

HOSTILE ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN NUKAK AND TUKANOANS:
CHANGING ETHNIC IDENTITY IN THE VAUPÉS, COLOMBIA

by Jean E. Jackson

This paper¹ is about a group of hunter-gatherer Indians, known as Nukak, who were temporarily resettled for two months in two communities in the Vaupés region of southeastern Colombia. In order to understand the painful experiences the Nukak underwent during this time, it is necessary to examine the traditional patterns of interaction between Tukanoans and Makú, the two indigenous groups inhabiting the Vaupés, and the ways in which ethnic identity in the region is currently being negotiated and transformed.

THE ENCOUNTER

In April of 1988 a group of Indians appeared in Calamar, a town in the province of Guaviare in southeastern Colombia (see Map 1). These people were clearly fleeing a dangerous situation to the east, and apparently originally intended to continue their journey westward. Another group arrived near Caño Jabón (Jabón Creek), a tributary of the Guaviare River to the north.²

These Indians were hunter-gatherers, completely nomadic, naked, and without a single item of White material culture. They spoke only their own language. They were originally composed of forty-one people: four men, four adolescent boys, and women and children (Wirpsa, 1988, p. 1B).³

Many mysteries remain as to where these people, now known to be Nukak, came from, and why they appeared at the doorstep of a rural school in Calamar. At the time, very little was known about them, and this state of affairs continued for some time due to the fact that, although twenty indigenous languages were used to communicate with the Nukak,⁴ there was no success in communicating with them.

Perhaps the most surprising feature of this encounter between these mysterious hunter-gatherers and rural peasants was the warm welcome the Nukak received. Calamar lacks Indians who are culturally distinct from local Whites to any extensive degree. Although some Tukanoan *colonos* (homesteaders), who have

FUTILITY

She'd treated by son with such a bruised tenderness that I felt discomfited. We met several times later during her week-long stay. We did not have a chance for such an intimate talk again.

I thought of a whole line of anonymous women lying in a row at the local women's hospital in a stinking room awaiting abortions. What of their predicaments?

What of the children, who were indulged with sweet words, candies, toys, expensive clothes? How could their caretakers breathe endearments, and with the same breath say *wo da si ni* (I'll kill you) to scare them into submission. There was both the open embracing of children with the cold-blooded practicality of mass abortions numbering in the billions since implementation of the one-child policy in 1971. I felt acutely the side which I'd cast my vote on, in my room over tea in civil tones.

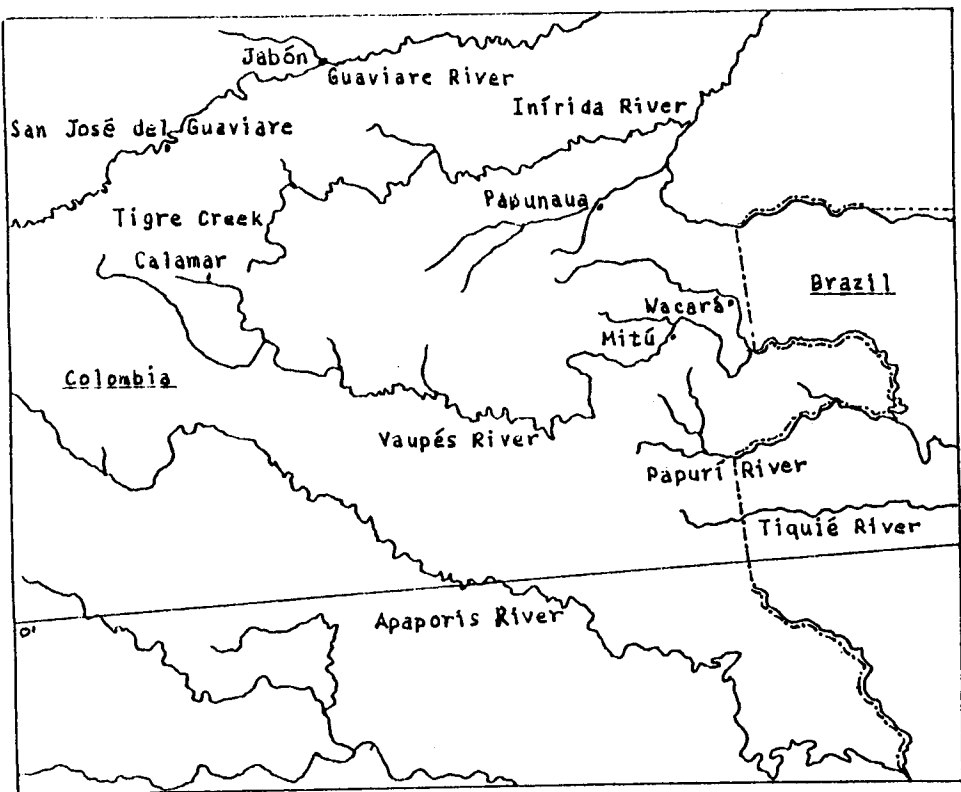
The conversation dwindled into other topics, student's studies, books, our children with futures.

Later that night, I walked Mrs. H.K. Brent and Xiao Chen to the school gate. The last bus ran at 9:30 p.m. They arrived at about 9:40 p.m., but they must have caught it. They didn't return to my room again that night. Back home, I felt a deep shiver that reached into my chestbone. My son was sleeping, curled up in the divine innocence of the sleeping young.

I mused then dangerously. If I became the mother of yet another child, if the laws were different, if I could bear the immense responsibilities of mothering a young infant into adulthood, if I could settle into a routine money-earning life, then I would hold a baby in my arms. I would readjust my habits again to make way for this thundering little life. I would love as if she herself rolled forth from my own flesh. And I would name the child after her natural mother.

I would call her Futility.

