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Chapter 10

Smoking Tobacco and Swinging the *Chicha*: On Different Modes of Sociality Among Guna ('Kuna') People

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Smoking tobacco was a pervasive feature of the everyday life in the Guna village of Ogobsuggun¹ located on an island in the middle-eastern section of the San Blas Archipelago, off the Atlantic coast of Panama, as I observed while conducting fieldwork in 2003 and 2004. Drinking *chicha*² was similarly common, a drink made with ground toasted maize, or alternatively with sugar cane juice, and consumed either fermented ('bitter') or unfermented ('sweet'), depending on the occasion. Both tobacco and *chicha* are key components of Guna sociality and in what follows I aim to look at the relationship between these two substances and how they correspond to different modes of sociality in a Guna lived world.

My partner and fellow anthropologist Margherita Margiotti and I were both heavy smokers during fieldwork and, despite the tropical heat and humidity, kept smoking tirelessly throughout our stay in the village. We used to bring back a good number of cartons of Marlboro Light from our trips to Panama City, and lived in fear of finishing them before our next visit to the metropolis. These we both smoked ourselves and distributed to our Guna friends and hosts. Whenever we were in company, which was most of the time, and decided to smoke a cigarette, it was unthinkable not to offer one

¹ I use here the new orthography for transcribing the Guna (previously spelled 'Kuna') language devised by a group of Guna linguists and officially adopted by the Guna General Congress (Orán and Wagua 2011). The main difference with previous forms of transcription, including the one I so far adopted, is the use of the voiced stop consonants g, b, d instead of the previously used k, p, t.

² *Chicha* is the term used throughout Spanish-speaking Central and South America to indicate different types of fermented and unfermented drinks, which can be made with maize, manioc, or different types of fruit.

to all the adult men and elder women in our company. If there was one thing we quickly learned to do it was sharing our tobacco provisions with our hosts, friends, informants and people we would occasionally meet. Often visitors coming to the house of our hosts asked us for a cigarette with the usual expression *ubie*, ‘I want to smoke.’ I remember a middle-aged unmarried woman, nicknamed Warakkwa, ‘thin one,’ who used to come to Raquel’s and Nicanor’s house and sit down waiting to be offered a cup of drink or a bowl of *dule masi* -coconut soup with plantain and fish. When either Margherita or I were present she would always ask us for a cigarette, which she would smoke eagerly sitting inside the house.

During the night gatherings in the communal house of the village, which were attended by all adult men, as opposed to the morning gatherings attended by women, I had the unspoken obligation to distribute cigarettes to the men sitting on the same bench as me, and sometimes even to some of those sitting in front of and behind. Moreover, every time I interviewed an adult member of the village, especially in the case of elder specialists, the conversation was punctuated by our respective lighting of numerous cigarettes, which were of course provided by me. In brief, I always had to make sure to carry a sufficient provision of cigarettes with me before leaving the house in order to satisfy all my companions’ requests. Luckily cigarettes in Panama then were a great deal cheaper than in Italy.

Guna Ways of Smoking

People in Ogobsggun used to smoke exclusively menthol cigarettes, which consequently were almost the only type available on the island. They bought single cigarettes in the local shops, mostly of Colombian make and sold by traders who had their base in Cartagena and stopped their boats regularly on each island selling different kinds of goods. In some ways our Marlboro Light might have provided an exotic counterpart to the menthol cigarettes they consumed on an everyday basis and which we were forced to smoke after our provisions finished, which regularly occurred sooner than we had expected. When asked why they smoked menthol cigarettes people normally answered that they liked their fresh taste and on a recent fieldwork trip I heard calling other types of cigarettes *cigarillos calientes*, ‘hot cigarettes.’

In my experience most Guna adult men and elder women enjoyed smoking and never refused a cigarette upon being offered one. Younger women, on the other hand, very rarely did so. The latter often commented that they found smoking unpleasant and that the taste of cigarettes was too bitter for them. Sometimes jokingly they puffed from a cigarette, only to cough and laugh out loudly afterwards. I also noticed that boys, especially if unmarried, did not usually smoke, while adult and elder men engaged more frequently in such activity. There seemed therefore to be both a gender and an age division in the way people consumed tobacco, young women being at the lowest point of consumption and elder men at its highest. Also, while adult and elder men smoked publicly, like in the gathering house or standing outside their houses on the village pathways, elder women never did so, apart from when they attended healing rituals. For such occasions a few elder women, alongside a number of adult men, were invited, upon payment, to attend the ceremony as ‘tobacco smokers,’ *waar uedi*, or *biba uedi*, ‘pipe smokers’. During such occasions they smoked pipes to assist the chanter in the performance of the healing session.

