

Debate, end of the first day

Arthur Gicqueau: It is time to move on to discussion, particularly on the basis of the ethnographic examples we’ve seen today. We can return to the potential points of consensus or, on the contrary, of disagreement. Today we have seen the great diversity that prevails both in the forms of confrontation and in the motivations behind them. This raises the question whether it is useful to try to classify all these conflicts. We saw this, for example, with the case of the Anga in Papua New Guinea. And I’d like to ask P. Lemonnier: do you think, for example, that it is possible to classify the examples you presented in the table that Christophe [Darmangeat] showed us this morning?

Pierre Lemonnier: I asked Christophe [Darmangeat] this question a few weeks ago, when I read the outline of his talk. The question is: why do we need categories? If categories help us think, because we compared them with each other, that’s fine. I always use a very simple example: when I was writing my thesis, over 50 years ago, you had to say: “This thing looks like such and such a trap from A. Leroi-Gourhan, volume two, page 37, Figure 56.” But honestly, who cares? It’s like the people who write theses today saying, “it is definitely a totemic ontology”. But if the Descolian totemic ontology is of no use to you, there’s no point in mentioning it! So what do we actually get out of such categories? I talked about something else. I explained how warriors are made, who are the actors of war, including the invisible ones, like shamans... We don’t always think about things like that. I am impressed that we can have such knowledge of a planetary mythology. Narrow categories are useful to making contrasts. As I said earlier: “A feud can turn into war, and a war can turn into a feud...” But again, who cares! People use the category. Perhaps the category is something else again, which will make it possible to think about the two or three things at once. That is why I did not hesitate to recall C. Lévi-Strauss and trade. In New Guinea, the exchanges of wealth temporarily take the place of the exchanges of blows. And in many societies, one cannot think about the exchange of violence (injuries, deaths) without also thinking about the exchanges of wealth. So, if Christophe [Darmangeat] has been doing this for months, he must have something in mind. Here, let me help: are there any precedents on this from A. Testart’s side?

Christophe Darmangeat: Yes, A. Testart did try to work on this subject, in a way that I find only half satisfactory. This is found in a text that was once public, and is now supposedly unavailable... although it is in fact still accessible online if you search the Internet properly, it should be republished in a few months. He approached the question by first looking at the goals (among the confrontations, some aim for political domination, others for economic gain, etc.) and second by what he called the “limited” (or not) intent. Thus, if revenge is carried out without restraint, is a “war of vengeance”; if it has a limited intent, it is a feud. For looting, he used the same distinction between a war of looting and a razzia. In my opinion, there is a better solution, which is the one I proposed this morning, because this presentation still has its limits and various problems. But fundamentally, why make categories? To help us find our way around! In Australia, there are fights involving 200 men on each side, but as soon as one of the fighters is seriously injured, people stop everything and celebrate together. Call it a war if you like—a “ritual” war, a “whatever you want” war. But even though there are armed people fighting, you have to understand that it is something that simply has nothing to do with war, both in its aims and its methods. Socially, it is not the same thing at all. So we have to put words on this phenomenon—which is complicated, because a priori, we don’t have any! That’s why I make a table with boxes. It is crucial to understand that behind this custom, there is certainly the idea of restoring harmony and peace, but by definition, there are no winners or losers. It’s a fight that is supposed to end that very evening, and for good. If we don’t carry out this classification work, we can’t make sense of it. That’s why I think it’s important. And even if it means anticipating tomorrow’s discussion, when you’re an archaeologist and you find a certain number of dead people somewhere, you think to yourself: groups fought here. If we’re not careful, we assume that if there are a lot of bodies, it was a war, and if there are fewer bodies, it’s a feud. At best, we try to make that distinction. But in fact, it can be many other things. Without giving away tomorrow’s debate, I remain very skeptical about the possibility of identifying the different scenarios through archaeology. But as you said, it’s better to say

nothing than to say something wrong. And so, rather than going straight ahead and saying that it was a war—simply because war is all we know—it is better to understand that this struggle could have been part of a different logic. That is why, in my opinion, we must start by classifying the different forms of confrontation. This also allows us to realize, in a very trivial way, how the formation of the State eliminated almost all the forms that I have presented, except for war. The state does not just eliminate feuds; it eliminates all conventional confrontations, razzia, headhunting, and so on. So there are various logics at play here, which means that we can then attempt to link them to different forms of society. But I have already talked at length, and not everyone has to agree!

