

**PROTESTANTS, CATHOLICS AND 'GENTILES':
THE ARTICULATION OF MISSIONARY
AND INDIGENOUS CULTURE
ON THE SAN BLAS COAST OF PANAMA**

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Introduction

IN making cultural sense of the encounter between the Western self and exotic other (Todorov 1984), the process of missionization holds a place of special interest and significance (e.g. Axtell 1985; Beidelman 1982; Bowden 1981; Burkhardt 1989; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991). Colonial agents, planters and policemen sometimes have cultural agendas; missionaries always do. Missionaries, however much or little they accommodate their work to local realities, always confront indigenous institutions and practices (Hutchinson 1987; Axtell 1985: 71-90; Neill 1986: 151-66). And to one degree or another, missionaries attempt to make the other into a special version of the self.

Good missionaries—from the scholar's point of view—also record their experiences at length. As a contribution to the cultural study of missionization, a field still in its infancy, I discuss here the encounter between the San Blas Kuna of Panama and two obligingly self-revealing missionaries, Father Leonardo Gassó, SJ, and Miss Anna Coope. The Kuna, an indigenous people, numbering perhaps 10,000 at the turn of the last century, lived in some thirty villages scattered along the Caribbean San Blas Coast, many on small inshore islands, others still on the mainland. Heavily engaged in selling coconuts and buying manufactured goods

from merchant vessels, the Kuna had several hundred years' experience of dealing with Westerners. Some had been touched, very lightly, by missionization in earlier centuries, and in theory they were Colombian citizens. In fact, however, they insisted on political and cultural separation, even after Panamanian independence from Colombia in 1903.

A Sketch of Mission History, 1903-25

The twentieth-century missionization of the Kuna began with Panama's 1904 constitution, which entrusted the Indians within its borders to the Catholic Church, a measure that combined policy and faith with expediency: lacking the means to subdue the Kuna and faced with more urgent tasks closer to home, the government was glad to delegate the Indian problem to others, at least for the moment. The party initially in power, the Conservatives, headed by President Miguel Amador Guerrero, generally favoured close church-state ties, but the numerically dominant and anticlerical Liberal Party did not.

In 1904 and 1905, President Amador opened friendly contacts with the leaders of a pair of adjacent San Blas villages named Nargana and Nusatupu. In 1906, the young chief of Nargana, Charly Robinson, who had been taught to read and write by English-speaking Protestants on the Colombian island of San Andrés, brought a group of sixteen boys to be educated at government expense by the Christian Brothers of LaSalle. Later the same year, the Bishop of Panama recruited Father Leonardo Gassó, a Spanish Jesuit and veteran missionary, to carry Christianity to the Kuna. After a few months spent in language-learning and translating a catechism into the indigenous language, Father Gassó set out in March 1907 for Nargana, where he was warmly received by Chief Robinson and part of the local population.

Others, however, reacted less positively. Gassó's aggressive programme of catechization threw Nargana and Nusatupu into turmoil and provoked intense hostility from the rest of the Kuna. After repeated delegations to Nargana and numerous threats, a flotilla of canoes attacked the island in late 1908, only to be repelled by Charly Robinson with government-supplied arms. In 1909, when Gassó visited a friendly island further to the east, Kuna enemies sacked the village a few days later (Gassó 1910a). By about 1910, however, several more priests and brothers had joined the mission and Gassó looked forward to the rapid conversion of all the Kuna.

As it turned out, these hopes were dashed by renewed dissatisfaction on Nargana and Nusatupu and intransigence elsewhere. When the Liberal Party gained control of the government in 1912 and discontinued financial support for the mission, Gassó abruptly departed for Spain. Though other priests and brothers persevered for a while, Jesuit resources were diverted to Asian missions

(Misioneros Hijos 1939: 114), and, except for sporadic visits, the Church left San Blas alone until 1928.

Gassó's Protestant successor was Miss Anna Coope, a British citizen who had lived in the United States for some years. Having already tried unsuccessfully to enter San Blas in 1909 (Gassó 1911a; Coope 1917: 79-103), in 1913 Coope received an invitation from Charly Robinson to begin an English-language mission school on Nargana. She too stirred up local controversy and hostility from other villages, and in November of the same year, Nargana was attacked again, though with no more success than before. Coope did better than Gassó, however, in attracting a devoted cadre of supporters, and despite the convulsion that followed when she convinced Charly Robinson to prohibit alcohol, she and a colleague were soon entrenched on both islands.

