

FROM REVOLT TO REVOLUTION: REMEMBERING THE EVENTS OF 1925 IN KUNA YALA

Along the way the big questions always arise: Why did our grandfathers have to rise up against the wagas (Latinos)? Is it true that we can only look for the real cause as coming from the motivation that arose from the invasion of Abia Yala (the Americas)? Is it true that our fathers rebelled because that is how Richard O. Marsh wanted it? Is it true that the policemen of those days were actually good so that it was pure savagery on our part?

All of this I tell you after having spoken at length with my father-in-law, Nugelipe, and with various witnesses to the Revolution; and from what I myself experienced in those days. The wagas would tell a different story, because it's convenient for them to change the facts in order to marginalize us more, in order trample on us even more; because according to them, nothing good can come out of us.

Why, then, was there blood?¹

- Inakeliginia
Sakla Dummad of Kuna Yala
(Inakeliginia 1997: 70).²

There are different accounts surrounding the events of 1925, in which the Kuna of Panama planned and executed an attack on foreign policemen, who had been stationed in their island-towns by the government in order to ‘civilize’ them. After the Revolution, the Panamanian government was forced to withdraw, and the Kuna eventually signed treaties establishing their own autonomous governing body and later an independent territory, known as the Comarca Kuna Yala. My main question here explores the symbolic importance of the Revolution for the Kuna and seeks to understand how the events of 1925 get remembered differently. I ground this question in the yearly performance of the Revolution in the urban Kuna *barriada* Koskuna in Veracruz, and look at the multiple layers of meaning of the *Revolución Dule*, hereafter referred to as the Kuna Revolution, in terms of historical significance, collective memory and identity. While what follows is not meant to recount the Kuna Revolution, there is nevertheless some narrative work done by the photos that I have assembled, and although I hope it give the reader a general sense of

¹ All translations by the author.

² Siempre nos salen al paso grandes preguntas: ¿Por qué nuestros abuelos han tenido que levantarse contra los uagas? ¿Es verdad que la causa real la tenemos que buscar sólo en la motivación que viene de la invasión de Abia Yala? ¿Es verdad que nuestros padres se alzaron, porque así lo quiso Richard O. Marsh? ¿Es verdad que los policías de entonces eran tan buenos que lo nuestro fue puro salvajismo?

Todo esto yo se lo cuento después de haber conversado largamente con mi suegro, Nugelipe, y varios testigos de la Revolución; y de lo que yo mismo he vivido en eso días. Los uagas dirán otra cosa, porque les conviene cambiar los hechos para marginarnos más, para pisotearnos más; porque según ellos, de nosotros nada bueno puede salir.

¿Por qué, entonces, la sangre?

the Revolution and its implications, I wish to stress that a “telling” of the Kuna Revolution is done through very specific discourses which have not been included here (see Inakeliginia 1997).

PERFORMING THE KUNA REVOLUTION

Today, the Revolution of 1925 is commemorated annually in Kuna communities through a sort of “reenactment” of the Revolution as a type of performance, followed by a celebration. The first dramatic reproduction of the Kuna Revolution took place in the island-town of Ailigandi in 1966, with Ustuppu being the second community to adopt the practice in 1970 (Kungiler, personal communication). Although the performance of the events of 1925 as a way to commemorate the Revolution is a more recent trend and the discourse surrounding its spreading have to be investigated more fully, it is now a widely adopted practice in most island communities and Kuna suburban *barrios*.

This account of a Revolution performance is based on my experience in attending the 2003 celebration in Koskuna, an urban Kuna *barrio* in Veracruz on the outskirts of Panama City. The celebration was held on February 23rd that year instead of the 25th, when it ideally would have been held, because the 23rd fell on a Sunday and the 25th on a Tuesday. Every year, people in the community, usually including a large number of young people, gather together to plan out and rehearse the yearly production. Those that are involved in the performance meet often in order to run through the course of events and plan out the scene, costumes and props. There is no detailed dialogue or script to follow, and no finite number of participants. There were perhaps thirty or forty participants that year in Koskuna, a community of approximately 300 families. Anyone who wants to participate is welcome, and the large number of participants suggests that, as with many performances, that the performance offers a unique and affective experience to both the performers and the audience.

