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culture, genuine and spurious: the politics of Indianness in the Vaupés, Colombia

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In this article I use Edward Sapir's (1924) famous phrase as a theme to explore how Tukanoans of Colombia's Northwest Amazon are learning to change their notions of their own history and culture to achieve a better fit with received wisdom about Indianness. Situated in a highly politicized context, this process involves local and national Indian rights organizations and sympathetic international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). I also briefly address the issue of ethnographic authority—the confrontation between anthropological and native visions of indigenous culture and history. [Northwest Amazon, indigenous mobilizing, identity politics, construction of culture, ethnic nationalism]

introduction

In the Vaupés region of the Central Northwest Amazon of southeast Colombia, ideas about cultural preservation have become highly significant in local politics. Tukanoans, the indigenous riverine inhabitants of the region,[1] are, in effect, learning about their Indian culture and identity from non-Tukanoans—a process of "becoming Indian" as well as "being Indian" (Jackson 1991a). In this article I describe certain features of traditional Tukanoan culture and the outside influences that have affected local notions of that culture over the last 20 years.

Tukanoans have undergone extensive changes since the beginning of the 1970s, primarily as a result of their increasing incorporation into the Colombian state. I illustrate how Tukanoans have mobilized around notions of recapturing and preserving culture as they work to recover land, maintain language, and protect traditional healing systems. Indeed, preserving culture is sometimes the main goal of projects for which funds are requested from state agencies and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). After examining the ways that regional, national, and even international Indian identity politics are currently influencing Tukanoan conceptualizations of culture, I discuss the implications of these changes for indigenous efforts in the region and for our concept of culture itself.

background to the Vaupés Tukanoans inhabit a tropical forest region straddling the border between Colombia and Brazil, on and above the equator. They number about 20,000 (Arango and Sánchez 1989:36–37),[2] and the population density is at most 0.3 per square kilometer (PRORADAM 1979:372). They speak Eastern Tukanoan and Arawak languages and participate in a regionally integrated social system characterized by extensive multilingualism and language exogamy. In recent years, nucleated villages have largely supplanted traditional settlements, which consisted of single, patrilocal longhouses containing four to eight nuclear families. At present, settlement size ranges from 15 individuals in a single household up to 300 people in a mission town. Tukanoan men hunt, fish, and clear swidden fields in which the women

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grow bitter manioc and other crops. A few Tukanoans, however, are wage laborers in mission settlements and in Mitú, the capital of the Vaupés and a town of approximately six thousand.

Tukanoans have developed an unusual marriage network. Each community belongs to one of 16 different groups—each with its own language—and individuals must marry someone both from a different community and with a different primary language. The main units of Tukanoan social structure, from least to most inclusive, are the local descent group, the patrilineal clan (also known as the sib), the (ideally) exogamous language group, and the shadowy and poorly understood phratry. Each language group (once referred to somewhat misleadingly in much of the ethnographic literature as "tribe," and today increasingly as "ethnic group") is composed of from 6 to more than 30 clans. Language groups are distinguished by (1) 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 specific linguistic property such as sacred chants; (4) the right to manufacture and use certain kinds of ritual property; (5) a traditional association with certain ceremonial objects; and (6) a symbolic association with a territory whose boundaries are unspecified. Membership is permanent and public: the one first and foremost fact known about an individual is his or her language group.[3]

Although there are variations in some traditional customs, artifacts, and level of acculturation, in most respects the 16 language-affiliated groups belong to a single cultural universe, a homogeneity that derives from the relatively uniform ecological conditions throughout the region and from shared models for structuring and interpreting the world. Vaupés language groups do not occupy discrete territories, nor do they act as corporate groups, and the vast majority of interaction situations involve participants from more than one language group. Tukanoans see themselves as parts of an interacting whole, in which what may appear to be cultural diversity unifies as much as it differentiates. The various languages facilitate interaction by serving as emblems of the participating groups, somewhat like different uniforms in a football game. Like the members of a symphony orchestra—each playing a different instrument—the members of different language groups together produce a coherent and often harmonious performance.[4]

outside influences on Tukanoan notions of culture

Notions of culture have become central to Vaupés indigenous politics. They evolve constantly as they are used in interactions among various groups in the area, including missionaries, government and NGO personnel, colonists, coca paste traffickers, guerrillas, and the military. A considerable amount of money comes into Colombia specifically to aid Indian communities, and regions with substantial Indian populations, like the Vaupés, are especially targeted by these programs.[5] In addition, both Colombian and international indigenous rights movements have influenced the ways in which culture is conceptualized in the region.

The issue of cultural preservation has received increasing attention from change agents working directly with Tukanoans in the last 15 years. For example, a proposal written in 1980 by a Dutch-sponsored health care program states:

> The component of Community Participation deserves special consideration, because of the complex nature represented by working within culturally different communities, which possess another form of interpreting reality and, because of this, another form of social organization. It is necessary to understand and respect this new form if one desires to achieve a positive change facing health and disease phenomena. [Programa Colombo/Holandés de Atención Primaria en Salud 1980:3]

The proposal apparently amounted to nothing more than a case of paying lip service to the issue, since these "diversity" sentiments were followed by a detailed discussion—in straightforward Western medical terms—of projects to control tuberculosis, provide cleaner water, and improve nutrition.

Three years later, however, the Ministry of Health embarked on a health care program that involved extensive attempts to preserve traditional Tukanoan culture by establishing a "shaman school" in which traditional shamans taught younger Tukanoan men (see Ministerio de Gobierno, División de Asuntos Indígenas, Mitú, Vaupés 1987c:3). The shaman school project and other grassroots projects like it (Jackson 1995) reflect the influence of the considerable number of anthropologists employed in government agencies and NGOs, and of indigenous organizations, regional and national, successfully arguing that "top-down" programs often result in loss of culture (see, for example, Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia [ONIC] 1987).

In the last 20 years, the changes that have had greatest impact on Tukanoans are the result of legislation at the national level, particularly land reforms. In 1975, Tukanoans received title to the Vaupés *resguardo* (literally, "protected area"), consisting of 3,354,097 hectares (a hectare is 2.48 acres) of communally owned, inalienable land. That so few people have title to so much land is indeed remarkable and reflects a highly unstable national political situation. In particular, the state of land ownership reflects a weak central government interested in curtailing drug traffickers and guerrillas (cf. Brooke 1990a:6; Gros 1991).

Although Tukanoans may not confront extinction or massive land loss,[6] they do struggle with organizational problems, much like those of other Indian groups. Indeed, the absence of an urgent threat sometimes makes attempts at grassroots organization more—rather than less—difficult. The often ethnocentric and paternalistic change agents in the Vaupés represent various agencies with divergent and at times competing interests. The history of development in the region reveals a familiar pattern of preliminary study, implementation, and, frequently, failure, followed by excuse-making, bickering, and mutual finger pointing among rival agents at local and national levels. For example, in 1987, the local Indian Affairs agent wrote the agency's national director to complain about a health worker in the Pirá-paraná who wanted to "set the Indians against us, an attitude that we have seen repeatedly, always with hostile intent." This agent also complained about the personnel of the Roman Catholic Prefecture in the Pirá-paraná region, who have a "monopoly on merchandise," so that Indians have no alternative but to follow their evangelization practices (Ministerio de Gobierno, División de Asuntos Indígenas del Vaupés 1987b). In another letter this same agent complained that the president of the regional indigenous rights organization, CRIVA (Regional Indigenous Council of the Vaupés), refused to return two outboard motors to the local Indian Affairs office (Ministerio de Gobierno, División de Asuntos Indígenas, Mitú, Vaupés 1987a). These examples, though minor, illustrate the constant altercations that occur among change agents in the region.

The Tukanoan situation is an example of the familiar pattern in which a relatively powerless people tries to maintain cultural and political autonomy within a highly bureaucratized and centralized state. (Admittedly, the Colombian state is so weak that it fails to administer a significant amount of its territory, collects no taxes on the substantial portion of its GNP derived from the illegal drug trade, and falls far short of adequately enforcing its civil and criminal statutes.) Traditional Tukanoan culture provides only a few mechanisms for accomplishing such goals: yet, as I demonstrate in this article, if Tukanoans are to have any power at all, they *must* have a traditional culture. Winning the battle for self-determination increasingly involves acting and speaking with an authority that arises from an "Indian way." That "way" draws on what can be described as traditional Tukanoan culture.