In 1915 and 1916, however, the Panamanian government finally began imposing secular control over the coast, establishing schools and small police posts on Nargana, Nusatupu and two other islands. Competition between government and mission schools and a challenge to Coope and Robinson from Catholic-educated youths returned from the city led to open conflict in 1919. By July of that year, the police had put down two uprisings by Robinson's group, passed local control to the young Catholic radicals, suppressed Coope's schools and begun forcing Nargana women to abandon traditional dress. Although Coope hung on for five more years, her mission had already effectively ceased to function (Howe 1990).

Through the early 1920s, the police expanded their sphere of control, actively suppressing Kuna practice on each newly pacified island (Howe 1991), until early 1925, when an insurrection (in which Nargana and Nusatupu did not participate) drove them from San Blas. US intervention led to a peace treaty between the Panamanian government and the rebels, and in the aftermath Coope was evicted altogether. Missionaries eventually returned—Franciscan teachers in 1928 (Puig 1948: 182), a Protestant alumnus of Coope's school in 1932 (Iglesias and Vandervelde 1977)—but 1925 marks the effective end of the first, heroic and largely unsuccessful phase of missionization.

The leaders of the two pioneering missions, Gassó and Coope, paralleled each other in many respects. Occupying the same site, even the same buildings (which she took over after he left), and claiming many of the same individuals as adherents, both missionaries were strong-willed, brave and pugnacious. Both wished to exclude the national society, Coope because it was Catholic and Latin, Gassó because it was corrupt and modern. And each saw the other as an emissary of Satan.

Gassó provided quite full, if one-sided, accounts of his activities, which record in vivid dialogue his arguments with Kuna opponents. His primary testament, a lengthy diary for 1907–8, issued in instalments by a Spanish missionary journal (Gassó 1911–14), was supplemented by a catechism (Gassó 1908) and grammar,

and by several published letters.¹ While Anna Coope's memoirs (1917) are sketchier and less revealing, documentation of her work also includes published letters (Keeler 1956: 148-66), Panamanian government documents (Howe 1990), Kuna oral testimony and other material (Dietrick 1925; Iglesias and Vandervelde 1977).

The present essay, leaving aside the more general subject of missionary competition (Howe 1990), focuses on the encounter between Kuna belief and practice and its Catholic and Protestant counterparts, in other words, on the articulation of indigenous and missionary cultures. Many aspects of this encounter were influenced or determined by less overtly cultural factors, of course, such as rifles. None the less, the results of their efforts—and much of what is interesting about the missionizing process—depended in large part on the way that aspects of Kuna culture resonated with their Catholic and Protestant counterparts.

The Kuna and the Catholic Mission

The encounter between Leonardo Gassó and the Kuna (he called them 'gentiles' rather than pagans) was fundamentally conditioned by his sense of alterity, of the radical break between Spanish Catholic self and savage other: 'an Indian thinks one way, a white man another; their likes are altogether different' (1909b: 237; see also vii, 133; x, 206; xxi, 39; xxii, 112). Highly ambivalent about the Kuna, Gassó oscillated between contempt, calling them savages, children, even beasts (iv, 56; xiv, 18, 43; xxi, 39, 66), and appreciation for their industry, moral commandments and other virtues (x, 204, 206; xi, 228-9, 250). He judged that intellectually the Kuna 'certainly surpass all those [savages] of America, although they are still Indians' (x, 206), and in contrasting them with the degradation of modernity he waxed even more enthusiastic: 'It is certain they lack for nothing, except to know and love Christ and keep his law and for the rest they enjoy more than anyone' (x, 227). Kuna virtues, however, he credited to an eighteenth-century missionary and even at his most admiring, he never forgot that they were still Indians.

Across the gulf between his culture and theirs, Gassó perceived antithetical parallels. Opposed to some practices because he found them offensive (noisy drunkenness) or immoral (infanticide), he felt the strongest enmity towards those roles and institutions most like himself and the Church. Although Kuna ritual is in fact carried on by a great variety of specialists—seers, exorcists, puberty

1. The book-length diary appeared in instalments from 1911 to 1914. Because the same page numbers occur in different parts of the diary, citations are given here by chapter (roman numerals) as well as page. For the letters, see Gassó 1909a, 1909b, 1910a, 1910b, 1910c, 1911a, 1911b, 1913; see also Canduela 1909; Fernandez 1911; Gurruchaga 1909; Mejicanos 1914; Valenzuela 1912.

chanters, medicinal curers, chiefly mythographers and several kinds of chant curer—Gassó mistakenly lumped them all into one category, *apsogeti* (a term properly used only for exorcists). Both he and the Kuna readily identified these ritualists as his equivalents and natural rivals (vi, 88; vii, 133; ix, 163; xiii, 16; xx, 280; xxi, 66). The form of ritual most like a mass or prayer service was the sacred gathering, in which chiefs sang to their assembled followers while maintaining contact with their deities, Great Mother and Great Father (Howe 1986). Gassó loathed this 'diabolical cult', whose leaders he tagged 'the Sanhedrin' (vi, 88; xxi, 39; 1909b: 236). Both sides channelled their struggle through rival events, scheduling catechization and gatherings at the same time to force people to make a choice between them (xxi, 40; xx, 135). And as Nargana divided into two camps, catechumens contrasted the mission building and the gathering hall as 'the House of God' and 'the House of Errors' (xxi, 40, 67; xxii, 135; 1909b: 233).