The 2003 revolution was held at the house near the elementary school on Calle 7º, which has a large yard, although in past years it has also been held in a field that is now overgrown. The performance began shortly after 9am, in part to avoid the afternoon heat, and lasted until 11am. The street and neighbor’s yards were filled with people of all ages, mostly from Koskuna, although there were also some *wagas* (Latinos) from outside Koskuna and one *mergi* (American) who shaded their eyes from the morning sun that day.

The performance itself was difficult for me to follow, as there was no omniscient narrator giving the audience clarifying plot, although some pieces of information were belted out over a small loudspeaker. Indeed, there was a hardly a need for one, as the story is generally well-known. The performance was also surprisingly attuned to detail, making it resemble a reenactment more than a dramatic play, although for reasons I will explain later, I am comfortable with neither term, and am only slightly less comfortable in calling it a “performance.”

Violence, both symbolic and real, is a key element in production of the Revolution, just as it was in the Revolution of 1925. Young boys are recruited to act as either Kuna fighters or Panamanian policemen, and a slight beating is expected in playing either role. Throughout the first parts of the play, the Panamanian policemen harass women and bully men, often to the point of causing physical harm. While the women aren’t physically harmed, they are mistreated by policemen and forced to take out noserings and take off their *wini* (leg and arm bracelets). The Kuna men do suffer physical harm from the Panamanian police; they are thrown to the ground, kicked, pounded and beaten (*see Photo 1*).



PHOTO 1 – Panamanian policemen brutalizing Kuna men³

As the situation worsens and Kuna leaders come to realize that something drastic must be

³ All photos by the author.

done in order to regain control over their territory and their lives. Many gatherings between leaders are held, and their meetings become increasingly secretive as they start to devise a strategy for regaining power (*see Photo 2*).



PHOTO 2 – Planning for the attack

It was decided that the attack would take place during Carnival, a time when the Panamanian policemen would be caught unsuspecting and drunk, which “called to mind the exorcisms by which communities periodically rid themselves of spirits by getting them drunk” (Howe 1998:267). When all was prepared and it was time to attack, the men stripped off their shirts, tied red bandanas around their necks or foreheads, sometimes painting their faces red with *mageb*, while the Panamanian policemen remained in their green army garb; all were armed with carved wooden sticks, usually in the form of a rifle (*see Photo 3*).



PHOTO 3 – Preparing to attack drunk Panamanian policemen

When the attack begins, the line between performance and real life again becomes increasingly fuzzy. Armed with their wooden guns and spurred on by the dramatization and onlookers, the boys hit, kick and push each other until the Kuna have emerged victorious (*see Photo 4*).



PHOTO 4 - Defeating the Panamanian policemen

The boys are all friends, and the victor is also certain, but no Revolution can be had without bruises and dirt-stained clothes. The crowd is entertained as one would perhaps be by a WWF wrestling match, enjoying the physical acting that borders on violence, but here the spectators have more at stake than seeing their favorite steroid-pumped wrestler flip another. Although I have not conducted interviews on this particular subject, I would suggest that the hazy line between symbolic and real violence is important here, as participants experience real bumps and bruises as their elders surely did. Their mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers and other friends and relatives in the audience also experience the violence in an affective way through watching their young boys beat others and get beaten.

The performance that day ended with the proclamation of Kuna victory by a woman perched atop a dogpile of dead Panamanian policemen, holding up the Kuna flag and surrounded by her people (*see Photo 5*). She dramatically recited a poem about the fighting, the victory and the Revolution, and her booming voice, both solemn and excited, signaled the end of that performance and the beginning of another: the *inna* celebration.



PHOTO 5 – Proclaiming Victory

The *Dia de la Revolución* is both the performance of the Revolution and the ritual celebration that follows. In Koskuna, the celebration was held on the covered patio between the school and the local meeting office, although it is usually at the community *Inna Nega*, or “House of *Inna*,” in Kuna Yala. Preparatory work includes that of making *inna*, usually a sugar cane or plantain-based alcohol, which must be prepared in advance by those that know how to make *inna* so that it is properly fermented for the day of the celebration. After the performance, the *Inna Sobed(s)*, with maracas and flutes around their necks and

feathered hats on their heads, led the crowd of both performers and audience members to the place where the *inna* was being served (see *Photo 6*).



