

RHETORIC IN A POSTCOLONIAL WORLD: THE DISCOURSE SURROUNDING THE COLUMBIAN NUKAK TRIBE'S APPEARANCE

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On the morning of 11 May 2006, I carried out my normal routine before school. I sat down for breakfast, a fresh copy of the *New York Times* resting on my kitchen table. As I skimmed the front page, a headline caught my eye: "Leaving the Wild, and Rather Liking the Change" (Forero). The article told the story of a group of about eighty members of the indigenous Nukak tribe in Colombia who had abandoned their lives of near seclusion in the tropical rainforest and appeared in the city of San José del Guaviare, fascinated with the prospects of modern life. I was so intrigued by this tale that I even read the continuations of the article, an act that rarely happened in the course of my rushed before-school breakfast routine. That afternoon, when I had more time, I decided to research exactly *why* the tribe left the jungle. I expected to find more articles that were consistent with the coverage and tone of the *New York Times*, ones that told of the Nukak's desire to ditch their "Stone Age" existence and embrace contemporary life. I was shocked and utterly confused by what I found on the Internet. "Drug Wars Force Forest Nomads to Flee" was the headline of an article written a few weeks earlier by Survival International, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that supports "the movement for tribal peoples." I asked myself, were the Nukak *forced* to leave their jungle home, or was their emergence a function of an autonomous decision to reap the benefits of modern life? Continuing my research, I learned that this event had attracted worldwide media attention, but I did not come any closer to answering definitively my question, due to the differing ways the event was framed in Western sources.

The inconsistencies among Western accounts of the Nukak tribe's emergence set the stage for this research project. My analysis focuses on the discourse surrounding the event; specifically, the way in which the appearance of this tribe was discussed by Western NGOs and mainstream media in the U.S. This paper does not attempt to prove that any of these headlines tells the true story of the Nukak, as the truth may never be clear. In this way, I draw my methodology from Michel Foucault, who states that "what is at issue . . . is the over-all 'discursive fact'" (11), or what *has been said about* the Nukak's experience. In other words, I will engage in "rhetorical analysis rather than historical narrative," whereby I examine the discourse surrounding this event, rather than the event itself (Spurr 1).

Analyzing discourse is important because the discourse creates ways of knowing about the Nukak tribe. The way in which the tribe is discussed establishes a certain system of knowledge or perception of the tribe. "Discourse, once established, may be a forceful element in creating people's realities," Hilhorst writes (77). Thus, analysis of the rhetoric surrounding the Nukak is worthwhile because this creation of knowledge through discourse has real effects.

Discourse itself is a function of power because the act of creating discourse asserts a particular mode of discussion to be ultimately worthy of creating a knowledge system. Therefore, by analyzing the discourse, we learn a great deal about the way in which particular sources (such as Western NGOs or media) project their alleged power. Even though Foucault's rhetorical analysis in

The History of Sexuality focuses on sex instead of an indigenous tribe in Colombia, his insight into how power is manifested in discourse is widely applicable. “And these discourses on sex did not multiply apart from or against power, but in the very space and as the means of its existence,” he writes (32); the same is true of discourses on the Nukak. Looking at the discourse surrounding the Nukak’s contact with the outside world, I strive to uncover a particular manifestation of power over tribal peoples by Westerners. In this way, I align my intention with Foucault’s, whose “main concern will be to locate the forms of power, the channels it takes, and the discourse it permeates” (11).

This paper looks specifically at how Western sources describe experiences of tribal and indigenous peoples in a postcolonial era. First, I will discuss the rhetoric of various Western NGOs that specifically advocate for tribal peoples because these organizations published many articles about the Nukak’s experience. Second, I will reveal the discursive mode of mainstream Western media outlets from countries with a history of colonialism, such as the United States and Great Britain. My approach to discourse analysis shares with Spurr the goal to “subordinate the complexity and discreteness of any moment to the need for understanding it within a larger context” (2). In this way, I strive to uncover patterns of language surrounding tribal peoples rooted not in any one specific occurrence but instead in enduring Western assertions of power.

