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In: Anna Roosevelt, ed.  
Amazonian Indians: From Prehistory to  
the Present: Anthropological Perspectives  
Tucson: University of Arizona Press  
1994

## Becoming Indians

### *The Politics of Tukanooan Ethnicity*

JEAN E. JACKSON

This chapter is a discussion of how an indigenous rights movement among Tukanooans of southeastern Colombia is affecting their notions about themselves and their culture. I argue that the concept of culture as conventionally understood does not help us understand these changes because several assumptions underlying it do not apply. I suggest that both anthropologists and activists promoting the preservation of "Indian culture" can at times unwittingly collaborate in misrepresenting what is actually going on.

To the degree that modern Amazonian Indian groups can and do choose to remain distinctively "ethnic" as they are increasingly incorporated into modern society, their distinctiveness changes in its essential nature. Even if the content of their ethnicity—the characteristics that make the group different from other sectors of society—appears to be identical with cultural forms from earlier periods, the underlying meaning is so altered that we cannot say these forms are the same (see Barth 1969). Part of the difficulty we may have describing situations like this stems from a conventional concept of culture based on a quasi-biological analogy in which a group of people are seen as "having" or "possessing" a culture somewhat in the way an animal species has fur or claws. In addition, people are thought of as acquiring culture slowly, during their childhoods, as part of their development. The culture they acquire existed before them and is seen as their legacy; they are not creating or

inventing it. While culture is understood to change over time, this is seen as gradual process; in the case of rapid change, acculturation is said to occur, with one group seen as losing some of its culture. Thus, similar in some respects to the way one's genes are inherited, culture is inherited, even though culture is seen as superorganic.<sup>1</sup> To suggest that people are at times less passive about their culture, that they do create and invent it, is difficult without sounding negatively judgmental—unless "create" is understood as a long-term process. People who are seen as engaging in inventing culture tend to be spoken of in negative terms, the implication being that the culture resulting from these operations is not really authentic.<sup>2</sup> In sum, for the most part culture is simply not considered to be something constructed or modified by individuals, and in this sense it is opposed to history.<sup>3</sup>

I argue in this chapter that defining culture in a truly dynamic and agential way will help us better understand those South American Indian groups who are increasingly being incorporated—but not assimilated—into the dominant societies surrounding them.

An ethnic federation in the Vaupés territory of Colombia is used as a springboard for these discussions. Descriptions of Tukanoan<sup>4</sup> (as the indigenous inhabitants of the Vaupés are called) culture in the Indian rights and indigenist<sup>5</sup> press allow us to draw some inferences about how Tukanoan culture is conceived of by non-Tukanoan Colombian Indians and others interested in promoting indigenous rights. Hence, the Vaupés provides a provocative case study for this discussion because of the material available that shows how Tukanoans are beginning to be instructed by outsiders, both whites and Indians, on what it means to be an Indian.

In a sense, then, in this chapter I look at Tukanoans not so much as Indians who have culture or who comprise a culture, but as a people who are acquiring culture—"Indian" culture. Although clearly Tukanoans already are Indians, in this sense they are also becoming Indians (see Jackson 1991a).

In addition to being an analytic term, *culture* can, like so many words in the anthropological lexicon, be used for polemical, ideological, propagandistic purposes, especially when imbued with positively valued moral connotations. If culture is defined in terms of things, tangible or intangible—the blueprints in people's heads for making artifacts, for interacting with one another, for making sense of their world—one can talk about how Tukanoans can "lose" their culture as they are increasingly incorporated into Colombian society. A picture can be drawn of a people deracinated, deprived, "without their culture." This is the view taken by various organizations involved in protecting indigenous groups, many American and Colombian anthropologists, and others knowledgeable about and interested in the Tukanoan situation.<sup>6</sup>

Although the culture-as-things (material and mental) model is useful for some purposes (I use it below for describing how the entire Vaupés in many respects is a single cultural system), it falters when one delves into the processes of how ethnic groups acquire new cultural forms or asks about why traditional forms are retained or dropped. For this we need a concept of culture more equipped to deal with the fact that cultural forms can radically change in meaning even though they appear to remain the same. As noted above, one of the problems with the "culture-as-things" model is that it sometimes assumes, incorrectly, that continuities between earlier patterns and present-day ones have been produced by the same cultural and societal processes. Another problem is that the model is overly static. It tends to downplay the agential, processual, and social interactional (see Bourgois 1988, 329) aspects of culture. Finally, it can promote a misreading of the circumstances of a given threatened people by overly focusing on the peril of "losing culture" rather than on other, perhaps more grave, dangers, such as loss of land base. I am not suggesting that "losing one's culture" never has negative consequences, but simply emphasizing that, in addition to being an analytic term, "culture" is often used in highly politicized contexts and that, while these political meanings are linked to the term's analytical, less political meanings, the two must be kept separate.

If we see culture as something dynamic, something that people use to adapt to changing social conditions, and as something that is adapted in turn, we have a more serviceable sense of how culture operates over time, particularly in situations of rapid change. At times it is helpful to see culture less like an animal's fur or claws and more like a jazz musician's repertoire. The pieces the musician plays come out of a tradition, but improvisation also occurs, and the choices made by the musician about the performance take into consideration the acoustical properties of the hall, the properties of the instrument(s) played, and the inferred inclinations of fellow musicians and the audience. This analogy stresses the agential aspects of culture; we cannot speak of a jazz musician as "having" jazz, and for the most part speaking of people as "having" culture occludes the interaction between those people and their traditions. The analogy stresses the interactional aspects of culture; the musician engages an audience and fellow musicians, just as to an important extent a culture exists because a "we" and a "they" are interacting. This may also turn out to be a more genuinely respectful view of present-day indigenous groups in their struggles to preserve their self-respect, autonomy, and a life with meaning (see Cowlishaw 1987, 221).