Successful struggles elsewhere in the country have given Tukanoans the right to be educated in their own languages, to be taught their own history and cosmology in school, and to have their healing system incorporated into the Ministry of Health's programs in the region. (This is the law; to what degree the law is enforced is another matter altogether.) Currently, all Indians in Colombia today enjoy advantages not granted other citizens: they pay no taxes, need not serve in the military, have access to free education through the *bachillerato* degree (roughly

equivalent to a bachelor's degree), and receive free health care. Many collectively own their land: 1.5 percent of Colombia's population now owns 22 percent of the national territory. Colombia has, in sum, moved toward the goal of giving Indians not only equal rights before the law but special rights based on cultural difference.[7] Although racist discrimination, oppression, and exploitation of Indians are still serious problems, Indians are now much more likely than in the past to claim, rather than disavow, their Indian ancestry,[8] and CRIVA leaders argue in favor of resisting pressures to assimilate.

In short, the problem for Tukanoans is not the relatively simple choice of resisting or accepting white society, or even of resisting or accepting notions of Indianness introduced from outside (some of which do not come from whites but from other Indians, Colombian and non-Colombian). Rather, Tukanoans are involved in a process of contesting and negotiating what cultural forms they wish to retain, modify, or discard. This entire process is taking place in the midst of the implementation of the 1991 Constitution, which declared Colombia an ethnically and culturally plural society (see Brooke 1991:A10; Jimeno 1993; Sánchez et al. 1992, 1993). Throughout the country, the national conscience is now aroused, and progressive sectors are interested in making amends for past abuses of Indians.

Ideas about culture held by change agents and others in the Vaupés affect the way Tukanoans think about culture. The Vaupés illustrates that cultural forms that have evolved in highly politicized circumstances can be, and often are, contested: one interest group claims certain forms as authentic while another group derides these same forms as invented. This is the very reason I characterize the politics of Indianness as often a problem of "culture, genuine and spurious" (cf. Friedman 1992:848, 852; Handler and Linnekin 1984).

influences from other Colombian Indians During the 1920s, Colombian Marxists, influenced by the Bolshevik and Mexican revolutions, broke radically with previous positions (held by both the left and the right) that called for Indian assimilation.[9] The Communist party began to speak of "Indianness" and of the "Indian proletariat," and, for a while, Indian leaders such as Manuel Quintín Lame—a Paez styling himself "the great leader of all Indians" (Gros 1991:179), who had fought for land rights during the previous decade—participated in various protests organized by the Marxists (Pineda 1984:211–212). During the 1930s, however, Quintín Lame and other leaders broke with the left, marking the beginning of Indian separatism in Colombia.

Indigenist and Indianist movements in Colombia never gained the strength of those found in some Latin American countries, most notably Peru and Mexico. Yet Quintín Lame—although he played a less vital role just before his death in 1967—left a significant legacy and is today widely recognized as the most important ancestral figure in Indian rights mobilization (Quintín Lame 1981; Rappaport 1990). For instance, an Indian guerrilla group in the Sierra Madre, demobilized in 1991, called itself the Quintín Lame Armed Movement. Quintín Lame's legacy is visible in present-day Indian rights projects that try to recover, revalorize, and reincorporate pre-Columbian cultural forms. Similarly, his rejection of universalist values (for example, egalitarianism and democracy) resonates in current debates, in Colombia and elsewhere, over whether radically different cultures can coexist within a single, modern, democratic state.[10]

Certain Andean models of Indianness held in Colombia, though of course "Indian," have more in common in some respects with the worldview of non-Indians than with that of Indians in the plains or tropical forests.[11] In part, this reflects the fact that Andean Indian culture emerges from a 400-year history of oppression: as one leader from Tolima told me, bitter memories bind them as closely as a common language. In addition, communication and pressure among Colombian Indian groups have, until recently, flowed in a highlands-to-lowlands direction. At the same time, lowland Indians such as Tukanoans, who still speak their native languages and exhibit many characteristics of traditional forest and plains Indians, are granted a kind of cultural purity that can carry symbolic clout.

the Colombian left During the past two decades, various pro-Indian organizations in Colombia have sought, like Quintín Lame, to distinguish themselves ideologically from the non-Indian left (see Sánchez 1986). Ethnically distinct groups that mobilized to regain land and autonomy were often seen as threats by the left because they would not buy into the mestizo-criollo nationalism (Anderson 1983) that was the paradigm for much left organizing. While attacking imperialism and capitalism, the left did not question the appropriateness of a nation-state model for Colombia's people. Indian rights theorizers attacked this position as assimilationist and resented the fact that some revolutionaries dismissed the Indian masses as dead weight.

A crucial aspect of this split, still of great importance, concerns the conceptualization of Indians. For the left, Indians were only another downtrodden sector of Colombian society; they would benefit when imperialist domination disappeared, but they had no distinctive role as Indians to play in a socialist future, which would come about through class warfare. That Indians were anti-imperialists, able to organize, and in some cases capable of violent resistance was obvious to all. But Indians perceived and expressed their resistance—even in overtly economic struggles about land—in social, cultural, and spiritual terms. Land, above all, was a symbol of cultural identity as well as a means of production (see Gros 1991:158). Such arguments did not cohere with leftist rhetoric.

As Gros (1991:160) points out, the Latin American left spoke three languages: democracy and social justice, progress and modernization, and national independence and the anti-imperialist struggle. Indians who mobilized clashed with their leftist counterparts because they conceptualized democracy and progress in different terms, and because the Indians' anti-imperialism sometimes took as its primary adversary the Colombian state rather than the United States. Thus, in Colombia, as elsewhere in Latin America, Indian resistance movements were sometimes seen as reactionary and separatist, at odds with a position concerning ethnicity of all kinds which was, at heart, integrationist. In this respect, the left's dependency theory converged with modernization theory (see Gros 1991:132–133). Understandably, the Colombian left's anti-imperialist nationalism, influenced by an urban elitist and criollo perspective (despite its pro-peasant rhetoric), has often clashed with the Indian rights position, sometimes violently (see, for example, *Unidad Indígena* 1985).[12]

This debate over the right to difference—on cultural, religious, or other grounds—is of course being played out in many other countries as well. By now a vast literature is available on Indian movements in this hemisphere, and many authors have discussed lowland South American Indian organizing around rights to land and other resources, development, and ethnic identity. For example, Ireland (1990) discusses attempts by the Wauja (Waura) to reclaim a sacred ceremonial site. Both Chapin (1985) and González (1992) discuss how Kuna culture is, and is not, environmentally conservationist, as defined in the West. Chapin (1985:42) also shows how the Kuna have modified their traditional political institutions to control potential threats to their sovereignty over the San Blas region more effectively. Howe (1991) treats the struggle over San Blas Kuna culture not only with respect to how Kuna resisted the Panamanian government's policies of forced assimilation, but also to how Kuna debated assimilation within their own communities as well. Smith (1985) describes the formation of various ethnic federations in Peru and Ecuador and the ways in which these resemble, and differ from, peasant unions and Indianist movements. Hendricks (1991), Ibarra (1987), and Salazar (1981) all discuss the role played by the fear of losing cultural identity and autonomy in giving rise to the Shuar federation, one of the oldest and most successful ethnic federations in Latin America. Varese (1988) discusses the rise of a significant number of militant native organizations during the Peruvian

revolutionary process of the 1970s, offering his vision of the task of "cultural construction" in an era in which national decolonization is far from a reality.

Although these authors and many others address the issues involved in efforts at cultural preservation in South American indigenous communities, the scholar who has considered some of the implications of these efforts most creatively is Terence Turner. In his various writings on the Kayapó (e.g., 1986, 1989, and 1992) Turner shows the Kayapó to be masterfully adept at understanding political context and at devising ways to capture and win over an audience using both traditional and new methods (in particular, new technologies [Turner 1992:14]).[13]

Space does not permit a comprehensive discussion of either the common elements in these and other campaigns for cultural preservation and autonomy, or of their differences (among themselves and in comparison with the Vaupés). Careful examination of virtually any publication belonging to this literature shows, however, that thorny theoretical and political issues arise when indigenous groups at the margins of national societies in the Western hemisphere attempt to mobilize to achieve their vision of self-determination, cultural preservation, and a strong ethnic identity.

the state Change agents from a wide variety of government agencies working in the Vaupés—such as Family Well-Being, the National Apprenticeship Service, the Agricultural Cooperative, the Ministry of Education, Communal Action, Indian Affairs, the Ministry of Education's Experimental Pilot Program, Public Health, the Mayor's Office, and the National Plan of Rehabilitation—are profoundly affecting Tukanoan society and political organization. These agencies compete for resources and constituencies, sometimes with one another and sometimes with Catholic and Protestant missionaries and NGOs in the region. What was once termed the "War of the Gods" (the title of a film by Brian Moser about competing missionary organizations in the Vaupés) has been transformed into a "War of the Bureaucrats," producing what one Cubeo man called "the bombardment of our communities" (Jackson 1995).