If discourse is itself a projection of both power and assumed knowledge, a certain discourse will usually dominate over others. This prevalent discourse may be a function of the dominant actor’s power over other actors. As Hilhorst writes, “The effect of discourse is that certain ways of understanding society, including its organization and the distribution of power, become excluded, whereas others attain authority” (8). In the discourse surrounding the Nukak tribe, it is apparent that Western voices are the dominant rhetors of this event, as independently published accounts from the Nukak tribe itself are nowhere to be found. Therefore, the discourse of this event is an example of Western assumptions of authority and superiority, the legacy of colonial times.

The rhetoric of Western NGOs and that of mainstream media are both examples of postcolonial discourse, but they are shown through different means. In mainstream media accounts, such as those found in the *New York Times* and ABC News, postcolonial discourse is manifested in the actual language used. The articles demean the tribesmen, draw upon stereotypes, and assume that Western ways of living are more worthy of desire. Although postcolonial discourse in Western journalism is not uncommon, I found it shocking that such self-righteous projections of Western power could be so rampant in the periodicals I read and rely on every day for international news. My analysis provides concrete evidence of this postcolonial rhetoric in the news sources we value.

While journalism is commonly examined in postcolonial discourse analysis, the role of NGOs is largely overlooked. The manifestation of Western power in NGO discourse is more unexpected because it actually contradicts the stated purposes of these organizations, which generally describe themselves as opposing or moderating the unequal power relations between Western nations and third world peoples, a depiction widely accepted by first world populations. Fisher observes that many critics of current development practices support NGOs as “vehicles for challenges to and transformations of relationships of power” (445). They are perceived as independent actors “‘doing good,’ unencumbered and untainted by the politics of government” (442). However, Foucauldian analysis reveals that NGOs sustain the very power structures they claim to challenge. Foucault’s theories of discourse—that discourse is an assertion of assumed power to create knowledge—validate the claim that NGOs project the postcolonial legacy of Western superiority and domination over tribal peoples, just as the mainstream media do. Even though the language used by NGOs is

sympathetic to the tribe's situation, the actual *act of creating discourse* projects the Western power found in postcolonial discourse. Western discourse is still postcolonial discourse, even in those voices expected to oppose the domination left over from colonial times.

It is important to note that a society is not likely to be aware of its discursive patterns: "There is nothing especially conscious or intentional in the use [of these rhetorical modes]; they are part of the landscape in which relations of power manifest themselves," writes Spurr (3). Therefore, when Western organizations employ "these rhetorical modes," they project assumptions of power that are so ingrained in their thoughts that the act becomes unconscious. The intention of my rhetorical analysis is to reveal these established power relationships to the society that projects them.

Even though the reality of the situation in Colombia has severe implications for the Nukak tribe, this is not the focus of my paper. I have already expressed my frustration in trying to uncover the hard facts surrounding the Nukak's situation; doing so appears to be nearly impossible and is ultimately unnecessary for this project. Yet the situation in Colombia (including a drug war and fighting between revolutionary groups) is inevitably a part of the media's discussion of the Nukak's appearance because this is one explanation for their move. Therefore, analysis of the discourse requires an exploration of the media's discussion of these conditions.

Discussion and Analysis of Western NGO Discourse

NGOs are often overlooked in postcolonial discourse analysis because their articles defend their generally accepted missions to moderate or oppose Western power assumed over third world peoples. Advocacy NGOs, which will be the focus of this paper, are particularly prone to producing rhetoric supportive of tribal people and opposing Western domination. Their overarching goal is to "[work] on behalf of others who lack the voice or access needed to promote their own interests" (Teegen, Doh, and Vachani 467). When advocacy NGOs published stories of the Nukak's emergence from the jungle, they were fulfilling their mission to provide a voice for the Nukak to reach the international community while advocating for the interests of tribal peoples. However, the language and content of articles by advocacy NGOs mask the power over tribal peoples inherent in the creation of their discourse.