Wolf provides a useful characterization of this alternative approach to "culture": "In the rough and tumble of social interaction, groups are known to

exploit the ambiguities of inherited forms, to impart new evaluations or values to them, to borrow forms more expressive of their interests, or to create wholly new forms to answer to changed circumstances" (1982, 387). This notion is particularly useful for understanding the present-day Tukanooan case, particularly with respect to indigenous-rights organizing, because it allows us to consider the possibility that, at times, Tukanooans are not to be seen as continuing some of their traditional cultural forms so much as appropriating them as a political strategy.

Sources for this chapter include twenty-eight formal interviews conducted in Colombia during March, 1987 and June-July, 1989. I also engaged in a number of informal conversations with native leaders, change agents, residents (both Tukanooan and white) of Mitú, the capital of the Vaupés, and with individuals in Bogotá who are knowledgeable about Colombian indigenous-rights organizing and development efforts among Colombian Indian groups. All interviewees characterized themselves as concerned about the autonomy and overall well-being of Colombian Indians. Continuing archival work in the Vaupés and Bogotá and dissertation fieldwork in 1968-70 have provided other sources of information.

### The Vaupés

The Vaupés is in the Colombian sector of the central northwest Amazon, a region including both Colombian and Brazilian territory, roughly the size of New England, on the Equator. Tukanooans, who number about twenty thousand, traditionally lived in multifamily longhouses, one per settlement, on or near rivers. Longhouses, as well as the more recent settlement pattern of nucleated villages, are separated from one another by two to ten hours' canoe travel. During this century four to eight nuclear families would inhabit a longhouse, and present village size ranges anywhere from 15 to 180 persons. Population density is quite low, at most .3 inhabitants per  $k^2$  (PROADAM 1979). The men of a settlement hunt, fish, and clear swidden fields in which the women grow bitter manioc and other crops.

The units of traditional Vaupés social structure, in ascending order of inclusion, are the local descent group, the clan or sib, the (ideally) exogamous language group, and the poorly understood phratry. (This is a simplified description; the Cubeo and Makuna are exceptions in some crucial respects.) The language group is a named, patrilineal-descent unit composed of from six to more than thirty clans (see Sorensen 1967). Distinguishing features are (1) the language and name; (2) separate founding ancestors and distinct roles in the origin myth cycle; (3) the right to ancestral power through the

use of certain linguistic property such as sacred chants; (4) the right to manufacture and use certain kinds of ritual property; and (5) a traditional association with certain ceremonial or near-ceremonial objects. Membership is permanent and public; the one fact known about an individual before anything else is his or her language group.

Although I am presenting this as a description of "traditional" Tukanooan culture, it is my belief that Tukanooan linguistic exogamy is an extremely dynamic and relatively recent institution, the result of indirect pressure from colonization efforts elsewhere in Colombia, Venezuela, and Brazil (see Gómez-Imbert n.d.; Jackson 1983, 164-78). Documentary and archeological information is so scarce for either the pre-Columbian or early colonial periods that we cannot assume much about earlier social or political structures. Population density was almost certainly greater (see Goldman 1963; Koch-Grinberg 1903-5; Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971).

Although varying internally in some traditional customs, ecology, and degree of acculturation, the Vaupés is a single society in many respects. This homogeneity derives from a similarity of observable phenomena, ecological and social, and from the similarities in Tukanooans' models of their world. Furthermore, Tukanooans themselves see themselves as parts of an interacting whole. Many apparent examples of cultural diversity in the Vaupés are actually mechanisms helping to unify the settlements of the region. Multilingualism is an example: the various languages, somewhat like different uniforms in a football game, facilitate the interaction by serving as emblems of the participating groups.<sup>7</sup>

The earliest explorers were the conquistadors looking for the famed "Dorado de los Omagua" in the first half of the sixteenth century. The first mission, a Carmelite one, was established in 1852 in the Brazilian Vaupés, but the first permanent missions were not established until 1914, at Monfort and Teresita on the Papurí River, by the Dutch Catholic Montfortian Congregation. Salesians built Yavaret in 1929, and in 1949 the Order of St. Javier founded the Prefectura Apostólica de Mitú, which has administered all Catholic missions since then. Protestantism appeared in the 1940s and has had a significant impact in the region, largely through the efforts of the near-legendary New Tribes Mission evangelist, Sophia Muller, and the Summer Institute of Linguistics/Wycliffe Bible Translators (see below). Except for the Pirá-Paraná region, most children were attending residential mission schools by the mid-sixties. Currently, education is managed by both the Prefecture and the Ministry of Education, and most teachers are Tukanooans. Also by the mid-sixties, except for the more traditionally minded, all Tukanooans had adopted Western clothing. Some aspects of native dress are currently being

promoted in the schools, and Tukanooan men will don some ritual paraphernalia for ceremonies; the degree to which these are mainly dancing and chanting ceremonies as opposed to more sacred ones depends on how far from Mitú the settlement hosting the ceremony lies.

