

The Ritual Play of the Congos in North Central Panama

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La Costa Abajo: The Lower/Down Coast

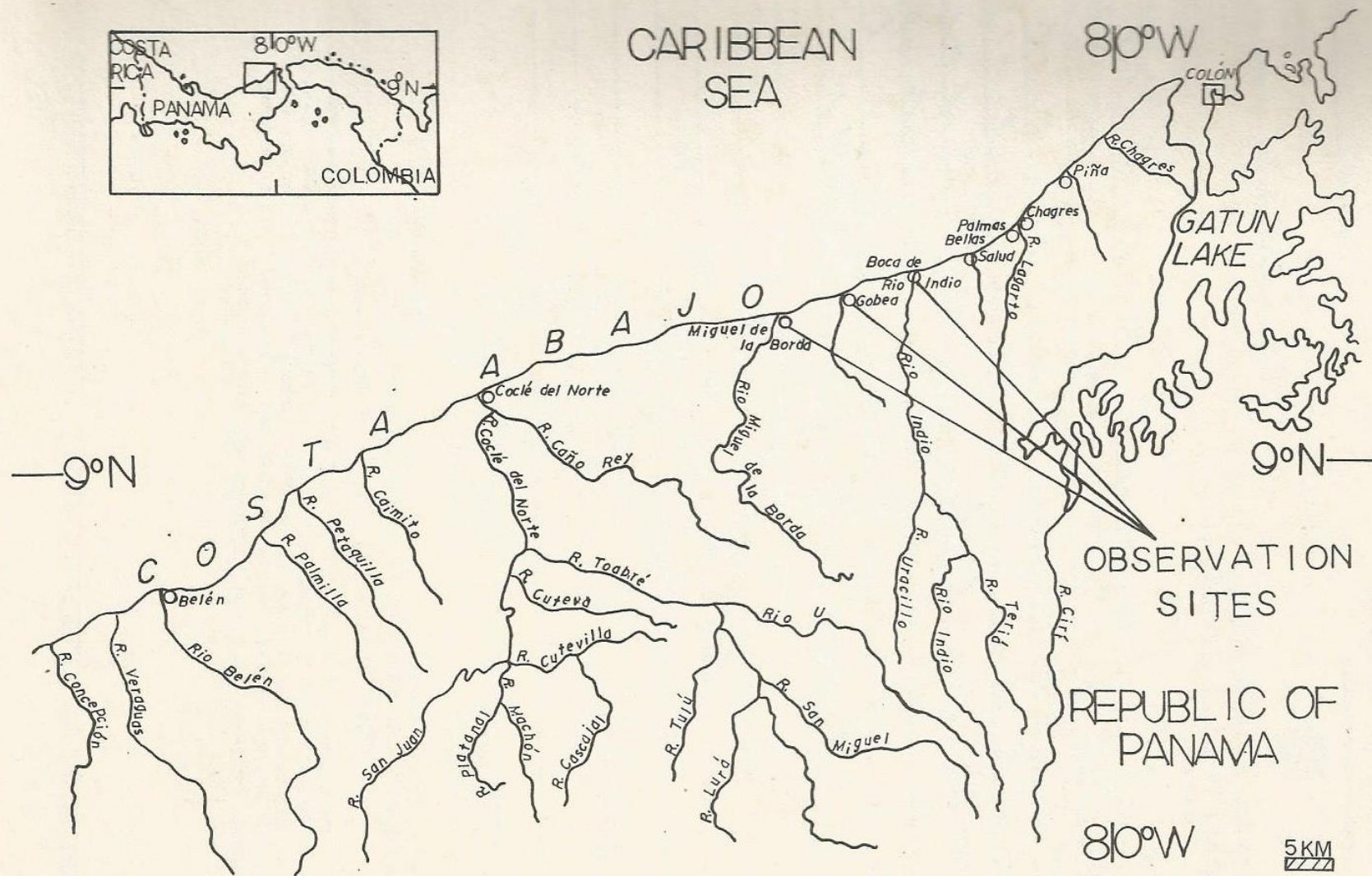
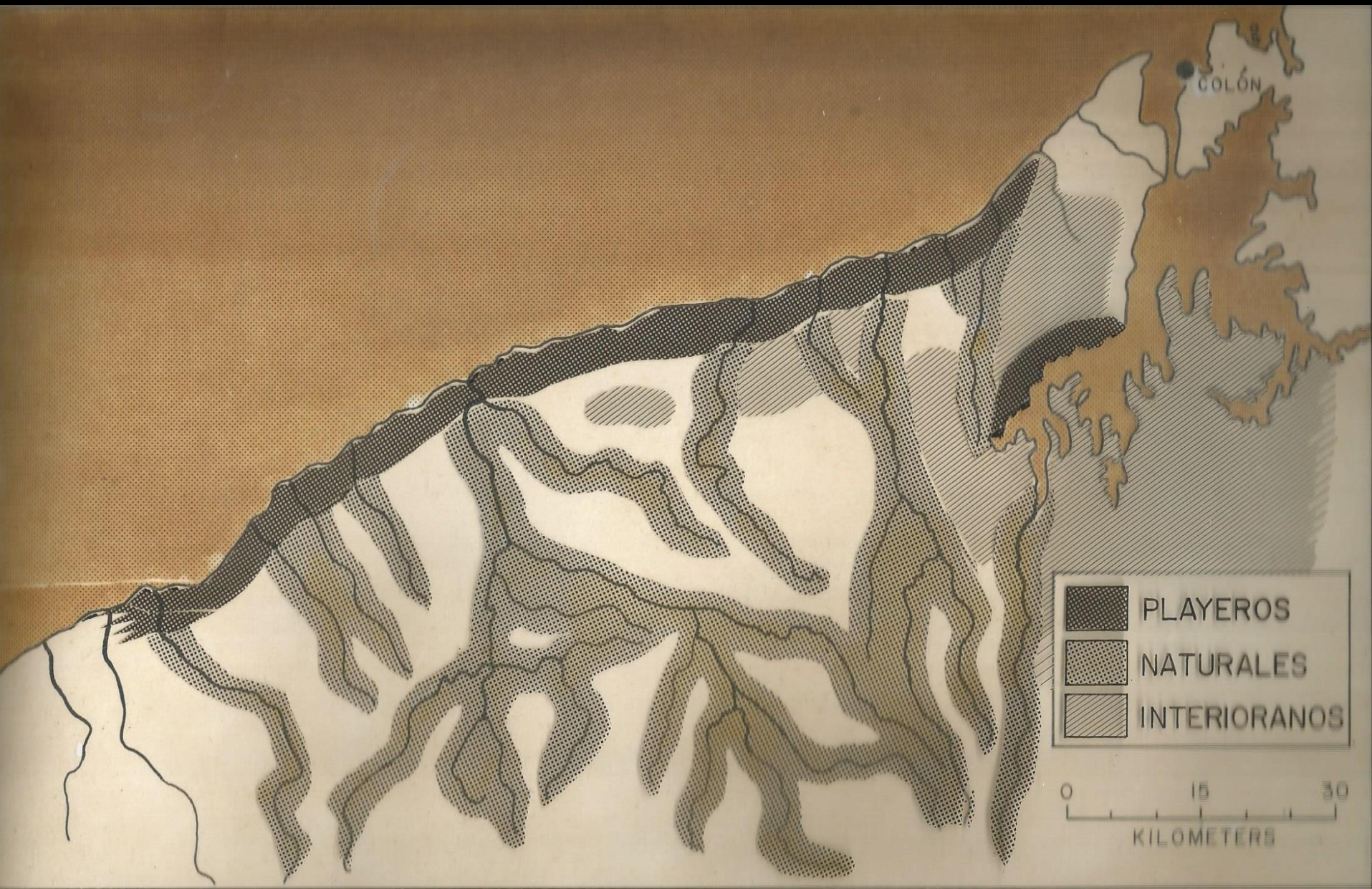


