DULE POLI-AESTHETIC MOVEMENT:
MOLAS, BOXING, AND POETRY

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DEDICATION

For Mom, Dad, Mamá Aida, Papá Bebe,
Tía Cristina, Tío Roberto and Tío Robertito
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ABSTRACT

Dule cultural practices and aesthetic products express the continued existence of the Dule, Indigenous people of Gunayala, in multilayered spaces in both everyday Panama and also beyond Panamanian borders. These articulations of Dule in/visible presence create a poli-aesthetic counterpoint-counterplot through multiple media including the textile art of molas (a Dule reverse-appliqué textile), the sport of boxing, and poetry. Dule poli-aesthetic (artful and political) ontology embodies the complexities of political, social, economic and cultural identities in modern Panama. This dissertation draws on the works of de Certeau, Rancière, Said, Nash, and Heidegger in order to address the ontological paradigm of Dule histories, juxtaposed with non-Dule Panamanian (hi)stories. Centering on molas, boxing and poetry, Dule poli-aesthetic movements present counterpoint-counterplot to Panamanian national narratives in such a way that threatens constructed national (hi)stories that purport to define “what is Panamanian” and “who is Panamanian.”
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Introduction

Peripatetic Texts: Molas, Boxing, and Poetry

“¡Mira y observa!” (Look and observe!), my grandfather once said to me as a young child as I watched him weave the fronds of the palm trees to make a roof of a dule house for my dolls. ¡Mira y observa! This call to “look and observe” has remained with me ever since as an invitation to awareness of the world around. It must have been at work in my subconscious on a rainy spring day several years ago when I entered a Starbucks coffeehouse on Alakea Street in downtown Honolulu and encountered an image of a large advertisement for a coffee product grown in Panama. I observed this large motif hanging on the wall instinctively recognizing the design’s origin. The motif was an abstract floral design, surrounded by vertical columns in the space of a squared outline border which, in turn, is encircled by stitched fragmented lines painted to simulate the look of thread stitches. This painted image was a replica of a *mola* or blouse, a brightly-colored, rectangular shaped reverse-appliqué textile. The mola’s origin is specific only to the Dule, an indigenous people of Gunayala residing on the Atlantic coastline of Panama.¹ It is one of the most notable aesthetic textile pieces made by the indigenous Dule. There I stood in the middle of a coffeehouse, looking at this folk artform that Starbucks chose to represent its product

¹ I use the term *Dule* in this dissertation to describe this specific Indigenous people of Panama; a word which they use to identify themselves as a people. However, Guna (another term also accepted by the Dule) is a word more commonly used by others, including academic scholars, to identify this group. Other words that are often used to identify the Dule include San Blas Indians, San Blaseños, Kuna, Cuna, and Tule. Furthermore, the name “San Blas” (this is Spanish term for Saint Blaise, a patron of the Catholic Church) is used (by others) to refer to the region Dule people inhabit, which today is called Gunayala (also with the spelling variation of Kuna Yala.) Throughout the dissertation, I keep to the original diversity of references used by scholars in their own literary works, as to how each has addressed the Dule people and contexts—i.e., Cuna, Kuna, San Blas Indians or Tule, including also isle communities such as Ailigandi, and the Gunayala region as Kuna Yala or San Blas. However, in my own analysis, I use the word Dule to refer to the people, Ailigandi (the proper Dulegaya spelling variation of Ailigandi,) and Gunayala to refer to the region they inhabit in Panama.
through the cultural and political aesthetics of a culture quite unlike its own and of a people living thousands of miles away from downtown Honolulu.

The relationship between Starbucks and the mola is based on Starbucks’ appropriation of Dule traditional dress in order to service its global economic interests. Yet, as Starbucks harnesses the Dule artform for its own purposes, paradoxically, the company’s practice of cultural appropriation reveals the Dule to the world. Economic appropriation unexpectedly also operates as Dule’s political herald. While appropriation is not an uncommon occurrence in most colonized spaces, on this day it was so clear to me how closely Starbucks’ appropriation of a Dule cultural aesthetic mirrors the relationship between the Dule and Panama.

In a place like Starbucks, where the Dule textile narrative is carved out for commercialization, in Panama, too, the Dule and their cultural and aesthetic materials are enveloped in Panama’s national story, woven as a presence in authenticating a national narrative, yet not being a full part of Panama. Just as Starbucks embrace Dule mola as an artistic product without highlighting the Dule as the creative artists and historical agents of these materials, similarly in Panama, Dule materials are showcased as Panamanian and never fully acknowledged as Dule. Both associations mold, develop and mediate commercialized narratives by poaching the Dule culture and their aesthetic products. Thus creating a strained, binary relationship that marks itself to determine and to construct national histories that purport to define “what is Panamanian” and “who is Panamanian.”

With this in mind, in this dissertation I will examine how these dynamics work to deny Dule a voice and how the Dule pushes back, resists and unravels them, thus securing a distinctly Dule political and cultural space across Panama and around the world. Aware that even the Starbucks’s representation is vested in the authenticity of the Dule cultural and aesthetic agency
for its appeal, I will seek to highlight the productive nexus between appropriation of the Dule culture and Dule projects of resistance and redemption. I will deconstruct the dominant Panamanian national narrative that claims full mastery of the colonial project over its subjects and demonstrate the continuing centrality of Dule poli-aesthetic practices in Panama. With these tasks in mind, in what follows, I challenge the prevailing perspectives of Panamanian national narrative by focusing on three specific arenas that disclose the presence of the Dule in non-indigenous spaces.

Like the layers of a Dule mola, this dissertation is composed of multiple layers of text that tell the unique story of the Dule people and their Indigenous existence within newly-propagated non-Indigenous spaces such as that represented by Panama, by way of threefold peripatetic texts: molas, boxing and poetry. Given this background, in the following chapters I elaborate, outline and evaluate these ubiquitous patterns of Dule continued existence.

I examine how Dule cultural actions and aesthetic products serve as mediums in the creation of their counterpoint-counterplot, or that is, the Dule’s alternative polyphonic, layered practices of engagement and disengagement that defy the dominant regime while simultaneously generating a dissident pretense of assimilation into the mainstream, non-Indigenous Panamanian society. Furthermore, this undertaking asserts that Dule cosmopolitics are based in counterpoint-counterplot positionality, demonstrated within the movements of molas, boxing and poetry. By focusing on these specific cultural spaces, I am able to show these cultural-political practices and aesthetic products demonstrate the enduring existence of Dule communities. These products/texts create space for recognizing and registering their histories not only within the realm of Panama’s current territorial existence, but also beyond its territorialized identity. Thus,
they reveal an active, if sub-political, Dule counterpoint-counterplot to Panama’s national history.

In establishing these Indigenous people as active agents within everyday Panama, this project challenges existing perspectives represented in Panamanian national narrative(s). These tend to perceive the Dule through foreign, Western, ethnographic lenses with regard to the political, social and economic spheres and, as such, present ontological biases that deny the Dule any authentic political existence. The opinions asserted within both historical and contemporary analyses by non-Dule scholars like Erland Nordenskiöld, Norman Chapin and Michael Taussig, reproduce these biases.

For example, Nordenskiöld, Chapin and Taussig study Dule cultural products such as the *nuchugana*, which are hand-carved wood figures used for ceremonial practices: each concluding that they are “carved in the form of ‘European types.’”² In fact, Erland Nordenskiöld, a Swedish amateur anthropologist whose earlier works include an ethnographic study on the Dule during the early twentieth century, stated, “All these wooden figures represent European types, and to judge by the kind of clothes, are from the eighteenth and possibly from the seventeenth century, or at least have been copied from old pictures from that time.”³ These outsider interpretations, however, are limited in that they are framed Euro-centrically, as opposed to Dule-centered, and therefore misrepresent cultural meanings and political accounts connected with those meanings. Furthermore, non-Dule researchers’ conclusions typically position and insubstantialize Dule political, cultural and historical agency in Panama. While insightful in many ways, their


perspectives and accounts need to be qualified in order to produce more accurate and complete histories of the Dule specifically and of Panama over all.

Given this objective, the main task in this dissertation is to engage the following three points. The first reveals how Dule cultural and social traditions and practices visibly endure in modern Panama. The second elucidates how the Dule function as active agents in their refusal to be absorbed into Panama’s modernist framework. Finally, the third makes clear how Dule autonomy within Panamanian society also speaks to and connects with emergent, global Indigenous struggles.

To this end, first I discuss the contemporary, dominant Western perspectives and academic framing of Dule existence. I then show how, through the Dule’s own perspectives, cultural actions and aesthetic products, this recognized Indigenous space can and does contribute to a much larger field of study of indigeneity. Ultimately, this dissertation aims to reveal how the poli-aesthetic layers of place and space present in molas, boxing and poetry serve as tool(s) and source(s) of power for Dule counterpoint-counterplot in day-to-day Panama. Also, it explains how Dule counterpoint-counterplot practices define and insure Dule continued political, social and economic agency and structure in Gunayala, Panama over all, as well as beyond Panama’s territorial borders.

Theoretically, I draw on a number of concepts that define and situate the positionality of the Dule people, their cultural practices, artifacts and everyday movements in relevant contexts. These include, for example, the terms: “poli-aesthetic” and “counterpoint-counterplot.” Chapter One offers examples of how I use the terms and I shall first, briefly elaborate on these descriptors here.
Firstly, I use poli-aesthetic to define the political and aesthetic practices in Dule society that are layered, fused and articulated as a single, collective unit. This term describes Dule social, political, cultural and artistic in/visibilities, both in modern Panama and outside the Panamanian region. Influenced by the work of Jacques Rancière’s *The Politics of Aesthetics*, I draw on and reconceptualize Rancière’s “politics of aesthetics” in order to conceptually frame and explain Dule engagement with modernity. Following Rancière’s model, I examine how the Dule seamlessly, concurrently occupy and navigate a seemingly non-indigenous spaces and places, while still retaining an artful and political existence that support Dule indigeneity. Rancière’s “politics of aesthetics” model suggests that art, “as the systems of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience…[offers] a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience.”

Such politics, centering on possibilities, determine areas that are perceived and expressed by those who are capable of observing and speaking “around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time.” That is to say, concerning aesthetics, there is an occurrence in the partitioning and distributing of perception. Yet, the political here is conditioned by the aesthetic possibility of shared sensory experience within inclusionary and exclusionary communities.

To expand Rancière’s concept, I use the term poli-aesthetic in defining artful and political existences in Dule society, recognizing that aesthetics and politics alike are conditioned not by each other but, rather, in how they operate together as a single equivalent unit counterpoint

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5 Ibid.
6 Ibid., 13.
7 Ibid.
within a natural ontological milieu, blended in all spaces. In so operating, they also enact a counterplot. That is to say, aesthetics and politics combine to form one undivided entity.

Dule governance structure and community-at-large, for example, are composed of political and aesthetic practices that are layered, combined and expressed as a single unit. To this end, poli-aesthetic movements in these sociocultural and sociopolitical practices offer one set of equivalent components wherein aesthetics and politics intertwine. My usage of poli-aesthetics, therefore, not only describes how the Dule engage with modernity, but also how others engage with the Dule—even unconsciously.

The next term coined in this dissertation is counterpoint-counterplot. I use “counterpoint-counterplot” in order to explain and reveal how the Dule, through poli-aesthetic movements, engages with and disengages from the Panamanian structural narrative by removing and replacing one plot for another. At the same time, it is creating a subversive façade of being in compliance with the dominant regime.

I draw on two concepts/notions for operationalizing the term, including Edward Said’s concept of the “contrapuntal” and June Nash’s notion of “counterplot,” to reveal how the Dule, through poli-aesthetic movements, operate and live in a non-Indigenous space like Panama.\(^8\) Contrapuntal, according to Said, applies to the studying of histories and processes that are synchronized and intertwined; yet disjointed and apart.\(^9\) The corresponding histories and patterns may appear to be harmonious, yet they reveal conflicting developments and interpretations. A contrapuntal counterpoint method unveils the networking links and articulations of Dule

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\(^9\) Said, 51.
indigeneity with and against Panamanian narratives that express a national imaginary identity. Subsequently, counterplot materializes as a practice for subversive acts that affords Dule a space for cultural manifestations and political actualizations with and against Panama’s national government and identity. This artful and political existence presents patterns and processes in polyphonic acts. In this sense, contrapuntal analysis point to numerous modes of arrangements and processes where Dule poli-aesthetic existence concurrently engages the dominant Panamanian structural narrative. At the same time, however, it disparately disengages from Panama’s main story. This modern nation’s narrative must also be experienced, viewed, engaged and disengaged on the basis of Dule experiences which, even if they have been masked, are salient and sentient. By de-centering the established Panamanian national narrative through this counterpoint practice re-centers Dule histories within it, making them visible.

Concurrent with the counterpoint practice, a counterplot act also occurs in revealing Dule experiences that have been otherwise obscured within modern Panama. I use counterplot to distinguish and demonstrate how Dule poli-aesthetic ontologies exist, reveal and even replace prevalent histories that try to ignore or eradicate their experiences within and beyond the Panamanian region.

June Nash writes, “Global integration has disrupted old bases for collective action while creating new modes of organization. With the loss of stable production sites, the basis for collective action by an organized working class becomes fragmented, yet new sites for dissent emerge to contest the consolidation of power in global settings.”

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10 Nash, 20.
Counterplot equals nonconformism, and the occurrence that takes place in these new positions for dissension, as described by Nash, represents nonconformity.\textsuperscript{11} Indigenous cultural and political movements emerge from marginalized locations, therefore as counterplot to the previously dominant histories that have shadowed and, in many cases, even attempted to erase Indigenous languages, epistemologies and histories through systematic colonialist policies.

Panama’s official story (since 1903,) for example, appropriated Dule-specific experiences in order to define and create its national narrative. This cultural appropriation has failed, however, and continues to fail on many levels. Given the histories of the Dule in Panama (which existed only as part of Gran Colombia until 1903,) there are visible manifestations of Dule as an Indigenous people that counterplot Panamanian narratives about them. Through a counterplot practice, whenever a Dule or non-Dule person engages in Dule cosmopolitics, via the site of a mola for example, his/her engagement with such Dule experience(s) disassembles Panama’s national narrative and forces one to view that story through Dule experiences. The practice of counterplot takes apart Panamanian narratives and strains them in such a way that reveals and opens up sites for Dule poli-aesthetic ontologies.

**Panamanian-ness: Mestizaje, Imagining, and Gender Conditions**

“Poets govern Gunayala” is a fitting, rhythmic description of Dule governance and society, as expressively observed by Nicaraguan poet Ernesto Cardenal.\textsuperscript{12} José Colman, a Dule artist from Agligandi and grandson of Sagla Simral Colman (a sagla of Agligandi,) explains that saglas (social-religious administrative chiefs) are leaders who are selected by the Dule to study

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{12} José Colman, Dule artist, interview by Sue Patricia Haglund, Personal Interview, Panama City, Rep. of Panama, 2 March 2009.
and govern Gunayala, the region Dule people inhabit in Panama.\textsuperscript{13} This is derived from their demonstrated aptitude to orally communicate Babigala (a network of Dule narratives and histories addressing Dule existence, role of a Dule in the universe, living social and moral practices in the community) and to understand in-depth Dule knowledge, histories, medicines and environment in a figurative language.\textsuperscript{14} The saglas communicate \textit{poetically} in a symbolic language of a type not spoken by the general population, about the profound knowledge and development of Dule cultural practices and histories.\textsuperscript{15}

In an \textit{onmaggednega}, a Dule gathering house, the sagla sings to the community-at-large, while the \textit{abinsaed} (a second chief) sings in response to the sagla’s narrative, and the \textit{argar} (a third chief) interprets and imparts all of the songs’ metaphors voicing and decoding these to the rest of the community in vernacular language.\textsuperscript{16} In all of these songs, the chiefs, from the sagla to the argar, inform and develop the imagination of Dule governance. Colman emphasizes that the saglas display and possess profound historical knowledge and exceptional poetic talent,\textsuperscript{17} and it is for this reason that non-Dule observers often describe them as poet-rulers.

Dule governance, in every communal context, comprises multiple leaders and includes medical practitioners and cultural specialists. Each governing entity, wherein poets are the leaders and songs are interpretative politics, articulates and fuses together the practices of politics and aesthetics within a single, collective body. One can neither bifurcate nor compartmentalize

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{16} José Colman, Personal Interview; and James Howe, \textit{The Kuna Gathering: Contemporary Politics in Panama}, 2nd ed. (Tucson: Fenestra Books, 2002), 31-50.

\textsuperscript{17} José Colman, Personal Interview.
the collectivity of Dule artful-political (poli-aesthetic) practices and way of life into separate, distinctive systems. Instead, Dule artful-political customs comprise one set of equivalent components, interweaving layers upon layers of interpretative networks singing with each other and to each other, while interpreting each other’s songs.

Dule cultural and political governance practices endure even as they collide with external and internal factors that, in doing so, continuously invigorate and reaffirm Dule traditions and ontological practices. The continued interplay of these dynamic processes is expertly communicated, among others, through three sample aesthetic modalities such as molas\textsuperscript{18}, boxing and poetry, which fluidly link to and delink from one another in demonstrating the full breadth of Dule culture. These modalities embody and exude a cultural visibility and invisibility, absence and presence, as well as aesthetics and politics in Panama. The Dule’s very presence, alas, via these three elements, constantly clashes with the presumed authenticity of a Panamanian narrative that privileges its history of mestizaje over that of Dule (and other groups’) indigeneity.\textsuperscript{19} Such dual movements and oppositions of these elements in multiple realms of Panamanian society appear and disappear, while persistently challenging the definition of who and what is truly Panamanian.

Panama’s ideology of nation-building through mestizaje both grounds and is grounded in national pride.\textsuperscript{20} Moreover, the conditionality of a national Panamanian identity varies in the

\textsuperscript{18} The mola is a brightly-colored, rectangular-shaped reverse-appliqué textile that is comprised of two to eight layers.

\textsuperscript{19} The Spanish term ‘mestizaje’ translates to ‘mixture’ in English. It is a concept that refers to the cultural, ethnic, and national blendings of race in Latin America.

marketing position of the country’s national need to develop and to authenticate Panamanianism and Panamanian-ness. Juan Materno-Vásquez, a Panamanian attorney and scholar who explores the construction of Panamanian racial and nationalist identities, explains that the notion of Panamanian-ness therein speaks to an incomplete unification, indeed separated in varied areas in terms of contexts and geography. Materno-Vásquez avers that any identity rooted in Panamanian-ness identity is based on localist and regionalist perspectives. These perspectives, throughout Panama, internally exclude and marginalize both Afro-Panamanian and Indigenous communities from the larger national identity especially in that languages other than Spanish may bind these communities. In Afro-Panamanian communities, for example, English is the preferred language, while in Indigenous communities, the respective native languages of each are dominant. The concept of national identity in Panama, according to Materno-Vásquez, shifts constantly and fails to remain cemented. It is important to note that within any Panamanian community, in all circumstances, it is thought better to be Afro-Panamanian, than indio or Indian (see Chapter Three).

In Panama, as in virtually all other Spanish-speaking nations in the Americas, when a non-Indigenous individual or group calls another person indio, this term is used to stigmatize or deprecate that individual. Ilan Stavans, a scholar whose research looks at Latino culture and

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21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
identity, points out that to be Indian in Latin America is a vulnerable, exploitative position, rendering the Indigenous person insignificant and invisible.26 This positionality, on a larger scale, creates, imagines and defines a country’s existence and national heritage. As evaluated in Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, there are elements that imaginatively create and define a nation and homeland, that also have consequences for the constitutional parts of the nation and homeland.

Anderson addresses the worldwide spread of nationalism and how the sentiment of national imaginaries emerged globally during the last two centuries. He defines the nation as “…an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”27 Nationalism, per that definition, is not a masked invention but an occurrence of “‘imagining’ and ‘creation’.”28

“Communities are to be distinguished,” Anderson asserts, “not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.”29 An imagined nation has components that allude to limitations with regard to sovereignty and community.30 He outlines the imagining as (1) limited in the sense of borders and boundaries, (2) sovereign in terms of when this concept evolved and emerged, “in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm,” and (3)


28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid., 7.
fraternal, “because…the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship…fraternity…”  

Anderson’s example of Peru, as a bordered territory created by creole Spaniards, notes that José de San Martín, a creole freedom fighter, “decreed in 1821 that ‘in the future aborigines shall not be called Indians or natives; they are children and citizens of Peru and they shall be known as Peruvians.’” Here Anderson demonstrates how creole Spaniards in the Americas were already establishing a form of what he calls “nation-ness.” By dubbing Peru’s Indigenous peoples as also Peruvian nationals, San Martín creates an “imagined community,” which in turn engenders a sense of belonging to the nation through shared culture that is more synthetic (imagined) than actual (lived). Creole Spaniards obviously harnessed Indigenous people, history and presence of in order to imagine and to formulate a unified, national identity and culture to be known as Peruvian. This is analogous to Panama’s usage of Dule cultural products, as well as, its attempts to nationalize the Dule people, in order to ground an otherwise-fabricated national identity with “authenticity.”

This works at two levels: macro and micro. On a macro-level, in the Latin American region as a whole, from the nineteenth century to present-day, both governmental and non-governmental agencies nationalized their population(s) as one unified people, particularly so as to include Indigenous populations into the mainstream society and citizenry. For example, in Peru, Panama, Guatemala and Mexico, nationalistic identities were constructed out of need and with a sense of urgency to embody something authentic and collective, in order to empower

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid., 50; and the definition of criollo or creole Spaniard is a person of purely Spanish ancestry, with no Indigenous or African blood, but who is born in Peru and not Spain.

33 Ibid.
nationalist troupes. The type of authenticity that emerged in such contexts was rooted deeply in the practice of *mestizaje*—mixing cultures and ethnicities under a single, national realm. As a result, the newly-independent Latin American nations, out of a need for authenticity, created a national identity that is imagined culturally and enacted politically. That is to say, where the “Latin American intellectual elite defined its own encounter with the internal Other as a recognition of Self.” From this location:

Three influential works by leading intellectuals celebrated mestizaje as Latin America’s indigenous cultural contribution to world civilization...By “indigenous,” Vasconcelos and Rojas meant the people who had settled the American lands, not the “Indians,” whom they regarded as conquered and broken. For them, the idea of mixing, or synthesis, was part of an evolutionary movement toward “white,” understood as modern, culture...Haya de la Torre...asserted that the Indian rather than the Hispanic past provided an image of communal unity and a promise of the future equality that would be attained by the region’s new raza.

Latin American nations commonly engaged the mestizaje process through not only biological procreation, but also in emphasizing the adoption and appropriation of Indigenous cultural practices. This has served as another way for European settlers to dominate and subjugate Indigenous places. The mestizaje of Latin America represents a fusion that has permeated through religion (Catholicism, mixed with Indigenous and/or African beliefs,) literature (the literary works of Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes, for example,) culture (dances like merengué and salsa,) and the arts (such as the murals of Mexican muralist Diego Rivera).

In “Sons of the Conquistador,” for example, Carlos Fuentes writes about the two sons of Hernán Cortés: Martín 1 and Martín 2. Martín 1, a creole Spaniard, is Cortés’ legitimate son with

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his wife, a Spanish woman. Martín 2, a mestizo, is Cortés’ illegitimate and eldest son, with an Indigenous woman. From both perspectives, the emergence of mestizaje is projected in the creation of a nation—Mexico—through the mestizo and the creole. It is an imagined national identity where:

Mexico is no longer Tenochtitlán. But it is not Spain, either. Mexico is a new country, a different country, which cannot be governed from a distance and at one remove, just like that. We are the Crown’s stepsons. My father knew it, but he as yet did not have a Mexican homeland, although he did want it. He wanted it; I want it. We, his sons, not only have a new country. We are the new country.37

The expression, “We are the new country” is a thematic framework that creole and mestizo populations exercise throughout Latin America. There is no place for Indigenous people(s) as distinct populations. They are erased into the “new country.” Fuentes’ short story exemplifies how states use Indigenous people within their imagined and physical borders as a way to conceptualize national identity. However, this very construction presumes a mirage of a unified, collective national identity, rather than the reality of a fixed, politicized one that marginalizes Indigenous people in the name of mestizaje, which is subject to creating the new nation. Nevertheless, in the name of mestizaje, as seen in Fuentes’ short story, there is no place or space for Indigenous populations. In fact, those who are Indigenous are forced to culturally and politically disappear—to be invisible—so that the “new homeland” and identity can materialize and thrive.


37 Ibid., 83.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.
Author Octavio Paz emphasizes the construction of Mexican national identity, as Fuentes points out in the short story, through lenses of the mestizo or creole which represent “otherness.” Paz notes, “Otherness is what constitutes us. I am not saying by this that the character of Mexico—or any other people—is unique; I maintain that those realities we call cultures and civilizations are elusive. It is not that Mexico escapes definitions: we ourselves escape them each time we try to define ourselves, to grasp ourselves.”

There is a contradiction between the nation, in terms of the Indigenous, and the nation, in terms of the “other”—that is, the nation has two faces. The dual faces reaffirm the perceived necessity to legitimize one nation’s history and conception, while erasing another’s. Paz believes Mexico’s national identity to be both illusory and contradictory because it is never a fixed national identity. There is continuous, ambiguous tension that exists within Mexican national identity that derives from cultures and histories of the Indigenous and that of the Spanish. The constant strain and struggle to obtain a Mexican national identity never allow space for the simultaneous existence of these cultures and histories. As Paz notes, one narrative disappears, while another materializes, but never at the same time. As such, Mexican (and other Latin American states’) national identity has constructed and cemented a fraternally imagined nation, as noted by Anderson, that is—a national, masculine identity.

A new nation’s sense of comradeship is one that excludes individuals or groups that do not fit its national narrative. Those who are excluded from any national narrative may include


41 Ibid., 290.

42 Ibid., 290-292.

43 Anderson, 7.
people of color, gender and sexual orientation. This fraternal communal relationship, on a micro-level, divides and separates men from women, as well as non-Indigenous from Indigenous persons. In this sense, Panama’s identity, like that of Mexico’s, as a fraternal communal nation excuses a gender condition by using male and female Indigenous bodies to design and narrate Panama’s reputation and personality.

The intersecting of gender within Panama’s mestizaje-focused, nation-building process is pervasive in a variety of arenas, including textile art, sports and touristic literature. On a micro-level, its agenda to acclimate and assimilate Indigenous peoples into its own and also some greater Latin American mestizaje-dominated landscape seeks to separate and re-define gender roles among Indigenous men and women.

For instance, Dule women and their mola art (done generally by Dule women) are visibly present in Panamanian mainstream society, but largely restricted to and silenced within the limited sphere representing tourism commodities and advertisements that usually present women’s bodies as permissive bodies. The mola is an extension of Dule female body. Mola is treated as a permissive space to be managed, exploited and penetrated. Like the Dule female body, however, the mola resists by acts of counterpoint-counterplot.

Not suprisingly, the practice of using female bodies to promote tourism is a common motif among travel brochures throughout the world, from Tahiti to Hawaii and from the Bahamas to Panama. According to M. Jacqui Alexander, in the Bahamas, for example, “Black women are also sexualized and exoticized in this tourist drama; in fact, white imperial tourism would not be complete without eroticized blackness.” Similarly, Panama utilizes and exoticizes
Indigenous bodies and arts in order to promote itself as a pristine, untouched land and exotic destination. Its touristic fetishization of female Dule bodies serves as a boundary marker in Panama-Dule relationship.

As Anne McClintock states, “Women are the earth that is to be discovered, entered, named, inseminated and, above all, owned. Symbolically reduced, in male eyes, to the space on which male contests are waged, women experience particular difficulties laying claim to alternative genealogies and alternative narratives of origin and naming.” In the case of Dule women, in much the same way as McClintock suggests, non-Dule Panamanians and non-Panamanian groups alike symbolically work to control Dule women’s bodies to define and to represent Panama’s unspoiled territory.

Despite these ideological and cultural frames, Dule women continue to turn to their indigeneity to define themselves and the spaces they inhabit, and/or those in which they move. They wear their mola dress, exuding confidence and independence that reflects Dule history and egalitarian society where womanhood is celebrated, and women are the central focus of Dule rite-of-passage ceremonies. Indeed, there are four such cultural ceremonies in which Dule women participate: the piercing of the nose, the classification of names, the puberty ceremony and the cutting of hair. A Dule woman is respected and celebrated in her society; however, in the Panamanian society at-large, she is subjected to an inferior position within the already marginalized reality for all Panamanian women.

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McClintock points out for women in general, especially for Indigenous women whether in Panama or the United States, “…served as the boundary markers of imperialism, the ambiguous mediators of what appeared to be—at least superficially—the predominantly male agon of empire.”\textsuperscript{46} Furthermore, she adds, “Most notably, the boundary figures are female.”\textsuperscript{47} In this case, women, particularly Indigenous women who serve as boundary markers between the patriarchal nation and its citizens, are consigned to two objects: the desired and the abject. These double objects and their meanings perpetuate colonial patrimony and misogyny. Thus, McClintock’s observation of a female’s body as a demarcation line is apparent in the Panama-Dule relationship.\textsuperscript{48} In fact, the Dule woman’s body serves as a boundary line regarding what is considered Panamanian in economic, social, political and touristic spaces. The same cannot be said, conversely, for Dule men and their bodies.

On the contrary, male Dule bodies are absent in promotional touristic ads altogether. Non-Indigenous Panamanians commonly view Dule men as puerile beings confined to the realm of sports (see Chapter Three). They and the Panamanian government treat Dule men like children existing in a ward-like state. This mirrors the ways in which the United States military and government, post-World War 2, has treated Japan.\textsuperscript{49} Naoko Shibusawa, a cultural historian specializing in twentieth century United States imperial political culture, notes:

The American characterizations of Japanese as an immature people helped to change a potentially bewildering postwar relationship into an easily comprehensible one that naturalized the unequal U.S.-Japan relationship and provided a basic template for

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 24.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 26.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{49} Naoko Shibusawa, America’s Geisha Ally: Reimagining the Japanese Enemy (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006), 54-95.
appropriate action. The Americans told themselves and their servicemen that they were to be teachers and guardians to the impressionable, vulnerable Japanese “children.”

The childlike treatment of Japan in its relationship with the United States, as Shibusawa affirms, stems from General MacArthur’s comments that it is an adolescent nation, akin to a twelve year-old boy.

In similar ways, Dule men experience stigmatization and marginalization by and within Panamanian mestizo communities where, all too often, they are branded as imbecilic, immature boys—in other words, as indio. Just as Dule women contest and exert their Dule identity in touristic discourses, Dule men also challenge and assert their Dule identity as participants in Panamanian sporting practices (see Chapter Three). While their bodies may be displaced and invisible in modern Panamanian contexts, from a Dule standpoint, they are well-placed and visible in their own communities in Gunayala, as well as in cities/towns throughout the country. In all the spaces both Dule men and women occupy in Panama, egalitarian practices and gender balance are continually present.

One must remember that although gender-imbalanced acts are employed, practiced and imposed upon the Dule by the greater non-Indigenous Panamanian population, this has not altered the Dule sociocultural practice of gender equality in their own communities. Evidence of such gender equality and balance can be viewed in many spaces, including home ownership, domestic labor, land holdings and agricultural labor.

As a result, the prevalence of gender balance and equality in Dule society contrasts sharply with Panama’s bifurcated positioning of Dule women and men within their methods for

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50 Ibid., 57.
51 Ibid., 54-95.
defining a Panamanian national culture. Moreover, equality and gender balance are integral components that stimulate and define Dule indigeneity.

Dule-ness: Engaging and Operating Indigeneity

Karin E. Tice asserts, “Panama is unusual in that the government has for the most part negotiated with the indigenous populations instead of violently repressing…Other indigenous peoples in Latin America have not been so fortunate.” 52

While this may be true at face value, it is in fact a superficial observation. The negotiation process between Indigenous populations, the Panamanian government and non-Dule Panamanians comes with a price. Their relationship belies an extensive prior history of violently repressive acts committed by outsiders, from the time of the arrival of Europeans to that of Panama’s post-1903 independence from Colombia. Nonetheless, the Dule, like other Indigenous populations in Panama, continually counter outside influences and maintain their independence while avoiding a geographical susceptibility to land displacement in Panama. At the same time, in spite of the autonomy the Dule possess in Panama, they are not immune to the potential loss of culture or negative impact when engaging a Western lifestyle. In fact, the Dule continually face day-to-day struggles with regards to cultural, political and economic subsistence. As Dule history shows, still, to this day they have managed somewhat, if not completely, to steer away from the aftereffects of colonialism, annihilation and assimilation that commonly are thrust upon Indigenous populations worldwide. To defend against acts of Indigenous erasure, the Dule negotiate and set the terms of their agreement with wagas (a Dulegaya term referring to “the other,” that is, non-Dule Panamanians) while understanding the full risk and negative

sociocultural and sociopolitical impacts that may happen when working with or without non-Dules. The strength Dule possess in securing and preventing total cultural and/or political destruction is rooted in continual reliance on Dule ontologies and epistemologies. Indeed, the Dule always return to their ontological (hi)stories: Babigala, Baluwala, knowledge in Nabgwana and the importance in maintaining an independent Gunayala. These ontological sources define, unlayer and engage Dule indigeneity. This engagement incorporates a process that can be understood through the lenses of Dule everyday practices.  

What does it mean to be Indigenous in multiple settings? To be Indigenous, as defined by Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel, embodies “an identity constructed, shaped and lived in the politicized context of contemporary colonialism,” where a complete or a partial process of colonialism occurs under certain conditions and in certain regions. They further explain:

\[ ... \text{Indigenous peoples} \text{ are just that: Indigenous to the lands they inhabit, in contrast to and in contention with the colonial societies and states that have spread out from Europe and other centres of empire. It is this oppositional, place-based existence, along with the consciousness of being in struggle against the dispossessing and demeaning fact of colonization by foreign peoples that fundamentally distinguishes Indigenous peoples from other peoples of the world.} \]

According to Alfred and Corntassel, “being Indigenous,” in reference to all Indigenous peoples worldwide, has a shared awareness. They assert that “being Indigenous means thinking, speaking, and acting with the conscious intent of regenerating one’s indigeneity. Each


55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.
Indigenous nation has its own way of articulating and asserting self-determination and freedom.”

Under certain conditions and circumstances, there are Indigenous communities that have lost (or have almost lost) their Native languages, traditions and cultural practices. Yet, in spite of the encroachment of assimilation and Western dominance, Native communities have been continuing to perpetuate and conserve their cultural practices, while also fending off complete assimilation into a modernist, Western nation-state framework. In this vein, Dule cultural and social traditions and practices endure in Panama. Even as aspects of Dule ways of living may have changed, they have never ceased to exist. They have been and are always there, always apparent.

The fact remains, however, that the entire conceptualization of indigeneity is rife with complications. Utilizing and addressing indigeneity is challenging. As Global Politics scholar Nevzat Soguk advises:

…care must be shown to comprehend indigeneity not as a monolithic experiential condition in the world to be simply found and represented. We know that indigenous worlds are rich and varied, and cannot be encapsulated into universalizing categories. At the same time, casting indigeneity as a purely local contingent condition in each case is reductionist, in denial of experiential commonalities historically forced upon indigenous peoples, beginning with mercantilist colonialisms and continuing through capitalist modernities. It is important to avoid essentialization of indigenous cultures and identities. However, it is equally significant to listen to and take seriously when indigenous people assert what they see to be their voices and visions.

Within the emergence of global Indigenous actions, Soguk examines the movements of the Zapatistas, Kanaka Maoli sovereignty and global indigenous participation in the juridical-political arena, as three collective Indigenous actions rising up in a space of survival to register

57 Ibid., 614.

their own form of “contemporary indigeneity.” He describes this as “a condition of both ongoing vulnerability of indigenous peoples and their enduring capacities to shape their lives and ours in critical dialogues.” These movements via tangible, practical Indigenous activism, argues Soguk, create spaces for ongoing and new political discussion about indigeneity at many levels, from the local to the global.

Chickasaw scholar Jodi A. Byrd addresses the engagement of indigeneity through the transit of Venus, where “each body pulls gravitationally upon the other to distort possible viewing locations and antagonizes any parallax angle to discern coequal or equivalent, static theories of how U.S. empire functions through its deployment of paradigmatic Indianness.” She engages “…colonial discourses pertaining to…American Indians, Native Hawaiians, and Amerindians in Guyana” in order to galvanize and to position indigeneity within critical theory and cultural studies.