The rubber boom early in the century, through its forcible recruitment of labor, the introduction of epidemics, and the substantial dislocation of settlements, greatly disrupted Tukanooan life. With very few exceptions, all non-Indians in the Vaupés have always lived in or near Mitú, the capital, on the Vaupés river. Since the creation of the Vaupés *resguardo* (reservation; see below), any non-Tukanooan needs to obtain permission to travel outside of Mitú's environs; with the exception of missionaries, no non-Indian can reside in Tukanooan territory.<sup>8</sup>

#### CRIVA

The Regional Council of Vaupés Indians (CRIVA) is an ethnic federation (see R. Smith 1985) representing some thirty-five named groups in the Vaupés territory. It encompasses a number of local units, some formed on language-group lines (e.g., Union of Cubeo Indians [UDIC] or regions (e.g., Union of Indians of the Acaricuara Zone [UNIZAC]). CRIVA, in turn, belongs to the National Colombian Indian Organization (ONIC).

Space limitations prohibit placing CRIVA in its proper context. To understand its founding and evolution would require a more thorough discussion than I can offer of the local Vaupés scene and of the people elsewhere in Colombia who create the legislation and make the policies that affect the region's inhabitants. Comprehending the current Tukanooan situation requires knowing about the history of land reform and Indian-white struggles elsewhere in the country. Interest groups whose members have had an impact on indigenous organizing in the Vaupés include people attached to the numerous governmental welfare and development agencies in Mitú; other government agents (e.g., the military police); missionaries; guerrillas; coca paste traffickers;<sup>9</sup> anthropologists; and representatives of national and international indigenous organizations. Although all non-Indians live in or just outside Mitú, a town of some six thousand inhabitants, *colonos* (homesteaders) and other non-Indians (for example, the owners of *almacenes*, or general stores), also play an important role.

CRIVA is of importance to this chapter's topic because the interviews I had with some of its members, along with some of the documents CRIVA has written provide examples of how ideas about Indian identity and culture from the exterior can influence a local Indian community.

However, the topic of how Tukanooans are becoming more politicized and self-conscious about their identity and culture cannot be comprehensively understood simply by examining CRIVA. For example, an increased interest in messianic movements can be seen as an alternative response to ideas introduced from outside (Hugh-Jones 1981; Wright and Hill 1986).

CRIVA was founded in 1973 with the backing of the Prefectura Apostólica del Vaupés, the Catholic mission headquarters in Mitú. Another organization influencing CRIVA's development is ONIC (National Organization of Colombian Indians) and a few of its member organizations, in particular the Regional Council of Cauca Indians (CRIC). Government agencies, in particular the Department of Indian Affairs, and Colombian anthropologists have been involved in CRIVA's activities as well.

CRIVA has had, and continues to have, problems. Almost all of the individuals I interviewed supplied evidence that the organization has not succeeded in gaining the allegiance and trust of its members. Most interviewees commented that CRIVA overly orients itself towards Mitú and the outside—towards non-Indians in the region and in Bogotá, and to non-Tukanooan Indians.

The vast majority of Tukanooans are substantially less politicized than active CRIVA members, and many Tukanooans are indifferent or hostile to the organization. For the most part, Tukanooans living far from Mitú are not actively involved in CRIVA, and many apparently do not respect the leaders or the positions they espouse. We can say that most Tukanooans are less self-consciously indigenist than active CRIVA members, and of those who are interested in indigenous-rights organizing, some are not sure that CRIVA best represents their interests in situations of Indian–non-Indian conflict.

Thus, no claim is being made that active CRIVA members typify Tukanooans in general. They may represent the Tukanooan of tomorrow, or they may not—the region is changing so rapidly that it is hard to predict what the future will look like.

Although this chapter is not an analysis of the difficulties CRIVA has encountered, a summary of reasons why it is so weak is necessary for understanding its cadet position vis-à-vis non-Tukanooans. The main factors are (1) no urgent threat to Tukanooan lands or other natural resources; (2) over-dependence on non-Tukanooans; (3) internal divisiveness; (4) the effects of coca paste trafficking; and (5) co-optation and marginalization of leaders, resulting in their losing legitimacy in the eyes of their constituents.

In the 1970s, the Colombian government instituted wide-ranging legislation affecting Indians that included regularization of Indian land claims into *reservas* (reserves) and *resguardos* (reservations). A *reserva* is land owned by the state with usufruct rights given to the inhabitants. A *resguardo* entails

collective ownership of land by the Indian community. A resguardo containing 3,354,097 hectares (Arango and Sánchez 1989, 115) was established in the Vaupés in 1982. That so much territory has been ceded to so few Indians, with virtually no pressure coming from the Indians themselves, is indeed remarkable. It reflects an extremely unstable national political situation (see Brooke 1990b, 10; Riding 1987; Youngers 1990, 5) and a policy implemented by a fundamentally weak national government that attempts to win hearts and minds in the countryside and thus prevent leftist guerrilla groups from gaining more converts.<sup>10</sup> Some of the more militant highland Indian groups played a role in these developments, as well as some well-publicized scandals involving Indian atrocities. During this time Indian organizing, with the participation of international indigenous-rights organizations, led to the establishment of many pro-Indian organizations, and a great deal of discussion in the national press about Colombian Indians, their current status, and probable future.

What is important to note is that not only is there virtually no land pressure currently in the Vaupés, Tukanoans now have a vast resguardo that they administer but which they played virtually no role in obtaining (see Brooke 1990a, 6). Hence, one of the important factors that can aid organizing, a perceived mutual threat to land or other natural resources, is missing in the history of *críva*. Although Tukanoans face many dangers and suffer from discrimination, compared to Indians elsewhere in Colombia and the hemisphere, they have not had to contend with such grave perils as land invasions, assassinations, or imprisonment and torture of Indian activists. One interviewee commented: "We have a problem here because these are people who didn't even know they owned the land. . . . obtaining the resguardo was an artificial event. . . . The Sikani won their territory, whereas many people in the Vaupés don't even know what a resguardo is."

