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A Meeting with Several Agendas: reflections on some recent developments in the Colombian Pirá-Paraná Region

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Introduction

At the end of August 1996, the peoples of the Pirá-Paraná river, a remote, southern backwater of the Colombian Departamento del Vaupés met to discuss the current provision of education in their area and to put forward proposals for a new educational programme which would be less destructive of their traditional culture and more compatible with their own needs. The meeting, co-sponsored by ACAIPI, the Asociación de Capitanes Indígenas del Río Pirá-Paraná, a local indigenous organisation, and the Fundación Gaia-Amazonas, a Colombian NGO with international affiliations, was attended by representatives of all the village communities in the area, by some of the leading payés ('shamans), and by a group of indigenous teachers. Notably absent were the inhabitants of the remaining malocas or communal houses and all but a few of the women.

Also present were the local Deputy to the Departmental Assembly, himself an Indian from the area, two representatives of the Departmental educational authorities based in the Vaupés capital Mitú, and the Co-ordinator of the Ministry of Education's Division of Ethnoeducation, also an Indian but from another part of the Vaupés. The meeting ended with outline proposals for a five-year programme to develop an alternative curriculum and to train a team of local volunteer teachers under the Ministry of Education's new P.E.I.('Institutional Ethnoeducation Project') initiative, and with the signing of a contract between ACAIPI and the different outside bodies.

For those who know this area well, this was an unprecedented series of events. That such a meeting could place at all is indicative of profound changes that have occurred in this most traditional part of the Vaupés region. That it should be attended by such distinguished visitors is also symptomatic of the radical changes in Colombia's Indian policy that have occurred over the past three decades, culminating in the new 1991 Constitution and its aftermath. I shall use a selective description and analysis of parts of

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the 1996 meeting as a case study through which to examine how these global changes have affected the people of a particular local area.

It has often been noted that an emphasis on language and culture and on efforts to revive or rescue waning traditional forms is linked with their deployment as political resources in the context of inter-ethnic politics. The 1966 meeting was particularly interesting in this regard. The explicit recognition of 'culture' is a relatively new development in the Pirá area but, more importantly, the people were forced to think carefully about the content of their traditional culture, about its different forms, about how culture is learned and transmitted, and about why exactly it was important to maintain cultural traditions. This came partly from the need to generate a new school curriculum which was compatible with traditional forms and would reinforce a respect for them but which would also facilitate the acquisition of new forms of knowledge embedded in a different cultural context. But it was also the product of a particular historical moment and set of local circumstances which made it possible for people quite different exposure to traditional and modern forms of learning to compare between them and to examine how they interact.

I am also interested in the part played by the various categories of people who attended the meeting and in how their different interests fitted together. The meeting was made possible by a new form of community organisation, built on older, local forms, which signals a shift in the balance of power between the elders and the educated younger men, and between sectional interests and those of a wider community. The meeting also revealed latent tensions and contradictions which result from this shift but its successful outcome suggested that the people are well able to deal with them.

The meeting also brought together an exceptionally large gathering of local people none of whom often co-operate in this way, and a group of outsiders whose presence was the indirect result of changes in government policy towards indigenous peoples. These changes, and their impact on the indigenous movement, have been discussed and analysed, at a national level, in a series of papers by Gros (1991, 1992, 1994, n.d.1, n.d. 2) and, with specific reference to the Vaupés region, by Jackson (1989, 1991, 1994,

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1995). Rather than go over this ground, my aim is to complement these analyses by taking a more local, anthropological approach. In relation to the longer term history of the area, I want to show how local people have adapted and modified existing cultural and social forms to interpret and respond to outside pressures, and how changing circumstances have given rise to a new consciousness of culture and created a new ethnic self-awareness.

A Brief History

I begin by outlining some of the changes that have occurred in the Pirá-Paraná since my first visit in 1968 and explaining why the area has come to play a special role in the politics of indigenous identity in the Vaupés region.

By 1968, the way of life of the Tukanoan-speaking peoples living in the central Vaupés had already been substantially altered by the activities of traders and missionaries. Rubber gatherers had employed Vaupés peoples during the first rubber boom, they worked in balata[1] gathering during the twenties and thirties, and the second world war created a further rubber boom. From 1914 onwards, Catholic missionaries ordered the people to stop living in dispersed, extended-family long-houses or malocas, relocating them in nucleated villages where they could be more easily administered and educated. The missionaries' education policy was designed to eradicate the linguistic and cultural peculiarities which prevented the integration of 'savage' Indians into a 'civilised' nation. Children were forced to attend the internados ('boarding schools'), often against their parents' wishes, where they were forbidden to speak their own languages and were taught a curriculum which made no allowance for local culture. The Colombian Javerian mission took over from the previous Dutch Montfortians and continued this policy until the late sixties. By then, **with few exceptions, it was only in the more isolated Pirá region that Tukanoan peoples still lived** in their traditional malocas and maintain a way of life once characteristic of the whole region.

Most Tukanoans live in the Vaupés river basin. The Pirá-Paraná, an affluent of the Apaporís, is cut off from the Vaupés and instead forms part of the Caquetá / Japurá

[1] A tree gum with industrial uses.

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system. Prior to the creation of airstrips, the Pirá area was difficult and dangerous to reach but its conservatism was never simply a matter of being left behind by forces of modernisation. The difficulties and dangers were as much psychological as physical, the results of political action and conscious decision taken by the people themselves. Skirmishes with rubber gatherers and the killing of several balateros in the early 30's had left the Pirá peoples with a hostile reputation which they reinforced by hiding their malocas on small streams away from the main rivers.

Isolation was itself a political resource which allowed the people to learn from their own direct but limited experience of outsiders and to gain indirect experience from contact with more acculturated neighbours. Tatuyo and Makuna peoples living near the headwaters and mouth of the main river were most exposed to outside contact and acted as a buffer which protected other groups of Tatuyo, Makuna, Barasana, Bará and Taiwano. The period of relative isolation was brought to a close when the Javerian mission and American missionaries from the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) established bases in the area in the late sixties. Some people still kept their distance but others, seeking direct access to commodities, schooling and medicines, began to abandon their malocas in favour of smaller houses clustered round the more permanent installations of airstrip, school and health-post.

The process of adjustment was prolonged by a change in the Catholic missionaries' policy which was designed to lessen their impact on this still traditional area. The new, more tolerant policy was partly the result of the Catholics' espousal of Liberation Theology but was also a response to the SILs government-backed programme of bilingual education which threatened their exclusive control. The SIL established airstrips and outposts next to strategically-chosen malocas, learned the local languages, developed orthographies, and began small schools. The Catholics built an Indian-style Church and school where they began a programme of primary education which included some faltering use of the local languages. The Catholic mission withdrew from the Pirá in 1987 and, in recent years, the activities of the SIL have been severely curtailed by guerrilla activity.