People in Ogobsuggun used to smoke in a number of different occasions, and I would caution against describing any of these as purely recreational (cf. Gow this volume). Differently from the way I conceived of smoking, as chiefly an individual activity - which retrospectively I see as a sort of defence against the almost too intense sociality of daily life during fieldwork - Guna people seemed to conceive of smoking chiefly as a relational pursuit. I can hardly recall anybody who had the habit of smoking alone and certainly I cannot remember anybody who was as dependent from smoking as I was at the time. The only case that comes to my mind is that of Wakala, an old widow, who lived with her daughter’s family, and used to ask us for two cigarettes at dusk, one to smoke in company and the other for when she lay in her hammock, because, she said, it would keep her warm before sleeping.

Although cigarettes were consumed in a variety of different occasions, smoking appeared crucial during healing and puberty rituals, where tobacco smoke functioned as a means of metaphysical communication enhancing the agency of those involved in the performance of specific ritual tasks. I observed three different forms of tobacco

consumption: as industrial cigarettes, in store-bought pipes, and as locally produced cigars³.

During trips to the mainland forest with Guna men going to work in their gardens, or collecting firewood or coconut, I used to take a packet of cigarettes with me, but people found it weird that I smoked while walking. Guna men used to smoke only when resting after intense work activities like felling trees, clearing new gardens, or gathering maize. Once, when I was accompanying Rotalio Pérez, a Guna man in his forties, to his garden, we encountered a group of women, who, after exchanging the usual greetings - 'where are you going?' and 'what are you doing?' - commented to him that they got scared before meeting us because they had smelled the smoke of my cigarette from a distance. That, Rotalio later explained to me, is usually the sign that a *wagsabbur*, a 'forest stranger,' is in the vicinity. *Wagsabbur* are strangers that could be found wandering in the forest. They might be *guerrilla* escapees who cross the border with Colombia, drug smugglers, or both.

Encounters with foreigners in the forest were highly feared by women who travelled alone, since, I was told, there had been cases of rape in the past. For this reason, Rotalio told me, it is extremely unusual that Guna men smoke when walking in the forest. However, I also suspect that men working alone in the forest rarely smoke because tobacco has the quality of establishing communication with the non-human world. Since the forest for Guna people is home of the most powerful and predatory spirits, like those of trees, animals and demons, it would not appear too surprising that Guna men consider smoking as not an entirely safe activity to be carried out in forest (cf. Fortis 2012a: 23-39). *Wagsabbur* are therefore those non-Guna people who travel in the forest careless of its inhabitants and showing a remarkable ignorance of its potential threats. In this sense, their misuse of tobacco could be interpreted as an index of their other-than-human nature, a characteristic that I most likely shared, especially at the beginning of my fieldwork.

³ However it should be noted that chewing tobacco was reported among the Colombian Guna from the Urabá Gulf in the 1950s by the missionary Severino de Santa Teresa (1959: 218). See also Wilbert (1987: 127).

In contrast, smoking on the island was considered a safer activity and men smoked regularly during night meetings in the gathering house, where the air was heavy with smoke and where the chiefs sang long chants from the mythical tradition and political matters were also discussed collectively (see Howe 1986). On a small table the village secretary (*el secretario del pueblo*), sold single menthol cigarettes, which were stocked in the village hall and provided a form of income to be spent on public affairs. When finishing singing, and while the village spokesman gave a speech interpreting their chants, the chiefs often lit cigarettes, or pipes and rested their throats by emitting puffs of tobacco smoke.

Another moment when men and elder women smoked collectively was during puberty ceremonies held in occasion of the menarche of a girl or few years after it. These ceremonies lasted between one and three days and people collectively drunk fermented *chicha*. When intoxicated by this strong brew, men and women smoked cigarettes and pipes that, they explained, were meant to satisfy the animal spirits that also attended the ceremony. Animal spirits (*bonigana*) are amongst the guests invited to participate in puberty rituals, alongside all adult members of the village and distant kinspeople from other villages. After asking further about the role of tobacco during puberty rituals I learned that smoking cigarettes and pipes provided animal entities with their own fermented *chicha*. Tobacco smoke is the *chicha* of animals, Guna people told me on several occasions. They drink it – so human participants smoke a plenty- and the animal spirits enjoy getting drunk with it, as human beings do with *chicha*.

‘Smoking tobacco’, *waar ued* in Guna language, is a key component of all healing rituals, shamanic initiations and puberty rituals. During these occasions, besides commercial cigarettes and pipes, long cigars, made with locally produced tobacco are smoked by ritual assistants. *Waar suid*, ‘long tobacco,’ refers to the long cigar made by rolling dried tobacco leaves and closed at one end by tying it with a string. This was the only way in which locally produced tobacco was smoked by Guna people during my fieldwork. However, people in Ogobsuggun made it clear to me that they did not cultivate tobacco any more. It was their distant kinspeople living in the interior region of Bayano, in the Darién forest beyond the San Blas range, who still cultivated it and made such cigars. When people from Bayano visited Ogobsuggun.

they brought cigars either to sell them, or to offer them as a gift to their hosts and friends. Otherwise, when a large quantity of cigars was needed in preparation for a village wide healing ritual, people went to Bayano to buy them. Let us now take a closer look at the association between tobacco and the two forms of *chicha*, fermented ('bitter') and unfermented ('sweet'), which constitutes the central concern of my paper.