It is important to note that the way in which NGOs inherently function and are structured in the international community heightens their ability to showcase a specific rhetoric: "Unlike democratically elected governments, which are accountable to their citizens, and firms, which are accountable to their owners and shareholders, NGOs serve diverse principals—clients, donors, individual members, and staff—and operate in environments that provide them with relative 'immunity from transparency'" (Teegen, Doh, and Vachani 471). In other words, because NGOs operate autonomously, the government and public have few means of checking their published accounts. Detailed rhetorical analysis of NGO articles is necessary because it provides a point of comparison to the discourse of mainstream Western media organizations and reveals how easy it is to overlook the power manifested in Western NGOs.

In line with their overarching mission, NGOs that advocate for the protection of indigenous peoples' rights and land were more likely to frame the Nukak's contact with the outside world as tragic and utterly detrimental to their identity and ties to traditional tribal life. In press releases, most stated explicitly that the Nukak were unwillingly pushed out of their homes or that they had no choice but to flee due to uninhabitable and unsafe living conditions. Many of these accounts blamed guerilla fighting and the drug war as the reasons the Nukak abandoned their territory.

The Colombia Human Rights Committee (CHRC) published an article, originally written by the Amazon Alliance for Indigenous and Traditional Peoples of the Amazon Basin, in spring of 2006, just at the time when the Nukak made their unexpected appearance in the city of San José del Guaviare. The Amazon Alliance, based in Washington, DC, “works to defend the rights, territories, and environment of indigenous and traditional peoples of the Amazon Basin” (“Support the Return”). An article about the emergence of the Nukak was written for another NGO, Survival International, which is based in England, with offices in other European countries, and works for tribal peoples’ rights through education, advocacy, and campaigns. Its Web site explicitly argues against the negative consequences of outside contact with indigenous tribes: “[W]e work closely with local indigenous organizations, and focus on tribal peoples who have the most to lose, usually those most recently in contact with the outside world” (“About Us”). It is clear that the CHRC, Amazon Alliance, and Survival are advocacy NGOs that claim to tip the balance of power back to indigenous peoples. However, by assuming the power to step in as the voice for indigenous peoples in the international community, they participate in the very power imbalance they claim to oppose.

The language used in these articles suggests that the Nukak’s emergence was not due to any autonomous decision, but rather was purely the result of fighting in the region. The title of an article published by Survival reads, “Drug Wars Force Forest Nomads to Flee.” It goes on to say that they were “trying to continue their nomadic hunter-gatherer way of life” amidst violence and seizure of their lands by coco farmers until “the scale of the fighting . . . made their life in the forest impossible.” Similarly, an Amazon Alliance article titled “Support the Return of the Nukak-Maku to Their Ancestral Lands in Colombia” states, “Most continued to live in the jungle, following their traditional way of life, until encounters with armed groups led a group of about 80 to emerge, once again, in 2003, followed by approximately 125 in March 2006.” Both articles emphasize the peaceful nature of the indigenous tribe, which was brusquely interrupted by intruders.

The consequences of outside contact for the Nukak tribe are portrayed as detrimental in these articles. The Amazon Alliance highlights dependence on inadequate government aid and overcrowded living conditions, which have resulted in disease and loss of identity (“Support the Return”). As a result, readers are left with the impression that the Nukak’s desire to return home is as great as their reluctance to abandon home in the first place. It isn’t surprising that the article published by Survival portrays contact with the outside world as a threat to extinction. A Nukak man named Chorebe is quoted in an article published in May: “We are few now; hardly any Nukak remain. The outsiders are many, and have big houses. They don’t care that the Nukak are being wiped out” (“Nukak Tribe”). Including authentic Nukak voices is a subjective decision by the writers for Survival International. Such quotes serve to support the greater mission of these advocacy NGOs to protect the territories and rights of indigenous people. I do not argue that these claims by the Amazon Alliance, CHRC, and Survival are untrue. Instead, my point is that this rhetoric, which frames the Nukak’s appearance in a modern city as life-threatening, causes readers to want to see the Nukak return to their homeland, thereby enabling these organizations to further their missions and execute their assumed role as the voice of indigenous peoples who, they claim, don’t have the power to speak for themselves.

