



**Dule Urwed and Boxing:
The Production of Dule Knowledge via Baby San Blas**

Sue Haglund

University of Hawai'i-Mānoa (Department of Political Science)

Abstract

This article is about the production of Dule knowledge and how it is conveyed in Panama's boxing world. The physical performance of boxing movements creates spaces for Dule presence and serves as a boundary marker for both Panamanian and Dule cultures. I will discuss and examine the participation of my grandfather Dule boxer Ricardo Walker, also known as Baby San Blas, who was successful in his boxing matches and how the conflicting stories of this Indigenous boxer in Panama's sporting world was, and is, political. The layers of the boxing world exposed via his performance reveals a production of knowledge for participants and their practices while dismantling and reconstructing those spatial practices.

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 the 1980s) posing in a victorious moment, after he had won a world boxing title fight. The following page featured the history of boxing in Panama, noting several athletes who had not only excelled but

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actually changed the face of the boxing world, both nationally and internationally. The article highlights 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 are featured who, while not world champions, were national champions. Those featured were: Antonio Buchí Amaya, Justiniano Aguilar, Luis Patiño, David Abad and Young Herrera.ⁱ That last name stood out.

[2] Young Herrera had been the former flyweight champion of Panama—that is until 1930, when a young boxer known as Baby San Blas, a Dule (or also known as Guna, a name to identify the Dule people, an indigenous people from Gunayala, Panama) took the title away from him. Herlindo Arias, a Panamanian journalist, highlights the victorious moment when Baby San Blas won the national title. He wrote:

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

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

Furthermore, 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”).ⁱⁱⁱ This description delineates two spaces: one for Baby San Blas as a boxer and the other for him as Indigenous. Despite his achievements in Panama’s national sport, this champion is recognized not as “Panamanian,” but rather as Indigenous.^{iv} Arias’ comment about Baby San Blas carves out a distinct and racialized narrative. It lauds an indigenous boxer and his accomplishments, while co-opting him into another spatial layer for a particular national narrative. 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.

Racism and Boxing in Panama

Boxing’s popularity in Panama arose from two metropolises: Panama City and Colón. U.S American and British men (including laborers, ex-pat professionals and military personnel) introduced boxing to Panama in the second-half of the nineteenth century.^v 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.”^{vi} Soon after, this fight begat the establishment of a small boxing club by Kid Thompson in Colón, Panama.^{vii}

[4] 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.^{viii} The American and English foreigners who introduced the sport organized these boxing matches.^{ix} He notes that white boxers who won bouts over their black counterparts served to symbolize the white-dominated system of the country, which once embraced slavery.^x

[5] Racial intolerance was common in the boxing world in Panama and beyond its borders. Over the years, however, boxing has become a place of contradiction, in terms of racism. John Sugden notes that the majority of the best fighters from the United States are African-Americans and recent newcomers rather than white American boxers.^{xi} He adds, “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."^{xii} In the case of Panama, between the 1920s and 1930s, most of its boxers were black, mulatto, mestizo or Indigenous.

[6] The form of racism encountered within Panama's boxing world is subtle. The process of mestizaje or mixing of cultures and ethnicities 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 mestizaje process created the need for Panamanian nation-building that could represent a unified authenticity yet conceptualized imaginings per mixing of cultures and ethnicities. This has produced what would become a new Panamanian character and race, under one national realm.

[7] In Panamanian pugilism, mestizo, mulatto and black Panamanians became the country's dominant boxers. By positioning themselves as sports champions, the race and ethnicity of these boxers would neither be compromised nor frowned upon in the greater society because they resemble their Panamanian audience, referees and judges. This is not the case, however, for those who are Indigenous.

The Machigua or Boy

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)*. They are bilingual newspapers founded by American publishers, whose readers during this period included Americans residing within the 10-mile Canal Zone strip occupied by the United States Government from 1903-1999 and the Panamanians who worked for and with them.

[9] It is important, for several reasons, to question articles written and published by these newspapers during 1930s and 1950s. Those articles on the major matches and events; often very brief, reflect the practice of racial politics that defines and recognizes what is Panamanian and who is Panamanian.