PHOTO 6 – *Inna Sobed(s)* lead the crowd to the celebration

The consumption of *inna* is important for Kuna women, especially older Kuna women, who must drink for their dead family members. Drinking *inna* out of gourds, many painted with red and yellow with swastikas for the Revolution, they socialized, sung, yelled, and danced with their friends while the two *Inna Sobed(s)* played maracas and panpipes as they danced in a circle (see *Photo 7*).



PHOTO 7 – Celebrating the Revolution by drinking *inna*

The drinking, dancing, singing and socializing goes on for hours under the covered patio. After having a few drinks of *inna* and visiting with friends, I went to a nearby house to continue drinking beer with friends. And this was my experience of the Kuna Revolution performed that 23rd of February of 2003 in Koskuna. But as this retelling of events draws to a close, I realize that it has resulted in a narrative that seems as if it were drawn straight from the fieldnotes of an observer, perhaps even from those of an aspiring anthropologist, as it indeed was. For the Kuna present that day in Koskuna, this “performance” was both more and less than that.

PERFORMING THE PAST

"But the past does not exist independently from the present. ... In that sense, the past has no content. The past - or, more accurately, pastness - is a position. Thus in no way can we identify the past *as past*."

- Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995:15).

The yearly performance of the Revolution in Koskuna, Veracruz, and throughout Kuna communities in Panama is an act of remembering that can be seen a “deeply embedded social practice that informs the present” (Flores 2002:xvi). That the Revolution is still remembered and re-membered every year is a testament to the fact that the meaning attributed to the events of 1925 is of great importance to the Kuna *pueblo* today, just as it was in 1925. The Revolution continues to bear great significance, but the exact ways that

the Revolution is important to people today, yesterday and in 1925 is constantly evolving and being shaped by demands of the present. In participating in this act of remembering *pastness* in the now, it becomes apparent that people are “doubly historical or, more properly, fully historical” and in doing so, “[i]t engages them simultaneously in the sociohistorical process and in narrative constructions about that process” (Trouillot 1995:24). As noted by Trouillot, these “two sides of historicity” help to explain how history is lived and experienced, so that the Kuna Revolution is neither an event of the past or the narratives surrounding the event, but rather a historical process which implicates both past and present, real events and real narratives, both of which remain elusive.

If history, then, is a process of both events and their retellings, how does the production of the Revolution as a performance work to challenge written history as an objective and finite account of the past? Written accounts of the Revolution have been written by Kunas, but this is not the way in which most Kunas learn about the Revolution. These books have been written to counter written Western historical accounts, but the Kuna account is brought to life every year on the 25th of February and is constantly being recounted, often in the political discourse of the *Onmaked Nega* (the local Kuna gathering house). And although the Revolution may have occurred on February 25, 1925 as the history books state, Inakeliginia notes that it the Revolution did not just occur on that day; it is an event that followed other events, and from when subsequent events have also followed (1997).

In celebrating the Revolution through performance, the participants draw on their knowledge of the events as they have been told by their elders. They plan out the scenes, the movement and the words to be said, with visions of both the reconstructed past and the drama as it will be performed in the present. They act out the events of 1925, creating a first-hand experience of an event in which they did not participate in any objective sense, but that they are subjectively part of. This process is both emotional and affective, and as such, remains an experience that cannot be objectified written words.

WHERE ARE THE SILENCES?

In the introduction of the book *Así lo ví y así me lo contaron*, as told by Inakeliginia and translated and compiled by Aiban Wagua, Wagua contextualizes the book itself and explains how the revolution has been misrepresented by historians, especially Panamanian historians Castellero and Carles:

Carles does not bother, even though it is the duty of a historian, to ask himself if there had been a greater cause behind the "revolt." The author limits himself to fortuitously condemning Marsh as the "absolute mastermind" of the Kuna Revolution, as if the Kuna had been manipulated as dogs tied up and instigated to bite the innocent policemen.

This is the version of history that the current generations receive, except for a few isolated articles that try to unravel the lies of the earlier accounts (Inakeliginia 1997: 11).⁴

Here Wagua describes how the Revolution has been silenced or "actively forgotten" according to Flores (2002:xv) by the historical process and hints at what Inakeliginia's account is speaking against. He also inadvertently points to the fact that Carles and others call the Revolution a "revolt," which is always referred to as "revolution" with a capital "r" in Wagua's compilation of Inakeliginia's account. This same silencing surrounding the Haitian Revolution is noted by Trouillot, who states that "[v]ery few textbooks even mentioned it. When they did, they made of it a "revolt," a "rebellion" (1995:99).

