"The body of my enemy": Armed conflicts in societies without wealth
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The "us" and the "them": intergroup conflict among social animals[1]

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Abstract: One of the great constants in the history of human societies is the opposition between "us," which embodies all conceivable positive values, and "them," which is associated with everything perceived as negative. Contempt or rejection of "the other" (clan, tribe, race, nation, region, class, caste, ethnic or religious group, family) is the principle behind all ethnocentrism. But the opposition between "us" and "them" is only the extension, in the cultural-symbolic order specific to our species, of a general defense mechanism present throughout the animal kingdom, from eusocial insects to primates: defense of the "close" or the "same" (whether related or unrelated) against what is perceived as distant, different, foreign, or outside one's own group. In the case of human societies, "us" and "them" can take very different forms, as groups are built on cultural foundations. While they have succeeded in bringing together millions (even billions) of individuals into coherent and relatively peaceful social units, human societies have constantly multiplied the types of us/them opposition, and therefore the potential conflicts between groups.
Keywords: Us/them, kin selection, conflict, nepotism, ethnocentrism, xenophobia, war.

"Presumably most groups gain some of their strength from their exclusiveness, from a sense of people outside who are not 'Us'" (Hoggart, 1971 [1957], p. 62).
"– He is accustomed to regarding all foreigners as inferiors, as beings not entirely human" (Le Guin, 1975, p. 25).

Throughout human history, one of the great constants has been the opposition between "us," imbued with every positive value imaginable, and "them," associated with everything perceived as negative.[2] The relegation of the "other" (clan, tribe, society, ethnic group, race, class, caste, order, group, category, etc.) to the realm of ugliness, ignorance, animality, "barbarism" or "savagery" is the principle of all ethnocentrism. The absolutization and sublimation (in the sense of an image "raised to the sublime") of the traits of one's own group (whether family, friends, religious, or national) classically leads to cutting all the beautiful costumes (full humanity, good morals, good taste, true culture, etc.) to one's own size and judging the greatness of "others" based on these costumes made to (one's own) measure: "But, whether the Walbiri [Australian aborigines] regard other tribes in a favourable light or not, their opinions always reveal an aggressive belief in their own superiority. As might be expected, they evaluate the behaviour and usages of other peoples in terms of the coïncidence of these with Walbiri norms, and they consider any noticeable divergence of the two to be evidence of the shortcomings of the outsiders. The fact that Warramunga mortuary ritual differs from that of the Walbiri, or that the Pintubi lack a thorough-going subsection system, is thought to reflect the essential inferiority of the group in question. On the other hand, the highest praise the Walbiri can bestow on well-liked neighbours, such as the Walmanba or Yanmadyjari, is to refer to them as 'half-Walbiri'" (Meggitt, 1971, p. 44).

Ethnocentrism is thus always a way of closing oneself off (one's civilization, nation, group, etc.) from the limits of existence considered worthy of being lived, and of keeping at a distance, discreetly or angrily, those who are placed outside the group. C. Lévi-Strauss wrote the following about ethnocentrism: "Humanity ends at the borders of the tribe, the linguistic group, sometimes even the village; to such an extent that many so-called primitive populations refer to themselves by a name that means 'humans' (or sometimes—we would say more discreetly—'the good,' 'the excellent,' 'the complete'), thus

implying that other tribes, groups, or villages do not share human virtues—or even human nature—but are at best composed of 'bad,' 'evil,' 'earth monkeys,' or 'lice eggs'" (Lévi-Strauss, 1987 [1952], p. 21).

And A. Leroi-Gourhan added a few years later: "In many human groups, the only word used by members to refer to their ethnic group is the word 'men'. The assimilation of ethnicity into a kind of ideal 'self', combining the qualities of good and beauty, contrasts with the tendency to place monstrous peoples beyond the familiar world, who embody evil and ugliness to the utmost in their appearance and customs" (Leroi-Gourhan, 1964, p. 12).

What could be stronger than deciding to confine humanity or human excellence within the limits of one's own group, relegating anything outside those limits to the realm of the "non-human" or "less than human"?[3] The observations of C. Lévi-Strauss and A. Leroi-Gourhan are thus confirmed, for example, among the Aborigines of Australia: "According to a pattern widely shared by comparable societies elsewhere in the world, Australian tribes had a marked propensity to conceive and designate themselves as the only true human beings, while denying this quality to others. The nicknames by which they were qualified often reflected the fear and enmity they inspired. Thus, while the Kŭrnai were literally the 'humans,' all their hated neighbors were the Brajerak, that is, 'those who are angry' and the tribe in western Victoria was the Thurung, the 'tiger-snakes,' because its members 'came sneaking about to kill us'" (Darmangeat, 2020, p. 231).

This opposition between "us" and "them" can lead, in the most peaceful cases, to ritual mockery (e.g. jokes that aim to ridicule an ethnic group or nation, or a category of people such as "blondes" or "redheads"), and in the most belligerent cases, to violent inter-ethnic conflicts or attempts to destroy the "other."