[10] 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", the writer uses disparaging words when referring to the Dule boxer and refers only to Baby San Blas' opponent by his professional 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

Nacional, en donde 'el indio' hace diariamente sus entrenamientos" (one showed up for the Gimnasio Nacional, where 'the Indian' does daily workouts).^{xiii} 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 boy said to us, when asked by us, about his physical conditions).^{xiv} In quotations, "el indio" and "el machigua" are repeatedly used throughout that article.^{xv}

[11] Additionally, in a news article from 1932 and another from 1937, reporters referred to Baby San Blas: "the Indian" and "the Indian Flash."^{xvi} 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 the writer's intended usage of these words shifts, when for example "...lo decían era como que lo escupían" (they said it, as if they were spitting).^{xvii}

[12] By employing the words machigua, indio, Indian and Indian Flash, writers compartmentalize the being of Baby San Blas within racial and gendered perimeters. The words function as coded acts that occupy and

traverse one space to another. The usage of these texts creates a layered, oppressive narrative of expectations about Dule. A Dule body traverses Panamanian society both visibly and invisibly. Its presence in local and national realms expands the constraints of identity through engaging acts: re-defining, re-interpreting and re-constructing their bodies with (and in) relation to Panama's national sociopolitical constraints.

[13] 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 [y no Gunayala] a la región de los gunas. Yo sí recuerdo la presencia de gunas en Panamá de mi época, en 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 [rather than Gunayala]. 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.^{xviii}

The usage of 'San Blas' (this is Spanish for Saint Blaise,) 'machi' and 'machigua' commands and elicits tensions present in Panama City. In addition, Father Guardia's observations of these words and the usage of 'San Blas' (instead of Gunayala when referring to the autonomous region the Dule people inhabit) demonstrate that the Dule were never allowed an authentic place or individuality with respect to either Panamanian or Indigenous identities. There is a similar occurrence in the U.S. regarding the representation 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:

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.^{xix}

The television commentators' choice to identify and separate the men based on race and gender also reinforces discrimination and the cultural ideals of masculinity.^{xx} 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 an adult male. He is a boy and an Indian.

[14] Now the usage of machigua and indio, is in reference to not only Baby San Blas but every Dule male, placing the body in a subjugated position. The body itself, however, resists such disparagement. 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. 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.^{xxi}

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. Every gesture of the body carefully designs a history depicting the dominant and dominated. In the case of the Indigenous body, every gesture embodies and defines the intricacy of Panamanian national identity.

[15] As to Panamanian national identity, according to Juan Materno-Vásquez, “En Panamá, el orgullo nacional es un orgullo racial” (In Panama, national pride is a racial pride).^{xxii} This is reflected throughout various

Panamanian sectors of European, African and/or Mixed Indigenous-European ancestry.^{xxiii} Where do the purely Indigenous fit in the Panamanian national-racial pride complex? The cultivation of Panamanian national identity marginalizes and excludes the Indigenous population from being full “Panamanians.” Materno-Vásquez asserts that “Los indios, en tanto, viven en un mundo aparte...” (The Indians, meanwhile, live in a world apart...)^{xxiv} Such exclusionary acts are evident in the written descriptions of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Panamanian boxers. In the case of Baby San Blas, the public wants the image of a minstrel-like performance, displaying an indio and machigua rather than the boxer himself. However, Baby San Blas’ bodily gestures in the boxing ring both dispelled and decoded—albeit for a moment—the public’s Indigenous image and expectation.

Conflicting Stories

Baby San Blas began his boxing career four years after the 1925 Dule Revolution. At the age of 12, he began his training in Colón, Panama. From a 1977 interview, he recounts his boxing career:

[...] en 1929 empecé a aprender boxeo bajo la dirección del expúgil 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.^{xxv}

Baby San Blas, along with other Dule boxers such as Pastor Muñoz, Francisco Mojica, Kid Alfaro, Young Alfaro, San Blas Kid, Baby Garcia and Baby San Blas' younger brother Eugenio Mendez had real presence in Panama's boxing world, Panamanian society and Gunayala. The agility of these boxers was evident in their matches and sparring practices. Eugenio Mendez and Francisco Mojica often sparred with Baby San Blas during training workouts.^{xxvi} Moreover, Francisco Mojica used to spar with both

brothers during training exercises until, one day, a tall waga (non-indigenous person) broke Mojica's nose during a practice.^{xxvii} After this nose injury, Mojica decided not to continue boxing.^{xxviii}

[17] For many Dule boxers, professional fighting allowed them to demonstrate their athleticism and character with non-Dule boxers. In a four-round curtain raiser, "Kid Alfaro, another Indian, fought four fast rounds with Young Herrera [a non-Dule Panamanian]."^{xxix} 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."^{xxx} 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."^{xxxi}

[18] Those of his generation recognize Baby San Blas and his contribution to the sport. His adept movements and swift punches in the ring become favorite moments for the large crowds of fans in Panamanian boxing. His popularity is evident in the attendance of crowds even during his training

preparations before a fight. In May of 1940, Baby San Blas prepared for a 10-round matching bout with Baby Canzoneri with both boxers weighing in at 112 pounds.^{xxxii} During Baby San Blas' training, an anonymous reporter described the presence of Dule fans at the training gym:

[...] 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.