Yet another parallel act of silencing for both the Kuna and Haitian revolutions is that history books have attributed the revolutions, or at least their instigation, to Western actors. For the Haitian Revolution it was, Sonthonax, a white revolutionary who was touted to be the leader behind the uprising. Trouillot reminds us that such discourse silences the Haitian agency, making the Revolution "unthinkable":

Implicit in that rhetoric is the assumption that the French connection is both sufficient and necessary to the Haitian Revolution. That assumption trivializes the slaves; independent sense of their freedom and the right to achieve this freedom by force of arms. ... Behind this terminological fuzziness is the lingering impossibility, which goes back to the eighteenth century, of considering the former slaves as the main actors in the chain of events described (1995:104).

In the case of the Kuna revolution, an American named Marsh is recognized as having played a substantial role:

The cosmopolitan nature of the story is due in considerable part to a North American adventurer named Richard Marsh, who turned up in 1924, just when things looked most bleak for the Kuna....Marsh wrote a declaration proclaiming an independent Indian republic, and in February 1925, the Kuna rebelled against Panama, prompting immediate intervention by the United States. Perhaps most unusual of all, the revolt succeeded (Howe 1998:6).

Here Marsh figures in as a central character, who made the revolt possible and even wrote a declaration for an Indian republic. Howe later mentions that the Kuna would have rebelled

⁴ Carles no se molesta, ni siquiera por un deber histórico, en preguntarse si habría alguna causa mayor detrás de la "revuelta." El autor se limita a condenar fortuitamente a Marsh como "autor total" de la Revolución Kuna, como si los kunas hubiesen sido manejados como perros atados y azuzados a morder a los inocentes policías.

Es esta la historia que llega a las generaciones presentes, salvo artículos aislados que intentan desmentir las anteriores afirmaciones.

anyways, but that “[t]he rebel Kuna had been very lucky” in pulling off their revolution (1998:292).

Attributing the Kuna Revolution to Marsh was also a way that history was able to frame the uprising as “unthinkable.” Howe recounts how the Panamanian government first read the news of the Revolution “with some skepticism, doubting the ability of the Indians to mount a full-scale rebellion” and put off action until the following day (1998:278). As with the Haitian Revolution, the Kuna Revolution was inconceivable in large part because they were as Indians ontologically incapable of mounting a revolution, reasoning based on “an implicit organization of the world and its inhabitants” (Trouillot 1995:73). Contrary to these stories attributing the Revolution to Marsh, Inakeliginia explains how the Kuna actually used Marsh in order to be able to establish contact with the American government, which later supported the Kuna as an independent nation:

Here we have to remember the following: Richard O. Marsh, the mergi (American), was very interested in the albinos. Marsh was studying the albinos with the other gringos. That's why Margarita, the albino, was integrated into the commission, because our leaders were looking for the fastest and the easiest way to make contact with the American authorities in the United States (Inakeliginia 1997:69)⁵

Here Inakeliginia accounts for the Kuna’s relationship with Marsh as an agentive one, where the Kuna were not passive subjects waiting for someone to help them write a declaration of independence. Instead, the Kuna exploited Marsh’s links to the US government in order to advance their own goals of expulsing the *wagas*. In a similar vein, Kantule and Iglesias critique the way that the revolution has been attributed to help from the United States and Marsh in history books, and the lack of documentation on behalf on the Kuna actors, such as Iguanigdipi:

The Kuna pueblo did not receive anything from the United States, not an ounce of gold or a single bullet. The only thing that our leaders of the revolution, Ologinidibipi and the great Nele [Kantule] did was ask for arbitration in the case of a massacre.

By chance, the North American Marsh came to our coast and the extent of his participation is known by the Kuna today: Marsh was going to take a group of albinos to the United States, as a pretext of scientific studies. But no one has documented in history that which Iguanigdipi said in those days before the senators (2000:22).⁶

⁵ Aquí tenemos que recordar lo siguiente: Richard O. Marsh, el merki, mostraba mucho interés por los albinos. Marsh estaba estudiando a los albinos junto con los otros gringos. Por eso la albina Margarita fue integrada en la comisión: porque nuestros líderes buscaban la vía más rápida y fácil de llegar a las autoridades gringas en Estados Unidos.