As Byrd’s work opens up space for alternative approaches to indigeneity within the realms of postcolonial and poststructural theories, Scott Richard Lyons’ analysis also adds to the discussion. Lyons provides insightful critique and analysis regarding the theoretical

59 Ibid., 5.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid., 1-22.
63 Ibid., xxxviii-xxxix.
64 Ibid., xi-229.
complications of Indianness and challenges the notion of literary Indigenous nationalism.\textsuperscript{65} Lyons provocatively and innovatively addresses the “Native assent” concept by evaluating the issues of “indigenous identity, culture, and nationalization.”\textsuperscript{66} Most particularly, Lyons critiques the limitations and dangers of relying on presumptively universal models that not only trigger but also perpetuate the practice of sorting out who and what is considered an authentic Native via blood quantum, the return to Nativeness traditions and possessing citizenship.\textsuperscript{67} In this way, Lyons’ critique of the peoplehood model starts a new discussion about indigeneity and the perils of cultural compartmentalization.

Before delving into Lyons’ criticism of the peoplehood model, let us examine the latter and how it is being used to define indigeneity. Tom Holm (Cherokee/Muscogee), J. Diane Pearson, and Ben Chavis utilize and explain (Cherokee) Robert K. Thomas’s concept of the peoplehood template to articulate indigeneity by the use of four elements, “place territory, language, sacred history, and ceremonial cycle.”\textsuperscript{68} The peoplehood archetype they articulate “adequately reminds us as scholars that human societies are complex and that Native Americans entwine everyday life with religious practice and a view that human beings are part of, rather than an imposition on, their environments.”\textsuperscript{69} Similarly, Cherokee scholar Corntassel, following Holm’s, Pearson’s, and Chavis’ version of Thomas’s peoplehood model, uses the four elements

\textsuperscript{65} Scott Richard Lyons, \textit{X-Marks: Native Signatures of Assent} (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), ix-189.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 34.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., ix-189.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 15.
of “sacred history, ceremonial cycles, language and ancestral homelands, while elaborating somewhat on their complex interrelationships.”

He elaborates on this paradigm to include:

(a) people with a kinship to ancestral lands via oratory and printed discourses,

(b) people who, via community-based interactions, “…reflect their distinct ceremonial cycles, kinship networks, and continuously evolving cultural traditions,”

(c) language expressed in verbal and non-verbals forms such as drawings and distinct dialects, and

(d) people who continuously live on ancestral lands and who are under constant threats of political, economic, and social displacements.

The peoplehood version, as described by Holms, Pearson and Chavis, along with Corntassel’s paradigm, limits and confines the definition of indigeneity, thus disempowering and closing up other possible conditions for addressing Indigenous existence and engagement in a modernist framework. As Lyons notes, “That is precisely the ‘problematic’ part of the peoplehood paradigm. If you do not conform to the model—land, religion, language, sacred history, ceremonial cycle, and so on—if you happen to live away from your homeland, speak English, practice Christianity, or know more songs by the Dave Matthews Band than by the ancestors, you effectively ‘cease to exist’ as one of the People.”

A similar critique I make regards the perils of placing categorical limitations upon people(s) by defining who and what is Indigenous. Outsiders, those outside of a particular

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71 Ibid., 91-93.

72 Lyons, 139.
community (even if they are Indigenous somewhere else) unintentionally make themselves culpable in evoking colonialist viewpoints by deciding who and what is Indigenous, even while attempting to disengage from colonialist oppression (historically and currently) through the decolonization process.

The varied expressions of indigeneity that do not conform to the peoplehood paradigm can be found in many Indigenous communities/nations. Dule expressions of indigeneity are among those communities/nations that exceed the parameters of the peoplehood model, while re-defining their indigeneity in the 21st century. Dule, for example, also exude manifestations of indigeneity, thus, placing the peoplehood model into unlikely ones such as boxing. Thus, this work is not in contrast to the peoplehood paradigm but, rather, it adds to and advances the model’s import by showing how contemporary indigeneity draws on multiple historical authenticities creatively and flexibly. With this in mind, it is tenable to show that the Dule exert their indigeneity through political-aesthetic counterpoint-counterplot acts that emanate from all areas of Dule cultural practices, as I discussed in the first chapter. Expressions of Dule indigeneity are present in every place, thing and practice. Some customs that exemplify their indigeneity are:

(a) The saglas, which sing into existence the origin of Dule people, ways of living, how one lives and cares for Nabgwana (see Chapter One and Four);
(b) The careful construction of Dule houses, which are placed in a particular manner where each material used carries symbolic meanings; and
(c) Practices such as oratory and mola-making, which constantly define and exert Dule presence in both Dule and non-Dule communities throughout Panama (see Chapter Two and Four).
Dule indigeneity is at once a history and a culture of change. This continuity occurs when traditional practices are flexible to an extent that they enable the Dule to incorporate foreign materials and/or practices into their culture. This absorption of appears in all places, with some materials and/or practices being obvious while others are not so. For instance, the traditional dress, mola and competing in the boxing ring while covered with nikeeu (a type of Dule medicine). Cultural flexibility allows the Dule to use and absorb Western things, while continuing to be Dule.

Cultural change among Indigenous peoples, as in Dule society, is not a new occurrence. This is also true for others such as the Kwara‘ae people of Malaita in the Solomon Islands. Pacific Islander scholar David Welchman Gegeo and Karen Ann Watson-Gegeo insightfully point out that in the Kwara‘ae language, the term(s) culture/tradition via Kwara‘ae’s “falafala” is applied and understood in a variety of ways/practices. The phrase falafala “includes the notion that culture is always changing” and the Kwara‘ae’s distinction of falafala occurs in varied places: in reference to ancient customs, ways passed down from one generation to another, and outside introduction of culture into Kwara‘ae society. Like their usage and application of falafala to describe the process of cultural changes from past to present in varied degrees, the Dule also have a way of describing these, from their own past events to contemporary situations, through Babigala.

Babigala, as addressed in the first chapter, is a network of Dule metaphorical narratives that explains ancient customs, teaches the ways of Baba and Nana on how to protect Nabgwana


74 Ibid., 61.

75 Ibid., 60-61.
(Mother Earth), emphasizes the importance of balance and equality, and justifies the reasons for defending Dule land and way of life against oppressive acts. Numerous figures appear in Babigala to symbolize cultural changes, but the most prominent recurring ones are the (hi)stories of two opposing entities: Ibeler and Biler. Dule sagalas recite their narratives from Babigala, which reflect the aforementioned themes: equality, unity, oppression, egoism and balance. These recitations interweave between past and present events in Dule history, by retelling events of the narrative encounters between the two. Ibeler represents unity, equality, and balance; in contrast, Biler symbolizes destruction, imbalance, and inequality.76

When one enters into these Babigala narratives, one goes to the baluwala. Sagladummad Inakeliginya clarifies that baluwala, a tree of salt, signifies oppressive structures imposed on the Dule by the imbalanced and greedy acts of Biler and his allies.77 Inakeliginya emphasizes that baluwala signifies a fight for balance in the world, which has been displaced by Biler and the allies of his who avariciously satiated all the goods from the salt tree.78 Furthermore, according to Inakeliginya, Ibeler is aware that Baba and Nana place fruits on the branches of baluwala for every person in the world, not just a selected few like Biler and his allies.79 For this reason, Ibeler cuts down the salt tree, in order to end the disparity and oppressive acts in the world that Biler created.80 He goes onto say that, “Todo había sido creado por Baba y Nana para todos

76 Aiban Wagua, Así lo vi y así me lo contaron: Datos de la Revolución Kuna Versión del Sailadummad Inakeliginya y de Kunas que vivieron la revolución de 1925, 2nd ed. (Panama: Nan Garburba Oduloged Igar, 2007), 144 and 146.
77 Ibid., 31.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid., 31-32.
nosotros por igual, y nadie tiene el derecho de acaparar más que otros” (Everything had been created by Baba and Nana for all of us equally, and nobody has the right to monopolize more than others).81 These narratives reflect the thematic principles of dualism, such as right and wrong, good and bad, liberation and oppression, as well as balance and imbalance. They cyclically appear in a sagla’s chants in order to show how history repeats itself in different forms, from the past and in contemporary situations alike. In an onmaggednega, for example, a sagla sings about the encounters between Ibeler and Biler, while an abinsaed sings in response, and an argar will “…take pains in their interpretations to point out parallels between past and present…” as he directs the lesson or commentary on present-day conduct to the entire community.82

Dule leaders sing narratives from Babigala to express cultural change and continuity based on past events in order to explain and provide resolutions to current circumstances. American anthropologist James Howe describes this communal engagement: “Accomplished [Dule] chiefs know a great many narratives (although no single chief knows all of them) and they should be able to devote a whole evening’s chant to covering one historical episode in detail. And as with metaphor, the continuity and equivalence between past and present found in history embodies the chiefly quality of seeing things in depth.”83 Howe’s remarks about a sagla’s skills in seeing things in layers denotes a process where a sagla interprets and reverberates Dule cultural transformations based on how (inter)generational knowledge is shared, how ancient practices are conducted and how foreign customs develop and integrate into the continuity of

81 Ibid., 32.
82 Howe, The Kuna Gathering: Contemporary, 49.
83 Ibid.
Dule ways of living. In this, the continuity of cultural change endures in Dule communities. Such changes, in all forms from textile art to ways of living, consistently define Dule indigeneity. It is Babigala, Baluwala, Nabgwana, Ibeler and Biler.

Dule indigeneity, as Sagladummad Inakeliginya avers, begins with Baba and Nana:

“Todo lo que ha creado Baba y Nana es para el beneficio de todos y no para unos pocos” (All that Baba and Nana have created is for the benefit of all, and not for a few).\(^84\) The unlayering of Dule indigeneity, as Inakeliginya reaffirms, is apparent in the story of Ibeler:

Afirma que si no escuchamos y sentimos los gemidos y los gritos de la Madre Tierra, no la podremos ayudar, ni mucho menos defenderla. Ibeler pegaba sus oídos a las rocas para escuchar los gemidos de mamá Gabayai. Si Ibeler no hubiera escuchado los sollozos de su mamá, no se hubiera animado a rescatar sus huesos ni ponerla de nuevo en la hamaca. Este es el papel de la historia, de nuestra historia. La Madre Tierra nos está gritando, pero si no pegamos los oídos a la dura roca de la historia, no vamos a poder escucharla, ni mucho menos defenderla.

(It says if we do not hear and feel the groans and cries of Mother Earth, we cannot help, let alone defend it. Ibeler stuck his ears to the rocks to hear the groans of his mother Gabayai. If Ibeler had not heard the sobs of his mother, he would not have been encouraged to save her bones and put it back in the hammock. This is the role of history, our history. Mother Earth is crying to us, but if our ears are not glued to the hard rock of history, we will not listen, let alone defend it.)\(^85\)

The intrinsic (un)layering of Dule indigeneity, as aforesaid by Inakeliginya, displays and links all the narratives of Babigala by a common theme: Nabgwana (Mother Earth). Dule historian Iguanape Purbagana concludes that the Dule relationship with Nabgwana constitutes a balanced partnership where they view their role as being part of the universe, but not the center of it.\(^86\) The Dule are indeed part of the universe, which is continually present in their philosophy, cosmology

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\(^{84}\) Wagua, *Así lo vi*, 32.

\(^{85}\) Ibid., 28.

\(^{86}\) Iguanape Purbagana (Miguel de León), interview by Sue Patricia Haglund, Personal Interview, Panama City, Rep. of Panama, 6 March 2009.
and socio-political structure. Dule indigeneity, through their people’s equal partnership with Nabgwana and as defenders of Nabgwana, represents an egalitarian political-aesthetic practice that endures, informs and defines the Dule as agents of their own change. This work, as a result, contributes and advances Indigenous literature by expanding current theoretical frames that limits discourse regarding Indigenous agency in actively propagating their traditions, cultures and aesthetic practices successfully within a dominant colonial setting.

Chapter Outline and A Reflection on Methods

The first chapter addresses a brief overview on Dule culture and society in relation to that of Panama overall. Most importantly, in this chapter, I delve into the theoretical usage and reconceptualization of Jacques Rancière’s “politics of aesthetics”87 in a combined format of poli-aesthetic, Edward Said’s “contrapuntal analysis,” 88 and the deployment of June Nash’s “counterplot.” 89 I refer to the poli-aesthetic to explain Dule society in a manner that brings forth multiple voices in a counterpoint dialogue and a counterplot interaction. From the works of Rancière, Said, and Nash, I am inspired to refer to the combination of these terms in a theoretical framework as Dule poli-aesthetic counterpoint-counterplot ontology. The merging of poli-aesthetic and counterpoint-counterplot facilitates the explanation and elaboration of Dule ontology and engagement with modernity.

In the second chapter, I discuss the poli-aesthetic counterpoint-counterplot by examining molas, in the ways they function as kinds of text, in order to probe the amalgamation of politics

87 Rancière, 9-45.
88 Said, 51.
and art in Dule society. This chapter explores and provides an account of how Dule counterpoint-counterplot emerges through mola production and location. The production and location of molas in all terrains create and develop multiple interpretations, evaluations and experiences in articulating Dule poli-aesthetic ontology. Dule ontological presence, via the molas, reasserts and reestablishes their political, cultural and economic agency both within and beyond Panama’s borders.

The third chapter analyzes the physical performance of boxing movements and how it creates space(s) for Dule presence in Panama. I discuss the participation of one specific and successful Dule boxer named Ricardo Walker, also known as Baby San Blas, and how the reporting and underreporting of stories about him as an Indigenous athlete in Panama’s sporting world was and still is politicized. The movements of Dule bodies in and out of the boxing ring create representative counterpoint-counterplot to identity, while the layers of politics that appear represent the recognition of what and who is truly “Panamanian.”

The fourth chapter introduces written texts of contemporary Dule poets, which represent a continuance of counterpoint-counterplot narratives demonstrative of Dule living in dual worlds—Panamanian society and their own. This chapter shows how Dule writers, including Manipiniktikiya, Aristeydes Turpana, and Aiban Wagua, transfer descriptive words of their own cultural identity and practices from oral to written words on paper, as well as from Dulegaya to Spanish. Further, their writings reveal their occupation of multiple spheres: the spiritual realm, in relation to their ancestral ties, and also the physical realm, relating to their own physical presence on land. All of these altering movements exhibit layers of Dule poli-aesthetic ontology.

In the final chapter, I summarize the important points of Dule poli-aesthetic counterpoint-counterplot practices, contextualized per the spaces they occupy. The usage here, of poli-aesthetic
movements as a Dule counterpoint-counterplot practice, adds and contributes to Indigenous studies in academia not merely as another sub-field, but as a field study of its own. In ways that are unique to Dule experience, poli-aesthetic counterpoint-counterplot acts demonstrate the people’s cultural continuance and autonomy enduring within Panama and beyond Panamanian borders as well.

My role during the informal research process was as both observer and listener. I live and exist as apart from the Dule community, and yet I am part of it through my genealogy. As a result, it was very important for me to present this research in the Dule voice, not only as a method of cultural preservation, but also as an expression of personalized and political self-determination.

I conducted my research in the Republic of Panama from January to April of 2009. While there, I visited various parts of the region such as Colón, Panama City, Veracruz, Arraijan, Nuevo Chorrillo, Aguadulce, Los Robles and Tocumen, and I conducted archival research in libraries and interviewed both Dule and non-Dule Panamanians. Additionally, in June 2011, I conducted one interview with a Dule artist who resides in London, Ontario, Canada.

In Panama City, I conducted archival research in Panama’s National Library: Biblioteca Nacional Ernesto J. Castillero R. Its collection of primary and secondary sources includes legislative documents, newspapers and published books related to boxing and Dule history. In addition, I visited the library of Onmaked Dummad Namakaled Congreso General de la Cultura Guna located in Panama City. My second cousin and Dulegaya translator, Roberto Martínez Owen, accompanied me there. He translated my words into Dulegaya for the Sub-Secretary Migdalia Herrera L. regarding my research project, and explained to her the type of sources I was seeking on Dule culture and history. With her assistance, I obtained primary and secondary sources on these areas published in Spanish and Dulegaya. Most sources that I found in Panama’s National library were written by non-Dule Panamanians, while those found in
library of Onmaked Dummad Namakaled Congreso General de la Cultura Guna were written and translated by Dule historians and linguists. By examining and analyzing the materials and data, I discovered multifaceted meanings to Dule ontology and the explanation of the cultural metamorphosis of Dule practices and cultural products.

Aside from archival research, I also conducted informal interviews with adult individuals, both men and women, who are of Dule and non-Dule Panamanian inheritances, especially among community leaders and members over the age of 18. These participants included Catholic priests, Dule artists including those of mola textiles, politicians, Dule historians, academics, former boxers and a sports commentator who is also a boxing historian. I approached these interviews as conversations, with little interference during the narrative process on my part. I conducted informal interviews and yielded control to participants so they had freedom to tell and share their stories as they wished. While conducting informal interviews, I had Dule translators (typically, a friend or relative) with me during any with subjects who spoke only Dulegaya. From the informal interviewing process, I gathered personal accounts and views from participants in order to understand multiple realities of Dule ontology. The site visits included Dule communities in the urban areas in Colón and Panama City, and included some participants of Dule heritage who split their residency between these cities and Gunayala.

I encountered very little difference in the lifestyle and worldview of the Dule in Gunayala from that of those living in the urban areas, especially regarding how these environments affect Dule cultural and social practices. The oral narratives I have collected from these interviews reflect Dule history and experiences throughout Panama, always centered on the three visible entities that flow in and out of Dule and Panamanian society alike: molas, boxing, and poetry.
Figure 1. Aerial Photograph of Agligandi, Gunayala. Photograph by Sue Patricia Haglund.

Figure 2. Aerial Photograph of Panama City, Panama. Photograph by Sue Patricia Haglund.
Family Narrative: 1925 Dule Revolution

Durante 1 o 2 años vivieron en las tierras de Orwila, el pueblo, para así salvarse de los policías panameños. Los estadounidenses bloquearon en la entrada de Gunayala, por la isla de Porvenir, con barcos de guerra, para que no entraron los policías panameños y proteger a la comunidad Guna.

Al principio de la guerra, el abuelo Baby San Blas, cuidó con otros tíos la isla [Agligandi], mientras el [bis] abuelo Olowibikina con otros hombres fueron a la guerra. El tío Roberto, para ese entonces tenía de 7 a 8 años, era pequeño, pero se acuerda, de lo que hicieron sus hermanos y su padre. El señor Colman era muy viejo, lo tenían que cargar otros hombres, él murió en 1929.

Eso fue en los carnavales en Panamá, cuando los gunas dieron la guerra, si no hubiera pasado eso, otras personas hubiesen sido los dueños de esas tierras. Los policías panameños abusaban de la comunidad guna. Había muchas prohibiciones, no podía llevar el vestido mola, practicar, hablar, vivir la cultura y tradiciones guna. Ellos querrían parar esos, fue una de las razones por la que pelearon los gunas.

El tío Roberto se acuerda que su mamá, los levantó por la mañana para bañarse en el mar, y los mandó a dormir en el piso, que no pusieron los hamacas si en caso hubiera tiro de armas. Por cualquiera cosa por la mañana, lo llevaron para la comunidad de Orwila.

Al papá de su papá [el papá de Olowibikina] le gustaba cantar, pero no sabían su nombre, cuando ellos nacieron ya no existía. Se hacía consejo a los jóvenes, a las madres y los hombres en diferentes horas en el Congreso. No cualquiera podía ver a Colman, siempre tenía dos policías cuidándolo. Mister Marx [Marsh], se creía que era alemán, les trajo las armas para defenderse de los panameños.

Todo esto fue dicho por el señor Roberto Martínez y traducido por su hija Indira Martínez.
During 1 to 2 years, they lived on the lands in Orwila, the village, in order to save themselves from the Panamanian police. The Americans blocked the entrance to Gunayala via the island of Porvenir, with warships, in order to protect the Guna communities and not allow the Panamanian police to enter the region.

In the beginning of the war, grandfather Baby San Blas with other uncles guarded the island [Agligandi], while [great] grandfather Olowibikina and other men went to fight. Uncle Roberto, was about 7 or 8 years old, even though he was a child, he remembers what his brothers and father did. Mr. Colman was very old, other men had to help him stand, he died around 1929.

It was during the carnivals of Panama, when the Guna began the war, if the war didn’t happen, then other people would be owners of these lands [Gunayala]. The Panamanian police abused the Guna communities. There were a lot of prohibitions, one couldn’t wear the mola dress, practice, speak, live the Guna culture and traditions. They wanted to stop these [acts]; it was one of the reasons why the Gunas fought. Uncle Roberto remembers his mother waking them up very early in the morning in order to bathe in the sea. And she sent them to sleep on the floor; they couldn’t put the hammocks up in case gun fighting began. For some reason during the morning, they were taken to the community of Orwila.

The father of his father [Olowibikina’s father] loved to sing, but they didn’t know his name, because when they were born, he was no longer alive. He gave advice to the youth, to the mothers and men at different hours in the congress.

Not everyone could meet with Colman; he always had two bodyguards protecting him. Mister Marx [Marsh] some believed he was German [he was American]. He brought arms to the Gunas in order to defend themselves from the Panamanians.

Story told in Dulegaya by Mr. Roberto Martínez and translated from Dulegaya to Spanish by his daughter Indira Martínez.¹

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¹ Roberto Martínez, brother of Baby San Blas, interview by Sue Patricia Haglund, Personal Interview, Colón, Rep. of Panama, 7 March 2009; Narrative told in Dulegaya by Roberto Martínez and translated into Spanish by his daughter Indira Martínez de Alarcón. English translation provided by Sue Patricia Haglund.
Chapter 1

First Layer: Singing Us Into Existence…

Roberto Martínez’s family narrative about the 1925 Dule Revolution begins in Orwila. Orwila is a place located in the mountains on the mainland of Gunayala near the island of Agligandi. It is a place where, “una parte de la comunidad de Ailigandi, por temor a las represalias de los wagas1 y por las amenazas continuas, se trasladó a Orwila” (a part of the community of Agligandi, fearing reprisals from wagas and ongoing threats, moved to Orwila).2 It is a place where Nele Kantule, a spiritual and ritual specialist from Usdub, who sings from the hammock in the onmaggedneg3 of Orwila.4 It is a place where Nele Kantule tells a story. He narrates:

Todas las estrellas en el universo están defendiendo a Napgwana [Nabgwana], a la Madre Tierra. Todas están vestidas de rojo, listas para amparar a la Madre Tierra. Todos ustedes deben estar en la misma actitud. Les he limpiado esta tierra para que vivan en unidad entre todos. Reconozcan siempre a los hermanos. No se odien nunca. Deben acogerse unos a otros.

(All the stars in the universe are defending Napgwana [Nabgwana], Mother Earth. All are dressed in red, ready to protect Mother Earth. You should all have the same attitude. I have cleared this land so that you may live together in unity among all. Always recognize your siblings. Never hate each other. You should look after one another.)5

1 Wagas refer to a non-Dule person. This word is normally used to refer to non-Dule Panamanians.

2 Wagua, Así lo vi, 98.

3 Onmaggedneg is a Dule temple used for communal gathering as a place of prayer or to resolve the community’s social, political, and economic issues.

4 Wagua, Así lo vi, 98.

5 Ibid., 98-99.
This narrative refers to the 1925 Dule soldiers who dressed in red as they protected Gunayala from the wagas in 1925. All Dule had to work together in order to defend the land from the wagas, who would later return to Gunayala.6 During this period, uncertainties and unpredictable reprisals from the Panamanian government disrupted Dule everyday life to the point where “...the captain of the USS Galveston, which also paid a visit, found Ailigandi abandoned, its inhabitants in the hills...”7 One to two years after the 1925 Dule Revolution, those from Agligandi like Roberto Martínez, Ricardo Walker, Eugenio Mendez, Juan Gallardo, Olowibikina, Ammawardat, Mukuaiet and many others relocated to the hills of Orwila, an area where they’d hoped that the disruption to their daily lives could cease—even for a moment. The temporary relocation, to Orwila as well as other parts of Gunayala, is from where many contemporary stories of survival and existence developed. Every place and movement inspired a story. Dule narratives, in all forms, are copious and never stagnant. As with Roberto Martínez’s family narrative, they are always evolving, connecting to cultural experiences and existence.

A Dule story is a story of constant change and movement in time and space. It is a story of continuing resistance, existence, shifting geography and ontological fluidity. As such, it is a story found in all locations, particularly in reference to this dissertation, this is a Dule narrative that includes: Gunayala, Panama City, Colón, textile materials, the boxing ring and poetry. The details are represented within the molas’ motif, in the boxer’s movements and the poets’ words. This is a story where molas, boxing and poetry can and do tell of history: a Dule history. A (hi)story that never fades away.

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6 Ibid., 99.

Dule Counterpoint-counterplot Acts via Poli-Aesthetic Movements

In order to identify the political and aesthetic expressions in Dule culture, I use the term *poli-aesthetic* to define, distinguish and articulate the interrelated and intrinsic bonds between art and politics. The prefix *poli-* is used to identify and discuss the system of politics employed by Dule communities. At the same time, *poli-* refers to the multiple ways non-Dule objects and practices, that enter into Dule society, function, are read and are interpreted. Additionally, I hyphenate and utilize the term *aesthetic* to describe how artistic methods are deployed by Dule governance and within cultural practices. By combining these terms into *poli-aesthetic*, I therefore explain and demonstrate that politics and arts are not separable components in Dule society, rather these two notions are one unit. The interlacing of art and politics in Dule society epitomizes how one reads, interprets and treats political as aesthetical and aesthetical as political. Poli-aesthetic, ultimately, refers to the objects that symbolize and relate to the political and the arts in terms of language, culture, tradition, textile art, boxing, poetry, and dance.

I use poli-aesthetic as the theoretical framework to address the work of aesthetics and politics in Dule elements such as molas, boxing, and poetry. Each of these elements exerts a political premise in the most unlikely space and place, both in and beyond modern Panama. Dule poli-aesthetic movements, both within their society as well as outside the Gunayala region, offer portals to Dule cosmopolitics and cultural identity. This challenges and expands the construct of a Panamanian national identity. Furthermore, they are demonstrated in all forms of expressions: physical, verbal, visual, and written.

Jacques Rancière’s “politics of aesthetics” concept is the theoretical location from which I reconceptualize and examine the work of Dule poli-aesthetic, as a cultural-political movement.8

8 Rancière, 9-45.
This movement reveals two things about the Dule: first, their Indigenous autonomy; and second, their Indigenous refusal to succumb to complete assimilation into Western practices.

Rancière’s “politics of aesthetics” model is instructive, and serves as a baseline in my exploration toward expanding and promoting fuller discussions in Dule poli-aesthetic ontology.9

In *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Rancière explores artistic acts as “configurations of experience that create new modes of sense perception and induce novel forms of political subjectivity.”10 For Rancière:

Aesthetics refers to a specific regime for identifying and reflecting on the arts: a mode of articulation between ways of doing and making, their corresponding forms of visibility, and possible ways of thinking about their relationships (which presupposes a certain idea of thought’s effectivity).11

By recasting “aesthetic acts” in the political terrain, Rancière explains how political and aesthetic systems create a “distribution of the sensible,”12 asserting:

The distribution of the sensible reveals who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed. Having a particular ‘occupation’ thereby determines the ability or inability to take charge of what is common to the community; it defines what is visible or not in a common space…13

In this sense, the relationship between the systems of politics and aesthetics determines an intrinsic nexus between how art is articulated in everyday life and the role that it can play in a political realm. In terms of Indigenous knowledges (epistemologies) and Indigenous lifeworlds

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9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., 9.
11 Ibid., 10.
12 Ibid., 12.
(ontologies), Dule political and aesthetic practices are entwined in all communal life. The poli-aesthetic existence therein, for example, is evident in the governmental frameworks and practices of the two main Guna Congresses, one body of congress handles political issues, and the other is responsible for the preservation of Dule culture and traditional practices.

The structural composition of these two bodies of government in Gunayala is important for the Dule. Iguanape Purbagana, who worked for thirty-seven years as a Dulegaya and Spanish translator in the Congreso General Guna, describes the presence and importance of the General Congresses in Dule communities.¹⁴ He describes:

El Congreso General Guna es uno de los organismos importante en la vida política y social de los gunas. El Congreso ha sido un organismo que ha defendido a la cultura, ha defendido los derechos de los pueblos indígenas de los gunas, ha defendido su territorio Gunayala frente la invasión de otros grupos sociales existente aquí en Panamá. Aquí hay dos congresos. Un congreso cultural cada tres meses se reúnen, es cantado. Porque la nuestra vida es cantada. El sagla se pone en la casa de Congreso. Se pone en medio de la hamaca. A través de tocando [música], comienza a remontar la historia guna este es antes de la llegada de los españoles. Porque la historia guna no se inicia en 1492 aquí en América o Abiayala sino mucho más antes porque ha habido los grandes neles porque aquí ha habido lo vamos a llamar reforma de gobernar…El Congreso Guna se hace cada dos veces al año o seis meses. Y la Cultura se hace cada tres meses, cada tres meses al año…canta cómo venimos nosotros, cómo venimos luchando, cómo mantenemos nuestra cultura, nuestro idioma y que hay nuestra propia escuela.

(The Guna General Congress is one of the important organizations in the political and social life of the Guna. The Congress has been an organization that has defended the culture, has championed the rights of indigenous peoples of the Guna, [and] has defended its territory Gunayala against the invasion of other existing social groups here in Panama. Here are two congresses. A cultural congress meets every three months, it is sung. Because our life is sung. The sagla is put into the house of Congress. He gets in the middle of the hammock. Through playing [music], he begins to trace the Guna history; this is before the Spanish arrived. Because Guna history does not start in 1492 here in America or Abiayala, but much earlier because there has been the great neles, because there has been what we call governance reform…Guna Congress takes place two times a year or every six months. And the Cultural [Congress] is done every three months, every

¹⁴ Iguanape Purbagana, Personal Interview.
three months a year ... singing how we come, how we come to fight, how we keep our culture, our language and our own school there.)\(^{15}\)

There are multiple layers of action occurring within the structural components of Dule governance. From Iguanape’s account, the Dule sing themselves into existence, all the while the sagla’s physical body is artfully laying in the middle of a hammock swaying back and forth. Dule histories acknowledge that lifeworlds do not begin with the sagla, in fact. Instead, they begin with the hammock itself. Aesthetically symbolic and politically vital, the hammock plays an integral part in Dule way of life.

As Iguanape points out, the hammock is the central place where the sagla chants and recites Babigala.\(^{16}\) It also is a place where the cycles of life occur, such as procreation, birth and death. He states:

La hamaca es importante en la reproducción del hombre guna. Hay dos hamacas: el hombre y la madre...la hamaca [está] en centro del Congreso...allí está la madre. La reproducción. La hamaca es la reproducción. Y por eso, hay que respetar la hamaca. El Guna reproduce en la hamaca no en la cama. Allí está la importancia. Representa eso.

(The hammock is important in the reproduction of the Guna. There are two hammocks: the man and the mother ... the hammock [is] the center of Congress ... there is the mother. The reproduction. The hammock is reproduction. And so, we must respect the hammock. The Guna procreate in the hammock not in bed. There is the importance. It represents that.)\(^{17}\)

The hammock is a living entity—it is life. Its existence contributes to and unravels the physical layering of sounds and movements in Dule culture, which include: the chanter’s voice, the sagla’s positioned body in the hammock and the audience, which sits on benches surrounding the

\(^{15}\) Ibid.

\(^{16}\) Ibid.

\(^{17}\) Ibid.
saglas’ hammocks as they listen to the chanters. The hammock, then, is ontologically connected to the molas in that it is a precursor before the actual mola-making, and therefore serves as one of the primary woven objects taught in Yoodiwalal to Dule women by great grandmother Gikadiryai, who “amarraba los palos de tejer hamacas [kachis] y tejía. Enseñaba a entrelazar los hilos de algodón. Nacieron las hamacas y las fue llamando de acuerdo a su uso, a su tamaño, a sus diseños. Gikadiryai también se acercó a la arcilla, a la arcilla roja, a la arcilla negra, a la arcilla amarilla, a la arcilla parda. Ibeorgun y Gikadiryai trabajaron unidos; por eso ellos nos hablaron de cómo debíamos trabajar en comunidad” (tied the poles to weave hammocks [kachis] and wove. She taught how to weave the cotton threads. The hammocks were born and were called according to their use, their size, their designs. Gikadiryai also approached the clay, thered clay, black clay, yellow clay, brown clay. Gikadiryai and Ibeorgun worked together, that’s why they talked to us about how we should work in the community).

All these sounds and movements from and in Dule cultural practices rhythmically produce ontological and ephemeral layers of poli-aesthetic existence. Dule governance is comprised of systems of culture and politics. In fact, their cultural and political systems, as Iguanape describes, demonstrate that there is no separation between arts and politics. The seamless articulation in combining the two within Dule ontological practices encompasses elements such as sound, breath, language, song and movement. These elements sing into existence religious, social and moral values commonly found in Dule society.

Similarly and more tangibly, Dule molas, like the hammocks, innately display and articulate all these uses in a Dule poli-aesthetic form. A mola is a “…short sleeved, bright colored appliqué blouses (molas) and calf length, wrap-around skirts of figured dark blue cloth,

18 Aiban Wagua, Relatos de mi gran historia (Panama: Nan Garburba Oduloged Igar, 2007), 27.
secured by rolling at the waist. The women’s head-covering is a rectangular piece of red cloth which hangs loosely down the back to below the shoulders.”

According to Mari Lyn Salvador, the artform and custom of molas originated in the 1800s when “…Kuna [Guna] women started experimenting with ways to transfer body-painting designs onto handwoven cloth. The new process eventually developed into the creation of designs that were cutout and sewn onto imported fabric.”

Since the nineteenth century, “the art of making molas is considered an integral part of their culture and important to their ethnic identity by the Kuna. Women sew while visiting, traveling, participating in village meetings, or sitting by themselves.”

Through Dule daily actions, a mola connects the vitality and continuity of their way of life.

A mola also demonstrates how the Dule perceive and interpret objects, persons, plants, animals, Dule history and cultural practices in and out of Gunayala. For instance, in Figure 3, a kansu mor is a great example of an object used in Dule society, as a design of small benches located in a Dule gathering house. In the structure’s interior layout, these small benches surround the hammocks, which usually hang in the center of the room.

Figure 3. Kansu Mor, Small Benches Mola. From the Haglund Family Collection. Photograph by Sue Patricia Haglund.


21 Ibid., 55.
The abstract design of these *kansu mor* exemplifies traditional-cultural *sergan* mola (old mola,) whose motifs are similar, yet different intergenerational designs shared among Dule molamakers. These designs represent political, satirical, cultural and social meanings.

The mola, aside from its usage as traditional wear, is also politically emblematic by design. The act of wearing the mola reinforces political-cultural identity for the Dule:

> Wearing *molas* also provided women with a public medium for social commentary, a means for describing and recording social changes, and a way to organize socially and to define their relationships with other Kuna [Guna] women in their communities. Older or less intricate *molas* were usually worn during the day while women were working. Newer and finer *molas* were worn to *congreso* meetings and on special occasions. *Molas* could be worn to make a political statement, such as indicating support for a political candidate or for a particular issue.\(^{22}\)

Two things occur when Dule women wear a mola:

1. They express pride in tradition and heritage; and
2. They allow a mola to serve as an identity marker that reveals political-cultural imaginaries, within their own communities as well as beyond the Gunayala region. The mola therefore becomes a reflection of unity and equal distribution of the sensible in Dule political terrain.\(^{23}\)

At the same time, to a non-Dule Panamanian, the mola is a decontextualized (from Dule) and generalized representation of Panamanian national identity. In the country’s political terrain, a non-Dule Panamanian takes the mola panel and puts it over their Western-clothing. Thus, the mola “…has become fashionable and a symbol of national pride…” for non-Dule

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\(^{22}\) Tice, 82.

\(^{23}\) Rancière, 12-13.
Panamanians.\textsuperscript{24} The mola, in a poli-aesthetic movement, casts and recasts itself on multiple levels in Dule culture and Panamanian society.

