with spear

0562:28 - Asiawa with ax

Subtitle: “Fight! Fight! Fight!”

0566:00 - Visitor runs to hammock

0577:28 - Two visitors dancing, one of which is a woman

Comments: Women rarely if ever participate in this initial display of fierceness by the visitors. It is unknown why this woman participates. A Yanomamo, when asked, said he had only seen it once before.

0581:20 - Cont.

Subtitle: Dangerous spirit! Dangerous spirit! Dangerous spirit!

0586:35 - Asiawa with ax (cont.)

0592: 11 - A visitor spins with arrows in his hand

0594:20 - Two -men exit through entrance

Comment: After the first two- men exit another small group enters displaying their fierceness.

D. All the Visitors Enter

0600:18 - Whole tribe enters

Comments: After the preliminary activity ends, all the men enter and dance around the perimeter of the village. They finally halt and end up in the center of the village. At this point, the hosts circle the guests and greet' them in the center. Then each host invites an individual guest to eat Plantain soup and to sit in his hammock

068:05 - All the visitors wait in the center of the village

Subtitle:

VISITORS

0616:20 - Host circles village, then move into the center of the village

Subtitle: HOSTS

Sequence 3: Entertaining the Guests

A. Hosts and guests feast

0638:38 - While in the center, the hosts invite guests to their hammocks.

Comments: By this time, the women have entered inconspicuously with the Mahekodo-

teri goods and supplies. They remain inconspicuous throughout the feast.

Subtitles: a) "You men come with me" b) You women, get busy and make the guests at home.

0655:24 - Hosts and Visitors eat plantain soup from the troughs

Comments: Plantain soup is the main food eaten during any Yanomamo

B. Host Displays Fierceness

0665:29 - A visitor sits stoically in a host's hammock

Subtitle: VISITORS

Comments: After feasting, guests recline in the host's hammock. Now, the hosts display their fierceness by threat using bows and unstrung arrows. The guest must remain stoic throughout these threats. There are times when hosts have been known to kill unprotected guests at this point in a feast. This did not occur at this feast.



0668:39 - A host threatens guest with bow and arrow
Subtitle: HOSTS

0710:11 - Finally at dusk, the hosts dance in the center of the village

Comments: Beginning at dusk, individual hosts and guests chant with each other throughout the night, often promising gifts to be exchanged in the morning.

Sequence 4: Morning Activities: Trading and Making Alliances

A. Chanting

0719:21 - Kumaeiwa (Krihisiwa's bearded brother) and Shinanokawa (the headman for the Mahekodo-teri) chant together.

Subtitles: a) THE NEXT MORNING, 7:00 a.m. b) "If you are hungry, my dear male relative, I will give you plantains." c) "I will also give you powerful magical plants that I have underneath my basket."

Comments: These two main headmen have ignored the political event so far in the feast, but now acknowledge it and chant with one another promising gifts. They have set the tone for the rest of the day, demonstrating the importance of the alliance and continued peaceful relationships.

B. Waking Up

0750:05 - Men Relaxing in Hammocks

Comments: The Yanomamo usually get up about 7:00 am. and then begin morning activities (i.e., preparing breakfast, putting on make-up, etc.)

0773:08 - Woman and child relaxing in hammock,

C. Trading

0775:24 - Two men trade arrows

Subtitles: a) "Can I take these?" b) "Go ahead, take them." c) "No! I got this point in a village to the south. It kills Basho moneys." d) "The shaft will be stuck into the body this way."

Comments: The Yanomamo take a great deal of time, and effort when constructing



arrows. They are designed with tail feathers that make the arrow rotate, which allows for greater accuracy.

D. Discussing a Future Raid on Another Village

0803:38 - Men make plans to raid another village

Subtitles: a) "Our raiders cannot go that way because the jungle is too dense and tangled. No! No! No! b) "Then we will approach when there is light to see by..." c) "Other Yanomamo - different ones - are prone to make enemies of us." d) "This many of them should be shot, I say." e) "Further down the trail you get one. This other guy will also shoot one, and so on..."

Comments: A village may organize a group of 30 to 40 men to attack another village, but rarely do many of them ever reach the other village. About half of the 40 will come back after two days with excuses that explain their return: old wounds which have begun to hurt, malaria attacks, etc. The rest of the men return in the days to follow also with various excuses and sometimes a few men reach their destination and may kill another Yanomamo or steal a woman.

Sequence 5: Afternoon Activities

0847:38 - A wide angle shot of the village

A. More trading

Subtitle: THAT AFTERNOON, 2:30 P.M.

0850:23 - Kumaeiwa bickers with Shinano-

kawa who wants his dog

Subtitles: a) “I’ll not give it!” b) ‘Whaaaaa! Don’t be that way.” c) “You claim to be friends! You are really stingy, though!” d) “I don’t want to give my dearest pet away! You people ought to be giving things to us.”

Comments: Guests are not easily refused when they ask for gifts from their hosts (i.e., when Shinanokawa asks Kumaeiwa for his dog). Even if the possession is precious, he must give it if asked. Kumaeiwa may be the most influential headman of the village but he did not initiate this feast. Krihisiwa did.

0881:11 - A guest asks a host for a hammock

Subtitles: a) “Don’t you know I need a hammock?” b) I’m tired of being ignored! Give me something!”

0894:15 - Another guest wants a hammock

Subtitle: “Me too! I want a hammock.”

0897:26 - This man wants some arrows

Subtitles: a) “I need some arrows!” b) “Just this many.”

0910:23 - Kumaeiwa walks over to Shinanokawa and gives his dog away

Subtitles: a) “I hate to give my pet, but I will.” b) “In this many days you will be our guests, so give generously now and we will repay you.”

0938:01 - The man who wanted the hammock receives one

0945:06 - Two men exchange each other’s bows

Subtitle: “Let us exchange bows, brother-in-law.”

Comments: Although in the exchange of the bows, the two men did not make a mate-

rial gain, the gesture symbolized the alliance between the two villages.

B. Departing

0953:36 - Kumaeiwa gives Shinanokawa a cotton belt

Subtitles: a) “He is wiry alright!” b) “rake my cotton belt ... and in a moment I will give you some arrows as a gift.” c) “Will you also give me some spun cotton?” d) “Yes, dear friend, but be patient. 3) “Take it, as I promised.”

0991:19 - The visitors leave after making last minute exchanges

0998:29 - Close-up of Kumaeiwa

Subtitle: “I’ll get something for my dog when I go to their village.”

Comments: When the Patanowa-teri visit the Mahekodo-teri they will have the opportunity to ask for their host for gifts. Kumaciwa plans to get something in return for his dog and he will not be easily refused.

1008:08

Narration: “Immediately following the feast, the two villages make a joint raid on an old ally and kill a girl, leaving her village disconsolate.

1017:17

Narration: No portion of this film can be used without the written of the publishers: Timothy Asch, Napoleon Chagnon.



Film Credits

Produced and directed by Timothy Asch and Napoleon Chagnon
We wish to acknowledge the assistance of Carolyn Carr, Kenneth Golden, and John Marshall in the final editing and Verdun Chagnon for preparing the maps.

This film was prepared as one aspect of a comprehensive study of the Yanomamo Indians in Southern Venezuela and Northern Brazil.

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Study Guide Credits

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