Gassó's sense of radical difference was mirrored by his Kuna opponents:

What do you think? God created the dog and to this day it's a dog; God created the jaguar and to this day it's a jaguar. God created the hen and to this day it's a hen. God created the Indian and now they don't want to let us be Indians. (vi, 86)²

They exploited their alterity, moreover, to defend themselves against proselytization:

We don't want a Father; because, look, the English have their religion and their priests or Fathers; the Germans have their religion and their Fathers; the Yankis their religion and Fathers; we have our religion and our fathers. Why don't you go to those nations and leave us alone? (Gassó 1910a: 334; xx, 280; xxi, 66-7)

Kuna religion resembles Christianity in a number of respects—an angry paternal creator god, a beloved mother, a sacred homeland, a long series of frustrated prophets, a strong sense of human iniquity and fear of divine punishment—parallels that can facilitate either syncretism (as has happened more recently) or opposition. Despite what Gassó has to say, it is unlikely that many Kuna took seriously the notion of two completely separate gods and creations (vi, 88; x, 227; xi, 250; xxi, 66-7), but they did insist that different religious rules, practices and dispensations applied to Indians and foreigners (v, 57; x, 227; xiv, 43; xv, 64; xx, 280). In effect, they divided conceptually to resist spiritual conquest.

Ironically, Kuna resistance in these terms forced Gassó to argue strongly for a sort of uniformitarianism, insisting that there was a single God with one message for all peoples who, in His sight at least, were essentially the same (xv, 64). The

2. It is clear that Gassó reconstructed dialogue for his diary. I am confident, none the less, that the remarks he quotes correspond to Kuna sentiments, which I also heard articulated during my fieldwork.

terms of Gassó's proof, however, betrayed his ambivalence. Pointing out that all people descend from Adam and Noah (xvi, 89), he made the common claim that Blacks, Whites and Indians stemmed from different sons of Noah, one of whom had mocked his father, thus condemning his Indian descendants to nakedness and drink—an argument that implicitly reaffirms separation and difference between peoples (xiv, 42, 43).

This duality of equivalence and opposition between missionary and 'gentile', it should be emphasized, did not exist in a vacuum. As is true of many or most Christian missionaries (Beidelman 1982: 27, 212), opposition to rival faiths and unhappiness with the modern world, which in his case could only be called loathing, conditioned Gassó's ambivalent attitude toward the 'gentile' other. Whatever the flaws in indigenous culture, he found it vastly preferable to 'the savagery of the Protestant gringos, imported in the form of rum, phonograph and *money*' [sic] (xiv, 18); the corrupting influence of West Indian traders and sailors ('ambassadors of hell'; xiii, 17); the lurking danger of Protestant heresy; and the abominations of Liberalism and Masonry (iv, 56; v, 21; x, 185, 204, 206-7; xiii, 17; xxi, 40). Even in his fear and hate, however, Gassó appreciated the irony that his pagan opponents also rejected the outside world, while mission supporters like Charly Robinson yearned to embrace it (vi, 86; x, 185; xi, 229).

Gassó played a double game, not only with Robinson's progressive faction (vi, 86), but also with the government that supported the mission. His real goal was not to pacify the Indians for Panama but to create a social order in imitation of the Jesuit *reducciones* of earlier times in the Americas (xvi, 106; xix, 232; Fernandez 1911: 287) and to found a separatist theocratic society devoted to piety and prayer, supported by a few secular authorities but otherwise entirely under mission control.