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Source: Wirpsa and Mondragón, 1988

immigrated into the region from the Vaupés territory farther east, can still speak their native languages, in dress, subsistence patterns, and other behaviors and values all of Calamar's inhabitants participate in the White *colono* lifestyle. Despite the fact that stories abound in the region about "savage" Indians, apparently all of Calamar's citizens accepted the Nukak, and tried to help and protect them as much as possible. Calamar residents considered the Nukak to be "pacifist, good natured, curious and sensitive" (Wirpsa and Mondragón, 1988, p. 38), as well as "happy, amiable, sensitive, neither cannibals, nor tall nor blond" (Chaves and Wirpsa, 1988, p. v)--these latter qualifications apparently in response to various legends circulating in the area. For example, Calamar's residents angrily protested an inaccurate, sensationalistic report about the Nukak that appeared in the regional newspaper *VEA*.

The help which Calamar's citizens extended to them included organizing committees to find lodging (a camp several blocks from town); giving them food, clothing (while worrying if the clothing carried contagious diseases), and other items; entertaining them with trips to the town discothèque and with rides in jeeps; and organizing shifts of guards to watch over them. Virtually all the town's civic organizations and other sodalities, from communal action to various unions (the most active being the Guaviare Union of Small-Scale Agriculturalists), from the Sports Committee to the Prostitutes' Club, showed a rare and remarkable fascination with the Nukak.⁵ Nukak women were invited into the town's beauty parlors and given manicures, and children were taken to *colonos'* homes and taught to bring firewood and water in exchange for food and rudimentary Spanish lessons. Each organization made a proposal which outlined how to protect and take care of the Nukak. Photographic exhibits of the visitors appeared on bulletin boards, inviting discussion as to the resolution of this problem. Everyone speculated about the Nukak's history and why they had turned up in Calamar. Commissions were formed to work out a solution.

These efforts were not adequate in solving the very serious problems facing the Nukak. First of all, they apparently wanted to continue their journey in the direction of "where the sun sets" (Wirpsa and Mondragón, 1988, p. 36), although they seemed to be content to remain in Calamar for awhile.

One of the many mysteries of the case is why the Nukak chose to go west in the first place. Various explanations offered suggest that the Nukak were: 1) looking for their relatives, 2) escaping vengeful *colonos* retaliating because Nukak were suspected of kidnapping a White boy, 3) fleeing a cold epidemic they believed had been sent by *colonos*, 4) responding to a dream one of the women had had, or 5) fleeing violence from non-*colono* Whites such as the army or cocaine traffickers.

Colonos in Papunaua, Guaviare, had been reporting attacks from a right-wing death squad since 1986, and there were complaints about an unmarked "killer" DC-3 plane shooting at communities and at people travelling on the river (Wirpsa and Mondragón, 1988, p. 36). Both Leonardo Reina of the Colombian Anthropology Institute, ICAN (personal communication) and Leslie Wirpsa (personal communication) are of the opinion that the Nukak had clearly been subjected to an attack from the air, although whether from a helicopter or plane cannot be established, and from the land. Reina believes this attack probably was perpetrated by the army or an anti-narcotics mission.

A second problem was that the Calamar Nukak (very little information is available about the Nukak who turned up in Caño Jabón) were too few and too demographically imbalanced to be able to survive by themselves. Some authorities from *Asuntos Indígenas* (AI, the Office of Indigenous Affairs) apparently thought at the beginning that these people were the only ones left of their ethnic group.⁶

Calamar authorities soon concluded that the current situation could not continue. They began a campaign, contacting journalists, and inviting commissions from AI and the National University in Bogotá and the University del Valle, Cauca to come to Calamar. The *Corporación de Aracataca*, an agency concerned with Indians and environment in the Colombian Amazon, also sent a representative. But the big surprise was the arrival of an unannounced third commission from new Tribes Mission, one of whose two missionaries, Michael Conduff, was able to speak Nukak. These two men said they understood the language because they had been working with the Nukak for twenty years.⁷ They said they had originally entered the Guaviare region because of a report of a massacre of "savage" Indians they had read about in the local press. None of the other officials involved in the case knew about such an event, nor remembered any newspaper articles.

Although clearly the two new Tribes missionaries knew from the beginning that other Nukak existed, they did not communicate this to the authorities. Various officials began to recommend that the Nukak be taken to "their elder relatives (*mayores*)," higher-ranking Makú groups to the east (Wirpsa, 1988; see also Wirpsa and Mondragón, 1988⁸). *Makú* is a generic name for two languages found in the Colombian Vaupés region: Cacula (Kakwa), which includes dialects spoken by Bará Makú (not to be confused with the Tukanoan Bará) and the Nukak, and Jupda (also known as Ubde or Hupdú).⁹

Third, despite the welcome that the Nukak received in Calamar, they faced grave danger if they remained in the region or travelled further west. Although some *colonos* argued in favor of the Nukak staying, saying, "let them stay here . . . the children come to our ranches and we give them food and clothing . . . they're learning to work, to bring firewood and water, and to speak Spanish," after almost

six months in Calamar the Nukak were dispersed, disorganized, and, according to some reports, depressed. Although the children would go visiting, the women stayed in their hammocks all day long. Furthermore, the region was not safe for the Nukak should they decide to leave Calamar: with the blessing of the National Economic Plan, which gives priority to mineral explorations, prospectors freely enter the region looking for uranium, gold, and oil. Furthermore, cocaine mafiosi, paramilitary squads, guerrillas (see Molano, 1989), the army, and antimarcotic teams carrying out coca eradication projects pose additional threats. The Nukak clearly were no strangers to violence; at least two arrived in Calamar with shotgun bullets in their shoulders, and they would immediately become apprehensive around aircraft or people bearing arms (Wirpsa and Mondragón, 1988, p. 36).

Perhaps the Nukak's biggest problem was that, until the arrival of Conduff, no one could understand them. Until then, communication was rudimentary, consisting of sign language on the part of Calamar residents and, according to all, the Nukak's extremely adroit imitation of White gestures and speech.

As can be seen by the calendar in the Appendix, the authorities finally arrived at a solution. Three couples were to be brought to Calamar from three different Makú settlements in the Vaupés: Wacará, Piracara, and Tarara. Apparently the original plan was to obtain more information about them with the help of the Kakwa residing in these villages.¹⁰

As it turned out, all the Makú who journeyed to Calamar were Kakwa from one settlement, Wacará, located on a stream that empties into the Vaupés River three hours' downstream from Mitú. This town has been the site of Summer Institute of Linguistics language work and mission activities since the late sixties, when Marilyn Cathcart and Lois Lowers arrived (see Cathcart, 1973).¹¹ Eventually two couples and a baby were flown to Calamar in March, and the month-long orientation workshop began. The trip was arranged by AI, CRIVA (Regional Council of Indians of the Vaupés), and ONIC, the Colombian National Indian Organization. The authorities stressed that these two couples went voluntarily, after hearing a tape in which Calamar Nukak spoke and sang. The two Kakwa couples stayed a month in Calamar.