Bitter Chicha

During the preparatory stages of puberty rituals the most important task is that of preparing *inna gaibid*, 'bitter *chicha*,' by mixing ground toasted maize and powdered cacao with the boiling juice squeezed from large amounts of sugar cane. When the liquid has cooled down it is then transferred into large clay jars lined against the wall inside the '*chicha* house', *inna nega*, their open tops closed with large *bijao* leaves (*Calathea lutea*). Furthermore, small Spanish pepper pods are placed on top of the leafy lids in order to ward off animal spirits that might come and taste the *chicha* and thus ruin it (Prestan Simón 1975:145). The *chicha* is left fermenting in the jars for a period of a week to ten days.

When this time has passed it is the task of the master *chicha* maker to taste the fermented beverage. This person was called in Spanish *el quimico de la chicha*, which was the translation of the Guna *inna sobedi*, 'he who makes/transforms the *chicha*.' At the time of my research only one man was recognised as being a fully fledged master *chicha* maker and was called by both villagers in Ogobsuggun and in the neighbouring village of Ustupu to 'taste the *chicha*' in preparation for their ceremonies. His name was Aurelio Smith. Aurelio had a group of pupils, some of whom had been following him on *chicha* tasting sessions for years, waiting to 'graduate' as *inna sopeti*, while he had previously learned from his father. Aurelio invited me twice to join the group, and during these occasions I had the chance to participate in the tasting of the fermented *chicha*. This was done in a ritualized way where we sat on a row of wooden stools, Aurelio, the most experienced *sopeti* at one end, and I, the least experienced one at the opposite end. Two men were in charge of opening one jar at a time and each one of us tasted its contents. After tasting the *chicha* from each jar, a man (*waar saedi*, 'tobacco blower/maker') holding a long

cigar started a sort of hopping dance from one foot to the other, stopping in front of each one of us to put the lit end of the cigar in his mouth and blow the smoke on our face. This operation was repeated as many times as the number of jars to be tasted, with the obvious consequence that at the end of the tasting sessions we were all happily inebriated.

During these sessions Aurelio, contemporaneously tasting and giving lessons of taste, judged the state of fermentation and the taste of the content of each jar. If the *chicha* from a jar was considered too alcoholic it would be mixed with warm water or unfermented maize *chicha*. If, on the contrary, it was too low in alcohol it was given more time to ferment. Also, if the taste of some jars was considered too ‘bitter’, *gaibid*, or else tasted like ‘copper,’ or ‘shellfish,’ some crushed dried tobacco from the long cigars was sprinkled in it. This would cause the *chicha* from the bad tasting jars to acquire the taste from the good tasting ones.

Smoking, Drinking and Sociality

Two ways of smoking are therefore practiced during puberty rituals. One is the ‘passive’ smoking of *chicha* makers during tasting sessions; the other is the ‘active’ smoking of *chicha* drinkers during the ceremony itself. If the former way entails the smoking of long cigars locally produced by the one assistant, the latter entails the intensive smoking of commercial cigarettes and store-bought pipes by all the attendants. Also, on the one hand, during tasting sessions smoke is ‘exhaled’, or ‘blown’ (*saet*), so that *chicha* makers can receive it on their faces. The same treatment, as I shall describe below, is reserved for the ritual chanter during healing sessions and to the small wooden figurines acting as auxiliary spirits. On the other hand, when drinking collectively people ‘inhale’ (*ued*) the smoke of their own cigarettes and pipes. This is reminiscent of the way in which elder women and men ‘actively’ smoke through inhalation when they assist at healing sessions, as briefly mentioned above. They smoke both cigarettes and pipes and collect the ashes in small calabashes. The rationale behind this operation is that tobacco ashes are the fermented *chicha* of animal spirits, which need to be appeased to retrieve the sick person’s soul (cf. Howe 1976). Both forms of smoking, by exhalation and inhalation, are therefore practiced in puberty ceremonies and healing rituals, but they are used for diverse ends.