⁶ El pueblo kuna no recibió del gobierno de los Estados Unidos ni una onza de polvo, ni una bala. Lo único que nuestros líderes de la revolución, Ologinidibipi y el gran Nele hicieron fue pedir el arbitraje en caso de una masacre.

Through these accounts it is made clear that the revolution has been documented in Western historical texts in ways that create silences around issues of importance for the Kuna. It is the creation of these silences that we can locate discrimination, oppression and subjugation, but it is in these silences themselves that we can locate the self-determination, resistance and agency that hegemonic power attempts to silence. Though this may be true in some cases, Trouillot cautions us to think of silences as “conceptual tools, second-level abstractions of processes that feed on each other” and that these result in distinct historical processes of mentions and silences, so that every process must be analyzed in its own right (Trouillot 1995:26).

IS THE REVOLUTION A MASTER SYMBOL?

The Kuna Revolution does not have one singular meaning. On the contrary, it has many multiple meanings that are evoked in different contexts to take on different meanings. But does it serve as a sort of structure that one can refer to in order to evoke any number of these associated meanings? If it can be considered a “master symbol” or a “key symbol,” what sorts of meanings is it used to reference?

Here I rely on the definitions of key and master symbols developed by Sherry Ortner and Richard Flores. In looking at what she calls “key symbols,” Ortner (1973) makes two major divisions in how symbols operate as either summarizing or elaborating. Summarizing symbols represent what the system means to a community of people, whereas elaborating symbols do the opposite, acting as a tool for conceptualizing the world. The master symbol is defined by Flores (2002) as a conceptual tool to describe both the physical Alamo and the historical processes of which it was a part:

The point to be made, however, is, first, that master symbols like the Alamo shape and inform a wide spectrum of social experiences and cultural meanings in ways that often go unnoticed and uncritiqued; and second, that these forms work in tandem with other generative processes like those construed around patriotism, heroism, and the nation so as to further mark as delinquent any critique of or variation from the norm (Flores 2002:160).

I will first tackle the second part of this statement in order to see how the Kuna Revolution, if indeed a master symbol, may work “in tandem with other generative processes.”

De casualidad llega por nuestras costas el norteamericano Marsh y su única participación es conocida por todos los kunas de hoy: Marsh llevará un grupo de albinos a los Estados Unidos, pretexto de estudios científicos. Pero nadie dice en la historia que fue lo que dijo hizo (sic) Iguanigdibipi ante los senadores en ese entonces.

The flag of the Kuna Nation and the Kuna Revolution, while also a symbol itself, is part and parcel of the symbolism surrounding Kuna independence. The flag, characterized by a black swastika on a yellow stripe, with two red strips above and below (*see Photo 5*), was designed on August 18, 1924 as the flag of the *Nación Dule*, or Kuna Nation, six months before the revolution took place (Kungiler 1994:13). As such, this flag was and is a symbol of sovereignty, which was then symbolically used during the battle for independence, and now also serves as a marker of identity for the Kuna people as a self-governing nation. The color red (*ginid*) in the flag is also symbolic of blood, specifically the blood that was shed in order to regain control over their people and their territory. The red dye achiote, called *mageb* in Kuna, was painted on the faces of those who fought. This practice, however, is also beneficial to the skin by helping to protect it from the sun, and is also recognized as a beauty-enhancing sort of makeup used on the cheeks. The color yellow (*gorogwat*) is symbolic of things sacred, related to the Kuna word *olodule* (sacred people, Kunas) and *olo*, which also refers to gold (but is not thought to be related to the Spanish *oro*). The swastika is a sacred symbol for the Kuna and signifies the circular and dual nature of life and humanity (Kungiler, personal communication). Here, then, the flag of the Kuna Nation and its symbolic components are functioning as what Ortner might term “summarizing” symbols, although I prefer to engage with these layers of symbols and symbolism in a less categorical manner. Instead of generalizing about their meanings (as I did above), I favor analyzing them in specific instances of use in order to explore their nuances, complications and contradictions, which I leave here for a future project.

