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The Makú Indians and Racial Separation in the Valley of the Rio Negro

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INTRODUCTION

There are some regions of the world, protected by almost inaccessible mountains or tropical forests, which contain areas which in ethnology may be called refugee areas. An ethnological map of these regions reveals a mosaic of many tribes and languages, often of the most diverse ethnological stocks. The most famous of these refugee areas are the Caucasus Mountains and north-central California. In South America there are similar areas, such as the Fireland, the Gran Chaco, the Upper Xingu and the drainage area of the Uaupés river, a tributary of the Rio Negro in north-western Brazil.

The following tribes inhabit Brazilian territory on the Uaupés river:

1. Betoya language family: Tukano, Dessano, Pira-Tapuia, Uanano, Tuyuka, Miriti-Tapuia, Arapaço, Carapaná and Kubéowa.
2. Aruakian language family: Tariana.
3. Makú language family: a collection of small nomadic families.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES

The territory occupied by the small groups of Makú is situated roughly between longitudes 60° and 70° West, and latitudes 1° and 1°30' North. This area lies between the Rio Negro and Rio Uaupés to the north and the Japurá river in the south. The whole of this area is densely wooded with tropical rain forest, and the climate is typical of the Amazon — humid and hot. Its flora and fauna are generally similar to those found along the whole valley of the Amazon.

MAKÚ GROUPS

Antonio Giacone¹ names the following six "families" of Makú:

Dometende, who live near the Jauareté mission.

Moicotende. There are two families called Moicotende. One

¹ P. Antonio Giacone, *Pequena Gramatica e Dicionario Português-Ubde-Nehern ou Maci*, Escolas Graficas Salesianos, Recife, 1955, p. 5.

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group live in the Serra Porcos, 15 kilometres from Jauareté, the other in the forests between the Uaupés and Tiquié rivers.

Competende, who live along the upper Japú-Igarapé, a small tributary of the middle Uaupés river.

Techaatende, who live in the neighbourhood of the village of Iariti, near the Rio Tiquié.

Namcotende, who inhabit the right bank of the Rio Negro from the mouth of the Uaupés to the Tapuruquara.

There are other small groups, such as the Makú of the Irá-Igarapé, the Makú of the upper Castanha-Igarapé and a small group of the Umari-Igarapé on the upper Tiquié. The chief of this group told me that it calls itself Wauro, a name which is generally used to designate a member of the most noble class of the Tukano tribe. A small group of Makú also still exist in Colombia, on the Rio Traira, a tributary of the Apoporis.

The Namcotende who live between the Rio Negro and the Rio Japurá are divided into two divisions — the Nadöbö (eastern) and the Anodoëub (western). Among the Nadöbö the best-known families are the Kabari of the upper Rio Uineixi. The Tucano Bibiano Vasconcelos told me that in the same region there still exists a tribe whom Whites call "Piranhas," a dangerous fish common to Amazon waters. The "Piranhas" remain hostile towards white people and have avoided their influence.

On the Paraná Boá-Boá, a tributary of the River Japurá, there lives a small group of Makú who, like the Uariua of the middle Japurá, belong to the "wild" Guariba.² Settlers of the Tukano tribe on the banks and islands of the Rio Negro call the Makú groups who live between the Negro and Japurá rivers the Shiriwai. Schultz³ states that the Makú of the Boá-Boá river call the Kabari of the Rio Uineixi the Manoide and look upon them as their relatives. The Kabari's own name for the Boá-Boá group is Makú. Schultz gives the word *cabori* for man. It seems likely that Kabari or Cabori may be their own name for the whole group. It is worth noting that two streams, tributaries of the Rio Tiquié, are called Cabari-Igarapé, and the Tukano chief Padilha told me that the first inhabitants of Tiquié were the Cabari.

CLASSIFICATION

The Makú who live between the rivers Uaupés and Tiquié call their language Hubde-nehern (*hub*, man; *hubde*, men; *nehern*,

² C. Tastevin, "Les Makú du Japurá," *Journal de la Société des Americanistes*, Paris, Vol. XV, 1923, pp. 99 ff; Harald Schultz, "Ligeiras notas sobre os Makú de Parana Boá-Boá," *Revista do Museu Paulista*, Vol. X, 1959, pp. 109 ff.

³ Harald Schultz, *op. cit.*, pp. 110 ff.

language).⁴ In an ethnological map, Loukotka⁵ classifies the Makú as an independent linguistic family, including (as well as the people already described) the Yapuoas, who live between the rivers Uaupés and Içana, and the Puinave, who inhabit the banks of the Rio Inirida, a tributary of the Guaviare, in Colombia.

