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5. Being and Becoming an Indian in the Vaupés

Jean E. Jackson

Introduction

Tukanoans, the indigenous inhabitants of the Vaupés region of southeastern Colombia, are being introduced to a new form of Indian consciousness as a consequence of their increasing incorporation into the Colombian nation-state.[1] This chapter argues that the nascent self-awareness Tukanoans are acquiring represents a significant shift from their traditional notions of themselves as tropical forest Indians and as Tukanoans to one more akin to ethnic group consciousness. An ethnic group is here conceived of as a recognizably distinct group of people substantially embedded in a larger society (see Barth 1969). Rather than a separate culture, an ethnic group is to be thought of as a subculture, its inventory of culturally distinct traits having been produced to a significant extent by interaction with other sectors of the society. Traditional tribal cultures are usually conceptualized as having been formed by factors such as isolation and adaptation to a specific ecological niche, with any extratribal contact generally limited to interaction with neighbors. While Tukanoan culture differs in some significant respects from this ideal type, as present-day Tukanoans evolve into an ethnic group, we can say that traditional Tukanoan culture fits the tribal schema more than the newer one.

This chapter examines an indigenous rights organization in the Vaupés, using it as a springboard for understanding how Tukanoans' concept of themselves is beginning to change in its essential nature. In a sense, then, this chapter is not so much about *being* Indian as *becoming* Indian.[2]

What is particularly valuable in an analysis of the Tukanoan case is that we can see the *beginnings* of a "tribal" group becoming incorporated into the dominant society to such an extent that virtually all of the cultural forms comprising their legacy from the past are being redefined, reevaluated, and assigned new functions. Of course, in a region so vast, some Tukanoans (a minority) have traveled along this road quite a bit;

most, however, are just starting on this journey.[3] The beginnings of this process occurred in the United States and Canada long before there were anthropologists around. Similarly, with some exceptions, Central American and highland South American groups have already been incorporated into the dominant society in many crucial respects. Hence, parts of lowland South America afford the only opportunity to observe the initial stages of this process.[4]

This chapter is to be seen as an initial report on an ongoing research project. Sources include twenty-two formal interviews conducted in Colombia during March 1987. I also engaged in a number of informal conversations with native leaders, change agents, and residents (both Tukanoan 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 Colombian Indian autonomy and Indians' overall well-being. Continuing archival work in the Vaupés and Bogotá, and dissertation fieldwork in 1968–1970, have provided other sources of information.

For reasons of space, this chapter can only introduce the topic and highlight the actors and institutions playing a role in changing Tukanoan identity. A comprehensive treatment would contextualize the Vaupés case by discussing the history of land reform and indigenist organizing throughout Colombia. It would also examine the role of various change agents in the region, such as personnel from the numerous governmental development agencies, missionaries, guerrillas, *colonos* (homesteaders), local coca paste traffickers,[5] anthropologists, and representatives of national and international indigenist organizations. It should also be noted that Tukanoans have responded to the extensive and stressful intrusions from the dominant society in ways not discussed here—for example, some have been drawn to a messianic option.[6]

This paper explores a secular option some Tukanoans have been attracted to—the Regional Council of Vaupés Indians—CRIVA. CRIVA is actually a federation[7] representing a number of local indigenous rights groups.[8] It should be noted that the vast majority of Tukanoans are less self-consciously indigenist than are active members of CRIVA, and many Tukanoans are indifferent or hostile to the organization. A discussion of the origins and evolution of CRIVA, thus, while useful as a springboard to begin a discussion of the topic of emerging politicized, self-conscious Vaupés Indian identity, in no way can claim to exhaust it.

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. Tukanoans number about twenty thousand. Tukanoans have traditionally lived in multi-family longhouses, one per settlement, on or near rivers. Longhouses, as well as the more recent settlement pattern of nucleated villages, are separated from each other by two to ten hours' canoe travel. During this century four to eight nuclear families inhabited a longhouse, and present village size ranges anywhere from 15 to 180—one or two mission towns are larger. Population density is quite low, at most .3 inhabitants per km^2. 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 sib or clan, the (ideally) exogamous language group, and the poorly understood phratry.[9] 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 varying internally in some traditional customs, ecology, and degree of acculturation, the Vaupés is a single society in many respects. This homogeneity derives from the similarity of observable phenomena, ecological and social, and from the similarities in Tukanoans' "models for perceiving, relating and interpreting" (Goodenough 1964: 36) their world. Furthermore, Tukanoans see themselves as parts of an interacting whole. Many apparent examples of cultural diversity in the Vaupés are actually mechanisms helping 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.[10]

Background to the Current Situation in the Vaupés

Many kinds of change agents have participated in transforming Tukanoan life. At present the most important ones are Catholic and Protestant missionaries; personnel from a variety of government agencies; and whites residing in the region, in particular *colonos* (homesteaders), retired rubber gatherers, and coca paste traffickers. Protestant missionaries belong to various evangelical nondenominational groups, such as

New Tribes Mission, and the North American–based Summer Institute of Linguistics/Wycliffe Bible Translators, or SIL. Catholic missionaries are all Colombian nationals.