A second factor is over-dependence on non-Tukanoans. *críva* has been treated paternalistically by virtually all the outsiders it has interacted with. The role of outsiders working with local Tukanoan leaders—priests, government agents, anthropologists, representatives of national and international Indian rights organizations, lawyers promoting civil and human rights legislation, and so forth—is extremely complex. These various interest groups have divergent goals, and although many sincerely want what is best for Tukanoans, one result of so many outsiders playing a role in the formation and evolution of *críva* has been *críva*'s inability to grow up. As an interviewee said: "very weak. . . . these Indians don't have representation in the communities, they are in the hands of the mestizos and don't have direct contact with the communities. They were formed in the mission and have interests

unsuited to the communities' interests. . . . they are more interested in their own personal development."

Another knowledgeable individual said that *críva* was initially promoted by the Catholic Church because it was seen as an alternative to the leadership found in the traditional settlement, a leadership less in tune with the church's interests than *críva* would be. One Bogot interviewee, very much involved in indigenous grass roots projects and knowledgeable about the Vaupés region, marked: "The priests say 'you have to organize.' And they [*críva*] organize, but the priests said that in order to continue managing the people. Thus, although they [*críva* leaders] are artificial officials, this corresponds to the interests of the mission."

Another activist in Bogotá commented that outsider Indians who travel to the Vaupés say, "we're going to work with the *gente de base* [the people of the base communities]." "But they're bureaucrats, they speak Spanish, they manage the white world. Now, it's true the local people may have to learn to manage the white world, but they must do so for their own interests."

A lawyer in Bogotá involved in Indian land claims cases characterized *críva* leaders: "They are waiting for those in power to do something—now it's waiting for a response from the government, tomorrow waiting for an investigator to give them money. It's not an Indian organization at all. Like most Indian organizations, it is conceived and made rational with the rationality of the white."

Another factor is the problem of internal divisions. The local Catholic mission played a decisive role in creating *críva* and undoubtedly sees its promotion of the organization as an answer to the many critics who have accused missionaries of creating divisions in Tukanoan society. Certainly, all who know the Vaupés have witnessed instances of the Prefecture's employing divide-and-conquer tactics over the years in its struggles against its evangelical Protestant rivals. And any new divisions probably build on already existing fault lines, such as the splits between old and young, proacculturation and traditionalist, and Mitú-oriented and backwoods. There is also some rivalry among language groups. Despite romantic claims of Tukanoan harmony and homogeneity in the national and local indigenous press, the Vaupés has never been known for its cohesion and unanimity.

In the late 1970s, many Tukanoans quickly acquired large amounts of cash and trade goods through coca. Although this bonanza has hardly been a blessing for Tukanoans in the long run, the results of this kind of white-Indian interaction are far different from the results of white-introduced epidemics, colono-induced violence, land invasions, and so on that have occurred elsewhere in the country. To some extent the rapid change and easy cash that

coca trafficking brought to the region resulted in many Tukanosans' feeling even less militant about protecting their land and customs, and even more inclined to interact with the white world than before. Various interviewees commented that Tukanosian Indian-rights organizing was as much a response to coca as anything else. One subgroup of *crüva* was described as little more than a coca growers' guild, concerned with regulating prices, the amount of land whites could cultivate, and the amount of *morüda*, or payoff, to local (and sometimes federal) authorities.

The final factor is the fact that participating in ethnic federations like *crüva* often brings about a degree of bureaucratization, co-optation, and marginalization of leaders vis-à-vis more traditional sectors. This process puts *crüva* leaders in a bind: to some degree, the more efficient and effective they become at garnering goodies offered by the system, the more suspect and illegitimate they become to their constituencies.

### The Acquisition of Indian Culture from Outsiders

Various interest groups in the Vaupés have recently found it useful to pay attention to traditional Tukanosian culture—as they conceive of it—and even to promote it. A general fear expressed by both Catholic clergy and government agents I interviewed is of creating too much dependency in Tukanosians. For example, one development agent said “you need the idea of self-sufficiency. And Tukanosians are moving more and more towards centralization and dependency on outside producers.” This is, of course, the classic development bind. What is interesting in the Vaupés case is that this concern results in these individuals taking a critical view of *crüva* for not being traditional enough. Non-Indians in Miritú are criticizing an Indian-rights movement for being too caught up in the white world and for not caring enough about preserving Tukanosian culture or developing genuine grass roots activism. One would expect the opposite kind of criticism.

Non-Indians who suddenly see virtues in Indian traditionalism probably do not come to think this way out of a recently acquired respect for lifeways different from their own. Two other factors probably influence their thinking along these lines: the guerrilla threat, and the inability of the local Catholic mission and the government to develop the region in a major way.

Most non-Indians in the Vaupés are worried about Indian-guerrilla alliances, and are thus comforted by the idea of traditionalist Tukanosians sponsoring guerrilla arguments about joining forces against a common enemy.<sup>11</sup> Most knowledgeable people recognize that the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the oldest and largest guerrilla group in the country, has

significantly different objectives than do Indian guerrilla groups. Indeed, some Andean Indians have mobilized to violently oppose national political fronts seeking to use popular movements as a springboard towards insurrectional, revolutionary actions. In the Sierra Central some especially violent clashes have occurred, and confrontations, including assassinations of Indian leaders by members of FARC and similar groups, are regularly reported in the Indian-rights press. The current leftist dialogue apparently recognizes this division: it is no longer couched in terms of how best to incorporate the Indian movement into the popular revolutionary movement, as was the case earlier. One interviewee commented: “The FARC wants democracy [in the areas it controls], yes, but with them as the heads. This is unacceptable to Indian leaders anywhere in the country.” Another commented that whereas FARC says “Yes, we respect Indian culture,” when push comes to shove they say, “the *comandante* commands here, and not the Indian chief.”