The Colombian government, which once opposed Indian claims to land and autonomy (see Gros 1991:213 ff.), has moderated its stance. Because the state is so weak (see Rappaport 1990:56–57), repressive tactics mounted against Indian organizations have failed in some instances.[14] Curently, the state, trying another tack, has attempted to attract Indian communities with programs such as the resguardo system and the National Plan of Rehabilitation, a program to build infrastructure in the country's poorest areas. The state has also established bases in the communities themselves to organize economic activities, offer services, and safeguard indigenous interests. Some of these efforts take the form of attempts to suborn Indian organizations and limit their influence. For instance, Communal Action has made periodic attempts to infiltrate and organize Indian communities in order to preempt indigenous rights organizations' efforts to form cooperatives. Granting Indian communities their own land is also part of an attempt to win hearts and minds in the government's fight against guerrillas and narcotics traffickers, and to co-opt the country's Indian movement, in particular the Colombian National Indian Organization (ONIC).

Clearly, the Colombian state perceives several advantages to responding in this way to Indian rights organizing. The government wants to reduce violence and diminish the appeal of radical groups, especially in the Andes. In addition, the state is coming to see Indian communities as the best guardians of natural resources and has publicized the resguardo entitlements to gain favor in the international ecology movement (see Barco 1987). Moreover, by co-opting organizations the government can weaken, if not neutralize, claims to political autonomy. When this happens, the remaining cultural autonomy becomes less threatening to state interests: Colombian Indian communities retain their languages and have input into the Ministry of Education's school curricula and the Ministry of Health's local programs, but their members become loyal, law-abiding citizens rather than dangerous revolutionaries. Consequently, such citizens accept that all political authority—to define, administer, and defend resguardos, for instance—ultimately derives from the state (although much everyday decision making might be in the hands of the local councils, known as *cabildos* or *capitanías*).

Pluriethnic states, of course, are found everywhere.[15] Colombian Indians of the plains and forest regions, however, are learning to see themselves as belonging to new categories—not only as Colombians but as Indians (*indígenas*), a group, they are discovering, that contains members from the boreal forests of Canada to Tierra del Fuego. Tukanoans, and Indians like them, are thus learning two incompatible kinds of ethnic-nationalist discourse: Colombian nationalism (which in muted form still implies criollo-mestizo ethnicity) and pan-Indian nationalism.

missionaries The Catholic Church has held special authority in the Vaupés since the 19th century, based on the *Concordato*, a church-state agreement, signed in 1887, and law number 89 of 1890, which cedes various state functions to the church in parts of the country inhabited by "wild" Indians. Protestant missionary groups established similar pacts in the 20th century: for instance, the Summer Institute of Linguistics/Wycliffe Bible Translators (SIL) signed an agreement in 1962 allowing it to establish teams of linguists in remote parts of the country with the understanding that SIL would facilitate air transportation and promote education and development. Later, SIL established bilingual education programs in a number of communities.

Influenced by Vatican II, the Golconda movement (Stoll 1982:175), and liberation theology, many Colombian priests have been leftists. In 1973 Catholic clergy in Mitú helped create the indigenous rights movement CRIVA, with the ostensible mission of eliminating the system of debt peonage associated with rubber tapping. As Catholic publications of the period made clear, however, the priests' efforts were also motivated by a desire to counter North American Protestants, most notably New Tribes Mission and SIL (which had by then established a considerable following among Tukanoans) (Goldman 1981; Jackson 1984; Stoll 1981). Church efforts, such as establishing schools, promoting CRIVA, and sponsoring catechists located in each settlement, have helped create a loyal Tukanoan elite. Virtually every primary schoolteacher in the region—nearly all of them Tukanoan—passed through the church's normal school in Mitú (now run by the Ministry of Education).

The presence of SIL forced the church to include bilingual education in many of its schools. SIL, although present, is no longer an important actor in the Vaupés, the result of protest mounted against it by the church, Colombian anthropologists, and indigenous organizations in the region and elsewhere (especially among Paez, Arhuaco, and Wayúu Indians). The history of SIL illustrates the evolution of cultural preservation rhetoric in Colombia. The many interest groups opposed to renewing SIL's contract in the mid-1970s hurled at it such accusations as charges that SIL was spying for the CIA, sterilizing women, and smuggling drugs and emeralds. Perhaps the most interesting criticism was made by General José Joaquín Matallana, head of Colombia's internal security police, who argued that SIL should leave Colombia because these foreign missionaries were subjecting the country's Indians to "cultural suicide" (Latin Letter 1975:371). Before the early 1970s, when Indian rights rhetoric first appeared in the Colombian national press, public officials would have been unlikely to criticize SIL for a pro-integrationist position toward Indians.

The relationship between the Colombian church and Colombian anthropology is marked by a fascinating ambivalence. Some individual, left-leaning clergy have been sympathetic to movements espoused by activist Colombian anthropologists, such as the Declaration of Barbados. In addition, the church appropriated from anthropology some of its most effective rhetorical responses to critics such as presenting missionary efforts as a means of preserving Indian culture: the church formed its own Colombian Missionary Anthropological Center, began a publication, *Etnia*, as early as 1965, and opened an Ethnographic Museum (now closed)

in Bogotá in 1973. Overall, the church has come to accept some anthropological perspectives but remains extremely hostile to others. The church, for example, claims that studying anthropology without humanistic bases creates an anthropologist who is irreligious and indifferent, and a compromised anthropology (Revista de Misiones 1983:118).

Certainly the Vaupés Prefecture has had a very mixed relationship with anthropology and anthropologists over the last 25 years. Although it invoked anthropological and leftist discourse in helping to found CRIVA, the alliance between CRIVA and the emerging national Indian movement led to conflict with the Catholic mission that continues to this day.

Anthropological notions, especially regarding "culture," inform both the Prefecture's and CRIVA's publications and self-presentations. The church offers numerous testimonials and other evidence documenting its efforts to preserve Tukanoan culture, but just what the church perceives as comprising culture is ambiguous. Space does not permit a comprehensive explication of this contested terrain, but editorials and articles in the local missionary newsletter, *Selva y Río*, give some idea of the Prefecture's attempts to bridge the gap between promoting Catholic dogma and preserving Indian culture. The cover of one issue of *Selva y Río* (1992a) for example, states, "The God of Life dies anew in the fights of Indian peoples, and in the solidarity of all, for the recognition of their ethnic rights and the defense of their traditional territory." And a recent article on the "cultivation of coca," an unimaginable theme 20 years ago, explains that coca leaf and cocaine are different, and that coca

> is a sacred plant that has saved and continues to save the life of many of our brothers and sisters who suffer oppression and hunger because of unjust exploitation. The coca leaf is an ancestral good of our people which needs to be defended today, and its cultivation ought to be supported in the way that generates life and not death, which is not the case after coca is transformed into cocaine. Long before the arrival of the Spaniards, even before the Inca Empire, Indians used it above all for medicine and nutrition, as well as to fight against the cold. [*Selva y Río* 1991e:16]

Another striking reversal of attitude concerns traditional longhouses. In 1970 a priest informed me it had been his duty to put longhouses to the torch as temples of demon-worship and encouragements to promiscuity, but a recent issue of *Selva y Río* (1991b) includes a photograph of a longhouse captioned "our longhouses are also the temple of God." Other numbers of the newsletter, however, tell of the need for "overcoming indigenism . . . just as we must overcome false Christianity . . . we fight to conserve all that which is valid and change all that which does not conform with Culture and the Gospel" (*Selva y Río* 1990:2).