In the 1970s the Colombian government instituted wide-ranging legislation affecting Indians that included regularization of Indian land claims into reserves (*reservas)* and preserves (*resguardos*). A *resguardo* is collective ownership of land by the Indian group. A reserve is land owned by the state with usufruct rights given to the inhabitants. This legislation led to establishing a *resguardo* in the Vaupés of some three million hectares. That so much territory has been ceded to so few Indians, with so very little pressure coming from them, is indeed remarkable, and merits much greater attention than can be paid in this chapter. It reflects an extremely unstable national political situation (see Riding 1987) 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.[11] Some of the more militant highland Indian groups doubtless played a role in these developments as well, in addition to some well-publicized scandals involving Indian atrocities.[12] During this time, Indian organizing, with the participation of international indigenous rights organizations, led to the establishment in 1982 of the National Colombian Indian Organization (ONIC), and a great deal of discussion about Colombian Indian groups, their current status and probable future, in the national press.

Although space does not permit a comprehensive discussion, it is essential to understand some of the fundamental differences between Andean Indians and their counterparts in the Colombian forests and plains. Vastly different situations obtain in white-Indian relations depending on what region one is talking about, and this is sometimes obscured by pan-Indian rhetoric. First, with few exceptions, Andean conflicts have most often been over land itself, whereas in lower latitudes the problems have been with small-scale (and more recently large-scale) extractive industries, *colonos* (homesteaders), and missionaries. Actual land pressures appeared only later—although these are currently very real in some lowland areas of the country. In the Vaupés there is virtually no land pressure; population density, as we have seen, is quite low. And Tukanoans now have three million hectares of *resguardo.*

Intensive white-Indian interaction has been occurring in the Andean sector for some four-hundred-plus years. This history in itself forms part of what groups such as the Paez consider their legacy: as one interviewee put it, these bitter memories bind them as much as their language. Furthermore, Andean peasants had been part of a state system for

centuries before the arrival of the Spanish. In contrast, nonviolent white-Indian interaction in the lowlands most often was on the basis of Indian attraction to white trade goods, offered by missionaries or individuals involved in extractive industries.[13]

Another contrast is found in the legislation creating Indian reserves and *resguardos.* The native community that oversees the communal property and deals with the state, and in several ways functions as an autonomous political unit is the *cabildo* (municipal council). In Andean areas, *cabildos* evolved from a traditional form of communal leadership, but, contrary to what is sometimes stated in the Colombian indigenist press, no such council traditionally existed for regions like the Vaupés. One interviewee from an Andean Indian community, a very knowledgeable Indian rights organizer, did comment on this as a failing of ONIC's policy-making, saying that ONIC has assumptions about priorities, such as defense of land, language, tradition, and how to struggle against large landholders. However, since these are not the conditions found in the Vaupés, ONIC ought to do a study to discover the conditions there and what the Indians there think.

Also, for the most part, highland Indians tend to be more suspicious and hostile to white intrusion than are lowland Indians—after any initial periods of violence have ceased. In addition, culture change usually takes place at a slower pace in Andean areas, if the local communities have any say-so in the matter at all. The examples of the Colombian Paez and Kogui are quite instructive. In contrast, lowland Amazonian Indians and most plains Indians, to the degree they are able, more readily participate in the intrusive economy and are far more willing to adopt its values.[14] Why this is so is complex, having to do with land tenure systems, history, degree of aggregation of population, overall population size, the nature of the exchanges taking place, and so forth. What is important to note is that often Andean Indian communities' and indigenist organizations' cultural assumptions can have more in common with non-Indian Colombia than with the worldview of their fellow Indians in the plains and tropical forests. However, this is a position most Indians involved in Indian rights organizing would reject out of hand, for understandable political reasons.

Because of the long-term struggles experienced by Colombian Indians in Tolima, Cauca, Antioquia, and other highland areas, these people are much more self-conscious of their cultural distinctiveness; they are ethnic groups, as defined in the beginning of this chapter. Andean groups are far more politicized, and their organizing and publications reflect this. As we shall see below, this can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts in a national movement that, while trying to be a pluralist movement, still needs unifying symbols and ideology. Sometimes the

symbols adopted are not, as thought, pan-Indian.

Another factor that must be mentioned but cannot be comprehensively explored here is the interaction between the national Indian rights movement and the various national political fronts who seek to use popular movements as a springboard toward an insurrectional, revolutionary movement. Great tension at times exists between ONIC and the left, particularly in cases of violence between guerrillas in rural areas and Indian communities.[15] True, some local sectors of Indian rights groups have referred to themselves as guerrillas and promoted violent solutions, and in some cases such confrontations occurred long before the non-Indian guerrilla movement became established in Colombia. But knowledgeable Colombians are aware of the different objectives of these various organizations and the struggles over who is to have hegemony in Andean Indian areas. In fact, the left no longer talks in terms of how best to incorporate the Indian movement into the popular movement.

Andean Indian responses to the radical left, for example, Sierra Indians' responses to the M-19[16] faction, are often simply along the lines of "leave us alone, we have different problems." But often open confrontation exists, as when Cauca valley *campesinos* (peasants) requested help from demobilized guerrillas to stop Paez Indian cattle rustling. The Paez stated that the rustling was a form of political resistance.

Thus, despite some similarities between Andean Indian communities and Indian communities elsewhere in Colombia, one should not lose sight of the very significant differences, especially given that lowland areas are so poorly understood in the rest of the country and the direction of Indian-to-Indian communication and political pressure is, for the most part, from highland to lowland. This is a crucial difference in itself, for whereas Andean groups have experienced pressure only from external *non*-Indian sources (e.g., leftist and populist movements, the state, the Church—although this is changing somewhat as Colombian Indian leaders confer with indigenous leaders from other nations), the impact of external *Indian* influence on Tukanoans in organizations like CRIVA has been significant.