However, attempts continue to be made to unite the Indian and non-Indian revolutionary movements, including some efforts to this end in Miritú. FARC has a permanent presence in the “zone of influence” of Miritú, and white residents affirm that some successful proselytization of Tukanosians has occurred. The FARC sometimes plays a Robin Hood role when Tukanosians complain of bad debts and the government Indian Affairs representative is unsuccessful at clearing the books. A FARC member will tell the debtor that he must pay up, leave the territory, or be killed. Although in general FARC does not consider Indians to be their worst enemies, Tukanosians nonetheless suffer from its presence. After a FARC raid on Miritú in April, 1988, river traffic was severely curtailed, and a military base was established, resulting in a substantial increase in illness—including venereal disease—among Tukanosians.

Another reason some non-Tukanosians in Miritú see advantages to promoting Indian traditionalism far more than was the case twenty years ago has to do with the welfare and development programs being promoted in Miritú. Everyone has stories of failed projects because Tukanosians did not like cement floors, latrines, beds, and so on. All of the interviewees I spoke with in Miritú commented that the correct approach was one that, yes, bettered Tukanosian lives but also somehow kept them in their ambient (“*mejorar su vida pero no quitarles de su elemento*”).

A crucial factor in this is that very little work is to be found in Miritú (more precisely, very little money is available for work needing to be done). In addition, many whites resent present-day Tukanosians, and wax nostalgic for earlier times, when Indians knew their place and were not *atrevidos* (insolent) and drunk. Some non-Indians as well as Tukanosians in the region feel that all of the Vaupés's publicly elected officials should be Tukanosian because the

population is 95 percent Indian. A few non-Indians see this as a world turned upside down and hence, are more likely to think kindly of Tukanosans returning to longhouse life, in their "elemento," rather than living in Mitú and appointed to offices like secretary of education (a position held by a Tukanosan in 1987). A town official commented that the Indian in his ambient is a good thing, that shaman medicines are better than white medicines, and that basically, what non-Indians have done is complicate Tukanosan lives, create needs that cannot be met, and in general, commit psychological genocide. Another interviewee favorably compared the paternal authority of a traditional Tukanosan headman to the out-only-for-themselves attitudes of politicians in Mitú. And another interviewee, in charge of many development projects, also took a traditionalist line and commented that all the bad debts non-Indians have saddled Tukanosans with is a good idea because then, they will know not to count on the daily-wage market and will continue to be economically self-sufficient. Tukanosans will mistrust non-Indians and stay in their settlements rather than migrating to Mitú, where there is no work. And Tukanosans must learn to be generally mistrustful of non-Indians so that "when the subversives (guerrillas) come in with money and communism, they will mistrust them." One priest sarcastically commented that the only way Tukanosans learned about the modern economy was in coca trafficking: "Production, redistribution, transport . . . *la coca* was the only example. And of course there was a market."

Thus, whereas twenty years ago non-Indians spoke of teaching Tukanosans the dignity of work and the value of saving money, clearly many factors have contributed to a changed position, apparently held by many non-Indians in the region, namely, that Tukanosans face grave dangers by acculturating too rapidly.

Catholic missionary publications at times support the preservation of culturally distinct groups and at times even espouse a socialist solution of Colombia's problems. In the Vaupés, the Prefecture has promoted publication of various booklets about the culture and geography of the Vaupés, including lexicon, mythology, and maps—materials with absolutely no Christian religious content.

One knowledgeable individual commented on the changes the local Catholic mission has gone through with respect to traditional Tukanosan culture: "The mission wanted to replace the longhouse. Before, there was interest in centralization. Fifteen years ago . . . the help from the state, from the Church was negating Indian identity. But now, to reinforce Indian identity we have to decentralize, to return to the longhouse, to pay attention to traditional language, clothing, rites, exchange of women."

Protestant missionaries have not promoted Indian rights, partly because they have not had the dialogue with Colombian and foreign anthropologists that Catholic clergy have (see Jackson 1993b).<sup>12</sup> Although not promoting the formation of groups like *CRIVA*, the Summer Institute of Linguistics/Wycliffe Bible Translators (*siu*) does present an image of an organization dedicated to studying indigenous language and culture, promoting bilingual education, and creating a corps of indigenous leaders to take over proselytization when the linguist teams depart.

In part due to the rivalry between the Prefecture and groups like New Tribes Mission and *siu*, in the last twenty years the local Catholic mission has tried to appear supportive of Indian rights from an enlightened, left-leaning, tradition-respecting, anthropologically informed position. It began to overlook such previously disapproved-of traditional practices as dancing, drinking manioc beer, and taking the hallucinogen *banisteriopsis*, in part because these activities are anathema to evangelical Protestants. The Prefecture has sponsored "Indian weeks" in which ceremonies and dances are performed—a complete reversal from its position of twenty years ago regarding Tukanosan ceremonies. The Colombian Catholic Church responded to criticism from outsiders by forming its own Missionary Colombian Anthropological Center, launching a publication, *Etnia*, in 1965, and opening an ethnographic museum in Bogotá in 1973.

