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The Embodiment of a Working Identity: Power and Process in Rarámuri Ritual Healing

JEROME M. LEVI

In a recent essay, Csordas and Kleinman conclude their discussion of an agenda for future research in medical anthropology by calling for studies that develop an analytic of *power* in conjunction with the examination of healing as *process*.¹ The present article takes seriously their directives, applying the most pertinent of their suggestions to a case study of ritual healing among the Tarahumara, or Rarámuri as they call themselves, an indigenous people in northern Mexico. This essay is concerned with examining the process whereby power is restored to a patient through the gradual embodiment of a working identity, that is, an identity that manifests a normative and corporeal self capable of participating with others in the everyday give-and-take of society.

On the one hand, Csordas and Kleinman urge describing the “connection among therapeutic, political, and spiritual power in both the practice of healers and the experience of the afflicted.”² They recommend a method which strives to recognize “distinctions among healing as a form or reinforcement of oppression, healing as a[n] ... attempt to address the misery of poverty and powerlessness, and healing as a mode of empowerment wherein small changes can mean the difference between effective coping and defeat.”³ While an examination of the structures of power are significant, they go on to say, “Perhaps more important than any other principle for guiding research is the observation that the therapeutic process does not begin and end with the discrete therapeutic event.” Like the analysis of power, they suggest that this also needs to be comprehended in several ways. “First, therapeutic systems and the events they generate exist in historical and social context, as both products of that context and performances that construct it.... Second, the therapeutic process cannot be understood as bounded by the therapeutic event precisely because it is ultimately directed at life beyond the event.”⁴

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Similarly, the interrogation of “power” has been linked with analysis of “the body.” Both have drawn increasing attention, especially in the wake of Foucauldian perspectives, as loci for the development of critical social theory. In a seminal article, Scheper-Hughes and Lock brought together these two analytic frontiers for medical anthropologists in an approach that not only married micro and macro levels of analysis, but conjoined symbolic and interpretive perspectives with a gaze from political economy.⁵ They wrote of the need to scrutinize the individual body, the social body, and the body politic as multiple and overlapping sites for the construction, arbitration, and subversion of meaning and experience. The phenomenology of health and illness was now understood not only via an idiom of intersecting bodies of power, but as a story whose significance was processual.⁶ By situating a performative microanalysis of a specific instance of religious healing within the broader frame of sociopolitical processes as they impinge upon the patient, I will show how the discussion of recovery is informed when an event-centered discussion is linked to the particularities of local history and worldview.⁷ Specifically, I shall demonstrate how a patient who presents symptoms of weakness, low energy, and a body in pain is gradually empowered by being brought into physical contact with agents, sites, and practices thought to embody power.⁸

Since anthropology’s beginnings, the ethnography on indigenous conceptions of power (such as *mana*, *wakan*, *orenda*, *manitou*, *ayelkwi*, etc.) has enjoyed a venerable tradition of scholarship.⁹ Offering rich descriptions of how various cultures regard power as being concentrated in certain objects, persons, times, or places, these discussions also have examined how its management is necessary for maintaining a dynamic balance between life and death, health and illness, rendering sacred and making profane. Similarly, the notion of “empowerment” today enjoys wide currency in contemporary writing. Yet, with few exceptions, its significance for medical anthropologists has been little developed.¹⁰

In the psychiatric anthropological literature, however, several studies have begun to formalize the concept theoretically, especially in institutional settings.¹¹ For example, McLean notes that a central idea of empowerment has to do with an individual’s capacity to exercise “control over options,” which for patients means being active agents in their own recovery.¹² Similarly, according to Ware and others, the “Golden Rule” of empowerment is a do-unto-others-as-you-would-have-them-do-onto-you philosophy.¹³ This, in turn, is dependent upon self-determination, self-help, and the knowledge and skills necessary to actualize a normal identity, where the empowered individual evidences a sense of oneself as part of the larger community.¹⁴ These are psychological expressions of the fundamental sociological notions of exchange and reciprocity, widely regarded as universal cornerstones of elementary social interaction.¹⁵ At bottom, these studies suggest that empowerment, in terms of individual recovery, means taking responsibility and realizing reciprocity. In other words, a healthy person is one who is able to assume in mind and body a “working identity.”