FIG.1 MAP OF PANAMA SHOWING REGION OF LOWER COAST AND SETTLEMENTS WHERE RITUAL PLAY OF THE CONGOS WAS SEEN.

Relative spatial distribution of Playeros, Naturales, and Interioranos in the Lower Coast



Participant Observation, 1979-1980



Symbolic Names of Female Congo Players

Macé/Micé/Mecé : *María de la Merced* (Mary of Mercy)

Revellín = *Revellín* (Ravelin)

Cundulilla = *Candelilla* (Fire Ant)

Llorongá = *Llorona* (Wailer)

Calebra = *Culebra* (Snake)

Minina = *Mi Niña* (My Girl)

Fabiana = *Fabiana* (Fabian, fem.)

Macha = *Macho* (Male)

Macha Relámpago = *Macha Relámpago* (Macho Lightning)

Macha Nucha = *Macha Noche* (Macho Noche)

Symbolic Names of Male Players*

Juan de Dioso/Barrachate: *Juan de Dios*/-
Borrachete (John of God/Drunkard)
Juan de Diosito/Barachate: *Juan de Diosito*/-
Borrachito (Little John of God/Little Drunkard)
Pujurete: *Pajarito* (Birdie)
Juruprango: *Aeroplano* (Airplane)
Trepautene: *Tropa Usted* (Climb You=Translator)
Purucinga: *Policia* (Police)
Unjunero: *Ingeniero* (Engineer)
Burucuntoo: *Barrecontoo* (Sweeps All = Thief)
Maca-Maca: *Masca-Masca* (Chewer-Chewer)
Cararao: *Colorado* (Red)
Marajencia: *Diligencia* (Business Transaction)
Mañegue: *Meñique* (Little Finger)
Muchuta: *Machete* (Bushknife)
Mema-Mema: *Lleva-Lleva* (Take-Take = Messenger)
Rulúmpago: *Relámpago* (Lightning)
Aruvino: *Adivino* (Fortuneteller)
Habrado: *Hablador* (Talker)
Cuneye: *Conejo* (Rabbit)

Pravo: *Pavo* (Turkey)
Gullunazo: *Gallinazo* (Black Vulture)
Chuva: *Chivo* (Goat)
Tugrillo: *Tigrillo* (Little Tiger)
Manao: *Venado* (Deer)
Curudilla: *Coloradilla* (Little Red Tick)
Gurupata: *Garrapata* (Tick)
Cujalla: *Caballo* (Horse)
Munkí: *Monkey* (Monkey in English)
Mufuanga: *Matuanga* (Old Man of the Woods)
Troyana: *Troyano* (Spanish Captain Cristóbal Troyano de León)
Mancella: *Doncella* (Indian Maiden)
Mundución: *Maldición* (Damnation)
Frastero: *Forastero* (Foreigner)
Nengre: *Negros* (Negroes) A collective name by which the players call themselves and emphatically refuse to be called *Congro* (*Congo*) which they say is a fish.

*Collective list of names of male players in Río Indio, Gobeá, and Miguel de la Borda. The name *Monkey* in English occurs only in Gobeá, a village of afroantillian founders who worked in the construction of the Panama Railroad and Canal.

*Airplane pulling the Nengres upon arrival from Gané/Guné
(Guinea) on January 19, eve of Saint Sebastian's Day
Maguedá/Miguel de la Borda, 1980*



Saint Sebastian = Abalu-aie and festive playing of the drums of Xango in Africa

In the Catholic ritual calendar, *January 20 is the feastday of Saint Sebastian*, who was a Captain of the guards in the imperial palace in Rome, and he used this position to help as much as possible the Christians being persecuted. When he converted the Governor of Rome Cromacio and his son Tiburcio and refused to renounce christianity, by order of the Emperors Diocleciano and Maximiano, of the Roman tetrarchy, around the year 284 a.C., Sebastian was tied to a tree and pierced by arrows, in the presence of the pretorian guards. Sebastian survived and courageously presented himself before Dioclesiano, who ordered that Sebastian be beaten to death and his body thrown into a drainage ditch. Through the centuries, Saint Sebastian has been invoked for protection against poisoned arrows as well as plagues and sicknesses prevalent in Africa and in America.

In Brazil, where scholars have correlated the festivities honoring African deities with the feastdays of saints in the Catholic liturgical calendar, *Saint Sebastian and his feastday on January 20 corresponds to the African Abalu-aie in whose honor there is festive playing of the drums of Xango, the most prestigious divinity who controls rivers, rains, storms, and travails.*



SAN SEBASTIAN

John of God, King of the Congos

MARZO 8



SAN JUAN DE DIOS

The king of the Congos is called **John of God**, in honor of *Saint John of God* (1495–1550), a lay man who founded the Community of Hospital Brothers, to take care of poor and mentally ill patients in hospitals, after having served a religious penitence in a hospital for patients suffering from mental illnesses in Granada, Spain, where he discovered the grave error of pretending to cure mental illnesses with methods of torture. Many runaway slaves were treated as mentally ill, particularly when they would talk in the ritual language of the Congos and could not be understood. In Portobelo and in Natá, the Spaniards established hospitals of St. John of God.

St. John of God was born and died on **March 8**, a date that falls during the ritual time of the Congos that begins on the *eve of St. Sebastian on January 19 until Ash Wednesday, the day after Tuesday of Carnival.*

Maeé/Micé/Mecé = Mary of Mercy

SEPTIEMBRE 24



The Queen of the Congos is called **Maeé/Micé/Mecé**, in honor of **Mary of Mercy**, patron saint of prisoners and of the religious order of **Mercedarians**, that was founded by Pedro Nolasco, a rich merchant of Barcelona, Spain, who had a vision of the Virgin Mary on the early morning of August 2, 1218.