Another major non-Tukanosan source of input about Indian culture to which Tukanosans are being exposed derives from the interaction between *criva* members and activist Indians from similar organizations elsewhere in Colombia who visit the Vaupés or who confer with *criva* officials during visits they make to Bogotá. As indicated above, although *criva* began as the creation of the Prefecture, it soon began to change, as a result of the increasing coca market and interaction with outside Indian-rights organizations.

An example of the collaboration between *criva* members and outsiders is a book written by a Tukanosan, Jesús Santacruz, on *Principios Fundamentales del Consejo Regional Indígena del Vaupés (Fundamental Principles of criva)*. It contains any number of incorrect ethnographic observations, very probably due to misinformation from Catholic missionaries and non-Tukanosan Indians. Publications written by *criva* members in their newsletter, *La Voz de la Tribu* and in *oni*'s newsletter *Unidad Indígena*, provide evidence that these individuals are coming to accept an outsider view of Tukanosans and their traditions, a view congruent with non-Tukanosan notions of what it means to be an Indian and even what it means to be a tropical forest Indian. For example, one article speaks of Tukanosans longing for unity, longing to stop distinguishing among tribes and clans (in *Unidad Indígena*, 1976, no. 12, 8). A *criva*

leader remarked to me that "The people wanted to end with the sense of isolated groups, such as Desana, Cubeo, and move towards unity, so that all the groups could reunite like brothers. To look for unity." Whereas, from the point of view of *criva*, factionalism along language group or clan lines is indeed divisive, I very much doubt if most Tukanoans are ready to stop distinguishing among themselves this way. This is a remarkably different notion of brotherhood than the traditional patrilineal one.

Some basic characteristics of Tukanoan society are distorted or not mentioned in these publications. For example, an article in *Unidad Indígena* describes Vaupés groups: "To each tribe corresponds a territory whose limits are clearly recognized and respected; in keeping with tradition and mythology, this territory is communal property of the entire tribe" (1976, no. 17, 6-7). The article continues: "Each culture conserves almost all of its own characteristics: each tribe speaks its own language, and owing to the contact between the different tribes, the result is that in general each person speaks three, four or more different languages" (*ibid.*). An association between land and language group in the Vaupés does exist, especially in an ideal, symbolic sense. But although language groups are found in some areas of the Vaupés and not others, and this is explained in the origin myths, land ownership is not thought of in terms of an exclusive, inalienable title to land; certainly, the boundaries are not precisely delineated. Local settlements are often intermingled with respect to language group affiliation; sometimes, a settlement's closest neighbors belong to other language groups. It is also interesting that the article does not mention the basis for so much contact: language exogamy. In this quotation, language is viewed in the conventional sense as a marker of a distinct cultural entity, a "tribe," which it most certainly is not. In another issue of the paper a romantic picture of communally worked land is given: "The communities . . . conserve, each one, its territory, which is communal property of all the tribe, and they work it communally. They live from the abundant fruits that the jungle gives them spontaneously and from hunting" (*Unidad Indígena*, 1976, no. 14, 11).

Land is not worked communally in the Vaupés. These and other quotations from *criva* and *ONIC* publications show, by their ethnographic inaccuracies, a systematic bias, a desire to present a particular view of tropical-forest Indians. It is a simplified, romantic, idealized image that glosses over or ignores confusing or inconvenient factors such as language exogamy, even though this is a fundamental organizing principle of Tukanoan social structure.

Such quotes provide a glimpse of a new Indian identity and culture, one provided by outside-derived images and, in part, by outside political aims. For example, to assert tribal communal ownership of clearly demarcated lands is

to have a strong arguing position in potential future battles over land rights. What is interesting is how Tukanoans are learning to say these things about themselves, as the Santacruz book and pages of *La Voz de la Tribu* confirm. And equally interesting is that these lowland Indians are receiving some of these new images from fellow *Indians*—representatives of *ONIC*, representatives of the American Indian Movement (AIM), and other pro-Indian groups. Many examples of this process can be found among Native Americans in the U.S.A. and Canada who have acquired feather warbonnets or drums their ancestors never used, but which now are important because they signal pan-Indian identity. What is of value in the Vaupés material is that we are observing the beginnings of this process.

### Rethinking Culture Change

What I have just described is what I referred to above as the process of "becoming an Indian." But how can we describe this process using our conventional notions of "culture"? Tukanoans are not passive recipients of efforts to change them. Part of their active response is their experiencing—living—the very real conflicts between many of their traditional cultural forms and those of the incoming dominant ideology. We have seen examples of a new wrinkle in the messages from this ideology: a heralding of the desirability of Tukanoans' remaining the way they are in some important respects. But "remaining the way they are" nevertheless involves significant change on the part of Tukanoans, paradoxical though it may seem, because definitions of who they are derive so extensively from their increasing interaction with non-Tukanoans.

We have seen that Tukanoans who are influenced by the national Indian-rights movement are hearing and incorporating into their self-image several notions foreign to their traditional understandings of themselves and their society. *criva* faces a dilemma because it tries to represent tropical-forest Indians to an outside world while occupying a marginal and relatively powerless status in Mitú and within the national Indian movement. Although to some extent Tukanoans are seen as more authentically Indian than some other Colombian Indian groups, because of *criva*'s relative lack of political savvy within *ONIC*, instruction about what being an authentic Indian means is for the most part not entrusted to Tukanoans. *criva* may in the future develop political clout and organizational *savoir-faire* to help them survive within externally imposed political structures. When traditional political forms and expectations differ extensively from the new ones, however, the members of an activist group can experience the conflict and confusion resulting from

fence-straddling and the marginality of biculturalism. Tukanos, coming out of relatively fluid, dispersed local communities, have little knowledge of centralized political structures, with their bureaucracies and cash-based economies. The means for achieving an active role in deciding their own destinies, making collective decisions following the new rules, and learning to negotiate with outside groups is not a part of the traditional Tukanos political repertoire (see Jackson 1984).