Mission publications even tolerate small gestures of Indian independence from religious practice if a careful reading can cast such gestures as acts of resistance to Protestantism. An interview of the national Indian leader Lorenzo Muelas (a Guambiano) quotes him as saying, "I only defend the unity that ought to reign in the entire human community. If there is a religion that defends this unity, it is good, but if the religion brings divisions among Indians, then it is better to reject it" (*Selva y Río* 1991a:10). The article then suggests that it is the divisions created by the SIL to which Muelas alludes.

A recent example of the church's antipathy toward other proselytizing bodies is found in a note in *Selva y Río* (1992b:15) that "a certain community changed its religious sentiments in exchange for an outboard motor." This nicely captures the Prefecture's resentment, not only of other missionaries, but also of how fickle some Tukanoan communities can be.

The Prefecture's ambivalence about traditional Tukanoan culture and its rivalry with other change agents colors relations with all institutions and individuals that deal with Indians. Anthropologists and the government are as suspect as CRIVA and SIL. An editorial in *Selva y Río* states:

> We have economic problems, but we can overcome them. Have we thought of the possibilities for tourism in our jungle? Gold appears everywhere, it is a benediction of God. . . . We will be an example for Colombia. We will not allow others to set a program for us; some anthropologists want to see us in the greatest misery, it seems that they are happy to picture us in the worst state of indigence, but we will not permit these intrusions. [1991c:3]

The battle over whose model of development will prevail is taken up again in the same issue in a letter from the archbishop, Gustavo Angel Romero, to the president of the country:

> The Division of Indian Affairs works to hinder all progress in the Vaupés. Several anthropologists have gone into the communities trying to convince the people that they do not need anything, that they lived well 100 years ago and ought to return to their ancient customs. The Indians are very troubled, because these anthropologists have become ecologists with the pretense of not touching any tree in the Amazon because other countries want it this way. . . . I believe this campaign has something to do with the suspension of the Highway Project. [*Selva y Río* 1991d:11]

It should be noted that the church and the Division of Indian Affairs have been rivals for years in the Vaupés and elsewhere in the country because both compete for Indian patronage. The fact that the division's staff has been preponderantly Colombian anthropologists has heightened the church's critical stance toward anthropology.

As these few examples show, the Prefecture sends conflicting messages because it must address diverse needs:

1. It must promote successful religious teaching, pure and simple.

2. It must promote modernization. The Prefecture supports modernization because most Indian communities want some kinds of development, because local clergy believe they should materially help Indians, and because the church must rebut critics who claim it is simply engaged in cultural imperialism,unconcerned about bettering the lives of Indians apart from saving their souls.

3. It must—at least in appearance—promote Indian culture and autonomy. Over time, this promotion can take various forms and at any given moment derives from only an assertion of a consensus among Prefecture missionaries.

The Prefecture's conflicting messages reveal contradictions within the church's notion of its own mission that have been present for some time—for example, the conflict between longstanding patterns of paternalism and a recognition of the need to foster Tukanoan leadership. SIL and New Tribes Mission, unlike the Prefecture, tried to establish native religious leaders from the beginning, and this was one reason they were so successful during the period of most intense missionary activity. Other contradictions are the result of new external pressures. Whereas the church once struggled against the system of debt peonage or, more recently, against Protestant missionaries, today it struggles with Indian nationalism and representatives from state and international agencies who claim to be selflessly devoted to both development and cultural preservation. The church finds it difficult to rebut such claims without seeming to deny its stated primary mission in the region, which is to preach the gospel. Today, however, Catholic clergy agree that the gospel has to be presented in a "culturally relevant" form, so there are lessons about scripture illustrated with metaphors from Tukanoan everyday life, and articles about the Tukanoan equivalent of Scripture appear regularly as features titled "Mythology" and "Culture" in *Selva y Río*.

As the church has seen the precipitous decline of its virtual monopoly in the region in the areas of religious and secular education, health, and day-to-day representation of state authority, it has tried to broaden its participation in other areas of Tukanoan social and cultural life. It faces competition in every domain: attempts to train Indian leaders clash with similar programs promulgated by the national Indian organization, ONIC. Church youth clubs encounter competition from similar programs sponsored by the Office of the Mayor. Church-sponsored education faces challenges from the Federation for Rural Education, a division of the Ministry of Education. Prefecture development projects collide with similar projects from many agencies, and health programs encounter similar efforts established by Family Well-Being and the Ministry of Health.

The church has always seen itself as promoting Catholicism, nationalism, the Spanish language, and "civilization" in the region. Although its campaign against SIL darkly referred to

foreign agents importing harmful, alien doctrines and influences, most interests represented in the Vaupés today have significant ties to international funding agencies—including the church. A Catholic diocese in Bavaria, for example, may provide the funds for electrification of CRIVA's offices. Indeed, so many studies and so many development projects in the region have been sponsored by non-Colombian agencies that most Tukanoans today would probably strongly reject the nationalistic—at times xenophobic—messages that were heard in sermons and in the schools 25 years ago. In fact, it often seems that Colombian indigenous peoples' attitude toward Colombian bureaucracies is less positive than their attitude toward international organizations. A good example of this is provided in the human rights newsletter *Colombia Update*, in which Marcos Avirama, an indigenous leader representing the Fundación Proindígena (Pro-Indigenous Foundation) of Popayán and the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca, criticized traditional Colombian political parties and the government: "The response of the government has always been to persecute us. There have been times when as many as 300 people . . . have been arrested and jailed. In exchange for their release the government wanted us to sign documents saying that we would desist from our land takeovers" (Avirama 1992:1). As a consequence, "We have had to rely on support from international organizations, which have given us economic support and recognized the value of our work" (Avirama 1992:1).

The church, finding it could not marshall the resources necessary to combat rival brokers from other organizations, has seen the advisability of presenting itself as interested in *some* kinds of modernization, in *some* anthropological truths, and in *some* forms of Indian independence, while continuing to proselytize. Richard Handler (1988:85) discusses how Catholic policies in Quebec shifted after the church failed to resist totally the introduction of "Anglo-Saxon values into the moral foundations of French-Canadian society," leading to a focus on "building a bridge rather than widening the gap." Similarly, the Vaupés Prefecture has tried to build bridges and appropriate some of its rivals' methods and policies, though, as the *Selva y Río* excerpts illustrate, these attempts produce many contradictions.

how Tukanoans incorporate change into their notion of culture

As I have suggested, Tukanoans are beginning to want to retain their Indian identity not only because they continue to value their traditions and autonomy but also because they increasingly need to demonstrate Indianness to obtain benefits from both government and NGOs. CRIVA leaders validate their own authority to act as brokers between Tukanoan communities and the non-Indian world by stressing the need to preserve Tukanoan culture and by making convincing arguments—especially to their Tukanoan constituency—that they are the appropriate individuals for this endeavor (even though CRIVA's bureaucratic structure is totally unlike traditional Tukanoan forms). CRIVA must also describe its Tukanoan constituency to outsiders (including other Indians), showing how Tukanoans belong to the pan-Indian aggregate of Colombia and the hemisphere while also providing accurate information about Tukanoan culture and society. CRIVA members must refer respectfully to the past without appearing reactionary; they must promote and seek progress and development without appearing to sell out Tukanoan uniqueness or buy into assimilationism; and they must champion Tukanoans' right to a place in the sun in a multiethnic society without appearing to endorse overly separatist policies.

The difficulties of incorporating new ideas while remaining Tukanoan can be seen in the fact that CRIVA leaders are now calling Tukanoan language groups *"grupos étnicos"* in their speeches and publications. This terminology puts CRIVA in a stronger political position than it would enjoy if they spoke of themselves as a "federation of language-affiliated patrilineal clans." In keeping with this "ethnic group" discourse, Tukanoan language groups are described in ways that heighten the distinctions separating them, while failing to mention certain crucial similarities. For example, a proposal written in 1989 by a group of Tukanoan schoolteachers for the Cambridge, Massachussetts–based organization Cultural Survival spoke of

> numerous ethnic groups [that] inhabited this Colombian territory many millennia before the discovery of America by the Europeans. Each ethnic group had their own way of life, their own social, cultural, political and religious organization which allowed them to organize themselves and locate themselves in different zones of this territory. [Grupo Investigadores Culturales del Vaupés 1989:2; see Jackson 1993]

The proposal refers to the larger culture area as the "Tukanoan nation," asserting that the different ethnic groups form "the great indigenous nation" of the Vaupés. None of the anthropologists who have carried out long-term investigations in the region, however, have found extreme differences among the language groups with respect to culture, way of life, politics, religious organization, or exclusive territory. Even though the differences separating some pairs of languages (especially the pairs whose speakers stand in an affinal relationship to each other) are minor, their major function is to facilitate interaction, linguistic and nonlinguistic, among language groups, paradoxical though this may seem (Gómez-Imbert 1991; Jackson 1983:164–178).