Space does not permit a thorough discussion of the roles missionaries have played in the Vaupés. Suffice it to say that until recently, apart from the rubber trade, practically all relations between Tukanoans south of the Vaupés River and the non-Indian world have involved Catholic missionaries acting as intermediaries, on both sides of the border. Although today the priests have less clearly coercive means of enforcing their authority than in the past, the Church is still very powerful: it is virtually impossible to ignore or bypass them in the parts of the region controlled by the Prefecture.

Members of SIL or Protestant evangelical organizations such as New Tribes Mission can today point to many Protestant settlements, particularly among the Cubeo (see Goldman 1981; Wright 1981a). Some earlier estimates assign as much as a third of the inhabitants of the combined *comisarías* (comissariats) of the Vaupés and Guainía to Protestant sects (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971: 7). Due to the more than sixteen languages in the area, SIL has had more bases in the Vaupés than anywhere else in Colombia of comparable area and population numbers.

With few exceptions, missionaries are the only non-Indians who are permanent residents in the eastern Vaupés outside of the administrative center of Mitú (two-thirds of the Vaupés is *resguardo*). Catholic missionaries have traditionally conducted trade, established shops, bought surplus products (especially food for their boarding schools), and occasionally hired Tukanoans. In some of these activities, despite their religious goals, missionaries have clearly been "agents of secularization" like missionaries among the Toba (Miller 1970). Local nonmissionary representatives of the Colombian government had until recently been so few that the missions had much de facto and in some respects de jure governmental authority. A recent example is the missions' informal regulation of coca paste trade south of the Vaupés River.[17] Powerless to stop the trade, Catholic clergy were successful in some areas at prohibiting dealers from making payments with firearms and alcohol for a period of time.

While one cannot say that missionaries are in the region to promote cultural autonomy and self-sufficiency, at times they *have* served as buffers between Tukanoans and highly exploitative change agents, such as most rubber gatherers. An especially interesting chapter in the recent history of the Vaupés is the role missionaries have played in the emerging indigenist movement. At times they have seen expressions of "Red Power" as threatening to their own enterprises, but at other times they apparently concluded that encouraging the growth of such movements and forming alliances with leaders was a way of giving discomfort to enemies (i.e., some of the other change agents in the region).

Some of the Catholic priests in the Vaupés, members of the Javerian order, became very radicalized during the mid to late 1960s; this trend continues today. Many were involved in the progressive Golconda movement (Stoll 1982: 175), and some continue to write about Liberation theology topics in mission publications. The anticommunist and progovernment stance assumed by foreign Protestant organizations has undoubtedly been an element in the assumption by many Catholic clergy of a left, traditionalist, and nationalist (e.g., anti-*gringo*) stance.

Today some publications by Catholic priests are still quite radical in tone, praising socialism and favorably comparing Indian communities with other sectors of Colombian society. However, when confronting

socialism as constructed by other leftists in the country, especially social scientists, the authors can become quite conservative. For example, in one instance, Msgr. Belarmino Correa Yepes of the Vaupés Prefecture addresses the readers of *Unidad Indígena*, the official publication of ONIC, speaking favorably of socialism: "During the time when we cannot count on living in a socialist state that respects and makes others respect culturally distinct groups with their own traditions, I find it very difficult to do something within the context of the present structures" (*Unidad Indígena* 1975b: 8). However, an editorial in a missionary journal states: "In contrast to the barking of the Marxist anthropologists, our missionaries offer works and reality" (*Revista de Misiones* 1976: 57).

Part of this shift in consciousness has been the result of missionary personnel listening to anthropologists working in the Vaupés and elsewhere and adopting language and concepts that are convenient to their purposes.[18] The alliances and conflicts between Catholic missionaries and anthropologists (mostly Colombian) are complicated and fascinating. For example, the Church states that studying anthropology without humanistic bases creates an anthropologist who is irreligious and indifferent, and a compromised anthropology (*Revista de Misiones* 1983: 118). An earlier article in this magazine chides Vaupés anthropologists for having helped create the "complex" Tukanoans have today (*Revista de Misiones* 1974: 224). The Church formed its own Missionary Colombian Anthropological Center, began a publication, *Etnia*, in 1965, and opened an Ethnographic Museum in Bogotá in 1973. Clearly, the presence of anthropologists in the Vaupés and exposure to activist anthropology (e.g., the Declaration of Barbados) have had an effect on the Church's mission policies—and have also nourished continuing ambivalence and sometimes hostility toward what missionaries understand to be anthropology's objectives.

The same can be said for indigenism: while CRIVA is the Prefecture's inspiration and to some extent its creation, in other instances indigenism is attacked in Church publications.[19] Thus, part of this assumption of the indigenist mantle has been the result of the radicalization of some of Colombia's Catholic missionaries, and part has been the result of the effects anthropologists, Colombian and foreign, had simply by their presence in lowland Indian territories. In addition, SIL, which has *not* been involved in indigenism in Colombia, has nonetheless presented an image of people dedicated to studying indigenous language and culture, and has published various collections on Colombian indigenous culture and linguistics.[20] These events threatened the Prefecture's image of itself and its justifications for its activities. Furthermore, SIL actively promoted bilingual education, various secular development projects,

and the creation of a corps of indigenous leaders to take over religious proselytization when the linguist teams left their communities.

Hence, during the last twenty years some priests became aware that several high-status and knowledgeable outsiders saw traditional Tukanoan culture as valuable, worth preserving, and even superior to Colombian culture in some respects, and this has had an impact on their outlook and programs. Part of the Catholic response was to appropriate these notions, with the resulting sponsorship of, for example, "Indian weeks" in which ceremonies and dances are performed. Such activities were anathema to Catholic missionaries twenty-five years ago.