Sylvain Lemoine: In that case, couldn't we simply talk about conflicts between groups?

C. D.: Yes, the term 'conflict' has the advantage of being less loaded than 'war'. So, indeed, we can say that war is a subcategory of conflict. However, even 'conflict' does not apply to every situation. For example, I mentioned sports; you could argue that it is a bit different, since there are normally no deaths or injuries. But even in a practice such as headhunting, for example, you don't have to be in conflict with the people you are going to hunt. You just have to be at odds with them. The same goes for razzia. After all, you have nothing against these people, you have no quarrel with them, but you can seize an opportunity. Some people are passing by, and you take the chance to rob them. Would you say that a burglar is in conflict with the homeowner? Not necessarily. So, among all the forms of violence, some are clearly part of a conflict, either because one wants to perpetuate it or, on the contrary, one wants to get out of it. But there are also forms that are simply an absence of peace or, more precisely, an absence of non-aggression.

S. L.: Let's talk about collective antagonisms. And in that case, wouldn't a common denominator be hatred, or at least if not fear, then at least a certain dehumanization of the other? Is it a relationship to otherness that differs otherness between members of one's own group and members of another group?

C. D.: That, I believe, is precisely the point of classification. I'm not sure there is a common denominator, apart from the fact that we are talking about groups that physically confront each other. But not everything follows the same logic. And if we try to fit everything into the same bag, we will find nothing or we will make mistakes. A few months ago, the *Monde Diplomatique* published an article that reported the memories of guys who are now settled down, but who took part in neighborhood fights in the 1970s and 1980s. Fights between gangs is something that still happens today and, in some cases, clearly correspond to economic struggles, for example drug traffickers who want to secure a monopoly. But in many other cases, it doesn't. It's simply that we are from a certain neighborhood and the others are from another. One former gang member interviewed in the article had a wonderful phrase, saying essentially: "In fact, behind all this, there was no hatred. There was simply competition

(or confrontation, I'd have to find the way he put it)" But here's the thing: it's not even necessarily hatred. So, there is certainly hatred in war; as far as feuds are concerned, I'm not even sure. It depends. It's the same for headhunting; it depends on the situation and, I repeat, I think that all these forms of confrontation correspond to different situations and logic and I don't see how we can find the common denominator for all of them. In fact, the point is that there may not be a common denominator—at least, there are certain common denominators for certain practices. It is important to understand that these can be very different phenomena.

S. L.: Okay, maybe we won't find a common denominator. But there is still a group dynamic at play. It's a group construct: "My group and I are going to take action." What we saw today is that there are in fact many entities, state or otherwise, that are built around war, that are constitutive or consubstantial with war. Take the example given by C. Jeunesse in Indonesia: they exist because they are at war. Many countries in the world survive because they are at war; if they were no longer at war, they would cease to exist. So, it is as if building a collective identity is constructed through conflict. This is the aspect that can bring together the different modalities we've discussed.

Alexandre Hamez: I'm from your field at all, I work in the private sector and I'm an IT specialist. So please you excuse me if I don't use the right terms. If we remove the physical aspect of conflict, everything you're describing reminds me a lot of conflicts in a company. What I find interesting in this classification is that it allows us to see why we have the same dynamics happen in a business environment. I know I shouldn't use personal examples, but the fact that humans define themselves in groups is exactly what I'm observing right now in a very large company. We build ourselves around this logic, with "us versus them" groups. That's why I find it useful to classify these things, because, in a way, we are also headhunting! Personally, I realize that I am also headhunting—from a conceptual point of view: fortunately, I don't literally tear the heads off my enemies!—but I do have adversaries I need to fight in order to exist. And that is almost the nature of business.

Maxime Petitjean: I know that during the conference, Christophe [Darmangeat] is the one who is supposed to express B. Lahire's thoughts. But it seems to me that this is one of the anthropological invariants that B. Lahire identifies in his book: what he calls, if I'm not mistaken, the law of attraction among similar people. Basically, it says that collective conflict is inherent in the existence of groups within various species, human or otherwise. So, it appears to be a fundamental trait of living beings. And then I also wanted to respond to the earlier comments about the usefulness of classifying phenomena. From my point of view, as a specialist in Antiquity, classification does have a certain usefulness. I think there are some major figures who remind us of this: J.-P. Vernant or P. Vidal-Naquet, for example, who drew a lot of inspiration from the work of anthropologists in trying to better understand the Greek or Roman worlds. By clas-