For example, Figure 4 depicts a mola in context of how it is used politically. Here, Panamanian schoolchildren in a parade, wave the country’s national flag—a common sight during Panama’s Independence Day and National Flag Day celebrations. Although Figure 4 can be perceived as an example of mola assimilation, through molamaker’s usage of cloth, thread, needle and motif design; in actuality it exemplifies Dule counterpoint-counterplot.

![Figure 4. Mola of Schoolchildren celebrating National Flag Day. From Haglund family collection. Photograph by Sue Haglund.](image)

In the Dule cultural actions and aesthetic products, there is an emergent counterpoint-counterplot to modern Panama’s national identity and national history. Dule counterpoint-counterplot practice creates multi-layered categorical, poli-aesthetic acts, which can be understood by examining:

(1) the conception of two coexisting discourses, as defined by Edward Said’s \textit{contrapuntal analysis};\textsuperscript{25} and

\textsuperscript{24} Tice, 93-94.
(2) the development of Dule opposition against these actions of cultural appropriation.

Edward W. Said defines contrapuntal analysis as “a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts.”\textsuperscript{26} He describes contrapuntal as a state of musical contrast:

In the counterpoint of Western classical music, various themes play off one another, with only a provisional privilege being given to any particular one; yet in the resulting polyphony there is concert and order, an organized interplay that derives from the themes, not from a rigorous melodic or formal principle outside the work.\textsuperscript{27}

That is to say, like musical counterpoint, contrapuntal analysis represents the act of studying two processes of histories and perspectives, together. Said stresses the study of both processes, “that of imperialism and that of resistance to it, which can be done by extending our reading of the texts to include what was once forcibly excluded.”\textsuperscript{28} In contrapuntal analysis, one can see how a text acts by itself and also together with other historical perspectives.

The Theory of Dule Poli-aesthetic Ontology

Following Said’s concept of contrapuntal analysis, Dule, as active political-cultural agents, create and sustain Dule ontological narratives with and against Panama’s national narratives. In three important ways, Dule narratives articulate Dule experiences:

(1) Molas: fabric art that operates as an element of ethnic, cultural and political identities on and off Dule woman corporeal body;

(2) Boxing: the corporeal body of a Dule boxer, which creates a representative

\textsuperscript{25} Said, 51.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 66-67.
counterpoint to political identity in terms of *who and what is Panamanian and non-Panamanian*; and

(3) Contemporary poetry (based from and inspired by oratory performances by traditional Dule singers and chanters): describing the continued existence of Dule history, culture, traditions and practices.

The analysis of these three sites reveals modern Dule cultural actions and aesthetic products that challenge the patterns and histories of Panama’s national identity. Through molas, boxing and poetry, Dule histories are apparent and marked; simultaneously, they are also invisible and unmarked.

Dule poli-aesthetic ontology moves in two synchronized operations: first, in collaboration with and second, in opposition to Panama’s histories. This duality permits Dule visibility and the acknowledgment of Dule histories; creating a contrapuntal agency.

Said uses contrapuntal analysis as a method to interpret imperialist and colonized narratives:

…[W]e can read and interpret English novels, for example, whose engagement (usually suppressed for the most part) with the West Indies or India, say, is shaped and perhaps even determined by the specific history of colonization, resistance, and finally native nationalism. At this point alternative or new narratives emerge, and they become institutionalized or discursively stable entities.29

His contrapuntal standpoint demonstrates how opposing agents, such as the colonizer and the colonized, interact and create a national identity or a national narrative. In the case of the Dule and Panama, the contrapuntal approach shows how Panama’s identity and representation demand of the Dule to establish and legitimize Panamanian identity and national narrative. A particular

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29 Said, 51.
process occurs within the interaction of Panama and its Indigenous peoples like the Dule. It is a “concert and order” process, with(in) and without Panamanian national narratives.\(^{30}\)

Counterpoint tensions exist when Panama appropriates Indigenous artworks like the molas as universally “Panamanian,” for various reasons—especially nationalism and tourism. As such, the molas represent a national identity and within a national narrative, which can be packaged and sold to others. Modern Panama’s nationalistic and economic needs, particularly by way of tourism, appropriate Dule experience, thereby revealing Dule poli-aesthetic movements. Yet, paradoxically, this cultural appropriation also highlights the Dule counterpoint, which recuperates the expropriated Dule materials and claims it as part of a Dule lifeworld. The Dule, in that contrapuntal moment, is elided, mixed and disappeared into a national imaginary. However, at the same time, the Dule is revealed as being distinct from it.

For instance, the mola-as-text serves different functions for the Dule than it does for non-Dule. On the body of a Dule woman, when it is part of her traditional dress (as previously mentioned,) it acts as an identity marker because it politically and socially identifies her, a Dule woman. At the same time, the mola serves as an artistic text by documenting a particular event that is significant for Dule people. If a non-Dule observes this mola on a Dule woman, however, its meaning and significance create an oppositional discourse. Indeed, when wearing her mola, a non-Dule person often overlooks the Dule woman altogether.

A Dule woman wearing a mola creates space and develops a Dule narrative. At the same time, as a walking book, the mola itself confronts and contradicts the Panamanian narrative, resulting in a contested space, where the non-Dule’s perspective no longer dominates the

\(^{30}\) Ibid.
interpretation of the mola.\textsuperscript{31} For most non-Dule, the mola is a mere commodity: a souvenir from modern Panama. The contradiction and absorption of mola content are taken in as solely aesthetic in appeal. Thus, a variety of understandings are called upon when observing the mola, which are dependent upon whether the observer is Dule or non-Dule.

Along this counterpoint, there also exists an act of counterplot to Panama’s identity and history. It operates as, “The loci of resistance and protest by those who are threatened by the disordering of their lives in the ‘New World Order’…”\textsuperscript{32} Accordingly, “Protests occur in the multiple sites of distress,” according to June Nash, “where people experience the crisis or symbolically identify its source.”\textsuperscript{33} I draw on her term counterplot to explain and reveal how the Dule remove and replace one stratagem for another, in order to exemplify the challenges the Dule pose to Panamanian nationalism. A counterplot action is a layering of multifaceted acts that defy a dominant regime, at the same time creating an appearance of falling in line with the governing establishment.

The counterplot acts appear in many areas of Dule experiences. Dule sites of protest against political-social confinement in modern Panama materialize through the Dule woman wearing a mola, the Dule boxer fighting in a boxing ring in Panama City, and in the written texts of a contemporary Dule poet.

For example, on the surface, the presence of a mola, a boxer, and a poet’s printed text in modern Panama are not automatically visible as Dule. Dule-specific elements are unrecognized

\textsuperscript{31} Oloedidili Monique Mojica, Dule Rappahannock artist and writer whose family is from Yandup-Nargana, interview by Sue Patricia Haglund, Personal Interview, Panama City, Panama, 2 March 2009; and Achu Oswaldo DeLeón Kantule, Dule visual artist from Usdup and Nele Kantule’s grandson, interview by Sue Patricia Haglund, Personal Interview, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2 June 2011.

\textsuperscript{32} Nash, 21.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
and/or obscured to the non-Dule observer. These are, however, often concealing dissident acts, hidden in the layers of day-to-day activities in Panama. Often they receive little to no attention, treated as insignificant and as though holding little substantive importance to the country.

Paradoxically, and unbeknownst to non-Dules, these elements often (and significantly) place and assert Dule presence in many arenas. In this way, they function as counterplots, which oppose confinement, definition, erasure and assimilation. From multiple locations, these sites oscillate, expand and reaffirm Dule identity, culture and way of life.

Dule counterplots are the walking mola,\(^{34}\) the boxer covered in nikeeu,\(^{35}\) and the contemporary Dule poet’s invoking of memory, tradition, and existence. All these elements develop and originate from the entwined relationships between the Dule and the nation of Panama since 1903.

The Entwinement of the Dule and Panama

The history of Gunayala territory and the Dule people, with respect to their relationship with the Panamanian state, differs from other Indigenous populations in Latin America in significant ways. For example, the Dule maintained their independence from the larger nation. Gunayala is one of what are known in Panama as the “five legally constituted territorial units (comarcas) which make up almost 20% of the country’s total land area.”\(^{36}\) The geographical location of their villages within it, along the eastern Atlantic coastline of Panama, brought Dule

\(^{34}\) Oloedidili Monique Mojica, Personal Interview; and Achu Oswaldo DeLeón Kantule, Personal Interview.

\(^{35}\) Roberto Martínez, brother of Baby San Blas, interview by Sue Patricia Haglund, Personal Interview, Colon, Rep. of Panama, 7 March 2009; and Eugenio Mendez, nephew of Baby San Blas, interview by Sue Patricia Haglund, Personal Interview, Panama City, Panama, 9 February 2009.

into contact with Europeans since the fifteenth century, including Spanish, French, Scots, British and pirates of diverse national origins. These encounters enabled Dule to develop a lucrative trading system among these groups, as well as with the (then-British Colony of) Jamaica. Merchandise they traded with Europeans included tools, firearms, and textiles.

Commercial trade was not the only contact the Dule had with outsiders, meanwhile. They often found themselves in the middle of geopolitical struggles (such as geographical, political, social, cultural and economical challenges) of nation-and-country-builders within the region. From the era of Spanish Empire to the time of Panama’s independence from Gran Colombia, the Dule have faced challenges from external groups, who have ruled the region under a common theme of manipulation, dominance and control.

During the early part of the twentieth century, the Dule were caught in a whirlwind of changes due to the developments occurring in Panama. For example, Panama’s gaining independence from Colombia in 1903 shows how the Dule were impacted by the political power plays of the day. During the independence fight, while the Dule officially “played no part in [Panama’s] secession from Colombia[,]” they still confronted and responded to the situation and weighing consciously the decision to choose sides, Panama over Colombia. Some scholars, like

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37 Tice, 34.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 Howe, A People Who Would, 5.
41 For further information on the U.S. involvement in Panama’s independence from Colombia in 1903 and U.S. invested interest in constructing the Panama Canal please see U.S. documents: Monroe Doctrine and Roosevelt Corollary.
42 Howe, A People Who Would, 27.
anthropologist James Howe, posit that the Dule wanted nothing more than to be left alone. He explains, “The issue facing the Kuna was whether Panama or Colombia should have their allegiance. Almost no one, except perhaps Charly Robinson [a sagla of Nargana], had any interest in becoming an active citizen of either country, but they were accustomed to offering token loyalty to a neighboring state.” However, historically, a few politicians assert that the Dule’s political allegiance was malleable. For example:

The governor of the province of Colón, the part of Panama closest to San Blas, commented astutely that the Indians would undoubtedly choose whichever government gave them what they wanted. Less astutely, he assumed they were after money, when what they were really asking for was to be left alone.

Both pro-Panama and pro-Colombia Dule groups developed in Gunayala after the 1903 independence, increasing the impact of their role within regional politics. Howe notes that the then newly-formed Panamanian government feared the invasion of Colombian armies via Gunayala, due to the region’s proximity to it. However, “Military threats soon evaporated, but in the first six months of 1904 a number of diplomatic missions visited the Indian area [Gunayala], as both governments [Panamanian and Colombian] courted the Kuna.”

According to D.B. Stout, these pro-Panama and pro-Colombia Dule groups’ allegiance of support to these foreign states divided the islands of Gunayala. The Pro-Colombia faction resided on the islands from Sasardi (an isle community) all the way to the east of Gunayala reaching

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43 Ibid., 28.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid., 29.
47 Ibid., 28.
48 Ibid.
Colombia, while the Pro-Panama contingent resided on the other isle communities west of Sasardi to El Porvenir.\(^{49}\) Two communities, Yandup and Akwanusadup, remained neutral.\(^{50}\)

One of the most notable among pro-Colombia Dule group leaders was Inanaginya who was a leader of Sasardi and a strong supporter of Colombia. Scholar James Howe reads a kind of political referencing in the singing metaphors Inanaginya was known to perform in the Sasardi gathering house.\(^{51}\) One song, for example, would affirm his loyalty to his wife (an older woman who is hard-working, responsible and experienced in tending to household duties,) while proclaiming that he would never leave her for a younger one (i.e., a woman who is not so responsible or inexperienced).\(^{52}\) Howe is not clear, however, as to what significance this, in terms of Dule politics, might hold, noting that “…Kuna oral tradition is vague about his [Inanaginya’s] followers’ response. It may be that a majority acceded to his wishes or suspended judgment for the moment, or that the coming schism may already have been apparent.”\(^ {53}\) His conclusion and interpretation, however, differs from the Dule oral account. Howe has presented an oral account in a certain way that is an incomplete recounting of it.

Sagladummad Inakeliginya’s oral account, however, accurately describes the Dule response to Inanaginya’s simile, as well as explains to the political situation that the Dule faced. According to Sagladummad Inakeliginya:

> “Los sailagan de la Comarca lo escucharon muy atentos”, dice Inadoiginya. Este canto de Inanaginya constituyó la piedra de división de nuestras comunidades.

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\(^{49}\) Stout, 84-85.

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 85.


\(^{53}\) Ibid.
Inanaginya se refería a continuar con Colombia o a aferrarse a Panamá, que nacía entonces como república. El *saila* de Wannuggandi, llamado Devis, se levantó y protestó recio contra del canto del *saila* Inanaginya. Según los testigos, era de noche. El *saila* Devis, provocado hondamente por el canto del *saila*, quiso volver de noche a su comunidad. Lo serenaron un poco, y pudo hacerlo en las horas de la mañana. Era una noche oscura de fuertes vientos, y el único medio de transporte de los kunas [gunas] era cayuco a vela y remo. Inanaginya había cantado refiriéndose a los hechos de la independencia entre Panamá y Colombia. Inanaginya se adhería así a Colombia y no quería aceptar a Panamá. Panamá le parecía muy débil y todavía sin nada. Todo lo que nos llegaba de alimentos nos llegaba no de Panamá, sino de Colombia; y hasta hoy no han cambiado las cosas.

("The sailagan\textsuperscript{54} of the region listened to him very carefully," says Inadoiginya. Inanaginya’s song established a division in our communities. Inanaginya was referring to continue with Colombia or to cling to Panama, then a newly formed republic. The saila of Wannuggandi, called Devis, stood up and protested loud against saila Inanaginya’s song. According to witnesses, it was night. The saila Devis, deeply provoked by the saila’s song, wanted to return to his community at night. They calmed him a little, and he could do so in the morning. It was a dark night of strong winds, and the Kuna’s [Guna’s] only means of transportation was sailing a canoe and rowing. Inanaginya had sung referring to the facts of the independence between Panama and Colombia. Inanaginya adhered well to Colombia and would not accept Panama. Panama seemed very weak and still had nothing. All the food that reached us did not come from Panama, but Colombia, and so far things have not changed.)\textsuperscript{55}

Inanaginya’s songs, he makes clear, did stir reactions among Dule in the gathering house, which eventually lead to the dividing of communities in Gunayala. Soon after that occurred, Inanaginya traveled with an assistant to Colombia to negotiate directly with the government; but he was unable to garner support from them for the Dule in return.\textsuperscript{56} Instead, Inanaginya and his secretary were killed.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{54} Saila or Sailagan (plural form) refer to a religious, socio-political administrator and leader in a Dule community. Since 2010 publication of Guna-Spanish dictionary, the accurate spelling variation of saila is sagla.

\textsuperscript{55} Wagua, *Así lo vi*, 45.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 46.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
Wannuggandi, as Inakeliginya recounts, was no longer under Inanaginya’s authority.\textsuperscript{58} As a result, the region divided into the pro-Panama group, led by sagla Simral Colman of Agligandi, and the pro-Colombia group led by sagla Inabaginya, who succeeded Inanaginya of Sasardi.\textsuperscript{59} Unmindful of these divisions in Gunayala, the newly formed Panamanian government had its own plans for the Dule, in any case.

Following Panama’s 1903 independence, its newly formed government included the Dule among its citizenry, actively attempted to assimilate all of its Indigenous inhabitants within a proscribed, unified national identity. Both governmental and non-governmental agencies were tasked with facilitating this process.\textsuperscript{60} Christian missionaries from the Catholic Church and various Protestant sects were sent to integrate the Dule into Panamanian society by means of religious conversion and the introduction of Western education. However, “[Christian] missionary attempts to subdue the Kuna were not successful.”\textsuperscript{61}

When these proselytizing endeavors failed to fully assimilate the Dule, the Panamanian government turned to its police force and administrators for alternatives, sending them to the isle communities in Gunayala, to strictly enforce Panamanian laws and ordinances, and “civilize” the Dule.\textsuperscript{62} As part of this process, Spanish-speaking schools were then established within

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 45-46.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{60} Howe, \textit{A People Who Would}, 105.
\textsuperscript{61} Tice, 39.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 39-40.
Gunayala. Administrators and police employed fear and control in order to suppress Dule culture, language and communities.

At times, these tactics provoked violence that spread throughout the Gunayala region. For example, “local congresos, [the] political-religious meetinghouses of the Kuna [Guna], were shut down…a few were burned…traditional Kuna [Guna] women’s dress, methods of healing, and other forms of sociopolitical expression were prohibited.” In other instances, Dule women were raped and forced to intermarry with the very same Panamanian police officers who had assaulted them.

As Panama continued to develop as an independent country, the Dule responded, acclimating to the rapid changes occurring there during the early part of the twentieth century. At the same time, they continued to maintain and preserve their “cultural identity and unity.”

Political rhetoric emerged as yet another tool to promote their assimilation. In an effort to counter Dule self-identity, Panama’s political leaders, including then President Belisario Porras in 1915, would visit Gunayala.

Porra’s vision of Panama, analogous to José de San Martin’s 1821 decree, did not include any reference to or acknowledgement of Indigenous identity within the country. Instead, it embraced a wholly national identity—Panamanian. He lectured receptive audiences about his

63 Ibid.
64 Ibid., 40.
67 Anderson, 50.
“civilizing program,” and “stressing that the Indians should respect the national flag, accept government schools, and consider themselves Panamanians.”

Porra’s attempts to impose his vision of a unified, national identity on Panama—one that called for vanquishing Dule distinctiveness—were unsuccessful.

The Dule fought to preserve their culture, thus, in 1925—an insurgency led by the Dule caught Panamanian government officials off guard. That year would define the political-cultural relationship of Gunayala and Panama.

**Babigala: Ibeler and the Dule Revolution of 1925**

The 1925 Dule Revolution is one of the most poignant events in the people’s history during the twentieth century. The narrative of events that took place during that period interweaves with the Dule narrative noted earlier in this chapter. In order to understand this history from a Dule perspective, one must understand what is Babigala: a network of narratives told in oral tradition that explains the people’s history and ways of life, the roles of men and women within society, how to care for Nabgwana and how the universe was created based on the teachings of Baba and Nana, supreme beings and co-Creators.

The start of the Dule Revolution of 1925 draws clear parallels with stories of Babigala, which in turn embodies the reasoning for engaging in a defensive war in order to protect Dule culture, way of life, Nabgwana and the people’s very lives. From Babigala, the story of Ibeler expresses the philosophy, reasoning and strategic approach of the people in combatting tyrannical acts of injustice committed by wagas and their allies. According to the Babigala,

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69 Wagua, *Así lo vi*, 143.
Ibeler represents universal balance, unity, the defense of Nabgwana and the freedom of a
people.  

Ibeler is the eldest of eight siblings raised by the guardian toads. Sagladummad

Inakeliginya references the history of the eight siblings (one sister and seven brothers) in the
following manner:

En la historia de los ocho hermanos que estamos comentando, aparecen varios
animales, y cada uno con significados específicos y actitudes muy concretas. En
esta perspectiva de relaciones, nuestra historia está llena de humillaciones, de
atropellos, de dolor, pero esas humillaciones, esos atropellos también han exigido
y provocado respuestas precisas de valentía, de unidad, de sangre de nuestro
pueblo. Los hijos de la sapa Gweloyai (Inanargikinele y Olodurgubipinele)
mataron en el río, a Gabayai, madre de los ocho hermanos. Ibeler y sus hermanos
crecieron engañados en la casa de sus tutoras sapas. Los niños pescaban por los
ríos, o cazaban por las selvas. Las tutoras, haciéndose pasar por la madre de los
ocho, les ponían los pescados más pequeños para comer, o el pedazo del pellejo
que sobraba. Las sapas conservaban las mejores presas para sus verdaderos
hijos… Así habla la historia de Ibeler.

(In the story of the eight siblings about whom we are commenting, appear several
animals, each with a specific meanings and very specific attitudes. From the
perspective of relationships, our [Dule] history is full of humiliations, abuse and
pain, but these humiliations, these abuses have also demanded precise answers
and caused courage, unity, bloodshed of our people. The children of the toad
Gweloyai (Inanargikinele and Olodurgubipinele) killed Gabayai, mother of the
eight children, in the river. Ibeler and his siblings grew up deceived in the house
of their guardian toads. The children fished the rivers, or hunted in the forests.
The guardians, posing as the true mother of eight, gave to them the smaller fish to
eat, or a piece of animal skin that was left over. The toads kept the best catch for
their real children… Thus speaks the story of Ibeler.)  

Commenting on the continuity of Ibeler’s story, Inakeliginya explains how the eight children, all
of whom believed they were offspring of these toads, discovered the truth about their mother

70 Ibid., 146.
71 Ibid., 19.
First, the river showed the siblings their reflections to reveal how their physical attributes were different and more attractive than that of the mother toads. The peacock then revealed to the siblings that their mother died at the hands of mother toad’s son Inanargikinele.

Inakeliginya continues:

Los ocho jóvenes se dieron cuenta de que ellos estaban viviendo en la casa de sus propios enemigos. Que ellos se fatigaban saliendo tan de madrugada a pescar o a cazar para alimentar a aquellos que les odiaban. Que compartían la comida con aquellos que habían matado y devorado a su mamá. Unas veces, las sapas aparecían como abuelas y les decían -¡machi waganye! (¡mis nietos!), otras veces, les decían ser sus verdaderas progenitoras. Después de este trascendental descubrimiento, Ibeler pasó a conseguir más aliados. Ibeler midió muy serenamente su fuerza, tenía que saber con qué armas y amigos contaba para una lucha que debía ser muy sangrienta, larga y dura. Ibeler bajó y subió por todas las capas de la Madre Tierra, quería enterarse de sus verdaderos aliados y de todas las cosas a su alcance para vencer a sus rivales.

(The eight youth realized that they were living in the house of their own enemies. They were so weary for leaving at dawn to fish or to hunt in order to feed those who hated them. They shared food with those who had killed and eaten their mother. Sometimes, the toads appeared as grandmothers and called to them - ¡machi waganye! (My grandchildren!) At other times they claimed to be their real parent(s). Upon this momentous discovery, Ibeler went to get more allies. Ibeler very calmly measured their strength, as he had to know with what weapons and friends he would have to count on for a fight that would surely be very bloody, long and tough. Ibeler climbed up and down, through all the layers of Mother Earth, wanting to learn from his true allies and about everything within his reach, in order to defeat his rivals.)

Inakeliginya asserts that Ibeler’s motive to defeat his enemies and to protect Mother Earth correlates to the reasoning of Dule leaders in launching the 1925 insurgency. Inakeliginya cites three names in particular Nele Kantule, Colman, and Nugelipe as embodying Ibeler’s

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72 Ibid., 22-23.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
motive for waging war in order to uphold the unity of the Dule people. He describes, “Nele, Colman, Nugelipe…surgieron bañados en las aguas de la historia y de la cultura kuna [guna]” (Nele, Colman, Nugelipe…emerged bathed in the waters of [Guna] Kuna history and culture).  

Furthermore, Inakeliginya explains:

Ibeler sentía el dolor del hijo, de hijo de una madre maltratada en las manos de Biler, cuyos aliados eran las sapas y sus hijos. Este mismo sentimiento fue la base de la actitud de Nele Kantule, de Colman ante el atropello de la policía colonial. Esto mismo fue la causa de la Revolución de 1925. Es muy importante para todos, redescubrir primero la verdadera historia, antes de escuchar las mentiras de los wagas. Para los wagas, nuestro derecho a la vida y a conformar un pueblo diferente, es agresión contra ellos, y entonces empiezan a buscar falsos héroes y se hacen ellos, víctimas. Nele Kantule, Colman, Nugelipe conocían profundamente esta nuestra historia, por eso fueron capaces de levantar al Pueblo Kuna [Guna] y de liberarlo de las garras de los invasores de entonces.

(Ibeler felt the pain of the child, the son of an abused mother in the hands of Biler, whose allies were the mother toads and their children. This same feeling was the basis of Nele Kantule’s attitude, of Colman’s [attitude] to the crimes of the colonial police. This same [feeling] was the cause of the Revolution of 1925. It is very important for everyone to rediscover the true story first, before listening to the lies of the wagas. For the wagas, our right to life and to form a different nation represent aggression against them, and then they begin to look for fake heros to make them victims. Nele Kantule, Colman, Nugelipe knew our history that deeply, so they were able to rouse the Kuna [Guna] people and release them from the clutches of the then-invaders.)

As noted earlier, since the inception of the Panamanian government in 1903, a series of atrocities committed by non-Dule Panamanian colonial police in Gunayala led to the Dule Revolution of 1925. These acts ranged from arson attacks on Dule gathering houses to the rape of Dule women. No one—not even Nele Kantule, a Dule leader of Usdub—escaped the wagas’

76 Ibid., 25.
77 Ibid.
78 Tice, 40; and Howe, A People Who Would, 184-187.
wrath. Inakeliginya recounts the one-month incarceration of 1921, which left a mark of humiliation and pain on Nele Kantule as much as Ibeler and his siblings had experienced under the care of the deceiving mother toads.\textsuperscript{79} According to Inakeliginya:

La situación se volvió insoportable. Nele Kantule sintió, así, en carne propia, los golpes de los saqueadores policías. Nugelipe, mi suegro, me dijo que Nele Kantule había salido de la cárcel, muy herido, muy humillado y juró responder con su puño a los desmanes de los policías. Nugelipe, gran amigo de Nele Kantule, solía repetirme que Nele tenía grandes asesores y consejeros de varios países. Nele había conocido a William Smith, Sam Aspinwall y otros. Cada vez que encontraba con ellos, les llenaba de preguntas. Ellos respondían a sus preguntas sobre los acontecimientos mundiales, sobre el dolor del mundo. “No hay nadie en el mundo que haya logrado un territorio sin derramar la sangre”, [a Nele Kantule] le decían sus amigos. Nele Kantule sabía que sin tierra, sus hijos serían pobres y mendigos; que la historia, la cultura no nacían, ni se fortalecían sin un territorio.

(The situation became unbearable. Nele Kantule felt, well, first hand, the blows of police marauders. Nugelipe, my father-in-law, told me that Nele Kantule had left the prison, very hurt, very humiliated and vowed to respond with his fist to the abuses by the police. Nugelipe, a great friend of Nele Kantule, used to repeat that Nele had great consultants and advisors from various countries. Nele had met William Smith, Sam Aspinwall and others. Every time he had found them, he asked them many questions. They responded to his questions about world events, on pain of the world. "There is nobody in the world that has achieved a territory without spilling blood," [Nele Kantule’s] friends told him. Nele Kantule knew that without land their children would be poor and become beggars, that history, culture are not born, nor are they strengthened without a territory.)\textsuperscript{80}

Dule leaders, like Nele Kantule and Sagla Simral Colman of Agligandi, learn from their own histories in Gunayala, but also beyond the geographical territories of Gunayala. James Howe confirms that Nele Kantule’s friends, William Smith and Charly Aspinwall (also known as Sam

\textsuperscript{79} Wagua, \textit{Así lo vi}, 54.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.
Aspinwall), were sailors like Sagla Colman who returned to Gunayala and brought with them experience and knowledge about places beyond Panama.\textsuperscript{81}

With the new knowledges imported from abroad, Sagla Colman and Nele Kantule began to get an idea of how other Indigenous peoples were treated.\textsuperscript{82} In fact, Howe states, “Nele [Kantule] may not have known all that much about North American history, Indian reservations, or the U.S. federal system, but he knew that the mergis [Americans] had fought the Indians and taken their land away, setting aside small parcels as native reserves, and that their national government united formerly separate entities.”\textsuperscript{83}

Nele Kantule’s growing awareness of the ongoing struggles other Indigenous people were facing throughout North America justified and reaffirmed his commitment to defend Nabgwana, Dule culture and way of life. Similar to Ibeler’s story, Sagla Colman, Nele Kantule and other Dule leaders forged alliances among Dule and non-Dule, and drew up an action plan against the wagas.\textsuperscript{84} The details of this included the recruitment of medicinal specialists, intelligence gathering and clandestine operation specialists who would observe the daily routines of colonial police and their allies, information specialists who would collect all the stories of abuses against Dule committed by the wagas, and also recruit the best Dule hunters throughout Gunayala.\textsuperscript{85} According to Howe, the attack plan was engaged during the beginning of Panama’s

\textsuperscript{81} Howe, \textit{A People Who Would}, 67-69.

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 69.

\textsuperscript{84} Wagua, \textit{Así lo vi}, 72.

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
Carnival festivities on February 22, 1925.\textsuperscript{86} According to Dule accounts, however, the planned attack started on February 21, 1925.\textsuperscript{87} Howe further describes that the Dule wore hats made from palm leaves, wore red clothes with red-painted faces and bathed with medicines made of everything from “jaguar teeth” to “hawk’s hearts.”\textsuperscript{88}

Leaving from the island of Agligandi, the Dule soldiers:

…partieron en cayucos a Ukubseni y Dupbile. Los que iban a atacar a Dupbile no atacaron porque no estaban seguros del éxito, mientras otro grupo iba a Ukubseni donde, hacia la 1 de la mañana del 21 de Febrero de 1925, estalla la revolución.

(... set off in canoes to Ukubseni and Dupbile. Those who were going to attack Dupbile they did not because they were not confident of success, while another group went to Ukubseni where, around 1 a.m. on February 21, 1925, the revolution broke out.)\textsuperscript{89}

The 1925 war became known as the Revolución Dule (Dule Revolution), an insurrection that was “planned in secret and became a reality....”\textsuperscript{90} It resulted in the eventual diplomatic meetings between the Dule and Panama, “over who has the right and power to make decisions that affect the San Blas region.”\textsuperscript{91} The outcome insured that the Dule retained “the right to practice their

\textsuperscript{86} For further explanation on James Howe’s usage of February 22, 1925 rather than February 21, 1925 see James Howe, \textit{A People Who Would Not Kneel} (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998), 345-34 n1. In regards to the start of the revolution, I follow the accounts as told by the Dule in Belisario Artman and Rodelick V. Richard, \textit{Mi Gente Que Hizo Historia} (Gunayala: Nan Garburba Oduloged Igar, 2009), 37.

\textsuperscript{87} James Howe, \textit{A People Who Would Not Kneel} (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998), 267; and Belisario Artman and Rodelick V. Richard, \textit{Mi Gente Que Hizo Historia} (Gunayala: Nan Garburba Oduloged Igar, 2009), 37.

\textsuperscript{88} Howe, \textit{A People Who Would}, 268.

\textsuperscript{89} Artman and Richard, 37.

\textsuperscript{90} Tice, 40.

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
socioeconomic and political traditions without direct interference from the Panamanian government.”

Since then, the Dule have maintained their autonomy through a series of statutes in the Panamanian Constitution, which acknowledged the rights and affirmed the territorial lands of all Indigenous groups within the country. The *Constitución Política de Panamá 1972 con reformas de 1978, 1983 y 1994* confirms these in the following:

Artículo 86.- El Estado reconoce y respeta la identidad étnica de las comunidades indígenas nacionales, realizará programas tendientes a desarrollar los valores materiales, sociales y espirituales propios de cada uno de sus culturas y creará una institución para el estudio, conservación, divulgación de las mismas y de sus lenguas, así como la promoción del desarrollo integral de dichos grupos humanos.

(Article 86.-The State recognizes and respects the ethnic identity of all indigenous groups, and will implement programs aimed to develop the material, social, and spiritual values pertinent to each cultural group and to create an institution for the study, conservation, and spreading of the culture and language, as well as to promote the integral development of these groups.)

Artículo 123.- El Estado garantiza a las comunidades indígenas la reserva de las tierras necesarias y la propiedad colectiva de las mismas para el logro de su bienestar económico y social. La Ley regulará los procedimientos que deban seguirse para lograr esta finalidad y las delimitaciones correspondientes dentro de las cuales se prohíbe la apropiación privada de las tierras.

(Article 123.-The State guarantees to the indigenous communities a reservation for all necessary lands and collective ownership of these lands for the attainment of their economic and social development. The law regulates the procedures to be followed to achieve this purpose and the corresponding boundaries within which prohibit private ownership of land.)

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92 Ibid.


94 Ibid.
Articles 86 and 123 are important because they set the precedent for the formal establishment and recognition of territorial lands for all Indigenous groups of Panama. The enactment of these articles is a step toward recognition of the Dule’s right to and exercise of self-determination. In addition to these articles, Ley 16 del 19 de febrero de 1953, (Panamanian Law) extends the Dule’s political power and control over their own society as an autonomous government in the Gunayala region. Furthermore, Ley 16 enables the Dule to exercise autonomy in areas such as land jurisdiction, formation of Dule governance “based on Kuna traditional ways of organizing society,” and economic authority relating to tourism and agricultural commerce.

In this regard, Dule autonomy is exercised as follows: “La tierra es heredada por hijos e hijas y se puede ceder o comercializar, pero solo entre dules, porque por ley ningún no-dule puede tener propiedad en Kuna Yala” (The land is inherited by sons and daughters and one can only assign or sell [land], between Dule, by law no non-Dule may own property in Kuna Yala).

The Dule formed two major branches of their own government: the Guna General Congress (responsible for political issues) and the General Congress of Guna Culture (in charge of conserving Dule culture and way of life). While the 1945 legislation known as the Carta Orgánica de San Blas, which established a Dule reserve, Ley 16 “further delineated the reserve’s boundaries as well as political and economic relations between the Kuna [Guna] and the national


97 Republic of Panama, La Asamblea Nacional de Panamá, Ley 16 del 19 de febrero de 1953


99 Henriksen, 20.

The Revolution of 1925 and subsequent establishment of the Dule Congresses effectively paved the way for future generations to fully maintain, preserve, and protect their way of life and cultural practices in the region, which had been declared “‘an independent republic.’” This cultural tenacity is an essential component to understanding present-day Dule leadership both in and beyond Gunayala, especially their success in “enforcing their territorial boundaries and maintaining their cultural identity. [Most importantly to note,] there were two Kuna Yala [Gunayala] legislators.”

Dules legislators in the Panamanian Legislative Assembly did demonstrate a pattern of Dule presence and essence in modern Panama. Symbolically and politically, they can be understood as analogous to Dule molamakers, boxers and poets. They exert a cyclically layered paradigm that constantly oscillates between spheres that are Dule, Panamanian and both.

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100 Tice, 41; and according to Karin E. Tice, the 1945 Carta Orgánica de San Blas “prohibited non-Kuna from purchasing, renting, or otherwise using land within Kuna territory. This law has been used by the Kuna to ensure that all enterprise within the San Blas region is owned and operated by Kuna and not by outsiders” [Karin E. Tice, Kuna Crafts, Gender and the Global Economy (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 41].

101 Tice, 40.

Chapter 2


Think like a dule and abstract it down to the gwage, heart, corazón—essence. What would it be if it were a mola with only what is necessary to tell the story and image?

Monique Mojica
April 2009

As a young girl, I remember my grandfather, known as Papa Bebe or Baby San Blas (his professional boxing name), always telling stories. He had never learned to read and write. But, despite this, he was a gifted storyteller—especially when recounting stories from his life as a professional boxer. When creating Dule art crafts, he also would sculpted stories with his hands. For example, he built a small replica of a traditional Dule house for my dolls and would make traditional Dule beaded bracelets for me called winis. I did not fully understand the ability and importance of art as a medium for storytelling, however, until the day he gave me my first mola (Figure 5), made by my great aunt and explained that molas tell the stories of the Dule.