The term Makú has been applied incorrectly to some other tribes of completely different linguistic stock, such as the "Makú of the Cauaboris," belonging to the Yanoname family, and the Piaroa-Makú, who form a separate linguistic family. The M'á ku (Makú) of the Serra Parima of the Roaima territory also form their own family. The Macúna (Makú with black skins) have been identified by Koch-Grünberg as a group of Tukano.⁶

HISTORICAL NOTES

The Makú affirm that they are the original inhabitants of this region. When the other Indians (Betoia and Aruak) invaded the land, the Makú were defeated, were forced to cede the land to the invaders and retreated to the interior forests, where they occupied the headwaters of small brooks. This tradition seems to be true. In the Tukano language the Rio Uaupés is called *Dya Poxsá* (Rio dos Makú). Wenceslao Padilha, an old chief of the Tukano village of Alta Bareira on the Rio Tiquié, a tributary off the right bank of the Uaupés, told me that the first inhabitants of the Tiquié were the Cabari (Makú).

Missionaries of the Carmelite order seem to have made an attempt to settle some Makú together with other tribes in villages. In the accounts of Noronha, Sampaio and Ferreira in the eighteenth century there is reported that the Makú inhabited the following villages on the Rio Negro: Maupi, Santa Isabel, Sao Antonio de Castanheiro Novo, Nosa Senhora de Nazaré de Curianá.⁷

Among more than 60 villages founded during the last 50 years by Salesian missionaries, only three have a partly Makú population: Paxiuba-Igarapé on the Uaupés river, and Piracuara and Jandu on the Papurí river.⁸

⁴ P. Antonio Giaccone, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁵ Cestmir Loukotka's map, "Ethno-Linguistic Distribution of South American Indians" appear in *Classification of South American Indian Languages* (edited by Johannes Wilbert), University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1967.

⁶ Theodor Koch-Grünberg, *Zwei Jahre unter den Indianern Nordwest-Brasiliens*, Stuttgart, 1921, p. 379.

⁷ P. Alcínio Brúzzi Alves da Silva, *A Civilisazao Indigena do Uaupés*, Missao Salesiana do Rio Negro, Sao Paulo, 1962, p. 41.

⁸ This is my own information.

A document written by Brother Marchetti, a Franciscan missionary, in 1885 absolutely prohibits the selling, buying and hunting of Makú.⁹

ELEMENTS OF MATERIAL CULTURE

All Makú groups are semi-nomadic and a whole group often will move to distant camping places. For instance, from 1960 to January 1961 the Makú of the upper Castanha-Igarapé were camping in the woods near the Salesian mission of Pari-Cachoeira, where I visited them frequently. They were 40 to 50 kilometres from their home area.

The Makú are mainly a hunting and collecting tribe. Only recently under the influence of the missionaries have they begun to grow small plantations.

Their houses are simple. Four beams are used for the four corners, the walls or sides and the roof being covered with leaves of the *açai* or *inaja* palms. Sometimes there are only two sloping roofs, forming with the earth in section a triangle to form one room.

The Makú are the sole producers of beautifully made *balaios* (sieves). These are made from liana stems, and the Makú also manufacture simple hammocks from the fibre of the *tucum* palm. For modesty's sake the Makú wear a *tunga* made from a banana leaf.

Because the Makú have no natural salt available they reduce the bones of hunted animals to ashes and mix them with pepper. As a drink they use *kaxpi*, prepared mainly from the juice of lianas of the genera *Banisteria*. The Makú are also great users of *ipadú*, a drug which is made from the dried leaves of the *coca* shrub (*Erythroxylon coca* L.) and chewed like tobacco to overcome hunger. It is made in a tube carved from the trunk of a tree in which the dried leaves are reduced to powder with the aid of a wooden pestle. The Makú are the sole producers of *ipadú* in the Uaupés region and their use of it is a cultural element they have in common with the Aymara and Quechua Indians in the Bolivian Highlands.¹⁰

The Makú are excellent hunters and tapir, monkeys, forest pig, deer and jaguar are the main contributions to their table. Hunting is carried out with bow and arrow, and also with the

⁹ This document was discovered by Father Balzola in 1923 in the possession of the Tukano chief of Pari-Cachoeira.

