Kuna gatherings I’ll draw on Sherzer’s (1987) monograph on the Kuna of Panama for the first half of the comparison. The Kuna live on the east coast of Panama and are organized around small, dispersed villages. At the center of each village is a “gathering  house,”  at  which  different  kinds  of  gatherings  are  held  at  the  end  of  each  day. These gatherings vary in who participates and in their importance, but it is in the  weekend gathering that most of the business of the village (and the Kuna people) is done.
 It is the venue for judicial proceedings, entertainment, and communication among villages. These gatherings are held at the “gathering house,” a large circular hut  located in the center of the Kuna village. While there are smaller gatherings daily that may only include a few of the village elders, Sherzer suggests that these are understood to be derivative of the more elaborate gatherings held once or twice per week. The central activity of such gatherings is the “chanting” by two “chiefs” – two are required because one “chief” must respond to another for the chanting. The  “chiefs”  (or  *saklakana*,  of  which  “chief”  is  only  a  rough  gloss)  are  literally central, because the gathering house is circular and the chiefs sit at the center on two hammocks, side by side. Near them is a “spokesman,” and at a further remove surrounding the chiefs and the spokesmen are the men of the village, and finally the women of the village in the outer ring. There are “policemen” who make sure that everyone stays awake and listens.

 Before  the  chanting,  there  may  be  some  other  business,  and  then  the  chiefs begin their chanting. They speak in a special “chief language” which is a derivative of the everyday Kuna language. In general, it has more elaborate morphology and some slightly different word order. One chief is the main chanter, while the other simply responds (Sherzer translates most of these responses as “indeed” The topics of the chants are varied, from stories of local people, to myths, traditional stories, histories of the Kuna people, and stories from the Christian Bible. These stories are meant to teach and provide a common history and set of beliefs for the community, and Sherzer suggests that they are important in maintaining the cohesion of each village and especially the cohesion of the wider Kuna speech community. Once the chiefs have finished chanting, the spokesmen reinterpret the chant in everyday Kuna language, and may add commentary about what lessons should be taken from the stories told. There may then be another chant from the second chief.