Mary ordered him, as a wish of her Son Jesus, to found a religious order to redeem captives, using his wealth and that of other lay men, like himself, who were not priests but gentlemen of Christ, to pay the **redemption fee of slaves**, that was called "**la merced**"—**the mercy**.

In the Catholic church in Portobelo, the altar to the right of the main altar is dedicated to Mary of Mercy. The church behind the Cathedral in the *Casco Antiguo* of Panama City is the Church of La Merced. And the patron saint of Boca de Río Indio in the Lower/Down Coast is Mary of Mercy, whose feastday is celebrated on September 24.

NUESTRA SEÑORA DE LAS MERCEDES
PATRONA DE LOS PRESOS

The Legal Permit to enact the Play



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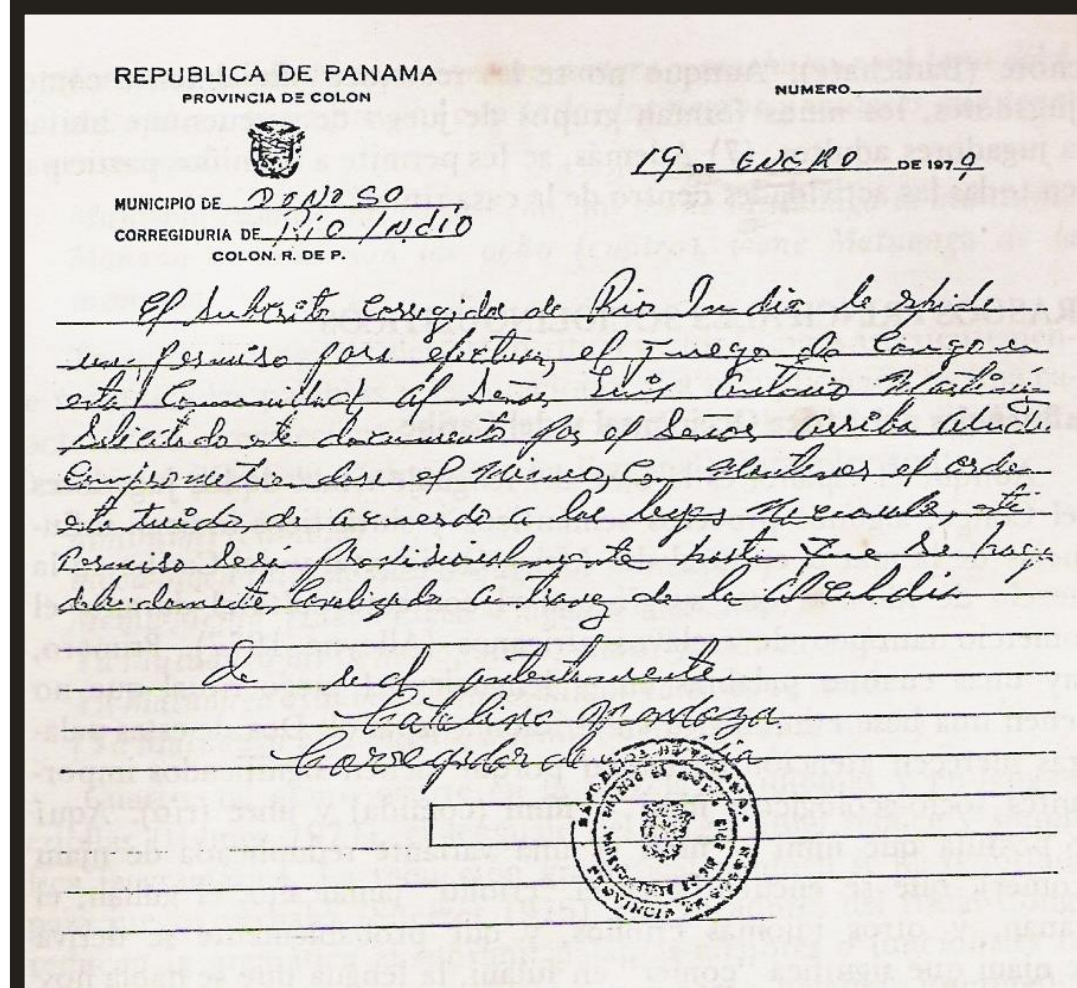


Figura A:

Purenque (Palenque) = The Ritual House



Tarengo de la Nengre / Terrain of the Negros

Boca de Río Indio, 1979



Measuring the terrain, Miguel de la Borda 1980



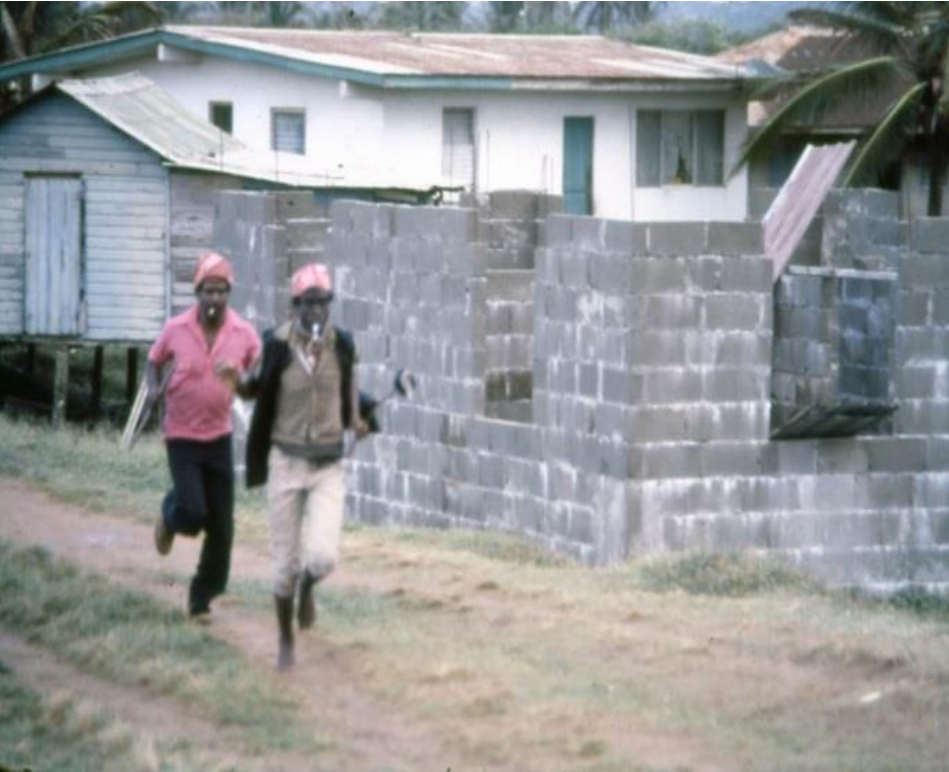
Pelea de la Caja de Plata / Fight for the Money Box *Boca de Río Indio, 1979*



The Indians Steal the Money Box



Capt. Troyano chases Birdie



The Indians capture the Queen of the Congos



Indians attack and surround the Purenque



Indian Chiefs negotiate with John of God to exchange the Queen for the Indian Women captured by the Nengre



Indian woman fumigates the Purenque and after, all Indians enter to dance with the Nengres and Captain Troyano inside the Purenque symbolizing the mixing of Negroes, Indians, and Spaniards



Miguel de la Borda, 1980: Arrival of Maʻuanga



Mecé and Juan de Dioso receive Matuanga



Gulunazo / Black Vulture attacks Matuanga



Gullunazo throws Matuanga down and Meeé beats Matuanga



Airplane rescues *Matuanga* and takes him to the Bishop's store



Asking for ñimá-ñimá, Miguel de la Borda, 1980



The Macrocho/Sancocho



*Distributing Arroz con Sal/Rice Pudding to the Juruminga,
Miguel de la Borda, 1980*



Jurumínga / *Little Ants*, Boca de Río Indio, 1979



Juruminga / *Little Ants*, Miguel de la Borda, 1980



Rufuncito pradio en la Jibre
Little Mouse Lost in the River
Miguel de la Borda, 1980



Paintings of Jurumínga / Children's Courts

Nilsa Justavino

Negritos Bailando Congo, 2005
Curundú, Panama City



Sonia Solanilla Morales

Corte de Congos., 2005
Nombre de Dios, Costa Arriba



Endoculturation

*Process of
acquiring
Culture from
within*

Culture =
Transmission of
information:
• Knowledge,
• Attitudes,
• Skills, and
• Values
for at least three
generations

Types of Endoculturation

- *Postscriptive—information of the past*
- *Coscriptive—information of contemporary age groups*
- *Prescriptive—information of the future, not known— invented*

Bibliographic References in English

Joly, Luz Graciela. 1981. *One is None and Two is One: Development from Above and Below in North Central Panama*. Ph.D. Dissertation. University of Florida, Department of Anthropology. Gainesville, Florida, USA. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International No.8127435.

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iThanks!

*May St. Sebastian,
St. John of God, and
Mary of Mercy bless you.*