If the “ascription of illness is one of society’s ways of recognizing that individuals are not always able to fulfill all the socially prescribed behaviors,” as sug-

gested by Adams and Rubel in their classic discussion of sickness and social relations among indigenous peoples of Mesoamerica,¹⁶ then well-being or health conversely implies a resumption and continuance of normative roles. The expression of normative behavior depends upon an ability to evidence an identity that “works,” both socially and physically. In addition to the cognitive and emotional components of an individual’s identity, a working identity also requires a body, as the corporeal manifestation of a temporal self. Conceptions of work and the body are of central importance to the definition of ethnic identity in Mexico, where indigenous peoples stereotypically are contrasted from the non-Indian population in terms of these dimensions of the self.

ETHNOGRAPHIC SETTING

The ethnographic domain to which this paper makes a contribution is the discussion of native healing systems in North America, with specific reference to the literature on ritual curing among the Rarámuri. The Rarámuri are one of the largest indigenous ethnic groups in northern Mexico, about sixty thousand of whom live in the Sierra Madre Occidental of southwestern Chihuahua, a place often referred to as the Sierra Tarahumara.¹⁷ Despite being one of the most populous and “traditional” Native peoples in North America, the Rarámuri have been the subject of relatively few studies devoted to analyzing their systems of religious healing. Building on the works mentioned below, this article attempts to address this gap in the literature.

The fieldwork upon which this paper is based was initiated in 1985.¹⁸ Most research has been conducted in the gorges downriver from the colonial mining town of Batopilas, in the Cuervo area—a series of dispersed hamlets (*rancherías*) east of Batopilas around El Cuervo mountain and the adjacent Barranca de San Rafael to the south—among Rarámuri locally known as *gentiles* (unbaptized ones) or *cimarrones* (fugitives). For comparative purposes, some fieldwork also was conducted among the baptized Rarámuri, known as *pagótame* (washed ones) or *revéame* (named ones), most of whom lived upriver from Batopilas.

Discussion of the differences between the Pagótame and the Gentiles is beyond the scope of this paper, though research on the Rarámuri is empirically skewed in favor of the former subgroup. Suffice it to say that while the two groups in large measure share the same cultural pattern, Gentiles reject baptism, inter their dead in ancestral burial caves, and are found only in rugged corners of the southwestern gorges, whereas Pagótame exist in the central highlands as well as in the canyon country, bury their dead in cemeteries, and accept the Christian sacrament of baptism. Also, Gentiles are a minority subculture comprising only about 5 percent of the total Rarámuri population.

Most importantly, Pagótame orient their civil and religious life around colonial churches centered in a pueblo, even though they may live in outlying *rancherías*, while the Gentiles, on the contrary, constitute communities that have severed most ties to nearby pueblos and churches. Instead, they have organized both their civil and religious life almost exclusively at the

ranchería level. These features are related to historical forces shaping the present identity of the Gentiles. As *cimarrones*, many Gentiles are the descendants of apostates and fugitives who associated conversion to Christianity with colonial practices of forced labor. In conceptually linking the Jesuits' missions with the Spaniards' mines and haciendas, many sought refuge from European intrusion by retreating into more isolated regions.¹⁹ To a great extent, therefore, the differentiation between Gentiles and Pagótame actually reflects a situation in which political and historical differences are articulated using religious nomenclature. In fact, both groups show influences from Christianity, though obviously these are much more apparent among Pagótame than they are among Gentiles.²⁰ For our purposes, the salient point is that Gentiles are the most marginalized minority of an indigenous ethnic group that is already dominated politically, economically, and numerically by the non-Indians, or Mestizos, in the region. Recalling that the language of illness often reveals how individual bodies bear witness to the impressions made upon them by the body politic, it is therefore significant that in the case of the "powerless body" I examine below, the patient himself is a Gentile.

Baseline investigations on Rarámuri culture, including descriptions of herbal as well as ritual healing techniques, were published early in this century by Lumholtz, Basauri, and Bennett and Zingg.²¹ In different ways, subsequent discussion of Rarámuri culture and ecology as they affect various aspects of health and illness has been advanced through the efforts of Anzures y Bolaños; Bye; Fried; González Rodríguez; Irigoyen Rascón; Pastron; Pennington; Plancarte; Salmón; Rogers; Thord-Gray; and Velasco Rivero.²² Particularly relevant for the present discussion are the works of Kennedy, Merrill, and Slaney.