¹⁰ P. Matthias Jacobs, *Wunderland Bolivien*, Kreuzlingen, 1953, pp. 37 ff.

sarabatana (blowpipe), whose manufacture is exclusively the property of the Makú. They also produce a deadly efficient type of arrow-head poison (*curare*) but refuse to reveal the actual formula they use in its manufacture. On their hunting parties the Makú are accompanied by small dogs. The only domesticated creature I have observed apart from these dogs is a bird, the *Gaviao real*. I once saw a woman call to one of these birds which was sitting in a tall tree. On hearing the woman's loud cry of *wii, wii*, the bird flew down and sat on her outstretched hand without doing her any harm. It immediately reminded me of some noblewoman of the Middle Ages with her hunting falcon.

Besides hunting, the Makú collect wild fruits in the woods, lizards, rats, ants, termites and other insects. Where they live near missions they grow plantations of manioc, yams and the *pupunha* palm.

RELIGION

Very little is known about the religious customs of the Makú. They have medicine men. The girls have an initiation ceremony and as far as I could observe their hair is cut short during this time. A missionary, the late Miguel Blanco,¹¹ writing about a funeral ceremony, says that all the people come together and are decorated with feather headdresses. After they have buried the body of the dead person they build a great fire on the grave. Afterwards they plant yams in the ashes but only return to the grave when the yams are ripe.

The Makú of the Paran  Bo -Bo , a fork of the Japur  river, have a festival when the fruits of the *pupunha* palm are mature.¹²

PHYSICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

The Mak  are small of stature, slender of build and fair skinned, rather like the colour of pale clay. They have abundant black hair, often of a fine texture. The forehead is low and sloping, while the cheekbones hardly show. The nose is high and fine and the eyes are more open than is normal in the Amerindians so that they appear almost Caucasoid. Some Mak  have more delicate features than the other tribes.¹³ The Mak  have a

¹¹ Miguel Blanco, *O Inferno Verde*, Edi oes Salesianas, Porto, Portugal, 1962, p. 40.

¹² Harald Schultz, *op. cit.*, pp. 109 ff.

¹³ P. Alc nilio Br zzi Alves da Silva, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

melancholy expression and some groups, like the so-called Makú of "Sao Gabriel" have a debauched appearance, which is attributed to alcohol.

These racial qualities very much resemble those of the Yanoname or Waika group, despite the fact that both belong to another linguistic family. It seems likely that the Makú, belonging from a cultural point of view to the same old stratum as the Yanoname (inner marginals), may be of the same racial proto-Australoid stock described by R. Gayre of Gayre in *Ethnological Elements of Africa*, including the Ainu of North Japan.¹⁴

POSITION AMONG TRIBES OF THE AREA

Dom Pedro Massa¹⁵ calls the Makú the pariah of the woods. The other tribes in the Uaupés area have a hierarchical structure. The Betoya tribes and the Aruakian Tariana are subdivided into many clans or classes with three or four leading clans — an aristocracy at the top with three lower clans which are called "slaves."¹⁶ All these tribes are exogamous.

The Makú, however, are completely different. Racially, culturally and linguistically they are different stock and they are completely separate from the other tribes. A Makú man can only marry a Makú girl, although preferably, but not necessarily, of another group. He may never marry a girl of another tribe and no man from another tribe will marry a Makú girl. The other tribes claim that the Makú are not people at all but "children of the jaguar." Because of this Makú are not allowed to live in the houses of other tribes or build cabins near the houses of other Indians. They are obliged to live outside the villages of the other tribes. If Makú are given food by other Indians for whom they are working they must eat it apart from the other Indians. Makú are completely prohibited from participating in the feasts of other tribes and are not even allowed to attend them simply as observers. The first Salesian missionaries noted that when a Makú received some cloth or a pot as a present, other Indians took the present away from him with the remark that "children of the jaguar" did not need such things. Tukano, Tariana, Dessano and Miriti-Tapuia forced the Makú to work on their plantations

¹⁴ Compare with my "The Aharaibu Indians: A 'White' Tribe in the Amazon," *THE MANKIND QUARTERLY*, Vol. X, No. 4, April-June 1970, pp. 185-198.

¹⁵ Dom Pedro Massa, *De Tupan a Cristo*, Missoes Salesianas do Amazonas, Rio de Janeiro, 1965, p. 67.

