

## THE BURNING OF TICANTIQUI or NIATUPU, Nov. 1919

Ticantiqui, also called Niatupu, was a tiny village on an island a few miles east of Nargana. Quite a few of its inhabitants had abandoned Nargana because of what missionaries, police, and the modernists there were doing. In November of 1919, the detachment head on Nargana heard that a man named Kilu who had fled Nargana earlier the same year had buried alive his grandchild's illegitimate baby. (Infanticide did sometimes occur in this era, most often for albinos and deformed newborns.) A narrative by an old man, then a youth, characterizes the event differently, depicting the young woman as carrying out the infanticide on her own initiative, with the implication that Kilu (whom the police had already branded a rebel) may not have dictated her actions.

We began to awake and someone noticed that an infant was crying in the brush.<sup>1</sup> It was crying in the middle of the brush. A pregnant woman, we didn't hear her... she put it into the brush... When it was about to happen, she said, the woman did,... "I'm going to the water" [to defecate or urinate]...<sup>2</sup>

Someone heard an infant crying in the seagrape. He said, "Why is there crying there? Where is a baby coming from? When he looked he heard it crying among the seagrape.

He went to Grandfather [probably the village chief]. "Grandfather, someone is crying. Why is someone crying there? A little person is crying. Then grandfather said, "Go get it for me, you hear!" ... Then grandfather came to see. Grandfather said, "Whose baby is this?" They began to search. Searching-searching-searching. Well it was that young woman's, they said. "Take it there!" ... "Aha!"

"We are in a terrible situation. What will happen?"

Then by the end of that same day, they already knew, the police already knew, in Nargana... They heard about it. Someone who had been here was a big mouth. It was in the morning, and the person who spread tales had already left. "This and this is happening in Niatupu..." "What's happening there?" "Thus and thus and thus and thus it's happening." "Aha." (Oral narrative, Abrán Escobar, 2/91).

The detachment head sent a party of policemen to arrest Kilu. They

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<sup>1</sup> At this point the island was still only lightly inhabited, with a line or two of houses on the shore closest the mainland, the rest of the island taken up by scrub and trees.

<sup>2</sup> i.e., she tried to conceal the fact that she was about to give birth.

arrived in the middle of the night, and when they tried to seize him, he resisted, and one of the policemen was shot and lightly wounded. The police fled, leaving the wounded man hiding in the brush. The next day the Ticantiqui people took him to another island, whose people took him to Porvenir. Meanwhile, however, the police sent a stronger party to Ticantiqui, which resulted in the killing of one Kuna and the burning of the island.

Nargana, 11/11/19, Detachment Head Ramón Garrido to Intendente:

I inform you that last night I sent a mission to Ticantiqui to capture and Indian who had buried alive a child (his grandchild) and this moment I have just learned that the Agents were attacked by the Indians, resulting that Pérez was gravely wounded.

Come immediately with reinforcements.

Police reports and Kuna oral history disagree strongly on what happened. The police claimed that their objective was to rescue their wounded comrade (though they had in fact already received word he was in Porvenir).

From the official police report on the incident: ...We arrived at the bay of Ticantiqui, and we saw all the Indians scattered along the beach, without there being in the village a single woman or child, which is among them an evident proof that they are disposed to fight. We circled the bay and they fired at us from the beach. We let them use up their cartridges,.. and when we saw that the shots were ceasing a little we made a volley from on board to intimidate them.

The Indians abandoned the beach and ran to situate themselves in the bush behind the houses... we ran among the houses in search of the Police Agent wounded or killed two days previously, which turned out inefficacious, but we did see in a house the Indian who killed his little newborn grandchild... and we sent him to the launch under arrest...

On arriving at the far end of the village, they followed us firing their shotguns... they threw a lighted stick of dynamite at me,.. but fortunately they didn't throw it with sufficient force,.. and it fell on the roof... The house caught fire immediately, the same as the one next to it, not so much as a consequence of the dynamite as that the Indians fired from among the houses with shotguns, which to shoot them, they used plugs of tow or paper, and when they are fired, these plugs come out, lit by the powder, and on falling on the houses lit them on fire.

We tried to put out the burning houses, but that was impossible with these houses of straw and the strong wind that was blowing. The fire was growing each second, and we had to embark and get the launch out of the Bay to keep a spark from igniting the gasoline tank on us.

The Kuna version depicts police actions as a punitive raid, sent to teach

rebellious Indians a lesson:

Then it arrived, the motor boat, the next day, in early morning... It went fast. Then it arrived. They were just looking and looking and looking; the [people on the] boat were counting houses,.. They didn't say anything, you see. Then they left... Then Chief Ikwatinikinye said, "They may come burn the place on us. Women, get together some of your things, get them outside,.. The women didn't listen. The women said, "He's just sounding off. He's... really afraid. .

Then the next morning they came back... Then they arrived, Zii! the motorboat arrived, they say.

According to Kuna witnesses, the young men of the village wanted to fight, but their elders persuaded them to take the women to the outer islands. When the elders went down to the shore to parlay, however, the police shot one old man dead on the spot, scattering the others, and they torched the village with kerosene brought specially for the purpose.

...the motorboat unloaded nothing but kerosene, suach-suach-suach! they poured out the kerosene. Then they finished off the place. [The flames] flash-flash-flash-flash, there were big pigs in each house, there were some big shops, over that way there was a big shop, belonging to Ikwa-inippiler... Wiped out! Gone! A big pig [tied] in front of the house... all gone... The people had lost it all! The big pigs that were there, the pigs were all fried--tiii!---the pigs were bubbling and frying. It happened that way in early morning, like burning off old forest, that's what happened, you hear. The place was giving off smoke, smoking, smoking, it was like that all day! We got up the next day and it was still burning like that.

In the aftermath of the incident, some villagers fled away, a few as far as Colombia. Over the next several years, they returned and rebuilt the village.