Kennedy is the only fieldworker, besides myself, to have focused long-term research in a community of Gentiles, or unbaptized Rarámuri.²³ Emphasizing that *tesguinadas*, or drinking parties, are not only the most important form of social organization and labor recruitment existing above the level of the household, he also shows that they are basic to virtually all Rarámuri ceremonies.²⁴ Furthermore, Kennedy uses his detailed ethnography of the Gentiles of Inápuchi to show that curing and other kinds of rituals, insofar as they convey a sense of order and control, are a social and psychological response to the fear that arises from living under unpredictable environmental conditions.²⁵ Slaney advances symbolic interpretations of Rarámuri culture. Her rich analyses of the most crucial rites of passage, specifically death rituals and "double baptism" in the Pagótame community of Panalachi, highlight the significance of Rarámuri bodies in relation to intersecting symbolisms of ethnicity and gender.²⁶ Merrill, focusing on the relation between healing rituals and worldview, demonstrates the centrality of concepts of the soul to curing, dreaming, inebriation, and the general maintenance of well-being in the Pagótame community of Rejogochi.²⁷ Moreover, in following a single Rarámuri man through multiple diagnoses, etiologies, curing rituals, and eventual death, his monograph represents another case-study approach to discussions of the therapeutic process.²⁸

This article builds on the above studies in several ways. First, I suggest that in addition to being "the house of the souls,"²⁹ the body is more than a pas-

sive receptacle for the active agents of Rarámuri personhood. The body itself merits serious attention in the analysis of Rarámuri healing rituals, as the locus of both symbolic and practical expressions of a working identity. To be sure, Rarámuri notions of life, vitality, and energy are linguistically and conceptually closely related to ideas about the soul, breath, and the imparting of strength, stamina, encouragement, and contentment.³⁰ But it is only through the possession of a physical body (*sapá*) that Rarámuri can manifest an empowered self, corporealizing the spirit of strength and ruddy health that each person seeks to radiate, communicating it through physical work and embodying it through social interactions. Second, this article presents comparative data on Rarámuri ritual healing, especially valuable since there is only one other source describing how these practices are performed among Gentiles. Noteworthy here is that the curing ceremony I describe exhibits differences, as well as similarities, when compared to the healing rituals among the Gentiles of Inápuchi on the one hand,³¹ and those of the Pagótame of Rejogochi on the other,³² further illustrating that patterned variation is an important feature of Rarámuri social life. Finally, this paper includes the only full text in the literature, in both Rarámuri and English, of a complete healing chant that is contextualized in the analysis of ritual events.³³

PROCESSUAL HEALING OF THE POWERLESS BODY: A CASE STUDY

Case History, Political Symptoms, and Social Antecedents

The healing ritual I shall describe took place on June 25, 1989, in the ranchería of Wa'éachi, a highland community located at the rim of a steep side canyon off the Batopilas Gorge, but below the approximately 5,625-foot summit of Crow Mountain (Spanish, *El Cuervo*; Rarámuri, *Korachi*). It was performed during the second phase of a *tesguinada*, or ceremonial drinking party, for a middle-aged man who was the eldest son of one of the region's respected leaders and elders. The patient, Felipe, reported suffering from great pain (*we okó*) all over his body, a condition that was especially acute in his neck and chest. He told me he had no strength (*tasi hiwera*), and generally described feeling weak, powerless, and lacking in energy. He first went to the government clinic in Yoquivo, but the personnel, according to Felipe, could find nothing wrong with him and were therefore unable to treat his symptoms. Subsequently, he sought the help of a family friend, who was also the senior shaman in the Cuervo area. The shaman said that he would perform a curing ceremony in the context of a *tesguinada*, and a date was set for the event.

Before describing the ritual, I believe some background information on the social and political events that were occurring in the community is relevant here. In many of the rancherías of the Cuervo district, unresolved issues of land ownership, community membership, and hazy geographical as well as administrative boundaries were perennial, albeit submerged, sources of social tension. Briefly, in the weeks preceding Felipe's illness and subsequent cere-

mony, the normally dormant issue as to who really controlled the craggy land where the Gentiles lived was becoming a more pressing matter, especially in view of recent gold exploration by an international mining firm at Satevó in the gorge below them, the escalating pace of the timber industry operating on the mesas of Yoquivo above them, and a rash of unpunished thievery that was robbing the Gentiles of their cattle, sheep, and goats. People from the old colonial pueblos of Satevó and Yoquivo were now coming into the district “reminding” the Gentiles that they really were still part of their pueblos. Another set of competing claims came from Mestizos at the mining town of Tres Hermanos. But the most ominous assertion of rights to the rancherías below the summit of Cuervo was made by some members of a Mestizo family at a nearby ranch, whose patriarch was notorious throughout the region for allegedly having killed members of his own family in order to lay claim to a vast, if somewhat indistinct, tract of land.