[...] 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 him at various exercises that he does.^{xxxiii}

Their support and presence surely influenced Baby San Blas' performance in the boxing ring. 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.^{xxxiv} The sports writer, who was intrigued by the Dule fans supportive presence during fights and training practices, describes Baby San Blas as "...el ídolo de la comarca de San Blas" ("...the idol of the San Blas region").^{xxxv} This description exemplifies Baby San Blas' legendary reputation

as a pioneering Dule prizefighter to compete in professional boxing at the national level in Panama.

[19] The journalists, boxing historians, boxing commentators, Dule and non-Dule Panamanians all provide differing oral and written narratives about Baby San Blas' boxing matches. These include conflicting accounts from 1930s to 1950s in both newspapers, *El Panamá-América* and *La Estrella de Panamá*.

[20] One of the most notable examples of conflicting stories appeared in *El Panamá-América*. 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 redactors 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."^{xxxvi}

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."^{xxxvii} The Kid Zefine vs. Baby San Blas match of November 12, 1939 was and remains a popular and sensationalized fight. The month leading up to the November 12th fight, both *La Estrella de Panamá* and *El Panamá-América* followed and reported on the physical and mental conditions of both boxers: predictions were made for betting purposes.

[21] The night before that bout, *La Estrella de Panamá* reported on the popularity of Baby San Blas and Kid Zefine, with the former receiving higher praise. According to the report:

Baby San Blas, el vengador de Kid Alfaro [a Dule boxer], fue muy aplaudido por el público que presencié 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.^{xxxviii}

Popular and a crowd favorite, the results of the Baby San Blas vs. Kid Zefine bout were not reported in the local newspapers. Instead, it took ten days for any reference of the match to appear in one of the papers. 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:

Permítame conocer del público por medio de su leído diario que Baby San Blas exige una revancha a Kid Zefine a quien se le concedió una victoria discutible. San Blas quiere pelear en está

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.^{xxxix}

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").^{xi} This letter to the Sports Editor is the only evidence I found that reveals the matching bout results. The omission of the results in *La Estrella de Panamá* and *El Panamá-América*, is unexplainable. By omitting this piece of history, the press disrespects both Baby San Blas and Kid Zefine.

[22] 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.^{xli} It is a hierarchical 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.”^{xlii} 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.^{xliii} 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 decisions”).^{xliv}

Grandfather Olowibikina’s Medicine

The boxing reports reflect how history is written. In boxing reports about Baby San Blas, there is a clear indication of what information contributes to the admitted stories, as well as omitted ones. According to Daniel Alonso, Panama’s leading boxing historian and commentator of sports television program *Lo Mejor del Boxeo*:

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 diferente 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 importantísimas victorias 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 outstanding boxer during the 1930s until the late 40s almost the 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 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.^{xlv}

The stories from both Dule and non-Dule Panamanians contrast and complement one another in clarifying Dule's 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.

[24] Alonso indicates:

Hay quien me dicen "¿pero cómo tú puedes decir eso si tú no lo viste pelear?" ...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 importantísimo estas referencias históricas que hemos recopilados sobre Baby San Blas para dibujar más o menos el perfil.

There are those who tell me "but how can you say that if you did not see him fight?" ...Historians like me we do not have to have seen the boxer. But with the references that 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.^{xlvi}

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 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”).^{xlvii}

[25] 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.”^{xlviii} Olowibikina, father of Baby San Blas, was an *inaduled* (a person who specializes in medicinal plants and medicine man) on the island of Agligandi.^{xlix} Sagla Simral Colman, a *sagla* or social-religious administrative chief 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.ⁱ Among the lists of names, Olowibikina, (whose name is spelled as “Olo Wigueguiña” in the letter,) was described as a doctor of medicine.ⁱⁱ 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.ⁱⁱⁱ

[26] 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 historia de él cuando yo estaba joven. Yo le pregunté del tío Baby. El abuelo Olowibikina hizo una medicamento de Dule...medicina que se llama "nikeeua." Nikeeua uno pajarito que está brincando del árbol [sounds "tikitikitikiki" 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 covertió, 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] gave 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 "tikitikitikiki" [sounds 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.^{liii}