What I will endeavor to show here is that the opposition between them and us is merely the translation and extension, in the cultural-symbolic order specific to our species, of a defense mechanism present in all living beings, namely the defense of those close to oneself against everything perceived as distant, foreign, or outside one's own group. In the animal kingdom, this begins with the defense of offspring against external attacks (predators, infanticide perpetrated by males). This is followed by the defense of one's closest relatives (father and mother, brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts, cousins, grandparents, etc.) or the preference given to them in many cases of cooperation, sharing, or mutual aid (Boyd and Silk, 2004, pp. 216–217). In the case of eusocial insects (ants and bees in particular), all members work and ensure the successful reproduction of the group, and the in-group expands to a large colony, which is nothing more than a giant family. Members of these societies have chemical means of immediately recognizing whether an individual belongs to their group or not. An ant belonging to another colony, which would be experimentally placed in this colony, would be immediately identified as such and destroyed. Within the same species, the logic of defending "the same" and mistrust or defiance towards "the other" is a general law that structures social relations throughout the living world.

Ethologists and biologists explain the mechanism underlying this law of constructing a "us" and the preference given to this 'us' by genetic proximity, without however seeing the counterpart of this preference in terms of mistrust of everything outside the "us." This explanation has a name: "kin selection theory." But by placing the explanation on the side of maximizing the protection of one's genetic capital—by defending those who share some of the same genes as oneself, one defends oneself—biologists often struggle to convince social scientists who insist that the construction of "us" is essentially cultural in human societies, and that this construction brings together, far beyond genetic proximity, all those who identify with common habits, values, symbols, emblems, traditions, or narratives.

Animals are, of course, incapable of directly detecting the genes of their fellow creatures. The fact that males in certain societies are unable to recognize their paternity when females have sexual relations with multiple partners, and that they do not invest as much in caring for their young as males who, because they are socially monogamous, are much more assured of their paternity, clearly shows that animals have no practical sense or intuitive understanding of genetic proximity or distance, but simply rely on their knowledge and recognition of others, their regular contact with them, and their experience of them. In fact, genetic proximity often leads to greater contact between individuals, and therefore translates into early social proximity, which lies in having lived with the individual for a long time, and sometimes even since the birth of one or the other; or, in other words, having maintained a high level of interaction with the individual in question from an early age. This is particularly important in the case of altricial species, which involve a long period of coexistence between parents (or at least one of them) and their offspring.[4]

Another explanation for cooperation provided by biologists and ethologists, in addition to the mechanism of kin selection, is the importance of reciprocity in cooperative interactions (Clutton-Brock, 2009). This brings us closer to the logic of gift-giving and reciprocity that is well known in human societies (Mauss, 2006). But in the case of the latter, the "us" (and therefore "them") can take culturally very different forms, and we can say that we move from concrete relatives or those in direct interaction (same colony or same "family") to a wider group of relatives (based on reciprocity), and even to relatives constructed on the basis of cultural traits, symbols, or mythical or ideological fictions (members of the same lineage, members of the same clan with a common mythical ancestor, members of the same ethnic group who share the same cultural, linguistic, religious, etc. traditions, citizens of the same homeland or nation, members of the same political party, supporters of the same football club, residents of the same neighborhood, etc.). The "us," which meant a physical proximity (the

people I am closest to, with whom I interact frequently and whom I know and recognize), becomes, thanks to cultural-symbolic capacities, a "us" of symbolic proximity, culturally constructed. With increasingly strong social differentiation of functions, human societies have constantly multiplied the types of "them/us" oppositions, just as they have succeeded in bringing together millions, even billions, of individuals into single, indivisible political entities with their own languages, flags, currencies, and national anthems.

While non-human primates prefer their relatives or members of their extended group, and while some of them, in certain circumstances, view other groups as potential enemies, their conflicts are relatively simple compared to those observed in human societies. As primatologist B. Chapais writes: "Human groups are always part of more inclusive social entities, which themselves belong to even more inclusive structures. In contrast, the vast majority of primate societies are independent, single-group structures" (Chapais, 2011, p. 1276). By multiplying the lines of differentiation between "us" and "them," humans have multiplied the opportunities to mock, denigrate, hate, and even wage war against or massively destroy others. Even rival football fans can end up fighting violently with each other on the basis of municipal, regional, or national differences.

THEORY OF KIN SELECTION

British biologist W. D. Hamilton theorized the concept of kin selection, which helps explain why natural selection favors "altruistic" or generous behavior among relatives. This theory is also associated with G. Price, E. O. Wilson, J. Maynard Smith, R. Trivers, and H. Hare. According to W. D. Hamilton, whether they are birds or mammals, if parents devote time to their offspring, feed them and protect them, sometimes at the risk of their own lives, and if siblings are more willing to help or share with each other than with unrelated members of their group or strangers, it is because by adopting behaviors that increase their survival, and therefore the reproductive fitness of individuals who are genetically related to them, individuals increase their overall reproductive fitness (inclusive fitness). In short, they ensure the fruition of their genetic heritage, both their own (selfish behavior) and that of their children or siblings (altruistic behavior).