These issues impinged on Felipe in meaningful ways that made the onset of his illness at this time especially poignant. Not only was he from the most prominent Rarámuri family in the area, with a ramified network of relationships with Indians and non-Indians throughout the region, but Felipe, and his father before him, recently had served as the *siríame*, or indigenous governor, of the Cuervo rancherías. As the chief community leader, this individual is regarded as morally upright and is charged with the responsibility for acting in the best interests of his community, which often requires intercession with outsiders on their behalf. And yet, during the simmering tensions in the summer of 1989, rather than struggling for the rights of his people, Felipe instead found himself embroiled in business dealings with the Mestizo family at the nearby ranch, share-cropping beans on some of their land and working as a day laborer in their cornfields. Felipe further distinguished himself from others in the community via an ethnically coded sartorial idiom. Rather than wearing the loincloth and handmade shirt that was the conventional attire of most Rarámuri men, Felipe almost always dressed in Western clothing.

Noteworthy also is that just days before his curing ceremony, Felipe misplaced his *bakánawi*, a personal power object carried by many Rarámuri in the region. *Bakánawi* are tuberous roots believed to have souls which sometimes appear in dreams in human form, such as Mestizos riding around on horseback, powerful Rarámuri men, or beautiful women. *Bakánawi* is identified as various plants in different parts of the Sierra Tarahumara, though often it is euphemistically glossed in conversation as “peyote” or *híkuri*.³⁴ The roots periodically must be fed cornmeal and tobacco, have traditional Rarámuri music played for them, and generally require being treated with utmost care and respect lest they endanger their owner. In return, the *bakánawi* impart health, power, and vitality, as well as bring luck in hunting and love. Yet *bakánawi* are especially prized for their ability to appear during nighttime dreams, singing beautiful chants and doing vigorous dances for the benefit of their owners.

The salience that these historical antecedents have for a social etiology of Felipe’s illness is that they suggest the patient was manifesting in his own body the political symptoms of his community. Torn between the plight of his people, on the one hand, and his own predicament with the landowners at the

nearby ranch, on the other, while simultaneously feeling pressure from other competing factions as a prominent member of the community, Felipe increasingly led a pained existence. Irony was now heaped upon tragedy. Felipe was a community leader, a powerful man from a powerful family, albeit among the most marginalized minority of the already subordinated Rarámuri. And yet, he was powerless. Physically, he lacked energy, nor could he advocate politically. A servant of his people who was beholden to their opponents, Felipe's powerlessness seemed to be psychological retribution for his own ill-gotten attempts at acquiring the signs of power, wealth, and status. In dressing like a Mestizo, he sought to embody the garb of the local power elite, distancing himself from headbands, loincloths, and homespun blankets, icons of Rarámuri identity but also ethnically coded symbols of poverty. Yet in doing so, and in associating with the forces that would threaten Cuervo's well-being, he lost his moral authority and with it his community's backing, which were the unexamined sources of his strength and empowerment. Finally, as if to underscore the message that Felipe possessed a body that lacked energy and an identity that was incapable of working in normal social contexts, he misplaced his bakánawi just days before the ceremony. That is, he lost his power object. In no uncertain terms, Felipe was showing people through this final, and potentially dangerous, act of carelessness that he had literally "lost his power." By asking for a curing ceremony, however, Felipe was also showing that he wanted to get back on the right path, correct his improper behavior, and redress these insults to cultural, natural, and supernatural orders through normative ritual intervention.