¹⁶ P. Alcínio Brúzzi Alves da Silva, *op. cit.*, p. 472. The "middle" clans may be considered free commoners.

and also provide game for them.¹⁷ Should the Makú refuse to carry out these duties they are ill-treated. Other Indians will even force the Makú to hand over their sons to them. These boys are compelled to serve as *pagen* (pages) to the sons of their masters. The chiefs of the Tiquié and Papurí river used, and still use, Makú to provide game and fish and take care of the chiefs' children. However, these Makú are not allowed to live in the houses of their masters and cannot participate in tribal festivals. O Tucano Bibiano Vascocecellos told me: "The Makú are for our service during peace and warriors in time of war." Even as late as the nineteenth century the Tukano sold Makú to white traders and received payment for them. This is proved by a document of 1882 which states that Franciscan missionaries banned the Tukano of the upper Rio Tiquié from selling Makú. However, this does not appear to be a real form of slavery, but rather a relationship more akin to vassalage. Today, in return for their services, the Makú receive protection and sustenance. If the work on which they are engaged is completed they are allowed to return to their *malocas* (common house) and live there freely, with their own chiefs and shamans. Alves da Silva¹⁸ claims that Makú women and girls must serve their masters as concubines during these working periods. This seems to be an exaggeration. Old missionaries, like Dom Joao Marchesi, P. A. Giacone, P. E. Lopez and P. M. Maltan, who have dedicated almost the whole of their lives to the service of these tribes, have told me that there is no proof of this. I myself observed that Makú women are anxious to protect their daughters and the girls never go out alone unless accompanied by their mothers.

In 1960, accompanying the late Bishop Dom José Domitrowitsch, I visited the missions of Jauareté and Pari-Cachoeira. The bishop wanted to take photographs of all the boys and girls of the major groups. All the other tribal groups came forward proudly and gladly but not so the Makú. In Jauareté they appeared only hesitatingly and reluctantly and in Pari-Cachoeira they fled. In the Tukano village of Alta Barreira the catechist, himself a Tukano, pointed to some Makú who were without clothes and observing our arrival from a good distance and said: "Look, there are some natives," forgetting that he was himself a

¹⁷ Father Alfonso Casasnovas, who was appointed missionary to the Makú in 1972, told me in January 1972 that this practice still exists. Makú are still working on plantations for other tribes and Father Casasnovas found Makú boys and even a girl in a Tukano village. In an ethnological map of the Uaupés river and the area of the Tiquié and Papurí rivers, Father Casasnovas shows that each village of the Betoya and Aruakian tribes has its own group of Makú working for it.

¹⁸ P. Alciniilio Brüzzi Alves da Silva, *op. cit.*, p. 386.

native. In Sao Paulo, on the upper Rio Tiquié, the Tukano ordered some Makú to stand back and were only called upon to appear when Father Maltan insisted that he wished to see them.

On the Rio Negro the Kabari and other small groups of Makú hold a similar position as their relatives in the Uaupés region. The population of Rio Negro consists mainly of *caboclos*, who have resulted from miscegenation between the Aruakian Baré and white settlers, including a few Portuguese merchants and owners of plantations of Para rubber trees (*Hevea brasiliensis*).

Most of the merchants on the Curi-Curiary river in Camondé, Maçarabi, Bom Jardim and Tapuruquara have Makú in their service. The Makú are lodged in miserable cabins without furniture, are very poorly dressed and very shy. If a missionary is known to be on his way to visit the village their masters will order the Makú to disappear. Whereas all parents send their children to the mission boarding schools the merchants refuse to send Makú to learn anything. I once asked some Makú in the village of Bom Jardim why they did not return to their tribe and they replied: "The master does not permit it." In November 1957 we encountered a Makú woman in the house of a merchant near Bom Jardim. When the merchant's wife was asked what the Makú woman was doing there, she said: "My sister has given her to me." The merchants of Tapuruquara visit the Kabari on the upper Uineixi to collect forest products but payment is very low and often nothing at all. The merchants often take away Kabari children, promising to give them an education. The "payment" for these children is three gallons of manioc flour. These children never receive any education but are used by the merchants as servants.

In a sad condition are the Makú of Sao Gabriel. They carry out such duties as hunting and collecting for merchants and are mostly "paid" with alcohol. As a result they live in a grave state of degradation.

Salesian missionaries have made repeated attempts to help the Makú. Dom Joao Marchese and P. E. Lopez have visited their villages, using Makú as guides to take them through the forests, and P. Maltan was guided by Makú through the woods between Pari-Cachoeira and Jauareté. The Makú proved to be very good guides, very attentive and courteous. In an effort to protect them against ill-treatment by other Indians, Dom Joao Marchese called them his "little brothers" and they have remained faithful. An interesting fact has emerged from this. The Tukano have now come to the conclusion that all white men are really like these Makú, and superior to the Tukano and Tariana only by their technical arts, and not their aristocratic equals.