Gassó's authoritarian utopia confronted a largely egalitarian reality. Kuna chiefs, chosen democratically, monitored closely and treated with minimal deference by their followers (Howe 1986: 79-106), seemed to Gassó intolerably weak (ix, 162, xvi, 105-6). He taught villagers to doff their hats to chiefs, rise when they entered church (ix, 38) and salute them with 'Praised Be the Most Holy Sacrament!' (iii, 235). He tried to stiffen Robinson's resolve (xii, 15; xvi, 105-6) and to strengthen his hand with guns, titles and moral support (ix, 162, 183; xv, 67; xvi, 88) and at the same time to dominate him. (He saw no contradiction between the two.) The Kuna, though sensitive to differences of prestige among leaders and ritualists, refused to let anyone, especially a chief or missionary, set himself above them; an attitude summed up for Gassó by their inability to kneel (v, 56): 'Like wild animals they do not understand about order or submission' (iii, 235; xi, 229). He thus gave the highest priority to humbling the Kuna and to imposing order and hierarchy on egalitarian anarchism in every way, from corporal punishment and kneeling to regular mealtimes (ix, 184; x, 204; xii, 17; xvi, 105, 106; xx, 16).

His efforts produced an inevitable reaction. The Kuna objected not just to receiving orders in particular, but to the more general demands for subordination, hierarchy and dependence that they recognized as inherent in the mission

programme (xii, 16). A verse from chiefly chanting attributed to the leader Nele Kantule, which I heard in 1985, sums up these demands with eloquent brevity: 'Someone wearing foot-tip clothes [robes], "I am your father," someone says to me. The foreigner says he will make himself my father.'

If Gassó and the Kuna differed radically in social attitudes, they shared a fundamental belief in supernatural intervention in daily life and the power of magic. Gassó was convinced, for instance, that Saint Joseph had kept his boat in harbour until a letter arrived (i, 57), that converts caught more turtles, and that those who faithfully attended mass caught more fish afterwards (ix, 162; xx, 16; xxi, 39; xxi, 136-7). He was convinced, moreover, that his frequent threats of hellfire and earthly punishment were regularly carried out for him by God (xxi, 67; xxii, 136): a wood-cutter who worked on Sunday, for instance, was half-killed by a log; an old man died because his sacristan son apostatized; a ship's captain who abused the priest had his arm broken in a sugar-cane press; a ship's pilot who thwarted Gassó was drowned; a chief whose men harmed the mission building was eaten by a jaguar; the leader of the pagan Kuna died of smallpox; and the mission's fiercest opponent on Nargana was asphyxiated over a fire—for all of which Gassó rejoiced! (vii, 132; ix, 132; xiv, 43; xvi, 67; xx, 280; xxi, 39, 66)

Catechumens may have taken pleasure from the promised economic benefits of conversion, as Gassó suggests (xxi, 38), but in the absence of an established cultural preoccupation with gaining wealth through supernatural means, such claims did not strike a chord. With Kuna fears of sickness and spiritual danger, however, the missionary tapped a richer and more easily exploited vein. He seems to have overcome initial resistance on Nusatupu in part by agreeing to baptize its children and by intimating that baptismal medals protected against devils (vi, 88; ix, 161). As the struggle on the two islands intensified, he pitted the power of holy water, the sacraments and Catholic medals and pictures against native medicine. Especially active in converting the dying (they tended to backslide less than the healthy (xiv, 42; xvi, 89, 106)), he repeatedly contended with relatives at the patient's hammock-side, substituting crosses and pictures of saints for the carved 'idols' used in Kuna medicine (1909a: 208; 1911b; vi, 88, 109; xvi, 89-90, 106).

Gassó was sure that his methods had effected several miraculous cures and that the water of St. Ignatius had saved catechumens from epidemics (xxi, 39). How the Kuna tallied up the score in the contest between rival magics is unclear. Certainly they did not abandon indigenous medicine: an important convert of the mission continued his curing practice for several decades more (Iglesias and Vandervelde 1977), and even on late twentieth-century Nargana (which is now quite acculturated) the few remaining practitioners have a large clientele.

The favourite weapon in the priest's arsenal was brimstone: 'the curse of God will fall upon you; sicknesses and misfortunes will come upon you, you will die in your infidelity and you will descend to be burnt' (vi, 88). As convinced of the persuasiveness of such threats as of his own power to carry them out ('Oh great hell, how many you put in Heaven!' (ix, 184; xxii, 136)), he was dispassionate enough to note how often the Kuna shrugged them off (vii, 133, 134; xxi, 66-7;

xxii, 136; 1910a: 333). Despite their appreciation of human wickedness and fear of God's wrath in this world, their cosmology put little emphasis on punishment in the hereafter. Here perhaps most of all, Kuna opponents invoked their radical alterity: "What? All of us be burnt? Hah! That will be you *huacas* [foreigners]...because we are going to see our Father" (i, 203).