This tendency toward ethnicizing and highlighting differences separating the language groups was also evident in plans for a museum CRIVA has wanted to build, in the form of a traditional longhouse. Each internal compartment along the sides, one leader told me, would represent a different Tukanoan ethnic group "with its distinct culture—Desana, Cubeo, Tukano, and so forth." Emphasizing the cultural distinctiveness of the language groups is politically advantageous for the same reason as embracing the term "ethnic group." The museum would display the ethnographically rich and complex heritage of the Vaupés region in a way that echoes the argument in a book on the Vaupés written by Jesús Santacruz (1985), a CRIVA leader in the early 1980s. In a section on "indigenous groups and their characteristics," he ascribes certain traits to each language group that in actuality apply to the region as a whole: Carapana, for example, are described as seminomads, but they are no more so than any other group, and Guanano are said to practice "slash-and-burn agriculture in the rainy tropical forest where they dwell," which characterizes all Vaupés language groups (Santacruz 1985:28–29). The book recommends that the Ministry of Education's Experimental Pilot Center introduce information about the history of each tribe into the curriculum (Santacruz 1985:109). While it is true that each language group has its own history, as recounted in the origin myth cycle, and that rivalry occurs between groups, one has the overall impression that Santacruz is significantly exaggerating the differences. (Note that, paradoxically, Santacruz attempts to demonstrate how CRIVA unifies the region, claiming that the organization "has worked to defend the interests of all Indians without distinguishing among the tribes, the castes; for CRIVA, everyone is the same" [1985:79].)

Borrowed models are also apparent in the way CRIVA came to be assigned juridical authority for the 3.3 million-hectare Vaupés resguardo. Cabildos are the traditional Andean community councils that were recognized in the colonial period as the proper unit for administering the communal territory of colonial resguardos.[16] The recent land reform legislation continued this arrangement. Nothing like the cabildo traditionally existed in the plains and forest regions of Colombia; in the Vaupés, when the resguardo was being set up, CRIVA stepped in to fill the vacuum and was considered to be the Vaupés cabildo (it is now referred to as a capitanía).[17]

It is clear that the indigenous rights organizations that represent plains and tropical forest Indians in Colombia do not reflect traditional models of organizing: there were no federations in traditional Tukanoan political structure except during times of war, and most communities still do not entirely accept the legitimacy of such a federation, in part because it is based on a white-derived model. To a certain extent, CRIVA leaders control access to the Vaupés resguardo, claiming that this is its mandate and that its officers are the proper brokers between Tukanoan communities and outsiders. However, from time to time CRIVA struggles with

government representatives and national and foreign NGOs who resent this control. One disgruntled researcher from a Colombian NGO described CRIVA thus:

> With an indigenist discourse they pretend to be recognized as representatives of the communities. The project as such did not interest them, although they expressed their desire to "administer" it. The problem for some was simply economic, and they proposed that we hand over money and equipment. . . . This type of person maintains a pseudo-indigenist discourse, denouncing the critical situation that the indigenous peoples of our country suffer, but interested in negotiating collective interests in exchange for personal profit. [Fernandez 1990:3]

CRIVA activists say they want to preserve culture—and, for the most part, they genuinely do—although what this means in practice is a complicated matter. As an institution, however, CRIVA resists any attempt by a community to preserve a culture that allows the community to receive outside funds directly, thereby bypassing CRIVA. Some Tukanoan communities resent this and deny that CRIVA has such authority.[18] For example, in the spring of 1991, the Canadian filmmaker Michael Grant arranged with a Makuna community on the Pirá-paraná and with the Colombian Ministry of Government to donate $10,000 (U.S. dollars) for a school to teach traditional Makuna culture. CRIVA leaders told me that they should have received some of these funds, but members of some Vaupés communities dispute this when asked and go on to describe CRIVA officers and activists as corrupt or as lackeys of the Prefecture. Santacruz (1985:80–81; see also Arhem 1993) himself describes the period of 1979–81 as a period of "decadence," during which CRIVA leaders "did not strictly comply with the statutes" and were "irresponsible and incapable of working as leaders."

Tukanoans did not speak of "our culture" 25 years ago, but those living in the environs of Mitú do now. This is apparently the practice, however, only near Mitú; in 1993, a lawyer who had spent a year surveying virtually every Vaupés community told me that many Tukanoans elsewhere in the region, when speaking Spanish, rejected the word "culture" because they associated it with primitivism and, therefore, associated it with what the priests have told them anthropologists want Tukanoans to do: go back to wearing loincloths. This lawyer noted that although CRIVA officials will use the word "culture," copying the discourse of ONIC (whose slogan, for instance, is "unity, land, and culture"), when Tukanoans in the communities want to talk of their culture they speak of their traditions, literally: of *"lo nuestro"* ("that which is ours"). "Culture" is used by so many non-Indians, the lawyer explained, that many Tukanoans have become suspicious of the word. Clearly, the term's meaning is dynamic, linked to Tukanoans' evolving sense of themselves as Indians. Members of CRIVA, though perhaps unsure of what comprises culture—though most would probably agree that, at the least, it consists of the elders' knowledge—say they resent it when outside experts, such as anthropologists, claim to know more about Tukanoan culture than they do themselves. This assertion is one that Catholic missionaries, in particular, have told them anthropologists often make. I was told that in the late 1970s CRIVA sponsored a book burning of the Spanish editions of ethnographies by Goldman (1963) and Reichel-Dolmatoff (1971), claiming that they were full of lies and immodest language. Santacruz (1985:114) recommends that each investigation of indigenous culture be examined by the respective community before it is published. But CRIVA leaders with whom I have spoken are not entirely sure how one studies culture, or if such study should involve only members of the culture in question. For example, a young Tukanoan asked me whether anthropologists studied customs (*costumbres*) rather than culture itself, for how could you study a culture of which you were not a member? Yet despite their criticisms, the Tukanoans with whom I have talked *are* interested in outsiders' help to secure funding for Tukanoan research projects promoting cultural recovery, and are interested in help to design such research.

Given that Tukanoans and other Indians have second-class status in the eyes of the non-Indian world, CRIVA officials must show their mastery of that world. To obtain funding one must speak Spanish, be familiar with Bogotá, understand bureaucratic procedures, and so forth; CRIVA leaders must demonstrate these skills to other Tukanoans as well as to non-Indians. Unfortunately, such displays, more often than not heavy-handed and condescending, contain their own form of paternalism. Worse still, the increased effectiveness of CRIVA activists as culture brokers seems to diminish the perception in Tukanoan communities of CRIVA activists as traditional, authentic leaders.[19]

The ideology of pan-Indian movements can also separate CRIVA from its constituents. A CRIVA member told me, "The people wanted an end to the sense of isolated groups, such as Desana, [and] Cubeo, and [wanted to] move toward unity, so that all the groups could reunite like brothers. To look for unity." Few, if any, Tukanoans show much interest in ending the distinctions between language groups; in fact, many express worries about possible erosion of both linguistic and settlement exogamy. Nor are they likely to refer to one another as "brothers": "Indian brotherhood" may be valued in pan-Indian discourse, but it translates badly in the Vaupés, where affinally related language groups would resist referring to each other as consanguines. Most Tukanoans would probably feel that such a switch would promote the demise rather than the preservation of Tukanoan culture.

The same dissonance appears in descriptions of traditional land tenure. According to *Unidad Indígena:* "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" (1976b:6–7). A communalist description such as this, with its anticapitalist overtones, makes sense in the wider struggle for land. But in fact only a vague, and for the most part symbolic, association between land and language group exists in traditional Tukanoan society. Some communities' closest neighbors, for example, belong to affinal language groups. In the same vein, another description states: "Each community . . . conserves . . . its territory, which is communal property of all the tribe, and worked communally. They live from the abundant fruits that the forest gives them spontaneously, and from hunting" (*Unidad Indígena* 1976a:11). Again, these claims bear little relation to actual practice. Communal usufruct rights do exist, with respect to both the local descent group (although without fixed boundaries) and in terms of a loose association between a territory and a set of clans belonging to a single language group. But communal work is rare in the Vaupés, limited to a few infrequent activities such as fish-poisoning parties, preparation for ceremonials, and construction of communal buildings such as longhouses or schools.