However, the question quickly arose as to what mechanisms were involved in kin recognition (Aron and Passera, 2000, p. 79), a difficult question given that, for many social species, genetic proximity is strongly correlated with spatial proximity and the intensity of contact from early childhood. Depending on the species, recognition signals are chemical (the most common),[5] auditory or visual, and in many cases depend on interactions and, more precisely, on the memory of past interactions. If the bond between the mother (and sometimes the father) and her children is particularly strong in mammals with altricial offspring, this is not just a matter of genetics, but a question related to the fact that the children are like parts of herself: she carried or brooded them, then nursed or fed them, warmed them, cleaned them, protected them, etc. Investment, when it exists, presupposes interactional closeness rather than relying solely on genetic proximity.[6] In some cases, it is even the location that defines kinship. For example, in seagulls, moving an egg a few centimeters away from the nest is enough for it to be considered a stranger by its parents and abandoned; conversely, placing a foreign egg in the nest is enough for it to be immediately treated as their child by the owners of the nest. Similarly, in rats, placing unrelated pups among the offspring at birth will make them interaction partners recognizable as relatives, and they will be treated as such by the others.[7] Finally, it has been noted that young wasps isolated at birth for a few hours are subsequently unable to distinguish between relatives and non-relatives on the basis of smell, demonstrating the fragility of recognition mechanisms in certain cases.

However, this does not call into question the primacy given to relatives, which can even be observed in the plant kingdom. A study by Canadian researchers S. A. Dudley and A. L. File (2007) highlighted the existence of a mechanism for recognizing relatives in plants. Their study focused on the American searocket (*Cakile edentula*). In nature, plants generally compete for light, water, and various nutrients found in the soil. The two researchers placed American searocket plants in pots. They used plants from eight different families. Some of the plants were grown in groups of four. The pots containing four plants were either made up of four plants from four different families among the eight, or four plants from the same family.

The scientists demonstrated the effects of competition for resources that takes place underground: when pots contain plants from different families, there is a significant increase in root mass compared to when all four plants are from the same family. The size of the roots indicates the degree of competition for resources (particularly nutrients and water). The slower root development in plants from the same family means that competition is less intense between related plants than between plants from different families. The findings of this study are therefore consistent with the predictions of kin selection theory and highlight the existence of kin recognition mechanisms via the root system.

Kin selection theory holds true in almost all zoological groups, from amoebas to mammals, insects, fish and birds. For example, younger birds generally imitate the songs of older males "with whom they are related or familiar", leading to the formation of "regional dialects". However, "dialects play a role in territorial defence, with males adopting more aggressive attitudes towards males producing foreign dialects than towards their neighbours" (Emery, 2017, p. 81). In bird and mammal societies, the privileged bonds between parents and children are particularly clear,[8] although the scope of altruistic or reciprocal cooperative behaviour is expanding: "The most

fundamental of altruistic behaviors, protecting dependent offspring, is ubiquitous among mammals and birds; in most species, altruistic acts are confined to this context. Among primates, however, recipients of altruistic acts may include individuals who aren't offspring and who may not even be closely related to the performer. Chimpanzees routinely come to the aid of relatives and friends, female Hanuman langurs join forces to protect infants from infanticidal males, and male baboons protect infants and cooperate to chase predators. In fact, the primate literature abounds with examples of altruistic acts—individuals placing themselves at risk to protect others from attack" (Jurmain et al, 2018, p. 219).

And when we observe forms of altruism between unrelated individuals, it is simply because altruism, which was originally linked to kinship, can find ways to extend to certain types of relationships between unrelated individuals: "Once altruism between relatives has emerged, there is nothing to prevent this trait from being used in a context other than that in which it was originally selected and for other reasons. In the same way that in humans, the hand can be used to write and play the piano, even though these were not the reasons that prevailed when it was selected by our primate and hominid ancestors" (Kreutzer, 2012, p. 223). Whether in the form of collective hunting companions among non-human primates, gifts and counter-gifts between bats that can regurgitate blood to feed some of their unrelated but previously helpful congeners, the help of some female cetaceans in watching over the offspring of a conspecific that goes in search of food, leaving her young alone, alarm calls or songs warning the whole group of danger in mammals and birds, etc., altruism beyond genetic kinship can be observed in species that have already developed highly structured social behaviours, which prove advantageous for survival, even from a strictly individual point of view.[9]

Primatology observes that a preference for 'us' based on kinship is observable in non-human primates. M. Tomasello wrote in a book on cooperation: "As a starting point, we know from the work of Joan Silk and others that nonhuman primate societies function in large part on the basis of kinship and nepotism, with a healthy dose of dominance thrown in in most cases. Any cooperation they show will thus most likely be based on kinship or direct reciprocity" (Tomasello, 2009, pp. 53–54).