Origin of Mola

Gikadiryai, la gran abuela, también enseñaba entonces en Yoodiwala…Antes de Gikadiryai, ya se vestían las abuelas y los abuelos. Ellos y ellas utilizaban el aramola, el dabumola y pieles de animals. Aún no había nacido el tipo de mola que utilizan nuestras mujeres de hoy. Con Gikadiryai empiezan a usar el diskelamola, masimola, abgimola, ubsanmola. Los tejidos fueron sometidos a las tinturas de diversas tonalidades. Gikadiryai utilizó las semillas de aguacate, el abgi, el gobirgwa, las raíces de los manglares…para teñir los tejidos; daba así los colores a sus ropas y hamacas. Los hilos se extrajeron del tallo del plátano y el oa se utilizó para tejer y coser los vestidos. Gikadiryai enseñó a Ogir, a Inar a Aidikili. Se elaboraron vestidos largos. Las abuelas se distribuían en grupos y cada grupo era dirigido por una que sabía más. Gikadiryai orientaba a todos los grupos.
Figure 5. Lobster Mola from the Haglund Family Collection. Photograph by Sue Patricia Haglund.

(Gikadiryai, great grandmother, also taught in Yoodiwala…Before Gikadiryai, grandmothers and grandfathers were already dressed. They were using aramola, the dabumola and skins of animals. The kind of mola our women use today was not yet born. With Gikadiryai, they begin to use [different types of fabric molas] the diskelamola, masimola, abgilomola, ubsanmola. The fabrics were subjected to various shades of dyes. Gikadiryai used seeds of avocado, the abgi, the gobirgwa, the roots of mangroves … to dye fabrics, giving color to their clothes and hammocks. The threads were extracted from the banana stem and the oa was used for weaving and sewing dresses. Gikadiryai taught Ogir, Inar, Aidikili. They prepared and made long dresses. The grandmothers were distributed into groups and the one who knew more directed each group. Gikadiryai directed all groups.)

Aiban Wagua (Dule poet and scholar), recounted and translated the origin story of mola, which tells us of Gikadiryai’s teachings. She teaches Dule women how to use plants, tree bark and seeds, in order to make, to tailor, and to color natural tree-bark for clothes and hammocks. The

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1 Wagua, *Relatos de mi gran*, 27.
narrative of mola’s origination explains, from a Dule perspective, the production of their aesthetics and cultural practices—existing long before contact with outsiders such as the Spanish, English, Scots and Americans.

Dule women are the artistic creators of molas. The quilted, reverse appliqué includes hand-stitched needlework designs from abstract geometric patterns to motifs of flora and fauna. After each cloth is completed, Dule women sew one mola onto the front and one onto the back of their blouses. From a young age, every Dule woman learns to embroider and sew, and designs her own mola by watching “other women in the household.” Dule mola-maker Cristina de Martínez explains, “de 7 a 8 años uno aprende a coser, la abuela le pone a uno a coser y cómo confeccionarlo…[Además] uno ve a la abuelita cosiendo y se sienta también a coser. La señora que me crió me enseñó a coser cosas para mí. Yo cosía, ella lo cortaba y lo confeccionaba” (from 7 to 8 years old you learn to sew, Grandma makes one to sew and how to tailor it...[Also] you see Granny sewing and you sit also sewing. The lady who raised me taught me to sew things for me. I use to sew, she use to cut and tailor it).  

To paraphrase Frederick W. Shaffer, when a young Dule woman reaches marriageable age, she should have already accumulated a large quantity of her finest blouses. Clyde E. Keeler describes the proportion and space usage in the design, noting, “Mola art at its best cannot tolerate spaces, and all colors employed must be distributed. Bodily proportions may be exaggerated to fit a particular space.” Before making a mola, each maker carefully selects her 

2 Salvador, “Kuna Women’s Arts,” 55.

3 Cristina de Martínez, a Dule mola-maker from Agligandi, interview by Sue Patricia Haglund, Personal Interview, Colón, Panama, 7 March 2009.

pattern, which may differ from other mola-makers, as well as utilizing the space provided from the cloth material. The selection of motif designs and the decision on how to space and place them onto fabric is governed by the norms of an artistic movement, not solely by individual. In Dule communities, there is art not only in the making, but also the wearing of them.

**Poli-Aesthetic Senses of Molas**

There is no separation between arts and politics in Dule culture. José Colman, a Dule artist from Agiligandi and grandson of Sagla Simral Colman (one of the Dule’s important saglas), explains:

La política real, lo que significa, es el arte del bien común, de hacer el bien común a la colectividad, eso es la política. Por lo tanto, nada está separado del uno a otro, porque como decía el sagla ‘deben entender el universo que le rodea para poder tener sentimiento de servicio a la comunidad,’ el servicio de comunidad de esa sensibilidad y ver en los otros un hermano, y ese sentimiento nos se prepara también en la colectiva, en la solidaridad.

(The actual politics, what it means, is the art of the common good, to have the common good for the community—that is the politics. As a result, neither one nor the other are separated because as the sagla says 'you must understand the universe around you, in order to have a sense of service to the community,’ the sensibility of community service and to see in others a sibling, and that sentiment also prepares us in the collective, in the solidarity.)

Colman’s description of an intertwined relationship between politics and art in Dule communities reflects movement and distribution. It is a poli-aesthetic movement, as mentioned in the first chapter, that complements Rancière’s distribution of the sensible, which outlines what kind of factors are to be included and which are to be excluded at a certain part or space, this is done via the acts of what are or what are not seen, heard or said. Rancière’s examination of the

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6 José Colman, Personal Interview.
politics of aesthetics focuses on practices, and *how* information of “aesthetic practices” is disseminated, in “forms of visibility that disclose artistic practices, the place they occupy, what they ‘do’ or ‘make’ from the standpoint of what is common to the community.”

He explains further:

> Artistic practices are ‘ways of doing and making’ that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility.

Among other spaces, forms, relationships and institutions, the “politics” of things are based on the production and thought of “aesthetic acts” and “artistic practices.” These “aesthetic acts” and “artistic practices” operate based on who participates, and who determines those who are included in the community versus those who are excluded—all of which disperse and create politicized aesthetics.

Rancière is interested in the operation of the experience and the sensible distribution of aesthetics, rather than placing an emphasis on art itself, for art’s sake. He explains:

> …ways of distributing the sensible that structure the manner in which the arts can be perceived and thought of as forms of art *and* as forms that inscribe a sense of community: the surface of ‘depicted’ signs, the split reality of the theatre, the rhythm of a dancing chorus. These forms define the way in which works of art or performances are ‘involved in politics’, whatever may otherwise be the guiding intentions, artists’ social modes of integration, or the manner in which artistic forms reflect social structures or movements.

Art is an integral part of politics, but not its totality, as Rancière points out. In every dimension

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7 Rancière, 12-45.
8 Rancière, 13.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Rancière, 12-14.
12 Rancière, 14.
where the senses are distributed and experiences are produced, there exists a community. For instance, one can take a simple element such as a mola and examine its role at a particular location based on the distribution of the sensible, thus revealing a shared communities’ experiential performativity, as well as, their shared commonality of space and time.\(^\text{13}\)

By examining a mola in terms of the distribution of the sensible, multiple readings are developed and expanded into a different discourse—“minor literature.”\(^\text{14}\) According to Dule historian, Iguanape Purbagana:

> Gikadiryai, unos de los grandes neles de mujer, se dedicó en cuanto a la confección de molas. La mola no se hacía así, la mola se pintaba. Ellos hacen tejidos y convertieron en telas—tela de algodón. ¿Y qué pasa? Los gunas pintaban porque hay muchos árboles que tienen pinturas, sacaban esos pinturas y pintaban geometrías, unas geométricas, molas viejas-sergan. Pero con el tiempo esas molas se ha ido cambiando por el trueque. Eso ocurre en 1700 a 1800, cambia la mola con el trueque porque los gunas comenzaron a sembrar cocos. Ya cuando pasamos a la cordillera hacia Atlántico, comienza a sembrar cocos, cacaos y comenzaban hacer trueque con los embarcaciones que venían de Jaimaca. [El] Cacao por otros telas, telas con diferentes colores. Los gunas nada más tenían una tela…blanco pero pintaban con pintura de naturaleza. Pero los colombianos y jaimacanos trayeron telas, esos telas que tienen diversos colores ya para las mujeres se han sido más fácil. Y trayeron también aguja y hilos delgados. Eso comenzaba cambiar con los cacaos con esos telas y con tijera. En vez de pintar, ya hubo un cambio, ya no pintaron, comenzaron a cortar telas pequeñas y comenzaron a coser, ahí aparece la gran mola.

(Gikadiryai, one of the great woman nele [seer], was dedicated to the making of mola. The mola was not done so [like today]; the mola was painted. They are woven into fabrics and converted to cloth—cotton-like cloth. And what happens? The Guna painted because there are many trees with natural dyes, they extracted these dyes and painted geometrically, a geometric design, old molas-sergan. But over time these molas have been changing due to commercial exchange. That first happened between 1700-1800, exchanging the mola through barter as the Guna started to grow coconuts. Now after we [Dule] crossed the mountains to the Atlantic, begin to grow coconuts, cocoa and began to barter with the ships coming

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 12

from Jamaica. [The] Cocoa for other fabrics; fabrics with different colors. The Guna had only one fabric…white but they painted it with paint from nature. But Colombians and Jamaicans brought fabrics, these fabrics that have different colors have already made it easier for the women. And also they brought thin needle and thread. That began the exchange with the cocoa with these fabrics and scissors. Instead of painting, now there was a change, and now they did not paint, they began to cut small fabric and to sew, there appears the great mola.\textsuperscript{15} 

A re-location process of mola making occurs when a Dule woman is constructing and designing a mola while using Western materials. By taking Western elements and incorporating them into their own cultural practices, the Dule create a new way of speaking, in terms of culturally reimagining and politically remaking the mola into a textile that is solely an extension of Dule tradition. The remaking process of designing a mola can be characterized as a type of “minor literature.”\textsuperscript{16} It is a “minor literature that doesn’t come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language.”\textsuperscript{17} It, in other words, is an integrated method that belongs to a minority group, such as the Dule, who constantly are re-inventing their marginalized positions in Panamanian society. Furthermore, minority discourse involves and enables a marginalized group, as a collective, to conduct a self-critique from within a hegemonic space.\textsuperscript{18} Their self-examination occurs under certain conditions, as Abdul R. JanMohamed and David Lloyd state: “the collective nature of all minority discourse also derives from the fact that minority individuals are always treated and forced to experience themselves generically.”\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{15} Iguanape Purbagana, Personal Interview.

\textsuperscript{16} Deluze and Guattari, 16-27.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 16.


\textsuperscript{19} Abdul JanMohamed and David Lloyd, “Introduction: Minority Discourse—What is to Be Done?” \textit{Cultural Critique} 7 (Fall 1987): 10.
Even though a marginalized group may be “Coerced into a negative, generic subject position, the oppressed individual responds by transforming that position into a positive, collective one.”

The Dule, as a collective group, are “eclectic” and “do not oppose the incorporation of foreign elements into their expressive arts as long as they can be made to fit within their cultural criteria.” The integration of foreign elements—cotton fabric, sewing needle and thread—therefore is adopted by and adapted in Dule society and culture. The distribution of these foreign objects, meanwhile, formulates a different “language.”

Dule use materials belonging to the “major language,” which positions and relocates the mola in a *new* space and terrain. Similar to the process of making them, spaces are partitioned and re-partitioned. The activities performed in them are common and shared by a collective group. Thus, the mola acts and re-acts itself through a shared sense experience of both the mola-maker and her community.

The distribution of the sensible occurs first with the maker herself. She decides what colors, what designs and how many layers are used when constructing one. Dule artist Indira Martínez Alarcón points out that “a la niña se le enseñaba temprano…cada puntada, los colores, el corte…” (a little girl was taught early on…every stitch, the colors, the cut…).

In fact, the mola-maker uses her sense experiences in terms of the distribution of what is or not seen, heard and said. The choices she makes are not arbitrary. The construction of elaborate designs and

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20 Ibid.

21 Salvador, “Kuna Women’s Arts,” 64.

22 Rancière, 12-45.

23 Indira Martínez de Alarcón, a Dule artist who grew up in Gunayala and Colón, interview by Sue Patricia Haglund, Personal Interview, Colón, Panama, 7 March 2009.
embroidery show how simple things can also produce depth with layers of meaning.

In this way also, the layers of mola are similar to layers of global politics. These actors decide on what political, economic, and social agendas will be addressed and how policies are implemented. A mola projects a political discourse. Its character follows the minor literature’s characteristics, as explained by Deleuze and Guattari, in that “everything in them is political.”

Although, the mola-maker behaves as an individual artist, her artistic practices in designing her work are shared amongst her entire community; the link between what is visible to the individual and what is visible to all. An individual mola-maker cannot disassociate herself from the community, because the mola links politically to all things where “cramped space forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics. The individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating within it.” Moreover, the political terrain in which a mola is operating “takes on a collective value.”

When a mola occupies places and spaces considered political, the sensible distribution unveils multiple realities of community and everyday life. It is the poli-aesthetic activity where a mola casts and recasts itself on multiple levels in Dule and Panamanian societies. The design of a mola and how it is read, in terms of minor literature, allows all the “sayable and unsayable” to exist in a collective place. Accordingly:

…what each author says individually already constitutes a common action…The political domain has contaminated every statement (énoncé). But above all else, because collective or national consciousness is “often inactive in external life and always in the process of break-down,” literature [in this case a mola] finds itself positively charged with the role and function of collective, and even revolutionary, enunciation. It is literature that produces an active solidarity…

24 Deluze and Guattari, 17.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
situation allows the writer all the more the possibility to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility…

A political-cultural community is formed for every mola that is produced. Its production divides and disrupts a poli-aesthetic space: a common occupied space in Dule society and another in Panamanian society.

How a mola behaves and operates goes against Murray Edelman’s ideals on art. He believes that “works of art do not represent “reality,” “the real world,” or “everyday life,” but rather, “art creates realities and worlds.” He further asserts:

People perceive and conceive in the light of narratives, pictures, and images. That is why art is central to politics, just as it is central to social relationships and to beliefs about nature. There cannot be any representation that reproduces another entity, scene or conception, but only constructions that may purport to reproduce reality while simplifying, elaborating, accenting, or otherwise constructing actualities and fantasies. Because they create something different from conventional perceptions, works of art are the medium through which new meanings emerge.

His standpoint on art functions and serves as a reproduction of objects from the “real world.”

Works of art are not the focus or function of politics; rather they serve as a medium conveying political thoughts and messages.

Here is my point of departure from Edelman: Works of art are more than mediums distributing political messages via modes of reproduction. Instead, they function, like language and literature, as modes of repositioning locations. Accordingly, what emerges from such works

27 Ibid.


29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.
are not the reproduction of a new world, but a union of one community with a “possibility to express another possible community.” Furthermore, if art is like literature in the sense of it representing a “minor literature,” then everything about it and “in them is political.”

**Molas and Spaces**

Molas perform spatial practices through conditions of everyday-operational acts. Michel de Certeau discusses the employment of how narratives work as "spatial practices." He describes space as "composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it." Stories form through the intertwining of movements in, out and around various spheres. Where there was once nothing, these elemental motions develop a culture. For example, the word “mola” translates to “cloth” in Dulegaya, Dule language. The mola’s stories, then, further define, in practice the cloth’s "place" and "space," by the very act of it “being-there” and also through “operations” where "movement always seems to condition the production of a space and to associate it with history.”

For instance, before beginning her creative process, a Dule molamaker chooses a “placed” inanimate or animate object from her surroundings, like a frog or the geometric motif of a patterned basket, and draws an outline of the item with a pencil onto the fabric. In doing so, the Dule artist takes the object (mobile and immobile) from its original location and transfers it onto fabric. By her stitching actions, she completes the creation of a new “space” for the original...

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31 Deluze and Guattari, 17.
32 Ibid.
34 Ibid., 117.
35 Ibid., 118.
object. This space becomes a “visual dwelling” in which the embroidered design represents how Dule interpret and relate to their environment (see Figure 6 and Figure 7). The making of a mola perpetuates a process where “stories thus carry out a labor that constantly transforms places into spaces or spaces into places.”

Figure 6. First layer of a mola. Photograph by Sue Patricia Haglund.

Figure 7. A work-in-progress mola featuring a mountain motif, made by author’s great-aunt. Photograph by Sue Patricia Haglund.

Ibid.
On the other hand, it could be argued that the historical content represented in the geometric patterns and “visual artistry” of molas creates another position in the “place” and “space” of relationship. Patterns that have been passed down from generation to generation can appear similar to one another, however their mutual distinctiveness is clearer when comparing examples from the past and present.

The molamaker’s imagination ultimately becomes a kind of “space” as well; the dwelling in which the aesthetic sense and creativity of the artist comes to life. Through the eye and hands of this seamstress, the tactile motif she creates for her mola reflects a singular vision, of the world and her reality, within an identity as Dule. Her visual craft becomes a tangible, established place, where she re-visions, re-defines, and also then re-establishes a confined, bordered reality—on textile. The spatial story occurs through the re-vision of artistic work. For example: simple abstract images of an animal, a plant even a bow tie (see Figure 8), or a more complex designs documenting important events, such as a Dule girl’s puberty ceremony, are re-interpreted in every generation.

Figure 8. A work-in-progress mola with a bow-tie repetition motif, made by author’s great-aunt. Photograph by Sue Patricia Haglund.
Similar to de Certeau, Martin Heidegger provides another interpretation and definition of spatial movement. He suggests that poetry, as it is being cultivated, creates “dwelling” for man’s existence.\(^37\) An artistic creation, in other words, becomes the tool with which the artist her/himself is able to create a place/dwelling—whether spiritual, emotional, mental, or physical—for her/his existence. Such works become a medium of power—a type that expresses and establishes an imaginary place for the poet’s creativity. Language, as Heidegger describes, “remains the master of man” even when “man acts as though he were the shaper and master of language.”\(^38\) In this sense, a layer of space is opened within the political arena as well, in which the artist or creator of a given work of art create an imagined communal movement, manifested in the pictorial designs, words or language (printed, verbal or corporeal) of its creator(s). Language, after all, is a tool for communication: a medium of power that enables an individual to support or to protest against issues or events that affect his/her community.

Similarly, in Dule molas, the design of animal or plant motifs is a process born from the artist’s own imagination (as his/her form of creative ‘language’). The visual image, similar to Heidegger’s referencing thereof, becomes “a calling” from Nature.\(^39\) The mola maker works as the master/creator of the visual design. In reality, the image itself also labors and acts as master and creator of the mola maker, such that the visual image instructs her to create an “existence” or a “dwelling” on textile.


\(^{38}\) Ibid., 213.

\(^{39}\) Ibid., 214.
Mari Lyn Salvador describes the molamaker’s creative process thusly:

Some *sergan* [“old” or “from the past” in Dule dialect] designs are simple geometric patterns, while others are inspired by patterns on baskets, beaded leg bands, and body painting, or from abstract designs based on images in nature or common household objects such as gourds, leaves, snakes, or wooden hangers used in the home. Some are easy to recognize, but others are so abstract that they require explanation. To create this type of abstract design, women scrutinize an object, often turning it to view it from all angles, and reduce it to what they consider the basic components of its form, then repeating the design over and over. 40

These abstract, geometric images, as artistic expression and spiritual engagement, demonstrate the strong influence that their natural surroundings have on their designers. The mola patterns itself becomes a medium for telling a story—the story of the artist. Figure 9, for instance, represents a *sue mor* or rainbow mola design.

Figure 9. Sue Mor, Rainbow Mola. From the Haglund family collection. Photograph by Sue Patricia Haglund.

40 Salvador, “Kuna Women’s Arts,” 61.
According to Erland Nordenskiöld, in Dule storytelling, “The rain-bow is called a sue. One should not point at the rainbow, for if one does, one will get warts on the hand. When there are two rainbows, the brighter is looked upon as a man and the other one as a woman.”  
Nordenskiöld did not elaborate further, alas, on the reasoning for why the brightness of two rainbows should thus distinguish between genders.

Achu (also known as Oswaldo DeLeón Kantule,) an artist and grandson of Nele Kantule, confirms that in Dule culture, the sue symbolizes fertility.  
As a mola captures a piece of history, passing it down from one generation to another, it engages an evolutionary movement that is reciprocal between both the artist and the image itself.

Molas and other Dule cultural products, in serving as poli-aesthetic texts that reveal social, cultural, political and economic movements, also show the intrinsic relationship among the Dule, land and Nature. Dule mola patterns originating from early body-painting designs represent:

Both these and the Copper-colour’d Indians use painting their Bodies, even of the Sucking Children sometimes. They make Figures of Birds, Beasts, Men, Trees, or the like, up and down in every part of the Body, more especially the Face: But the Figures are not extraordinary like what they represent, and are of differing Dimensions, as their fancies lead them. The Women are the Painters, and take a great delight in it. The Colours they like and use most are Red, Yellow, and Blue, very bright and lovely...The Men, when they go to War, paint the Faces all over with Red; and the Shouldiers, Breast and the rest of the Bodies, here with Black and there with Yellow, or any other Colour at pleasure, in large Spots; all which they wash off at Night in the River before they go to sleep.  

41 Nordenskiöld, with Pérez Kantule, 394.  
This seventeenth century account demonstrates the act of art emerging onto the physical body. It also provides us an account of how Dule artwork moves from one realm to another. This transference of body-painting designs, such as the geometric images, flora and fauna motifs, onto cloth represents movement—a movement of designs from temporary canvases such as the human body onto more permanent ones such as the mola. These movements occur from within the artist’s environment, which moves through her imagination and recycles (in)to her reality as an artwork form, on both the body and the fabric.

As the flora and fauna motifs are stitched onto its fabric, molas progress through another kind of “movement,” linking art and environment together in one locale. This simple, physical technique creates a new reality of consciousness or spatial movement of knowledge. In other words, the knowledge of the five senses, the environment, history, language, tradition and experience. For example, Dule artwork’s movement from body to cloth represents not only a literal one, but an epistemological movement, creating a link between two physical layers. Most importantly, however, it is not just the obvious creation of different physical spheres, but also the transference process that takes place from Dule body to cloth. For most Indigenous peoples, including the Dule, spatial and place-based relationships do not explicitly demarcate the here and there worlds. Instead, a correlation of layers emerges within a variety of worlds; for instance, the physical and spiritual or the heavens and earth. The layers of the space and place, in both physical and spiritual realms, are not separated but rather synchronous spheres.

Lakota author and scholar Vine Deloria Jr. explains the relationship between space and place as “one of relationships, and since the entire cosmos cannot be contained in our daily lives, we learn that sacred places represent the power by showing us that we can become a part of a
The relationship between space and place reveals that consciousness is another sphere: a spiritual realm that is not compartmentalized, but rather becomes reality even when our physical body occupies the physical world in all locations ranging from a sweat lodge to a sacred mountain or land.\textsuperscript{45} This is similar to de Certeau’s assertion that “space is a practiced place.”\textsuperscript{46}

The visual narrative of a mola represents how a Dule sees and relates to his/her natural surroundings. Some of the common mola designs include lobster, turtle, parrots, leaves, canoe, and events of every day life. According to Dule educator Roberto Martínez Owen:

> En los dibujos siempre vamos a encontrar animales. Animales porque el Guna siempre quiere conservar la naturaleza. Siempre quiere cuidar a los animales como los perros, los gatos y los loros. Todos esos animales ellos los quieren cuidar. Por eso siempre encontramos en la mola los dibujos. Siempre encontramos las flores, siempre encontramos las montañas, o sea siempre encontramos la naturaleza.

(Well in the drawings, we will always find animals. Animals because the Guna always want to preserve and to protect nature. They always want to take care of animals like dogs, cats, and parrots. Take care of all these animals. That is why we always find drawings on the mola. We always find drawings of flowers, we always find mountains, that is to say, we always find nature.)\textsuperscript{47}

Aside from images of nature, other popular designs include, as mentioned earlier, geometric and abstract patterns. The diversity in motifs “illustrate[s] things that interest them [women, as mola makers], and almost anything a woman sees or hears about may become the inspiration for a pictorial mola.”\textsuperscript{48} Additionally, “women create designs from objects they see or events they

\textsuperscript{44} Vine Deloria, Jr., \textit{The World We Used to Live In} (Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing, 2006), 202.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{46} Certeau, \textit{The Practice of Everyday}, 117.

\textsuperscript{47} Roberto Martínez Owen, a former Physical Education Teacher and Dule from Agligandi, interview by Sue Patricia Haglund, Personal Interview, Panama City, Panama, 7 March 2009.
participate in, such as the girls’ puberty ceremony...they listen to narratives in the gathering house and illustrate the primary characters and activities in their molas.” As these seamstresses tell their stories, the pictorial designs become visual narrations of Dule ontology, identity and culture.

Molas are mutable stories that change and move. For Dule-Rappahannock theatre artist and playwright, Oloedidili Monique Mojica, theatrical performances serve as her molas. She explains, “These are my molas. I can’t sew to save my life, I mean I can put a button back on, but this work [speaking of her collection of plays Chocolate Woman Dreams the Milky Way.] these are my molas. These are all the layers that I’m trying to sew together and figure out how they fit to present this other perception that comes from within.”

Mojica is, therefore, a Dule seamstress working in an alternative medium and context; one who sews her plays—her mola—on stage: an embodiment of other Dule women wearing mola as they connect to the stories of their ancestors, in the sergan molas. In Mojica’s emphasis:

[The victim narrative] These stories need to be told, but who were we before the rupture? And if those entities, that energy, that spirit still exist in those dimensions, where they came from. They haven’t gone anywhere. They haven’t change. We’re the ones who’ve changed. And that means we can still find ways to connect ourselves to them...I can connect myself to Buna Siagua [Chocolate Woman], ...I can connect myself to Muu Bili [Grandmother Ocean]...connect myself to Nis Bundor [Star Daughters], to Napguana [Mother Earth], Ibedon [a kalu or sacred land that overlooks Yandup-Nargana] ً


49 Ibid.

50 Oloedidili Monique Mojica, Personal Interview.

51 Ibid.
Mojica’s connection to Buna Siagua, Muu Bili, Nis Bundor, Napguana and Ibedon is a space of consciousness: a space where there is “constant movement” in the molas.52

Dule visual artist Achu Oswaldo DeLeón Kantule understands the mola as representing a “moving place” on the bodies of Dule women.53 Similar to the function of books, the molas Dule women wear act as pages describing their culture and lifeworlds. In this way, Dule women become “walking books” carrying their stories with them everywhere they go.54 In the Montreal First Peoples’ Festival 2005 visual art exhibition, *Artists’ Books: Written Images of the First Nations* (organized by Terres en Vues/Land InSights,) Achu created an “[installation of a mola-book [that] pays homage to this ability to transmit a symbolic language.”55

Both Achu and Mojica describe Dule women as moving storybooks.56 Mojica further explains that a mola reflects the practice and belief of Dule ontology and belief systems, especially its duality and multiple layers existing within Dule worlds.57 She describes her meeting with an argar, a specialist who interprets a sagla’s symbolic language on the teachings and ways of Babigala, during her travels to Gunayala in 2008 with Achu:

I was here [in Panama] in September. Achu and I spent an entire afternoon with the argar Ricardo Arias Sipu from Agligandi, where you’re from [referring to me]. He spoke to us in the same terms about multidimensionality, about the duality of Baba and Nana. Everything is Baba and Nana, everything is in twos or multiples of twos. It begins to get very mathematical; it starts to go into Dule

52 Ibid.
53 Achu Oswaldo DeLeón Kantule, Personal Interview.
54 Ibid.
56 Oloedidili Monique Mojica, Personal Interview; and Achu Oswaldo DeLeón Kantule, Personal Interview.
57 Oloedidili Monique Mojica, Personal Interview.
physics, because it amplifies in terms of everything. Everything has eight levels. If you’re looking at anything within the Dule culture, you’re looking at eight levels; all at the same time. That’s why, [with] the molas, you are looking from the top, from the bottom, [and] from the inside. There are just always eight levels because they’re four times the sacred number two.⁵⁸

In Dule ontology, all things exist in repetition, as multiple layers and symbolic language. This is notable in the way designs and motifs of molas appear in pairs, showing a repetition of patterns, layers of materials and abstract symbols.

Mojica, in the context of explaining how to interpret a mola, talks about the different activities “in constant movement” occurring simultaneously in her uncle’s house: “kids all over, my tío Francisco’s television blaring baseball, animals out on this level, and all my female cousins laughing really loud.”⁵⁹ She recalls that her colleague, Erika Iserhoff (a James Bay Cree textile and costume designer,) interpreted these things in the following way, after they had left her uncle’s house together: “Erika said, ‘well you know when you look at a mola, it is the same as being in your family’s living room. There is all that cacophony, all those different layers and all that movement and all those different colors that seem they shouldn’t go together, but they do.’”⁶⁰

The counterpoint-counterplot framework of mola stories displaying a poli-aesthetic movement is embodied in its cacophonous (but ultimately harmonious) textile. At the same time, it also represents identity and unity similar to that lived by the Dule before and after the 1925 Dule Revolution.

⁵⁸ Ibid.
⁵⁹ Oloedidili Monique Mojica, Personal Interview.
⁶⁰ Ibid.
Multiple Interpretations

In 1925, a group of Dule revolted against the Panamanian government’s attempts to assimilate them into Western culture—thus resulting and giving rise to the Dule Revolution. The primary catalyst of the insurgency was the unlawful and inhumane treatment Dule experienced under the Panamanian colonial police. Tice explains, “Kuna women in a number of Kuna communities had been forced to take off their molas, to wear western clothes, to remove their nose rings and wini....”

In one testimony, Elisa Blanco describes her mother’s incarceration by colonial police during the Panamanian occupation in Gunayala to La Prensa, one of Panama’s local newspapers. According to Arcadio Bonilla:

Elisa Blanco, una mujer de 89 años, aún recuerda con claridad parte de los sucesos que se vivieron durante la revolución, porque su madre, Hilda Campos, fue una de las tantas personas arrestadas por la policía colonial. Al enterarse del incidente, Blanco, quien entonces contaba con nueve años de edad, le llevó chichi de maíz. “Cuando la vi, comencé a llorar. Ella, me confirmó que estaba detenida, junto a otras mujeres, porque se negaban a quitarse los uinis y la mola.”

(Elisa Blanco, an 89 years old woman, still remembers with clarity some of the events they experienced during the revolution, because her mother, Hilda Campos, was one of the [Dule] people arrested by the colonial police. After finding out about the incident, Blanco tells the story of when she was nine years old [and] she brought her mother a corn drink. “When I saw her, I began to cry. She confirmed to me that she was detained, along with other women, because they refused to take off the winis [bracelets] and mola.)

This brief testimony represents a literature of existence and Blanco’s spoken words transform to written testimony. It is an example on how the (story)teller conveys his/her words into a

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61 Tice, 40.
62 Ibid., 61
63 Arcadio Bonilla, “El año en que los kunas se alzaron,” La Prensa (Panama), 26 Feb 2006.
materialized political medium, much as Dule women’s acts of resistance to the prohibitions against wearing the mola and winis. Many Dule women, like Elisa Blanco’s mother Hilda Campos, continue to proudly wear these cultural identity markers, which serve as sites of literary production and political resistance.

The act of prohibiting women from wearing their traditional dress “was considered by many Kuna as a way of stripping them of their identity,” an “important symbol of the Kuna people’s right to self-determination.”64 Their culturally-specific ways of wearing the mola have and continue to distinguish Dule from the larger Panamanian population and reaffirm their resistance to colonial assimilation.

The conservation of the mola is similar to the preservation of Mayan literature and language. These entities, mola, Mayan language and literature, serve as expressions of “cultural agency,” in which they highlight “the ways that subjects, often peripheral or subaltern, empower themselves through cultural practices.”65 The practice of cultural agency in:

Maya literature began to appear for the first time written in Maya languages…These Maya texts include a range of genres. One might think initially of testimonios, such as those of Rigoberta Menchú and Victor Montejo, which were a first attempt to frame a rhetoric of being and to name agency for Mayas, to state the right to be themselves.66

The production of this literature mobilized the cultural revitalization of Maya people and reinforced their resistance to suppression and oppression. As political acts, they represent a poliaesthetic practice of existence. Various groups and organizations began to look to the symbols of the collective past, such as the Mayan glyph writing system, and re-introducing them to the

64 Tice, 62.


66 Ibid., 171.
Like the mola and wini in their roles as Dule cultural identity markers, “there is among works of Maya literature] a discursive performativity that explores the contours of a collective identity, representing the construction of a subjective and moral ‘imagined community’.”

For the Dule, oppression under and occupation by police and government forces in Gunayala serves as catalysts of resistance against Panama’s domination thereof, both prior to and post-1925 Dule Revolution. This is reiterated in Roberto Martínez’s account:

La guerra yo me recordaba de esa. En 1926 toda la gente se fue para el monte por allá, tierra firme. Yo como a siete años, ese viejo él se llama Colman, este viejo cuando yo lo vi, ya está viejito ya, gente cargaba a este cuando él se va. San Blas cuando tiempo panameño cuando vive por alla policía que se llama Tupile, Narganá, Corazón de Jesus, Playón Chico. Gente de Playón Chico viene y dice [al Simral Colman], “yo no puedo ir al monte policía te agarra. La policía quiere parrar todo ese tiempo.”

(The war, I remember it. In 1926 all the people fled to the mountain over there, tierra firme. I was about seven years old. That old man, his name was Colman. That old man, when I saw him, he was already old then. People carried him when he went about. San Blas, when it was under Panamanian control, when the police lived over there in Tupile, Narganá, Corazón de Jesus, Playón Chico. People from Playón Chico come and say [to Simral Colman,] “I cannot go to the mountain. The police catch you. The police want to stop everything during that time.”

Every thing in Gunayala and in Dule society everywhere becomes sites of poli-aesthetic counterpoint-counterplot acts. The poli-aesthetic movements of molas and winis construct a space for the Dule and demonstrate a continuity of existence. The testimonies of the Dule people and the political manifestations of pictorial systems in their communities endured during the occupation in Gunayala by Panamanian colonial police.

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67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
69 Roberto Martínez, Personal Interview.
With respect to the 1925 Dule Revolution, Iguanape Purbagana stresses the importance of this war:

Yo le digo la importancia de la revolución Dule. Hubo un papel importante en la vida de los gunas. ¿Por qué los gunas hizo participar al norteamericano Marsh? Simplemente ellos se dieron cuenta que (1) siempre ha sido aliado con los ingleses, y (2) los gunas se dieron cuenta en que ellos no podían pelear solos. Porque aprendieron en su propia historia...para poder defender lo suyo, defender su vida, su derecho, su historia, su congreso, su mola, su forma de vivir tal como guna ellos tenían que unirse con alguien que tenga una fuerza que la pueda apoyar eso es todo. No es como Marsh quiso quedar por la revolución, sino es como cualquier otras revoluciones. Si tu ves la revolución Americana de Independencia muchos pidieron el apoyo de los franceses. Porque nadie ha salido solo en la guerra. En ninguna guerra que una triunfa solo. Eso lo que hizo los gunas simplemente.

(I will tell you the importance of the Dule Revolution. It was an important part in the lives of the Guna. Why did the Guna allow the North American Marsh to be involved? They just realized that (1) they have always been allied with the English, and (2) the Guna realized that they could not fight alone. Because they learned in their own history...to defend their own, defend their life, their law, their history, their congress, their mola, their way of life as a Guna they had to unite with someone who has a force that can support them, that's all. It is not like Marsh stayed for the revolution. It is like any other revolution. If you take a look at the American Revolution of Independence, many called for the support of the French. Because no one is alone in a war, in any war no one succeeds alone. That's simply what the Gunas did.)

There was a lot at stake for their culture, way of life and practice. The very essence of being Dule and the continuity of Dule existence in Panama were determined by their traditional dress: the molas and winis. In order to honor their culture, the Dule made the decision to take up arms against the Panamanian government. Thereafter, Dule traditional dress becomes symbolic of cultural existence and agency, a site that defines who they are as a people and how they perceive their history, way of life and traditional practices. Furthermore, it is a place where Dule women non-violently expressed themselves by wearing their Dule story through these artistic, decorative

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70 Iguanape Purbagana, Personal Interview.
blouses, and by culturally identifying and defining themselves through experience, representation, interpretation and philosophy that is strikingly different from the non-Dule’s understanding and knowledge thereof.