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The missionaries also had a significant economic impact. After the demise of the rubber industry, work on their airstrips and buildings provided a new outlet for Indian labour and their stores satisfied the increased demand for consumer goods. This short-lived windfall was followed by the Colombian cocaine boom. A remote area well supplied with mission airstrips made the Pirá an ideal location for cocaine production and the Indians' traditional use of coca provided a ready supply of leaves and cuttings. When the price of cocaine dropped, attention switched to gold mining, an activity which has mainly affected the Makuna who live close to the major gold deposits in the south.

The arrival of missionaries coincided with that of the duturos ('doctors'), the Indians' term for researchers. At least eight anthropologists and three linguists have done research in the area, six documentary films have been made, and local people have had contact with an assortment of other specialists. There has also been a steady increase in contacts with teachers, educationalists, health teams, surveyors and other representatives of the state and local government. This influx has meant a shift away from the predominantly commercial relations which Indians had maintained with non-Indian people, most of whom were local to the region and who made relatively brief visits. At the same time, the arrival of these different kinds of outsiders has created new economic and political opportunities as employers, teachers and health promoters alongside previous, more passive roles as workers, pupils or patients. These new opportunities have given rise to a new literate 'elite' made up of younger men, and to an increasing demand for education. The meeting was mainly organised by this group and, alongside its emphasis on traditional culture, the meeting was also a symptom and expression of their enthusiasm for modernisation.

The influx of outsiders interested in Indians has also made local people more conscious of their culture and more aware of their own identity *as* Indians. When I first visited the area, 'culture' was largely implicit, taken for granted and mostly acquired without formal instruction. This implicit culture, common to all the people of the area, stood in contrast to its more conscious manifestations as ceremonial possessions, **association with territory,** and less material rights to territory, language, names,

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songs, chants and myths. Externally, exclusive rights to parts of this ritualistic culture differentiated each group from the rest; internally, its uneven distribution served to rank the group's component clans into an ordered hierarchy. On a more personal level, knowledge and control of different aspects of this more formal culture were the basis of an individual's status as a headman or as a specialist chanter, dancer, or payé. The anthropologists' preferential relations with these cultural experts served to enhance the standing of elder people and their questions gave rise to a new awareness and interest concerning things which had previously been taken for granted or were no longer done but their note books, ethnographic collections and films also created a growing suspicion that such objectified forms of culture might also have commercial value.

Identity was contextual and phrased mainly in terms of kinship, language, place, and origins. People knew their immediate kin, their affiliation to a particular localised clan, and that clan's place in a hierarchical order; they knew that those who spoke the same language were descended from an ancestor different from that of their neighbours and affines; and they knew of the names and existence of other, more distant Tukanoan-speaking peoples who were all understood to have their place in some vaguely-structured grand scheme. But they still had no idea of a generic identity as 'Pirá-Paraná Indians' and still less as 'Vaupés Indians' or 'Colombian Indians'.

Under the previous mission order, 'culture' as the whole gamut of indigenous customs, beliefs, living arrangements and ways of life, had been viewed as a barrier standing in the way of 'civilisation'. When anthropologists attacked the Catholics as the destroyers of this culture, the mission first responded by enlisting them as advisors. Later, the missionaries appropriated anthropology and its notions of 'culture' as their own, presenting themselves as its true defenders, and attacking the anthropologists for stealing or exploiting what properly belonged to the Indians alone. As will become clear below, there is a strong ambivalence towards anthropologists in the Pirá. It has several sources but the influence of the mission has been a major input.

Under the new order of Liberation Theology, what the missionaries understood by indigenous 'culture' and what consequences were deemed to follow from its

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preservation or loss, underwent a dramatic change. Indians were told to return to their malocas and although certain of its features remained unacceptable, Indian culture was now held to be broadly compatible with the Christian message, a view shared by the SIL. Because the education coming from the missionaries involved not only what was taught formally in school but also a new diet, new bodily habits, new clothes, new technology, and a new social order, and because Pirá peoples had already learned lessons from contact with rubber-gatherers and with their more acculturated neighbours, it was clear that **even if their culture had positive connotations, it was not obviously compatible with** civilisation or modernity. This was evident in the meeting's discussion of peoples' shame in taking part in dances and other traditional practices and in the typed record of the meeting's proceedings which lists 'learning to organise oneself in communities' as being one of the benefits of education.[2] In the Pirá area, the urge to create village communities has been largely the result of local initiative and has not come directly from the missions.

The 1991 Constitution, which gives recognition to the pluri-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-lingual character of the Colombian nation, and the subsequent policy reforms relating to education for indigenous peoples, have also made a major contribution to Pirá Indians' growing awareness of their own culture and identity. In addition to the decentralisation of educational services and the ending of the Church's monopoly over education, these reforms acknowledge the value of ethnic and cultural diversity and are designed to give indigenous peoples much greater control over the planning, delivery, and content of the education they receive.[3] For Indian and non-Indian peoples alike, an explicit notion of 'culture' is now seen as something which defines ethnic difference and which carries with it special rights and privileges; it has also become a resource that can be preserved, lost or recuperated. Significantly, the meeting's proceedings also list

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[2] Acta Numero 005 (unpublished) referred to henceforth as Doc. (document) 1..

[3] Some of these changes predate the 1991 Constitution. Law 20 of 1974 broke with the previous 1889 Concordat between the Vatican and the Colombian State granting the Church exclusive control of education in the 'mission territories'. The Church now delivers education under contract with the State. Decree 1142 of 1978 first outlined a policy of bilingual and bicultural education. Art. 55 of Law 60, 1993, the General Law on Education and arts. 56 and 57 of Law 115, 1994 contain the major post-Constitution reforms.

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'knowing ones rights and duties which are recognised by the state' as another advantage of Western education and lists people's 'loss of value of traditional culture', their 'failure to recognise Indian identity', and their 'shame in participating in their own customs' amongst its disadvantages.

If this new conception of culture is more explicit, it is also more restricted. 'Culture' is increasingly used to denote a limited selection of more salient and exotic 'items' such as feather head-dresses, traditional dances, and myths. Together with language, such items are taken as characterising all indigenous peoples and as making them different from White people. In the Pirá area, but in a quite different context, it is just this same range of items which define the identities of individuals and which allocate them to the clans and wider groupings which form the basis traditional social organisation. But on top of this local system, people have now come to see these ceremonial attributes as the markers of a new, pan-Indian identity.