The counterpart to cooperation, which is essentially inward-looking and leads to the formation of closed "us" groups, is the perception of the outside world as potentially dangerous. Chimpanzees are very wary and even hostile towards other groups and may engage in surveillance to prevent their members from entering their territory. Chimpanzees living in large mixed groups are territorial, with "male chimpanzees attacking strangers" (Chapais, 2011, p. 1277). J. Goodall says that chimpanzees make a clear distinction between individuals who belong to the group and those who are strangers, between friends or allies and enemies (Goodall, 1986), and F. de Waal does not hesitate to describe them as xenophobic, given how aggressive they can be towards strangers: "Males kill each other through highly coordinated actions against single individuals of another community […] There is no question that chimpanzees are xenophobic. In one attempt to introduce ex-captive chimps back into the forest, the local wild chimps reacted so viciously that the project had to be abandoned. […] The chimps acted almost the way they do toward prey, treating the enemy as if it belonged to another species" (de Waal, 2005, pp. 139–140).

THE WILSON-SAHLINS CONTROVERSY

In his controversy with biologist E. O. Wilson, anthropologist M. Sahlins criticized genetic reasoning when it consists of "transforming social altruism into genetic egotism by the observation that the 'kin' of the self-sacrificing animal, who share a certain amount of genetic substance with him, are often benefited by his act. Therefore, service to others can actually optimize ego's 'inclusive fitness,' the proportion of his genes passed on to subsequent generations" (Sahlins, 1976, p. 20). M. Sahlins questions how members of a given society can consciously recognize themselves as genetically related (p. 24) and in doing so makes an error in biological reasoning. In biology, an individual does not need to be aware of their degree of kinship with the individuals they interact with in order to cooperate (or not) with them, as long as there is a simple means of recognizing their relatives (e.g., spatial proximity or phenotypic similarities).

M. Sahlins is right to emphasize that, in many human societies, "relatives" are not defined on a genealogical (and therefore genetic) basis, but on a cultural basis that is rooted in their history. He cites the example of Rangiroa Island in the Tuamotu Archipelago, studied by P. Ottino, where "coresident relatives are, independantly of their genealogical position, considered 'closer' than non-residents" (p. 28). Similarly, in societies located in the Fiji Islands, there is a preference for cross-cousins over siblings, "that is in clear contrast to genetic amity, and only explicable by the cultural system of descent and alliance" (p. 35). He therefore concludes that, in human societies, there is a decoupling of "close kin" and genetically related (p. 57).

However, while genetics clearly cannot explain everything—how can genetic relatedness explain the willingness to "die for one's country" (Kantorowicz, 2004) when citizens of the same country are far from all being related? – the theory of kin selection has nevertheless succeeded in identifying the general law of preference given to the "close", which underlies the empirical law of preference given to close relatives. The only problem with this theory is that it generalizes a particular manifestation of the proximity in question. Focusing on all forms of life, kinship selection theory correctly identified genetic relatedness as the basis of the mechanism it uncovered in many species. However, the more species organize themselves into complex societies, the more

proximity becomes independent of genetic relatedness (which operates in many taxa on the basis of chemical signals). In fact, biologists themselves have highlighted the decoupling between "close" and "genetically related" in birds and mammals, particularly when recognition is based on criteria of early interaction or early presence in the right place, thus allowing for proximity between unrelated individuals.

Anthropologists who, like M. Sahlins, dismiss genetic explanations seem to overlook the many established facts on which the theory of kin selection is based, and fail to ask why mutual aid, cooperation, and exchange in human societies are nevertheless favored among relatives, even if they are not genetically related. Nor do they ask why human societies display multiple manifestations of ethnocentrism, nepotism, racism, patriotism, nationalism, etc., which should prompt us to question the general mechanism at work. The relevant question to ask the theory of kin selection is how "close" is defined for bacteria, plants, animal species with little culture, and a hyper-cultural species such as humans. M. Sahlins clearly sees the flaw in the reasoning but sticks to this critical observation because he does not believe that the knowledge produced by biology can shed light on strictly anthropological questions. I believe, on the contrary, that he should have taken advantage of his criticism of biology to grasp central phenomena that concern all kinds of societies, including human ones.

Despite his conviction that there can be no general law governing human societies and that anything is possible, in responding to biologists, M. Sahlins comes close to formulating a general law on human social behavior that could be summarized as follows: belonging to a group immediately implies considering that the other members of the group are made of the same "substance"[10] as oneself—the ideology of blood being only a figurative way of embodying this identity with "blood ties" or "blood brothers"—and that preference must be given to them in various situations involving sharing, mutual aid, and cooperation; conversely, belonging to another group automatically makes people "outsiders" who should be mistrusted.

This idea of the "substance" of the group had already been formulated by historian P. Lacombe at the end of the 19th century: "Man does not live alone; he lives in concentric groups that become increasingly larger: family, tribe, caste, class, nation, etc. The groups to which he belongs are, in the eyes of each individual, like extensions of his own person" (Lacombe, 1894, pp. 79–80). But one of the roots of this idea can be found in Aristotle. In Nicomachean Ethics, the Greek philosopher writes that our children are almost part of us, this being truer for mothers than for fathers (both because of gestation and breastfeeding, and because they are more certain than fathers that they are their offspring). In saying this, Aristotle perfectly expresses one of the manifestations of the general law of the relationship between us and them and the preference given to "us" or the law of attraction between similar things, which means that when we perceive someone as being close to us, we develop more trust, less mistrust, more generosity, and a greater willingness to give or sacrifice ourselves. Ultimately, what parents love in their children is themselves, Aristotle says in essence (1992, pp. 347–348).