When SIL/WBT's contract was up for renewal in 1975–1976, young Colombian linguists and anthropologists entered the campaign to have the organization removed (*Micronoticias* 1978: M-54). In the Vaupés itself, from 1969 to 1975, six SIL/WBT teams were dislocated, and the conflicts came to national attention in the press (Stoll 1982: 175). Here the Church, Colombian anthropologists, and national Indian rights leaders found it advisable to be temporary (and mutually suspicious) bedfellows, an alliance SIL bitterly complained about (see Cass 1981).

Both SIL/WBT and New Tribes Mission oppose certain traditional practices that Catholics are increasingly willing to overlook, which further takes them into the relativist anthropological camp. Dancing, drinking manioc beer, and taking the hallucinogen *banisteriopsis* are examples. Goldman (1981: 8) noted a Cubeo revival in 1970, encouraged by the Church, that included "the resumption of previously forbidden mourning rites and the reconstruction of the communal *malocas* (longhouses) that earlier missionaries had put to the torch."

Another response to SIL/WBT's presence was the Catholics' altering their educational policies. In 1965 they instituted a project whereby Tukanoan catechists would teach religion and the rudiments of Spanish spelling. They subsequently came to speak favorably of bilingual education and later on promoted hiring Tukanoan secondary school graduates to teach primary school in outlying communities. Today they promote bicultural education.[21]

The Church has unquestionably made substantial changes over the past fifteen years, but the picture that emerges is confused. Sometimes it seems as though a total about-face has occurred; rather than espousing a "now we civilize them" policy, priests apparently sometimes conclude that today's position should refer to how well-off Tukanoans are in their "element," and that one should try to better their lives, yes, but not if it deprives them of their traditions. One priest, disillusioned, commented that Tukanoans are "by nature made to live in the longhouse seated on their stools. They had the possibility of changing and didn't do it." He mentioned that whereas the Church is now in favor of bilingual and

bicultural education, this upsets the parents, who say that their children already know how to speak their languages, do not see any reason to learn to write in them, and want to learn Spanish.

CRIVA

CRIVA began in 1973 with the backing of the Prefecture; its leaders were and have continued to be selected from the graduates of the Prefecture's María Reina *Internado* secondary school (which became a government school in 1975). Today approximately 80 percent of teachers in the Vaupés are Indian and bilingual.

CRIVA claims members from thirty-five different ethnic groups, although it should be noted that the vast majority of Tukanoans are significantly less politicized than active CRIVA members, and many Tukanoans are indifferent or hostile to CRIVA. The Tukanoans who live far from Mitú are for the most part not actively involved in the movement, and many apparently do not respect the leaders or the positions they espouse.[22] Traditionally, the Vaupés had no federated regional organizations, or political corporate groups or leaders above the level of the settlement. This is not to say that Tukanoans are not adept at making collective decisions, but that the structure and purpose of a pan-Vaupés organization like CRIVA is foreign to them.

Although perceived pressure from nonmissionary whites such as anthropologists doubtless played a role, certainly the main reason behind the Prefecture's encouraging the founding of CRIVA, in 1973, was its rivalry with SIL, which dates back to the 1940s. As Stoll (1982: 66) aptly notes, "[indigenous rights] organizing . . . was sometimes difficult to distinguish from patronage battles between rival brokers." Clearly, from the beginning the Vaupés Indian rights movement was an endeavor greatly influenced by non-Indians and continually linked to larger disputes occurring in all government agencies concerned with indigenous affairs, the struggle between SIL and Catholic church leaders, and debates occurring within the national anthropology establishment.[23] For some time the Vaupés has been a battleground in a "War of the Gods," as a film made by Brian Moser characterized it, and the entry of organizations such as CRIVA into the fray added a new interest group and level of intrigue.[24] An SIL veteran maintained that organizations like CRIVA would destroy Indian culture faster than anything else, and that mutual "blackmail" between rival outsiders (which permits each to go about its plans, scrutinized by the others) was a superior alternative (David Stoll, personal communication).

CRIVA soon began to change, affected by the coca paste traffic and by outside organizations such as CRIC (Regional Council of Cauca Indians)

and ONIC. CRIC's attempt to reproduce itself elsewhere in Colombia has not met with success in the Vaupés. Difficulties with ONIC, difficulties within itself, difficulties with local state representatives, difficulties with the Church, difficulties with other Vaupés Indians sum up my impressions about CRIVA.

Virtually all interviewees, Indian and white, in Mitú and in Bogotá agreed that at present CRIVA has very little influence. The one area in which CRIVA was successful, from the Prefecture's point of view, was in its pressuring SIL and New Tribes missionaries to leave the region, especially in 1974.

As we have seen, some of CRIVA's problems—structurally and in image-management—definitely stem from its close association with the Prefecture. All non-CRIVA members interviewed agreed that in part CRIVA was a white creation. The Church maintains that it facilitated the founding of CRIVA to speed up the death throes of the debt-peonage system from the rubber period. A Mitú priest commented that Father Valencia Cano founded CRIVA because of the rubber exploitation of the Indians, to take the yoke from their necks, to show them they were not subject to anyone. While this surely was a major motivation, the role of the Church vis-à-vis CRIVA is more complicated. One interviewee in Bogotá, very much involved in indigenous grass-roots projects and knowledgeable about the Vaupés, commented:

> The priests say "you have to organize." And they organize, but the priests said that in order to continue managing the people. Thus although they [CRIVA leaders] are artificial officials, this corresponds to the interests of the mission. And with these Indians taking on state jobs comes individualism [e.g., a tendency to self-interest rather than commitment to one's constituency].