It is clear that these advocacy NGOs rely heavily on each other for information, further demonstrating a shared discourse among them. Articles written by one organization often quote another, or the NGOs simply post the exact same press release for their readers, establishing a net-

work of shared discourse. An article regarding the Nukak published in the Spanish newspaper *El mundo* picked up on this sharing of content published among NGOs, stating, “[T]he NGOs in defense of indigenous peoples complain that both the main leftist Colombian guerillas, the FARC, and the right-wing paramilitary army, the AUC, have a large number of armed forces in the territory of the Nukak” (“Se suicida”). The fact that *El mundo* singles out “the NGOs in defense of indigenous peoples” suggests that other sources might account for the circumstances of the Nukak’s appearance in a different way.

Their employment of rhetoric supporting the development and protection of “third world” people is not the only reason NGOs have largely escaped accusations of engaging in postcolonial discourse. NGOs’ separation from governments creates the impression that those being advocated for enjoy greater participation within the organization. Lara Fischer comments that NGOs have witnessed an increase in funding “by virtue of their purported abilities to be more participatory, egalitarian, and democratic, among other positive attributes, than state-left social programs” (1). Through a Foucauldian lens, including indigenous points of view means these people have greater power to create a knowledge system through discourse. As William Fisher observes, referencing Foucault, “[Activists and revolutionary theorists] envision the emergence of alternative discourse and practices of development and anticipate the contribution of NGOs to an ‘insurrection of subjugated knowledges’” (445). In other words, NGOs appear to empower the people, making their use of postcolonial discourse seem unlikely. However, Western NGOs, not the indigenous people themselves, ultimately assume this power asserted through discourse. NGOs stand in for the “authentic” voice of the indigenous people speaking to the international community instead of empowering them to speak for themselves. Therefore, Western NGOs project the power characteristic of postcolonial discourse through the creation of a unique power-knowledge system. While it may be true that NGOs work closely with indigenous people to more conscientiously address their issues, this does not necessarily result in power granted to the Nukak through the projection of their own discourse.

The fact that NGOs feel the obligation to step in and magnify the interests of oppressed peoples is a comment on how these NGOs view their own power. When NGOs claim to voice and protect the interests of tribal people, they assume that these people lack power to assert their own discourse to represent themselves. In a study of how NGOs from Northern countries discussed the people of Southern countries they were representing in political situations, Fischer found that “Southern citizens continued to be patronized and/or colonized by being treated as if they were incompetent to speak for themselves, and pre-empted from, or at least not enabled to, represent themselves” (225). These advocacy NGOs therefore view themselves as possessing a more commanding and influential voice in the international community than the people for whom they advocate. hooks re-creates the thinking of these NGOs towards the tribes in order to better illustrate how power is manifested in their discourse: “I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become my own. Rewriting you, I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still the colonizer, the speaking subject” (qtd. in Fischer 228). NGOs may work closely with the Nukak to advocate for their interests, but the way in which they represent the tribe’s desires will never replace the true voice of the Nukak.

If discourse is an assertion of power, then the appropriating of the Nukak tribe’s discourse by NGOs is another projection of the West’s alleged power over peoples previously subject to colonization. Unlike in the discourse of Western mainstream media outlets, in which notions of power

are explicit in the language and content, power here is projected through the very act of creating discourse. Postcolonial power lives on through this new way of understanding and knowing the tribe. I do not discredit the claims made by NGOs; instead, I argue that it is important to keep in mind these conditions when analyzing the discursive regime they construct.

Discussion and Analysis of Western Mainstream Media Discourse

While postcolonial rhetoric has been discovered in countless Western texts, the articles written about the Nukak tribe's appearance reveal the painful prevalence of this rhetoric in our nation's most trusted news sources. In mainstream Western media accounts, such as those published in the *New York Times* and aired on ABC's daily television show *Good Morning America*, the Nukak experience is framed in stereotypical binaries, contrasting "modern" lifestyles and amenities with the "traditional" ways of the Nukak. While the accounts made an attempt to explain why the Nukak left their home in the jungle, there was less emphasis on the devastating circumstances from which they were forced to flee, and more emphasis on their hopeful plans for the future. Most interesting is the discussion of the tribe's embrace of modern ways of life in San José del Guaviare.