Both in puberty ceremonies and healing sessions tobacco ashes assume, through a perspectival logic (Viveiros de Castro 1998), the position of fermented *chicha*. What human beings see as ashes, animals see, and indeed taste, as beer. Therefore the tobacco smoked on the occasion of puberty rituals *is* the fermented *chicha* of animals. Normally kept at distance from the village, lest people fall prey to their malevolent intentions and get sick or die (Chapin 1983; Fortis 2012a: 40-66), animal entities are instead invited to participate in puberty ceremonies and to share in the festive and cheerful atmosphere created by human beings. They listen to the songs that people sing, hear their feet stomping on the ground during their dances, and indeed desire to drink alcoholic *chicha* and get drunk with it, as human beings do. The drunkenness of animal entities is to be considered one of the key factors for the good accomplishment of puberty rituals. The ritual entails a number of sung performances conducted by the main specialist, the *gamdur*, the ‘flute man’, who invites animal spirits to participate in the ritual. Through his life-long ability and experience in mastering these incredibly long and powerful chants the *gamdur* has to make sure that the animal entities feel happy and satisfied, but at the same time he needs to make sure that their proximity does not turn into danger for human beings. For this reason a number of taboos, sexual and alimentary, have to be followed by those involved in hosting and preparing the ceremony. If these taboos are not respected the *gamdur* and the *inna sobedi* might become ill and even die as a consequence of the attack of animal spirits.⁴

Animals are not the only ‘others’ invited during puberty rituals. The whole village gathers during such ceremonies. Affines, or completely unrelated persons from the same village, share the same festive mood, and otherwise potentially hostile relations are eased by the collective inebriation. Moreover, visitors from other Guna villages often come and stay for the duration of the festival. These visitors are called *girmar*, a term used to indicate the mother’s brother and father’s brother, but also meaning ‘ghosts’ and ‘forefathers.’ This multiplicity of meanings seems to me to point, on the

⁴ With great sadness Margherita and I learned in 2005, after having returned back home, that Aurelio Pèrez had died. Aurelio was already ill during our stay in Ogobsuggun and said that despite the fact that he was given different plant medicines they all seemed to be ineffective in curing his illness. People in the village commented that this was because the illness had been caused by the revengeful attack of animal entities angered by the fact that the father of a pubescent girl who the previous year had hosted a puberty ceremony for which Aurelio was the *inna sobedi* had broken the taboo and had had sex with his wife during the fermentation period of the *chicha*.

one hand, to the 'spatial' distance that separates ego from the MB, who moves out of the house when he marries, and from the FB who always happens to live in another household, Guna people being a matri-local society. On the other hand, ghosts and forefathers are people 'temporally' distant. They do not share the time of human beings. They are no more among the living and can be only encountered in the forest as ghostly figures, in dreams, or in mytho-historical narratives.

In anthropological terms, during puberty ceremonies the village is prototypically open to alterity in its different forms: unrelated people from within the village, distant kinspeople from other villages and animals all participate in the drinking party.⁵ Despite the generally positive mood during drinking ceremonies, the atmosphere can get heated and sometimes quarrels abruptly transform into violent fights, which nonetheless are quickly forgotten when people become sober again. When people get 'drunk,' *mummud*, after drinking great quantities of *chicha*, they easily lose their temper and act without 'thinking', *binsaed*, thus unable to acknowledge the relations that link them to other people. Guna people used to ask me, half-jokingly, whether I was scared of participating in drinking ceremonies, since I might get involved in a fight and get punched, although this never happened. Also, when men become drunk they engage in singing competitions. Sitting near one another, ritual singers start performing healing chants, singing loudly and showing off both their specialist knowledge of long chants and their strong, hoarse, low-pitched voices. Competition and violence seem therefore to be among the characteristic aspects of puberty ceremonies, and although the actual occurrence of the latter might be less often than people admit, its potentiality was quite clear at both the physical and metaphysical level.

Puberty ceremonies were also among the aspects of Guna life that encountered the earnest opposition of missionaries and policemen. Between the 1900s and 1920s Catholic and Protestant missionaries tried, with limited success, to establish missions in some Guna villages and one of their very first objectives was that of preventing young Guna men from getting drunk during puberty ceremonies. As the Catholic

⁵ Guna people call those people who are not their kinspeople *an ibmar suli*, literally 'not my thing'. As Margiotti (2010) argues it is difficult to identify a category of affines among the Guna and there are not preferential categories of marriageable peoples.

priest Leonardo Gassó was disconcerted to note in the summer of 1907, two puberty rituals were celebrated a week apart in the village of Nargana (Howe 1998: 45-6). Likewise Panamanian police put much effort into opposing the celebration of puberty rituals in Guna villages, trying to substitute them with rural traditional dancing events which Guna people were forced to attend. In the effort to acculturate Guna people and to impose a sense of order on what national authorities perceived as chaos, a ban was issued against puberty rituals in 1919 (*ibid*: 180). In particular, what Panamanian policemen located in the San Blas outposts seemed to fear most was the uncontrolled and riotous behaviour of drunken Guna men. The element of animosity that was normally expressed in Guna puberty ceremonies, alongside other more convivial elements, seems therefore to have received particular attention from non-Guna outsiders concerned with trying to convert, control and ‘pacify’.