The Pirá peoples had long been aware that, following the missionisation of the central Vaupés region, they alone still retained their ancestral ways but, recently, there has been a change in their perception of the relative advantages and disadvantages of this 'most traditional' status. In 1968, they bemoaned the shortage of consumer goods and knew that other Vaupés Indians looked down on them as poor and backward. Today, they see themselves as the guardians of authentic culture and sell feather ornaments and shamanic expertise to impoverished neighbours who envy the attentions they receive from a growing band of wealthy and prestigious outsiders. In their own and others' eyes they are 'real Indians' or 'real people'.

The Meeting and its Agenda

The 1996 meeting was the outcome of previous meetings between Fundación Gaia and ACAIPI and of visits made by a Gaia anthropologist to nearly every community and maloca to sound out peoples' views on education. Both Gaia and local people knew of the openings offered by Government's educational reforms and by the local education authorities' need for viable proposals to put forward under the P.E.I. initiative. A formal request from the Capitanes of the local communities led to an agreement for a meeting

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between ACAIPI and Gaia: ACAIPI would provide food and organisation and Gaia would pay for local transportation and provide a team of consultants.

The site the meeting, a maloca at the Barasana village of San Miguel, was significant in itself. San Miguel was the site of the first Catholic mission station and the choice of the maloca instead of the two-story school building was an explicit re-affirmation of culture and identity. Each village retains at least one maloca, the embodiment of traditional culture, which is used as a meeting place and ceremonial centre. These village malocas are typically situated some distance away from school and church and maintained by elders noted for their traditional knowledge, an intentional separation between the traditional and the modern.

The maloca's painted front had been specially renewed for the meeting and, in the meeting, the building served as a constant source of imagery and reflection: the meeting's daily progress was measured from back door to front, the payés provided a 'safe roof' for the proceedings, and speeches were made regretting the decline of the maloca's convivial atmosphere now that people chose to live dispersed in small houses. The layout of the meeting also reflected the traditional ordering of maloca space with elders towards the middle, young men at the front, women to the rear, and sacred items in the middle. The Capitanes sat at school-desks arranged in a semi circle; the organising committee occupied two tables just inside the front door; the few women present sat well towards the back; and the final contract was signed under the box containing ancestral feather head-dresses which hangs above the centre.

The business was conducted mainly in Barasana and Makuna, the area's dominant languages but Bará, Taiwano, and Tatuyo were also used. For the benefit of the outsiders, the proceedings were translated into Spanish and the payés' wisdom was explained to an audience unfamiliar with the initiation rites and shamanic spells. For those ignorant of Spanish, younger people used inspired metaphors to recast the speeches of visiting bureaucrats into local idioms, successfully conveying some idea of the complex organisational structure and baroque legislation of the Colombian educational system to an elder generation still living in a world based on radically different premises.

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The organising committee, elected at the meeting's start, had two Secretarios, one a young Makuna with extensive knowledge of the outer world, the other a Tukano from the central Vaupés seconded to the area as a school-teacher, a Taiwano with experience as an SIL translator as the Secretario General, and a Makuna teacher as Coordinador. If the maloca represented tradition, the committee's skilled chairing, bureaucratic procedure, written agenda, careful note-taking, and typed-up proceedings certainly underlined modernity.

The meeting's agenda, written on a large sheet of paper pinned to the maloca's facade, gives a clear idea of the peoples' concerns and the topics discussed. It read as follows:

> What is education ? What use is it ? What kind of education do we want ? What do we want our children to learn and for what ?.
>
> What is learning ? How do people learn - traditionally, in comparison with the world of White people?.
>
> How has education been delivered in the Pirá region ? (The P.E.I study plan).
>
> What have been the advantages and disadvantages of that education ? Problems with learning about the world of White people and traditionally.
>
> What role will community members, especially elder men and women, play in the education of the children ?.
>
> How to reinforce our culture ? The course of professionalisation as a solution.
>
> Discussion of a proposal for education appropriate to the Pirá region in relation to legislation on Indian education.
>
> Concluding discussion of proposal with government representatives.

Rather than commenting on the agenda itself, I will focus my attention on 'education', 'culture', 'identity' and 'community', the dominant themes of the ensuing discussion. I begin with 'education' and 'culture' which were treated as being as opposed to one another and, in relation to this, I also consider some of the reasons why a loss of culture was seen to matter. I then discuss the formation of ACAIPI and the issues of 'identity' and 'community' before moving on to a consideration of the different categories of indigenous and outsider participants.

Education and Culture

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The pressures on land and conflict with outsiders which have **(been)** given impetus to indigenous movements in the Colombian highlands have not been a significant factor in the **Amazonian** lowlands. A campaign against exploitation by Vaupés rubber gatherers was not mounted by indigenous people but rather by an alliance of journalists and the Catholic mission and the mission also had a hand in founding CRIVA, the Regional Council of Vaupés Indians, Colombia's oldest lowlands indigenous organisation (see also Jackson 1994: 389). The creation of the Vaupés resguardo ('reservation') which guarantees land rights was also an outside initiative in which the President of Gaia, then working for the state, played a major part. Under these relatively benign circumstances, rather than being linked to a threat to land, affirmation of identity has become linked to a threatened loss of culture and this is why education is at the top of the agenda (see also Gros 1994: 146) .

In the past, the Pirá peoples' major preoccupation was not education but trade: how to obtain manufactured goods whilst minimising contact with outsiders feared for their brutality and as a source of disease. There was little scope for controlling White people directly but, where possible, people preferred to work in rubber camps or on mission stations rather than having outsiders come to them. The nature of the work and the desire to protect their women from foreigners meant that virtually all outside contact was mediated through men.

Imported guns and steel tools were important in food production, but access to goods and their distribution in trade also played, and still plays, an important role in the prestige system and gave some headmen control over loose, shifting federations between autonomous maloca communities. In itself, obtaining goods from White people was also a form of, control. To posses the guns, clothing, and other goods called gaheuni, the same term as that used for ceremonial possessions, was a way of redressing the obvious disparity between Indian and White. This desire for material equality is as important today and lies behind the spiralling demand for consumer goods and their public display, notably by the younger generation (see also Hugh-Jones 1988, 1992).

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People had long been aware of the more obvious benefits of education - in the meeting these were identified as being able to read, write and speak in Spanish, knowing how to use money, and how to conduct business with White people. A few people had already sent sons away to mission schools and when the mission finally arrived, many were highly critical of its new 'culture friendly' policy. They wanted a proper internado and proper Spanish not the folkloric buildings and rudimentary bilingual education they were offered. These demands were repeated in the meeting along with worries that 'ethnoeducation' might prove a poor substitute for the 'real thing'.