Postcolonial discourse in Western journalism is easier to pinpoint than NGOs' discourse because assumptions of power are explicit in the actual rhetoric used. At the same time, Foucauldian analysis leads to the claim that this power is generated by the creation of discourse. Therefore, postcolonial discourse simultaneously reflects and enables Western nations' extension of power. Spurr explains that colonial discourse is collectively known as "the particular languages which belong to the process [of colonization], enabling it while simultaneously being generated by it" (1). While the Nukak tribe's decision to leave their home in the jungle is not exactly an example of colonization, the way in which the Western media discuss these indigenous people and their experience mirrors colonial rhetoric. Spurr alludes to this idea that colonial discourse is exemplified in situations beyond pure colonization: "My own study treats colonial discourse as belonging both to the classical colonial situation and to the more elusive, more powerful forces of cultural hegemony in the post colonial world" (6). In other words, Western discourse is still colonial discourse. This rhetoric exemplifies the West's perception of itself as a "cultural hegemon" and is explicit in these accounts of the Nukak's experience.

Headlines of the event published by major Western media outlets project notions of postcolonial superiority. "Stone Age Tribe Pleads: Let Us Join 21st Century" (Knapp) was printed in bold letters in the *Daily Star*, published in Britain in May 2006. This headline gives the impression that the Nukak left their territory autonomously, wrapped in desire to lead the modern life of the Western world. The fact that this tribe must "plead" to "join the 21st century" automatically sets up relationships of power between the West, which belongs to the modern world, and this "Stone Age tribe," which seeks to join it. Using the verb "plead" indicates that joining the modern world requires the approval of those already a part of it. By assuming that the "21st-century" lifestyle is worthy of desire, colonial discourse maintains postcolonial hegemony: "[Colonial discourse] is a way of creating and responding to reality that is infinitely adaptable in its function of preserving the basic structures of power," states Spurr (11). Knapp, the author of the article, upholds the structure of power that the West asserted in colonial times by emphasizing the Nukak's desire to live a Western way of life.

This facet of colonial rhetoric is further exemplified in the article published by the *New York Times* titled "Leaving the Wild, and Rather Liking the Change" (Forero), (my first exposure to this

event) and in an article published by ABC News (“Remote Jungle Tribe”) that mirrors the story aired on *Good Morning America*. It is important to note, however, that these articles do not firmly attribute the Nukak’s abandoning of their homes to an autonomous decision to seek modern life, as did the article published in the *Daily Star*. At the same time, the articles do not explicitly state that the Nukak were helpless, forced out of their homes by unsafe conditions of guerilla civil warfare, as did the articles published by the advocacy NGOs Survival International and the Amazon Alliance. Instead, they give a variety of reasons, stating, “[I]t is not known for sure why they left the jungle” (Forero) and that the Nukak came into society “for reasons that remain a mystery” (“Remote Jungle Tribe”). Both articles do, in fact, suggest the most likely reason to be “[fleeing] the civil war” (Forero). This elusiveness in explaining the Nukak’s reasons for seeking contact allows the authors to execute postcolonial discourse at their discretion when explaining the Nukak’s current experiences with modern life.

It isn’t hard to guess that amidst this uncertainty, the articles still hint that these eighty tribe members were enticed by contemporary life. Framing the story in this way is characteristic of colonial rhetoric, as it portrays the tribe wanting what we, as an “advanced society,” already possess. In only the second paragraph, the *New York Times* article implies that the abandoning of their home means they “declared themselves ready to join the modern world.” Similarly, the first line of an article written for the *Daily Star* states that the Nukak “say they want to join the modern world,” (Knapp, “Stone Age Tribe in 21st Century Plea”). Using powerful language such as the word “declare” gives the impression that the Nukak’s abandoning of their hunter-gatherer life was not due to force by armed revolutionary groups fighting for land, or the uninhabitable situation of being caught in the crossroads of a drug war, but was rather their own autonomous decision to seek modern life.