But animosity was, and is not, the only element to characterize *chicha* ceremonies. Marriages can also be agreed during puberty rituals. On these occasions the families of the bride and the groom speak and find an agreement. After that the groom is mockingly ‘abducted’ and carried by three or more men of the bride’s family to her house where he will start living and contributing to the daily workload (cf. Prestan Simón 1975: 92-3). The often jovial tipsiness caused by drinking fermented *chicha* makes people better disposed to each other and breaks the barriers of communication normally existing between families that do not consider themselves as related.

The theme of drunkenness as conducive to smoother relations with affines, but as also potentially dangerous, is present in a series of myths that I have analysed elsewhere (Fortis 2012a). In these narrations the culture hero Dad Ibe and his siblings organise two drinking ceremonies to celebrate the marriages of Dad Ibe and his sister Olowaili, respectively to the daughter of Biler, the trickster, and Urgunaliler, the thunderstorm master. Both marriages were diplomatically conceived by the culture heroes as a way of establishing alliances with, but also of defeating, their enemies, the ancestors of the contemporary animal species. During these ceremonies they invited the grandchildren of Biler to participate. They were different animals who still had a human form. The latter got drunk and started fighting between themselves so Dad Ipe, through the help of a shamanic stone, kicked them out of the *chicha* house and transformed them into the different animal species that Guna people know nowadays. Moreover, in one

version of this myth, narrated to me by Nicanor Pérez in Okoposukkun in 2004, the *chicha* that Dad Ibe prepared for the animals-*cum*-affines-*cum*-enemies, instead of being made with sugar cane and maize, like the one he and his siblings drunk, was made with *ina nusu* (*Spieghelia anthelmia*), a medicinal plant used to kill intestinal worms, but which if taken in high doses can be lethal to human beings. In this last mythic narrative then, the difference between humans and animals in ancient times is stressed not so much by appealing to their different bodily appearance, since they all had human appearance, but instead to their perceptual differences. *Chicha* for human beings is a drink made with maize and sugar cane, while for animals, we are told, it is made with a poisonous plant.

A further perspectival trope emerges when we focus on Guna people's statement that the ashes of tobacco smoked by drunk people during drinking ceremonies are the fermented *chicha* drunk by animal entities, which, as Nicanor told me, in mythic times was actually a poison, hence a quintessential 'anti-food'. This should not appear surprising as, in the second volume of the *Mythologiques*, 'From Honey to Ashes', Lévi-Strauss opens with a demonstration of how among Amerindians honey - and similarly beer - share with tobacco the quality of oscillating between the category of food and that of poison.⁶ Although the fermented *chicha* drunk during Guna puberty rituals is not a poison, its bitter taste and its alcoholic composition place it outside of the Guna category of 'food'.⁷ Guna people consume fermented *chicha* only on the occasion of puberty rituals, its bitter taste standing in opposition to their predilection for sweet drinks in daily life, which I shall discuss in the next section.

Sweet Chicha

Sweet drinks included sweetened coffee, chocolate drink, *madun*, a drink prepared with ripe plantain, and *inna ossid*, 'sweet *chicha*', made with unfermented maize. All these beverages were sweetened, rather excessively to my taste, with white sugar,

⁶ See Londoño-Sulkin (2012:97-103) for a study of the convivial and predatory qualities of tobacco among the People of the Centre (cf. Echeverri this volume).

⁷ See Margiotti (2010) for an insightful analysis of the differences between the daily preparation and distribution of food carried out predominantly by grandmothers in Guna households and the latter's inebriation during puberty rituals, when the preparation of food becomes thus responsibility of younger women who do not usually drink alcoholic *chicha*. This would suggest an interesting parallel between young women's avoidance of tobacco and of fermented *chicha*. Both substances share the quality of enhancing relations with the non-human world.

which was consumed in huge quantities by each Guna household during my fieldwork. Among these drinks the one considered quintessentially nutritious (and therefore included in the category of ‘people’s food’, *dule masi*), was *inna ossid*, ‘sweet *chicha*.’ This drink was also the one available virtually every day in Guna households. Each household always had a good provision of maize cobs, which were kept toasting in a wooden structure supported by four poles overhanging the cooking fire. To prepare sweet *chicha* dry toasted maize grains were ground and boiled in a big iron pot and left to cool. Although its taste was originally sour, it was served with added sugar.