In a letter from CRIVA to *Unidad Indígena*, CRIVA disputes a reporter's attributing to a CRIVA member a statement that CRIVA encounters problems "because the leadership has not had the sufficient force, but has supported the dependency on Msgr. Belarmino Correa, who does not value indigenous culture" (*Unidad Indígena* 1984: 5). The writers of the letter denounce the article, saying it was not legally authorized by CRIVA, and that they demand the name of the author in order to: "take very drastic measures against this individual, because we know that he is trying to divide the good relations that we have always had with our Prefecture" (ibid.). In another letter in *Unidad Indígena*, the "Comrades of the Vaupés from Santa Rosa" strongly criticize the "mediocre" education provided by the Javerian clergy, because it is "given in a capitalist style, and they don't know the reality of our

necessities." This letter appears on the same page as a message from CRIVA, but, perhaps significantly, is not directly linked to it (*Unidad Indígena* 1975a: 5).

An example of the problem of paternalism is the extremely interesting comment by Monsignor Belarmino in ONIC's official organ:

> what if we leave the Vaupés (not a difficult thing to do), do you have a half-human solution for this people? Can the Indians defend themselves alone today? Would you be capable of controlling the avalanche of irresponsible people who are interested only in their personal advance?. . . You have the word and hopefully in the direction you're going you don't place the Indian in worse conditions than he was formerly. (*Unidad Indígena* 1975b: 8)

However, when talking about other kinds of outsiders being able to help Tukanoans, he states: "Indians of the Vaupés: In congresses and reunions of 'Whites' one thinks . . . that the Whites want to help you leave your marginalized position. But they . . . won't resolve your problems, you must find the solution" (October 1973, quoted in *Un Pastor en la Selva*: 39). One priest I interviewed did comment that the Church should change its position regarding CRIVA: "The Church has to leave CRIVA alone, so that it can mature, not be dependent. When a child falls down, you have to give him a hand up, but sometimes they have to pick themselves up."

Some interviewees commented that CRIVA is too linked to whites in general. A government functionary in Mitú stated that "CRIVA's leaders have more fear of whites than they do of their constituency, so they accomplish nothing." According to a lawyer involved in Colombian Indian land claims cases: "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 activist located in Bogotá indicated that CRIVA was too involved with the politics of the national Indian movement and this led to their being manipulated by other Indians with different interests. He criticized these outsider Indians, saying that they say: "'we're going to work with the *gente de base* [the people of the 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." The theme of paternalism and unwillingness to let CRIVA mature and find its own identity came up several times. CRIVA leaders are still in some ways playing the role

of students—both in terms of traditional Indian authority, in that all the leaders are young, and in terms of their ability to define and obtain what they want. Fostering leadership under these circumstances is difficult. One Bogotá interviewee remarked: "these groups would have been better *without* help from outsiders, it's another example of paternalism, they don't let them mature . . . the last thing CRIVA needs is another group of assessors making recommendations."

CRIVA also has a problem with internal divisions. One indication of this is the number of times CRIVA calls for unity in its own publications, for example: "[During the third congress] a great interest was seen for the necessity for UNITY without distinguishing tribes, nor clans, nor religious beliefs, in order to study the most urgent problems" (from a report by CRIVA in *Unidad Indígena* 1976b: 8). In the same issue, Tukanoans are criticized for their "lack of great interest on the part of the distinct communities and surroundings."

The Church undoubtedly sees its promotion of CRIVA as an answer to the many critics who have accused missionaries of creating divisions and exacerbating previously existing factions in Tukanoan society. It is clear to all who know the Vaupés that the Prefecture has indeed employed a range of divide and conquer tactics over the years for winning Tukanoans away from rival enterprises. One of the most worrisome features of the strife among missionaries pertains to potential consequences in Bogotá: the specter of increased legalized repression of Indian civil rights movements justifying itself with claims of being necessary to solve disputes among evangelical, Catholic, indigenist, and traditionalist interests.[25]

However, the question of factionalism in the Vaupés is more complicated. Traditional Tukanoan society was hardly a utopia in this regard, and what may initially appear as new divisions probably build on already existing fault lines. The splits between old and young, proacculturation versus traditionalist, Mitú-oriented versus backwoods, are lines of cleavage that combine with the newer rivalries connected with allegiances to different non-Indian patrons. Furthermore, indigenous institutions of leadership are a complicated matter in the Vaupés, where a general dislike of individuals who assume superior airs is coupled with unmistakable indicators of hierarchy. Certainly, the Catholics exacerbated this with their policy of bypassing traditional headmen and appointing as settlement *capitanes* younger men who looked more favorably on the Church. The Church's catechist program in the early 1970s is another example; the local community's complaints about sullenness were fully merited in the case of one Desana catechist I visited with in a Tuyuka community on the Tiquié in 1970. And in the use of Tukanoan school teachers, the priests must contend with gripes from the host communi-

ties about arrogance (again, often fully warranted, especially if the teachers are Tukanos in a non-Tukano community). Thus, CRIVA and its problems of representation and leadership are to some extent continuations of already well-established patterns of conflict.

Part of CRIVA's problems stem from the fact that the more one becomes effective in a nontraditional form of leadership, especially if it involves brokering with outsiders, the less accepted one is as a traditional, authentic member of the culture. The one exception to this seems to be messianic leaders, but this is really an instance of the culture itself changing its ideas of leadership and what it means to be "traditional."