Exceedingly interesting is the emphasis placed on the Nukak’s desire to embrace the modern world now that they have abandoned the jungle for unknown reasons. Rather than focus on the past, the article published by ABC News focuses on the tribe’s current fascination with modern life and alludes to the fact that they are content to stay: “According to the *Times*, the tribe is enjoying its first experiences of the modern world.” Merely three days after this content was aired on national American television, the article by Survival called for the tribe’s return home and requested the removal of armed groups in the Nukak’s territory.

Extending this rhetoric of the tribe’s contentedness is the *New York Times* article, which quotes a Nukak man named Ma-be saying, “We do not want to go back. . . . We want to stay near town. We can plant our own food. In the meantime the town can help us” (Forero). Noting the context of this quote is very important in understanding its true meaning. The quote “We do not want to go back” is placed directly after the author’s statement that the Nukak have “declared themselves ready to join the modern world.” Therefore, readers with no prior knowledge of the subject get the impression that the Nukak “do not want to go back” to the traditional world that contrasts with the “modern world” they have just boldly entered. It is highly unlikely that a reader would ever presume that the Nukak “do not want to go back” because life-threatening guerilla warfare awaits them. Therefore, the author, perhaps subconsciously, sets up his readers to believe that the Nukak actually desired contact and the adaptation of modern ways of life.

These articles appear to provide the Nukak with an autonomous voice speaking to the international community; however, we never have unmediated access and cannot truly understand their claims. Quotes from Nukak tribe members are used to illustrate their curiosity with the luxuries of

contemporary life. Forero writes, “Are they sad? ‘No!’ cried a Nukak named Pia-pe, to howls of laughter. In fact, the Nukak said they could not be happier. Used to long marches in search of food, they are amazed that strangers would bring them sustenance—free.” On paper, this quote technically serves as evidence of the Nukak’s contentedness in the modern world, and readers are left with this impression. However, there are also indications of the quote’s deception. Pia-pe’s simple answer “No!” to the question of his sadness does not necessarily translate to “I am genuinely happy experiencing modern life.” There are hints throughout the article that the Nukak members interviewed did not answer the questions in a completely serious manner. First, Pia-pe answers “to howls of laughter,” indicating that perhaps his fellow tribesmen know he is joking. The article goes on to say that “they laughed at some of the questions, and it seemed, wholly innocently at their own predicament.” Once again, this indicates that perhaps the quotes from the Nukak demonstrating their embrace of modern life were not totally genuine. Perhaps the journalist himself could not accurately judge the attitude of the Nukak because he does not speak their language and was delivered translated answers. These numerous pitfalls for perfectly understanding the Nukak’s firsthand accounts allow the author to cater to age-old colonial rhetoric. There are multiple instances, therefore, when the article’s overarching message that the Nukak “[like] the change” (to quote the title) is supported by quotes taken out of context.

Forero’s references to the tribesmen’s “howling laughter” and joking personae do more than just indicate that perhaps their quotes weren’t totally genuine; these references also extend a colonial rhetoric that portrays indigenous people as childish and uninformed. In describing specifically American colonization, Spurr discusses how American action is portrayed as the “salvation of the world’s poorest nations who . . . must be weaned from their childish addictions” (120). The fact that the Nukak laugh “wholly innocently . . . at their own predicament” makes it seem as if they aren’t smart enough to make decisions they can justify, so much so that the abandonment of their homes has stuck them in “their own predicament.”