ETHNOCENTRISM IN HUMAN SOCIETIES

In the case of a cultural species such as the human species, the theory of kin selection lack relevance because it fails to take into account the fact that the mechanism it has uncovered has expanded considerably over the long history of life. Cultural variation is the logical evolutionary consequence of genetic variation, on which natural selection traditionally operates. It is a more flexible and rapid means of adapting to the environment and, therefore, an even more effective adaptive solution than genetic variation. As a result, culture can be said to be a continuation of adaptation by means other than genetics. The preference given to those who are close (belonging to the same group), as well as mistrust of those who are distant (existing outside the group), are essentially defined on cultural grounds in human societies, even if they find their evolutionary origins in the matrix of parent (or alloparent)-child relationships.

Nepotism, esprit de corps, parochialism, regionalism, nationalism, patriotism, and chauvinism are just different forms of the same phenomenon. By turning strangers into brothers ("we are all brothers," say Christians), by making a homeland (or "fatherland") the object of emotional attachment and self-sacrifice ("Motherland," "love of country," "dying for the homeland"), etc., by making a company a "big family" or by inventing "fraternities" or "sororities," human societies are merely recalling the family origin of altruistic behavior. Even the use of the term "cultural kinship" by some authors is a kind of tribute to original kinship. The American anthropologist M. Alvard perfectly expressed the situation of the human species in relation to non-cultural animal species: "The cultural mechanisms that are present in recognizable form in non-human primates and other animals […] work in humans to increase social complexity beyond the level that genetic kinship generally provides in these other creatures. While genetic kinship remains important in human societies, mechanisms of cultural kinship and other forms of group identity are able to create larger, hierarchically structured societies […] Genetic relationships, for example, provide kinship structure that assorts individuals and facilitates nepotism in humans and other social species. […] While accepting the essential nature of Darwinian theory, it is increasingly clear that culture plays the key role in structuring human social behavior beyond the level of the family" (Alvard, 2012, pp. 585–586).

Clans, tribes, lineages, ethnic groups, religions, castes, classes, orders, nations, regions, cities or villages, neighborhoods, families, sports clubs, peer groups,

gangs, are all ways of bringing together individuals who recognize themselves as belonging to the same community and identify with the same group, bear the same name (starting with the family name), attribute the same label to themselves (French, Breton, Marseillais, etc.), and gather around various markers of the group (flag, anthem, symbols, language, accent, dialect, etc.). Closeness means the possibility of cooperation, alliance, mutual aid, and sharing. Altruism is exercised first and foremost within the limits of these more or less extensive in-groups. The help we give, the cooperation or sharing we accept, is primarily directed towards "our own," our loved ones, which is why altruism has sometimes been considered an extended form of social selfishness. Protecting the members of one's group, sometimes at the risk of one's life, and giving them preference is indeed a form of sacrifice or self-giving (of one's time, money, energy, and sometimes even one's life), but it is also a form of defense of the group, which is seen as a kind of extension of the self. As H. Whitehead and L. Rendell write: "Individuals cooperate with those belonging to "their group" whom they perceive as like themselves and may be antagonistic toward those they perceive as being from a different group" (Whitehead and Rendell, 2015, p. 36).

Just as certain species of mammals develop forms of sociality—particularly cooperation and mutual aid—that extends beyond genetic ties, as in collective hunting or collective defense of territory, humans have organized cooperation on a larger scale by culturally constructing increasingly expansive "us" groups. For example, the inhabitants of Lamalera, a village on the island of Lembata in Indonesia, are hunter-gatherers who hunt large marine animals such as sperm whales and manta rays in cooperation with each other. However, M. Alvard notes that "if kin selection were the only mechanism operating, the Lamalerans would have difficulty organizing themselves into sufficiently large groups to hunt whales". In such human groups, "socially constructed and culturally transmitted identities like patrilineages" (Alvard, 2012, p. 588) may play a more important role than strict genetic kinship.

As the American anthropologist R. Lowie pointed out, the "clan" in primitive societies is a unit that "traces kinship through either parent to the total neglect of the other" (1961 [1920], p. 111) and makes all members of the clan relatives to the same degree, enabling cooperation on a broader basis than would be possible with genetic kinship. For example, among the Crow Indians, who are divided into thirteen exogamous maternal clans, "Sibmates not only address one another as though they were blood-kindred, even not related, but actually act towards one another as such, gladly giving help when an opportunity offers" (Lowie, 1961 [1920], pp. 116–117). Cultural kinship is attested by the name shared by all members of the clan, which functions, like the chemical signal in many species, as a sign of recognition and closeness.

Despite the broadening of the sense of community made possible by cultural means (shared names, myths and rituals, ancestors, symbols, etc.), human societies cannot escape the logic of preference for "us" brought to light by kinship selection theory. Listing the types of human societies that have never existed and are unlikely ever to exist, American sociologist S. K. Sanderson refers to "societies in which people consistently favor nonkin over kin and distant kin over close kin," those "Societies lacking a sense of ethnic identification," or those "societies with high levels of ethnic heterogeneity in which there is no ethnic conflict" (Sanderson, 2015, pp. 260–261).