Boys and girls of the Makú have been accepted by the mission schools, although Indians have protested at this action. For instance, at supper time, when all the children are sitting down, the little Makú took their plates and ran out of the refectory and sat down on the ground to eat their meal with their fingers. Dom José Domitrowitsch and P. J. Schneider accepted children at the mission of Sao Gabriel but they fled after two or three days. The Salesian assistant and sisters could not give a reason. A few children remained for two or three years in the colleges, but Dom Pedro Massa states that the system did not seem successful.¹⁹

Repeatedly the Makú have asked for a mission which would be open only to their own people but shortage of Salesian missionaries as well as the dispersion of Makú groups throughout the jungle delayed carrying this out.

Attempts were made towards providing one by Dom J. Marchese, P. Luciano and P. L. de Stefano, although the death of Dom Pedro Massa proved to be another setback for this missionary work. An attempt by Dom Marchese was a failure. He wanted to settle some Makú on the Salesian-owned plantation of Fatima on the Tiquié river. The Tukano objected, saying that the region belonged to the Tukano and that Makú would not be allowed to settle there. Recently the Tukano chief of Sao Francisco on the Rio Tiquié asked the mission to found a school solely for Makú children and to send a girl teacher from the pedagogical school of Tapuruquare, promising to provide food for the children.

In conclusion it can be said that the position of the Makú among the tribes of the Uaupés and settlers of the Rio Negro is an authentic case of racial segregation.

OTHER EXAMPLES OF RACIAL SEPARATION AMONG INDIANS

The Makú are not the only case of racial separation among the pre-Columbian population of the New World.

Alain Gheerbrant²⁰ tells of a similar relationship between the Karibian Maquiritares and the Guaharibos, a branch of the Kamishawani of the Yanoname linguistic family. The Kamishawani play a similar rôle to that of the Makú

The relationship between the Urus of Lake Titicaca and the Uro d'Ancoaqui and the racially, culturally and linguistically

¹⁹ Dom Pedro Massa, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

²⁰ Alain Gheerbrant, "Im Urwald zwischen Orinoko und Amazonas," *Welt ohne Weisse*, F. A. Brockhaus, Wiesbaden, 1955, p. 211.

different tribes of the Bolivian and Peruvian highlands must also be called racial separation. Here, too, the Uro have a similar position to that of the Makú.²¹

The most famous example, however, may be that of the Inca Empire. The Inca Ayllus or Hatun-Rincriyoc formed a racially and culturally distinct caste which even had its own language, which was not known to the Hatun-Runa, who were the broad mass of the population of the Inca empire. The Incas had fairer skins, and were even known to have people with blond hair.²²

In North America, the Athapascan Etchareetine have been called *Awokanak* ("slaves") by their Algonquin neighbours the Cree, and seem to have held a similar position to that of the Makú.²³ A similar position may have been occupied by the Nijora among the Pima, Yuma and Papago of Arizona.²⁴

²¹ Siegfried Huber, *Im Reiche der Inkas*, Walter Verlag, Olten, Switzerland, 1956, p. 43; A. Métraux, "Contribution à le Ethnographie et à la Linguistique des Indiens Uro d'Ancoaqui," *Journal de la Société des Americanistes*, Vol. XXVII, 1935, p. 59.

The Hatun-Runa was composed of tribes who spoke different languages, often transferred from their original homelands to other regions, and all accepting the Ketshua language. Properly speaking the Incas were a great clan or tribe who dominated all others and did not mix with them. (The last Inca, Atahualpa, was the son of the Inca king and royal princess of the kingdom of Quito. Because of this Atahualpa could not succeed to the Inca throne; the legitimate heir was his half-brother Huaskar. The king decided, however, to divide the kingdom between them, a decision which resulted in war and helped Pizzaro conquer the country.) The Incas maintained their racial integrity by keeping themselves apart from the broad mass of the people; they even had their own language. All high officials (governors, state councillors, and so on) had to be members of the Inca clan Hatun Rincriyos. The only legitimate wife of the king was his own legitimate sister and only her children could be heirs to the throne.

²² Siegfried Huber, *op. cit.*, pp. 72 and 76.

²³ F. W. Hodge, *Handbook of American Indians, North of Mexico*, Pageant Book Company, New York, 1960, Vol. I, pp. 439-440.

²⁴ F. W. Hodge, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 78.

CORRIGENDUM

In Vol. XIII, No. 1, on page 20, line 10: for "former" read "latter."