Perhaps the most obvious embodiment of colonial discourse in the Western media is the exaggerated contrast between the description of life in the forest (portrayed as “less advanced”) and the modern life the tribe members so desire (portrayed as “more advanced”). These descriptions draw upon established perceptions of Western superiority. Spurr references the ideas of the French anthropologist Georges Balandier to describe this aspect of colonial discourse: “A set of relations is put into place between two different cultures: one fast-moving, technologically advanced, and economically powerful; the other slow-moving and without advanced technology or a complex economy” (6). The article published in the *New York Times* is a perfect example of this discourse surrounding the contrast in material wealth when it states, “Ma-be explained that the idea is to grow plantains and yucca and take the crops to town. ‘We can exchange it for money,’ he said, ‘and exchange the money for other things.’” Here, Forero makes it clear that the Nukak want to abandon their simple economy and enter into the “advanced” and “powerful” economic system by using modern money for the first time. This comparison between modern “fast-moving” and traditional “slow-moving” values is also demonstrated by the title of a slide show of photos that accompanied the article on the *New York Times* Web site: *Caught between Worlds*. The rhetoric surrounding the Nukak’s traditional practices builds upon this disparity in development by portraying them as living behind the times. “The men *still* go into the jungle, searching for monkeys. . . . The women *still* spend their time carefully weaving intricate wristbands and hammocks, using threads from palm leaves,” the article reads (my emphasis). While the articles by Survival and the Amazon Alliance

focus mostly on the Nukak's displacement, this article begins and ends with discussion about the Nukak's fascination with the more advanced objects that Western society has produced (such as planes, pots, pans, shoes, caps, rice, sugar). This discussion not only emphasizes the contrast in material development between societies, but also suggests that Western existence is superior and worthy of desire.

In the wake of this notion that the Nukak lead a "slow-moving" life in contrast to that of a modern fast-paced economy, they are referred to as "primitive" and "Stone Age," connotations that denigrate their way of life. The article published in the *New York Times* opens with the sentence "Since time immemorial the Nukak-Makú have lived a Stone Age life" (Forero). The title of the article published in the *Daily Star* reads "Stone Age Tribe in 21st Century Plea" (Knapp). The *Sunday Express* edition of this paper published on the same day refers to the tribe as "Stone Age" and "primitive" (Knapp). ABC News' 15 May story refers to the Nukak's "ancient way of life" ("Remote Jungle Tribe").

This rhetorical contrast of contemporary and traditional values is a component of colonial discourse that draws upon stereotype: "These relations are antagonized by the instrumental role which the colonized society is forced to play, so that in order to maintain its authority the colonizing society resorts not only to force, but also to a series of 'pseudo-justifications and stereotyped behaviors'" (Spurr 6). These "stereotyped behaviors" are exemplified in the *Daily Star* in Knapp's reference to "a group of around 80 half-naked tribesmen" who "wandered out of the wilderness with their children and pet monkeys in tow." While this was probably true, the specific language chosen evokes the stereotype of a typical tribe member: half-clothed and secluded in the jungle with a monkey for a pet. The single picture that accompanies this article is a close-up of an innocent-looking Nukak boy with a monkey on his head. For readers of the *Daily Star*, this image stereotypically represents the entire Nukak tribe: a group of childish and helpless people who play with monkeys, oblivious of modern life.

Furthermore, the ABC News article fails to reveal that the Nukak have previously had brief contact with the outside world, portraying them as completely new to modern life. In this way, ABC News ignores much of the context surrounding the story in order to create a stereotyped image of oblivious jungle tribesmen. The article reads, "In March there was a remarkable meeting of the millenniums [*sic*]" ("Remote Jungle Tribe"). In addition to drawing upon stereotypes, ignoring the tribe's previous contact with outsiders is an extension of colonial discourse in itself: as Caton argues, "From a western perspective, it is quite convenient to erase these historical realities, as doing so, by default, erases western responsibility for current structural global imbalances in human welfare that are largely the result of past western imperialist projects, as well as past and present western economic and cultural hegemony" (18). In this way, colonial discourse serves Westerners by ignoring any harmful implications their contact with the third world has created.