N. and J. Henrich wonder why ethnicity is such a powerful force when it comes to cooperation or conflict: "Why do ethnic boundaries—and not other possible boundaries—so often mark the fault lines for warfare, genocide, oppression, in-group favoritism, and so on? People could fraction according to height (tall versus short people), occupation (plumbers versus cashiers), or Lions Club membership, but they don't" (Henrich et Henrich, 2007, p. 73).

The answer to this question undoubtedly lies in the composite nature of ethnicity compared to other types of groups or categories mentioned above. An ethnic group is generally defined as a human population sharing a common ancestry, history (real or mythological), language, religion, culture (which may be musical, culinary, sartorial, etc.), and most often all of these at once. As such, it encapsulates many principles of differentiation from the rest of the world and is, in fact, present in many instances of "preference" or, conversely, conflict.[11] However, authors tend to focus on intra-ethnic similarities and inter-ethnic conflicts, downplaying differences of another kind, even though social class, nation, region, village, neighborhood, family, gang, and other factors also function, in many cases, as principles of similarity and division.

One final point is worth raising. While it seems likely that the principle of ethnocentrism and preference for members of one's own group originates in the relationship between parents and their offspring—which explains the numerous confirmations of the theory of kin selection—the uniquely human ability to form groups on cultural or symbolic grounds, beyond family ties, has, at the same time, made it possible to pacify the social space by pushing back the boundaries of the in-group ever further or, to put it another way, by creating ever larger in-groups (from the family to the clan, from the clan to the tribe, from the tribe to the ethnic group, from the ethnic group to the nation, etc.). Hence, we see that the logical solution to tensions and conflicts between groups is to promote the integration of these groups into larger units, turning former strangers or former enemies into members of the same community. The most sociologically relevant pages on this point are not found in a social science book, but in the work of the father of the theory of natural selection: "As man advances in civilisation, and small tribes are united into larger communities, the simplest reason would tell each individual that he ought to extend his social instincts and sympathies to all the members of the same nation, though personally unknown to him. This point being once reached, there is only an artificial bar-

rier to prevent his sympathies extending to the men of all nations and races" (Darwin, 1889 [1871], p. 122).

However, the expansion of small in-groups only plays a pacifying role if the movement is accompanied by the monopolization of legitimate physical violence by a specialized group within society. But while physical aggression tends to diminish in intergroup relations within society as a result of relative unification and the monopolization of physical force, at the same time, the concentration of forces resulting from the expansion of the perimeter of society is fraught with greater potential for inter-societal violence (e.g. the two world wars between powerfully armed nation states). Furthermore, the unity of large societies always remains very fragile and is constantly threatened by forces of division. Thus, throughout history, many large political entities (e.g. the Roman or Mongol empires, plurinational societies, etc.) have ended up fragmented or have had to face significant internal tensions. It is sometimes at the cost of enormous symbolic and material effort, and sometimes even violence against attempts at separatism, that unity is painstakingly maintained. The movement toward greater inclusiveness is not without a countervailing tendency, particularly in times of economic crisis, toward retreat into smaller units that seek to distinguish themselves from others (e.g., nationalist movements).

THE FOUNDATIONS OF WAR: CHIMPANZEES AND HUMANS

The logic of opposition between "us" and "them" can be observed in both non-human primates (particularly chimpanzees) and humans, and in both cases can lead to the logic of war.[12] "Both humans and chimps are gentle, or at least restrained, toward members of their own group, yet both can be monsters to those on the outside" (de Waal, 2005, p. 142). One of the major differences lies in the fact that, while humans can symbolically express their hatred by treating "others" as "less than human," "beasts," or "savages," chimpanzees simply express the same logic through their behavior.

J. Goodall was the first to highlight the analogy between human and non-human social logic, based on her long-term observation of chimpanzees in Gombe (Tanzania), particularly following the split of a community into two groups. The dehumanization of the "other" on the human side[13] finds its corollary in the "de-chimpanzeization" of the enemy group on the chimpanzee side, and this process seems to allow members of these groups to treat "strangers" (the "intruders," the "enemies," etc.) as members of a different species on which violence can be unleashed that is out of all proportion to acts of aggression within the group. The universal mechanism of distinguishing between "us" and "them" means that aggression is strongly inhibited within the group and weaker towards the outside. With regard to human societies, it is clear that "all [of them] distinguish between killing within their own community, an act that is judged and punished as murder, and killing outsiders, which is often seen as an act of bravery and a service to the community" (de Waal, 1989, p. 10).