In “Ontology of Identity and Interstitial Being,” Anne Waters states that, “Over 500 years of cultural seeing of the resistance of American Indians to colonization, assimilation, and genocide have informed our hearing of a different drum.” She refers to the senses of seeing and hearing as embodying the production of a collective experience of one’s surroundings and the self. The markings of self-perception and existence (with)in a certain location draw out and disclose an interpretative experience of one’s culture, way of life, and communication. Waters explains:

In this way, what I see when I look in a mirror, or hear myself speak, is not only what is in the playful mirror or voice, but it may be radically different from what you see or hear. I, and not you, am in the place of experiencing self-reflection on my identity in the present, the very moment that I live the experience. This is one way we can be tricked in the game of identity—for what we appear to be to ourselves may not be what we appear to be to others.

The “I” and self-experience, as she mentions, articulate and put together a space for self-reflection and self-identification. In terms of literary production, the readings of texts like molas or quipus create a space for multiple interpretations and understandings of Indigenous identity and experience. Even though these texts are normally not classified as literature or cataloged in a Western literary genre. The literary production from the Andes and Central America is different to the European scriptural texts. In the case of Indigenous-specific literary production, pictorial, glyphic and knot-coded systems were developed and used.


72 Ibid., 161.
In *Writing Without Words*, Elizabeth Hill Boone describes the texts developed in Mixtec and Aztec cultures. She asserts, “in the semasiographic systems of the Mixtecs and Aztecs, the pictures *are* the texts. There is no distinction between word or image.”

Boone further explains, that “Individual or composite glyphs are used to indicate personal names and place names, but they fundamentally a part of the pictorial presentation. And it is the relationship of the disparate pictorial elements that carries the meaning.”

In order to read a text, a storytelling experience is developed between the pictorial object and the reader. When a non-Mixtec or non-Aztec archaeologist (re)discovers a glyph and reads it, what is his/her interpretation? Do they impart to a non-Mixtec or non-Aztec archaeologist the same experience and meaning that a Mixtec or Aztec may have experienced?

A non-Mixtec or non-Aztec archaeologist’s reading of a glyph differs from what is experienced by a Mixtec or Aztec. Although the text occupies the same location along with the archaeologist, its history and how it was fashioned in Mixtec and Aztec cultures records and establishes a story first from their insider perspective. An archaeologist therefore, experiences a different relationship to the glyphs, as a mysterious and coded puzzle. In this way, Mesoamerican glyphs serve comparable roles to those of the Andean quipus and Dule molas, and “could be read or interpreted by many people other than their creator.”

The interpretations and readings of a text generate a similar, yet different relationship.

Readings of texts generate similar yet different relationships therewith. For example, the experience is different for a non-Indigenous than an Indigenous person with reading an

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74 Ibid.

75 Ibid., 22.
Indigenous text. A space for discussion of multiple stories and multiple interpretations emerges from the production of reading a text. The development of multiple perspectives and understandings of it, however, is always vulnerable to the dangers of a dominant group’s official story. These dangers create an absence of and/or a gap within the stories of a dominated group.

In the case of the molas, how do these dangers affect the expression of molas in Dule culture?

How does a non-Dule interpret them? Dina Sherzer and Joel Sherzer assert:

Visual art (which the molas represent par excellence) is, on the other hand, superficial and decorative. As distinct from verbal art and communication, the molas involve no deep, hidden meaning; there is no need for interpretation or explanation; there is no rhetorical or magical effect.\(^76\)

To assume that a mola has no meaning or “need for interpretation” imposes a rigid conclusion and bias of it as a limited and primitive artform. Michel Perrin takes his conclusion about mola art to another level from the Sherzers’ interpretation, concluding:

Whatever the case, molas were incorporated into primal myth preferred over historical accuracy. In fact, molas are barely a century old, and are made solely from materials introduced by whites—cotton fabrics, manufactured thread, needles and steel scissors. By denying the true chain of events, mythical interpretations prevent anyone from taking credit for inventiveness, yet they also make it impossible to recognize borrowings from Western culture. They have suppressed the idea of a debt or dependence on whites so successfully that molas have become the very symbol of “Kunaness.” Some Kunas even go so far as to defend this white lie…\(^77\)

Perrin interprets the introduction of the mola by Gikadiiryai as a fictional story akin to a character out of myths, fables and unsubstantiable faith, such as Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny and Jesus.

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\(^{76}\) Dina Sherzer and Joel Sherzer, “Mormaknamaloe: The Cuna Mola,” in *Ritual and Symbol in Native Central America* No. 9, ed. Philip Young and James Howe (Oregon: University of Oregon Anthropological Papers, 1976), 36.

Gilberto Arias Olonaigdiginia counter argues Perrin’s and Sherzer’s understandings of Dule culture in general. He contends:

¡Cuidado, en hacer suya la historia de los blancos; de las mentiras que cuentan de nuestros padres! Esa historia Blanca les hará renegar de los valores de nuestro pueblo. Los verdaderos salvajes y caníbales eran ellos, así debe ser escrita la historia.

(Be careful, to endorse the story of the whites; of the lies they say about our fathers! That White story will make them deny the values of our people. They were the real savages and cannibals, and must be written in history.)

The misinterpreting of molas by scholars like Perrin and the Sherzers confine and (to outsiders) define how Dule are perceived through incorrect assumption and a misdirection of reality. These researchers too-freely interpret, exploit and often outright dismiss the Dule’s own explanation and meaning in (his)stories. At the same time, these scholars embrace the notion of ‘playing Indian.’ Philip J. Deloria, a Lakota scholar, explains that “playing Indian” fulfills the need for a national narrative “authenticity” in order to legitimate a fallacious American patriotic state, culture, fraternity, image, and history. In the case of the Sherzers’ and Perrin’s conclusions, their dismissive interpretations of Dule histories and stories allow them to claim the authenticity of Western culture and practices above those of the Dule. Sagladummad Inakeliginya clearly affirms the great difference between the Dule and non-Dule (wagas like the Sherzers and Perrin):

Siempre tenemos que tener presente una gran verdad: somos distintos de los wagas, y no nos parecemos. Nuestra cultura, comparada con la de ellos, es distinta. Ellos no piensan como nosotros, no sienten como nosotros, no planean como nostros. Los wagas planean para acabarnos y dicen que nos quieren mucho.


79 Philip J. Deloria, Playing Indian (New Haven: Yale University, 1998), 63.
(We must always bear in mind a great truth: we are different from those wagas, and we do not look alike. Our culture, compared with theirs, is different. They do not think like us, do not feel like us, do not plan like us. The wagas plan to finish us and they say that they love us.)

For Dule, the mola reinforces Indigenous ties via traditional dress, political-cultural identity and social connections among Dule women. Beyond their own culture in modern Panama, nevertheless, the mola continues to be recast from its true Indigenous Dule affiliation to that pertaining to the greater Panamanian national character.

**Conclusion**

The blue logo of Autoridad de Turismo Panama (see Figure 10) functions as an active agent that opens up areas for discussion on Dule existence in Gunayala, Panama, and beyond Panama’s territorial borders. Some people who view this image might conceive that molas in all forms are signs of cultural appropriation. The logo, at the same time, also symbolically reaffirms Dule presence and existence in Panama.

![Blue Fish Logo](image)

**Figure 10.** Blue Fish Logo is the current emblem of Autoridad de Turismo Panama since 2008. Photograph by Sue Patricia Haglund.

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It speaks to a continued existence of Dule culture in all terrains. The mola is re-distributed and re-partitioned in different spaces: a Dule blouse, a single panel on a Western style tee shirt, a face of a Dule woman on travel brochure, and including this Panama Tourism Bureau logo (Figure 10). These expressions collectively recognize and register Dule histories, intentionally or not, (in regards to sense experience and perception of the visible and invisible, sayable and unsayable, and audible and inaudible) within the realm of Panama’s modern territorial existence as well as beyond its territorialized identity.\footnote{In reference to Jacques Rancière’s distribution of the sensible in Jacques Rancière, \textit{The Politics of Aesthetics}, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004), 12-14.}

In addition, the mola serves as a reflection of unity and equal distribution of the sensible within Dule political terrain, as well as developed in Panama’s national political terrain. The distribution of the sensible from Dule society thus is re-distributed in Panamanian society. These images, as active agents, operate in terms of “minor literature” giving voice to a collective group and politically operating either in silence and invisibility or making noise and becoming visible.\footnote{Deleuze and Guattari, 16-27.}

It is an authentic demonstration of exclusionary and inclusionary productions. Regardless of the original intention and role that the mola may have in Dule society, it has appealed to and informed cultural-political movement in all terrains. Mola is political. It exerts political intentions through modes of being. There is constant distribution and disruption that recycles to re-distribution and re-disruption of the sensible.

As a political being, objects considered modern at one point in time in a community; also are traditional in another. Hence, as we see in the operations, the distributions and the disruptions
of the sensible, that there are more spaces and places created, developed and modified. Iguanape Purbagana describes it thusly:

En 1925 la mola no era apreciada. Era un tumultuario querido de lo llamado civilización estatal y por eso nos separan porque quisieron acabar con esa tradición de mola. Hoy, pero hoy la mola es famosa a nivel mundial. O sea, mira como cambia la mentalidad del hombre. Hoy se comercializa la mola. Hace muchos años que era una cosa no apreciada porque no se comercializaba. No era dinero, por eso dinero. El cambio del mundo y por eso la revolución Dule es esta: defensa de la mola, defensa de su cultura, idioma, y todo de su propia autonomía.

(In 1925 the mola was not appreciated. It was tumultuous that it was not wanted by the so-called civilized state and that is why they separated us because they wanted to ban the traditional mola. Today, but today mola is famous at the global level. Look how man’s thought has changed. Today the mola is commercialized. Years before it was an object not appreciated because it wasn’t commercialized. It wasn’t money, now it is money. A changed world and that is why the Dule Revolution is just that: the defense of the mola, defense of culture, language, and everything of our own autonomy.)

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83 Iguanape Purbagana, Personal Interview.
Chapter 3

THIRD LAYER: DULE URWED AND BOXING

In 2003, one of the local newspapers *La Prensa* produced a series of newspaper articles discussing the history and narrative of modern Panama per the subjects of Sports and Arts. The Sports Edition featured a picture of Panamanian boxer Roberto Durán (an internationally-known athlete active from 1972 through 1980s) posing in a victorious moment, after he had won a world boxing title fight. Then turning to the next page, the writers presented Panama’s history in the sport of boxing—when and how it began, and making special note of several athletes who not only excelled but actually changed the face of the boxing world, both nationally and internationally.

The article informs readers about Al Brown (a national and world boxing champion, active from 1922 to 1940s), Ismael Laguna (another boxer who competed during 1965-1970) as well as Roberto Durán. Additionally, in “Panamá, Tierra de Campeones”, written by the paper’s editorial team, many local Panamanian boxers who, while not world champions were, in their
time, Panama’s national champions. Those featured were: Antonio Buchi Amaya, Justiniano Aguilar, Luis Patiño, David Abad and Young Herrera.¹ That last name stood out.

Young Herrera had been the former flyweight champion of Panama—that is until 1930, when a young Dule boxer known as Baby San Blas took the title away from him. This victory was recounted in El Siglo, a contemporary Panamanian newspaper, on June 25, 1990 within an interview published on Baby San Blas highlighting his boxing career from 1929-1947. In the article “Baby San Blas Maravilla del Ring”, Herlindo Arias wrote:

[Baby San Blas] fue campeón nacional por espacio de 7 años tras haber derrotado a los mejores de su división [Mosca] y se adueño de la Corona al poner fuera de acción en un asalto a Victor Young Herrera.

([Baby San Blas] was a national champion for 7 years after having defeated one of the best in the division [Flyweight] and taking hold of the Crown by one single knock out to Victor Young Herrera.)²

The article notes that this Dule boxer held the flyweight title until “lo perdió ante… Kid Zefine por decisión en 13 vueltas…” (he lost it to…Kid Zefine by decision after 13 rounds…).³ Baby San Blas is further described as:

Fue bueno de verdad este púgil todo corazón. Un pugilista en todo el sentido de la palabra. Subía al tinglado a cumplir, a pelear, porque para eso era su profesión. Y lo demostró porque fue durante siete largos años el Campeón Nacional de las 112 libras.

(well, truthfully, this fighter was all heart. A fighter in every sense of the word. He rose to the occasion, to fight, because that was his profession. And he demonstrated it because he was for seven long years the National Champion 112-pound.)⁴

¹Redacción Extracentenario, “Panamá, Tierra de Campeones,” La Prensa (Panama), 15 June 2003, special ed., 22-23.


³Ibid.

⁴De Los Archivos Papí Mendez, “Baby San Blas Todo Un Felino Arriba Del Ring,” Sucesos (Panama), Unknown Date: 36.
With the above photograph (Figure 11), the representative face of Panamanian boxing is recast—to that of a Dule. In articles written about Baby San Blas, most journalists used phrases that distinctly recognized his ethnicity and people. For example, Arias mentions that he was an “oriundo de la Comarca Kuna Yala, como representante fiel de su raza indomable” (a native of Gunayala, a true representative of his indomitable race).\(^5\) This description delineates two spaces: one for Baby San Blas as a boxer and the other for him as Indigenous. Though he held the Panamanian flyweight title for 7 years, it is important to note that, in the above phrasing, this champion is recognized not as “Panamanian,” but rather as Indigenous, despite his achievements in Panama’s national sport.\(^6\) Ultimately, the presence of Baby San Blas in the sport of boxing allows his Indigenous body to traverse both Panamanian and Dule national and political spaces.

\(^5\) Herlindo Arias, 30.
Counterpoint-Counterplot Bodies

The Indigenous body is a traversable body. Specifically, it embodies fluidity, it crosses and negotiates multiple areas from political to social and economic locations. The spatial operations of such a body function and occupy Indigenous and non-Indigenous national spaces simultaneously. They exist as practices of counterpoint-counterplot occurring in a variety of spaces such as tourism and boxing.

Female Dule bodies, for example, operate and appear in Panama’s national and capital spaces. In the former, they embody Panama’s national identity. In the latter, however, a Dule female body is commoditized into a kind of exotic lure used to promote the country’s tourism industry. Her image helps to package and sell Panama as an exotic destination, with many different stories operating simultaneously in the weaving of a nationally imagined identity for Panama. A Dule female body is the pueblo, the emblem, the arts, and the exotic: She is Panama (see Figure 12).

\[\text{Figure 12: Pueblo Indigena}\]

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6 Ibid.

A female Dule body is a narrative subject, appropriated to create an inscription of commodity on the body, which parallels Michel de Certeau’s “inscriptions of the law on the body.” According to de Certeau, law inscribes and marks a body in such a way that it, itself, is a text; a marked place that is “defined, delimited, and articulated by what writes it.” The relationship and textual function of law and body, as he explains:

…that the law constantly writes itself on bodies. It engraves itself on parchments made from the skin of its subjects. It articulates them in a juridical corpus. It makes its books out of them. These writings carry out two complementary operations: through them, living beings are “packed into a text” (in the sense that products are canned or packed), transformed into signifiers of rules (a sort of “intextuation”) and, on the other hand, the reason or Logos of a society “becomes flesh” (an incarnation).

In the case of the Dule women’s images, the female body becomes “packed into a text;” manufactured, reproduced, and disseminated to the public (local and international) for tourism.

For another example of this, one travel brochure distributed by the Autoridad de Turismo Panamá (Panama Tourism Bureau) features the image of a Dule woman inscribed on paper, with her body operating as a virtual text. As she silently stares at us, the viewers, her bodily image suggests multiple stories in multiple spaces. First, there is the engagement between the body image and camera—with the camera as tool, functioning as an intermediary entity. It captures the

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8 Image is a “welcome sign” to the Indigenous communities’ replica of Mi Pueblito, a folkloric representation of all cultures in Panama. Photograph by Sue Patricia Haglund, Panama City, Panama.

9 Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday*, 139.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid., 140.

12 Ibid.
image and reproduces it into a photographic text. This text links the image to its viewer, producing a visually encoded story of Panama’s exotic and “undiscovered” locations.

This interplay is similar to the sensory-motor image experience of a viewer when s/he watches a film. In *Cinema 2*, for example, Gilles Deleuze states, “What a viewer perceived therefore was a sensory-motor image in which he [she] took a greater or lesser part by identification with the characters.”¹³ That is to say the audience, as an observer, interacts with the film. Within this interaction then, a multidimensional relationship is created among viewer, camera and director. In this dynamic, the audience, the director of the film and the film itself operate as three entities that mutually require one another to serve as a conduit.¹⁴ The operational relationship is evident in the images of Dule female bodies on any kind of paper and billboard sign.

The camera is an instrument that “mediate the relation between” both the image and the physical body of a Dule woman, resulting in such a photograph reproducing itself as a visual text to the observer.¹⁵ This operational interaction seemingly “organizes social space: it separates the text and the body, but it also links them, by permitting the acts that will make the textual ‘fiction’ of the model reproduced and realized by the body.”¹⁶ To expand further, the reproduction and advertisement of their images serve as a conduit that convey the message to the public that “She is Panama” and “Panama is her”—a gendered-female and exotic nation. The social and national


¹⁵ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday*, 141.

¹⁶ Ibid.
spaces of these images twist the visual senses of the observing public, which learns to hypothesize the following conclusion: Such an Indigenous woman represents the authentic Panamanian, therefore Panama—like the Dule woman herself, in the national imaginary—is a pristine paradise; exotic, undiscovered and untouched by outside influences.

Conversely, when a Dule observes such images of Dule women, these textual bodies lead to a disparate discourse—a Dule narrative of continued existence as Indigenous peoples. As Panama’s tourism capitalizes and commodifies these bodies, it should be noted also that the Dule commodify the country’s national image with their own visible and active presence in Panamanian social and economic spaces. Photographic images interlace a story between the one who takes a picture and the one being photographed. In this particular story, Dule women’s bodies collectively, become a site for the counterpoint-counterplot act within both Indigenous and Panamanian national spaces.

The male Indigenous body, within a counterpoint-counterplot approach, serves as a boundary-marker for both Panamanian and Dule cultural spheres. While Panama believes that it needs to use the Dule woman’s image for tourism, its interest in and relationship to the Dule male body is markedly different. In considering the corporeal aspect of boxing, this engenders a paradox. Tamar Mayer asserts that, “as a nation, gender, and sexuality interact with one another, one nation, one gender and one sexuality come to dominate; and therefore what the nation is, its “ego” becomes embedded in what men are and what women are assigned to be.”17

In the case of Panama, when the masculine Indigenous body is represented in boxing, the gender expectations vis-à-vis gendered images are switched. The male Indigenous body triggers a different understanding of the Panamanian nation. This is different to Mayer’s analysis,

17 Tamar Mayer, Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation (London: Routledge, 1999), 18.
wherein the nation’s ego is fixed in what women are and what men are assigned to be.\textsuperscript{18}

Although Baby San Blas is identified specifically as an Indigenous boxing champion, this identity is confined to and appears to be reduced within a limited national space, based on his race and ethnicity. In actuality though, he manifests a place of visible presence and contributes to the practice of a Dule discourse in Panama’s national space.

Dule discourse operates in the same manner to Edward Said’s contrapuntal approach, where one expected narrative simultaneously plays with and against another expected discourse both in the production of multiple national narratives.\textsuperscript{19} In this manner, the Panamanian national and Dule-specific polyphonous narratives unite and weave together both reported and underreported stories that define Panamanian identity, cultural practice and colloquialism. Accordingly, the discourse of Dule presence in modern Panama is neither ambivalent nor unexpected, but rather, is underreported.

In boxing, Arias’ comment about Baby San Blas, as being a true representative to his indomitable race, carves out a distinct and racialized narrative.\textsuperscript{20} It lauds an Indigenous boxer and his accomplishments, while co-opting him into another spatial layer for a national narrative.

Michel de Certeau points out that “Official historiography-history books, television news reports, etc.-nevertheless tries to make everyone believe in the existence of a national space,” which results in a “fragmentation of narrations.”\textsuperscript{21} As one is led to believe in the concept of ‘national space’, a layer of representative counterpoint-counterplot endures—an \textit{Indigenous-}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Said, 51.
\textsuperscript{20} Herlindo Arias, 30.
\textsuperscript{21} Certeau, \textit{The Practice of Everyday}, 125.
\end{flushright}
representative expression thereof. The ‘national space’ referenced in this chapter is Panama’s boxing world, with the fragmented narration of that space represented by the Indigenous boxer who occupies that place. From a counterpoint-counterplot perspective, these layers expose the fictionalized national space as grounded in an underlying Indigenous space.

This notion is similar to Octavio Paz’s analysis on the “Mexico character” in The Labyrinth of Solitude, in which he states that, “Mexico’s character, like that of other people, is an illusion, a mask; at the same time it is a real face. It is never the same and always the same. It is a perpetual contradiction: each time we affirm one part of us, we deny another.” Similarily, the construction of national identity creates imagery of only what appears to be, rather than what is fully apparent.

This is especially evident in the representative counterpoint-counterplot of Baby San Blas. One recognizes his talent and boxing accomplishments as celebrated in the local newspaper, El Siglo in 1990; yet in 2003 (the year of Panama’s centennial celebration of independence) La Prensa excludes this Dule champion and his boxing accomplishments from their Sports edition special altogether. Baby San Blas, as an Indigenous boxer, occupies a separate political and racial space, which exists simultaneously inside and outside of the country’s national space. The corporeal body of Baby San Blas, as a Dule boxer, juxtaposes his Indigenous identity against a Panamanian national identity. That is to say, as a boxer he typifies the underlying Dule history—one in which Panama failed to subdue and conquer them as a people.

22 Paz, 290.
Racism and Boxing in Panama

Boxing’s popularity in Panama arose from two metropolises: Panama City and Colón. U.S American and British men (these included laborers, professionals who were ex-pats, and military) introduced boxing to Panama in the second-half of the nineteenth century. According to Benjamin Waterman, it was the fierce “Kid Thompson-Jack Burke, twenty-two round contests, held between 7th and 8th Streets on Bolivar Avenue, in the City of Colón around the year 1905 or 1906, which really started the ball rolling on to further competition.” This fight soonafter begat the “installation of a small club by Thompson, in old Cristobal…[from which] boxing became know[n] [sic] to Isthmianites [Panamanian citizens].”

The matching bouts in Colón included those between both white and black men, usually from the United States, England and/or West Indies. Cesar del Vasto affirms that the boxing events brought together Panamanians to observe competitive bouts. The American and English foreigners who introduced the sport there organized these boxing matches. He notes that white boxers who won bouts over black counterparts served to symbolize the dominant white system of the country, which once had a slavery system. Racial intolerance was common within the boxing world in Panama and beyond its borders. Over the years, it has become a place of contradiction, in terms of racism.


25 Ibid.

26 Vasto, 25.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.
John Sugden notes that the majority of the best fighters from the United States are not “white Americans, but [either] relatively recent immigrants or African-Americans.” He also points out that, “Paradoxically, it was largely as a result of institutionalized forms of racism and ethnic discrimination that blacks and immigrants became anchored at the bottom of American society and, for reasons of economic necessity and subcultural capacity, it was from these social groups that most aspiring boxers were drawn.” In the case of Panama, between the 1920s and 1930s, most of its boxers were black, mulatto, mestizo or Indigenous.

The form of racism encountered within the country’s boxing world is subtle. In Panama, the process of mestizaje is similar to other Latin American countries. Most Panamanian genealogies are a mix of two or more races and/or ethnicities: European, African, Indigenous, Asian and Middle Eastern. The creation and operation of Panamanian nation building, through the mestizaje process, created the need for representing itself with some kind of authenticity within its national imaginings per the conceptualized mixing of cultures and ethnicities. This produced what would become a new Panamanian national character and national race, under one national realm.

In Panamanian pugilism, mestizo, mulatto and black Panamanians become the country’s dominant boxers. They positioned themselves in a world in which, as sports champions, their race would be neither compromised nor frowned upon in the greater society. In general, most of


Panama’s boxers resemble their Panamanian audience, referees, and judges. This is not the case, however, for those who are Indigenous.

**Dule Urwed: Dule who fights**

The position of Indigenous boxers in Panama’s pugilist world during the 1930s-1950s is marginalized—a marginalization reflected in articles published in two national newspapers, *La Estrella (The Star & Herald)* and *El Panamá-América (The Panama American)* (both founded by American publishers). They were bilingual newspapers, whose readers included Americans residing within the 10-mile Canal Zone strip occupied by the United States Government from 1903-1999, and also the Panamanians who worked for and with them.

It is important, for several reasons, to question articles written and published by these newspapers during 1930s and 1950s. This is especially the case because most of those on Panama’s boxing matches were very brief. Those articles written on the major matches and events reflect a layer of racial politics that defines and recognizes what is Panamanian and who is Panamanian.

From 1930 to 1937, Ricardo Walker (Baby San Blas’ given name) was the first and only Indigenous boxer to hold the champion title in the Flyweight division. His longstanding boxing career is an exemplary. Starting in 1929 at the age of 12, he fought 156 boxing matches in Panama and Colombia. At 5 feet and 2 inches tall, his height is typical for a Dule, whose

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31 Luis Cedeño, “Fue Siete Años Campeón Nacional: Baby San Blas ‘La Maravilla del Ring,’” *Hipodeportes* (Panama), 10 June 1977. Note: Ricardo Walker’s (aka Baby San Blas) career as a boxer lasted from the years 1929 to 1947. However, he was Panama’s flyweight champion from 1930 to 1937.

32 Ibid.
physical characteristics include being described as “short stature.” This physical attribute gave him an advantage in being quick and fast in the ring.

In June 1977, journalist Luis Cedeño interviewed Baby San Blas. Cedeño describes him as “un peleador fabuloso, fogoso, aguerrido y con una agilidad felina sin paralelo” (a great, spirited, [and] brave fighter and with an unparalleled feline agility). He focuses on the boxer as an athlete and Panamanian, at the same time, recognizing with respect, his ethnic identity as being the only Dule and Indigenous boxer to achieve such goals as he accomplished in professional sporting. Cedeño asserts, “Fué por ello que al anunciar su retiro Baby San Blas de los rings nacionales después de 156 encuentros, perdía el boxeo panameño a uno de sus máximos exponentes, a un púgil espectacular, valiente y guerrero” (It was for this reason after 156 matches, Baby San Blas announced his retirement from the national rings, and the Panamanian boxing world lost one of its greatest exponents; a spectacular boxer and brave warrior). Cedeño’s lexical descriptions engage a reader’s attention with a dual discourse of race, in relation to Baby San Blas, both as a Panamanian and Dule. This is in obvious contrast, meanwhile, to newspaper articles published in Panama from 1930s to 1950s.

In El Panamá-América, articles from 1930s to 1950s marginalize Baby San Blas based on his race and gender. In “Baby San Blas Está Pegando Muy Duro” (May 1, 1940,) the writer uses disparaging words when referring to the Dule boxer, referring only to Baby San Blas’ opponent by his actual boxing name. The anonymous sports reporter writes that one would find Baby San Blas training at the Gimnasio Nacional. He states, “…se apersonó por el Gimnasio

33 Stout, 15.

34 Cedeño, “Fue Siete Años Campeón Nacional: Baby San Blas ‘La Maravilla del Ring.’”

35 Ibid.
Nacional, en donde ‘el indio’ hace diariamente sus entrenamientos” (one showed up for the Gimnasio Nacional, where "the Indian" does daily workouts).³⁶ He further refers to Baby San Blas, a grown man, as a “boy,” and writes, “‘Cada día que pasa me siento como un acero,’ esto fue lo que nos dijo el machigua, al ser interrogado por nosotros, sobre sus condiciones físicas” (‘Every day that passes I feel like I’m made of steel,’ this is what the machigua said to us, when asked by us, about his physical conditions).³⁷ In quotations, “el indio” and “el machigua” are repeatedly used throughout that article.³⁸

Additionally, in one from 1932 and another from 1937, reporters referred to Baby San Blas “the Indian” and “the Indian Flash.”³⁹ In Dulegaya (Dule language), “machigua” is not an insulting word, but rather, translates to “boy” or “son.” However, when a non-Dule calls a Dule man “machigua” (or “Indian” for that matter)—it has a derogatory effect.

The implication in a speaker’s or writer’s intent usage of these words shifts, when “…lo decían era como que lo escupían” (they said it, as if they were spitting).⁴⁰ By employing the words machigua, indio, Indian, and Indian Flash, writers compartmentalize the being of Baby San Blas within racial and gendered spaces. The words function as coded acts that occupy and traverse one space to another. The production and usage of speech acts and texts create a layered, oppressive narrative of expectations about who and what Dule men are or should be. A Dule

³⁷ Ibid.
³⁸ Ibid.
³⁹ “Slammer and Ramos in Ten Rounds of Action Tonight At The Colon Ideal Arena,” The Panama American (Panama), 19 March 1932, p. 2; and “Al Carlos Opposes Young Pancho In Main Event,” The Panama American (Panama), 31 July 1937, p. 5.
⁴⁰ Raul Leis, Machí: Un Kuna en la Ciudad (Panama: CEASPA, 1992), 21.
body visibly and invisibly operates in and traverses Panamanian society. Its presence in local and national realms expands the constraints of law through acts engaging their body, re-defining, re-interpreting and re-constructing with and in relation to Panama’s national sociopolitical constraints.

Father Fernando Guardia is a Panamanian Jesuit priest who grew up in Panama City and watched boxing matches during the 1940s in a gymnasium located on Avenida A near El Chorrillo (a neighborhood in Panama City.) In discussing the social climate of Panama during the 1940s, in terms of how Dule men were treated, he states:

En esa época no respetábamos a los gunas porque llamábamos San Blas a la región de los gunas. Yo sí recuerdo la presencia de gunas en Panamá de mi época, su trabajo le decíamos machiguas. Machigua, me parece que machi es una palabra guna, entiendo que machi es una palabra guna. Y les decíamos ‘machis’ a los gunas. El impacto de ellos en la ciudad es ciertamente era numerosos ahora siempre en oficios bajos.

(During that time, we did not respect the Guna because we called the region the Guna [lived in,] San Blas. I do remember the presence of Guna in Panama during my generation; at their workplace, we called them machiguas. Machigua, I believe machi is a Guna word; I understand that machi is a Guna word. And we called them, the Guna, machis. As to their impact in the city, certainly there were many there, always at low-paying jobs.)

The usage of ‘San Blas’, ‘machi’ and ‘machigua’ commands and elicits (un)provoked tensions present in Panama City. Father Guardia’s observations of these words demonstrate that the Dule are never allowed a proper authentic place, with respect to either Panamanian identity or to their own, without any reference that they are different. This is a similar occurrence in the U.S. in regards to the placement of African-American males in sports and the media. Don Sabo and Sue Curry Jansen explain how African-American males are perceived and treated like women by media commentators covering competitive sporting events. They clarify:

41 Father Fernando Guardia, Panamanian Jesuit priest, interview by Sue Patricia Haglund, Personal Interview, Panama City, Rep. of Panama, 3 February 2009.
Margaret Duncan, Michael Messner, and Linda Williams (1990) studied the ways television commentators described athletes who participated in the 1989 NCAA women’s and men’s basketball finals and 1989 women’s and men’s U.S. Open tennis tournaments. They found that commentators called female tennis players by their first rather than their full or last names 53 percent of the time, and men only 8 percent of the time. They also discovered that, of the men, only men of color were referred to by their first names only; full names were used to identify white male athletes. The researchers describe this overall pattern as a “hierarchy of naming,” that is, a linguistic vehicle for reinforcing status differences between men and women, whites and blacks.\textsuperscript{42}

The commentators’ words to identify and separate the men from the boys based on race and gender also “shores up prevailing beliefs about the meaning of masculinity.”\textsuperscript{43} Gail Bederman’s framework, regarding the child-savage relationship in a hegemonic society, recalls that “Savages, like children, were weak and vulnerable, and required the manly supervision of powerful civilized men like himself.”\textsuperscript{44} In the case of boxing in Panama, reporters identified and framed Baby San Blas and his opponents in a similar fashion. At times, Baby San Blas is not named nor recognized as a male adult. He is a boy—that is childlike. He is primitive—that is, a savage.

Now the derivative usage of machigua and indio, in reference to not only Baby San Blas but every Dule male, places the body in a subjugated position. The body itself, however, marks resistance to such inferiority. Why the body? What makes the body so important to merit a constructive analysis? It is language and memory. According to Michel de Certeau:

[Indians were] Dominated but not vanquished, they keep alive the memory of what the Europeans have “forgotten”—a continuous series of uprisings and awakenings which have left hardly a trace in the occupiers’ historiographical literature. This history of resistance punctuated by cruel repression is marked on the Indian’s body as much as it recorded in transmitted accounts—or more so.


\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{44} Gail Bederman, \textit{Manliness and Civilization} (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1995), 113.
This inscribing of an identity built upon pain is the equivalent of the indelible markings the torture of the initiation ceremony carves into the flesh of the young. In this sense, “the body is memory.” It carries, in written form, the law of equality and rebelliousness that not only organizes the group’s relation to itself, but also its relation to the occupiers.\textsuperscript{45}

The link between language and memory, in relation to the body, expands and fluctuates within a discourse of historical relations between European and Indigenous peoples. Similar to the layers and design of a mola, the body, with every gesture and every movement, carefully designs a history depicting the dominant and dominated. A body’s movements and gestures, in the case of the Indigenous body, embody and define the intricacy of Panamanian national identity.

As to such intrinsic Panamanian national identity definitions, according to Juan Materno-Vásquez, “En Panamá, el orgullo nacional es un orgullo racial.” (In Panama, national pride is a racial pride).\textsuperscript{46} This is reflected throughout the Panamanian population sectors of European, African and/or Mixed Indigenous-European ancestry.\textsuperscript{47} Where does the purely Indigenous fit in the Panamanian national-racial pride complex? Materno-Vásquez asserts that “Los indios, en tanto, viven en un mundo aparte…” (The Indians, meanwhile, live in a world apart…).\textsuperscript{48} The cultivation of Panamanian national identity marginalizes and excludes the Indigenous population


\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.

from being full “Panamanians.” Such exclusionary acts are evident in the written description of Panamanian boxers: Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

Reported and Underreported Stories

In the article “Kid Slammer Will Meet Luis Ramos in Colon on Saturday”, the reporting on matching bouts between Baby San Blas and his opponent once again distinguished the Dule fighter by his ethnicity. However, further down the article also describes a different boxing match between two other boxers, Tonin Troncoso and Mike Gonzalez, who are not ethnically or racially identified at all. They are identified noting the city they represent. For example:

Colon fans also will see in action next Saturday night San Blas Baby [Baby San Blas] sensational Panama City Indian flyweight, who meets a Colonite in a four rounder. This San Blas Boy is plenty good and is sure to gain the plaudits of Colon fans—all of whom are keen students of the manly art of self defense.

And yet then:

Tonin Troncoso, another promising Panama City flyweight, will meet Mike Gonzalez, of Colon, in a four rounder. Troncoso is on his way to stardom while Gonzalez is one of the snappiest and most scientific boys on the Gold Coast.49

These snappy descriptions of two separate matching bouts—Baby San Blas vs. a Colonite and Tonin Troncoso vs. Mike Gonzalez—reflect a disparity amongst these boxers—not by their choosing, but in terms of the writer and spectator. The sportswriter refers to all the boxers as “boys,” but Baby San Blas is clearly identified and singled-out as “Indian.” The distinction in his ethnicity becomes the staple of identification throughout his boxing career.

49 “Kid Slammer Will Meet Luis Ramos in Colon on Saturday,” The Panama American (Panama), 13 March 1932, p. 2.
Baby San Blas began his boxing career four years after 1925 Dule Revolution—at the age of 12, in 1929 beginning his training in Colón, Panama. From an interview in 1977, he recounts his boxing career:

…en 1929 empecé a aprender boxeo bajo la dirección del ex-púgil Marcos Zorrilla. Tenía como 12 años de edad y vivía en la Costa Atlántica con la familia del señor Maximino Walker, quien era Comandante del Cuerpo de Bomberos de Colón. Todas las tardes iba a la calle 4ta de aquella ciudad a recibir enseñanzas del señor Zorrilla y también del ex-púgil Chato Amador. Muchas veces cuando celebraba sesiones de guantes me daban tan duro, que lloraba. Pero continué en mis afanes, en mis propósitos, dispuesto a aprender el boxeo y después de 1 año consideraron ellos que yo podría pelear profesionalmente con mucho éxito.