The 1996 meeting coincided with a dispute over gold. The Capitan of San Miguel had allowed in a team of prospectors which went against ACAIPI's previous decision not to allow outsiders to exploit gold within the resguardo. A government commission, called by ACAIPI with Gaia backing, was expected soon and there were proposals that part of the meeting should be devoted to discussion of the gold issue. The defeat of these proposals indicated a change in priorities between commerce and education and between older sources of income based on extraction and newer sources of income and employment associated with education and literacy. After the meeting, the aeroplanes sent to bring out the visitors also brought in a commission from the Ministries of the Environment and of Mining and Energy. ACAIPI stuck to its earlier decision that mining would affect all the communities of the area and was therefore a collective, not village, affair and the commission ordered the prospectors to leave.

The meeting signalled a growing awareness of the benefits of education but it also expressed a relatively new concern over its more negative consequences. In discussion, the alienation of the young from their culture and identity, their moral laxity and lack of respect for elders, the decline of community life and values, and a general loss of knowledge and expertise, were all blamed on a system of education which has given local people only minimal input into policy, planning, or execution. The proceedings list the disadvantages of education as follows:

Devalues peoples' traditional culture.

Fails to recognise Indian identity,

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Gives rise to many personal interests regarding White peoples' merchandise,

People are ashamed to participate in their customs.

Disorder in traditional fiestas.

Young people tend to leave their communities to look for other needs.[4]

The meeting provoked a remarkable degree of self-examination and self-reflection concerning the traditional process of learning, the contrast between this and education, and the problems caused by the introduction of formal schooling. Like the spatial opposition between school and maloca mentioned above, 'education' and 'culture' were seen as opposed. 'Learning' was analysed as oral, informal, practical, and moral and as a process in which both parents and payés played a major part. In contrast, 'education' was seen as literate, formal, abstract, and pragmatic and speakers complained that it had marginalised the role of the payé and that, with the introduction of schools, parents had abandoned their own responsibilities. The proposed new curriculum devotes a whole section to 'sexual orientation' with renewed parental and community input **over matters of morality**. It also emphasises that if parents and teachers really want to revive traditional culture and give it renewed value, they must also practice what they preach. One of the requirements for candidates for the proposed course of professionalisation stipulates 'that they know their values and culture as Indians' and 'that they should be active and take part in traditional fiestas'.[5]

The emphasis on fiestas is consistent with the importance attached to the more conscious, ritualistic aspects of culture in defining identity and status. It also reveals latent tensions caused by the displacement of the payés' authority and by the creation of new forms of prestige linked with the acquisition of knowledge from the outside world. Speakers stressed that the payés' rituals surrounding birth, first menstruation, and the initiation of young men were the main vehicles for the transmission of traditional knowledge and that it was the payés who determined peoples' place in adult life. But there were also complaints that the process had now broken down and that culture was being lost because the payés refused to pass on their knowledge. In return, payés and

[4] Doc. 1: 4.
[5] Doc. 1: 6.

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other elders accused the young of a lack of interest and of being unwilling to obey the strict rules of fasting and sexual abstinence which are required in order to learn properly. Significantly, criticism of the payés came mainly from an older group who had received a small amount of schooling when the Catholic mission began work in the area but whose education had been interrupted when it later withdrew. This group, the potential successors of the present payés and Capitanes, are caught between two generations and between two systems of prestige.

Why 'Loss of Culture' Matters

The new awareness of 'culture' has several sources. Comparison with their neighbours has made local people realise that they still retain something that others no longer have but now seek to recuperate. More recent comparisons between young and old, or between village and maloca, brings the threat of loss closer to home. An influx of outsiders who target an area noted for its traditional ways has demonstrated the potential advantages of conserving culture. And from militant anthropologists, a militant Church and a militant indigenous movement, people have acquired the rhetoric of 'culture' itself. As Jackson (1994: 399) observes, whereas Indians were once more aware of themselves as a distinct *people* different from their neighbours, they have now become aware of themselves as a *culture*.

Jackson (1994) is correct that, in reality, culture is socially produced, historically determined and subject to constant adaptation, modification and improvisation by human agents and not a static 'thing' or a collection of elements which may be owned, retained or lost. Nonetheless, it is relevant to ask where this other view of culture comes from and how it fits with local ideas. There is an elective affinity between older, outdated notions of culture as unchanging tradition exemplified in myth and ritual, which the indigenous movement has assimilated from militant anthropologists, and indigenous views of a timeless order based on an ancestral heritage from a mythic past, made up of tangible ceremonial goods and less tangible rights to various kinds of verbal property, and displayed in ritual performances. This cultural property can be exchanged between individuals and groups, can decay or become forgotten, and can also be forcibly

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prohibited or destroyed by outsiders. In short, if the reification of culture as something which can be retained or lost has been given a new meaning and importance in the context of inter-ethnic relations, in the Pirá context it also has a clear precedent within the traditional order and builds on an already existing set of ideas.

The symbolic capital which defines the status and identity of individuals and groups is mainly in the hands of the elders whose position and authority depends on their control of ritual and esoteric knowledge. In the meeting, the elders complained of loss of respect, of loss of knowledge, and of a decline in customary ways but not of a 'loss of culture'. Those who talked most of 'loosing culture' and of a need to give it new strength and value were typically educated younger men, especially the school teachers who had been charged with preparing proposals for a new curriculum. The **elders' concerns** have as much, if not more, to do with a threatened decline in their prestige and status and a gradual loss of their control over younger people which their knowledge and ritual powers maintain. Their complaints of a shortage of manioc beer, of people drinking selfishly in the privacy of their own houses and of empty malocas where people no longer gather to smoke, chew coca and converse, were also expressions of their regret over the erosion of a valued and familiar way of life which defines 'true people'. Because 'culture' now underwrites the advantages of a new generic Indian identity, the younger generation, whose education and literacy was gained at the cost of traditional learning, now put pressure on their elders to teach them what they lack and to share it openly with all. This makes perfect sense in the new context in which the young now find themselves but it is likely to cause conflict with the payés and other elders whose position depends on cultural knowledge much of which is either secret or is an integral part of the identity of the group which own it.

Alongside a concern over the loss of this more esoteric or group-specific culture, speakers also raised complaints of a different kind. Because outsiders failed to recognise that local people already possessed a great deal of knowledge and technical skills, younger people no longer possessed the practical mastery of the environment on which the local economy depends. This meant that people no longer used the full range of food

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resources, depended more on food and equipment brought in from outside, and were loosing their ability to fend for themselves. This discussion was important in that it made people aware of the threat posed by the loss of more practical and less conscious aspects of 'culture' and of the potential dangers of the narrower focus on explicit, ritual culture which identity politics encourages. The proposed course of professionalisation aims to re-affirm the existence and value of local knowledge by building new learning on what is already known. At the same time, the acknowledgement of indigenous systems of knowledge removes the requirement that only those with formal education can serve as teachers. This point, which met the approval of the local education authorities, is a partial solution to the unwelcome reliance on teachers from elsewhere in the region due to a shortage of trained local people.