In April, 1989 the Nukak, apparently twenty-four in number by now, were flown to Mitú. They were greeted by a crowd of people at the airport and taken to the hospital, where they were given medical exams and treatment. Then they were taken to Wacará. But after fifteen days they wanted to go back to Mitú, where they remained for a month under what appeared to be extremely difficult circumstances. All the authorities involved were at a loss over what to do.

What happened during the fifteen-day sojourn in Wacará is something of a mystery. In Mitú, various Tukanoans with whom I spoke during my visit in July,

1989 said that the residents of Wacará had never wanted the Nukak, but were afraid to go against the AI decision. Clearly, given that the adult Nukak were all widows, their arrival represented an economic strain for their hosts. Some of the rumors which I heard included comments that the Kakwa of Wacará considered the Nukak to be savages. Various Whites in Mitú, however, told me that on the contrary, the Wacará Kakwa had welcomed the Nukak very warmly, giving them "food, inviting them to dances, inviting them to hunt," and that it had been the Nukak themselves who had not wanted to remain. One explanation given as to why they did not wish to stay was that they were disappointed in the availability of game. And virtually everyone agrees that the Nukak women were disappointed in the availability of men; Wirpsa describes the women as "pleasantly aggressive" in this regard (personal communication). This may have created problems in Wacará: it certainly occasioned a lot of gossip in Mitú, where stories were told about how, in Wacará, Nukak women made passes at Kakwa women's husbands. Apparently all--Whites and Tukanoans--agreed that the Nukak's demographic imbalance was creating problems and would continue to do so.

In sum, although what really happened during those fifteen days in Wacará may never be entirely known, especially given the difficulties of the situation, it is not surprising that the Nukak did not want to stay in Wacará.

In any case, the Nukak returned to Mitú. A veritable rumor mill followed, and what was already a crisis became very nasty, indeed. People gave all kinds of examples about the Nukak's ignorance and lack of civilization. The Nukak were said to be cannibals. Nukak did not really bathe. Nukak did not want to wear clothes. The Nukak's impressive ability at mimicking Spanish gestures was also offered as a sign of their low level of development, for this related to the idea that they were childlike and did not speak a proper language. Some said the Nukak could only communicate by sign language. Some Tukanoans would grab their children when a Nukak appeared and run away, fearing for their safety. Everyone complained that the Nukak did not understand private property, that they would go into a garden and steal bananas and pineapples. Some complained that Nukak women did not go to the fields to farm. Nukak were said to eat raw meat; even worse, the dentist at the hospital told me that a Tukanoan had told him that he had seen a Nukak eating a live monkey. When I asked him whether he believed this story, he said yes. Others commented on how much the Nukak looked like monkeys. Stories abounded about how Nukak women made advances to all kinds of men, even the soldiers from the military base upriver from town. One story began with an attempted rape of the Nukak women by some soldiers, the women getting the better of them by catching their testicles in their teeth, ready to bite them off and eat them.

In Mitú, the Tukanoans with whom I spoke said they had not been surprised at the failure of the Wacará resettlement scheme. One commented, "I told the representative from Indian Affairs, 'listen, I know the Indian communities in this region, and I know they aren't going to want to accept these Nukak in their communities.'" Many of the Tukanoans I spoke with believed that AI (*Asuntos Indígenas*, Indian Affairs) had forced the people of Wacará to accept the Nukak, and that there had been bad feelings even before the Nukak arrived:

They [the inhabitants of Wacará] consented out of fear. They accepted them, but they didn't want them. They rejected them, well, a bad thing for the Nukak. And they [the Wacará people] won't accept them. So they brought them here [to Mitú] again.

An additional anecdote regarding the Nukak's stay in Wacará was that the Nukak, "like savages," had cut down and used for firewood a wooden post which functioned as a weathervane at the airstrip used by the SIL (Summer Institute of Linguistics) missionaries.

Although the Nukak were receiving food from CRIVA, the *comisaría* (the governor's office), and AI, and their health was being looked after, it was clearly an impossible situation. The Nukak became virtual prisoners in the house provided for them, such was the authorities' concern about their safety.

Some Cubero Tukanoans went to the representative of AI in Mitú with a solution: they would take the "Macusios" back to their village on the Vaupés River, feed them and give them a roof and protection in exchange for labor in the fields and at home (Elsa Gomez, personal communication). As we shall see, this reflects a well-established Vaupés pattern--although playing a servant role does not seem to have been part of the Nukak's cultural traditions. These Cubero were disappointed and uncomprehending when the AI representative declined their offer.¹²

After a month, AI requested an inspection of the New Tribes mission station to the south of Laguna Pavón, Guaviare. This mission has a house a shelter for Nukak when they come to visit (none stay there more than a few days at a time), an airstrip, and a dispensary. Six people connected to New Tribes are attached to this mission. This visit, made by Robert Franco of INDERENA (*Instituto Nacional de Recursos Naturales*, the federal conservation agency) and Diego Azcarte of AI, was videotaped. The videotape dramatically shows at least 50 Nukak running away when the airplane landed, the first incontrovertible evidence that the Calamar Nukak belong to a much larger grouping. During this visit New Tribes' personnel told of their knowledge about the seven Nukak clans and the relations among them. Franco and Azcarte spoke with a young man whose mother had belonged to the

same clan as the Calamar Nukak, finding out more about why they had migrated so far. AI then sent representatives to Mitiú with this young man and, after some consultations in Bogotá, decided to fly the Nukak to this mission station. It carried out this plan the following week. After arriving, the Calamar Nukak stayed around the mission for medical inspection and treatment for about ten days, and apparently then returned to the forest and a nomadic existence in territory they clearly already knew. During these ten days (during which time the videotape was made), the Nukak divested themselves of their clothes, put on arm and leg bands, and began sleeping in the forest. After Franco and Azcarate returned to Bogotá, New Tribes informed them that the Nukak had eventually completely returned to the forest. However, AI did not verify this.