Sweet unfermented *chicha* was drunk during the day to quench thirst and, if available, offered to kinspeople and friends visiting the house. It was kept in small metal pots in the cooking house and when a woman took a cup of it she made sure to scoop up some of the ground maize that had deposited on the bottom of the pot. Guests were usually given a glass of fresh water after drinking sweet *chicha* to rinse their mouth and get rid of the maize grains; then they spat out the water to one side on the ground with remarkable precision. People often stressed the good property of *inna ossid* in contributing to make the bodies of their kin strong and healthy. They compared it to *dule masi*, the coconut and plantain soup eaten with fish, which constituted the main and by far the most desired meal. Other drinks like *madun* were also praised, as opposed to coffee and cocoa drinks that, although often drunk and easily available, were not considered ‘real food’. Most adult men used to take a bottle of *inna ossid* to the forest, or just some ground maize and sugar, which they diluted with fresh river water. This was considered the best way of coping with the intense heat and hard work in the forest gardens. Men did not spit the residual ground maize when drinking *inna ossid* in the forest but instead ate it. Thanks to its not purely liquid but more substantial composition, *inna ossid* was considered a food.

Women made *inna ossid* in their own kitchen. Prepared and offered exclusively by women, it was the outcome of the combined, although temporally disjointed, work of both sexes, since maize was sown and harvested by men. Similar to the rest of the daily food, which if in abundance could be offered to visiting kinspeople, sweet *chicha* was mainly consumed by co-residents. On the contrary, ‘bitter *chicha*,’ *inna gaibid*, as noted above was not considered food. Its consumption was unrestrained

and led to vomiting; its composition was liquid and was always drunk cold. It was prepared outside people's houses, in the communal *chicha* house. The collection of sugar cane in the forest, the squeezing of its juice in the community mill, *trapiche*, and the subsequent stages of preparation were carried out collectively, sometimes involving children. Men and women worked together during the preparation of the *chicha*, stirring and filtering the boiling liquid. Its final maker, overlooking its fermentation, was a man, the maker of *chicha*. If *inna ossid* was the quintessential convivial food, shared by co-residents and making their bodies similar, *inna gaibid* was the vehicle to bring together unrelated people for a limited, festive, amount of time. If the former was conducive of an ethos of peacefulness, the latter, despite its mood enhancing quality, had an element of animosity and entailed a more or less latent degree of violence. We can also point out that those who drink bitter *chicha* together might eventually end up offering each other sweet *chicha* if they become related through a marriage. Interestingly enough, those who usually share sweet *chicha* tend not to drink bitter *chicha* together, since women tend to stay sober in order to help their husbands when they are too drunk to get back home by themselves.

Let us now focus on a further instance of the association between *chicha* and tobacco in the Guna lived world. In the next case both substances respectively oscillate between sweetness and smoke, and bitterness and ashes, retaining the capacity to create peaceful and convivial relations on the one hand, and mediate inimical and predatory ones, on the other.

Healing

There are striking similarities between the *chicha* and tobacco nexus in puberty rituals, shamanic initiations and healing rituals. The last two cases show almost the same internal organization and due to space constraints I only deal with the latter here.⁸ Both puberty ceremonies and healing rituals are witness to elaborate forms of exchange with alterity, both human and non-human. In the case of the former, as we have seen, animal spirits are invited to participate and are offered fermented *chicha* in the form of tobacco ashes in exchange for their peaceful return to their underworld villages once the ceremony finishes. This is reminiscent of the myth in which Dad

⁸ For more information on the use of tobacco during Guna shamanic initiations see Fortis (2012a: 152-174).

Ibe, in occasion of his marriage with the daughter of the trickster Biler, transformed the ancestors of animals into their present day forms. Furthermore as mentioned above, during puberty ceremonies the bride's kinsmen may 'abduct' the groom, taking him by force into the girl's house in order for the couple to start living together. In the case of healing rituals animal spirits are offered fermented *chicha* as a way of persuading them to relinquish the soul or, rather, one of the immaterial doubles of the sick person. In most cases, I was told, the 'abduction' of a person's soul/double was carried out by an animal spirit's chief, who wanted to acquire a spouse for one of his/her children (cf. Vilaça 2002). If the abducted soul was not retrieved it would remain to live with its animal companion and its earthly body would die.

During one healing ritual in which I was invited to participate in October 2004, the chanter, Aparicio del Vasto, worked with the help of three female 'pipe smokers', *biba umala*, a male 'cigar smoker', *waar saedi*, and a person in charge of burning cacao beans, *sianar daggedi*, literally 'he/she who looks after the cacao burner'. During the curing session, which was held after sunset, Aparicio sang for more than four hours directing his chant to his auxiliary spirits, who travelled in the metaphysical realm to find the abducted soul of the sick person kept hidden in a village of animals invisible to normal human beings. Auxiliary spirits are lodged in small wooden carved anthropomorphic figures and are colloquially called *nudsugana*, or *suargana*. Aparicio had taken his wooden figures a few days before the curing session and set them in a box below the hammock of the ill woman who was separated from the rest of us by a curtain. During the performance of the ritual he stopped singing twice, during which time the cigar smoker stood up and, with the lit end of the long cigar in his mouth, puffed the smoke on Aparicio's face and on all the other assistants four times. His way of smoking was the same as that of the *waar saedi* during Aurelio's tasting sessions. Meanwhile, during the whole duration of the ritual the three elder women kept smoking their pipes and collected the ashes in small calabashes.