Traditional cultural forms that are retained are not necessarily the "same" if their meaning has changed. This might seem so obvious as not to warrant comment, but such a point is often forgotten because anthropologists, indigenists, and others are interested in discovering the connections between current traditions and earlier ones. But "culture" is not necessarily an analytic, purely descriptive term in these circumstances; rather, it is often a politically loaded one. If a ritual evolves from something Tukanos do entirely for one another into something they do for outsiders, or if Tukanos perform a ritual for themselves because it fosters a self-image that has been inspired by outsiders, then despite superficial similarities that these new rituals might have with traditional rituals, they are not traditional in some important respects. We can speak of a ritual having been folklorized when it occurs because the participants' involvement in the larger society significantly influences why the ritual is performed and why particular traditional ritual forms have been retained. As noted above, it is difficult to talk about this type of transformation, whether of a ritual or of Indian culture in general, except in deprecatory terms. Simply to talk of "becoming an Indian" suggests something inauthentic, insincere, as does the word "folklorize."

As Tukanos are increasingly embedded in Colombian culture and society, they will increasingly come to define themselves in terms of the larger society, even though this definition is not the simple one of "how fast are we amalgamating?" We are seeing the very beginnings of a process of folklorization of some aspects of culture among the more acculturated Tukanos who participate in the local indigenous-rights movement. They are finding out what it means to be Tukanos in a new way, one different from the way Tukanos revised their self-concepts over the past two centuries in interactions with whites. Young Tukanos who reside in Mitú and its environs are learning from outsiders not only how to be Indian but also to some extent how to be Tukanos. The pages of *criva's* newspaper that describe Tukanos traditions in ethnographically incorrect fashion are a harbinger of a transformed Tukanos identity. That this transformed identity receives some of its form, language, and content from other *Indians* in no way changes the basic process of what I am calling folklorization.

An important change occurs when, because a vastly more powerful cultural system is making significant inroads into an indigenous culture, the members of that culture become aware of themselves as a *culture*—here contrasted to being aware of themselves as a distinct *people*, which, I would maintain, is how indigenous cultures conceive of the differences between themselves and their neighbors in precontact situations. A further refinement, a distinction difficult to characterize, is that whereas to some extent indigenism begins with the very first contact with a radically different culture, *Indigenism*—indigenism with a capital *I*, self-conscious indigenism, along with self-conscious culture—begins when a group of people begin to appropriate notions of who they are *from* the intrusive dominant culture, albeit in contradistinction to it.<sup>13</sup> This is now occurring in the Vaupés. The analogy about unselfconscious rituals versus folklorized ritual—ritual whose meaning is derived in part from the fact that the audience includes people from vastly different cultures—is useful. The same point can be made about "authentic" North American Indian handicraft intended primarily for the non-Indian market: to some extent it is the market and the federal government, not the Indians, that determines standards of authenticity and excellence (see Belkin 1988). No Tukanos spoke of *nuestra cultura* ("our culture") in the late 1960s in this self-conscious sense, although at that time many complained bitterly about non-Indians. But Tukanos are now beginning to speak in this fashion.

As noted above, it is difficult to describe this contrast without introducing judgmental notions (e.g., "authentic" vs. "derivative"). I do not want to give the impression that I am judging some cultural traits as better than others simply because they are traditional as opposed to newly introduced. I do believe there are criteria with which to make such judgments, but they have to do with the effects of such preserved or new traits on the well-being of the group in question—and sometimes this is difficult to assess, even in hindsight, partly because as anthropologists we often play the dual roles of analyst and advocate. We form opinions about what is valuable and what should be jettisoned in the Tukanos and Colombian cultural systems. In this sense we, no less than others, are political actors.

### Conclusions

Questions about evolving Tukanos culture illustrate some of the problems faced by anthropology in defining and analyzing cultural units, in particular when trying to assess change from one type (e.g., a somewhat isolated and bounded "tribal culture") to another (e.g., an "ethnic group," a group of

people fairly thoroughly embedded in a larger unit). I have argued that we are seeing the beginnings of a process of folklorization of various Tukananoan cultural traits. Perhaps in the future we shall see the commoditization of them; elsewhere in the hemisphere various interest groups, including indigenous groups themselves, package and promote "Indianness." The cultural forms that are retained from earlier traditions can therefore totally change in meaning, as when traits are retained, cast aside, or redefined as part of a self-conscious awareness and promotion of a particular kind of Indian identity as a political strategy.

Since resemblances between earlier forms of Tukananoan culture and later forms may be spurious, conceiving of a culture in terms of traits that persist over time can be misleading. If the underpinnings of a new, partially folklorized Tukananoan culture are quite different, if the criteria for membership serve different purposes and are oriented to different audiences, then we cannot conceive of this culture simply in terms of a continuous stream that, while evolving, has had an underlying identity over the decades. We need to think of culture change over relatively short periods of time in a more dynamic fashion rather than as either the "same" or "amalgamated" or "lost." We need to see Tukananoans and others as creating and improvising culture in addition to possessing culture. And we need to create and invent models and metaphors that analyze this process in nonderogatory terms.

The northwest Amazon has always presented thorny problems to those who adopt and promote "cookie-cutter" models of society and culture. Tukananoans continue to play this provocative, and, although at times exasperating, extremely worthwhile role.