But the situation is similar among chimpanzees, about whom J. Goodall speaks of an "unusually hostile and violently aggressive attitude toward nongroup individuals" (Goodall, 1986, p. 534). Not only do "they clearly differentiate between individuals who 'belong' and those who do not," for example by protecting infants and females who are part of the group and attacking those who are not, but "the patterns of attack may actually differ from those utilized in typical intracommunity aggression," with victims being "treated more as though they were prey animals" and effectively "dechimpizied" (Goodall, 1986, p. 532).[14]

F. de Waal sums up the analogy between humans and chimpanzees by saying that we share with our cousins "a loathing of the out-group to the point of dehumanization (or 'dechimpization')." He highlights, with regard to the episode of war between the two parts of what had previously been a single group in Gombe, the surprising nature of hostility based solely on separation, even though individuals from both communities had coexisted fairly peacefully when they were part of the same troop: "The other even more disturbing out-group phenomenon that emerged at Gombe involved chimps who actually knew each other. Over the years, one community split into a northern and southern faction, eventually becoming separate communities. These chimpanzees had played and groomed together, reconciled after squabbles, shared meat, and lived in harmony. But the factions began to fight nonetheless. Shocked researchers watched as former friends now drank each other's blood" (de Waal, 2005, pp. 141–142).

This proves that a structural social logic at the level of group functioning, independent of the previous behavioral habits of the Gombe chimpanzees, comes into play when favorable conditions are present and transcends individual behavior in both nonhuman primates and humans: "Us-versus-them among chimpanzees is a socially constructed distinction in which even well-known individuals can become enemies if they happen to hang out with the wrong crowd or live in the wrong area. In humans, ethnic groups that used to get along reasonably well may all of a sudden turn against each other, as the Hutus and Tutsis did in Rwanda and the Serbs, Croats, and Muslims in Bosnia" (de Waal, 2005, p. 142).

One of the major errors in interpreting facts about nonhuman animals is to assume that they are necessarily biological in nature, and more specifically genetic. The error is typically based on a confusion between the "cultural" and the "social": compared to our species, chimpanzees have very little cumulative culture (artifacts and embodied knowledge), but they do have a social life that constitutes a specific level of organization of reality that is different from biological levels of organization (molecular, cellular, genetic, or anatomical). By concluding that, because intergroup violence is observed in cer-

tain non-human primates, warlike violence has biological foundations, we place non-human animals entirely on the biological side, even though they are just as social as we are. The question is therefore not to explain a social fact—human or non-human—by a biological cause, nor to deny or to neglect the study of cultural variations in this social fact, but to show that variations can only be truly understood by grasping general social laws.

One of the fundamental points for understanding these conflicts is the opposition between "us" and "them", which functions as a mechanism for sorting individuals into "enemies" and "friends," "strangers" and "friends," "sub-chimpanzees" or "sub-humans" and "chimpanzees or humans." Once the other is perceived (in chimpanzees as in humans) or even named (in humans) as an "enemy" or a "stranger," a mechanism is set in motion that allows for its destruction without inhibition. As I have pointed out, ethnocentric behaviors, which consist of giving preference to members of one's own group, are widespread, and perhaps even universal, in the animal kingdom: "Female sea lions seize strange pups that are trying to suckle from them, frequently very roughly, and toss them to one side. Greylag geese attack strange goslings, and herring gulls even kill strange chicks that have strayed onto their territory. In such cases only acquaintanceship inhibits aggressive feelings. This pattern: 'known = friend,' 'unknown = enemy' also generally determines the social life of the adults" (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1971, p. 125).

This has consequences for human societies, which are not immune to these very general, trans-specific principles, but which are modulated according to the specific characteristics of each species. In this case, the unprecedented demographic growth of the human species among mammals, which has given rise to a multitude of societies, a differentiation of functions and a multiplication of principles of differentiation (religious, ethnic, cultural, economic, political, etc.), the production of artifacts, including increasingly powerful weapons, make human societies deadly powers without parallel. As the Austrian ethologist I. Eibl-Eibesfeldt (1971, p. 6) wrote: "We are inclined to cast members of an alien group in the role of enemies, giving rise to the question of whether we are adopting certain attitudes of mind involuntarily. For those engaged in peace research the illumination of these processes is of great importance. Man usually has less fellow feeling for strangers, and by the same token his aggressiveness toward them is less inhibited. This is one of the reasons why conflicts between different groups tend to be aggravated."

War is often considered a characteristic specific to human societies, and even a relatively recent practice in the history of the Homo genus. Animals, which do not possess weapons and have no warlike ideologies, would therefore be spared such activity. However, since J. Goodall's work, evidence of collective aggression in animal species has accumulated. As anthropologist and primatologist R. Wrangham (1999, p. 1) writes: "Mounting evidence suggests, however, that coalitional killing of adults in neighboring groups also occurs regularly in other species, including wolves and chimpanzees. This implies that selection can favor components of intergroup aggression important to human warfare, including lethal raiding."

R. Wrangham put forward what he called the "imbalance of power hypothesis," which explains, against a background of permanent intergroup hostility, deadly attacks between groups by "sufficient imbalances of power between parties that one party can attack the other" while taking as little risk as possible.

Among chimpanzees, deadly raids are part of territorial defense and border patrols. Any incursion by "strangers" triggers attacks and sometimes collective killings. These violent actions mainly involve males, who are more likely to attack their "enemies" when they are numerous and can benefit from the protection of their fellow chimps. The major difference in power imbalances between human groups and non-human primate groups is the manufacture and use of artifacts for warfare. But weapons do not cause war. They are merely a means of waging war more effectively.