In healing rituals like this, tobacco is used both as strengthening sweet *chicha* and inebriating bitter *chicha*. I suggest that during the session the chanter, his assistants and the wooden auxiliary figures become similar in that they establish a form of

communication, whereby the chanter and the wooden figures are the closest. I was told that the chanter masters the special language spoken by *nudsugana* and by animal entities. This is the language in which healing chants are sung. In brief, chants use the vocabulary of daily life to construct highly imagistic speech patterns the meaning of which, although possible for a non-specialist to guess, is highly esoteric (see Sherzer 1983). By chanting, that is speaking the ‘language of spirits’, Aparicio became of a kind with them for the duration of the ritual, as did the pipe smokers. The only difference between them was that Aparicio was able to control his interactions with the spirit world and to master the whole ritual. By virtue of having stopped menstruating, the elder women pipe smokers were able to withstand close relationships with the spirits and were essential to the accomplishment of the healing process.⁹ For this reason chanter and assistants are treated similarly to auxiliary spirits and fed the food of the latter, tobacco smoke.¹⁰ Human participants in the healing ritual thus *become* ‘spirits’. In this way, tobacco smoke is used as a vehicle of conviviality between humans and non-humans, making them temporarily of the same kind for the purpose of establishing close positive relationships with a view to curing sick human persons. In this sense chanter and assistants perceive tobacco smoke in the same way as *nudsugana*, as sweet *chicha*.

Tobacco ashes are understood to be the same substance both in healing rituals and in puberty ceremonies: the fermented *chicha* drunk by animal spirits. The chanter summons female *nudsugana*, the auxiliary spirits, to bring the ashes/*chicha* to the animal spirits, who in turn, seduced by their beauty, cannot refuse to drink it and quickly get drunk. Similar to puberty rituals female auxiliary spirits are ‘those who swing the *chicha*’, *inna obanedi*, referring to the swaying movement of female dancers who carry half gourds full of fermented beer and offer them to dancing drinkers who meet them at the centre of the *chicha* house. Swinging the *chicha* is therefore the typical way of offering the fermented drink during festivals and involves an element of cheerfulness and exchange between the sexes, who attend to each other by singing and dancing. By the same token, male *nudsugana* play the diplomatic side of the battle and convince the drunken animals to reveal where they hide the

⁹ This by no means entails that Guna women have lesser ritual capacities than men. See Fortis (2012a: 110-132 and 2014) for a discussion of female specialist skills.

¹⁰ See Baer (1992) for a discussion of the use of tobacco among Matigenka shamans who feed their auxiliary spirits tobacco daily.

soul/double of the sick person. Once this is discovered they can sneakily retrieve it and restore it to its original owner. A remarkable difference thus appears between tobacco smoke and ashes in the context of healing rituals; while smoke is equally perceived as sweet *chicha* by human beings and *nudsugana* – i.e. there is concordance - ashes are perceived differently by human and animal beings - there is discordance. Thus while sweet *chicha* has the property of traversing specific perceptual boundaries, bitter *chicha* stresses the limits of those very boundaries.

At this point I need only introduce one last element: the food of *nudsugana*. As anticipated above, these auxiliary spirits receive the same treatment as the ritual chanter and the *chicha* maker, that is, the smoke of long cigars is blown on their faces. Tobacco smoke is the sweet *chicha* of *nudsugana*; it is their food, which gives them the force to ‘work hard’ and fight the animal spirits. The smoke/*chicha* is consumed by these powerful beings through their nose. As can be clearly seen by the way these figures are carved, *nudsugana* have no mouth. Instead they have a long pointed nose, which is a key indicator of their other-than-human nature (cf. Fortis 2012a: 87-92, 2012b). Guna people stress the fact that, in contrast to both *nudsugana* and white people, they themselves have short flat noses.

Guna people are aware of the alterity of these powerful beings and through daily acts of conviviality aim at familiarising them. As I discuss elsewhere (Fortis 2012a: 178-180), people look after these protective figurines in their daily life in order to incorporate them in the house as a particular type of co-resident by washing and feeding them. In this way they ensure that the protector spirits ‘remember’ their hosts when the latter are in need.

Nudsugana are normally kept in plastic or wooden boxes inside the dormitory house of almost all Guna households to protect people against the predatory attacks of malicious spirits. Once I observed Wakala lighting a pipe filled with tobacco and, covering the bowl with one corner of her fabric skirt, blowing on it so that she could direct the smoke coming out of the mouthpiece toward the *nudsugana* gathered in a wooden box inside the house. Rotalio, her son-in-law, told me that Wakala was giving them ‘sweet *chicha*’ so they would be strong and alert during the night, watching over the sleep of the family.