It also appears to be the case that CRIVA members who are from distant settlements and spend a lot of time in Mitú are becoming alienated from their communities. While Mitú has a substantial Indian population, politically and culturally Mitú is a white settlement, the only one in the entire Vaupés. An Indian activist from outside the Vaupés commented:

> 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. When the *resguardo* of the Vaupés was being created, it was all due to pressure from outsiders, there was no Tukanoan pressure.

CRIVA leaders seem to see a solution in being bicultural. One commented to me:

> Earlier they thought that to speak Spanish was superior, but it's the opposite. We are Indians. We don't reject the other culture but accept what is useful to us. It's biculturalism: you learn to dance and become a *payé* [shaman] but also you learn how to dress differently when you're with *doctores* [high-status whites]. But when you're with the people, you paint yourself and are with the people.

This interviewee maintained that CRIVA does attempt to find out what the communities want; for example, attempting to enlist older, traditional Tukanoans for teaching history classes in the schools became something CRIVA promoted after finding out that this was what people in the communities wanted. But other Tukanoans I spoke with stated that there is little communication between most communities and CRIVA. With few exceptions, CRIVA leaders appear to limit their travels south of the Vaupés River to mission villages, and when CRIVA sends delegations, the delegates do the talking.

In fact, policies about bilingualism and biculturalism can be found in the publications of the Prefecture, in government documents concerned with developing indigenous communities, and in CRIC and ONIC organs. We really do not know what the majority of Tukanoans think in this regard.

Many of the interviewees most knowledgeable about indigenous organizing stressed that indigenist organizations are most successful when they are most threatened. CRIVA lacks a strong identification with an issue: founded in terms of the struggle against the remaining traces of rubber debt-patronage and some incursions from *colonos* (homesteaders), its response to a new threat, coca paste trafficking, was hardly one of a unified stance against a white-introduced plague. One interviewee, for example, described one of CRIVA's branch organizations as little more than a coca-growers' guild, regulating prices and organizing payoffs. Currently, there is nothing that is both visibly and urgently menacing to fight for. Tukanoans indisputably face many dangers—inroads into Tukanoan traditions are perceived as threats to cultural integrity, and everyone in Mitú can come up with a long list of how Tukanoans could be better off. But it is hard to adopt the militant rhetoric one reads in publications from Indian groups elsewhere in the country (whose members are being assassinated, evicted, imprisoned, etc.), to "fight for" something like higher employment rates or for less of the discrimination Tukanoans experience. As Stephen Hugh-Jones notes, when discussing threats to Tukanoan identity, CRIVA represents a set of solutions looking for a problem (personal communication).

The national political situation and resulting policies make it now possible to speak of the *advantages* of being Indian in Colombia, or at least in the Vaupés. I am not referring to the familiar resentment expressed by some whites about *any* pro-Indian legislation, but analyses by knowledgeable people of the potentially negative consequences of pro-Indian government policies for groups like CRIVA. As one interviewee, a consultant in a number of pro-Indian projects, put it:

> Indians constitute only 3 to 4% of Colombia's population. It's good if the government knows you are an Indian, you can guilt-trip them into coming to study your community, talk to you, offer you things. Compared to the *campesinos* [peasants], they're pampered. Some groups like the Arhuacos are sophisticated and win battles against the *colonos* [homesteaders—usually peasants] by manipulating journalists.

Or, as another put it: "to have access to these services you must *be* an

Indian. Not perhaps a real Indian, but the appearance is important."

One government agent involved in Indian rights legislation commented that: "[Mitú Tukanoans] . . . they are molded by Colombian law now, they participate in the national system, *resguardos, cabildos* . . . they don't pay taxes, they receive public health. To be an Indian is an advantage in this sense." He noted that the above-mentioned advantages may not prove to be so in the long run because Tukanoans have not had the conditions under which to develop a strong enough sense of ethnic identity, or perhaps even a notion of being superior to white society, as have some Indians elsewhere in Colombia: "CRIVA says Indians have been discriminated against and now you must treat them well because they have been so badly treated. But whereas the Koguis say 'the whites are our younger brothers' [i.e., of lower status], they [Tukanoans] don't think like this in Mitú." Of course, "advantage" is only relative. *Why* certain policies and edicts are advantageous has to be spelled out, especially if one is speaking of long-term advantages.[26] And these knowledgeable people warn that groups like CRIVA risk co-optation and increasing dependency on the government.

Co-optation can also occur in interactions with other Indians. Some of CRIVA's characterizations of itself and the Tukanoan communities it represents do not fit with most Tukanoans' views of themselves and their culture. For example, a CRIVA member told me: "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." This individual made a specific comparison between CRIVA and CRIC, saying that more respect comes if groups unify themselves. While more traditional Tukanoans are probably not upset with the idea of forming federations for the purposes of promoting Tukanoan well-being, they probably would be upset with the idea of ending with the distinctions between Desana and Cubeo, and so on. I cannot imagine Tukanoans in the near future coming to agree that all the riverine Indians of the Vaupés should see one another as brothers.[27] In promoting this, CRIVA would probably be seen not as a bulwark against the end of Tukanoan culture but as speeding it up.

Some basic characteristics of Tukanoan society are distorted or not mentioned in Colombian Indian rights publications. For example, *Unidad Indígena* describes Vaupés language groups thus: "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" (1976c: 6–7). Whatever traditional Tukanoan notions are of land ownership, an association between land and language group exists in a symbolic, mythological sense only. Furthermore, local communities are intermingled with respect to language group affiliation; often a community's closest neighbors all belong to other language groups. In the same article, language groups are described in the following terms: "each culture conserves almost all of its own characteristics; each tribe speaks its own language, and owing to the contact between the different tribes, it results that in general each person speaks three, four or more different languages" (ibid.). No mention is made here of 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."