The meeting's emphasis on the need to reinforce and revitalise traditional culture should be taken not as an expression of resistance to a process of modernisation but rather as an integral part of that process in which the indigenous movement itself now plays an active and often enthusiastic role (see also Gros n.d. 2). The people of the Pirá area typically express a desire to combine what they see as the best of both worlds and to reap the benefits of further integration into the national society without loosing their culture and identity, though what this means often varies according to the age and experience of the speaker.

The document outlining the proposed course defines ethnoeducation as a process which will 'allow the people of the Pirá to both value and strengthen their culture and also acquire outside forms of knowledge which will allow them to develop in today's world'.[6] Less formally, people now frequently talk of combining 'two sides or banks of a river', an image which suggests a shift in the way that outsiders are perceived. In the traditional cosmology, the people of the Pirá placed themselves in the middle of a concentric, hierarchically-ordered universe with White people relegated to a less favoured position at the extreme edge where they had been sent in ancestral times. The payés used their powers to keep White people firmly in their place and prevent them from approaching the

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[6] 'Propuesta de Etnoeducacion para las Comunidades Indígenas del Río Pirá-Paraná - Departmento del Vaupés. Septiembre 1996' referred to henceforth as Doc. (document) 2.

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sacred centre where true people lived. Outsiders were excluded from diametric, two-sided relations of equality reserved for marriage and other exchanges between indigenous groups but, as the possessors of powerful technology, White people were at once superior and inferior and, on a more practical level, shamanic resistance was combined with the limited accommodation necessary to ensure supplies of merchandise (see also S. Hugh-Jones 1988; 1994).

The image of 'two sides' represents a reformulation of this cosmological schema. Instead of having ambiguous status beyond the sphere of normal human interaction, and instead of simply refusing to stay put, White people are now actively brought centre stage as equals with whom an open dialogue is possible. The apparent inevitability of the older forms of contact has been replaced by an awareness that people now play an active role in determining their own destiny and in maintaining their own culture and identity.

After this discussion of 'education', 'culture', and the threat of cultural loss, I now turn to a discussion the different categories of people who took part in the meeting.

ACAIPI: Problems of Identity and Community.

The 3,354.097 has. of the Vaupés resguardo are inhabited by groups speaking many different Tukanoan languages. In theory, a single resguardo creates the context for a collective, regional identity as 'Vaupés Indians' linked with common rights to land. It also creates the need for a new administrative structure, the community council or cabildo that administers the highland resguardos on which lowland counterparts are modelled. In practice, several factors have made for difficulties in asserting a collective identity and in creating a single administrative body.

Traditionally, Vaupés Indians were aware of sharing a common culture and of forming a regional system based on intermarriage and other exchanges but this took second place in relation to regional sub-systems and to identity based on language, clan or communal house (see also Hugh-Jones 1993). With the new Constitution and growing indigenous movement, linguistic and cultural difference have assumed new importance. This is reflected in the meeting's proposal for ethnoeducation which describes the Vaupés as having 'approximately 20 different *cultures* (our emphasis) and 20 different

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languages', which characterises the Pirá as 'having one of the greatest cultural and biological diversities of the Amazon forest and of the country' in an area where 'cultural and traditional knowledge is best conserved', and which includes 'giving value to cultural identity in each ethnic group'.[7]

Reference to biological diversity shows a willingness to reflect back outsiders' concerns with the environment, and the implication that ethnic groups conform to the model of 'one language, one culture, one nation' is consistent with the rhetoric of ethnicity. But, in the Vaupés, the idea that cultural diversity and species diversity be similar phenomena kind or that special rights or privileges might be attached to ethnic groups runs counter to any attempt to forge a collective regional identity. Significantly, Jackson quotes a CRIVA leader who says that 'the people wanted to end with the sense of isolated groups, .., and move towards unity, so that all the groups could reunite like brothers' (1994: 395-6).

CRIVA[8] notionally represents all Vaupés Indians and their sub-regional organisations and would seem the obvious candidate to administer the affairs of the <u>resguardo</u> and its people. In reality, CRIVA is politically weak and beset by a host of problems including competition between rival patrons, corruption, division between the traditional and the modern, between young and old, and tensions along ethnic and regional lines (see Jackson 1994). The Pirá peoples have been the least active in CRIVA and they are well aware of these problems. From the perspective of ACAIPI, CRIVA is remote and it neither represents their own interests nor the kind of 'culture' with which they identify. Furthermore, they know that government and NGOs prefer to deal directly with 'real' Indians rather than with acculturated bureaucrats. CRIVA argues that they alone should administer aid brought in by the state and NGOs, but ACAIPI knows that, under CRIVA, they are unlikely to see the benefits of their unique position and that they are better off dealing directly. The 1996 meeting was an assertion of this new independence.

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[7] Doc. 2: 2, 6.

[8] CRIVA, Consejo Regional Indígena del Vaupés.

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In the past, Pirá peoples were conscious of forming an open-ended community which shared ancestrally-allocated territory but, with the formation of ACAIPI, this has been concretised into a new regional identity as 'Pirá-Paraná Indians' with common interests and able to deal collectively with outsiders. The tensions inherent in CRIVA are also reflected, on a smaller scale, within ACAIPI. Some of these tensions surfaced during the meeting. The move from maloca to village has altered an older pattern in which malocas of more than one language group became temporarily allied under the leadership of an influential man. The villages are more stable communities, typically made up of people from a single language group under the leadership of an elected Capitan. In the meeting, the Capitanes represented their villages and not their language groups but the representatives of the more numerous Barasana and Makuna villages tended to dominate those from Tatuyo, Taiwano, and Bará communities and group interests were still manifest, notably in a debate over where to hold the training course and which languages to use. The solution adopted - to circulate the course between different villages and to use all languages - was politically astute but will be hard to put into practice. The meeting was in itself a test case of the new regional identity and new collective organisational capacity manifest in ACAIPI and both the decision over language the decision not to allow gold prospecting mentioned above showed willingness to forgo sectional interests in favour of those of the wider community.