Conclusions

Different ways of smoking tobacco – ‘inhaling’ (*ued*) and ‘blowing’ (*saed*) – correspond to different types of *chicha* – ‘bitter’ ‘fermented’ (*gaibid*) and ‘sweet’ ‘unfermented’ (*ossid*) – and consequently to these convivial and predatory social relations. At the same time this suggests a reading of the different moral behaviours associated respectively to humans on the one hand, and animals and foreigners on the other hand. The former are capable of establishing consubstantial relations based on the production and circulation of ‘real food’, which they should consume moderately and without greed according to the appropriate moral attitude towards sharing that distinguishes ‘real people’ from ‘strangers’ and ‘others’. The latter are considered more prone to, besides the excessive smoking of cigarettes, the excessive consumption of inebriating drink (anti-food) that, in Guna terms, besides being produced by non-kin and not being circulated through the usual paths of relatedness, leads to the boisterous behaviour that stands in stark opposition to the tranquil everyday life that co-villagers strive to pursue. We could even suggest that tobacco smoke and sweet *chicha* stand in relation to the ‘cooked’ in the same position as tobacco ashes and bitter *chicha* stand in relation to the ‘rotten’. But instead of appealing to a division between ‘human culture’ and ‘non-human nature’, following Stolze Lima (2000), I wish to point to a division between a ‘human quality’, characterized by a certain degree of morality, including Guna people and the familiarized *nudsugana* spirits, and an ‘animal quality’ that, from a human perspective, is characterized by a distinctive lack of morality and an excess of predation. Neither ‘qualities’ nor moral attitudes are essential and unchangeable traits of any single living being, human or otherwise.

Commercial cigarettes and pipes are mainly smoked to produce the ashes that are served as bitter *chicha* to animals. This active form of smoking corresponds to the anti-food character of tobacco. Drinkers of bitter *chicha* smoke when they are not engaged in eating food and are instead prone to vomiting. Pipe smokers inhale the smoke during healing rituals, occasions when they have to follow a number of taboos, including restraining from sex and from eating certain types of food. Men resting during work in the forest inhale the smoke of their cigarettes to placate their hunger; the same thing that they do in the gathering house, a place where everyday food is

never consumed.¹¹ By contrast, the passive form of smoking corresponds to the food character of tobacco. Smoke from long cigars is blown on *chicha* makers during tasting sessions. It is explicitly meant to prevent them from getting drunk while they taste the *chicha* from the several jars from which the entire village will drink. The smoking of *nudsugana* as noted above is a form of feeding too and is carried out inside the house, the quintessential place of conviviality.

If different ways of smoking correspond to different forms of sociality it is interesting to note how the greater access to commercial tobacco, in the form of cigarettes, was happily embraced by Guna people in the past century when Guna population in the recently created island villages grew dramatically. The consequence of this has been that Guna people have had to work hard to maintain a safe and peaceful everyday life. Since the possibility of splitting and creating new villages is less of an option now than it was in the past, social life has had to elaborate new mechanisms to deal with internal conflicts.

Puberty rituals maintained an important role in Guna village life and have survived repeated attempts by missionaries, policemen and schoolteachers to eradicate them during the past century. By the same token, healing rituals have played a crucial role in dealing with the multiplication of predatory attacks from extra-human forces. The intensification of productive activities carried out on the mainland to provide food for the highly populated island villages has often had the consequence of upsetting the invisible dwellers of the forest causing the spread of epidemics. Guna people have thus found new allies in their wooden auxiliary figures, which are arguably endowed the spatio-temporally transformed powers that Guna specialists once themselves possessed before moving to the islands (Fortis 2011). Thus, far from revealing a growing addiction to commercial tobacco at the expenses of a supposedly ‘traditional’ use, the consumption of cigarettes has come to occupy a crucial place at the intersection of the differential modes of sociality in the transforming lived world of Guna people.

¹¹ In few occasions crackers and squash drinks were distributed among attendants in the gathering house. However Guna people did not consider that ‘real food’.

In this chapter I have argued that, for the Guna, tobacco smoke is the sweet *chicha* of *nudsugana* – auxiliary spirits – and tobacco ashes are the bitter *chicha* of *bonigana* – animal spirits. In line with Lévi-Strauss’ argument (1983[1966]: 58-9) this double association seems to point to a system whereby both tobacco and *chicha* oscillate between the position of food and that of anti-food. Given the ‘convivial’ character of sweet *chicha* and the ‘spirited’ one of bitter *chicha* described above, tobacco seems to be the metaphysical counterpart of the maize drink, mediating the relation between human beings and auxiliary spirits on the one hand, and human beings, animal spirits and unrelated people on the other. In brief, tobacco does at the metaphysical level what *chicha* does at the physical one; they both index consubstantiality with beings to be made similar and mediate predatory relations with Others.

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