Furthermore, the article also states that the presence of missionaries is the reason Vaupés communities are divided and have problems among themselves. While it is true missionaries have produced much divisiveness, especially with regard to patronage battles among different missionary organizations, such a statement ignores the traditional raiding and feuding characteristic of lowland Amazonian groups, traditions still very much alive in Tukanoan mythology and ethnohistory (see, for example, Goldman 1981)—as well as other traditional causes of factionalism. Such a picture does not only appear in the national indigenist press; a book written by a CRIVA leader, Jesús Santacruz, *Fundamental Principles of CRIVA*, is full of ethnographic errors showing the same type of bias.

In another issue of the national newspaper, we find the romantic assertion that the land is worked communally: "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* 1976a: 11). Other examples can be offered of what I consider to be a systematic bias toward describing Tukanoans in terms of a general image of tropical forest Indians—an image that is simplified, romantic, and idealized. Incomprehensible arrangements, such as language exogamy, though fundamental to Tukanoan social structure, are glossed over or not mentioned at all. Insofar as Tukanoans are coming to describe themselves in these terms, as is evidenced by the Santacruz book, we have the beginnings of a process of cultural co-optation: Tukanoans are learning how to be proper Indians from non-Tukanoan Indian images and values. Many examples of this process can be found among Native Americans in the United States and Canada; what is interesting in the Vaupés is that we are seeing the beginnings of it.

Despite its unique characteristics, understanding the Tukanoan case helps our general comprehension of how ethnically diverse and rela-

tively powerless peoples can maintain their cultural and political autonomy within a highly bureaucratized and centralized state, be it capitalist or socialist. Tukanoans' traditional culture provides only a few empowering mechanisms in the current situation of extensive and rapid intrusion by the larger society. In societies like this one, as yet without a perceived threat to land base or to physical survival,[28] how to get to the point of being able to choose which aspects of modernization would be beneficial and which too costly may require traveling far on the road to incorporation. Interesting counterexamples (e.g., Maybury-Lewis 1983; Chapin 1985; Bonfil Batalla 1981) can be offered, but for many groups the battles won for cultural authenticity and autonomy have been somewhat pyrrhic victories, for the cost in terms of factionalization and acceptance of foreign mentalities and increased economic and cultural dependency has been high.

Nonetheless, barring catastrophe, Tukanoan culture *will* continue in the foreseeable future, albeit a culture evolving into a subculture—an ethnic group—as it increasingly participates in the dominant society. Whether Tukanoans respond to changing conditions by retaining, revamping, or rejecting traditional cultural forms is a matter of empirical observation and analysis. But it is certain that the meaning of any forms retained will be altered. Increasingly, Tukanoans' casting aside, altering, or preserving various traditions will be in part a matter of strategy in political engagements with non-Tukanoans—government agents, other Colombian Indians, the Church, and so forth. In this regard, understanding the history and current position of CRIVA is extremely instructive. Understanding the considerable differences separating Andean Indians from Indians of the forests and plains of Colombia has also been important.

The examples offered above of such strategies influencing Tukanoans' presentation of themselves to others and, perhaps, ultimately to themselves, are enlightening. The example given of indigenist publications' emphasizing the coterminality of Tukanoan language groups and clearly defined territories is congruent with the most effective pro-Indian position to take in the struggle for a secure land base. The absence of descriptions of Tukanoan language exogamy fits with general notions about face-to-face communities and cultural homogeneity in small-scale tropical forest Amerindian societies.

However, what we are seeing is not a black-and-white situation of Tukanoans' *either* resisting *or* accepting white society, or even "Indian" society as experienced and imparted by non-Tukanoan Indians. To some extent, Tukanoans will resist hegemonic attempts, yes, but the content of Tukanoan representations of their culture and identity will be gradually transformed as a result of Tukanoans' encounters with non-Tukanoan

ideologies, be they about modernization, religion, or indigenism.

The Vaupés is instructive as a case study because it illustrates many of the factors impeding, or at least complicating, the establishment of genuine self-sufficiency, increased autonomy and empowerment of native groups vis-à-vis the state, and maintenance of cultural authenticity. The most significant factors are: (1) bureaucratization, co-optation, and marginalization of leaders in indigenist organizations vis-à-vis traditional sectors, (2) lack of a sense of threat to land or other natural resources, (3) the siren coca, which promised the ultimately false promises bonanzas always offer, and (4) paternalism and divergent interests in institutions promoting change, even if they see themselves as promoting indigenous well-being. 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.

This chapter has suggested that Tukanoan conceptualizations of themselves as "Indian" are in a process of evolving into a form quite different from the traditional consciousness. The new consciousness is far more self-conscious and politicized. It derives from Tukanoans' increasing embeddedness in the Colombian nation-state, a process turning them into an ethnic group, as opposed to a distinct culture. It also stems from Tukanoans' being instructed by non-Tukanoans—both whites and Indians from elsewhere in Colombia and the world—on what it means to be an Indian, and, in some instances, what it means to be a Tukanoan. The problems CRIVA faces, both in terms of its own identity and its ability to represent all Tukanoans, vividly illustrate many of the general problems faced by any indigenist organization (see Smith 1985). In particular, a notable number of factors, internal and external to the organization, mitigate against CRIVA's achieving true grass-roots representativeness. In particular, certain factors that can be characterized as advantages to being an Indian in Colombia, which particularly apply to the Vaupés case, can still produce obstacles to achieving autonomy and group cohesion.