The emerging tendency to portray Tukanoan language groups as distinct ethnic groups clashes with traditional practice most strongly with respect to the crucial matter of language exogamy. Activist Tukanoans have discovered that outsiders, Indian and non-Indian alike, believe that small-scale indigenous societies are culturally and linguistically homogeneous, face-to-face communities. Such outsiders do not understand linguistic exogamy, and many—especially missionaries and non-Tukanoan Indians—disparage the practice, so Tukanoans experience a sense of conflict: they know that prestigious outsiders see linguistic exogamy as an odd institution at best, yet they want to preserve the different languages and worry that the decline of settlement exogamy could presage a breakdown in the system.

Clearly, a simplified, romantic, and idealized image of Tukanoan society and culture is being created. Just as clearly, it is an image some Tukanoans are gradually coming to accept. Tukanoans write for, as well as read, the Prefecture's newsletter, *Selva y Río,* and CRIVA's intermittent publication, *La Voz de la Tribu*. We are witnessing a process that is part cultural co-optation, part adaptation to a new social environment (see Barth 1969). Far from being bulldozed into oblivion or forced to assimilate, Tukanoans find their culture to be not just tolerated but encouraged. As we have seen, however, the culture to be preserved is being simplified and folklorized to make it easier for outsiders to understand.

implications for current Colombian indigenist and Indianist politics

As I have previously argued (Jackson 1989, 1991a), although many writers on ethnicity have recognized the complexity of processes that groups such as Tukanoans use to retain, remodel,

or reject traditional cultural forms, anthropology has not provided adequate conceptual tools for the analysis and interpretation of those forms.[20] The Vaupés, immersed in local, national, and international indigenous rights movements, offers an especially difficult challenge. How can we analyze culture using conventional paradigms that are themselves part of the very social reality we wish to discuss? How can new forms of "culture" that emerge in such highly politicized situations be seen as anything but something manipulated and inauthentic—indeed, as spurious?

To set goals and claim rights on the basis of culture is to share the ambiguity and fuzziness of the concept. CRIVA has three goals. The first, to defend the land, is unproblematic and self-explanatory, as is. The second, to defend the people, involves such things as eliminating military bases in the region and discouraging cocaine traffickers. But what, exactly, is the meaning of CRIVA's third goal, "to defend the culture"? As Handler (1988) has shown, culture so conceived is a thing to be possessed, a *thing* to defend. One "has" culture, an entity that can be lost, enriched, or stolen—in other words, a commodity, subject to all the processes to which any commodity is subject, a familiar notion in our late-capitalist society. This notion of culture as a possession that can be alienated is illustrated in a report written by the disgruntled NGO researcher in the Vaupés quoted above (Fernandez 1990:4). Here he states that, in one Tukanoan community, "people resisted giving information . . . many said this would contribute to the 'robbery of culture,' which is what the anthropogists did. This ideological argument is very much cultivated by religious and political agents in the zone."

Another telling example of this conceptualization of culture is a CRIVA official's description in 1991 of a "cultural exchange" that involved Tukanoans and a dance group from Cali, each performing their traditional dances. He described this as an appropriate interaction because it was a balanced exchange of culture—a dance for a dance. The notion of properly exchanging (rather than improperly stealing) culture is clear in such examples. Of course, the concept of intellectual property and its exchange exists among many small-scale indigenous groups; what is new is the idea that this applies to culture in general.

A problem arises with regard to legislation that promotes development in Colombia's Indian communities: if claims to entitlements rest on cultural difference, then development programs should not threaten a community's traditional culture. As we have seen, change agents in the Vaupés—NGO representatives, filmmakers, and priests alike—have adopted a discourse about preserving culture (although as recently as 20 years ago Catholic clergy saw their mission in terms of eliminating traditional Tukanoan culture as rapidly as possible). But all change agents in the region are, by definition, there to promote change, even though they claim that the sort of changes they are promoting need not entail culture loss (see Escobar 1992:674). Thus, virtually all programmatic statements written by groups involved in development in the Vaupés contain internal contradictions. For example, an Indian Affairs proposal for an interdisciplinary work project for the community of San Miguel in the Pirá-paraná speaks of the need to respect culture and indigenous tradition, the need to understand Tukanoan mythic conceptions of health and illness, and the need to "rehabilitate the space of shamans' work . . . and reinforce his activities" (Ministerio de Gobierno, Comisión de Asuntos Indígenas 1987:7). But it basically promotes cultural change. As the introduction to the proposal clearly states, the object of Indian Affairs is to "study stable indigenous societies as a base for planning cultural, social, and economic change . . . looking to the progress of such societies" (Ministerio de Gobierno, Comisión de Asuntos Indígenas 1987:4).

The same can be said for many other development-oriented projects. For example, a well-intentioned document titled "Attention to the Indigenous Family," though stating that it favors "ethnic strengthening" and respect for indigenous cultural systems, is in fact concerned with implementing changes that experts on the family in Bogotá consider vital (Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar 1988:13–14). I do not deny that Tukanoans want such changes, nor am I myself opposed to many of them, but we must recognize that these and similar documents are rife with contradictions. When the topic of cultural preservation arises, requisite formulaic rhetoric is used that has little connection with the fundamental stated purpose of these proposals.

The same sorts of conflicts and contradictions vis-à-vis Indian "culture" also appear at the national level. Colombia's national Indian movement is currently divided with respect to patterns of political organizing. ONIC, the national Indian organization, which originally separated from a peasant league (ANUC—National Peasants Association), continues to promote alliances with progressive non-Indian movements, such as leftist organizations and the nascent black communities movement (*Unidad Indígena* 1992:11). In contrast, AISA (Indigenous Association of the Southern Andes, now Indigenous Association of Colombia [AICO]), a challenger that grew out of Guambiano Indian mobilization in Tierradentro in 1990, took a far more conservative position. Claiming an organization based on traditional forms of political authority (leaders, for example, were called shamans and wise men), it was willing to forge alliances only with other regional Indian groups (such as the Arhuacos) because nonindigenous Colombia was not seen as ready to accept Indian authority as on a par with the authority of Western institutions. In a particularly strong version of the cultural-separatist argument, AICO bases its demands on the superiority of traditional Indian culture.

These organizations are constantly evolving. In 1992, Gabriel Muyuy Jacanamejoy (1992:52) characterized the three then-current national Indian rights groups as follows:

1. ONIC is a group "which believes we can work hand in hand with other sectors of society but from within our cultural differences. Whites are whites, mestizos are mestizos, blacks are blacks, and Indians are Indians."

2. AICO is a group that says ONIC "should respect traditional authorities more."

3. The Indigenous Social Alliance (ASI) is a group "which believes Indians, blacks, and whites should work together."

conclusions

Who belongs to a culture, and to whom does a "culture" belong? Who can—and ought to—study and preserve it: Tukanoans by themselves, or can outsiders help? If so, in what ways? And, perhaps most important, what is culture? In the Vaupés and Bogotá, these questions do not by any means elicit unanimous answers. We have seen that in the Tukanoan case, "culture" is a component in political negotiations at both the local and national level. At the national level, a colonial institution, the resguardo, has, ironically, become the major symbol of the recovery of indigenous culture. At the local level, two non-Indian institutions, public schools and public health services, provide an arena within which battles for cultural autonomy are fought and, to some extent, won. The concern over what is taught in schools illustrates a pervasive contradiction, for school curricula are at once a means of acquiring the instrumental knowledge and skills to act successfully, as individual or organization, in the dominant society, and a means for education in Indian history, language, and culture. A further irony exists in the organizational efforts to promote cultural autonomy, for these very efforts promote integration into the national society. CRIVA, with its ties to ONIC and national and international NGOs, and with its representatives attending numerous government-sponsored and international seminars and conferences, provides an excellent example. Moreover, the models for cultural recovery, their justifications, the criteria for evaluating success, and even the sorts of benefits sought (control of land, definition of particular rights, and access to a certain number of services) all derive from the dominant society (see Gros 1991:330).