I return to the discussion of master symbols in relation to other processes, specifically, the concept of “place” in historical processes. In his analysis of the Alamo, Flores analyzed many properties and processes surrounding the Alamo, including looking at the Alamo as a “memory-place.” Drawing on Pierre Nora’s *lieux de mémoire*, Flores describes how “[c]ultural memories, disguised and ‘entangled’ with the workings of historical discourse, are spatially and physically embedded in geographically fixed sites of public history and culture” (2002:18). While the Battle of the Alamo and the Kuna Revolution were both events in which fighting was involved, here the Alamo emerges as a master symbol tied to place. There are no places of remembrance dedicated to the Kuna Revolution such as markers, memorials or buildings, but, place does, however, play an important role. One such way in which place holds a certain significance can be seen in the sand, visible in the photos of the Revolution in Koskuna. In reviewing the preceding photos,

one may not have noticed that there are piles of sand on the ground that seem out of place. While most people pride themselves on their cut green lawns in the suburb of Veracruz, people in Kuna Yala are constantly collecting white sand from nearby beaches and sweeping the streets in order to keep the soft white sand roads of their town neat and clean. Members of the community of Koskuna specifically walked to the nearby Pacific beach in Veracruz to collect sand for the scene, because the heroes of 1925 most certainly did not carry out a revolution on a fresh-cut lawn. Although this is perhaps a relativistic argument, I wish to raise the question: Would marking events in terms of place with historical markers in Kuna Yala as is done in Western societies be to beg the question? Alternatively, would the lack of such place/space historical markers signify that there is no ‘extra’ remembering to be done, as historical remains of the events to be remembered are still present? In writing about “popular” and “elite” memory in Europe, Gillis suggests that, “[o]rdinary people felt the past to be so much a part of their present that they perceived no urgent need to record, objectify, and preserve it” (1994:6). While I do not find the “popular” and “elite” distinction to be useful here, I think it can easily be suggested that the past was and is so much a part of the present that there was little need to create a monument or site to remember the Kuna Revolution, although one may indeed appear in the future. There are undoubtedly other ways that place works in remembering the Kuna Revolution, including some that seem to be connected to events other than the fighting itself, but these remain to be explored.

In thinking of the symbolism that has emerged from the events of 1925, two particular, but interrelated, questions have come to mind: (1) is modernity a useful concept for exploring the Kuna Revolution? and (2) how does a bottom-up analysis of symbols differ from a top-down analysis?

Can the significance of the Kuna Revolution be elucidated through an analysis framed by modernity? Here I draw on Flores definition of modernity, which explains it as referencing

a complex, uneven, and multi-faceted process of transformation through which earlier social and cultural complexes are dislodged from the habitats of their making and reconstituted, under the weight of rationalized, technocratic forces, into distinct and qualitatively new forms (2002:2).

The term “modernity” itself is problematic for me, especially in regards to other semantic connotations of linear progress and the ease of juxtaposing it to the pre-modern and the modern/post-modern. However, I cast aside these reservations for the moment in order to get at what I believe to be the most important significance that modernity currently has for this analysis: a significant qualitative change in the relationship between people and their

material world. The Western invasion and colonization of Abia Yala (the Americas) was and is surely an important period of qualitative change between the Kuna and other indigenous *pueblos* and their material world. Western invasion and colonization of other peoples is indeed what unites the indigenous *pueblos* of the world (Tuhiwai Smith 1999). As such, could colonization serve as a master symbol of sorts for indigenous peoples? If colonization is the master symbol of modernity for indigenous peoples, can the Kuna Revolution be conceived as a rejection of colonization and the related processes that follow from the usurpation of land?