The shift from a lower-order identity based on territorially-based language-groups towards a more inclusive, higher-order regional identity has also affected the content of identity and the political issues to which it gives rise. Traditional politics was much taken up with debating the relative status of different clans within one group, with negotiating inter-group marriages and other exchanges, and with who had the right to live where. These issues, which all depend on the cultural heritage which marks group identity, continue to be important today but, quite strikingly, none of them were mentioned in the meeting. The emphasis was on a common concern with problems of culture and education, on what distinguished the Pirá peoples from other Vaupés Indians, and on

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defending a collective identity attached to a portion of the resguardo and its share in state funds.

With increased integration, the issue of identity also becomes one of administration and community. In Colombia's ideology of a new participatory democracy for indigenous peoples, 'culture', 'identity', and 'community' go hand in hand and there is a common assumption that lowland groups have communal property and work arrangements and a strong sense of community (see also Jackson 1994: 396). The creation of resguardos in lowland areas also presupposes that some form of communal organisation already exists. In practice, 'community' is either imposed from without, as happened in the central Vaupés, or it must be created by local people at the expense of previous forms. In the traditional order, the maloca formed a residential community. Beyond this, community was not tied permanently to place but was given temporary expression in collective rituals held in one maloca to which others were invited (see also Hugh-Jones 1993).

In the Pirá, where just under half the population still live in malocas, people have created villages for themselves, in part because villages represent modernity and progress, in part because they give access to education and other benefits, and in part because they are necessary to forms of organisation which are required in dealing with outsiders. The conflict between village and maloca was a dominant theme of the meeting and several speakers commented that the move to villages had caused a partial breakdown of the traditional ritual system which is the backbone of traditional community organisation and had led to a decline in a moral sense of community.

The conflict between old and new forms of community is reflected in the ambiguous position of the village representative or Capitan, a transformation of an older form of leadership. The traditional division between the ritual authority of the payé and the more secular authority of the maloca headman was modified and extended when missionaries and traders nominated some powerful individuals as Capitanes and intermediaries. These men were often chosen precisely because they were less traditional: through their work on mission stations and in rubber camps they had acquired some

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Spanish and some knowledge of the outside world. In this sense, although their position has a quite different basis, they are older counterparts of the new elite made up of educated younger men.

The division of labour between the Capitanes, who deal with outsiders, and the payés, who deal more with internal ritual affairs, goes together with the spatial division between ceremonial maloca and secular village mentioned above. The Capitanes speak in the name of traditional culture but their title, their villages, and their organisation ACAIPI have no traditional legitimacy. Changes in the nature of external contact, the renewed emphasis on traditional culture, and the increasing importance of education and literacy now put conflicting pressures on their position. On the one hand, the Capitanes need to maintain alliances with the younger educated generation; on the other hand, those who lack a secure knowledge of tradition also need the support of the payés. The President of ACAIPI is himself the educated son of a Makuna Capitan and payé and, apart from the Tukano school teacher, the other members of the meeting's organising committee were all the sons of powerful men of this kind.

The Teachers

The school teachers are in a very contradictory position with respect to their own culture. Their status depends on alien knowledge and skills and they are under constant pressure to increase what they know in order to carry out their duties and to play their important role in community organisation and negotiations with outsiders for which their training makes them uniquely suited. They are also often the ones most familiar with ideas coming in from the wider indigenous movement and can use their education to analyse the situation of their people from a more radical perspective. But because new knowledge has usually been gained at the expense of learning things closer to home, they are distanced from their own culture and actively contribute to further cultural loss by teaching within the school system. As Gros observes 'c'est à ceux qui dans un certain sens ont le plus 'perdu' de cette culture, qui savent le moins, dont l'identité est la plus floue et parfois la plus controversée, que le mouvement s'adresse et demande de

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construire le discours légitimateur de la spécificité culturelle, des valeurs traditionells, du droit à la différence at à l'identité ethnique' (1994: 147).

There is a potential conflict between the aims of ethnoeducation and the kind of experience and training which will be necessary to implement it. People in the meeting were clearly aware of this which is why they emphasised that the teachers in particular should both know about their own culture and being willing to live by what they knew. This placed the teachers drafted in from other parts of the Vaupés in an especially difficult position. In the eyes of local people, these teachers are de facto representatives of White society: they belong to other groups, speak other languages, and must therefore teach in Spanish. They threaten specifically local identities and are not well placed to teach or defend local culture about which they know relatively little. This evident contradiction was handled with tact but everyone agreed that the replacement of outsider teachers was a high priority.

The Payés

Many Pajés prefer to distance themselves from regular contact with outsiders by living in isolated malocas. Alongside a fear of becoming ill through contact with a large gathering of people, this was probably one reason why few of the area's better known payés attended the meeting. In addition, 'payé' is not a fixed status but depends on reputation in the eyes of others and most payés would be cautious about airing their opinions or esoteric knowledge in a public forum. To attend a meeting explicitly as a payé might be seen as pretentious and as relying on outsiders to enhance status - a local payé who has been given official recognition in the regional hospital's programme of ethnomedicine comes in for comment on this account.

The payés were there to give their opinions and advice, to protect people from harm, and to sponsor the meeting and ensure its success. Those who did attend said very little but they were shown great respect and much emphasis was given to their presence which served to endorse the value of traditional culture and to legitimate the event itself. The respect shown by local people also served to ameliorate latent tensions between the elders and the younger educated men and to mask the potential contradictions that are

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raised in seeking to make indigenous culture part of a school curriculum. Coming from non-Indians, this respect also appeared to counterbalance the fact that, in seeking to uphold indigenous culture, they necessarily have to deal largely with those are least representative of it.

Not all payés would necessarily endorse the aims of a meeting of this kind. There is quite a difference between their view traditional culture and that of the younger people who are concerned to revive it. It was suggested that the payés might be co-opted as teachers or trainers in the course of professionalisation. Attractive as this might seem, the idea that the payés should share their knowledge indiscriminately with all is in potential conflict with the fact that some aspects of this knowledge are the property of a particular group, or are secret matters about which women and children should not know and therefore integral to the payés authority. This came up in the outrage over suggestions that books published by explorers and anthropologists which contain photographs of secret ritual objects might be used as teaching materials and as records of the past. Also raised was the question of payments to the payés. Payés are paid for their traditional services and if they should now become teachers, should they not also be paid ? The meeting decided that they should get no salary but that their needs should be taken care of in recognition of their time and effort.

Absent Presences

The women's reluctance to appear had to do with the fact that dealing with outsiders is traditionally a male role. The organisation and style of the meeting also marked it firmly as 'men's business'. Pressures to conform to traditional roles mean that relatively few women have secondary education or extensive experience of the outside world but even those who do find little space to use their knowledge in teaching or in the indigenous organisation. The move from maloca to village and the pre-eminence of ritualistic forms of culture in the meeting, and in ethnic politics more generally, may also be relevant here. Traditionally, women had relatively limited access to the overtly ritualised aspects of culture but their vital economic contribution was ritually elaborated in its own right (see C. Hugh-Jones 1979) and socially recognised in the prestige accorded

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to an elder women as the joint leader of each maloca community. Women still play a key economic role and, significantly, it was precisely in the context of the discussions of food production, and of the less obvious aspects of culture that these raised, that the women were called to attend the meeting but, as the elder's observed, women now enjoy much less prestige in the village context.