Gassó's teaching methods articulated with Kuna belief and practice more successfully than his threats did, at least on the surface. Like most Catholic missionaries, he emphasized catechetics, that is, systematic rote instruction in prayers and key points of doctrine, which converts were to memorize and recite. The particular catechism he used (Gassó 1908) was based on a model from earlier New World missions thought appropriate to simple Indian minds (xviii, 186). In addition to prayers and affirmations, it included the commandments, acts of confession and contrition, lists of sacraments, sins, works of mercy, enemies of the soul, and so forth, as well as a series of questions and answers on points of doctrine, to be recited in formal exchanges between priest and faithful.

Undoubtedly, catechetics appealed to the Kuna because it conformed to traditional expectations about learning. Kuna men competed for prestige and influence by setting themselves to memorize supernaturally powerful texts used in curing and other ritual; in the case of chiefs and sub-chiefs, they learned and enacted cosmology and mythology. Whether or not catechumens hoped to affect the spirits with the new texts, they certainly anticipated social benefits in the human world.

The catechism itself, which Gassó translated into Kuna with the help of native assistants before he ever saw San Blas, must have puzzled his flock, because it is often ambiguous or confusing and, in places, completely unintelligible. Among the virtues listed, for instance, Hope (*esperanza*), is translated as 'to wait/anticipate, called *esperanza*,' while Temperance is 'to hold back one's heart, belly and all, called *templanza*'. Similarly, 'the Sacraments of the Holy Mother Church' are rendered ludicrously as *Dios Inna*, 'God's home brew'. Gassó also oversystematized the Kuna language in accordance with others he already knew (xxii, 112; Puig 1948: 151), elaborating word forms that are rarely used or totally unknown, thus, like other missionaries before and since, producing a new dialect of the native language.

These confusions probably mattered little to the Kuna, who did not expect to learn the meaning of the esoteric verses they memorized until late in their apprenticeship. Even when understood, moreover, the new teachings did not require a radical shift in belief. The commandments were mostly familiar and unexceptionable, as Gassó himself noted (xi, 228, 229, 250), and to recite the 'Ave Maria' one needed only to add the Virgin to the Kuna pantheon or to assimilate her to Great Mother.

The oral nature of catechetics mattered intensely to Gassó. Fulminations against the church's commitment to schooling recur throughout his diary (esp. vi, 85; xv, 64), and he even tried to have his catechism printed in a typeface so unusual that students could not transfer the ability to read it to sources of

contamination like newspapers and Protestant versions of the Bible (xviii, 186). Catechumens, however, vehemently demanded education for their children (Valenzuela 1912: 258; Gassó 1913: 346). In addition to its practical benefits, they perceived schooling as an even stronger version of apprenticeship, a modern path to prestige and influence, as indeed it later proved to be. Acceding to their desires only grudgingly and partially, Gassó was in the end defeated in no small part by his own distrust of literacy.

More than being merely a site of contention, Gassó's catechetics exemplified the systematic miscommunication typical of the missionizing process, in which the parties to an interchange interpret it in terms of radically different presuppositions (Burkhardt 1989). For Gassó, catechetics entailed a fundamental change of belief and commitment; for the Kuna, it offered a new path to traditional social goals. For Gassó, the authoritarian nature of catechizing as a social event, which limited catechumens to two-word answers ('After he died on the cross, did he return to rise again living?—Yes, Father') epitomized the proper form of society as a whole. For the Kuna, who deferred to their teachers but few others, submission in the limited context of apprenticeship implied nothing about the rest of life. Even face-to-face in the same small room, the two sides could not bridge the gap between hierarchy and equality.

The Kuna and the Protestant Mission

In the fundamental matter of her attitude towards the Kuna other, Coope was the diametrical opposite of Gassó. Coope saw everyone (with the possible exception of Catholic priests) as essentially alike, all of them sinners and souls to be redeemed. When confronted by hostility from women on one Kuna island, Coope records, 'I could not help thinking of the way many so-called Christians treat a woman of the street, shrinking from even the touch of her clothing. These Indian women are made of the same sinful tendencies' (Coope 1917: 87). And the interest taken by some women on another island in her clothes and hair provoked the thought: 'Oh, vain woman, everywhere the same! Colour does not change the natural curiosity and vanity' (ibid.: 91). In her remarks on Kuna culture, she recognized women's dress as an ethnic marker—'they would not be Indians without beads'—but even then she reverted to universalism: 'Dame fashion is as tyrannical in San Blas as in other parts of the world' (ibid.: 174). And she concluded a chapter, profiling 'Some of My Boys', with the remark, 'you see they are just as human as the boys in America' (ibid.: 147). To Coope, the other was essentially the same.³

3. The differences between Coope and Gassó in this respect are of course not absolutes but matters of degree; but they are great none the less.