The fundamentals we share with other animal species (the opposition between "us" and "them", with a perception of friend or foe, and the imbalance of power) are culturally expressed in the form of artifacts. For example, the imbalance of forces can now be objectified in differences in military power (having more weapons or more lethal weapons is decisive in intergroup conflicts). Similarly, the establishment of a boundary between "us" and "them" and the logic of defending a territory, both present in chimpanzee groups, have been objectified throughout human history in architectural structures (e.g. ditches, palisades, ramparts, walls, etc.) and means of representation (e.g. borders on a map) that separate and oppose "inside" and "outside" (right up to the modern division of our ministries into "ministry of the interior" and "ministry of foreign affairs").

Violent intergroup conflicts have existed in human societies without highly sophisticated weapons, because war is a social dynamic that is not a mechanical consequence of the existence of instruments of combat. War, in the broad sense of the term (conflict between groups leading to the more or less regulated, controlled death of the enemy), is as prevalent among hunter-gatherers without wealth as it is among hunter-gatherers who already possess wealth, and as much in stateless societies using only stone, wood, and bone weapons as in state societies with sophisticated weapons and more or less professional armies. Of course, the "motives" for war vary from one type of society to another, but violent conflicts between groups have punctuated the life of societies since the dawn of humanity.

We will conclude with a general remark. Seeking to explain intergroup tensions or violent conflicts by uncovering their causes seems logical, but ultimately does not allow us to understand why tensions and conflicts persist even when the causes change. In fact, groups fight each other to appropriate what they consider to be valuable and what constitutes capital for them within the

framework of their social relations. This may be women, objects, territory, various types of resources, money, or honor, and when there is no money or wealth, the main causes of conflict are women and revenge (Darmangeat, 2020, p. 221). But recognizing the existence of a general sociological *law* that governs all relationships between groups, regardless of their nature and size, allows us to see the invariant background against which a multitude of conflicts with very varied forms, modalities, and motives stand out.

NOTES

1 This text is a condensed and revised version of Chapter 21 “Us/Them: Ethnocentrism, Racism” (Lahire, 2023, pp. 842–877). I would like to thank my two reviewers for their helpful comments and feedback.

2 Defined as “positive awareness of one’s own group and negative views of others,” ethnocentrism is considered one of the great universals by C. Antweiler (2016, p. 118).

3 See also J.-L. Le Quellec, 2019.

4 Apart from regular direct contact, it should be noted that part of kinship recognition in primates involves the perception of similarities in facial features. See the study by M. J. Charpentier et al (2020) on mandrills (*Mandrillus sphinx*).

5 For example, mice recognize their close relatives by the smell of their urine and tend to nest with females that smell the same as them. This same method is used to avoid incest, with mice mating with males that have a different smell (Hurst et al., 2001).

6 British biologist J. Maynard Smith wrote more cautiously than some of his colleagues that “the essential points are that, in higher animals, social interactions within a group depend on individual recognition, and that an individual’s behaviour towards another depends both on genetic relatedness, and on a memory of previous interactions with that individual” (Maynard Smith et Szathmary, 2000, p. 157).

7 The same phenomenon can be observed in ants (Bowlby, 2002, pp. 72–73).

8 For example, as predicted by kin selection theory, aggressive behavior in naked mole rats is inversely proportional to kinship (Desor, 1999).

9 Kin selection does not explain how groups composed of several families or groups of unrelated individuals can exist, cooperate, and defend any of their members. This is why group selection theory was developed, notably by V. Copner Wynne-Edwards and G. Price.

10 « Individuals of the same group may then figure as particulate expressions of the same inherent substance: they have a coefficient of relationship of 1, whatever their genealogical distance” (Sahlins, 1976, p. 60).

11 In a large study based on 178 multi-ethnic countries, Finnish sociologist T. Vanhanen measured the degree of ethnic heterogeneity in countries and linked it to ethnic conflicts, concluding that “ethnic nepotism is the common cross-cultural background factor which supports the persistence of ethnic conflicts in the world” (Vanhanen, 2014, p. 143). He draws on the work of P. Van den Berghe (1981), who argued that ethnic feelings evolved as an extension of nepotism, as a propensity to favor relatives over non-relatives.

12 We could just as easily have used the example of collective confrontations between meerkats. « The presence of both within-group cooperation and between-group hostility in meerkats make them a valuable point of comparison in attempts to understand the ecological and evolutionary roots of human warfare » (Dyble et al, p. 1).

13 In the recent case of the genocide of the Tutsis in Rwanda (between April and July 1994), research shows that the violence that unfolded was made possible by processes of animalization or objectification of the victims (Dumas, 2014).

14 Since J. Goodall’s observation, systematic recording of fatal attacks (N = 152) in chimpanzee (N = 18) and bonobo (N = 4) populations has confirmed that both aggressors (92%) and victims (73%) are overwhelmingly male, and that conflicts are mainly inter-community (66%) (Wilson M. et al., 2014). It should be noted that these conflicts are not the “artificial” product of anthropization of sites or of human presence alone, as M. Power (1991) once claimed.

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