When I arrived in Mitiú a month after the Nukak had been flown out, people were still speaking passionately about the experience, and, although everyone was willing to talk, no one, White or Indian, had anything good to say about the Nukak. Puzzled about the intensity of this negative response, I began to ask everyone I could about these events in a more systematic fashion.

I was not surprised that both Whites and Tukanos negatively responded to people like the Nukak; Whites basically are of the opinion that anything Indian is inferior, and Tukanos believe that anything associated with Makú is inferior. But I was surprised by the force of the opprobrium in Mitiú's inhabitants' comments. The degree of vehemence that emerged in my interlocutors' comments was remarkable, as was the fact that Tukanos outdid the Whites in this regard.

MAKU-TAKUANOAN RELATIONS, TRADITIONAL AND CURRENT

Why such heavy affect? I believe that one reason lies in the tendency on the part of Mitiú and Wacará residents to see the Nukak as "less than Makú." To understand what this means, it is necessary to provide some background about traditional Makú-Tukanos relations.

Some of what went on, both during the Nukak's sojourn in Mitiú and after, was doubtlessly due to simple misunderstanding. Since every culture is ethnocentric, people will tend to see different behavior patterns--and the values supporting and justifying such behaviors--as inferior. Any ethnic group, when it wants to deprecate another, will very likely comment on the other group's eating habits (eating raw meat, or, worse, cannibalism, or eating something while it's still living); its sanitary standards; its morals (particularly regarding sexuality); its language. Riverine, horticultural Indians like the Tukanos will likely see interfluvial foragers as deficient in personal hygiene and will not condone foragers' "gathering" bananas and other crops from gardens. Tukanos' comments about

Nukak language are also familiar--putting down a language as a way of putting down its speakers is virtually universal.

But I believe that what I witnessed in Mitiú in July was due to more than simple ethnocentrism, provincialism, or lack of tolerance. Also assuredly playing a role was a traditional social system that continues to structure ethnic relations between the two groups, a system that includes well-entrenched forms for denigrating Makú. This legacy undoubtedly contributed to the intensity of the rejection which the Nukak experienced in Mitiú.

In addition to the role played by these traditional interaction patterns, the confused and complicated feelings arising from current shifts as to how Indian identity is conceived, specifically Tukanos identity, also played a role in fostering such a virulent response to the Nukak. Comment made by Tukanos schoolteachers during a two-week seminar on ethno-linguistics and ethno-education which I attended illustrate these changes and their effects.

The literature on the Vaupés is replete with reports that Tukanos have traditionally considered Makú as not quite human. Although varying to some degree throughout the region, in general Makú have stood in a subordinate position to Tukanos. Observable differences include Tukanos' greater sedentarization, and more extensive and elaborate horticulture and fishing. For the most part, differences between Tukanos and Makú are those of degree, but when Tukanos use Makú as a symbol these differences are often transformed into stark contrasts.¹³ Space does not permit a comprehensive discussion of Makú-Tukanos interaction or symbolism. I merely want here to summarize those aspects of traditional Makú-Tukanos relations most germane to understanding Tukanos reactions to the Nukak.

"Symbiotic" relationships between Tukanos and Makú local groups¹⁴ can assume a relatively temporary form, consisting of one- or two-day events in which meat, labor, or various forest products are exchanged for cultivated goods and white trade items. Or they can consist of long-term interaction occurring between a Makú family or larger group and a Tukanos longhouse community. These latter arrangements resemble a servant-master relationship.

These kinds of interactions between Makú and Tukanos are the basis of a Tukanos classificatory system in which Tukanos represent positive, and Makú negative, attributes. For example, that Makú marry within their linguistic unit and have a stronger constraint toward regional endogamy provides evidence for Tukanos that Makú "marry their sisters," or "are like animals." One of the meanings of the term "Makú" in the various languages of the region simply refers to wild, savage, people.¹⁵ Makú play an important role in Tukanos myth as examples of what *not* to do in the domains of social structure (e.g., marriage practices),

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personal behavior (e.g., urination practices), language, diet (e.g., non-observance of food taboos), dress (lack of attention to body adornment), subsistence efforts, and ritual and cosmological understanding. Thus, Makú have played the familiar role of scapegoat and stern reminder of what can happen when people become sloppy about deportment, lazy, lustful, etc.---they cease being people. Other themes that crop up are cannibalism, stupidity, sorcery, gluttony, and (from the earlier published accounts) slavery.

Makú also have served as a symbol used in the internal ranking system of each Tukanooan language group; many authors report that Tukanooans use some of the characteristics attributed to Makú to describe low-ranking Tukanooan clans in each language group as well (see, for example, Goldman, 1963, p. 91). Low-ranking clans are reminded of their station (and specific individuals sometimes insulted) with Makú symbols familiar to us from the Nukak case: nakedness, inferior speech, inattention to dietary taboos, etc. And Makú are symbols of servanthood, as in the frequently-heard characterization of them as "cigar-lighters."