#### NOTES

This chapter was originally a paper delivered in 1989 and revised in 1990: the ethnographic data and analysis offered here should be understood to apply to the situation up to that time. In the intervening years some significant changes have taken place at both the national and local levels, in particular the creation of a new Colombian Constitution in 1991 that contains many articles dealing with Colombia's Indian communities. Some of these changes are discussed in Jackson 1991a, 1991b, 1992, 1993a, 1993b, and n.d.a.

The research for chapter 5 is part of an on-going research project concerned with changing identity among Tukananoans of Colombia. I am grateful to the MIT Provost's Fund for funding a trip to Colombia in March, 1987, the Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences Fund for funding a trip to Colombia in June and July of 1989, and to

both for support for archival research. My thanks to all in Bogotá and the Vaupés who have so willingly given of their time and energy. My appreciation also to the Anthropology Departments of the National University and the University of Los Andes, the Office of Indian Affairs, and the Colombian Anthropology Institute. Thanks also to the participants at the 1987 Bennington South American Indian Conference who commented on an earlier oral version, and the participants at the Wenner-Gren conference in Novo Friburgo in June, 1989. Readers of previous drafts who kindly offered suggestions include Jaime Arocha, Charles Hale, Darna Dufour, Christian Gros, James Howe, Stephen Hugh-Jones, Theodore Macdonald, Anna Roosevelt, David Stoll, and Robin Wright.

1. Some of the literature on ethnicity offers similar critique. Vincent, for example, suggests that we have a "too stolid perception of ethnic groups as permanent component units" (1974, 376) and asserts that "ethnic ties are not primordial ties—the assumed givens of a society and their actual realized organizations in any situation have to be demonstrated" (1974, 377). Barth notes that "our habits of speech may hark back to the days of Wissler and Kroeber, when a culture was a trait list of customs" (1982, 79). Poyer states flatly that "primordialist theories are no longer supportable" (1988, 472)—but see A. Smith 1986.

2. See Kahn (1981, 43), who notes how hard it is to avoid taking ethnicity as a given, a natural phenomenon rather than an ideology that needs to be explained. Surely one source of this difficulty is the moral opprobrium that attaches to depictions of people choosing their culture in some fashion—note the negative connotation of Kahn's "ideology." Many writers argue that embedded in the idea of ethnicity is the notion of permanence, but that this is only "putative," a similarly potentially deprecatory term. A number of writers on ethnicity discuss the malleability of criteria for membership, which "can be narrowed or broadened in boundary terms in relation to the specific needs of political mobilization" (Cohen 1978, 385–86). Such analyses can be felt as a slap in the face of a given group who is making a claim to land or other resource on the basis of common origins and tightly defined criteria for membership (see Jackson 1989).

3. Small-scale tribal groups that are seen as still retaining their culture are considered to be "without history," as Cowlishaw nicely puts it (1987, 221). Also see Wolf 1982.

4. "Tukananoan" refers to all riverine indigenous inhabitants of the Vaupés. Makú, forest-dwellers who also differ in other respects, are not included (see Silverwood-Cope 1975). Although many Tukananoans live on the Brazilian side of the border, this paper considers only those in Colombian territory.

5. Indian-rights consciousness in Colombia goes back to the 1920s when, with the effects of the Bolshevik Revolution, the Latin American communist movement spoke about the Indian proletariat and adopted a vision of a "Great Indo-American nation" (Pineda Camacho 1984, 211–12). I should note that I often use *Indian* for

the Spanish *indigena*. The Spanish cognate, *indio*, is a highly pejorative term, which is not the case in English, despite some writers who prefer *Native American*. But *Native American* connotes Indians of the U.S.A. and Canada. It is worth emphasizing, however, that any difficulties encountered in any group nomenclature (e.g., "native," "Indian," "white," "ladies") are relevant to the purpose of this paper. Justifying use of a given term by aesthetic and conventional-use arguments is not meant to imply that problems of nomenclature are not of great political and moral significance.

6. For a critique of this point of view with regard to the effects of the introduction of white trade goods, see S. Hugh-Jones 1992.

7. For more comprehensive treatments of Tukanoan ethnography, see Åthem 1981; Chermela 1992; Goldman 1963; C. Hugh-Jones 1979; S. Hugh-Jones 1979; Jackson 1983; Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971.

8. For further information on the history of the region, see Goldman 1963; S. Hugh-Jones 1979, 1981; Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971; Wright 1981.

9. Coca paste is an intermediate stage between coca leaf harvesting and processing and the production of cocaine per se, which, to my knowledge, does not occur in the Vaupés.

10. See "Programa Nacional de Desarrollo de las Poblaciones Indígenas" (National Program for the Development of Indian Populations), and former president Belisario Betancur's *El Indígena: Raíz de Nuestra Identidad Nacional* ("The Indian: Root of our National Identity").

11. And it is true that a leftist victory in Colombia would not guarantee an Indian utopia—whatever that might look like. If we examine other nations that have experienced leftist (progressivist or socialist) governments, whether by election, coups, or revolutions, the circumstances of fourth world groups within them has not necessarily improved from previous situations.

12. Relations between *sir* and Colombian anthropologists and linguists have generally been poor. Foreign Protestant organizations tend to assume an anti-left and progovernment stance at odds with many of the country's social scientists. In 1975–76, many Colombians who had carried out investigations in the Vaupés entered a campaign to have *sir* leave the country. This alliance among national Indian rights leaders, Colombian social scientists, and the church was bitterly resented by *sir*. (see Cass 1981; *Micronoticias* 1978, M-54; and Stoll 1982).

13. I am grateful to Stephen Hugh-Jones for his well-thought-out views on this topic.

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