In her case, uniformity also implied equality. No respecter of titles or social distinctions, she dealt with everyone directly and informally, including on several occasions, the President of Panama. Her warm personal manner and lack of pretension evoked a very positive response from Kuna students and followers. Her egalitarian outlook had its limits and contradictions, especially concerning 'Spaniards', by which she meant Latin Americans: she worried, for instance, that Panamanian teachers would bring servants, who 'are of the low dirty class' (see Keeler 1956: 165). Far from challenging Caesar or the established order, moreover, she urged her readers to be 'obedient to those over you, whoever they may be' (1917: 178). And much like Gassó before her, she tried to get her way by controlling Charly Robinson, though she never sought the same sort of total domination, either of the chief or of his village, that Gassó had. Ultimately, however, she saw herself and the Kuna as equal and alike, because all were sinners capable of redemption:

Some people have an idea that if they could only go to a far-away heathen land where the people are so different from those at home, they could do great things with them. But let me say for the benefit of those people that the heathen have as much knowledge of evil as our educated teachers at home, for the fallen nature is theirs to contend with just as much and it comes to the top in a remarkable manner. The colour of the skin does not hinder its manifestations, and education does not eradicate it; only the blood of Jesus Christ can do that. (Ibid.: 147-8)

Coope's accepting attitude had another side to it, however. Taking everyone as essentially alike, she had little curiosity and a very superficial understanding of Kuna culture. Her ethnographic observations, both in her memoirs (ibid.: 165-75) and in notes circulated in the Canal Zone,⁴ are much more perfunctory than Gassó's. Her relaxed, incurious attitude, combined with a minimal knowledge of Kuna and only a modicum of Spanish, seems to have left her floating on the surface of village life, only aware of the currents swirling below when Charly Robinson told her about them.

Coope did not try to suppress much in Kuna practice, except alcohol. Although she objected to 'that horrible custom' of piercing infant girls' septa for noserings (ibid.: 170), she was content to encourage the practice's eventual disappearance through example and argument, and she disagreed strongly with the coercion with which the government began to suppress noserings and leg-bindings in 1919 (see Keeler 1956: 158). Despite her strong personal belief in faith-healing (1917: 29) and a willingness to treat cuts and scrapes, she did not press the point when Indians usually preferred their own medicine. She condoned or ignored Kuna religion, asserting with complacent obliviousness that 'they do not seem to have any spirit of respect or worship or reverence at all' and alluding to Kuna

4. See File 80A-15, Records of the Panama Canal, US National Archives and Record Service, Washington, DC.

magic as 'Obeahism'. According to Samuel Morris, one of Coope's students whom I interviewed in 1979, her willingness to tolerate village gatherings, which she dismissively alluded to as 'pow-wows' in her notes, and to overlook their religious nature, accounts in no small part for the reduction in conflict with Kuna traditionalists during the ascendancy of the Protestant mission.

She did, however, confront and suppress drinking, sparking a huge row. It is important, however, to understand her target. She set herself against a universal vice, as prevalent and dangerous in her own country as among the Indians, not against a trait peculiar to indigenous culture. She could not ignore the fact that Kuna drinking occurred primarily in the context of female puberty ceremonies, but as far as she was concerned, the ritual was little more than a pretext for getting drunk: a 'chee-chee' (Coope's rendering of the Spanish word *chicha*) 'really is a drunken spree over a girl's coming to maturity'. Thus the problem was not with satanic alterity, with institutions and practices in opposition to the true faith, but with universal sin.

If there was a dangerous cultural other from which the Kuna needed rescue, it was not paganism but 'the villainy of the Spanish people Rum and Rome ridden' (see Keeler 1956: 165). Like Gassó, she tended to lump her disparate antagonists into a single enemy force, repeatedly insisting, for instance, that priests smoked and drank (1917: 126, 138). If paganism could be allowed to wither away slowly, Catholicism had to be discredited immediately. All of the images and 'idols' left behind by Gassó, whose symbolic power Coope had no trouble recognizing, she threw into the sea, except one saved as an 'object lesson': 'I laid the image down and stepped on it, asking: "Can it feel, can it help us, can it hurt me, can it get up?"' (1917: 118). The pagan other, for Coope as well as Gassó, constituted not one side of a polarity so much as one point of a triangle of oppositions, on which the strongest negative charge flowed between true and false Christianity.