In sum, Tukanooan interactions with, and characterizations of, Makú embody the following themes: (1) Makú represent what "true people" do not do; (2) Makú represent what low-ranking Tukanooans are like; (3) Makú represent servants. Makú occupy an ambiguous and ambivalent position in Tukanooan explanations of their social order, one which figures in the kinds of justifications used to maintain many systems of dominance: while on the one hand Makú are described as inherently inferior, on the other they are spoken of not so much as nonhuman but as *potentially* human "if only they would . . ." This ambiguity, characterized by an alternating separation from and approach towards the inferior other, makes for complicated relationships, opinions, and, certainly, feelings, because, while at times the other is seen as categorically other, at other times the other is seen in terms of identification with, even incorporation into, the self.¹⁶

During their sojourn in Mitú the Nukak were clearly associated with Vaupés Makú and assigned to the category of not quite human. Perhaps even Wacará also made such a judgment, for these people have only recently "overcome" their Makú identity and taken on most of the attributes of Tukanooans.¹⁷

It seems clear that the arrival of the Nukak brought up a number of strongly-held and ambivalent feelings about Indian identity in the Tukanooans living near Mitú. Apparently the Nukak reminded everyone of issues they would just as soon not have to think about. For example, when the seminars I attended on ethno-linguistics and ethno-education showed the films "Last of the Curva" and "War of the Gods," both of which are sympathetic to the hunter-gatherer way of life, Tukanooan viewers were uncomfortable. They joked about the warm and supportive depiction

of what they perceive as primitive and crude lifeways. Part of their confusion doubtless came from the discrepancy between the film's attitudes towards hunter-gatherers and what Tukanooans understand to be White attitudes towards "uncivilized" lifeways. Tukanooans are just beginning to hear about cultural relativism, or about a pan-Indian identity that would classify them together with Makú in a positive way, a classification at present difficult for them to accept. Assertions that Tukanooans should consider Makú as just another Vaupés group or even as their Indian "brothers," or that a nomadic, foraging, interfluvial lifestyle is even as their Indian "brothers," or that a nomadic, foraging, interfluvial lifestyle is praiseworthy for ecological and other reasons are extremely new ideas, to say the least. From what I can tell, Tukanooans are quite ambivalent about such notions. For example, a Cubeo joked to me that the Makú should head a list of all the Vaupés ethnic groups in a research proposal a group of Tukanooans were writing "because they are always put last." He was not really suggesting that Makú should head the list, he was showing his awareness of recently introduced ideas as to how democracy and equality should be extended to all indigenous Vaupés groups, even Makú. Such ideas are contained in publications of ONIC (the national Indian organization in Colombia) and similar groups, as well as in those from White institutions such as the Catholic mission and SIL (Summer Institute of Linguistics/Wycliffe Bible Translators), but are barely beginning to be mentioned in publications of CRIVA (the Vaupés Indian organization), such as *La Voz de la Tribu*.

Another contributing factor is the complaint, ironically heard these days from many Whites in Mitú, that Indians do not really want to save their culture but instead want to become Whites (ironic because until ten years ago this was what these very same Whites were working towards--see Jackson, 1989, n.d.). In this sense, Makú--and Nukak--are exemplary, a kind of proto- or hyper-Indian, for if we posit a White-Indian continuum, then Makú-Nukak are at one pole, and high-status, educated Whites at the other.¹⁸ The dilemmas encountered by Tukanooans in reconciling their desire to preserve their culture and identity and their desire to think and behave in approved-of fashion are exacerbated in discussions about how Nukak, or Curva, or Makú are praiseworthy because they represent true Indianness, ecological sensitivity, egalitarianism, and so forth. These painful dilemmas were eloquently illustrated by the Tukanooans attending the seminars on ethno-linguistics and ethno-education. These individuals most often blamed themselves for the contradictions they lived. Their confusions were deep and agonizing: about what to value and preserve of Tukanooan culture; about how to demonstrate Mitú Tukanooans' superiority to the Nukak without appearing to be judging them too harshly; about the need to become aware of and to have solidarity with other Indians in Colombia and elsewhere in the Americas; about what the role of CRIVA,

the local Indian organization should be in all this; about whether they were "betraying" their pupils and their own children because they teach and speak Spanish too much.

Hence, the three factors of basic ethnocentrism, traditional Tukanoan-Makú patterns of interaction, and recently introduced ideas about the need to achieve pan-Indian identity created an atmosphere which produced a remarkably antipathetic reaction to the Nukak. The traditional structured interaction between Makú and Tukanoans, characterized by built-in dominance and ambivalence, is mirrored in Tukanoan-White relations, and the Nukak became the scapegoat for all the negative effects of these patterns. The residents of Calamar were culturally and socially distant enough from the Nukak so that these Calamar *colonos* could see the Nukak almost as pets--especially given that almost from the beginning the Calamar Nukak consisted of only women and children. However, the residents of Wacará and Miti did not have enough of this distance between themselves and Nukak not to feel threatened by them and the circumstances under which they appeared. The Nukak represented lifeways that were "less than Makú" with respect to the distance between Tukanoan culture and the admired and emulated White lifestyle. Doubtlessly the Nukak not only reminded the Makú of Wacará and of any Makú living in Miti of their own low origins, but also reminded all Tukanoans about their inferior status vis-a-vis Whites. When we combine the fact that the Nukak symbolized a degraded status with the fact that somehow these "savages" were attended to by high-prestige authorities who fed them and rained other gifts on them, we can understand some of the confusion and resentment that resulted. That the Nukak, during their sojourn in Miti, would evoke from Tukanoans very little of the good will and tolerance shown by the Calamar *colono* community could have been anticipated.

DISCUSSION

The information we have about the fourteen-month saga of the Calamar Nukak raises several points of discussion. One is the almost total lack of official information about the Nukak prior to this group's appearance.¹⁹ Although published information did exist,²⁰ no anthropologists or government agents involved in the case possessed any accessible information whatsoever on these people. Only New Tribes, having been in contact with Nukak for twenty years, knew that there were at least 800 Nukak, knew 350 of them personally, knew that there were seven clans, knew that the Nukak's western boundary was such-and-such, etc. Miguel Conduff had been at the mission station south of Laguna Pavon for six years. (NT had originally established a mission on the river but, when threatened by

guerrillas, moved to a location inland.) And New Tribes did not divulge this information for many months. The ICAN commission found out only very slowly about NT's program for attracting Nukak--its airstrip, its medical services, its work on the language, its documents and photographs.