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. To corroborate, 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*."^{liv} 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.^{lv} He recounts that the moment Olowibikina caught the bird; he would prepare it and cook it until it would become a powdery substance.^{lvi} From there, this *nikeeua* powder would be placed on Baby San Blas' body, from which he should absorb the essence of *nikeeua*'s quickness.^{lvii} This is evident in his matching bout against a noted Colombian boxer from Cartagena, Colombia. In *Historia Del Boxeo Colombiano*, Eudocio Ramirez, alias Cisco Kid, describes his boxing 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. Imagínate, 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 pararán 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.

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.^{lviii}

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.

[27] For example, in boxing, a contender cannot use any foreign substances while competing in the boxing ring. To uphold this regulation, a referee inspects the boxers' bodies, their gloves, and their bandages for any foreign materials in order to prevent any unfairly disadvantageous practices against an opponent.^{lix} However, in Baby San Blas' case, the usage of *nikeeua* powder challenged and defied this regulation. 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.

[28] The boxing ring 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 manifests the agency of Dule ontology. It is a space where the Dule lifeworlds manifest in relation with, but independent from, Panama's lifeworlds. Dule medicinal practices carried into the Panamanian boxing arena through Baby San Blas' body show

how Dule practices and cultural beliefs are integral; not only to its society and people but also within Panama's stories shared, by Dule and non-Dule Panamanians.

ⁱ Redacción Extracentenario, "Panamá, Tierra de Campeones," *La Prensa* [Panama] 15 June 2003, special ed.: 22-23.

ⁱⁱ Herlindo Arias, "Baby San Blas Maravilla del Ring," *El Siglo* [Panama] 25 June 1990: 30.

ⁱⁱⁱ Arias 30.

^{iv} Arias 30.

^v Cesar del Vasto, *Roberto Durán Samaniego: Hombre y Mito* (Panama: Universal Books, 2001) 25.

^{vi} Benjamin Waterman, "Boxing in the Republic of Panama," *El Ring Panameño* [Panama] Mar. 1947: 14.

^{vii} Waterman 14.

^{viii} Vasto 25.

^{ix} Vasto 25.

^x Vasto 25.

^{xi} John Sugden, *Boxing and Society: An International Analysis* (United Kingdom: Manchester UP, 1996) 34.

^{xii} John Sugden, *Boxing and Society: An International Analysis* (United Kingdom: Manchester UP, 1996) 33-34, Sugden citing S. Kirson Weinberg and Henry Arond, "The Occupational Culture of the Boxer," *The American Journal of Sociology* 57, no. 5 *The Sociological Study of Work* (March 1952): 460-469.

^{xiii} "Baby Está Pegando Duro: El Machigua Entrena Diariamente en el Gimnasio Nacional," *El Panamá-América* [Panama] 1 May 1940: 5.

^{xiv} "Baby Está Pegando Duro" 5.

^{xv} "Baby Está Pegando Duro" 5.

^{xvi} "Slammer and Ramos in Ten Rounds of Action Tonight At The Colon Ideal Arena," *The Panama American* [Panama] 19 Mar. 1932: 2; and "Al Carlos Opposes Young Pancho In Main Event," *The Panama American* [Panama] 31 July 1937: 5.

^{xvii} Raul Leis, *Machi: Un Kuna en la Ciudad* (Panama: CEASPA, 1992) 21.

^{xviii} Father Fernando Guardia, a Panamanian Jesuit priest, Personal Interview, 3 Feb. 2009.

^{xix} Don Sabo and Sue Curry Jansen, "Seen But Not Heard: Images of Black Men in Sports Media," *Sex, Violence, and Power in Sports: Rethinking Masculinity*, ed. Michael A. Messner and Donald F. Sabo (California: The Crossing Press, 1994) 152.

^{xx} Sabo and Jansen 152.

^{xxi} Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, *Theory and History of Literature* 17, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2000) 226-227.

^{xxii} Juan Materno-Vásquez, *El hombre panameño, un prisionero de su historia*, (Panama: Lotería Nacional, 1977), p. 146, qtd. in Elba D. Birmingham-Pokorny, "Renewal and Reaffirmation: The Aesthetic and Ideological Impact of Carlos Guillermo Wilson's *Los Nietos de Felicidad Dolores*," *Denouncement and Reaffirmation of The Afro-Hispanic Identity in Carlos Guillermo Wilson's Works*, ed. Elba D. Birmingham-Pokorny (Miami, Florida: Ediciones Universal, 1993) 146.