(... in 1929 I started to learn boxing under the leadership of ex-boxer Marcos Zorrilla. I was about 12 years old and lived in the Atlantic Coast with the family of Mr. Maximino Walker, who was commander of the Colon Fire Department. Every afternoon I went to 4th Street in that city to receive lessons from Mr. Zorrilla and ex-boxer Chato Amador. Many times when sparring sessions were held they hit me so hard, I cried. But I continued on my desires, my goals, willing to learn boxing and after 1 year they felt that I could successfully fight professionally.)

Baby San Blas, along with other Dule boxers such as Pastor Muñoz, Francisco Mojica, Kid Alfaro, Young Alfaro, San Blas Kid, and Baby Garcia, also including Baby San Blas’ younger brother Eugenio Mendez, had real presence in Panama’s boxing world, Panamanian society and Gunayala. The quickness and speed of these boxers were evident in their matches and sparring practices. Baby San Blas’ younger brother, Eugenio Mendez, sparred with him during training workouts. Francisco Mojica used to spar with both brothers during training exercises until, one

50 Cedeño, “Fue Siete Años Campeón Nacional: Baby San Blas ‘La Maravilla del Ring.’”

51 Francisco Mojica, a former Dule boxer, interview by Sue Patricia Haglund, Personal Interview, Panama City, Rep. of Panama, 19 March 2009.
day, a tall waga broke Mojica’s nose during a practice. After this nose injury, Mojica decided not to continue boxing.

For other Dule boxers, professional fighting allowed them to demonstrate their athletic skills with other non-Dule boxers. In a four-round curtain raiser, “Kid Alfaro, another Indian, fought four fast rounds with Young Herrera [a non-Dule Panamanian].” However, the “next preliminary ended in the second round when Al Rios proceeded to throw the San Blas Baby [Baby San Blas] out of the ring. Rios was leading the fight but he lost his temper and the fight by his rough tactics.” No further explanation is provided for Al Rios’ unsportsmanlike conduct towards Baby San Blas. Regardless, Baby San Blas continued to fight successfully against other opponents a few days after his matching bout with Rios. According to an article in *The Panama American*, on April 24, 1932, “San Blas Baby [Baby San Blas] knocked out Young Herrera in the 1st round of the main preliminary. The Indian landed a right to the chin and a left to the body that finished his rival. He was given a big hand by the crowd.”

His bodily movements and swift-gesturing punches in the ring become favorite moments for the large crowds of fans in Panamanian boxing. Those of his generation from 1920s to the present, recognize Baby San Blas and his contribution to the sport. His popularity is evident in the attendance of crowds even during his training preparations before a fight. In May of 1940,

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52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.


55 Ibid.

56 “Frisco Beats Wills in Poor Fight at Gym,” *The Panama American* (Panama), 24 April 1932, p. 2.
Baby San Blas prepared for a 10-round matching bout with Baby Canzoneri with both boxers weighing in at 112 pounds.\textsuperscript{57} During Baby San Blas’ training, an anonymous reporter described the presence of Dule fans at the training gym:

\begin{quote}
…Todos los días se le puede ver entrenando entusiastamente en el Gimnasio de la Avenida “A” y frente a él se pueden observar la pléyade de indígenas de la tierra de Nele de Cantule, que acuden diariamente allí a animarlo, y a aplaudirlo en sus diversos ejercicios que hace.
\end{quote}

(\... Every day you can see him training enthusiastically in the Gimnasio of Avenida "A" and before him you can see the myriad of indigenous people from the land of Nele Cantule, who flock there daily to encourage and applaud at various exercises he does.)\textsuperscript{58}

Their support and presence surely influenced Baby San Blas’ performance in the boxing ring. In fact, the results of 1940’s Baby San Blas vs. Baby Canzoneri bout found Baby San Blas winning the fight, by technical knockout, after the fifth round.\textsuperscript{59} Furthermore, the sports writer, intrigued by the Dule fans support and presence during fights and training practices, describes Baby San Blas as “…el idolo de la comarca de San Blas” (…the idol of the San Blas region).\textsuperscript{60} This description exemplifies Baby San Blas’ legendary reputation as the pioneering Dule prizefighter to compete in professional boxing at the national level in Panama.

Most Panamanian boxing fans of Baby San Blas’ generation and some non-Dule Panamanian (who are born in the 1960s and later,) know and/or hear about his boxing accomplishments. Amongst Dule Panamanians, however, Baby San Blas’ reputation in boxing

\textsuperscript{57}“El Programa de Esta Noche,” \textit{El Panamá-América} (Panama), 12 May 1940, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{58}“El Baby Entrena Bajo La Dirección de Y. Hurtado,” \textit{El Panamá-América} (Panama), 8 May 1940, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{59}“S. Blas Baby Noqueó a Canzoneri,” \textit{El Panamá-América} (Panama), 13 May 1940, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{60}Ibid.
continues to be well-known and familiar in Dule communities. In a 2009 interview, with then-governor of Gunayala, Avelino Brenes, he states:

Hablar del señor Baby San Blas un boxeador guna, se está refiriendo de los años 40 que dónde en cual que todavía no he nacido. Imagínate, pero la historia [que] me ha contado de que hubo un señor, Baby San Blas, que ha dedicado mucho en boxeo y ha sobresalido y era los mejor conocidos aquí. Pero se quedó en la historia del pueblo guna que era primera vez que un indio llega a una altura de ser un buen boxeador.

(Speaking of Mr. Baby San Blas, a Guna boxer, we are talking about 1940s where in which I have not yet been born. Imagine, but the story [that] was told to me that there was a man, Baby San Blas, who dedicated a lot of his time to boxing and has excelled and was the best known here. But he stayed in the history of the Guna people, for it was the first time an Indian reaches the heights of being a good boxer.)

This interview demonstrates the visibility and recognition Baby San Blas continues to have in both Panama’s boxing world and in Gunayala. Governor Brenes’ oral account is an example of how stories are circulated and shared in Dule communities, demonstrating Dule storytelling practices. This storytelling is the nexus of counterpoint-counterplot acts that flow with and against modern Panama’s historical and relational accounts with the Dule.

Take for instance, the 1925 Dule Revolution. According to Panamanian accounts, in two Panamanian history books used in the public schools, one published in 1969 and the other in 2007, it is positioned as an uprising instigated and led by a U.S. American, Richard O. Marsh. This narrative is not accurate, however, per Dule oral histories, which emphasizes the inaccuracies of the history when told by non-Dule Panamanian historians. The Dule narration, as

61 Avelino Brenes, Governor of Gunayala, interview by Sue Patricia Haglund, Personal Interview, Panama City, Rep. of Panama, 26 January 2009.

Sagladummad Inakeliginya shares, states:

Por eso, afirmamos que hay una gran mentira cuando los historiadores panameños nos dicen que en 1925 el mergi [American] Marsh había sido el incitador de los kunas. Yo no sé si esos historiadores sabían que el mergi Marsh no era kuna. Marsh no vivía con nuestro dolor, él no conocía nuestras armas, él no era abofeteado por los policías coloniales; y las armas no nacen de afuera, nacen del mismo dolor. Nuestros dirigentes, Colman, Nele Kantule, Nugelipe, son los que nos alentaron a vivir libres.

Therefore, we assert that there is a big lie when Panamanian historians tell us that in 1925 the mergi [American] Marsh had been the instigator of the Kuna. I do not know if these historians knew that the mergi Marsh was not Kuna. Marsh did not live with our pain, he did not know our weapons, he was not slapped by colonial police, and the weapons are not born outside, they are born of the same pain. Our leaders, Colman, Nele Kantule, Nugelipe are the ones who encouraged us to live free.\textsuperscript{63}

The above narratives, in contrast to one another, illustrate a variance in the telling of the facts in the 1925 Dule Revolution. The divergence of stories shows how both non-Dule Panamanian and Dule historians write history. It is the exact occurrence of what de Certeau refers to as the function of history in society.\textsuperscript{64} He asserts that, “the historiographical institution is inscribed within a complex that permits only one kind of production for it and prohibits others.”\textsuperscript{65} Dule Revolution narratives in Panama’s history books permits an American as the strategist leader of this uprising, while inhibiting the actual account, that Dule leaders were the true revolutionary strategists.

A similar narrative plays out in Baby San Blas’ boxing career. According to Panamanian-owned newspapers between the 1970s and 1990s (such as Hipodeportes, El Siglo, and La

\textsuperscript{63}Wagua, \textit{Así lo vi}, 17.


\textsuperscript{65}Ibid.
Crítica) and personal interviews of Dule and non-Dule Panamanians, Baby San Blas held the Panamanian Flyweight national title from 1930 to 1937. Pastor Muñoz, one former Dule boxer and good friend to Baby San Blas, confirms this accomplishment in Panama’s national boxing world, stating:

El sí disputó varias peleas aquí en Panamá y fue campeón mosca. Él fue campeón nacional. Él no salió al campeonato mundial sino campeón aquí en Panamá. Después él salió por ser buen profesional y buen peleador, a él ellos le mandaron a Colombia. Allá peleó varios boxeos y él ganó varias peleas en Colombia…entonces él ya vino y empezó de nuevo a pelear aquí en Panamá. Él sí fue campeón de peso mosca y también campeón de peso mínimo peso de 108 libras, 109 libras porque campeón peso mosca era de 112 libras. Y después de allí él subió peso y también ganaba buenas peleas. Él fue buen boxeador que tuvo la Comarca de San Blas, eso porque le decían Baby San Blas.

(He did fight several matching bouts here in Panama and was a Flyweight champion. He was a national champion. He did not go to the world championship, but champion here in Panama. Then he went on being a good professional and a good fighter, they sent him to Colombia. There he fought several boxing matches and won several fights in Colombia…and then he came and began to fight here again in Panama. He was Flyweight champion and also mini Flyweight champion of 108 pounds, 109 pounds because flyweight champion was 112 pounds. And then from there he also was gaining weight and won good fights. He was a good boxer that the Comarca of Sán Blas ever had that is why they called him Baby San Blas.)

Muñoz accounts note that Baby San Blas, as a national Flyweight champion, was so quick in the ring that other boxers, twice his size, refused to fight him because he was known as a knockout puncher, who trained with the best coaches. Obviously, Baby San Blas’s boxing accomplishments are well known to people living in Panama City, Colón and Gunayala. Why then, in La Estrella de Panamá and El Panamá-América from the 1930s to 1950s, is Baby San Blas’ achievement as Flyweight national title holder in his weight class is not reported?

66 Pastor Muñoz, former Dule boxer and Baby San Blas’ good friend, interview by Sue Patricia Haglund, Personal Interview, Panama City, Rep. of Panamá, 7 February 2009.

67 Ibid.
The Panamanian journalists, boxing historians and commentators, Dule and non-Dule Panamanians, provide differing oral and written narratives about Baby San Blas’ boxing matches. These contrast with the accounts reported and underreported from 1930s to 1950s in both *El Panamá-América* and *La Estrella de Panamá*.

An anonymous reporter from *El Panamá-América* described the January 14, 1940 upcoming boxing bout, a rematch between Kid Zefine and Baby San Blas, as follows:

Este que ustedes ven aquí, estimados lectores, es nada menos que el “terrible” indio de la comarca de San Blas, cuyo nombre de Guerra es San Blas Baby [Baby San Blas], en honor de la tierra que lo vio nacer. En estos días, uno de nuestros redactores entrevistó a San Blas Baby [Baby San Blas]… “Estoy ansioso que llegue el día de la pelea, pues me voy a vengar de la injusticia que se me hizo.”

(This you see here, dear readers, is nothing less than the "terrible" Indian from the region of San Blas, whose war name is San Blas Baby [Baby San Blas], in honor of the land of his birth. These days, one of our editors interviewed San Blas Baby [Baby San Blas]… "I look forward to the day of the fight, because I'm going to avenge the injustice done to me."

The injustice Baby San Blas talks about regards his bout with Kid Zefine, held on November 12, 1939. According to *The Panama American* in 1940, the January 14th rematch was one where “Zefine already holds one victory over the Baby,” and the matching bout on November 12, 1939 was one that was “scored last year but…was a very unpopular decision.” The Kid Zefine vs. Baby San Blas match of November 12, 1939 was and remains a popular and sensationalized fight. From October 1939 to the days leading up to November 12, 1939, both *La Estrella de Panamá* and *El Panamá-América* follow and report on the physical and mental conditions of both boxers, while predictions are made to bet on which boxer would win the fight.


The night before that bout, *La Estrella de Panamá* reported on the popularity of Baby San Blas and Kid Zefine, with the former receiving the most applause and reported to have been the crowd’s favorite. According to the report:

Baby San Blas, el vengador de Kid Alfaro [a Dule boxer], fue muy aplaudido por el público que presenció su exhibición frente a Baby Quintana [sic], el gran púgil istmeño, en el Gimnasio Nacional anoche. Zefine también fue aplaudido pero no tanto como su contrincante, señal de que San Blas será favorito en los pronósticos populares sobre el resultado de su encuentro del domingo por la noche.

(Baby San Blas, the avenger of Kid Alfaro [a Dule boxer], was applauded by the audience who witnessed his display against Baby Quintana [sic], the great Isthmian fighter, at the National Gymnasium last night. Zefine was also applauded, but not as much as his opponent, a sign that San Blas is a favorite in the popular forecast about the outcome of their meeting on Sunday night.)*70

Popular and a crowd favorite, Baby San Blas entertains during his bout with Zefine. After their match however, neither *La Estrella de Panamá* nor *El Panamá-América* report on or even mention the results until ten days later. On November 22, 1939, a community member, José Solís’ letter to the Sports Editor of *La Estrella de Panamá* is published. Written on November 20, 1939, Solís states:

Permitame conocer del público por medio de su leído diario que Baby San Blas exige una revancha a Kid Zefine a quien se le conocidió una victoria discutible. San Blas quiere pelear en esta ocasión por todo el premio y pide de manera especial que los jueces sean de la Zona del Canal, porque los locales incurren en muchos errores como lo ha informado infinidad de veces la prensa.

(Let me inform the public through your daily paper. Baby San Blas demands a rematch with Kid Zefine who was awarded a controversial victory. San Blas wants an occasion to fight for the entire prize and ask special requests so that the judges are from the Canal Zone, because the locals incur many errors as reported by the press many times.)*71

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*70 “Baby San Blas Fue Aplaudido Mucho Anoche,” *La Estrella de Panamá* (Panama), 10 November 1939, p. 4.

*71 “San Blas Baby Pide la revancha con Kid Zefine,” *La Estrella de Panamá* (Panama), 22 November 1939, p. 4.*
Furthermore Solis, on behalf of Baby San Blas, implores for a rematch with Kid Zefine, “…en condiciones que garanticen un fallo justo” (…in conditions that ensure a fair decision).\footnote{72}{Ibid.} This letter to the Sports Editor is the only evidence I found that reveals the matching bout results. The omission of the results in \textit{La Estrella de Panamá} and \textit{El Panamá-América}, is unexplainable. By omitting this piece of history, the press disrespects both Baby San Blas and Kid Zefine.

Additionally, this silence relates closely to the U.S. Sports media’s practice of not reporting sporting results and performances of African-American athletes well into the 1990s.\footnote{73}{Sabo and Jansen, 150-160.} It is a hierarchial behavior wherein “these silences cannot be explained as simple neglect or ghettoization…To the contrary, these silences are an integral part of the topography of American power relations.”\footnote{74}{Sabo and Jansen, 153.} Both men of color, San Blas and Zefine, are silenced. That silence, nevertheless, is broken through the fans protest against the judges’ decision on their bout.\footnote{75}{“Estará en juego el título de los moscas,” \textit{El Panamá-América} (Panama), 31 December 1939, p. 6.} The fans “estimaron que el indígena había acumulado suficiente cantidad de puntos durante los diez asaltos del encuentro como para merecer la decisión” (estimated that the Indian had accumulated enough points over the ten rounds of the match to merit the decision).\footnote{76}{Ibid.}

The boxing reports as noted in this chapter reflect how history is written in what is admitted and by what is omitted. According to Daniel Alonso, Panama’s leading boxing historian and commentator of sports television program \textit{Lo Mejor del Boxeo}:

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\footnote{72}{Ibid.}
\footnote{73}{Sabo and Jansen, 150-160.}
\footnote{74}{Sabo and Jansen, 153.}
\footnote{75}{“Estará en juego el título de los moscas,” \textit{El Panamá-América} (Panama), 31 December 1939, p. 6.}
\footnote{76}{Ibid.}
Baby San Blas, según nuestras investigaciones periodísticas, fue primer gran exponente del boxeo profesional salido de la Comarca de San Blas [Gunayala] del grupo indígena conocido como guna. Fue un boxeador muy destacado en la década de los 30s hasta al final de los 40s casi el inicio de los 50s...Baby San Blas aunque obviamente nunca vi pelear...está muy documentado en diferentes fuentes el estilo de pelea que tenía y que era muy gustado por el público...Era muy diminuto y pesaba 107, 108, 109 libras, pero en esa época no existía una división inferior a las de 112 libras. Por eso Baby San Blas tenía que pelear con boxeadores a quien a lo mejor pesaban 112, 114 o 115 libras siendo un boxeador de muy bajo peso. Aún así logró importantísimos triunfos y entendemos que fue campeón nacional de peso mosca...que hizo muchas campañas en Colombia y que tuvo un gran impacto en otros boxeadores gunas que vinieron después de él...Baby San Blas es reconocido como el gran pionero de los boxeadores gunas en el boxeo panameño. No el único pero quizás el principal...Baby San Blas fue el zapador, el pionero y gran, gran boxeador.

(Baby San Blas, according to our investigative reporters, was the first great exponent in professional boxing from the Comarca de San Blas [Gunayala] and from the indigenous group known as Guna. He was a very high ranking boxer during the 1930s until the late 40s almost beginning of the 50s ... Baby San Blas although obviously I never saw him fight ... he is well documented in different sources, the fighting style he had and that he was very well liked by the public... He was very diminutive and weighed 107, 108, 109 pounds, but at that time, there was no division lower than 112 pounds. Therefore, Baby San Blas, being a boxer from a very low weight [class], had to fight boxers who probably weighed 112, 114 or 115 pounds. Still he achieved important victories and we understand that he was a national flyweight champion...he did many of campaigns in Colombia and had a great impact on other Guna boxers who came after him ... San Blas Baby is recognized as the great pioneer of Guna boxers in Panamanian boxing. Not the only one but perhaps the main one... Baby San Blas was a sapper, a pioneer, and great, great fighter.)

So what is the truth? Who is the historian that makes the history, produces it, and disseminates it? What comes first written history or oral history?

De Certeau states, “orality is displaced, as if excluded from the writing. It is isolated, lost and found again in a ‘voice,’ which is that of nature, of the woman, of childhood of the

77 Daniel Alonso, boxing historian and commentator for Lo Mejor del Boxeo, interview by Sue Patricia Haglund, Personal Interview, Panama City, Panama, 13 February 2009.
The stories from both Dule and non-Dule Panamanians contrast and complement one another in clarifying Dule corporeal presence in modern Panama. In fact, when Daniel Alonso emphasizes Baby San Blas’ boxing achievements, he admits that there are those who will question his credibility and knowledge on Baby San Blas’ boxing career. He indicates:

Hay quién me dicen “¿pero cómo tú puedes decir eso si tú no lo viste pelear?” Tánmoco estuvé aquí cuando llegó Cristobal Colón a América. Y sé que era un gran navegante. No tengo que haber estado allí para saberlo. Tiene que haber sido un hombre valiente cuando cruzó un mar desconocido y llegar a las islas, a las Indias no había pensando ya había descubrido al Nuevo Mundo. Bueno así mismo los historiadores como yo no tenemos que haber visto al boxeador. Pero con las referencias que tenemos de él [Baby San Blas], como hace Cisco Kid, que dice que es un hombre demasiado rápido. A Cisco Kid le decían “El Eléctrico” porque tiraba los golpes rápido y San Blas era más rápido que él. Así que yo puedo imaginarme a ese diminuto boxeador san blaseño de 105, 106 libras, dando 7 golpes al segundo y tengo que haber estado allí. Así que es importante estas referencias históricas que hemos recopilados sobre Baby San Blas para dibujar más o menos el perfil.

(There are those who say "but how can you say that if you did not see him fight?" Nor was I here when Columbus came to America. And I know he was a great navigator. I do not have to be there in order to know. He must have been a brave man as he crossed an unknown sea and to reach the islands, the Indies, he had not thought he had discovered the New World. Likewise historians like me we do not have to have seen the boxer. But with the references we have of him [Baby San Blas], as Cisco Kid does, who he says is too fast of a man. The Cisco Kid was called "The Electric" for pulling quick hits and San Blas was faster than him. So I can imagine that tiny San Blas boxer 105, 106 pounds, taking 7 shots in the second and I have to be there. So it is important these historical references that we have collected about Baby San Blas more or less draw the profile.)

In fact, the quickness of Baby San Blas in the boxing ring is attributed, through family stories, to Dule medicinal protection. Ana Rosa Haglund, Baby San Blas’ daughter, describes some of her father’s practices before a fight. She states, “Por tradición indígena mi abuelo [Olowibikina] juntaba a mi padre antes de cualquier encuentro boxístico un medicamento hecho por él como


79 Daniel Alonso, Personal Interview.
protección contra su adversario y así salir de eso de sus encuentros’” (Based on indigenous tradition my grandfather [Olowibikina] with my father before any boxing match prepared medicine for him as a protection against an opponent and to come out of those encounters).  

Furthermore, Roberto Martínez, Baby San Blas’ brother recounts, “My father [Olowibikina] used to put medicine on Baby here and here [gesturing to his body] before fighting.” Olowibikina, father of Baby San Blas, was an inaduled (a person who specializes in medicinal plants and medicine man) on the island of Agligandi. In fact, sagla Colman of Agligandi wrote a letter to Panamanian President Porras in 1913, listing all the names of Dule medical and cultural practitioners from Agligandi with the title of doctor before each name. Among the lists of names, Olowibikina, (whose name is spelled as “Olo Wigueguña” in the letter,) was described as a doctor of medicine. Sagla Colman’s purpose in using and giving doctor titles to the Dule practitioners of Agligandi, according to James Howe, is to demonstrate to President Porras that these Dule practitioners are equivalent to doctors in Panamanian society and as such, play a vital role in defining it.

Moreso, Eugenio Mendez, another nephew of Baby San Blas, shares the following details of Olowibikina’s medicine on Baby San Blas:

Mi papá [Eugenio Mendez, younger brother of Baby San Blas] me echó una

80 Ana Rosa Haglund, daughter of Baby San Blas, interview by Sue Patricia Haglund, Personal Interview, Ewa Beach, Hawaii, 5 April 2009.

81 Roberto Martínez, Personal Interview.

82 Roberto Martínez Owen, Personal Interview.

83 James Howe, Chiefs, Scribes, and Ethnographers: Kuna Culture from Inside and Out (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 83-84.

84 Ibid, 84.

85 Ibid.
historia de él cuándo yo estaba joven. Yo le pregunté del tío Baby. El abuelo Olowibikina hizo una medicamien
to de Dule... medicina que se llama “nikeeua.” Nikeeua uno pajarito que está brincando del árbol [sounds “tikitikitikitiki” made by speaker to demonstrate bird movements] pero cuando alguien quiere cogerlo con una escopeta no lo coge. Y entonces el abuelo hizo medicina al Papá Baby para otra cosa entonces se convirtió, se uso del boxeo. Por eso cuando él estaba peleando nunca le pegaba al golpe a él le saltó brincar pa-pa-pa-pa, eso hizo la medicina. Tomó la medicina antes de la pelea; hizo el abuelo la medicina.

(My dad [Eugenio Mendez, younger brother of Baby San Blas] told me a story about him when I was young. I asked about Uncle Baby. Grandfather Olowibikina made Dule medicine that was called “nikeeua.” Nikeeua is a type of bird that is jumping from the tree making [sounds “tikitikitikitiki” made by speaker to demonstrate bird movements], but when someone wants to take it with a shotgun, it cannot take it. And my grandfather did medicine for Baby San Blas for something else, then later for boxing it was used. So when he was fighting one never beat him because he would jump pa-pa-pa-pa, it was medicine. He took the medicine before the fight; grandfather made the medicine.)

Olowibikina’s medicine on Baby San Blas, during every fight shows how deeply rooted Dule identity and practices are within every aspect of the Dule way of life. Most important, in a separate interview, Roberto Martínez, brother of Baby San Blas, confirms the usage of the nikeeua medicine. When asked in Dulegaya about the medicine’s name, Martínez, without hesitation, emphatically states “nikeeua.”

Corresponding to Mendez’s description, Martínez describes nikeeua as a small bird that jumps from here to there; it is too fast and quick to catch. He recounts that the moment Olowibikina caught the bird; he would prepare it and cook it until it would become a powdery substance. From there, this nikeeua powder would be placed on Baby

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86 Eugenio Mendez, Personal Interview.
87 Roberto Martínez, Personal Interview.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
San Blas’ body, from which he should absorb the essence of nikeeua’s quickness.\footnote{Ibid.} This is evident in his matching bout against a noted Colombian boxer Cartagena, Colombia. In \textit{Historia Del Boxeo Colombiano}, Eudocio Ramirez, alias Cisco Kid, describes experience with Baby San Blas:

Mi pelea más dura fue con ‘Baby San Blas,’ un indio panameño, se llamaba Ricardo Walker. Peleamos un 24 de diciembre. Nos pusieron a pelear porque éramos atracción. Imaginate, yo era rápido lanzando los golpes, por eso me decían el rey de los puños eléctricos, pero ese San Blas era rapidísimo. No lo veía…ese tipo tiraba siete golpes por segundo, y don Daniel Lemaitre, que era el alcalde intervino para que pararan la pelea. Él gritaba: quiténselo que lo va a acabar y es lo mejor que tenemos. Ahí me gané cien pesos. Perdí en el séptimo round. Duré varios días tomando la sopa con pitillo, porque no podía abrir la boca ni masticar la hinchazón era grande.

(\text{My toughest fight was with 'Baby San Blas,' a Panamanian Indian called Ricardo Walker. We fought on December 24th. They put us to fight because we were the attraction. Imagine, I was fast throwing hits, so I was called the king of electric fists, but that San Blas was very fast. I did not see him…that guy threw seven shots per second, and Mr. Daniel Lemaitre, who was the mayor intervened to stop the fight. He shouted: Get him off, he will finish him and he is the best that we have. Then I won a hundred pesos. I lost in the seventh round. I lasted several days eating soup with a straw, because I could not open my mouth or chew the swelling was great.})\footnote{Raul Porto Cabrales, \textit{Historia Del Boxeo Colombiano} (Cartagena: Litohermedin Ltda., 2002), 283.}

Cisco Kid’s description shows how Baby San Blas exuded the nikeeua’s rapid pace through his seven-second-knockout punches. The personification of nikeeua protects Baby San Blas from his opponents and enables him to quickly evade their punches, but it also challenges boxing rules and regulations.

For example, in boxing, a contender cannot use any foreign substances while competing in the boxing ring. This regulation prevents any unfairly disadvantageous practices against an opponent. For instance, a referee “inspeccionará los vendajes y los guantes y se asegurará de que

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no se les ha aplicado sustancias extrañas a los guantes ni a los cuerpos de los púgiles, en detrimento de su adversario” (will inspect the bandages and gloves and ensure that no foreign substances have been applied to the gloves or the bodies of the fighters, to the detriment of his opponent). 92 However, in Baby San Blas’ case, the usage of nikeea powder challenged and defied this regulation. In fact, through their defiant acts, Olowibikina and Baby San Blas reassert Dule indigeneity in a non-Dule dominated space. Moreover, the layered existence of Dule ontologies in a boxing ring reaffirms identity, cultural practice and movement.

The boxing ring, as a counterpoint-counterplot space, turns into an extension of Dule indigeneity. As a space to assert Dule ontological practices, the ring becomes the gathering house for both the Dule boxer and Dule boxing fans. It represents agency to Dule poli-aesthetic ontology. It is a space where the Dule lifeworlds manifest in relation with, but independent from Panama’s lifeworlds. Dule medicinal practices carried into Panamanian boxing arena through Baby San Blas’ body show how Dule practices and cultural beliefs are integral not only to Dule society and people, but also with Panama’s stories shared by Dule and non-Dule Panamanians.

**Baby San Blas and Boxing: Counterpoint-Counterplot Practices**

The layers of the boxing world serve as a procedural poli-aesthetic performativity. They comprise a narrative that produces both commodity and entertainment, with the purpose of packaging and selling bodily images and performance to a consuming society. It is a narrative subject appropriated to create an act of “making do.” 93 It “concerns the types of operations and the role of spaces: strategies are able to produce, tabulate, and impose these spaces, when those

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operations take place, whereas tactics can only use, manipulate, and divert these spaces.  

An operational act occurs from any location and by any means. When it is in place, it can then be used in the practice of consumption.

The “ways of operating” and the “way of using” boxing, as a poli-aesthetic medium, can be drawn from Michel de Certeau’s analysis on consumption. He discusses the operation and consumption of cultural products as “no longer merely as data on the basis of which statistical tabulations of their circulation can be drawn up or the economic functioning of their diffusion understood, but also as parts of the repertory with which users carry out operations of their own.” He further clarifies that an act of active consumption occurs when “these facts are no longer the data of our calculations, but rather the lexicon of users’ practices.”

For example:

Thus, once the images broadcast by television and the time spent in front of the TV set have been analyzed, it remains to be asked what the consumer makes of these images and during these hours. The thousands of people who buy a health magazine, the customers of newspaper stories and legends—what do they make of what they “absorb,” receive, and pay for? What do they do with it?

This analysis considers how “images broadcast by television” effectuates a behavioral mode, such as “the time spent in front of the TV.” As the representation is analyzed through the modes of behavior, there is consumption of materials. This also occurs in boxing.

94 Ibid., 30.
95 Ibid.
96 Ibid., 30-31.
97 Ibid., 31.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid.
Boxing, as an operational act, serves a variety of purposes: an economic purpose and physical art. When viewed by the spectator in a gymnasium (the structural place), it becomes a place of consumption. The spectator consumes the place and all its amenities: the concession stand, the referee, the coaches, the boxers, the ring, the gloves, the judges, the chairs, the sounds, the smells and actions. As the place is being visually consumed, it generates and enables this type of consumption to be fueled by money. It is an economic space, one where money is moving certain elements into action: the boxers to fight, the judges to judge the fight, the referee to control the fight, the reserve seating for the spectator and the spatial reservation of the building (the gymnasium and boxing ring). As a result, a sporting narrative is created, not only by the visual consumer, but also by the economic operation that takes place.

Within that constructed space, one can operate inside, outside, and between the interstices of consumption. Such practices occur, for instance, in relationships between boxer and his opponent, boxer and audience, audience and boxer, referee and boxers, referee and judges, audience and judges, audience and referee, boxers and judges. The act of consumption, explains de Certeau, is “an entirely different kind of production.” 101 De Certeau clarifies the “way of using” interaction between the Spanish culture and Indigenous cultures as a place of consumption deriving from the same occupied space—similar in ways to how spectators use and consume the operation of boxing. 102 He states:

...the Indians often used the laws, practices, and representations that were imposed on them by force or by fascination to ends other than those of their conquerors; they made something else out of them; they subverted them from within—not by rejecting them or by transforming them (though that occurred as well), but by many different ways of using them in the service of rules, customs or convictions.

101 Ibid.
102 Ibid., 32.
foreign to colonization which they could not escape. They metaphorized the dominant order: they made it function in another register. They remained other within the system which they assimilated and which assimilated them externally. They diverted it without leaving it. Procedures of consumption maintained their difference in the very space that the occupier was organizing.\textsuperscript{103}

The consumption of the colonizer’s materialized products (laws, rules and practices for example) by “the other”—in this case, the Indians—establishes and constructs a shared space—the kind of action that exemplifies a counterpoint-counterplot action—that is, a location of Indigenous continued existence and resistance to total influence and domination of a hegemonic nation. In reference to boxing, there is a completely new system, wherein the identity and culture of a people, vis-à-vis a state are defined. Boxing, in modern Panama, defines a people and a culture similarly to Roland Barthes’ signified/signifier wrestling-like elements.

In “The World of Wrestling”, Roland Barthes analyzes the meaning of wrestling in a semiotic system through gestures, bodies, and actions of wrestlers and the audience who absorb these movements. The signifier function of wrestling is as “spectacle” and its importance to participants is based on “what it sees” and not “what it thinks.”\textsuperscript{104} Barthes makes this comparison between boxing and wrestling. He asserts, “A boxing-match is a story which is constructed before the eyes of the spectator; in wrestling, on the contrary, it is each moment which is intelligible, not the passage of time.”\textsuperscript{105} Wrestling is a place where “[e]ach sign…is therefore endowed with an absolute clarity, since one must always understand everything on the spot.”\textsuperscript{106} In addition, the body of the wrestler serves as the “basic sign” through “gestures, attitudes, and

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\textsuperscript{103} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 15-16.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 16-17.
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mimcry,” that is movement of a wrestler’s body, “arranges comments which are episodic but always opportune, and constantly help the reading of the fight.”

The body of an Indigenous boxer in Panama is closely related to Barthes’ wrestling-like features.

An Indigenous boxer such as Baby San Blas resembles Barthes’ wrestler, where the “function…is not to win; it is to go exactly through the motions which are expected of him.”

Indigenous boxers and boxing in Panama present a paradoxical spectacle to the public in the mere fact that “what the public wants is the image of passion, not passion itself.” In the case of Baby San Blas and boxing, the public wants the image of a minstrel-like performance displaying an indio and machigua, not the boxer himself. However, Baby San Blas’ bodily gestures in the boxing ring, moment by moment, dispelled and decoded—albeit for a moment—the public’s indio and machigua image and expectation.

Conclusion

The layers of the boxing world viewed through Baby San Blas’s performance, in and of itself, expose and assemble space for participants and their practices; while dismantling and re-constructing those practices. It is a location for a participant (boxer, audience member, referee, judge, etc) who develops a (de)coded “consumed” observation and understands the precise activity that is *being* operated.

Take, for instance, the audience’s consumption of Baby San Blas’ boxing matches and boxing promoters. Boxing promoters observe the public’s entertainment consumption and act on

\[107\] Ibid., 18.

\[108\] Ibid., 16.

\[109\] Ibid., 18.
it by converting the audience’s consumption from an entertainment space to an economic space. Baby San Blas’ presence and success in the boxing ring create a binary space: capital space for the promoters and entertainment space for the public.

Daniel Alonso describes, “al extremo de que los promotores de la época ponían a pelear a Baby San Blas porque sabrían que iba llevar a mucha gente a verlo porque era un boxeador muy aguerrido, muy valiente y muy rápido” (to the extent that promoters from that time put Baby San Blas to fight because they would know that would drive many people to see him because he was a seasoned boxer, very brave and very fast). Two things are happening in this single statement, that describe Baby San Blas’ boxing movements and influence: (1) the public sees a boxer and (2) promoters see money. Both the public and promoters consume and interpret two different stories, but in reality the body of Baby San Blas as a text, methodically invokes a counterpoint-counterplot that materializes a cultural-political genre of Dule’s cultural-political presence in the boxing ring and in Panamanian society.

Boxing carries out a national definition of who is Panamanian or not Panamanian based on race and gender. Racialization and genderization occur simultaneously between these two realms—that is to say, Dule male and female bodies are distinctly defined by gender and race. The process of racialization and genderization determines what has become the paradox of who is Panamanian and who is not Panamanian. This process is evident in the ways a Dule body is utilized and appropriated to facilitate in the creation of a Panamanian national identity.