This point was debated in the press, and continues to be discussed. How could scholarly and official bureaus contain no easily obtainable information on 800 Indians? How could a North American missionary group have such a "monopoly" of information and access? How could their work remain so secret for so long? And how, now that such information is accessible, can it be that there are apparently no means to officially force NT Mission to be more responsible to the Colombian authorities who, after all, gave them permission to reside in the country and carry out their proselytizing mission? This issue evoked much bitterness in the two conferences on the Nukak in Bogotá I attended in the summer of 1989. Apparently, unlike Summer Institute of Linguistics, New Tribes' contract with the government is much less exigent.²¹ Second, New Tribes so far has apparently not been able to sedentarize or missionize the Nukak; the degree of contact and incipient dependency is unclear. The evidence from the videotape argues that Nukak have apparently wanted nothing in the way of White goods, and have chosen to have contact with Whites only under extreme circumstances: when they get sick and visit the mission for several days and then fade into the forest again, or when they have been attacked and migrate to places like Calamar and Caño Jabón. If this is the case, it is interesting to speculate whether any forager group can be missionized while it is completely nomadic and able to choose to remain self-sufficient, even with other options available (see Bodley, 1990, pp. 3-24 for a discussion of how many tribal peoples are *not* eager to exchange their cultural lifeways for the benefits of civilization). However, Wirpsa and Mondragón are of the opinion that Nukak do possess White goods, and that the videotape made by Franco and Azcarate is based on too short a period of time to be conclusive in this regard.²²

The Nukak case leads one to speculate anew just what the missionary-Indian-government relationship should consist of. The authorities with whom I spoke who had been involved with the Nukak problem all were of the opinion that New Tribes initially purposely avoided revealing that there were others besides NT personnel who could communicate with the Nukak--e.g., other groups of Nukak and Makú who understood the Nukak language. NT has a reputation for not allying itself with any other organization.²³ According to one government representative in Bogotá, NT's attitude is one of "we don't accept anyone's help: we have our own planes, our own doctors and we don't see any reason to give information to anyone else." In the discussions I heard in June and July, the consensus was, "It's the Indians themselves who have to decide whether to keep or reject a missionary. But one missionary

organization shouldn't have a monopoly." But while the representatives of the various government agencies agree that NT should not have a "carte blanche to do what they want," an alternative scheme so far as not been implemented. Despite cries of "Colombia's sovereignty is being compromised," no detailed alternative proposal was promoted by representatives of the various government agencies involved.²⁴

Third, a study of the Nukak could ask what the Nukak might have to teach us about the possibility of a more nomadic, more foraging, and more self-sufficient way of life than is true for any of the Makú groups studied so far--if, in fact, NT's effects on the Nukak have been as slight as they maintain. Convincing arguments have been made against a pure foraging adaptation even being possible in any tropical rain forest (see Bailey, et al., 1989, especially their review of previous publications on this debate).

And, finally, what can we learn from the controversial way in which Colombian officialdom handled the problem? The case illustrates the dilemmas faced by anyone who tries to help refugees like the Calamar Nukak. The solution arrived at, presented as a way to allow the Nukak to return to their forest habitat (or at least one similar to the one they had known) and maintain contact with other Nukak, resulted in New Tribes' continuing to maintain virtually exclusive contact with the Nukak, with all other interested parties needing NT missionaries and intermediaries. Another question concerns the study that many anthropologists and government bureaucrats argue must be done. What kind of study? Who should do it? Who wants to fund it? How can we demonstrate that it will harm the Nukak less than *not* setting up such a study? Such an undertaking can be promoted on humanitarian grounds because in order to justify creating a territory that will be adequate for the hunting-and-gathering mode, much more information must be acquired on the Nukak. Colombia so far has been far ahead of its neighbors in developing and implementing Indian reserve legislation, but no territory, to my knowledge, has been ceded to populations that maintain their hunting and gathering subsistence activities. If the Nukak are given a reservation, how could they even begin to administer it? For example, important obligations of the state include the provision of medical care, schooling, etc. Although an impressively vast body of Colombian laws details how Indians differ from other Colombians with respect to the educational, medical and other services they are entitled to and the obligations they are exempt from (military service, for instance), applying these laws and creating others for a foraging group like the Nukak is a delicate matter for the simple reason that *any* contact between Nukak and Whites is dangerous. Yet clearly to leave them alone is certainly more dangerous, given the geopolitical reality of the territory they inhabit.²⁵ If not anthropologists, missionaries and government agents,

then *colonos*, guerrillas, narco-traffickers, soldiers, and assorted other locals (many of whom are rough customers indeed), would be the cultural brokers.

The Nukak, thus, illustrate the virtual inability of any state to deal in a reasonable and responsible fashion with ethnic groups as radically different from the dominant society as are the Nukak. The admittedly depressing lesson to be learned about the Nukak problem is that it is a problem having only imperfect solutions. While a different handling of the case by officials would have resulted in less suffering and dislocation, even the best possible treatment would not have been entirely satisfactory. In some respects the job facing AI and others was and is the proverbial no-win situation.

Seeing the videotape in which the Nukak chose to divest themselves of every trace of White culture and, presumably, eventually fade into the forest, leaves an indelible impression, along with some troubling thoughts about ethnographic cages, "Nukak tours,"²⁶ and the manner in which Colombia's Indian organizations have dealt with groups like the Makú.

CONCLUSION

The Nukak case illustrates how Tukanos continue to see Makú--represented by the Nukak in this instance--as symbolizing inferior, "less-than-human" status. That Makú and Tukanos are undergoing rapid change has exacerbated this state of affairs, even though both Tukanos and Makú are moving away from the traditional lifeways that originally justified these invidious comparisons. That the sojourning Nukak were seen as "less than Makú" made their reception in both Wacará and Miritú an inevitably rocky one. Furthermore, given Tukanan-White relations, both current and past, and the strong emerging Indian consciousness in the Vaupés, the Nukak's appearance probably aroused additional ambivalent and painful feelings, even (or perhaps especially) in those Tukanos most interested in Indian rights. Makú represent the subhuman, the forest-linked, the forbidden yet indulged-in sexual partner--in short, the wild and therefore the inferior--to Tukanos. The parallels with White attitudes towards and treatment of Tukanos themselves cannot be missed. Thus, when the Nukak arrived, attended to by all sorts of White officials, given free food, medicine, and lodging, extremely strong and negative sentiments erupted. These feelings cannot be explained only by the fact that outsider Indians were given a lot of attention of material goods, but rather because the attitudes and treatment which Tukanos have traditionally held towards Makú surfaced during this period, and surfaced with a vengeance. Since Makú represent all that is not White in Tukanos, they are to be rejected and disparaged. However, given the uncanny resemblance between Tukanan attitudes

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towards Makú and White attitudes towards Indians, such rejection and disparagement represented a partial, yet very painful, rejection of self.