Scholars such as Clifford and Handler have argued that we need to rethink our notions of "culture" so that the kinds of change discussed here, which result in part from the attention

native peoples themselves pay to their culture in highly politicized contexts, can be adequately incorporated into culture theory. Of course, many anthropologists have stressed the shifting, contested nature of culture, and many have offered critiques of overly static models that use the language of borrowing and syncretism. (See, for example, the authors mentioned in note 20 as well as some earlier work on "creole" societies during slavery and after, such as Drummond 1981 and Mintz and Price 1974). In addition, many anthropologists have asked penetrating questions about our analytical language (see Wolf 1988 on "society," Comaroff 1991 on "ethnicity," and Hymes 1968 and Fried 1975 on "tribe"), and about our need to draw clear-cut boundaries between cultures (for example, Barth 1969; Cohen 1978; Southall 1976).

Tukanoans are rapidly becoming an ethnic group, or, in the terminology preferred by some, a "nation" composed of ethnic groups (the increasingly favored label for the individual language groups), and Tukanoans in turn form part of the larger ethnic grouping of "Colombian Indians." To the degree that modern-day Amazonian Indian groups can and do choose to remain distinctively "ethnic" as they are increasingly incorporated into modern society, the nature of that distinctiveness changes. Even if the content of their ethnicity—the characteristics that make them different from other sectors of society—appears to be identical with forms from earlier periods, if the underlying meaning becomes significantly altered, we cannot say these forms are the same.

Part of the difficulty we may have in describing such situations stems from a conventional concept of culture based on a quasibiological analogy in which a group of people are seen as "having" or "possessing" a culture somewhat in the way an animal species has fur or claws. In addition, people are thought to acquire culture slowly, during their childhoods, as part of their development. The culture they acquire existed before them and will be their legacy; they neither create nor invent it. Although culture is understood to change over time, this is a gradual process; rapid change is described as acculturation, with one group losing some of its culture. Similarity can thus be found with genetic makeup: culture is inherited, as genes are inherited, though culture is considered superorganic.

If, however, we see culture as something dynamic, something that people use to adapt to changing social conditions—and as something that is adapted in turn—we have a more serviceable sense of how culture operates over time, particularly in situations demanding rapid change. It is helpful sometimes to see culture as less like an animal's fur and more like a jazz musician's repertoire: the individual pieces come out of a tradition, but improvisation always occurs, and the musician's choices at a particular performance take into consideration the acoustic properties of the hall, the qualities of the instrument(s) played, and the (inferred) inclinations of fellow musicians and the audience. This analogy empasizes the agentive aspects of culture; we cannot speak of a jazz musician as "having" jazz, and, for the most part, speaking of people as "having" culture occludes the interaction between those people and their tradition.[21] The analogy also underscores the interactive aspects of culture; just as a jazz artist's music depends on engaging an audience and fellow musicians, so does a culture come into existence because a "we" and a "they" interact.[22] This may also prove to be a more genuinely respectful—as well as correct—view of present-day indigenous groups in their struggles to preserve their self-respect, autonomy, and a life with meaning.

The criterion of authenticity lurking underneath many assertions about culture, made by both natives and anthropologists, should be seen for what it is—a value judgment. The new cultural forms that Tukanoans and other native peoples are creating, though perhaps not historically accurate, are not corruptions; they are neither spurious nor contrived culture. For example, if every Tukanoan comes to believe that in the past Tukanoans owned and worked the land communally, then this belief will be part of their culture, no matter what we might say about such a notion being a recent invention. Similarly, if in ten years every Tukanoan refers to other Tukanoans (or all Indians) as "brother" and "sister" in some contexts, such concepts will then be part of their cultural repertoire. In politicized situations characterized by continuing negotiation about culture, authenticity takes on great significance, just as in the past racial purity was significant in discussions about authentic races. Thus, anthropologist and native may, and often do, unknowingly collude in their search for a culture that fits their models, especially where (as in the Vaupés) notions of cultural purity have such political force.

Of course, statements about land tenure or kinship terminology are different from the actual rules that apportion land or organize kinship relations. And the creation of a highly self-conscious ideology about practice has a different ontological status than the part of culture that informs the practice. But rather than dismiss such statements as inauthentic and inaccurate, we should understand these differences in status and understand how all are a part of culture.

We need to recall familiar lessons about agency. The Tukanoan case is an outstanding example of the human capacity to adapt and to search actively for solutions to problems encountered in new situations. But if we think of Tukanoans as "creating" or "manipulating" their own culture, we will have a great deal of trouble responding except with laughter or lamentation.

Within anthropology, "pure" culture is commodified as a high-prestige item, as illustrated by the tendency to award high prestige to those who study remote, and thus "pure," cultures (see Herzfeld 1987). Granting less prestige to anthropologists who study more accessible societies tells us much about our own tendencies to essentialize culture, to see only some groups as having a "good" culture, one worthy of study. I do not deny that some people have more integrated cultural heritages than others, or that such a sense of who they are may contribute to their well-being in a way not available to people who, for whatever reason, find their understanding of the world and their sense of their own value in it greatly diminished. Exploitation, oppression, cultural imperialism, and discrimination exist; we certainly have ample evidence of these processes in Colombia. But "culture" is a more complex word than phrases such as "denying them their culture," "enriching their culture," or "helping them preserve their culture" imply.

If we wish to promote the cultural autonomy and self-determination of groups such as the Tukanoans, we will be more effective if we comprehend the complexity of the situation. Distinct ethnic groups within a state should be entitled to survive as culturally distinct peoples, but demands for autonomy and self-determination may be self-defeating if they ignore the contradictions inherent in calling for equal opportunity—as well as special privileges—before the law. We must recognize that when a state provides equal opportunity to their minorities without depriving them of their distinctiveness, the state generally handles these contradictions by trying to control what kinds of distinct cultural forms will be allowed to survive. When successful, this process transforms relatively independent groups, with at times radically different cultures, into enclaved ethnic groups that continue to retain distinct cultures, but ones that, to a large extent, owe their distinctiveness to the dialogic relationship they maintain with the national culture. When non-Tukanoans and CRIVA leaders encourage Tukanoans to reconstruct their history and present themselves as having customs that fit Western notions of "the authentic, essential alien society" (Carrier 1992:196), they provide an example of just such co-optation.

One anonymous reviewer of a previous draft of this article questioned whether I was describing "culture" or "Indianness." Is this process "culture" or "ideology"? I am questioning the validity of so clear-cut a distinction. Granted, I have argued that we might, at some time, correctly analyze intrusive elements—newly present in the Vaupés—as evidence that Tukanoans are folklorizing, even orientalizing themselves (following Said 1978), in the sense of changing their beliefs and practices—their "culture"—to acquire more "Indianness." This would, perhaps, allow them to adapt better to their social environment, which includes pressures from representatives of numerous bureaucracies, Indian and non-Indian. Such "culture"—because it has been recently created, because it can be seen as a process of

folklorization—could perhaps be considered "spurious." I would prefer to argue that if, in 20 years, all Tukanoans have adopted these new forms and believe they are and always have been Tukanoan, then these new cultural elements would be "genuinely" Tukanoan. Even if we grant that CRIVA members, engaged in the process of trying to change themselves and their fellow Tukanoans in response to outsiders' notions of what Indian culture is, are coming to accept "a Western theory of cultural difference" (Handler 1985:171; see Jackson 1989), it is still true that, at a more profound level, their vision of themselves, whatever it may be, is just as authoritative as the one I have when I use words such as "orientalize." I have no final claim to authority in this matter; like Clifford (1988:290), I acknowledge that others might disagree with my analysis. I do not want to seem to pretend I am writing from "inside" Tukanoan reality (as Wendt [1987:89] complained, as cited in Friedman [1992:854]). But I do want to write about Tukanoans, and I do have a viewpoint. There simply is no solution to this dilemma except to accept multivocality.

The Vaupés case and similar examples provide lessons about culture change, but we will not learn from them if we continue to rely on our conventional notions of culture. The old notions of cultural evolution and the language of survivals and borrowings found in the majority of introductory textbooks are limiting and must be rethought. Culture is not a primordial legacy from the past; cultures are not static, homogeneous systems on which change is imposed. Rather, cultures are systems whose very foundations are characterized by dynamism, negotiation, and contestation. Cases such as the Vaupés support the already persuasive argument that the culture concept, in its essentialist, static, reified forms, demands serious reconsideration.[23]

notes

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1. Although many Tukanoans live on the Brazilian side of the border, this article concerns only those in Colombian territory. The non-Tukanoan Makú, forest-dwellers inhabiting the region, are not included. Tukanoan classifications of themselves vis-à-vis the Makú are being contested in a context where hunter-gatherer Indians are increasingly seen as purer, almost hyper-Indians, giving Makú a symbolic superiority greatly resented by Tukanoans, who have traditionally considered themselves superior to Makú in almost every respect. See Jackson 1991b.

