

NARRATIVE OF THE KILLING OF POLICEMAN ON ONE KUNA ISLAND
spoken by Miguel Hipólito of Niatupu, February 1991¹

Now, the queen [of carnival] was about to be crowned. The carriage was about to be drawn through the streets. So they felt grand. It was a fiesta, as they saw it. They had no idea it would be a day of war, you hear. As for the old men, they knew, they were all ready, you hear.

Then someone called out: "People from Wala are coming!" [i.e. rebel Indians from islands not controlled by the police] They were coming, over there, from the east, people were coming. 016. Then they arrived, they were coming in on the seaward side.. they were going and going and going. Then after quite a while had passed, someone called "Wala people are coming. They've landed."

In fact those people were already some distance past---it was a trick... So they couldn't shoot them. Then they went after them, the Latins did, carrying their... gun; off they went, one carried the... gun. It was Herrera. And Samuel. And after him, Sosip. [the three policeman on the island]. The three of them. Those who went. Aha. They crossed over [to the outer islands].²

They went in my canoe, they crossed in my canoe. Like this. They crossed over. They landed there. Then they went there, they searched for them. No one there. They went to look another place. No one there. They went another place and saw, off in the distance, people [i.e. the rebel canoe] going away. They fired their guns four times. Four times. The people, it just made their sail flutter [i.e. the bullets hit the sail but none of the people in the canoe].

Then when the Latins were coming back, they came crossing over. [People] had said to Manuel [a young Kuna man], "Go meet them [i.e. the returning policemen]. They'll tell you, 'Pull up the canoe.' You say to them, "No. I won't pull it [by myself], just a second and I'll go call [the others] at the club to pull up the canoe.'" "All right" [Manuel said].³

The canoe landed, it was coming fast and it landed. "Come here!" Then he went to them. Thus. The canoe landed. When the canoe landed, Manuel came to them. Aha. The Latins stood up: Herrera. Sosip. Samuel. Here. Over there the end of the gun barrels were sticking out, from the cookhouse. Chief Wawasu's gun,... [he fired it].

¹ The narrator, now an old man, was a young boy at the time. He spoke standing in the middle of an island street.

² There were three islands, with channels between them. The village was on the innermost island. The rebel Indians in a sailing canoe passed through the channel between the outer two islands.

³ This was a stratagem to leave the three policeman standing by the canoe with no villagers near them, so they could be shot from ambush.

So they were just [lying] on the ground... Another fired too. Another was firing---on-and-on-and-on they were firing. War. Herrera was shot here. In his arm. The bullet came out the other side. Aha. Then he cried out when it was broken. Then off he ran.

What's-his-name, Sosip. Sosip ran away, his house was here. Then he was attacked here. Sosip was hanging upside down. You hear. He wasn't lying on the ground. He was hung upside down. I was standing over there, standing and watching. Off I went! I ran off home. I took fright. When I was sitting at home, the elders called out: "Everyone go bathe. [to purify themselves from the pollution of the killing and blood]."

There were lots of people here, women. One whole house full of them. The women fled. The women were screaming and yelling, I tell you. As for me,... I was running... I saw him. I was running there. I got there. We came running... the boys left where they were and were running around. There was blood, umh! we saw. I would have run over [there] but my mother said: "Why are you touching those things? Don't touch those things! The spirits will come take you away. You're all covered in blood, you see, the place was full of it."

As for Samuel, he ran away. He was caught over there. He was climbing up [struggling to get away into the second story of his house], and they caught him by the foot. Down he was pulled! they say. Then they hit him with an axe, between the arms, crack! With a machete, crack! Then he was bleeding.

Herrera. Herrera fled. His shoe got caught. He ended up falling. Then they fell on him, cutting and cutting with their machetes, they came up and shot him with their guns. He died too. But his wife didn't die. My older brother [a ringleader] said, "Don't touch the woman. As for the Latin woman, don't touch her, that's bad."

Aha, then when the fighting was all over, they were carried away. They said, "Carry away the Latins, their bodies. Olotiwikinya. Shorty. [men who carried the bodies]. You hear. Also Manuel... Another as well. The other Latin as well."

As for Samuel, people couldn't kill him. He was still alive. They knocked his head... bang against a log. Nicolas did it. (The Nicolas who recently died.) He was holding a big stick. He went up to his head and bam! No. [He didn't die.] So they did it twice more. Shorty said, "I'll do it twice too!" No. Then another. Twice more. No. His head was split open, his brains were all scrambled. That did it. All empty. How would that feel? Yeech!

At sunset we didn't sleep in hammocks. On the ground. They softened up the ground, digging and digging, and there were little children spread all over the place. Like that for two days.

. . . .

So the woman didn't die, Samuel's wife there. They came to get her [later]. When they came to get her, one old lady helped her. The old lady's name was Ikwa-ilikili. She was the one who helped her. It was said, "Where did Samuel's wife go? Put an end to her! Kill her too!" The old lady said, "Is that so?" [The Latin woman] she had long hair. Snip-snip-snip, they did a rushed job on it, and it was all in clumps. They... changed all her clothes, quick quick, they changed her clothes. To the clothes our women wear. She stood up wearing that.

"This is the moment. The men are coming. Jimmy Smith is coming. Lupos is coming. They're coming for her, to kill her." The old lady said, "Is that so? Girl, come here! She held her. She grabbed her arm, like this. So she stood her up... "They're coming for you, to kill you."

"What are you coming to do?" she said to them. What have you come looking for?"

"I've come for Samuel's wife."

"Is that so? The one standing here, who do you see standing here? Look, it's Samuel's wife, she stands here wearing Indian clothes, you see her headcloth? She looks exactly like us, her head is like ours, just like that, you see," the old lady said.

"All right." They went off again. She was saved. You hear. That's as much as I'll say.