All those who attended the meeting have sacrificed the autonomy life in the maloca for new material and social benefits in the expanded social world of the village. In the meeting, the perceived costs of this choice were frequently expressed as a 'loss', not merely of something useful in re-affirming an indigenous identity to an external audience but also of a set of values intrinsic to the internal dynamics of an social order to which all still subscribe to some degree. This order and its associated prestige system was, and still is, predicated on the productive and ceremonial regime associated with the maloca. The inhabitants of the remaining malocas have made a political choice which was reaffirmed by staying away from the meeting. To participate in the course of professionalisation would be a reversal of that choice and it remains to be seen whether or not they will do so.

The Outsiders

A full discussion of the outsiders present at the meeting would take me far away from the more immediate issues with which I am concerned. Here I shall restrict myself to a few brief observations.

Indigenous peoples make up some 90% of the Vaupés population and their vote carries considerable weight in local party politics but politicians have only recently become active in the Pirá area: the people there have recently discovered politics as the politicians have discovered them. The Delegado represents the Pirá area and traces of his recent electoral campaign were evident in the t-shirts emblazoned with his name which several local people were wearing. He enjoyed evident support but the uneasy co-existence between the indigenous movement and traditional party politics were reflected in complaints, directed at him and the two representatives of local education, concerning the

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corruption and clientism of politicians and local officials in charge of education and health which affect the delivery of services to the Pirá.

In the new Colombian policy towards Indians, participatory democracy, local autonomy, decentralisation, and self-generated development add up to the notion that the state will help those who are willing to help themselves (see Gros n.d. 2). Although it is often welcomed from below, policy is also imposed from above. Ethnoeducation provides an example. The Ministry and local authorities are under pressure to develop programmes of ethnoeducation which are fully sensitive to local cultural and linguistic circumstances as required in recent legislation. But because there is often no clear idea as to what ethnoeducation might be or how it might be implemented, and because it is presented in a form which local people do not always understand or want, viable and genuinely grass-root initiatives are often hard to come by. This had been the experience of the two representatives from the local education authorities at the meeting. For them, and for the representative of the Education Ministry, the 1996 meeting was a godsend. It allowed local people to tell them what they did and did not want, it produced an in-depth discussion of what exactly a programme of ethnoeducation might look like and how it might work, and it generated a concrete proposal for an Institutional Ethnoeducation Project (P.E.I.) which could be taken back to show to others.

NGOs have only recently begun work in the Pirá but have been active throughout much of the Vaupés region where they have extended and also partially displaced the missionaries' previous role in development, shifting emphasis from religious conversion to the conservation of both indigenous culture and of the environment. The Indians' appointed role as stewards and custodians of the tropical forest is evident in the state policy of turning much of its Amazon regions into indigenous resguardos (Republica de Colombia 1988) which are simultaneously biodiversity reserves. With aid increasingly tied to human rights and the environment, the state is under international pressure to pay attention to these issues. Both the Gaia Foundation and local people are aware that the privileged cultural status of the Pirá goes hand in hand with the fact that it is still relatively free from problems the over-fishing and forest degradation which affect other parts of the

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region. The reference to both cultural and biological diversity in documents produced by the meeting and the inclusion of a biologist amongst the Gaia representatives make this common awareness clear.

Gaia was also represented by a lawyer and by three anthropologists including its Director, all Colombian citizens. As independent consultants there were also two British anthropologists (myself included) and a French / Colombian linguist, each with long-term experience in the area. With Vaupés indigenous organisations now exerting strict control over research, and with more direct state and NGO intervention in the region's affairs, anthropologists have responsibilities to new masters and their work has been radically altered. This change is encapsulated in the term '<u>asesoría</u>' ('consultancy'). The Pirá has seen more than its fair share of anthropologists. Today, especially for younger educated people active in the indigenous organisation, <u>asesoría</u> is acceptable but <u>investigación</u> ('research') is not.

A special evening session was specially devoted to discussing the nature and value of anthropology, how anthropologists were paid, what they did with their data, and why they rarely returned it to source. The anthropologists were in an ambiguous position. As experts on 'culture' and as witnesses of a more traditional period when the meeting's younger participants were still children, they could offer advice, assist in the course of professionalisation, and help to rescue cultural knowledge which is fast disappearing as the elder generation dies. But, as researchers, their interests and priorities were considered to be different from those of local people and there were demands that they should now repatriate the culture that they had objectified and removed in the form of books, recordings, photographs, and films.

The linguist had an altogether easier ride. Under the new Constitution, Colombia is now formally recognised as multi-lingual and indigenous languages have local official status, language plays a key role in affirming indigenous identity, linguists have worked in close collaboration with the indigenous movement, and linguistic training and adequate orthographies are the preconditions for a successful programmes of bilingual education. Linguistic diversity, generalised multilingualism, and the role played by language in

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defining group identity all give language and linguistics a special significance in the Vaupés region. Local people are peculiarly sensitive to the structure and sound patterns of different languages and, having worked with the SIL and independent researchers, they respect linguists and appreciate their work.

Language and linguistics are also politically-charged. For the indigenous population, the dominance of languages spoken by larger groups threatens the identity of smaller groups. For different missionary groups, local authorities, the State and the NGOs, rival programmes of bilingual education have become part of a wider struggle for control over indigenous education. The meeting expressed strong approval for bilingual education: the use of local languages will help children to become literate and learn Spanish, will keep local languages in general use, and will be an affirmation of culture and identity. But with a very small population divided between five language-groups each of which attaches political importance to learning in their own language, and with only two qualified teachers both belonging to the same group, bilingual education becomes difficult. In addition, although several people can now read and write in their own languages, the inadequate and cumbersome orthographies developed by the SIL and the prestige of Spanish mean that, in practice, they rarely do so.

Conclusions

The meeting described above was, in many respects, an historical event. It involved an entirely new level of co-operation between local people in active and successful negotiation with a powerful group of outsiders; and it marked a new phase in peoples' consciousness of their historical situation and of their capacity to determine its future outcome. But, at the same time, it was also a new phase in a much older process.