Notes

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1. "Tukanoan" 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 Tukanoans live on the Brazilian side of the border, this chapter considers only those in Colombian territory.

2. See Jackson (n.d.) for a discussion of how conventional notions of culture fail to characterize this change. Also see Wolf (1982); Cowlishaw (1987); S. Hugh-Jones (1987).

3. Bear in mind that we are not talking about *contact*—even extensive and with radical consequences—between whites and Indians, which has been occurring for centuries.

4. Groups such as present-day Wampanoag, Sioux, Navaho, Miskito, and Kuna, however, have much to teach us about later stages of this process.

5. 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. For information on coca in tropical forest areas of Colombia, see Arango and Child (1984) and Jaramillo, Mora, and Cubides (1986).

6. Messianic-type movements among Arawakans are analyzed by Wright and Hill (1986) and Wright (1981b), and among Tukanoans by S. Hugh-Jones (1981).

7. CRIVA would be termed an ethnic federation in Smith's (1985) typology.

8. A list of acronyms: ONIC—Organización Nacional de Indígenas de Colombia; CRIVA—Consejo Regional de Indígenas del Vaupés; UNIP—Unión de Indígenas del Papurí; UDIC—Unión de Indígenas Cubeos; UNIZAC—Unión de Indígenas de la Zona de Acaricuara; ORIVAM—Organización de Indígenas del Vaupés Medio; UNIQ—Organización de Indígenas del Querarí; ORIT—Organización de Indígenas del Tiquié; ALUBVA—Alianza y Lucha del Bajo Vaupés.

9. This is a simplified description; in particular the Cubeo and Makuna are exceptions in some crucial respects.

10. For more comprehensive treatments of Tukanoan ethnography, see Århem (1981); Goldman (1963); C. Hugh-Jones (1979); S. Hugh-Jones (1979); Jackson (1983); Reichel-Dolmatoff (1971). Also consult Chernela (1982, n.d.).

11. 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).

12. See Stoll (1982), on the Planas Affair, a series of tortures and killings in the Columbian eastern plains perpetrated by homesteaders on Guahibo Indians.

13. Violent interactions have characterized Tukanoan-white relations well into the twentieth century. Stephen Hugh-Jones notes that one could say that [in the Vaupés] the economies of Indians and whites are *complementary*—Indians want goods, whites want rubber, coca, and so on, while in the highlands the two economies are antagonistic—both want the same land (personal communication). Also see Jackson (1984a).

14. This is not to say that highland Indians do not change over time (the Otavaleños of Ecuador are a good example) nor that lowland groups do not seek to preserve their lifeways and reject certain elements of white culture. The Colombian Arhuacos are an example.

15. Reports of such clashes between the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, the oldest, largest, and best organized of the several guerrilla organizations) and Indians appear regularly in the Colombian press. See, for example, *Unidad Indígena* (1985) regarding the assassination of a local Indian leader.

16. A radical urban guerrilla faction that until recently tried to launch a national movement from various rural areas, which is alleged to have kidnapped and assassinated the SIL linguist Chester Bitterman in 1981. The Brazilian *Jornal da Tarde* of Oct. 17, 1985, reported a base of 500 M-19 in the Colombian Vaupés (as reported in *Aconteçeu* 1987: 97). However, Stephen Hugh-Jones is of the opinion that such claims are flimsy and basically serve the purpose of justifying a strong military presence in the Brazilian Vaupés.

17. This has been remarked on by so many people knowledgeable about the Vaupés that I have no doubts about its accuracy; for understandable reasons I am not attributing this information to any named persons.

18. Five Vaupés anthropologists, myself included, participated in a constructive-criticism session with Catholic clergy in Bogotá in early 1969.

19. See, for example, "¿Problema indígena o indigenista?" (Indian problem or indigenist problem?), *Revista de Misiones* (March–April 1974: 57–58).

20. The SIL publications dealing with Tukanoan nonlinguistic culture (e.g., a book on material culture) are superficial and not very useful; nonetheless, such activities were a prod to the Catholics to engage in similar enterprises.

21. Not all of the wrinkles have been ironed out of this one: when I asked a priest in Mitú how the Church could reconcile having elder Tukanoan men teach about myths, given the mission of the Church to preach the gospel, he replied, "this is what is waiting for us to deal with."

22. I am grateful to Darna Dufour for information on this matter.

23. See Friedemann and Arocha (1982); Arocha and Friedemann (1984); Friedemann (1984); Arocha (1984).

24. See also Stoll (1981, 1982); van Emst (1966); Reichel-Dolmatoff (1972); Hvalkof and Aaby (1981); Jackson (1984b).

25. *Cultural Survival Newsletter* (1979); Urbina (1979a, 1979b); Martinez (1979); *Unidad Indígena* (1979: 10).

26. An example is the Akwesasne Nation's policy about not utilizing federal

assistance, especially welfare programs, described in the film *Akwesasne: Another View*. Similarly, Morris (1985) has argued that legislation favoring Australian Aborigines has only succeeded in creating a welfare-dependent minority.

27. See Jackson (1983) for a discussion of the scandal that erupted in 1970 when it was found out that a priest was promoting a marriage between two Tukanos—who of course called each other "brother" and "sister."

28. In this, the Tukanoan communities of the Colombian Vaupés differ markedly from their Brazilian neighbors.

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