sifying certain phenomena, such as initiation rites, they could perceive things that were not necessarily visible otherwise, at least not through the prism of Greek and Roman sources, which are subject to a certain number of biases, which mean that we do not necessarily perceive aspects that may appear more obvious to anthropologists. This seems especially relevant in the case of war, because here the Greco-Roman sources show a very clear perspective, which I will present tomorrow, that considers any form of armed conflict that is not state-based, that does not pit political communities against each other, as non-wars. These are events that are largely dismissed or categorized as banditry or looting, things that anthropologists would of course define differently, with conceptual tools that involve comparisons and classification work.

P. L.: The wide-ranging comparison we are making makes it possible, for example, to understand that while we spend our time, even nowadays, exterminating others, dropping bombs at dawn because they are not human, it is not the case everywhere. I mentioned the children of the Yewarenaasa enemies because our colleague I. Hodder, whom archaeologists know, explained that people mark their material culture in order to be different, even though nothing distinguishes a Baruya from a Yewarenaasa, not even language. A Baruya speaks, dresses, and undergoes the same initiations just like a Yewarenaasa, probably shares the same myths, yet he is willing to smash the skulls of their babies. I say this because it is tempting to say that we dehumanize those we kill. No, we do not actually dehumanize them. I'll move on to something else: for the sake of comparison, if I hadn't read D. Fabre and J.-C. Schmitt on revenants, I wouldn't be able to understand the return of recent spirits to the heart of New Guinea. Saying something that can be useful to archaeology is extraordinarily complicated. But if it is possible to do this kind of work (history, archaeology, etc.)—and I am doing nothing more than quoting M. Godelier once again in the introduction to *Fondements des sociétés humaines*—it is because people all over the world have had to deal with identical problems: with whom can one have sexual relations? To whom do the children belong? How can one give meaning to the world? How does one populate the invisible? How does one organize the relationship between men and women? How does one organize politics? In anthropology, we don't immediately say, "I'm going to find something brilliant that will be cited in every philosophy textbook on the planet". No, we try to understand the local situation, and that's what these categories are for, refined through trial and error. I am fortunate to belong to a generation where J.-P. Vernant came after P. Vidal-Naquet, who came after an archaeologist, who came after an anthropologist; of course, you are right to point out that these people used categories. But they were trying to understand the Greek world. They were not doing what was once called "middle range theory" in archaeology—I have never understood whether it was a theory of middle ground or a theory constructed in a middle world. What I am trying to do with the Anga is middle range theory. We can compare the phenomena.

Then, the move to the next level must be controlled. Indeed, there are conflicts in companies—though we shouldn't say it, there are also conflicts between academics! There are rivalries that do not involve young warriors, but young people who do other things. At stake is a reward, a trophy. There is something: money, the joy of having one's own ideas accepted. The whole anthropology of science and technology shows the quarrels of engineers and the quarrels of schools. So, when "I'm going to play one off against the other so that the guys in the sixth floor get the contract after me", we form a collective. But there is a goal, there is an objective. Of course, there comes a time when they are so unpleasant that you want to beat them just for the fun of it. But you're right: in these cases, not everything translates into blows with a war club on the head.

Isabelle Crevecoeur: My question is perhaps a little more general and non-ethnological, regarding the various presentations that we have heard today, with an archaeologist's view of temporality. In fact, in relation to everything you have presented, this is the dimension that I am missing. We see geographical diversity, perhaps also some temporal diversity on your scale—over a few hundred to a few thousand years perhaps. But I wonder if in what your observations, there are any recorded, documented cases of changes in the behavior of populations over this time, even if it is very short? And if not, how do you interpret it?