The discourse of identity (that which defines what Panamanian culture appears to be and what it desires to be) creates sociopolitical tensions and constraints on the presence and placement of Dule men and women in Panamanian society. The tensions and constraints both

110 Daniel Alonso, Personal Interview.
within and even against the country’s ‘national’ identity enable Dule bodies to redefine, reinterpret and redraw spatial discourses of Dule existence in modern Panama and also beyond Panama’s borders. The visibility and invisibility of Dule boxing bodies gives strength to Dule cultural practices and ontology in spaces like the boxing ring. Therefore, it is not the Dule being defined by Panama; but rather, it is Panama being defined by the Dule. That result engenders a paradox.
Family Narrative: Poets of Gunayala, Panama…

In 2004, my Aunt Chava (my mom’s younger sister) sent materials for an art exhibition I was working on for the Pacific Traditions Gallery in Honolulu, Hawai‘i. The theme of the exhibition presented the role of textile art through modes of non-violent resistance in Dule culture. The items that my aunt sent included several molas, a map of Panama, a traditional Dule dress and an old newspaper article. The article, dated October 12, 2003 from El Siglo (The Century newspaper) focused on the works of Cuatro Poetas Kunas (Four Guna poets) responding to the theme of Creación (Creation). In this article, I found the works of Manipiniktikiya and Aristeydes Turpana.

In 2009, my friend José Colman also introduced me to the works of Aiban Wagua. In Panama, most non-Dule Panamanians are not aware of the importance and quality of Dule oratory, let alone its contemporary poets. Reading the words of these poets with their genealogical links, connect me to my Dule heritage. These words include: Ibeler, tinaja, Kueloyai and hamaca.

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CHAPTER 4

Fourth Layer: Gwage Layers of Poetry

Contemporary Dule discourse comprises of a spoken art form and printed text. Oral tradition and poetry alike share common experiences, while expressing an insurgence of cultural permanence. The Dule continue their reliance on oral tradition to this day. As more migrate toward urban areas, from rural Gunayala to the hustle and bustle of downtown Panamá City and Colón (Panama's two major cities,) the Dule bring with them many of their cultural practices and traditions. These include: the continuance of women wearing the mola dress, speaking Dulegaya (Dule language), teaching the ways of Babigala and also teaching urban Dule youth a variety of Dule art forms: dance, poetry, painting, theatre, music (for example in the case of Dule artists from El Taller Arte Guiled (translation: Guiled Arts Workshop, an urban Dule cultural art studio in Panama City.) In sum, Dule culture counterpoints-counterplots spaces outside of Gunayala in order to poli-aesthetically accommodate to new surroundings.

The evolution and perpetuation of oratory and written poetry exemplify, visibly the metamorphosis of Dule society and politics. For example, any time an individual, group, or community resists the attempts by another hegemonic group to assimilate, to colonize, and to oppress them; then their resistance is political. Any time a community and its members begin writing in a printed text or discourse, a modality that did not exist in a culture whose stories originate from oral tradition, then that too is political. It is political because written texts (such as contemporary poetry, periodicals, novels or essays) like oratory, function as a mechanism for communication in order to express directed actions of defiance against injustices committed by a
hegemonic group over another. Affirming the dual importance of oratory and written discourse alike, Osage intellectual Robert Warrior notes:

…literary texts are…part of larger processes of social and political engagement, and they are processes that Native people experience. Something similar is true of what has come to be known as the oral tradition.¹

The roles of oratory and written text in Native communities are politicized because both forms of discourse create outlets for a people, like the Dule, to persist within the larger, non-Indigenous society, continuing to practice their culture, way of life, tradition, language and history. Dule poets, like Manipiniktikiya, Aristeydes Turpana and Aiban Wagua, take the Western practice of writing and make it their own: a Dule way to describe their history, communicated through Dulegaya, share stories and engage in their daily lives and communities. Writing allows Dule poets to keep and sustain the culture and tradition not by replacing oral tradition, but by extending oratory in an additional format. In fact, the poetic writings are a poli-aesthetic extension of Dule oratory where the words are active agents that display a counterpoint-counterplot practice to reformat Dule presence and culture on paper.

This chapter examines the works of three Dule poets from Panama: Manipiniktikiya (Abadio Green), Aristeydes Turpana, and Aiban Wagua. In the examination of their poems, written in the Spanish language, several questions come to mind:

- What frustrates the artists?
- What angers them and what sustains them?
- Who are they?
- Who speaks to them?

Their poetic expression using the Spanish language demonstrates versatility in their existence in two worlds: the Dule and Panama (i.e., Western). James Howe, however, assumes Dule writers, such as the aforementioned, “seem caught in the contradiction between the written and spoken word.”² He states that Dule authors like “Abadio Green (2004) tries to resolve this contradiction through denial, by asserting that ‘the writing of indigenous peoples is life,’ that is, that oral and written are one and the same.”³ Howe’s assumption is inaccurate, however. There is no contradiction between orality and printed text. These two systems of communication complement and extend the range and communicative ability of each other. As will be demonstrated and explained in this chapter as well, the Dule writing poetry on paper reflects Dule oral tradition and a poetic counterpoint-counterplot expression through the modes of musicality, metaphors, descriptive imagery of the environment, Dule way of life and stories.

The Gathering House of Voice and Song on Paper

The fact that Dule oral tradition still exists today, alongside contemporary Dule poetry, demonstrates a layer of counterpoint-counterplot practices via the active usage of Dulegaya within both spoken art form and printed text. We see similar transformation in the cultures of other Indigenous peoples, whose stories originate from oral tradition and now exist also in written text form. Noenoe Silva, a Kanaka Maoli professor of Hawaiian Language and Political Science, asserts that in Kanaka Maoli culture the production of their own Indigenous language

² Howe, *Chiefs, Scribes, and Ethnographers*, 246.
³ Ibid., 246.
newspapers like *Ka Hoku o ka Pakipika* created “a revolution where ink flowed rather than blood and that took place largely in the reflection and recreation of the oral tradition.”

As oral tradition still exists today in Dule society, it continues to be a part of every aspect of the people’s political, economic and social realms. The addition of written discourse therein creates an extension to this verbal artistry. Poetry, thus, exists as a printed communication and art form to the Dule, much as the Hawaiian language newspapers like *Ka Hoku o ka Pakipika* for the Kanaka Maoli become a vehicle for “anticolonial resistance through the print media.”

This analysis confronts an idea that Chickasaw scholar Jodi Byrd describes, in "(Post) Colonial Plainsongs: Towards Native Literary Worldings", accordingly:

> The problem with hegemony is that one never does have to think about it, and all too often, Native scholars and authors are left with the task of confronting the unthinking hegemonies that continue to shape academic knowledges about indigenous peoples.

In the academic realm, where studies of Indigenous peoples are labeled and categorized, often by non-Indigenous peoples, there should be a methodology to non-violently resist the labeling of Indigenous peoples in Western academic structures. The non-violent resistance to academic compartmentalization creates an empowerment and independence from the realm of Western academia that, oddly enough, always finds a way to define Indigenous peoples. One mode, for example, as mentioned by Byrd through the works of Crow Creek Lakota poet and academic Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, is the necessity and importance to:


5 Ibid., 55.

…restructure Native studies to reflect the intellectual sovereignty of Native nations and to resist the fetishization of political independence by academic hobbyists, tourists, and the writers of fiction and memoir.\textsuperscript{7}

In the case of Dule, the peoples’ own literary works (which are currently absent from discussion) have to be included in Native studies. As will be discussed in this chapter, most “academic hobbyists, tourists, and writers of fiction and memoir” are non-Dule sociologists, linguists, anthropologists, and ethnographers who evaluate the studies of the Dule as a mimic and a primitive.\textsuperscript{8}

The lack of recognition given to Dule literature in Panama itself, and also elsewhere in Abiayala, places and categorizes Dule existence in Western academia through the myopic and limited studies of sociological, anthropological and ethnological frameworks. One example of how an anthropologist placed limitations upon and obscured significant aspects of Dule culture and existence in Panama is mentioned in David Stout’s \textit{San Blas Cuna Acculturation: An Introduction}.\textsuperscript{9} In this, James Howe points out:

\begin{quote}
While Stout gave due attention to Kuna relations with the government, newspapers, and political parties, he made so much of their North American leanings and connections as to obscure determined Kuna efforts to make a place for themselves in Panamanian society. In a modified, attenuated, scholarly form, Stout was still following Nordenskiöld and the amateurs from the Zone in defining the Kuna in terms of their separatism, characterizing them as essentially \textit{not-Panamanian}.\textsuperscript{10}
\end{quote}

The non-Dule’s separatist interpretation of Dule in Panamanian society is a common presumption that is seen and mentioned in the previous chapters, with regard to molas and boxing. Moreover, the practice of separating the Dule from Panamanian society is seen in areas

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{7} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{8} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{9} Howe, \textit{Chiefs, Scribes, and Ethnographers}, 187.
  \item \textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 188-189.
\end{itemize}
of Western literary genres. Howe asserts that works from prior amateur anthropologists, such as José Reverte’s 1968 work *Literatura oral de los indios cunas* (Oral Literature of the Kuna Indians) embraced Dule oratory to the extent that it “merited stylistic analysis.”\(^{11}\) Nevertheless, at the same time, Dule knowledges and stories were “swamped by European rhetoric, folklore theory, a priori assumptions, guesswork, and displays of erudition.”\(^{12}\) Reverte embraces the value of studying Dule oral poetry and stories—but only to skew them with misinterpretations that were non-Dule; it reaffirms a Western-centric position on Indigenous peoples like the Dule, insisting that their knowledge and practices were limited as “survivals from a past age whose greatest utility was to serve as living laboratories for investigators like himself [Reverte].”\(^{13}\)

Western ethnographers’ practices of acceptance and misinterpretation of the Dule and their culture are common. This common behavior is similar to Western religious institutions’ behavior toward the Dule and their way of life, exemplified in the presence in Gunayala of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, i.e. Mormons.

José Colman shares his encounter and conversation among a group of non-Dule Mormons with a young Dule Mormon convert. The non-Dule Mormons asked the young Dule if he believed in the stars and worshipped idol carved figures called *nuchu*. This form of conversation was a way to devalue the young Dule’s culture and identity.\(^{14}\) Even after joining their faith, the young Dule man was still placed in the figurative position of a “savage”—or, as

\(^{11}\) Ibid., 192.

\(^{12}\) Ibid.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 193.

\(^{14}\) José Colman, Personal Interview.
Christians like to say a “non-believer.” Colman reminded the non-Dule Mormons they were in the Gathering House. He describes:


(And I said to him, “You were in the House of Congress.” And I said, “The House of Congress is the temple of the Guna. And the House of Congress cannot have a cross because the Guna are not Christians. That does not mean we do not believe in god. We believe in god. But, for example, my grandparents could not say Christ because they did not know who is Christ. And they had not read the Bible. But that does not mean they did not believe in god. And Christ belongs to a culture. It is true that this culture believe in Christ. But we here belong to another culture. And otherwise communicate with god through other songs and we are in communion.” And they said no. And I said, ”We are in the House of Congress where it is the temple of the Guna, where they meet and the Guna communicate with god.”)

Colman reminds these non-Dule that they are visitors in Gunayala. He makes clear to them that even if Dule form of spiritual belief and expression is different from the Mormon, they both share similar values. He reminds them the Casa de Congreso is a temple and therefore, it is sacred.

The onmaggednega or the Casa de Congreso symbolizes the Dule nation, with the latter representing its political structure. Each stick that is used in constructing the onmaggednega represents a person, according to hierarchy (see Figure 13).
Figure 13. A roof of a Dule house. Photograph by Sue Patricia Haglund.

It forms a place where all community members are active participants and where “Las decisiones trascendentales que impactan a la comunidad se toman de forma conjunta; igual aquellas que no tengan mayor impacto. Nadie debe imponer sus ideas, la interdependencia, la interrelación constituyen la base de sus relaciones cotidianas.” (Important decisions that affect the community are taken together, as those who do not have the greatest impact. No one should impose their ideas, interdependence, interrelation is the basis of their daily relationships).\(^\text{17}\) Onmaggednega is connected to Bulaled (community), Kuamakaled (unity) and Kuenadigualde (fraternity).\(^\text{18}\) These three principles are deeply rooted in society and guide Dule in everyday life.\(^\text{19}\) It is a sacred place for Dule oratory and poetry. It is a temple of music and literature. It is the gathering place for all Dule in the sacredness of Dule identity and way of life. From this gathering place, we can

\(^{16}\) Anelio Merry López, *Nega: Casa Kuna como Símbolo de Organización Social Una Guía Interpretativa* (Panama: Instituto de Investigaciones Koskun Kalu del Congreso General de la Cultura Kuna, 2003), 8.

\(^{17}\) Ibid.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 9.

\(^{19}\) Ibid.
then see a counterpoint-counterplot form of gathering place of voice and song emerge, on pen and paper.

**Dule Discourse: Poetic Counterpoint-Counterplot Expressions**

The experience of writing can be tedious and difficult for a writer; yet, the end result of the work is an art form. Stream-of-consciousness is the center of creativity of a writer (artist). It is where ideas are designed and created; beginning of a “thought” art. Martin Heidegger explains:

> The artist is the origin of the work. The work is the origin of the artist. Neither is without the other. Nevertheless, neither is the sole support of the other. In themselves and in their interrelations artist and work are each of them by virtue of a third thing which is prior to both, namely that which also gives artist and work of art their names—art.  

Such a compact is made between the artist and the work. Without the artist, there is no work of art. Without the work of art, there is no artist. In essence, the work comes from within the artist’s very being. The source can be anything from within it: a memory, a smell, a laughter, a place, a person, an emotion or environment. In other words, it is the inspiration of the beginning: the beginning of the artist’s creation.

The source and driving force of inspiration enable notions to manifest in various forms of discourse, through songs, paintings, textile art, music or dance. Through forms of communication such as verbal, written or body languages, inspiration guides the artist in creating an account.

What is the account? It varies from historical events to the creation of life, universe, earth and humankind. It is a discourse that individuals or groups record and re-tell to the next generation, about a people’s shared experience or event(s). As in most Western cultures, such as

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20 Heidegger, 17.
that of the United States of America, events are recorded in various forms: dances, music, songs, paintings, and words (verbal and written). We find these same practices among Dule.

Traditionally, in Dule society, events are recorded through dance, music, chants, songs, and in textile art. However, it is common practice that historic events and legends are verbally shared among Dule within the family or in communal settings. Joel Sherzer says that “the myths and counsels of chiefs; the histories, legends, and stories of traditional leaders…tellings and retellings of humorous anecdotes; and the greetings …conversations, narrations, and joking of everyday life. All of this is oral—spoken, chanted, sung, shouted, whispered, and listened to.”

Oral expression is a traditional practice in Dule society. It is an art form that, as Kiowa author N. Scott Momaday describes, “helps us to understand that words are more valuable…It demonstrates the importance of memory and the importance of listening carefully.,” thus engaging both the storyteller and the audience. Oral expression as an artistic performance crosses over all facets of the Dule way of life: political, social, economic, and ceremonial. Sherzer points out, “verbal forms which Kuna people themselves, through their performances of these oral forms and their appreciation of them, indicate that they consider to be verbally artistic.” Dule oral expression comprises an instrument of sounds.

Like poetry in Western culture, the sounds are in verses, rhythms and tones. Sherzer emphasizes that the voice performance in Dule culture is filled with:

…patterned repetitions of sounds, words, grammatical forms, and meanings, including assonance and rhyme, figurative and symbolic language, rhetorical and

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22 Charles L. Woodard, Ancestral Voice: Conversations with N. Scott Momaday (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 120.

23 Joel Sherzer, “Kuna Language and Literature,” 105.
metaphorical devices, storytelling and humor, and the manipulation of grammar for poetic effect.\textsuperscript{24}

The Dule presentation of spoken words, as Sherzer describes—especially, in the way language is used to verbally express emotions, viewpoints and rituals—reminds one of what in the U.S., is known as “slam poetry.” It is a type of poetic performance sometimes influenced and/or accompanied by “urban” music (a genre dominated by African-Americans and, to a lesser but significant extent, U.S. Latinos) for background effect, while a performer is onstage. In the city of Honolulu in Hawai‘i, for example, First Thursdays is a monthly event in which slam poets verbally and artistically give voice to social, political and economic injustices (such as poverty, homelessness, domestic violence, discrimination and war). It speaks to the audience and to the spirit of the people.

Sherzer further asserts that verbal expression in Dulegaya or dule language is distinguished through the power of oral tradition as performance, carrying sound in different ways like “…silence, creating intonation and melody, rhythm, balance, suspense…imitating other voices and sounds…”\textsuperscript{25} The Dule voice serves as a music box, so much like much of the poetry written from a Western cultural expression. When poetry is read aloud, there is a musicality of form and function. Some of these technical components include the “voice and tone and its concentrated use of connotative diction, figures of speech, imagery, symbols, sound and rhythm.”\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 104.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 113.

Aiban Wagua, a Dule writer and historian, affirms that in Dule society, literature is life.\textsuperscript{27} He maintains:

Todas las luchas que ha librado el pueblo kuna han surgido de su mismo lenguaje-vivencia...Por lo tanto los relatos míticos en el pueblo kuna constituyen una herramienta de lucha. Precisamente porque la lengua kuna es oral ha servido como herramienta de resistencia en estos 500 años frente a la cultura dominante.

(All the struggles that has freed the Guna has emerged from their language-experience ... So the mythical stories in Guna are a tool of struggle. Precisely because the Guna language is oral [it] has served as a tool of resistance in these 500 years compared to the dominant culture.)\textsuperscript{28}

These stories are recounted in the onmaggednega where Dule, from a very young age, sit and listen to accounts of history from a sagla, who narrates them in diverse styles. The stories are told so that footprints of Dule grandparents are not erased, but continue with each generation and are understood at the current time period.\textsuperscript{29}

José Colman avers that poetry is politics in Dule society. \textit{There is no separation between the art and politics:}

Es muy obvio de que Gunayala está gobernado por poetas. Primero porque como comentaba la oralidad todo el contenido metafórico para orientar, para dirigir a la comunidad. Está lleno de palabras poéticas las metáforas de que se usan. Porque para ser dirigente, para ser sagla de la comunidad las personas no se escogen al azar. Sino que escogan personas estudiadas de la cultura guna, su historia, su pasado, su Babigala, el camino hacia el ser supremo. Y todo ese conocimiento, por ejemplo, terapéutico, cantos, los ritos tienen un lenguaje propio. Que habla solamente los que han estudiado diferentes conocimientos o tratados de la cultura guna. O sea tiene que ser una persona versada en su propio origen, en su conocimiento profundo de la tierra, del universo para poder gobernar a estos pequeños pueblos. Por eso cuando el sagla de la comunidad se dirige a la


\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
(It is very obvious that poets govern Gunayala. First, because as I said orality [is] all metaphorical content in order to guide and lead the community. It is full of metaphors, poetic words that are used. Because to be a leader, to be sagla of the community, people are not chosen at random. But they choose people who studied the Guna culture, its history, its past, Babigala, the way to the supreme being. And all that knowledge, for example, therapeutic, songs, rituals have their own language. Speaking only those who have studied different knowledge or discourse in the Guna culture. So it must be a person knowledgeable in their [Dule] origin, in their knowledge of the earth, the universe, in order to be able to govern these small communities. So when the sagla addresses the community, he does with metaphorical words, in song and there is an argar that translates it into plain language, the common speech of the Guna in order to understand it.)

Every experience in Dule society has a form of poetic counterpoint-counterplot expression. Dule socio-cultural mannerisms sing into existence a poli-aesthetic ontology. From the sagla’s metaphorical stories to the argar’s interpretation of them into common speech for the rest of Dule community members, there is an ontological fluidity of movements (with)in the narratives. Dule orality and stylings traverse onto printed text of contemporary Dule poets.

The similarities between Dule oral performance and the styling of Western poetry can be found in the works of Dule poets: Manipiniktikiya (Abadio Green), Aristeydes Turpana and Aiban Wagua. The poetic counterpoint-counterplot works of these writers illustrate and represent Dule culture in a variety of ways, while taking apart previous narratives and understandings made by non-Dule. These Dule poets’ written works of art convey various symbols and meanings of Nabgwana, Babigala and the history of the Dule people as well as the reflections of Dule community members living in Gunayala. Like their performances, these poets continue the tradition of their counterparts in the choice of words, the imagery and tone of voice.
The First Counterpoint-Counterplot Expression: Manipiniktikiya’s Poem

“Tinaja” is a short poem, in which the poet Manipiniktikiya uses imagery to symbolize both place and historical events in Dule culture. It is about the relationship of historical events and natural surroundings that bind the Dule as a people and society together. Manipiniktikiya reverberates history as told by the elders; a history of resistance against the process of assimilation into Panamanian society:

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\begin{align*}
    \text{Que la tinaja tiene vida} & \quad \text{That tinaja has life} \\
    \text{Que la tinaja representa} & \quad \text{That tinaja represents} \\
    \text{La resistencia de nuestro pueblo} & \quad \text{The resistance of our people} \text{.}^{31}
\end{align*}
\]

The “tinaja” is an earthenware jar. This pottery symbolizes the earth. It is material made of the land, thus from its origin the tinaja is transformed from clay to a jar. The pottery itself is in a new form of life. It is created from small particles of the earth to become an object used for everyday tasks, such as food preparation. In a greater essence, the tinaja also becomes a place of resistance for the Dule—because like the Dule themselves, the strength of the tinaja brings forth the strength of the people who resist the invasion and complete assimilation into the culture of the West.

What is the resistance that the poet refers to? By referring to Dule history, the reader can understand the type of resistance the speaker is referring to. For instance, the Dule “in 1900…had enjoyed more than a century of peace, following two hundred years of intermittent war against the Spanish empire.”\textsuperscript{32} However, several years later, the Dule faced a “quarter-century of conflict with outside powers who wished to subdue, exploit, and make them over, as

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\textsuperscript{32} Howe, \textit{A People Who Would}, 5.
well as quarrel among themselves about how to respond.” Examples of hegemonic powers that sought to either assimilate the Dule or steal the lands include landless farmers, missionaries (Catholics/Protestants) and the Panamanian government.

Dule resistance, although it is briefly described in the poem, is largely symbolic for the poet. It demonstrates how a people and nation come together to fortify themselves, like in the tinaja, from outside invasion. The armed resistance of 1925 Dule revolution, the Dule (both men and women) fought as warriors against Panamanian colonial police forces. As a group of Dule men took up weapons for protection and preservation of Dule traditions and culture, Dule women stood by wearing their traditional mola dress (even though it was banned in the early 1900s by Panamanian colonial police) in order to express their full resistance to assimilation to the Panamanian society. These warriors, in Dulegaya, are described as *uri* (singular form for warrior) or *urigan* (plural form for warriors), *macheret urwed* (man who fights) and *ome urwed* (woman who fights). In addition, by mentioning resistance, most Dule would automatically understand that Manipiniktikiya is referring to or calling to the reading mind, all of this history.

Henry Wassén refers to Dule warriors in a 1938 essay writing about the founding history of a Dule isle community named Narganá, as told by Inatoigiña (former Dule sagla of Tupile). According to Dule history, Dada Golosina (a Dule leader) and his associate Dada Orgun Ibe (a Dule leader) arrive to Narganá from the mountains near the Madungandi (also known as the

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33 Ibid.
34 Tice, 61-62.
35 Ibid., 62.
36 José Colman, Personal Interview; and Roberto Martínez Owen, Personal Interview.
37 Wassén, 20.
Bayano) River.\textsuperscript{38} Prior to their arrival, as Dada Golosina prepare for the journey to the Atlantic coast, Inatoigiña narrates:

First \textit{Dada Golosina} gathered his people and all his \textit{hurris} [e.g. warriors] or \textit{kingitules}; it was two days before his journey. His trip began at \textit{R. Madungandi}, the great river which empties into the Pacific Ocean. He had with him on the trip a great retinue, women and warriors. The main ones among the warriors who followed him were \textit{Susucua, Nipsicui, Quiki, Quiblu, Achu, Cuampú}. It was the great warriors who fought against the Spaniards and at that time defended our tribe who as a token of this were called the \textit{kingitule}—the bow people.\textsuperscript{39}

Inatoigiña shares a vital piece of Dule knowledge and history regarding Dule migration and warriors. Most significantly is the notation of Dule warriors, \textit{hurris} and \textit{kingitules} (regardless of spelling variation of hurris versus uri/urigan.) The Dule understanding of what defines a warrior, thus, contradicts that of Kanien’kehaka scholar and activist Taiaiake Alfred. He writes, “[F]or the Kuna: there is no literal equivalent for the English term [warrior]…and the closest approximation is \textit{napa-sapgued}, meaning ‘One who protects or guards the land, or nature.’”\textsuperscript{40} Alfred states that the Dule lacked a term for “warriors” in their own language.\textsuperscript{41} To clarify his position, Alfred states, “To get at this notion beyond my own people’s cultural heritage, I asked a number of people from different nations to tell me what the \textit{warrior} word was in their own language….”\textsuperscript{42} In his chapter endnotes, Alfred explains that the term for warrior in Dulegaya was provided by Anishinaabe scholar Brock Pitawanakwat (who speaks Spanish, but

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 21.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
I draw out Alfred’s usage of the Dule term for warrior in order to demonstrate the perils of lexical misrepresentation. Unintentionally, this misrepresentation takes away and discounts the Dule urigan (warrior) history which, in turn, makes it invisible.

Another example of misrepresentation is found in Alfred’s account on the Dule. He describes them as “a people who interact mostly with Panamanians, Spanish-speaking Settlers.” This statement says very little about who the Dule are as a people. Surely, Dule are more than being a people who exist only per their proximity to others. Alfred’s description does not fully take into account the complexity and nuance needed to fully describe a people. The Dule are a prime example of a people whose culture is still intact, they exercise the right of self-determination and oral tradition continues to be an integral practice in their communities. The aforementioned examples make clear that certain ideas assumed and/or applied to Dule and Dule culture from outsiders—for example, the term “warrior,” of which it is said Dule have no equivalent to the English term—place limitations upon how others may view them. This outsider-driven misrepresentation and misinterpretation is problematic. The unwanted, problematic viewpoints overlook all interactions and history the Dule had with other persons who reside in Panama and those who reside outside the country’s territorial borders. These groups include other Indigenous peoples of Panama, as well as, settlers from Jamaica, Colombia, Scotland, France, and the United States. These groups did not speak Spanish, yet they have an extensive history of interactions with the Dule. Obviously, this links back to my earlier

43 Ibid., 100.
44 Ibid., 80.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
discussion of the mola and its existence in different locations, such as Dule traditional wear or a product logo. In essence, the representation and usage of words do matter.

In contrast to Alfred’s deduction however, the Dulegaya term urigan is in fact, a “…literal equivalent for the English term…”47 warriors. In fact, Aiban Wagua clarifies that urigan are combative Dule fighters trained to defend Gunayala.48 José Colman further explains of what happens to an uri after a battle and returns to his/her community:

Sean preparados esas personas y cuando ellos regresan, la propia comunidad los aisla por varios meses lejos de la comunidad en un lugar tranquilo como para humanizar de nuevo a las personas que fueron a combatir.

(These people are prepared and when they return, the community itself isolates them for several months away from the community in a quiet place in order to humanize again the people who went to fight.)49

After every battle, the urigan must complete a process for community reintegration. The isolation and purification rituals are ways to re-focus and re-integrate the urigan back to Dule society.50 This is similar to Baby San Blas’ usage of nikeeua for protection in the boxing ring, the urigan’s isolation cleanses and protects a Dule’s burba (spirit), but also the community’s burba.51

Most specifically, days after the 1925 Dule Revolution, the urigan stayed away from the community-at-large in order to perform “purification to rid them of the pollution of blood and danger from their victims’ souls, detaching them from war and effecting their reentry into life.”52

47 Ibid.
48 Wagua, Así lo vi, 150-151.
49 José Colman, Personal Interview.
50 Howe, A People Who Would, 272.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
Obviously then, the Dule do have a term for warrior, which designates community members trained to combat and defend their lands and way of life. Wagua eloquently describes:

Los urigan eran nuestros abuelos que combatían contra los invasores, contra los europeos, contra los wagas. Los urigan eran defensores de esta tierra, nuestros combatientes. Como se trataba de muerte, de peligro, les decían urigan. Eran seleccionados entre los mejores cazadores, entre los mejores flecheros y arqueros, entre los que corrían más, entre los que conocían mejor los escondites de las selvas, entre los que no tenían miedo a morir. Los urigan eran sometidos a baños medicinales para correr mejor, para esconderse rápidamente, para no perderse en las selvas.

(The urigan were our grandfathers who fought against invaders, against Europeans, against wagas. The urigan were defenders of this land, our fighters. Since this was death, danger, we called them urigan. They were selected among the best hunters, among the best arrow makers and archers, including those who were running more, among those who knew better hiding places in the forests, including those who were not afraid to die. The urigan were undergoing medicinal baths to run better, to hide quickly, to avoid getting lost in the jungles.)

As Colman reminds us, an uri never wants to enter into battle unnecessarily, but if there is a threat of invasion the uri would be obligated to defend Gunayala and Dule culture as demonstrated throughout the people’s history, from the Spanish invasion to the 1925 Dule Revolution.

Much like with interpreting meanings in Dule poetry about the resistance, one has to consider not only what question is being asked, but also how it is asked, in order to receive an accurate answer. Thus, as the poet describes the ‘tinaja’ representing the Dule resistance, a couple of questions the reader should ask are: (1) What resistance is the speaker referring to? (2) And what are these Dule (male and female) warriors resisting? The urigan, both macheret urwed and ome urwed, fought in the resistance of the 1925 Dule Revolution in the revolt against

53 Wagua, Así lo vi, 135-136.
54 José Colman, Personal Interview.
assimilation and cultural annihilation. As a result, this story of resistance in 1925 is shared from one generation to the next, as Manipiniktikiya describes, “Cuentan mis abuelos” (My grandfathers say).\(^{55}\)

In other Dule stories similar generational linkages are made which serve to erase time and allow the people to sit with one another. These stories allow great, great, great grandfathers to speak to their children. For instance, Manipiniktikiya describes the Dule drinking a liquor drink, fermented cane, used in Dule ceremonial practices.\(^{56}\) With the description that a Dule drinks, he continues:

\[
\begin{align*}
Esa \text{ caña fermentada hasta la saciedad} & \quad \text{Drink’s one fill of the fermented cane} \\
Porque beber es recordar el camino de los mayores & \quad \text{Because to drink is to remember the elders’ ways} \\
Es embriagarnos con nuestra historia. & \quad \text{Is to intoxicate us with our history.}
\end{align*}
\]

The “Dule” represents the people.\(^{58}\) In honoring the Dule as a nation, it is only right for one to drink the “caña fermentada” (fermented cane).\(^{59}\) It is a way to pay homage to one’s elders who have gone before them.\(^{60}\) The power of the drink is understood as something magical, thus defining a realm in which history and reality meet. The intoxication that one experiences, therefore, is not the liquor itself but the knowledge of the history through which older generations paved for the new ones. Inebriation following consumption of the liquor, as

\(^{55}\) Manipiniktikiya, 26.

\(^{56}\) Ibid.

\(^{57}\) Ibid.

\(^{58}\) Dule or Dule refers to the Guna as a group or individual.

\(^{59}\) Manipiniktikiya, 26.

\(^{60}\) Ibid.
described by de Certeau, intersects and links language, memory and customs.61 Similar to the boxing ring, consuming the fermented beverage serves as a catalyst and an extension of Dule poli-aesthetic ontology. It occupies and evokes indigeneity in ephemeral, phenomenological spaces shifting this from thought to memory and from language to speech. Regardless, these shifting words and historical memory invocations, like the tinaja, fortify and unite Dule people in multi-layered existences.

“Tinaja” reflects Dule history in printed text. The printed poetry, like oratory, brings out the description of “either personal experiences or those of others…descriptions of new events…[telling and retelling of the same story] whether first person or third person, fact or fiction, myth or history, spoken or chanted, ritual or everyday.”62 There is a link between narrative forms: spoken and written.

Martin Heidegger asserts that, “Projective saying is poetry: the saying of the world and earth….”63 Both forms of poetry, spoken and printed, convey musicality as well as impart the meaning of the speaker’s thoughts and expressive viewpoints to reader and listener alike. By utilizing oral tradition alongside written text, the artist (speaker and/or writer) not only empowers him/herself, but the audience as well, to gain knowledge of language, history, cultural traditions, and ways of living.

In *Writing as Witness: Essay and Talk*, Kanien’kehaka author Beth Brant points out that, “Oral tradition requires a telling and a listening that is intense, and intentional. Giving, receiving, giving—it makes a complete circle of Indigenous truth. [So too]…writing utilizes the power and

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62 Joel Sherzer, “Kuna Language and Literature,” 112.
63 Heidegger, 71.
gift of story, like oral tradition, to convey history, lessons, culture and spirit. As a result, the combination of these two art forms illustrates the power of knowledge. Both the speaker and the writer design their art of storytelling in a particular way that enables them to reflect back to the origin of their creation. That is to say:

The origin of the work of art—that is, the origin of the both the creators and the preservers, which is to say of a people’s historical existence, is art. This is so because art is by nature an origin: a distinctive way in which truth comes into being, that is, becomes historical.

In Dule society, there is a great distinction among the different levels or types of knowledge that each community member possesses, how this knowledge is distributed and these knowledges combine to form the whole. Mary Helms makes note of Erland Nordenskiöld’s and Joel Sherzer’s observations on Dule knowledge distribution. In Helm’s words, Nordenskiöld indicates that in Dule society, knowledge is “distributed differentially among individuals…in such a way that no one knows ‘everything.’” In regards to medicinal practices, plants, and chants, Nordenskiöld directly states, “the knowledge of these men [medicinal specialists] can cover very different fields and their statements can be varying…Different medicine men can be specialists in different evil spirits. It is obvious that there is no single Indian who knows all medicines, evil spirits, sagas, traditions, and so forth.”

65 Heidegger, 75.
66 Mary W. Helms, Ancient Panama (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), 122.
68 Nordenskiöld, with Pérez Kantule, xvii.
Following Nordenskiöld’s observations, Joel Sherzer, with regard to the role of “persons present” during a Dule girl’s puberty ceremony, points out that they can be viewed as “‘non-knowing auditors,’ aware of the social and stylistic significance of the kantule’s ikar [the way of the kantule], but not its referential details.”69 Sherzer, like Nordenskiöld, makes a point to distinguish and separate the role of the ceremonial specialist from that of the typical community member. By doing so, he clarifies that the knowledge differential between participant and specialist is not so much the case of knowledge between “haves and have-nots,” as Helms surmises of Sherzer’s point. Rather it marks the “distinction between those who ‘know in depth’ and those who ‘know superficially.’”70

Hence Manipiniktikiya’s poem, “Tinaja,” (see Figure 14) is a reflection of knowledge shared between the speaker (i.e. the poet) and the reader. The symbolic meaning of (earthenware jar)’tinaja’ and ‘la resistencia’ reflects the speaker’s knowledge of his/her history and culture. However, the reader could only, to all appearances, assume who the Dule are, where they come from and what they experience.


Figure 14. A Sianala or Sianar, a brazier earthenware used to burn cacao in Dule ceremonies. This sianar, photographed above, is a gift given to the author from Dule Artist Achu Oswaldo DeLeón Kantule and it was made by the artist’s sister. Photograph by Sue Patricia Haglund.

The Second Expression: Aristeydes Turpana’s Poem

Aristeydes Turpana’s poem, “Archipiélago”, describes particular facets of Dule everyday life in Gunayala. The territory comprises a “long, narrow strip of mainland jungle extending two hundred kilometers along the coast and fifteen to twenty kilometers inland and an archipelago of 365 small islands.”\(^{71}\) Hence, as it is evident in “Archipiélago”, the reader is given the sense of a village located by the sea. For instance, the poet states:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>En mi pueblo marino</td>
<td>In my marine village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al llegar la pesca de tortuga...</td>
<td>Arriving turtle fishing...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...Así llegan las lluvias</td>
<td>...Like that, the rains come back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allá en mi pueblo</td>
<td>Over there in my village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junto al mar.(^{72})</td>
<td>By the sea.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{71}\) Tice, 3.

Turpana provides to the reader the visual imagery of the Dule way of life, but he also gives the reader an image of a Dule community’s natural surroundings and how the people relate to them. He depicts a marine village and one of the every day maritime tasks of a Dule with the words “en mi pueblo marino/Al llegar la pesca de tortuga” (In my marine village/Arriving turtle fishing). 73 Indeed, Dule communities’ proximities to the ocean and its plentiful marine life allow the people to gather sea life for their daily diet comprising lobster, fish, or turtles, to name a few. It is quite evident from this first stanza, that the Dule “Se alimentan de peces y mariscos” (Nourish themselves with fish and seafood). 74 It describes a common Dule meal known as Dule Masi, comprising a coconut stew, served with fish or other seafood on the side.