APPENDIX: TIMETABLE

April, 1988 Discovery of Nukak in Calamar and Caño Jabón. "Spontaneous paternalistic attitude" on the part of residents of Calamar. Periodic visits to Calamar from various authorities begin. Delegations, responding to requests from Calamar, consisting of doctors, representatives from Indian Affairs and other government agencies, representatives from the National University and the University del Cauca, the National Organization of Colombian Indians (ONIC), and the press, arrive. A New Tribes missionary, Michael Conduff, shows up, surprising all. He is the only informant-translator available.

May, 1988. Articles appear in *El Espectador* and other newspapers.

June and July: Discussions in ICAN (Colombian Anthropology Institute) and AI (Indian Affairs) about the problem. On July 28, Marco Antonio Fonseca, the *corregidor* (similar to a mayor) of Calamar, sends a letter to ICAN requesting a delegation including Leonardo Reina, the Colombian anthropologist most familiar with Makú languages.²⁷ The situation becomes more critical; AI decides it must resolve the problem if the Nukak were not, in fact, from the Calamar area.

26 August: AI holds a meeting, with the participation of representatives from ONIC, Marín Von Hildebrand, the director of AI, asks the director of ICAN to form a commission, in response to the request from the *corregidor* of Calamar and the attention from the media.

September: The ICAN commission is formed. It travels to Calamar, makes contact, and confirms similarity between Nukak, Kakwa, and Bará Makú (see Chaves and Wirpsa, 1988). The Nukak recognize some of the mythical places mentioned in Peter Silverwood-Cope's thesis; further cultural and linguistic similarities established. Makes recommendations.

Oct. 1988. Meeting in Planeación Nacional and the linguistic project begun. "El Salvamiento del Grupo Nukak."

Nov. 1988. Discussion of project in a meeting with individuals from Planeación Nacional, DAINCO, Ministry of Public Health, INCORA (the Agrarian Reform

agency), Ministry of Government, Coleultura, ONIC and various independent biologists and journalists. The "Comité para la Defensa de los Cazadores y Recolectores" is formed.

January 24, 1989. The secretary of DAINCO offers to finance the project. It is decided, after a great deal of criticism of how the Nukak case has been handled, to move them to a region where there are other Makú: to Wacará, to Piracuara, perhaps to Taraira.

February and March. Four Wacará adults and a baby travel to Calamar. One month of interaction between them and the Calamar Nukak.

March and April. A workshop (*taller de investigación*) is established, which Leonardo Reina attends. *Colonos* of Calamar attend the workshop, too, which turns into something of a roundtable discussion. The Nukak say they wanted to get to know the people of Wacará. According to Leonardo Reina, the only translator was Michael Conduff, who at this time reveals a substantial amount of information about the Nukak, but who and disappears "from the map" (quote from Reina) after a week.

Beginning of April. The Nukak's trip to Mitú. Civil and ecclesiastical authorities, including CRIVA and the bishop, Monseñor Belarmino Correa, work out the details of the Nukak's stay in Mitú and Wacará. DAINCO pays 40% of the cost of transport and AI 60%. The Nukak are welcomed and given medical attention.

Mid-April. The Nukak are taken to Wacará, where they remain 15 days, then request to return to Mitú.

End of April. Nukak return to Mitú and spend 1 month there.

May 24, 1989. The Nukak are flown to New Tribes mission in Laguna Pavón. The trip is contracted by and paid for the public health services of Mitú. Filming of video.

June, 1989. New Tribes reports to AI that the Nukak have gone back into the forest. No independent confirmation of this, however.

July-December, 1989. *Colonos* in Mapiritpan make contact with another group of Nukak, several of whom are reportedly sent to a hospital in San José de Guaviare

for treatment. Unconfirmed report that a San José health worker spent two months trekking with these Nukak.

June, 1990. INCORA (the Colombian Agrarian Reform Institute) gives a verbal commitment to include a study of the feasibility of creating a Nukak reserve (reserva) or reservation (*resguardado*) in its agency beginning January 1991. (INCORA is legally obligated to do a minimal feasibility study; such a study is necessary before legal procedures for establishing a reserve or reservation can commence. INCORA's budget is about \$4,000.

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NOTES

1. An earlier version of this paper was prepared for the 13th South American Indian Conference at Bennington College, August, 1989. I wish to express my gratitude to the Dean's Fund for Faculty Development of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, MIT, for funding my trip to Colombia in June-July, 1989. Thanks to the following people in Colombia for talking with me about the Nukak: Leonardo Reina, François Correa, Enrique Sánchez, Kaj Arhem, and Simón Valencia, and to the following individuals who very kindly read and commented on earlier drafts of this paper: Darna Dufour,

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Elsa Gomez, Jonathan Hill, James Howe, Stephen Hugh-Jones, Hector Mondragón, Graham Townsley, and Leslie Wirpsa.

2. Although Wirpsa and Mondragón (1988) indicate both groups come from the same area, Leonardo Reina believes they were separate groups, one coming from the territory north of the Infrida River and one from near Paunaua south of the Infrida River (personal communication).

3. The composition of the Calamar group during the fourteen months is somewhat uncertain. Both Wirpsa (1988) and Reina say that originally the group was 41 people and that at some point it divided in two with one group apparently going back. The Wirpsa and Mondragón article (1988) states that the group consisted of 6 men, 17 women, and 18 children. Reina (1989b) states that the original group was composed of 41 women and children, the men having died under unclear circumstances. Reina believes that the men died of a mixture of violent attacks, sickness and interethnic conflicts. Franco stated in a meeting that he believes that the men had been killed by cocaine traffickers. By the time the Calamar Nukak were moved to Mirú, the number had been reduced to 22 or 24, and there were no men.

4. With the help of ONIC--the National Organization of Colombian Indians.

5. Given that at some point the men in the Calamar Nukak group disappeared, I have wondered if the marked concern shown by Calamar residents might have derived in part from the fact that the Nukak were entirely women and children.