2. In 1989, Arango and Sánchez gave a total of 18,749 for the following language groups: Bará, Barasana, Cabiyarí, Carapana, Cubeo, Desana, Guanano, Makuna, Piratapuyo, Pisamira, Siriano, Taiwano, Tariano, Tukano, Tuyuka, and Yurutí. Excluded from these figures are Arapaho, Carijona, Curripaco, Letuama, Makú, Matapí, Tanimuka, and Yucuna, some of whose members reside in the Vaupés territory.

3. The Makuna (studied by Arhem 1981) and the Cubeo (studied by Goldman 1963) are exceptions to the rule of language group exogamy.

4. For more comprehensive treatments of Tukanoan ethnography, see Arhem 1981, Brüzzi 1962, Chernela 1992, Goldman 1963, C. Hugh-Jones 1979, S. Hugh-Jones 1979, Jackson 1983, and Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971. Gómez-Imbert 1991 and Sorensen 1967 provide information on Tukanoan multilingualism.

5. For example, in 1990 the European Community contributed $386,000 to help Colombian Indian communities set up administrations for their territories (Brooke 1990a:6). An Indian rights activist told me in 1992 that Bogotá contains over 4,000 NGOs, some of them simply maildrops set up to administer incoming funds. In my opinion, this figure is exaggerated; there are, however, numerous NGOs in Colombia.

6. Compare Gros's characterization of the Vaupés:

> For the rest, the Vaupés, compared with other regions of the Amazon, seem an island of relative tranquility. It has escaped . . . that which in other places is the most decisive and dramatic element in the recent history of Indian populations: the massive arrival of homesteaders and the loss of land. [1991:16]

7. An extremely interesting special right is the recognition by Colombia and Brazil that Indians on both sides of the border form a single culture and should be entitled to a binational identity pass that would allow easy transit across the international boundary (*Unidad Indígena* 1991:11).

8. Interestingly, at present, unlike the United States (the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs uses blood quanta to define Indian identity), Colombia's legislation outlining criteria for determining who is an Indian is somewhat vague. According to Correa, the state considers a community to be Indian if it is

> a) a social group b) of Amerindian origin or which has sentiments of identification with such an aboriginal past, c) that maintains features, customs and social values of its traditional culture, d) and forms of government and social control, that distinguish it from other communities in the country. [1992:78–79]

On the ground, acknowledgement by an Indian community that a given individual is or is not a member is the criterion used. And, until recently, it has just been "known" which communities are Indian. Currently, when claims about Indian ancestry made by entire communities are contested, members of the agencies adjudicating such matters (for instance, INCORA, the land reform agency) have sometimes disagreed among themselves (Roberto Pineda, personal communication, August 2, 1991; Roque Roldán, personal communication, July 23, 1991; see Gros 1991). Also see Arocha Rodríguez 1992.

9. For more comprehensive treatment of this topic, consult Gros 1991, Pineda 1984, and Rappaport 1990.

10. Space does not permit comprehensive discussion of the current debates in Colombia resulting from the Constitution of 1991 that touch on this issue, especially with respect to jurisprudence. In the near future, Colombian Indians will be able to adjudicate matters internal to their communities to a significant extent. An illustration of arguments in favor of permitting substantial flexibility comes from Gabriel Muyuy Jacanamejoy, an Ingá who represents the department of Putumayo in the Colombian Senate, who writes: "We Indians must be very careful with applying justice to take into account the cultural diversity of our communities. The way an Ingá Indian views crimes and punishment is very different from the Paez way of things. The laws must respond to Colombia's cultural diversity" (1992:52).

11. This is a position, however, that most Indians involved in Indian rights organizing would reject out of hand, for understandable political reasons.

12. Of all the guerrilla movements in Colombia's recent history, M-19 (now demobilized) most closely fits this description. Others are more internationalist in ideology and goals—for example, the EPL (Popular Army of Liberation), also demobilized, is Chinese-Maoist, and the largest movement, FARC (Colombian Armed Revolutionary Forces), still active, is linked with the Colombian Communist party and was linked to the former Soviet Union. The other still-mobilized group, the ELN (Army of National Liberation), follows a *foquista* model, consisting of a small group of dedicated guerillas (see Brooke 1990b:14; Gros 1991:105).

13. For example, Turner rejects the notion that by using video technology, Kayapó have fallen victim to an irresistible and absolutely dominating Western mode of representation. Turner is rebutting Faris, who, in Turner's paraphrase, sees the Kayapó Video Project as "epitomizing all that is politically misguided, epistemologically mystified and existentially inauthentic" (Turner 1992:13) because Kayapó subjectivity has become "suborned and transformed into a mere projection of the dominant West" (Turner 1992:15). Turner, noting that the Kayapó's use of video helped them secure a series of reserves totalling roughly the area of Scotland, remarked facetiously: "Not bad for a bunch of de-subjectified projections of the Western gaze" (1992:14; but see also Faris 1993).

14. The "National Indigenous Statute," a highly repressive law proposed in 1979 (and subsequently defeated) proposed to "determine and establish when and how indigenous communities exist, who are their traditional authorities, how they should obtain juridical solicitorship and in which cases the State can suspend or cancel it" (Triana 1978:37–38; also see Gros 1991:224; Urbina 1979). See Stoll 1982:169–173 and Gros 1991:285–287 on the Planas Affair, a massacre of Guahibo Indians in the Colombian eastern plains, a turning point for Colombian Indian mobilizing.

15. Indeed, in actuality nation-state are as rare as dodos—see Tilly (1990), who prefers the term "national state." See Urban and Sherzer (1991:8) for a definition of "nation-state" that does not assume a state made up of only one "people."

16. The resguardo is not a pre-Columbian form of land tenure but was established by colonial legislation and strengthened by law 89 of 1890. At first, in 1971, CRIC (Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca), the first regional Indian organization to gain national notice, denounced this law and the resguardo system because of the language of racism and paternalism. But six months later CRIC came to see the law as a possible method of fighting the powerful landlords attempting to further dispossess Paez Indians of their lands (Gros 1991:217).

17. In the Putumayo, another tropical forest area to the south, when Indians were told they were to be given a vast tract of land they were also told "you have to search your roots to find a base for having and administering this land." The resulting organization, referred to as a capitanía, is substantially different from CRIVA's (Roberto Pineda, personal communication, August 2, 1991). The 1991 Constitution refers to cabildos and capitanías as "indigenous territory"; there are no longer any legal differences between them (also see Ministerio de Gobierno, División de Asuntos Indígenas, Mitú, Vaupés 1988:2).

18. Santacruz recommends that "all investigation among the different tribes of the Vaupés ought to consult first with CRIVA, and this [organization] will communicate to the other zonal organizations and the communities" (1985:114).

19. Richard Handler (personal communication, August 15, 1992) is reminded of Goffman's observations about how representatives of stigmatized groups become unrepresentative of their stigmatized brethren by the very act of representing their "kind" (Goffman 1963:25–28).

20. Many authors have raised this issue—for example, Barth 1982, Bourgois 1988, Comaroff 1991, Desprès 1982, Dominguez 1977, Fienup-Riordan 1990, Kahn 1981, Keesing 1992, Keyes 1976, Moerman 1965, Nagata 1974, O'Brien 1986, Varese 1988, Vincent 1974, Williams 1989, Wolf 1982, and Wylie 1987.

21. Friedman (1992) raises the issue of who "has" the authoritative voice to describe a culture or an aspect of a culture. Who, to choose what may be a better example than jazz, "has" the blues tradition? The differing opinions we can elicit on this are instructive.

22. The notion that "cultures" should, at least at times, be seen as social, as opposed to cultural, entities is hardly new. Leach, for example, has argued that "the ordinary conventions as to what constitutes *a* culture and *a* society are hopelessly inappropriate" (1954:281). The Kachin of Highland Burma were (variably) culturally distinct as a function of their structural opposition to other social entities.

23. Many other anthropologists have also made this point—for example, Bourdieu 1977, Clifford 1988, Fischer 1986, Keesing 1992, Marcus and Fischer 1986, and Rosaldo 1989.

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