Conclusion

In my search to uncover the Nukak tribe's reasons for abandoning their secluded jungle home, it became clear that Western discourse surfaced as the dominant rhetoric. I was not able to locate any sources that were controlled directly by the Nukak and independent from Western groups, although both NGOs and media outlets cite the words of Nukak people. In creating this discourse, Western NGOs and media outlets assert their power to construct a perspective of the Nukak tribe that becomes a reality to their readers. Readers of the *New York Times* and press releases from

Survival International will understand the Nukak's situation from an inevitably Western perspective, which is laced with ongoing postcolonial power. NGOs seek to reverse the damage that Western contact inflicted upon tribal peoples' culture and generally resent the Western assumptions of superiority that caused this damage. However, in doing so, they assume that they possess a greater power and influence in the international community. The discourse they perpetuate stands in for the authentic voices of people they claim to represent, thereby marginalizing the latter's participation and power. Mainstream media outlets assert Western power through a colonial discourse that assumes Western ways of life are supreme and worthy of desire. Overall, power over tribal peoples lives on through the discourse the West creates. Western discourse is proof that conceptions of Western hegemony still exist, even in the very organizations that claim to resist that notion.

While Western sources are the dominant rhetoric, these sources lack consistency in accounting for the Nukak tribe's appearance. In other words, my initial question of why the tribe left the jungle is still unanswered. If creating discourse is an act of power and knowledge-creation, two competing discourses will result in a power struggle between them. Hilhorst writes, "Issues of power and control are at the heart of conflicts over discourse" (49). The contrasting accounts of Western NGOs and mainstream media, explicit in this paper, have visibly produced a "conflict over discourse." The reader ultimately determines the dominant discourse that will dictate his or her understanding of the tribe. What will the reader choose to believe—accounts of the Nukak forced to flee their homes and eager to return, or accounts of the Nukak enjoying contemporary life? In the event of a "conflict over discourse" within the larger framework of Western rhetoric, readers can shift the balance of power towards one discourse or another.

Whichever discourse ultimately dominates will create the knowledge used to assess the Nukak's situation in Colombia. Hilhorst writes that "the more dominant a discourse, the more it operates as a set of rules about what can and cannot be said and done, and about what" (11). Therefore, the future of the Nukak—whether they will return to the jungle or continue to live in San José del Guaviare—rests on whether the NGOs or mainstream media become the dominant discourse. Unless alternative voices gain strength in the international system, either discourse will be a function of postcolonial Western power. We may never know which is closest in line with the voice of the Nukak, but at least being aware of Western power in discourse will enable us to evaluate the situation in Colombia from a more practical perspective.

A specific mode of discourse is constantly perpetuated in a society because its members are conditioned to think that way from the time they perceive language. In this way, discourse is simultaneously executed and protected so that the next generation will carry on its legacy. We buy into these rhetorical modes because we engage in them and are a part of them ourselves; in other words, we "speak the same language" as the Western journalists who document these foreign events. It is only when we are exposed to alternative discourses surrounding specific events that we have any chance of coming to terms with our own popular language. In fact, the act of writing this paper served exactly that purpose for me. I was so intrigued by the article "Leaving the Wild, and Rather Liking the Change" in the *New York Times* because I liked and readily accepted the idea that a "Stone Age" tribe would aspire to be a part of the modern world in which I already lived. This portrayal of the event, of course, made sense to me because my thinking has inevitably been framed by manifestations of the postcolonial power that is rampant in Western discourse. It was only when I researched the accounts of this event in other sources that I realized the Nukak's embrace of mod-

ern life (or rejection of modern life, for that matter) may not be wholly in line with reality. That reality is known only by the Nukak themselves.

I write this paper to make known these Western rhetorical modes that may be harmful and unfair to other citizens of the world, namely, tribal peoples or others who have been targeted by Western notions of superiority. In this way, my project extends the purpose of other postcolonial scholarship, which “attempts to call attention to the dangers implicit in the patterns of thinking we take for granted and suggest alternative ways of constructing the world that are healthier and fairer to all of its citizens, especially those who have been marginalized by previous regimes of truth (Foucault)” (Caton 6). It is my hope that awareness of the power implicit in this discourse will cause others to realize its marginalizing effects and start to treat indigenous people as empowered equals so that we may hear their real story.

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