Through colonization, and the rejection of colonization through the Kuna Revolution and establishment of an autonomous province, the significance and possible analyses of colonization as a master symbol become complicated. Anthropology has especially concerned itself with oppressed peoples, finding that methodologies and epistemologies change when taking a bottom-up approach as to a top-down approach. For example, had Flores concentrated on the symbolic meaning of the Alamo for Anglos, to whom the mission is a bastion of political and economic victory and a tribute to the heroism of Crockett and Bowie, his analysis would have looked very different (but would have perhaps born a striking resemblance to those found in many school textbooks). Similarly, in his analysis of the Haitian Revolution, Trouillot scrutinized top-down accounts of the historical events surrounding the revolution and was able to show through a bottom-up analysis how certain aspects of the revolution had been silenced in power-laden ways. In looking at the Kuna Revolution, there is no question that the people of this indigenous *pueblo* have fought for and obtained what many indigenous peoples still lack: territory and self-governance. They even have grand heroes of the revolution that would rival Davy Crockett: Nele Kantule of Ustuppu and Simral Colman of Ailigandi. They still, however, face poverty, discrimination and many other inequities, as do other indigenous *pueblos*. Were the Kuna Revolution “master symbol” as such, I believe that a bottom-up methodology would prove difficult, as the Revolution was successful and widely recognized. If it were broached from the top-down, it would produce an analysis that I judge would look too favorably upon the situation of the Kuna *pueblo* today. While there are many other possible analyses, in following with the idea of key and master symbols, I find colonization and imperialism to be the underlying master symbol here. As such, the Kuna Revolution can be analyzed as a marked form of resistance, both real and symbolic, against these historic powers and processes against which all indigenous people struggle.

THE RE-MAKING OF A REVOLUTION

Why, then, is it important that the Kuna Revolution be understood as a “revolution” and not a “revolt,” “rebellion” or “uprising”? If the processes of colonialism and imperialism are still present in the lives of the Kuna and other indigenous peoples, then it is clear why the word that semantically carries the most resistance – revolution – be used in reference to the events of 1925.

The yearly “performance” of the Kuna Revolution in Veracruz, should perhaps more properly be dubbed an historical re-making. In calling it a play, drama, reenactment or “performance,” it is easy to overlook the fact that history is being both created and recreated. In this sense, the community of Koskuna, along with other Kuna towns, are producing history to celebrate in the now the successful revolution of 1925, and in doing so, simultaneously perform resistance against the hegemonic forces of today, all too similar to those that were fought against in 1925. In analyzing the production of history, Trouillot states:

The meaning of history is also in its purpose. Empirical exactitude as defined and verified in specific context is necessary to historical production. But empirical exactitude alone is not enough. Historical representations - be they books, commercial exhibits, or public commemorations - cannot be conceived only as vehicles for the transmission of knowledge. They must establish some relation to that knowledge. Further, not any relation will do. Authenticity is required, lest the representation becomes a fake, a morally repugnant spectacle (1995:149).

Indeed, the purpose of history is inseparable from its meaning. The “performance” of the Kuna Revolution cannot solely be considered a “vehicle for the transmission of knowledge.” Although it does also communicate knowledge, it is done for the people and by the people, experienced by the participant-actors and participant-spectators, as a way to remember and remake the events of 1925 for the purposes of the present. However, I must pause here to qualify Trouillot’s take on “empirical exactitude” in the production of history. Although one can distinguish between empirical and objective approaches, here I find the term “exactitude” as an attempt to reinsert objectivity into history. Trouillot in other places distinguishes between the Past and pastness, but I find it difficult to find a place for “exactitude” within pastness. In re-making the Kuna Revolution in Koskuna, there were many instances when creative license overrode “empirical exactitude,” and with great reason. To make an obvious example, in the proclamation of a victorious revolution there is a Kuna woman reciting a poem atop a pile of Panamanian guards, which no one would have mistaken to be part of “history” or criticized for its lack of “empirical exactitude,” but

which was appreciated and understood because the message it bore was historically appropriate for the present (*see Photo 5*). Again, while “empirical exactitude” can possibly be construed differently, similar concepts have been used in the past to discount histories such as that of Rigoberta Menchu.

Quibbling aside, I return to the importance of the yearly re-making of the Kuna Revolution. The events of 1925 may have passed, as did their re-making in Koskuna in 2003, but they both constitute and were constituted by the present, and both make reference to processes that began long before that, and will continue afterwards as well. As Trouillot writes,

The so-called legacies of past horrors - slavery, colonialism, or the Holocaust - are possible only because of that renewal. And that renewal occurs only in the present. (1995:151).

In re-making the Revolution, the Kuna are renewing the horror of colonialism and imperialism, celebrating their coordinated resistance against these forces in 1925, and actively reminding themselves that there is still a reason to resist in the now.

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