With reference to the Kayapo, Turner (1993: 12) has emphasised the relevance of traditional social and cultural forms for an understanding of the way in which indigenous peoples modify existing patterns of organisation to cope with new situations of contact and use existing cosmological schema ideas to construct them from their own point of view. Tukanoan culture and social organisation and the nature of their contact with outsiders have both meant that inter-ethnic relations in the Vaupés region have not

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generally involved the violent conflict which has been a feature of contact between the Kayapo and Brazilian society. In Vaupés society aggression is downplayed and, even in the past, warfare played only a very minor role. Violent resistance to White people was sporadic and short-lived, partly because of traditional values, partly because it proved to be costly and ineffective, and partly because the arrival of the missionaries served as a restraint on the worst excesses of the traders. After a brief phase of millenarian activity in the latter half of the last century (see S. Hugh-Jones 1994), the emphasis was more on accommodation than resistance.

In the Pirá area, where missionaries arrived relatively late, active resistance continued for longer and was combined with a form of resistance in which the payés strove to keep White people firmly at the edge of a concentrically-ordered universe. On a more practical level, this cultural resistance was combined with the material accommodation necessary to ensure supplies of merchandise. Mediated though powerful individuals, this accommodation led to the transformation of an older pattern of leadership and its institutionalisation in the position of the Capitan.

Initially, the missionaries were seen in predominantly economic terms as a source of goods.. Education was seen more as a guarantee of more equal trading relations and as a new source of employment than as creating problems of 'culture' in its own right. 'Culture' was mainly an outsiders' preoccupation. The cultural impact of missionary education and proselytisation in the Pirá was the principle theme of War of the Gods. This film, made in 1971[9], influenced the political relations between missionaries and anthropologists working in the Vaupés and helped put culture and education firmly on the agenda of the new indigenous movement. Its pessimistic tone reflected the fact that, at the time, the future of indigenous culture appeared to be entirely in the hands of outsiders with the people themselves only dimly aware of the reality of their situation and not in a position to have much say in its outcome.

The 1996 meeting showed that such pessimism was unwarranted. If it was a symptom of accelerating change and increasing integration into national society, it also

[9] War of the Gods, Granada Television, Disappearing World Series. Director: Brian Moser; Anthropological Consultants: C Hugh-Jones, S. Hugh-Jones and P. Silverwood-Cope

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underlined the Pirá peoples' capacity to manage their own affairs, to produce innovative solutions to new problems, and to interpret them in a new light. The rise of the indigenous movement, the new Constitution, and the reform of the education system have altered the balance of power in a complex game between local people, more acculturated Tukanoans, missionaries, traders, and anthropologists and have brought in politicians, NGOs, and direct representatives of state as new players on the scene. Indirectly, these changes have given rise to a new, extended form of organisation based on the older position of the capitan, but now brought together under ACAIPI. More directly, these changes have created an opening which allows people to question the cultural dependency supported by a previous system of education and to demand a greater say in its future provision. If Jackson (1991: 140) is correct that the War of the Gods is now becoming the War of the Bureaucrats, it is also a war in which outsiders now dance to an increasingly indigenous tune.

A crucial element in this process has been the development of a new self-consciousness of culture and a new, wider sense of ethnic identity. The concern with culture and identity has two principle sources. On the one hand, through education, the school teachers and other younger people have exposed to new ideas and a new vocabulary coming from the indigenous movement and its allies. On the other hand, experience of the impact of education, first on other Tukanoan groups, and later in the Pirá itself, have made people aware that 'culture', now recognised as such, can be maintained or lost. The meeting demonstrated that younger people are using their education to analyse the contact situation and, specifically the cultural dependency it creates, from a new perspective which complements the viewpoint of the elders.

The elders still tend to view traditional culture as something created in ancestral times and largely beyond human control which will continue in an unaltered form so long as correct ritual procedures are maintained. The meeting explored practical learning as another important mechanism by which culture is transmitted, highlighted the conflict between traditional modes of learning and formal schooling, and emphasised that cultural transmission also depended on the active intervention of ordinary people. The course of

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professionalisation exemplifies this intervention and aims to reduce the conflict between old and new forms of learning by combining the best of both.

The image of 'two sides', used to convey this combination, represents a reformulation of an older cosmological schema and signals a changed perception of relations with outsiders. Instead of vain attempts to keep White people beyond the sphere of normal human interaction, and instead of granting them an ambiguous status, at once superior and inferior, they are now brought centre stage as equals with whom an open dialogue is now possible. This dialogue now gives people an active role in determining their own destiny and in maintaining their own culture and identity.

In the Pirá context, where the persistence of traditional forms now coincides with a changed perception of their relevance and value, and where different individuals have had radically different exposure to outside influence, the urge to reinforce traditional culture and to assert a collective indigenous identity should not be seen as a simple instrumental revival or re-invention nor simply as a sign of resistance to modernisation. 'Culture' has indeed assumed a new importance in the external negotiation of rights and benefits linked with identity and alterity, but different people understand culture and identity in quite different ways and in relation to different interests many of which relate to internal and more local processes.

These different understandings and motivations give rise to the tensions and contradictions concerning the distribution of power and influence between the elder and younger men which emerged during the meeting. The central focus of the meeting was a debate over the degree to which accommodation with the wider national society is compatible more traditional social and cultural forms and over how best to bring the two together. The course of professionalisation was offered as an experiment designed to confront and solve these problems. There is still a discrepancy between the explicit culture and identity now being affirmed and the more implicit forms of the past. These were represented, at one extreme, by ACAIPI, the committee members, the school teachers, and the other younger men who made up the core of the meeting and, at the other extreme, by the people still living in isolated malocas who stayed away.

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The training course and proposed new curriculum imply a process of (partial) re-indianisation of teachers and pupils alike, but it is clear that they wont be the same 'Indians' as before. To retain fully the cultural and social forms which the maloca represents carries with it the risk of increasing marginalisation from what has now become the mainstream of social life and the persistence of older stereotypes also carries the risk of appearing 'uncivilised'. People recognise this paradox but, most importantly, they now have the space to deal with it in their own way. The decision not to allow gold mining was a brave one and problems of economic and technological dependency remain, but the meeting represented an important step in putting an end to the cultural dependency of the former system of education.

Gros, Jackson and others writing on the Colombian indigenous movement have given much emphasis to the ways in which indigenous peoples have operationalised an explicit awareness of culture and new sense of ethnic identity in their dealings with Colombian society. In part, this is perhaps a reaction to the ahistorical and inward looking tendencies of more traditional ethnography. This paper is offered as a case study which illustrates the value of combining a focus on these more external, instrumental concerns with an exploration of how they relate to traditional social and cultural forms and to internal processes. The image of two sides, the outside and the inside, the traditional and the modern, are attractive to indigenous peoples and analysts alike, but to date this middle ground has remained relatively unexplored.

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