^{xxiii} Materno- Vásquez qtd. in Birmingham-Pokorny 146.

^{xxiv} Materno-Vásquez, *El hombre panameño, un prisionero de su historia*, (Panama: Lotería Nacional, 1977), p. 73, qtd. in Birmingham-Pokorny 147.

- ^{xxv} Luis Cedeño, "Fue Siete Años Campeón Nacional: Baby San Blas 'La Maravilla del Ring,'" *Hipodeportes* [Panama] 10 June 1977. In addition, 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.
- ^{xxvi} Francisco Mojica, a former Dule boxer, Personal Interview, 19 Mar. 2009.
- ^{xxvii} Mojica, Personal Interview.
- ^{xxviii} Mojica, Personal Interview.
- ^{xxix} "Joe Walcott Wins Ten Round Decision Over Kid Lombardo in Colon Arena in Bitter Battle," *The Panama American* [Panama] 18 Apr. 1932: 2.
- ^{xxx} "Joe Walcott Wins Ten Round" 2.
- ^{xxxi} "Frisco Beats Wills in Poor Fight at Gym," *The Panama American* [Panama] 24 Apr. 1932: 2.
- ^{xxxii} "El Programa de Esta Noche," *El Panamá-América* [Panama] 12 May 1940: 4.
- ^{xxxiii} "El Baby Entrena Bajo La Dirección de Y. Hurtado," *El Panamá-América* [Panama] 8 May 1940: 5.
- ^{xxxiv} "S. Blas Baby Noqueó a Canzoneri," *El Panamá-América* [Panama] 13 May 1940: 4.
- ^{xxxv} "S. Blas Baby Noqueó" 4.
- ^{xxxvi} "El 'Terrible' San Blas Baby," *El Panamá-América* [Panama] 1 Jan. 1940: 3.
- ^{xxxvii} "Kid Zefine, San Blas to Meet Sunday: Clash In 12-Rounder At Panama Gymnasium," *The Panama American* [Panama] 13 Jan. 1940: 9.
- ^{xxxviii} "Baby San Blas Fue Aplaudido Mucho Anoche," *La Estrella de Panamá* [Panama] 10 Nov. 1939: 4.
- ^{xxxix} "San Blas Baby Pide la revancha con Kid Zefine," *La Estrella de Panamá* [Panama] 22 Nov. 1939: 4.
- ^{xl} "San Blas Baby Pide" 4.
- ^{xli} Sabo and Jansen 150-160.
- ^{xlii} Sabo and Jansen 153.
- ^{xliii} "Estará en juego el título de los moscas," *El Panamá-América* [Panama] 31 Dec. 1939: 6.
- ^{xliiv} "Estará en juego el título" 6.
- ^{xliiv} Daniel Alonso, boxing historian and commentator for *Lo Mejor del Boxeo*, Personal Interview, 13 Feb. 2009.
- ^{xlivi} Alonso, Personal Interview.
- ^{xliivii} Ana Rosa Haglund, daughter of Baby San Blas, Personal Interview, 5 Apr. 2009.
- ^{xliiviii} Roberto Martínez, brother of Baby San Blas, Personal Interview, 7 Mar. 2009.
- ^{xlix} Roberto Martínez Owen, a nephew of Baby San Blas who is a former Physical Education Teacher and Dule from Agligandi, Personal Interview, 7 Mar. 2009.
- ^l James Howe, *Chiefs, Scribes, and Ethnographers: Kuna Culture from Inside and Out* (Austin: U of Texas P, 2009) 83-84.
- ^{li} Howe 84.
- ^{lii} Howe 84.
- ^{liii} Eugenio Mendez, nephew of Baby San Blas, Personal Interview, 9 Feb. 2009.
- ^{liiv} Martínez, Personal Interview.
- ^{liv} Martínez, Personal Interview.
- ^{lvi} Martínez, Personal Interview.
- ^{lvii} Martínez, Personal Interview.
- ^{lviii} Raul Porto Cabrales, *Historia del Boxeo Colombiano* (Cartagena: Litohermedin Ltda., 2002) 283.
- ^{lix} Enrique Mendoza, "¿Conoce Ud. El Reglamiento de La Com. De Boxeo de Panamá?" *El Panamá-América* [Panama] 3 Apr. 1937: 4.

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