C. D.: This is just a first response, which will really only state the obvious, and I imagine that some colleagues will have more to say. In ethnology, very often, people have not had much time to see changes. Or more precisely, they have seen one major abrupt change: the result of colonization. This is a major point of discussion: did colonization increase conflict, or warlike phenomena, or on the contrary, did it actually suppress them? This question has fueled major quarrels. It seems to me that the correct answer is to say that in some cases colonization did increase conflict, for example, in North America with the Indian wars over the trade routes. But ultimately, in all cases, it suppressed them. We all agree that by proclaiming that it now held a monopoly on violence, state control replaced one form of violence with another. But in doing so, it eliminated local forms of violence. In Australia, this is very clear. Previously, people could take matters into their own hands, undertake feuds, sometimes even wars, large regulated battles, etc. When the Australian state arrived, it said, "Now it's over. If you have a problem, you go through us, through the police". A classic historical example is that of the reconstruction of the state among the barbarians in the early Middle Ages, where royalty tried to intervene in private feuds by imposing itself as the obligatory intermediary and interlocutor. So, we do have a few historical cases, with the Australians essentially saying that before the whites arrived, it was like being in the army all the time. As Pierre [Lemonnier] said: we went to sleep with our weapons, we got up with our weapons, we didn't even go for a pee without our weapons, etc. Now that the white people are here, we

have other problems, but at least we don't have that one anymore! So yes, the impact of colonization is obvious. But do we have any other elements? Apart from those influenced by the West, I don't think we have many chronological sequences in ethnology.

P. L.: Even influenced by the West... "Modernity", as it is called, is such a complicated package! It is effectively the State telling you: "You must not make war, you must gather together, dig toilets, etc." It is the Church telling you that you have a soul and it needs to be saved. It's the market telling you that you could go and work on plantations and come back with at least a machete and a bath towel after two years of work, and that is supposed to be great! It's the school system; we all support education, but we don't realize the pressure it puts in everything. And it's healthcare. People love being healthy. So, it is essential to understand not how a society disintegrates, but how it transforms. But you have to be there to see it, and you have to be there at the right time.

I. C.: But beyond this shock, the real question is how deeply you investigate what you record. Is almost phylogenetic work being done on what is observed, on these myths, rituals, passages and concepts of war over a somewhat longer timescale? When we interview these populations, do we have any idea of the very origin of these traditions in terms of time? Because we can see that populations move and change...

P. L.: Not for New Guinea. When it comes to changes related to the place previously held by war in people's lives, there are parts of the New Guinea highlands where, as soon as the policemen arrived, women weren't the only ones to say: "Phew! We're not going to be at war any more." And then, five kilometers away, there are people who have continued to wage war in their own area. On the other hand, there are also newly created myths. There is an absolutely wonderful article by J. G. Ballard about myths in which things like oil wells appear. But as for the relationship to war, no. What we need re-examine are the resurgence of wars, but in forms such as those you may have read about in *Le Monde* a month ago. Not only are people waging war in New Guinea, but there are now mercenaries equipped with automatic weapons. Historians know about things like this. They see how attitudes toward war are changing.

Maurice Fhima: I would like to mention a very simple case that is reported by A. Testart. An Australian Aboriginal killed a white man, went to prison and stayed there for a long time. When he returned to his tribe, and the marriage rules had completely changed. We don't know why, but the Whites had nothing to do with it. It was an internal phenomenon within the tribe. They had shifted from one form to another. It's a documented case—well, I hope so!

Unknown person: I am by no means an expert on the subject, but I would like to draw a bold comparison with the issue of war. In the end, could it be that war is some kind of horrible carnival? I am thinking of R. Girard and the question of restoring order to a world and a society. That is one aspect. Then, it seems to me that there are differences that have been identified by experts I have listened to since this morning, between wars waged for wealth and territory, and those in response to the other, the stranger, the outsider, the one who is not from our country. As for vendetta and razzia, I would say that there are differences. Vendetta, in its Italian or Sicilian sense, is a family matter that does not necessarily lead to what we might call a war. And as for razzia, a term that comes from North Africa, referred to a group launching an expedition to acquire wealth or women. This question of war is very difficult, starting with its definition. As for the founding myths of war, I don't know much about it, but a little. It seems to me that mythical creation always begins with a conflict. There are stories of conflicts between deities for the construction of the myth, and ultimately this question of myth could also give rise the phenomenon of war.

Jürg Helbling: To answer your question, I think that for Australians, but also for other hunter-gatherers, the decisive factor is sedentarization. Either because of accumulated droughts or because children are required to attend school. Sedentarization has major consequences because for the first time, truly patrilineal groups begin that live together for long periods of time. This greatly increases the frequency of rituals: there are rituals two hundred days a year! This, combined with other factors, gives men, for the first time, a preponderance over women. This is what D. Bell describes for the Warlpiri, and what A. Yengoyan describes for the Pitjantjatjara and the Warlpiri. But there are also similar descriptions for the Inuit: it is really a fairly common mechanism.