Coope's theological differences with Catholicism—her disapproval of a 'wafer god', Mariolatry, and the 'worshipping of graven images'—were spelled out bluntly (1917: 95-7; Keeler 1956: 150). She also rejected the doctrines of the Anglican church in which she had begun, as well as Methodism, to which she had been exposed in England (see Keeler 1956: 150; see also Coope 1917: 10). In Rhode Island she had been swept off her feet by a 'holiness' revival (1917: 22-3), and she joined there a 'dissenting' church that Keeler (1956: 10) identifies as Nazarene. A believer in scriptural inerrancy and the second coming (see Keeler 1956: 150; also Coope 1917: 23-4), her preaching among the Kuna, as far as one can tell, does not seem to have been heavily apocalyptic, and the orientation of her independent and non-denominational mission seems best characterized as charismatic rather than fundamentalist in the strict sense (Sandeen 1970). In her memoirs and letters, hellfire is not mentioned much.

Emphasis fell instead on salvation; on a personal, mystical relationship with Jesus; and on an end to sin, which in practice meant abstinence from alcohol. In the short and medium run, Kuna who forswore drink, attended services and supported the mission seem to have satisfied its requirements: the details of

Coope's theological orientation, as filtered through her practice, thus made light demands on adherents. Only key individuals, namely Charly Robinson and Coope's most promising male students, were pressed to find Jesus sooner rather than later.

Conversion in Coope's mission, it must be stressed, was not renunciation of a pagan religion in favour of Christianity, conversion from one faith to another, but abandonment of sin and acceptance of Jesus. Not only was its essence personal and ineffable rather than dogmatic, but it was a universal state or process, no different for Charly Robinson (Coope 1917: 154) or Coope's students (*ibid.*: 132) than for her own unbelieving parents (whom she had brought to Jesus after decades of effort) or for Coope herself (*ibid.*: 38-42, 15). Here again, the Kuna were not the other, just a somewhat exotic example of the same.

Coope's methods, finally, resembled Gassó's only in that both tried to entertain their students (she tried harder) and both used Charly Robinson to tell stories and interpret their words to the Kuna. As sources of enjoyment and inspiration rather than supernatural control, music and texts had a less powerful role in the Protestant mission and as far as one can tell, Coope taught her students through Bible stories, poems, skits, and exhortation rather than through dogma and memorization. In short, the model was Sunday school.

Even the inspiration of Sunday school, however, yielded to the practicality of learning to read and write, because Christianity for the Kuna was to rest, eventually, on the foundation of direct contact with the Bible, which presupposed literacy. Until the Panamanian government suppressed her schools in 1919, Coope pushed ahead almost unceasingly, five days a week. And because the Kuna of Nargana wanted schools so desperately (and because, other things being equal, most of them preferred instruction in English), she won support. If the government had not introduced its own schools in 1915 and then a few years later, suppressed hers, it seems clear that her education-centred approach and her egalitarian, universalist ideology would have carried her mission a long way. Whether she would have made Christians of the Kuna is another question.

Discussion

A subject as rich as the missionization of San Blas cannot be exhausted in an essay or two. For lack of space, I have only touched in passing on language and translation in missionary practice, neglecting altogether such relevant topics as the relationship between proselytization and nationalism and the anglophone and Hispanic cultural imperialism in Coope and Gassó's work (see Howe 1990). Kuna fears of sexual depredation by outsiders, the importance of which in the mission field Gassó immediately recognized (*ii*, 206), I hope to discuss elsewhere.

Here I have focused attention on perceptions of alterity and their consequences, on the effects of opposition to rival missions and the secular world on such perceptions, and lastly, on one of the most common processes in missionization, a matching up of equivalents in the cultures of missionizers and missionized. This process is evident in attempts at translation and cross-cultural communication. As Burkhardt (1989) has shown with subtlety and elegance for sixteenth-century Mexico, evangelists must work through native categories whose range and connotations may differ radically from those of their closest Christian equivalents (see Nida 1966). That the same kind of cultural articulation also shapes action is most apparent when, as in Gassó's case, missionizers and missionized have a strong sense of equivalence and rivalry, but it also occurs in less blatant form with Coope and others like her. In her case, the matching up was not between her mission and the sacred gathering or between icons and 'idols', but between temperance and licence, between traditional apprenticeship and literacy and between two varieties of egalitarianism. The examples of Coope and Gassó thus tend to correct the emphasis elsewhere on the overwhelming effects of dominant ideologies and practices: missionaries, at least, must to some extent adapt to the cultural forms they hope to eliminate or transform.

The striking contrasts between the two missions in the way they articulated with Kuna culture obviously derive in large part from differences in the personal and cultural baggage that Gassó and Coope brought with them. When I first began to consider the two together, the peculiarities of their characters and the immediate historical situations seemed to explain their differences more convincingly than any broad Weberian contrast between Protestantism and Catholicism, especially as Gassó seems in some respects to resemble late twentieth-century fundamentalist missionaries more than he does contemporary Jesuits.