As nightfall descends and the jungle is silent, Turpana describes that one can hear the sound of the hammocks swaying from side to side. 75 An example of hammocks’ soft rhythm and tempo, he writes:

\[
\begin{align*}
Bajo pulsaciones de tinieblas & \quad \text{Under the pulsating darkness} \\
Se oyen chirriar las hamacas & \quad \text{One hears the screeching sounds of hammocks}
\end{align*}
\]

His choice of words, such as “pulsaciones de tinieblas” (pulsating darkness) and “chirriar las hamacas” (screeching sounds of hammocks), describe the slow, melodic tune of a lullaby. 77 When Turpana is talking about the sound of the hammocks, the rhythm that they make, he is talking about the rhythm of Dule life—strong and vibrant. The hammock symbolizes the place of various aspects of Dule everyday life in different communal settings: as a place to sleep, as a

73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
place to bury the dead and as a place to procreate. In a community gathering, the hammock is a place where the saglas lie down while leading a community meeting, telling a story or chanting, and even in medicinal rituals the hammocks are used during events like a complicated childbirth.

In his work, “The World of Spirit, Disease, and Curing”, Mac Chapin talks about the positioning of the woman, the midwife and chanter during a Dule childbirth ritual. Chapin notes that during a difficult childbirth, “while the midwives take care of the woman, the chanter positions himself on a wooden stool at the head of her hammock, places some dried chile peppers on the coals of a clay brazier to keep the bonigana at bay, and begins to intone his chant.” The position of the chanter “at the head of her [woman’s] hammock” is an example on how the hammock is used in diverse settings in Dule daily life. The hammock is the symbol of Dule life in total (as mentioned in the first chapter of this dissertation). It represents Dule cycle of life: procreation, birth and death. As Achu eloquently summarizes:

the Hammock is the centre or the heart of Kuna culture. Not only is the hammock our resting place at the end of the day; it is also used to cradle our mortal remains when we begin our voyage to our next life after death. The hammock is the place from which our Sailas, or spiritual guides, sing to us everyday in our meeting house, relaying our collective memory through sacred songs. When we are sick, our healers sing to us while we lie in our hammocks, and burn cocoa seeds in a clay pot under the hammock, helping them to travel to other dimensions in order to cure us.


79 Ibid.

80 Iguanape Purbagana, Personal Interview.

Next, the description of the flora and fauna in the second stanza gives the reader a sense of the natural environment. Turpana speaks of the growth of new vegetation and the fragrant smell of plums as reflecting life’s cycle. The smell of fresh fruit in the air and the rebirth of flowers blooming in a coconut grove signify the ongoing processes of nature. Just as men and women do their daily tasks like cooking, fishing or taking care of the family, so, too, does the earth take care of its flora and fauna (of which the Dule are a part) by providing sunlight and rain.

“Archipiélago” also gives the audience an insight to the poet/speaker’s personal memories and experiences of living in Gunayala, although no specific isle community is mentioned. The poet reveals a common Dule lifestyle as lived among the typical flora and fauna among all communities (see Figure 15).

![Figure 15. Agligandi, Gunayala. Photograph by Sue Patricia Haglund.](image)

In Gunayala, the Dule are “primarily farmers and fishermen…[hence they obtain] a large part of their protein from ocean fish…[Furthermore] their lifestyle is definitely conditioned by their

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82 Turpana, 26.
83 Ibid.
location on islands near the coast.” Both poems, “Tinaja” and “Archipiélago,” exemplify written discourse. Like Dule tradition, they impart sounds, rhythm, choice of words, tempos, tones, and visual elements in the written poetry that characterize the history, culture, life lessons, personal accounts and daily life in a Dule community.

The Third Expression: Aiban Wagua’s Poem

In “Civiliza mi corazón, mamá,” Aiban Wagua references Dule-specific narratives and names as a way to distinguish Dule culture from Panamanian culture. Wagua refers to varied elements of Dule culture, medicinal practices, and stories. The rhythmic tone of the poem illustrates angst, sensitivity, pain, loss, disconnect and yearning for connection to a cultural identity. Raúl Leis points out that these verses speak to a profound pain that was so great that the Dule man forgot his name. The reclamation of Dule medicinal practice, culture, and identity is revealed in the recitation of Dulegaya phrases.

Throughout the poem, Wagua calls out myriad phrases that reference medicine, for example, using words reflecting medicinal practices, language and practitioners. He uses inaduledi (medicine man specializing in curing and plants), akuanusa (smooth stone used in Dule therapy) and siguanala (clay brazier). In terms of culture, he names akebir’uala (medicinal shrub), suara, koke, kangi (musical instruments used in Dule culture), Tad Ibe and Ibelele (names of the same being who represent freedom, goodness and value) and usuyae (the

84 Ventocilla, 59.


87 Aiban Wagua, De la Tinaja Kuna (Ustupu, Gunayala, 1987), 35.
agouti [a type of rodent related to guinea pigs] dance).\textsuperscript{88} Lastly, Wagua mentions Kueloyai (mother of the frogs in Dule stories).\textsuperscript{89}

Wagua writes:

\begin{quote}
Vengo muy pobre, mamá
recoge mi hatillo de ropa sudada
y mira que no queda nada en la calabaza
de la chicha fresca
que se llevó tu adolescente unas lunas atrás.

Heme aquí, mamá
tu pequeño cazador apiñado lanzas,
desamado y asustado
con una hamaca proletaria mal enrollada.

Vengo lastimado, mamá
he mamado los pechos de Kueloyai
y entre tanta arma ajena
perdí hasta mi nombre \textsuperscript{90}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
I come very poor, mommy
pick up my bundle of sweaty clothes
and see that there is nothing in the gourd
of fresh chicha
that took your adolescent many moons ago.

Here I am, Mommy
your little hunter crowding spears
unloved and scared
with a badly wounded proletrian hammock.

I come hurt, Mommy
I sucked the breasts of Kueloyai
and among such alien weapon
I lost even my name.
\end{quote}

“Civiliza mi corazón, mamá” opens with the speaker crying out to his mother for comfort. The speaker calls on the variety of mother figures one finds in Dule culture: Nana (the Great Mother), Gabayai (Ibler’s mother), a cry to Nabgwana (Mother Earth) as well as one’s biological mother. The mother figure in Dule culture is “everything,” and as José Colman clarifies further, the woman is represented and depicted through molas, therapeutic songs, Babigala and ecological surroundings.\textsuperscript{91} The repetitious usage of “mamá” calls attention to the speaker’s layered

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{90} Wagua, “Civiliza mi corazón, mamá,” 110.

\textsuperscript{91} José Colman, Personal Interview.
The above stanzas display myriad emotions, detailed and layered on top of each other. Similar to the layers of a mola, their adjectival phrases describe the feeling of emptiness Dules experience when one is separated from his/her spiritual-cultural communities and/or is confined to an unrecognizable place. This is reflected in Wagua’s choice of words: “very poor,” “sweaty clothes,” “unloved and scared,” “badly wounded,” “hurt” and “lost.” These terms simultaneously isolate and integrate the speaker’s emotional process on regard to Dule history and community.

Furthermore, the thread of connectivity is displayed when Wagua refers to “fresh chicha,” “proletarian hammock” and “Kueloyai.” As described in the abovementioned poem, chicha is fermented cane liquor and is a vital component in a Dule girl’s puberty ceremony. Symbolically, this drink fortifies and connects the speaker to his/her Dule communal practices as seen in Manipiniktikiya’s “Tinaja.” The difference, however, is the emotion behind the expressive usage of chicha. In “Tinaja”, the liquor is an empowerment to invoke historical memory and present-day solidarity. However, contrary to that is the way in which the drink is noted in “Civiliza Mi Corazón, Mamá” as a lamentable longing for what is missed. The chicha mediates a reconnection to culture that is otherwise inaccessible where the speaker currently resides.


93 Ibid.

94 Ibid., 110.

95 Ibid.
Wagua does not specify the current whereabouts of the speaker. Nevertheless, through usage of the phrases “protelatrian hammock” and “Kueloyai,” the speaker is a Dule who probably lives outside of Gunayala. The experience that the speaker describes as having endured is one of deception—Kueloyai. In the story of Ibeler and his siblings, discussed in Chapter One, Muu Gweloyai or Kueloyai (mother of the toads) raises the orphaned Dule siblings and Gweloyai tells them she is their mother.\textsuperscript{96} Ibeler and his siblings find out from animal allies that her son killed the siblings’ mother, Gabayai.\textsuperscript{97} After realizing this deception, the siblings find their way back home and wage war against the injustices and death of their mother.\textsuperscript{98}

As Inakeliginya recounts, Ibeler sets out to battle Gweloyai, Biler and their allies.\textsuperscript{99} In doing so, he justifies his actions, thusly: “Muu Gweloyai me mintió, me robó la mamá, y mi deber fue defenderme” (Grandmother Gweloyai lied to me, she stole my mother from me, and my duty was to defend).\textsuperscript{100} Gweloyai represents deception in unfamiliar places and symbolizes a different way of life and society. She embodies the perils of emptiness and lost of culture. Thus, following Ibeler’s story where the siblings confront her and return to their proper home, the speaker also must confront his/her own pain and return home. If a Dule does not confront the real danger of cultural annihilation, then cultural return would be difficult and challenging, if not impossible, to regain.

\textsuperscript{96} Wagua, \textit{Así lo vi}, 35.
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid.
Wagua’s “Civiliza mi corazón, mamá” is similar in structure and implication to the onmaggednega. There is the theme of community, cohesiveness and fraternity. According to Colman, the speaker cries to the mother for salvation for the following reason:

Porque a los indígenas se nos acusan de ser salvajes, de no entender nada, de ser ignorante, y entonces lo cual no es así. Porque la cultura occidental si no entiende, si no aprende y si no convive con la cultura indígena; nunca va a entender [de lo] que [hay] dentro de la cultura guna.

(Because they accuse us Indians of being savages, of understanding nothing, of being ignorant, which is not so. Because Western culture does not understand, if they do not learn by actually living with the Indigenous culture, they will never understand [what is] in Guna culture.)

The speaker is isolated from his culture and home. He feels the asphyxiation of Western society, lamenting:

Mamá, susírrame palabras que perdonan
Vuelve civilizar este corazón mio
Y haz de él una barricada
Porque alguien debe quedarse en casa:
Ya suena estridente el tambor de la escuela
Y han callado tu suara, tu koke, tu kangi.  

Mommy, whisper words that forgive
Come back to civilize this heart of mine
And make it a barricade
Because someone should stay home:
Loud sounds and drum school
And have silenced your suara, your koke, your kangi.

As the speaker ask for forgiveness and calls on the remembrance of Dule culture, rites, musical instruments and curing chants, there is a slow reconnection to his past, identity and home. Aiban Wagua utilizes all Dule sources, especially those of everyday life, expressed metaphorically in content and stories. His poetic stylings recreate the feeling, the listening and the spirit. Most of all, he recreates this poetic usage in his writings in a way that is similar to what one finds in oral

101 López, 9.
102 José Colman, Personal Interview.
103 Wagua, “Civiliza mi corazón, mamá,” 110-112.
104 José Colman, Personal Interview.
tradition, “para elevar la identidad del autoestima porque los niños, tantos los jóvenes y mayores se ven reflejados en la poesía, o sea conocen lo que está diciendo,” (in order to lift the self-esteem and identity of the children, the youth, and the elderly; because they see themselves in the poem and they know what he is saying). 105

Wagua’s poems are well known in Gunayala and “casi todos jóvenes y niños por la comarca de Gunayala los recitan,” (a majority of children, and youth alike, recite his poems). 106 Their popularity demonstrates unity, community and fellowship. The gwage layering of poetry in Dule culture and of Dule politics as well are so intertwined that neither one can be isolated from the other.

Colman addresses the empowering nature of poetry, pointing out that, “la poesía y la política no pueden aislarse” (poetry and politics cannot be isolated). 107 In most Western communities, as Colman observes, poetry and politics are fragmented and separated. 108 Western society’s political and religious leaders, in comparison to Dule political-religious leadership, function in separate areas that forces communities to operate and develop as individualist, rather than progressing as a collective entity. 109 Solidarity and collective participation is the essence of Dule governance, everyday life and history. Poetry and politics, as well as cultural ceremonies and customary practices, cannot be divided from each other. If these components are separated,

105 Ibid.
106 Ibid.
107 Ibid.
108 Ibid.
109 Ibid.
then there is the possibility that Dule indigeneity in one form or another would be dismantled, incomplete and/or eventually erased.

**Conclusion: Full Circle**

Thus, we return to the questions posed earlier in this chapter:

- What elements frustrate the artists?
- What angers them?
- What sustains them?
- Who are they?
- Where do they come from?
- Who speaks to them?

One may never know with absolute certainty what elements frustrate or anger the artists, but it can be inferred that the factors that perhaps sustain them are found in the practices and cultural identity of being Dule, in mind, body and spirit. Who are these artists? They are the poets and the storytellers who share their personal experiences as well as those of others in their verses. The place that they come from is Gunayala. It embodies and is a repository for the spirit of their people and language and is the soul of the earth that speaks to them about the histories, legends and life lessons of the Dule. Their written poetry serves as an extension to their oratory.

It is in reading these poets’ written words that further enables one to understand how they—as artists and Dule—transpose oral tradition onto paper, even as oratory continues to be an integral part of their culture and society. Spoken poetry connects a person to a family and a community. Furthermore, even though writing is a written art form imposed by non-Indigenous centered Panamanian schools, the Dule poets take this Western element and with it craft an
authentically-Dule element of memory in who they are, where they come from and where they are going.

As Brant asserts, “writing is done with a community consciousness,” a viewpoint also evident in the writings of Manipiniktikiya, Aristeydes Turpana and Aiban Wagua. Their poems reflect not the thoughts of the Dule poets as individuals; rather as from a nation. Audience members’ experiences of their works will differ when reading the poems themselves. A Western reader may understand them as representing the thoughts and words of the individual poet alone. A Dule reader, on the other hand, may read them and see the collective thoughts and words of both the poet and his community.

The differing viewpoints of a Westerner and a Dule will impart distinct experiences thereupon. Connecting this to other Indigenous tribes and their relationship with the West, Lakota scholar Vine Deloria, Jr. states:

They [Indigenous People] have stories, Cram [a missionary Reverend] has stories; but what is important is the fellowship and dialogue between the parties and not the competition to define truth—since truth is a matter of perception…the Indians recognized that there were different perspectives which had equal claim to veracity.

It is the points of view therein, however, from stories that present the particular difference, thus allowing a broader spectrum of truth and knowledge to exist in the poetry of spoken and written words. The origin of the work of art, on multiple levels, is consciousness, spirit, and reality; thus uniting verbal language and printed text through an artform.

Like oral tradition, writing is performative in the choice of words, poetic rhythm, and tempo selected by its author. The words inscribed on paper present a realm of concepts with

110 Brant, 19.

which the artist (i.e. the writer) is familiar, “an act that can take place in physical isolation…the memory of history, of culture, of land, of Nation, is always present—like another being.” For the Dule, their identity is found in the songs’ and stories’ reflecting of “essential themes of the culture and reveal its basic religious and moral character.” The poems, “Tinaja,” “Archipiélago,” and “Civiliza mi corazón, mamá,” embody these ideas, and they return to the stylings typical of oratory that transmit, inspire and invoke historical memory of Ibeler and the Dule revolution and return to the songs and stories of Babigala:

Los cantos más insistentemente entonados por Nele y por el venerable Colman, eran sobre la lucha de Ibeler y sus hermanos, sobre Igwasalibler, hijo de Ologanagunkiler, sobre Duiren y las invasiones de los sawisawidulegan. Con esos cantos él nos levantaba el ánimo, él nos hacía tomar las armas para continuar viviendo con dignidad. Nele, así, nos metía en los corazones el espíritu de Ibeler. Nos hacía sentir parte de los hermanos de Ibeler para defender a la Madre Tierra.

(The songs sung by Nele more insistently and the venerable Colman, was about the struggle of Ibeler and his brothers, about Igwasalibler, son of Ologanagunkiler about Duiren and invasions of sawisawidulegan. With these songs he was uplifting us, he made us take up arms to continue living with dignity. [From] Nele, just like that, we got into our hearts the spirit of Ibeler. It made us feel as we were one of Ibeler’s siblings in order to defend Mother Earth.)

These songs and stories offer connectivity to and empowerment within Duleness and Dule history, reflecting the people’s identity and expression in different forms: the spoken word and written art—i.e., poetry.

112 Brant, 20.
113 Ventocilla, 56.
114 Wagua, Así lo vi, 108.
Family Narrative: Now I Know Your Journey…

On June 16, 2005, while visiting relatives in Agligandi, Gunayala, Aunt Laura asks me in Dulegaya “Where do you come from?” With a quizzical expression, I stated “um both Panama and the U.S.?” Shaking her head after hearing uncle Roberto’s translation. Aunt Laura asks again, “where do you come from, your journey?” I looked at her and asked uncle Roberto to tell her: “My journey from Hawaii to Agligandi took 28 years of my life, 15 hours by plane, 40 minutes by cargo plane and 30 minutes by boat. That is where I came from to specifically meet my family: her and other relatives and to know where Papá Bebe grew up. Then, she grabbed my hand, squeezed it and said in Dulegaya “Now that I know where you come from, now there is no way I could ever forget you.”

* * *
CONCLUSION

A DULE THAT DWELLS

We, the Dule, did not shun modernity—and we have made sure that modernity has not shunned us. Dule culture is a ubiquitous way of being and knowing that dwells in the multi-layered planes that come into existence through storytelling, sewing, drawing, dancing, writing, and many other poli-aesthetic ontological forms. Dule culture is a paradigm that endures, links and networks in locations, which reflect the abstraction, as well as the total sum of Dule continued existence. In order for an ontological prototype to come into being, certain elements must express and represent in unity, community, and organization, while intersecting at a particular meeting point. Such elemental factors construct and materialize Dule ontological existence; more specifically, a poli-aesthetic counterpoint-counterplot, similar to Heidegger’s existential elements of dwelling, building, and thinking.¹

The discourse on the interrelationship of dwelling, building and thinking, as Heidegger explains:

Dwelling…is the basic character of Being in keeping with which mortals exist. Perhaps this attempt to think about dwelling and building will bring out somewhat more clearly that building belongs to dwelling and how it receives its nature from dwelling. Enough will have been gained if dwelling and building have become worthy of questioning and thus have remained worthy of thought. But that thinking itself belongs to dwelling in the same sense as building, although in a different way, may perhaps be attested to by the course of thought here attempted. Building and thinking are, each in its own way, inescapable for dwelling. The two, however, are also insufficient for dwelling so long as each busies itself with its own affairs in separation instead of listening to one another. They are able to listen if both—building and thinking—belong to dwelling, if they remain within

¹ Heidegger, 158.
their limits and realize that the one as much as the other comes from workshop of long experience and incessant practice.²

Dwelling, building and thinking interlock and occur in communal and experiential spaces; ingredients of ontological movements that define multifaceted sites and layers of ‘Being.’ At a particular junction, they phenomenologically function together and apart, as in Said’s contrapuntal analysis³, requiring recognition and registry of each other. In these movements, both the individual and the collective can exist in a structural location with many access points.

In these regards, I would like to reiterate and rearticulate the particular example found in the movement of molas as discussed in Chapter 2, to demonstrate fluidity and versatility. Molas, as an instrumental form, exist in multiple spatial sites: on textile, on canvas, and on the body. The introduction of molas, as a commodity in a global market, reinvented the process of mola-making and begat molas’ entrance into a capitalistic economic sphere.

From the early twentieth century to the 1960s, outsiders—usually missionary wives or tourists—increasingly became interested in the artisanship of mola blouses. Tourism in Gunayala, according to Tice, “increased greatly” and “tourists in the 1960s were interested in buying molas.”⁴ Non-Dule interest in purchasing molas as commercial merchandise creates a shift in the creative process and the mola’s aesthetic articulation, from body painting to traditional wear; to a source of economic gain.

The retailing of molas remade an Indigenous traditional dress into a profitable commodity, which expanded the role of Dule woman in her dwelling place and transformed how she approaches her mola-making process. This has enabled Dule women to become not only

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² Ibid.
³ Said, 51.
⁴ Tice, 119.
artists in their own right, but businesswomen as well. For instance, Indira Martínez de Alarcón explains that, as a young girl, her cousin used to take her to places to sell molas to foreigners, as a way to economically survive.5

As tourists’ demand for them increased, “[Guna] women sold their worn mola blouses…[and became] producers [who] began to sew specifically for the market.”6 Due to the high demand, the “production of molas for immediate and eventual sale came to be women’s primary daily activity.”7 Their sale and distribution continues to be a source of income in Dule households. Also, Dule women have strategically steered the expanded movement of molas into the global market. To sell them beyond Gunayala, they vend “used mola blouses” to “U.S. citizens stationed in the Canal Zone” and also have given their “used blouses” to “male relatives…working in Panama City to sell.”8

Their impact therefore, as a commodity, reveals the changes in how Dule women and men approach their culture and creativity within it. The high demand for a mola as a souvenir has encouraged excess production of a poorer quality and less artistic approach, in the layering and embroidering of molas. As Michel Lecumberry explains:

The manufacture of a beautiful mola requires from two to five weeks, sometimes more, for an exceptional piece of creativity and quality. Increasing demand requires that a few Kunas [Gunas] abandon the traditional process to sew “tourist-molas.” They are panels generally of two layers on which different motifs are sewn in bright colors. This type of “mola” comes sewn in one day…Productivity, if you will.9

5 Indira Martínez de Alarcón, Personal Interview.
6 Tice, 119.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid, 63.
Obviously the creative space and mola-making process, similar to Heidegger’s building-thinking processes, changes.\(^9\) The mola-maker stops producing the traditional, high quality mola with elaborate designs; instead, creating multiple low-quality molas with less elaborative motifs. As a result, a new *dwelling* occurs for the mola as merchandise. The significance of this new space for Dule culture and identity, in relation to Heidegger’s discourse on dwelling, building and thinking, produces another existential dwelling that, before, did not exist—a new access point, a new thought process, a new building process and a new place to dwell that can elevate Dule ontological existence to another site.\(^11\) This new site, in turn, opens up new spaces and new relationships for Dule and non-Dule persons in relation to the mola in the global market.

At the same time, Dule women themselves, can be found at a new *place*. Their imagination creates an artistic reality in their surroundings, which previously was only appreciated by their own people. Their contact and interaction with others in the global market, however, has since opened new *dwellings* in both the physical and imaginary. The former includes the physical placement of Dule women when selling and distributing their molas, while the latter refers to the variety of motifs inspired by Dule and even non-Dule cultures. The dwelling movements of molas in commercialized and non-commercialized sites demonstrate a change in spaces and places, revealing the artistry of the imagination in the physical placement of molas in the evolution of the reverse appliqué, from being part of Dule Indigenous traditional dress to becoming just another type of 21st century tourist-sought merchandise. At the same, this


\(^10\) Heidegger, 158.

\(^11\) Ibid.
dwelling movement also exhibits an ubiquitary Dule presence in Panama and beyond Panama’s borders.

Ubiquitous Dule Essence and Presence

James Howe explicates:

One [anthropologist and/or ethnographer] may understand that cultures are not organisms or even clearly bounded entities. One may respect today’s inheritors of proud cultural traditions. But Kuna [Guna] who live in the city and learn both Father’s Way [Babigala] and the latest news from Venezuela through the printed word, or Lakota who drive pickups, live in trailers, and work for wages, live lives radically different from their ancestors’, and one does them no disrespect to say so.12

There is an obvious disconnect in referencing an Indigenous way of life in present-day compared to how their ancestors have lived. Howe’s statement strips a Dule (or a Lakota, etc.) from any ties to traditional ways of being just because they may live in a city and not on a reservation, and they can read newspapers and use modern appliances in their everyday activities. Howe implies that one cannot simultaneously be Indigenous and modern, living in urban areas; instead, to embody indigeneity, one must be primitive. In addition, when a non-Indigenous person points out such distinctions, it is not understood (from his/her viewpoint) as an insult, but a mere matter of fact.

While Howe does claim to embrace Dule culture and indigeneity, his comments on Dule “cultural evolution” imply that the Dule should be placed in a metaphorical glass case, not to be disturbed. He remarks that their political uniqueness in Panama sets them apart from other Indigenous populations; a distinctiveness which thus allows the Dule to join in solidarity with other Indigenous groups to fight for cultural preservation in Abiayala.13

12 Howe, Chiefs, Scribes, and Ethnographers, 250.
Like a parent warning a child not to venture too far off the path, Howe cautions: “The Kuna would be wise...not to submerge their identity too far into a pan-Indian soup, not to dilute or neglect their Kunaité or the culturalist work that feeds it.”¹⁴ He asserts that, “Every success they have enjoyed...has depended on the understanding that, yes, they are Indians and loyal Panamanians, but first and last, they are Kuna.”¹⁵ An admirer of the success of Dule’s achievement in autonomy and cultural preservation, he contradictorily assumes that they will nevertheless somehow “misplace” their indigeneity in one form or another.

There is, in this dissertation’s view, no limitation inherent or applies to Dule essence and presence in modern Panama. As I have explored and demonstrated throughout, there are almost innumerable instances where Dule indigeneity asserts and re-asserts itself within the space of modernity. This is the case with making and wearing of a mola, in a boxing ring, and through the writing and performance of poetry. This assertiveness and reassertiveness of Dule indigeneity, therefore, serves as a constant reminder to both Dule and non-Dule, saying, “Hey, we the Dule are still here, and here we will stay.” The fluidity of movement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous spheres, including between Gunayala and the cities, represents the essence of being Dule.

Those who live outside of Gunayala do not lose their Dule identity. In fact, their identity, culture and community ties to Gunayala are maintained and practiced. Their links and obligations to Gunayala villages are continually strengthened in myriad ways. The Dule, for example, in developing different initiatives such as community-based organizations and Dule-

¹³ Ibid., 247.
¹⁴ Ibid., 247-248.
¹⁵ Ibid., 248.
only urban neighborhoods in order to meet the needs of Dule communities outside of the Gunayala. Marta Lucía de Gerdes notes that Dule community-based centers called *capítulos* monitor the people’s migration to and from Gunayala and provide cultural services “much like an embassy or a consulate.” Furthermore, she explains how *capítulos* are “regional branch offices that represent the authorities of each of the major Comarca villages in Panama City, and sometimes also in the City of Colon.” The capítulos function as a resource center for each community. As de Gerdes continues to point out, “They serve as post offices, fund-raising headquarters…” but they also facilitate in “the coordination of Kuna cultural performances in the cities.” As a social engineering development, capítulos cultivate—literally and symbolically—an enduring quality of Duleness.

Through different community-based activities, they perpetuate, produce, combine and absorb Dule and non-Dule practices such as “sports events…displaying island affiliation…found in Kuna sports leagues” and “…with a heavy emphasis on oratory and poetry…” traditional Dule cultural performances. In his thesis, Roberto Martínez Owen examines the effect and development of Dule sports leagues, particularly basketball and softball, in the Panama Canal Zone area from the late 1970s to the early 1980s. In the Panama Canal Zone and surrounding


17 Ibid., 315.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid., 316.

20 Ibid.

urban areas, La Unión de Trabajadores Kunas (U.T.K.: Union of Kuna Workers) a Dule social labor organization which represents and the Dule workers who reside in the cities to ensure they have the right to access economic and sociopolitical developments, developed an initiative sporting organization. The U.T.K, as Owen points out, “en vista de su gran responsabilidad…decidió nombrar una comisión que se encargue de las actividades deportivas, creando una organización llamada Unión Deportiva Kuna [U.D.K.]…” (in view of its great responsibility…decided to appoint a commission to be in charge of sport, creating an organization called Kuna Sports Union…). Similar to the two Dule Congresses that handle political and cultural issues respectively, the U.T.K. serve as an administrative component and the U.D.K. serve as coordinator of sports program development. In this regard, the U.D.K. formed two sports leagues, Junta Directiva Liga de Baloncesto and Junta Directiva Liga de Softbol. Most importantly, Roberto Martínez Owen explains the U.D.K’s role and objectives as being to promote sports and fellowship, develop a healthy mind and body for the Dule youth, and to provide a space free from outside influences, a space that is in accordance to Dule values and practices exercise in Gunayla. The sports leagues like the capítulos extend and connect Dule in the cities to Dule communities in Gunayala.

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22 Ibid., 2-3.
23 Ibid., 7.
24 Ibid., 5.
25 Ibid., 2.
26 Ibid., 7-8.
De Gerdes also notes that the Dule living in urban Dule-only neighborhoods have developed another institution called “Kuna Nega.” These replicate “…to some degree part of the traditional social structure of the Comarca villages” and “…provide an alternative to those with limited economic resources, and who wanted a lifestyle more in accordance with traditional Kuna values.”

My own relatives, in fact, live in similar Dule-only neighborhoods located in Tocumen, Veracruz and Cativá. In these urban spaces, I have seen firsthand how my relatives exercise Dule language, storytelling, art and other cultural practices, as well as how these activities thrive and endure in these spaces. In separate interviews I conducted, many participants express that they are Dule, and as Dule, they respect and appreciate their Indigenous identity and culture.

For instance, mola-makers Cristina de Martínez, Analeri I. Colman and Claudina Iglesias, in three separate interviews, affirm that there is no difference in wearing the mola when living in communities inside or outside of Gunayala. All three Dule women emphasize that it is normal to wear them every day, and that they take great pleasure in doing so. The source of pride and appreciation of Duleness is fostered and passed from one generation to another.

Indira Martínez de Alarcón, a Dule artist, points out that everywhere she goes, she proclaims, “Yo soy Guna…a mí me enseñaba a tener el respecto a mi cultura, escuchando a mi papá, a mi mamá…” (I'm Guna...I have been taught to respect my culture, listening to my dad, to

28 Ibid., 319-321.
29 Cristina de Martínez, Personal Interview; Analeri I. Colman, a Dule mola-maker from Cartí, interview by Sue Patricia Haglund, Personal Interview, Panama City, Panama, 9 February 2009; and Claudina Iglesias, a Dule mola-maker, interview by Sue Patricia Haglund, Personal Interview, Panama City, Panama, 9 February 2009.
30 Ibid.
The affirmation and reaffirmation of Duleness is never lost. In the fields of anthropology, linguistics and migration, non-Dule scholars who study cultural works of the Dule do not thusfar fully comprehend the magnitude of Dule cultural sustenance, even in the face of externally imposed cultural changes.

In the words of Dule artist Danilo Martínez, “Primero siempre hemos mirado a la cultura guna. Aunque nosotros nacimos aquí en Colón, llevamos la sangre guna. No lo dejamos” (First we have always looked to Guna culture. Although we were born here in Colón, we carry Guna blood. We do not leave it). As a result, the changes observable in Dule communities in both Gunayala and in cities throughout Panama do not and should not represent cultural resurgence; rather they become experiences of continuity in the ways that Dule integrate them into their realities in their own ways.

Roberto Martínez Owen has explained that the pride and essence of being Dule comes from within one’s Dule heritage and genealogy. He tells me to remember the significance of Dule essence exists in any location where we, as Dule, may dwell:

Ser Guna no significa que uno es menos, siempre uno se siente menos sino que siempre se siente orgulloso por su raza. Porque esa raza es autóctona. Esa raza de Guna es autóctona. No es una raza mezclada. Es una raza que viene de los indios de la raza Guna—aborigen. Así que tu abuelo [Baby San Blas] es de aquí [Panamá]. Así que tú debes sentir que tu abuelo es Guna, y tu parte pertenece a la parte Guna. Tú eres Guna también. No porque tu mamá y tu abuela son de otra raza. Tú estás mezcla pero te sientes de que tú eres una Guna.

(To be Guna does not mean that one is less, always one feels less, but one always feels proud of his/her race. Because this race is autochthonous. Guna race is native. It is not a mixed race. It is a race that comes from the Indians of the Guna race—aboriginal. So your grandfather [Baby San Blas] is from here [Panama].

31 Indira Martínez de Alarcón, Personal Interview.

32 Danilo Martínez, a Dule artist who grew up in Gunayala and Colón, interview by Sue Patricia Haglund, Personal Interview, Colón, Panama, 7 March 2009.
you must feel that your grandfather is Guna and your part belongs to the Guna. You are Guna too. Not because your mom and grandmother are of another race. You are mix, but you feel that you are a Guna.\textsuperscript{33}

Martínez’s description regarding the importance of Dule essence in Panama transmits and exemplifies how we—including me—who live either in a city (in Panama) or in another country, are not stripped from our Dule identity and heritage. From the hammocks of Gunayala to an urban household in Panama City, cultural empowerment is instilled in every Dule, connecting him/her to Babigala, Gunayala, molas, oratory, written poetry, or sports. This empowerment is about historical memory and the ability to navigate in a world that is constantly changing and adapting to those changes. It is also about, in the cultural sense, Dule poli-aesthetic ontological counterpoint-counterplot where the people’s indigeneity occupies all spaces in Panama.

In truth, the Dule do not look to the nation of Panama to define who they are as a people and society. Rather, it is Panama which draws on Dule culture and people in order to help define a Panamanian national identity and political practices. José de Jesús Martínez points out, for example, that General Omar Torrijos, Panama’s military commander and leader from 1968 to 1981,\textsuperscript{34} used to artfully position himself in a hammock and greet political leaders and dignitaries in the manner that a Dule sagla would receive his community members in the gathering house.\textsuperscript{35} When Torrijos would visit Dule saglas, however, he “…se sentaba en una silla. Y no frente a ellos, sino que con ellos, en torno a una imaginaria mesa redonda” (…sat in a chair. And not in front of them, but with them, around an imaginary roundtable).\textsuperscript{36} This positional action

\textsuperscript{33} Roberto Martínez Owen, Personal Interview.

\textsuperscript{34} Hurtado and Jaramillo, 147-148.

\textsuperscript{35} José de Jesús Martínez, \textit{Mi General Torrijos} (Havana: Ediciones Casa De Las Américas, 1987), 54-57.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 54.
demonstrates an indirect Dule poli-aesthetic counterpoint-counterplot act imbedded in modern Panama’s government. Torrijos’ reclining action, unnoticeably and unwittingly, implements and perpetuates Dule indigeneity, therefore strengthening Dule essence and presence in Panama.

Similar to the story of Ibeler, his siblings, and allies, every person plays a vital part in shaping and defining Dule essence and presence—even a non-Dule Panamanian. Inakeliginya narrates:

Entre los ocho hermanos y sus allegados, cada uno era importante, cada uno cumplía con un trabajo específico e insustituible. Olowaili se ocupaba de aquellas cosas que sus hermanos no podían hacer. Pasaba lo mismo con Bugasui o Olosunnibeler. En el combate, cada uno de sus amigos ejercía su función. Amma Gorigori hacía reír a los enemigos, otros tocaban la flauta…todos ellos estaban en guerra contra Biler. Por eso, nuestros sailagan nos enseñan que ninguna danza ni instrumento musical fue inventado sólo para distraer a la gente, sino que forman parte de las armas de lucha; y desde ahí surgió nuestra música, nuestro arte. El arte kuna es parte de la lucha del Pueblo Kuna.

(Among the eight brothers and their relatives, each person was important, each serving a specific and irreplaceable work. Olowaili took care of things that her brothers could not do. It was the same with Bugasui or Olosunnibeler. In combat, each friend exercised his/her role. Amma Gorigori laugh at enemies, others played the flute ... all of them were at war with Biler. Therefore, our sailagan teach us that any dance or musical instrument was invented not just to distract people, but as part of the weapons of struggle, and from there came our music, our art. [The author’s emphasis] Kuna art is part of the struggle of the Kuna people).

Dule art is all about movements, things, practices, words, voices, and ways of life. Both art and politics impart a Dule essence in every place that a Dule object or person occupies. Dule movements define the people’s indigeneity in all spheres, from the source of Babigala to the boxing ring. In sum, Dule art-as-politics and Dule politics-as-art are poli-aesthetic counterpoint-counterplot acts in molas, boxing and poetry. Through these movements, such elements—molas, boxing, and poetry—demonstrate Dule articulation and engagement with modernity. The Dule did not shun modernity and they made sure modernity did not shun them.

37 Wagua, Así lo vi, 41.
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