6. This is a source of dispute among the individuals involved in investigating the Nukak. Among others, Wirpsa and Mondragón are critical of Columbia's *Asuntos Indigenas*, saying that these officials maintained that the Calamar Nukak "are a group apart from other indigenous communities in the region" (1988, pp. 39), and that one anthropologist insisted initially that the Nukak were not related to Makú. Leonardo Reina also says that at the beginning, authorities were of this opinion and that it was only later when two missionaries of New Tribes were more forthcoming about what they knew about the Nukak, that it became clear that there were at least 800 Nukak in the interfluvial regions between the Vaupés and Infrida Rivers. A number of the individuals I spoke with in July, 1989, also were especially critical of AI, who, they said, did not accept the possibility that the Nukak were from a

significantly larger group, that the Nukak spoke a Makú-Puinave language, or that an air attack caused the initial displacement. In the spring of 1990 another group of about 20 Nukak were seen in Mapiirpan, some of them obviously ill. They were successful in communicating this to the *colonos* there and some were taken to San José de Guaviare (the major town in the region) and treated (Leslie Wirpsa, personal communication).

7. This is corroborated by Hugh-Jones who, with Silverwood-Cope, was in the region and knew of the missionaries arrival in the region at that time (personal communication).

8. The classification of the relatives the Nukak were seeking is unclear. According to Wirpsa and Mondragón, Miguel Condit's original translation was that the Nukak wanted to find "otra gente Kakwa" (personal communication).

9. Hupde/a, also known as Yuhupde/a, spoken by Makú in the Apaporis region (studied by Reina), and Kakwa are the two primary groups. Within Kakwa (which includes Nukak) are the dialects Kakwa, spoken by the Wacará Makú (note: SIL calls all Makú who speak Kakwa Cacua, not Makú). A Hupda/Ubde?Hupdu, which includes Silverwood-Cope's "Bará Makú." A third group, Nadebe, found only in Brazil, Reid and Silverwood-Cope consider to be a branch of Hupdu/Bará (see Reid, 1979, p. 17), but Wirpsa and Mondragón consider to be a separate group (personal communication). Note that Reid (1978, p. 25) states that there are four mutually unintelligible Makú languages. The information available on Makú groups and languages is confusing, first because authors are not always clear about whether they are talking about a social or linguistic unit, second, because much research remains to be done, and third, authors do not agree on either classification or terminology. See Cathcart, 1973, 1979; Correa, 1987; Reid, 1978, 1979; Reina, 1989; Silverwood-Cope, 1972.

10. However, in my notes from June-July, 1989, the plan was presented as a project to enlist these young couples' aid in preparing the Nukak for a move to the Vaupés. The couples' communities had to be in favor of the project. These three couples would stay in Calamar a month and a half, orienting the Nukak. After a month it would be decided if the Nukak could be moved.

11. Wirpsa and Mondragón speculate that for some reason SIL representatives convinced the Cacua of Wacará that they *had* to accept the Nukak, which contributed to the problems the Nukak encountered when they arrived (personal communication).
12. Mondragón (personal communication) was told that Tukanosans say that the only thing worse than a Makú is a Makú who does not want to be a servant.
13. Makú also use Tukanosans as symbolic vehicles; cf. Silverwood-Cope, 1972, Reid, 1979.
14. This information describes the situation as it was in 1968-1970 (see Jackson, 1983, Chapter 8).
15. References on Makú include Giaccone, 1949, p. 88; C. Hugh-Jones, 1979; S. Hugh-Jones, 1979; Koch-Grünberg, 1906; MacCreagh, 1926; McGovern, 1927; Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1971; Van Ernst, 1966, p. 191; Whiffen, 1915, p. 70; A.R. Wallace, 1972 (1889).
16. Barth's (1969) discussion of ethnic boundary creation and maintenance helps us understand this ambiguity.
17. This process has clearly happened throughout Vaupés ethnic history (see Koch-Grünberg, 1909-10, p. 136; Goldman, 1963, p. 107; Silverwood-Cope, 1972, p. 104).
18. Interesting evidence in support of this comes from Ezio Ponzo's study of acculturation in "primitive" populations (1967) in which he obtains drawings from Tukanosans of the Upper Rio Negro area in Brazil of "good," "attractive" Tukanosans, who are dressed like Whites, and "savage Makú" who, interestingly enough, are *not* dressed like Makú but like traditional Tukanosans, with ceremonial feathers and body paint. In this example, Tukanosans seem to have come to associate their own traditions with a denigrated group. The example comes to associate their own traditions with a denigrated group. The example is ironic because Makú traditionally were criticized for lacking proper body decoration. I am grateful to Stephen Hugh-Jones for providing this reference.
19. Wirpsa and Mondragón (1988) say that Reichel-Dolmatoff identifies two groups of Makú in his book, *Desana*, and gives a population estimate of 1,000. The reference is actually Reichel-Dolmatoff 1967.
20. E.g., the 1967 piece by Reichel-Dolmatoff. And Kaj Arthem (personal communication) notes that mention is periodically made of the Nukak in the regional press of Guaviare and the Upper Vaupés, when it reports on the often bloody encounters that occur between Nukak and Whites. Arthem himself was offered a chance during a boat trip in the area in 1971 to go and see some "wild Indians" (he declined).
21. Only one commentator knew of any attempts at regulation, saying that New Tribes had promised DAINCO some information in order to keep their legal status.
22. Leslie Wirpsa (personal communication) notes that since New Tribes had promised DAINCO some information in order to keep their legal status.
23. Although SIL officials apparently know a great deal about NT's operations.
24. Apparently AI in June of 1988 suggested that the government would create a reserve for the Nukak in their traditional homeland, but nothing came of this (Wirpsa and Mondragón, 1988, p. 38).
25. These points were eloquently debated by the Villas Boas brothers regarding Brazilian policy towards uncontacted groups.
26. AI was accused of promoting "Nukak tours" during the Nukak's stay in Calamar (Wirpsa and Mondragón, 1988, p. 38).
27. This was written on the recommendation of Wirpsa and Mondragón, who point out (personal communication) that even in a situation of such urgency it still took the government five months to send Reina to Calamar.

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