I am now persuaded, if not of missionary essentialism, at least of continuity in practice and the typicality of Coope and Gassó: even at their most seemingly idiosyncratic they shared a great deal with their predecessors and co-religionists. Much of James Axtell's (1985: 43-127) account of Jesuit missionization in seventeenth-century French North America, for instance, could apply with only small changes to Gassó three centuries later—a conclusion that would undoubtedly have warmed his traditionalist heart. The Jesuits in colonial Canada, unlike rival orders, lived among their charges, whom they struggled to isolate and protect from the corruption of *voyageur* and settler society. In each band and village missionaries built a core faction of converts, while waging spiritual warfare against pagan resisters. Working in the native languages, Jesuit missionaries made efforts towards tolerance and accommodation, at the same time that their inflexibility on key points led them to oppose and suppress much of native culture (see Pickering above). They ridiculed indigenous religious beliefs, made a point of substituting Catholic medals for native amulets and, confronting native ritualists at every turn, they tried to demonstrate their own superior magical powers. Like Gassó, they put less emphasis on heaven than on hell, frequently invoking God's wrath against Indian opponents. Baptism and the other sacraments were presented as magically

efficacious protection against spirits, and missionaries took credit for supposed cures, for their own resistance to introduced diseases, and even for converts' economic success.

Still more striking is the degree to which Gassó reproduced turn-of-the-century Catholic attitudes from his native Spain, especially those typical of the Society of Jesus. As Frances Lannon notes (1987), the Catholic Church in Spain was extremely conservative politically, and no group more so than the Jesuits. Strong supporters of the class system and the privileges of the aristocracy, as well as of hierarchy and submission to authority as general social values, Jesuits were outspoken in their opposition to modernism and liberalism, which had been declared a sin. Reactionary in the literal sense of the word, they yearned for a return to an idealized past, in which the predominance of Catholic values and the complete exclusion of other religions were not in doubt: 'nostalgia for a former golden age became a ferocious weapon in the present' (ibid.: 38, 146). And in both France and Spain, ultramontane Catholicism emphasized providential intervention in human affairs and the 'the immediacy of the supernatural' (McLeod 1981: 48). The closeness of Gassó's thought to this cultural configuration is apparent even in the new name, Corazón de Jesús, that he bestowed on Nusatupu, evoking the cult of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which represented 'the extreme Right of the Catholic political spectrum' in Spain (Lannon 1987: 29), and in the patron he found for his mission, the reactionary Marqués de Comillas, most prominent Spanish lay Catholic of the era (ibid.: 31, 147-55, 171).

Even the seeming peculiarity of Gassó's opposition to schools makes sense in the Spanish context. It was not only that he feared the bad effects of exposure to the liberal media, nor just that he dreamt of a return to the patterns of earlier New World missions, in which instruction had been oral, it was also because he came from an order dedicated to the schooling of the Iberian upper classes (ibid.: 69, 77-84), élites whose Indian equivalent he had no intention of fostering in San Blas. The point was not to elevate the Kuna or to confirm them in their xenophobic pride, but to humble them, to *reduce* them to Christianity. Even as Christians they were to remain the other.

Coope makes equally good sense in her home context, displaying the theological orientations and preoccupations of her generation of charismatic, evangelical Christians. Her sturdy egalitarianism, which served her so well with the Kuna, derived from a conviction that the one true measure of social worth was salvation, which could be found only in an intensely personal relationship with the deity. Less educated than Gassó, she saw literacy as the key to understanding truth. And in her obsession with drinking, she reflected the high-point of the temperance movement in the early 1900s and its success in establishing alcohol as a religious, and not merely a social, issue.

What stands out, I hope, is not that missionaries import social and political attitudes along with the Gospel, which is by now a truism. It is rather the extent to which, and detail with which, ideologies and social programmes worked out in Valencia, Lancaster or Rhode Island are implemented in Panama or New Guinea.

Back home, ultra-conservative Jesuit Catholicism and working-class charismatic Protestantism presupposed particular institutional contexts, particular social currents, particular sets of friends and enemies. In their new settings none of these applied, but the projects and mindsets continued on the same course, interacting with a radically different social environment and encountering new fields and new enemies, notably each other.

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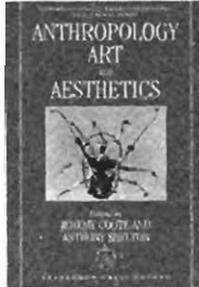
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