The Work Party

Because Rarámuri tesguinadas require substantial expenditures of labor and resources from the households that host them, they usually cover several ritual functions.³⁵ The one that preceded Felipe's curing ceremony was similarly multipurpose. Felipe and his father, Benito, who were the ritual hosts (*chokéame*) for this gathering, stipulated that this tesguinada was held for three reasons. It was convened as a work party to build a new corral for Benito (*nochama napawuka newama koralchi*, "to work together to make a corral"); as a curing ceremony for Felipe (*owema uchémpera rehói*, "to cure by anointing a man"); and as the annual petition for rains needed for their summer crops (*bayésa ukwíki*, "call the rains"). For the occasion, three large earthenware pots (Spanish, *ollas*; Rarámuri, *sekorí*) brimming with sacred fermented maize beer (Spanish, *tesguino*; Rarámuri, *suwí* or *batári*) had been prepared, as well as a smaller olla that was hidden away, to be consumed by family and close friends at a more intimate party after the other guests had departed.

By 8:30 a.m. many men were on the hill above Benito's house, bringing poles and starting to build the corral for Benito's large herd of sheep and goats. Others joined gradually, and some men did not come until the drinking was about to begin. Because of his status in the region, Benito had an impressive network of people upon whom he could call for labor inputs or ceremonial duties. As the more than seventy-year-old patriarch of his own

family, this included not only the families of his married children, but also those of his older and younger brothers, the extended kin group of a wide range of agnates, numerous friends and their families, as well as other community leaders and their close kin. For this event two notable men and their families arrived: Pedro, who was a shaman and *capitán*, and Rufino, who was both the eldest man and senior shaman in the vicinity. In all, about fifty people came for the occasion.

Work continued on the corral until around 11 a.m. Some men brought poles cut from the forest, some tied the poles together, some hauled poles from another corral—but many men just sat around. Even Felipe helped, as best he could. Benito was constantly working, so as to inspire the others to participate, he later explained. As is customary, however, he gave no work orders, even though he was the *chokéame*. Nor was anyone else directing the labor. People saw what needed to be done, knew what the task required, and either pitched in or did nothing as the spirit moved them. In this leisurely manner, the corral was finished.³⁶

It was now almost noon and people began to file down to the house, signaling the next phase of this social event, which consisted of the ceremonial drinking of *tesguino*. As the senior ritual host, Benito opened the ceremony by taking a small pot of the *tesguino* to the domestic dance patio (*awirachi*) outside the house and, before a four-foot cross erected for the occasion, performed the *wiróma*, offering *tesguino* to God (*Onorúame*, “The One Who Is Father”) by tossing libations of the sacramental drink skywards and to the four directions.

Significantly, the domestic dance patio, the actions performed on it, and the associated ritual objects all index aspects of Rarámuri cosmology. As a physical representation of cosmography, it was explained to me that the circular dance ground replicates in miniature the *namókame*, the cosmic disks “stacked like tortillas” comprising the earth, the heavens, and the lower worlds. Most people reported that there exist three planes below the earth and three planes above, with God dwelling on the third and highest plane.³⁷ Benito explained that the wooden patio cross stood for God which, in the Cuervo district, is unequivocally associated with the sun. Similarly, the pot of *tesguino* is always placed to the east just before the cross, or as Benito said, “*bachá, bachá!*” (meaning “first” or “in front”), pointing to the vessel containing the sacred drink with his index finger and then to the rising sun. *Bachá* connotes priority in any ordered sequence, and can refer to older brothers, earlier actions, original conditions, or seniority of people, things, times, and places. In this context, Benito indicated that *bachá* conveyed a fundamental principle of ritual primacy in Rarámuri worldview by mapping spatial and temporal equivalents onto a single dimension of cosmological precedence, referenced by the sun, symbol of God, the primary giver of order.³⁸ In like manner, Benito and others explained that when the host or shaman opens a ceremony by casting upwards with a drinking gourd droplets of sacramental maize beer in all directions around the dance patio, it is both an offering to God as well as a mimetic reenactment of the creation of the Rarámuri people. When the world was new, God himself stood in the center of the earth—on the middle cosmic plane in the middle of the disk, as people symbolically do

to this day while standing in the center of the dance patio—tossing libations of tesguino in all directions, thereby sprinkling across the land scattered drops of maize beer. I was told this is why Rarámuri live in dispersed ranchos to this day. Thus, even a seemingly mundane work party is first sanctified by using tesguino to make connections between God, people, land, and maize; primordial space and sacred time; sun and the orders of existence.

Now, one by one, people were served the fermented maize beer. They sat tranquilly on the ground around Benito's house, talking peacefully and laughing in hushed tones, sun glinting through the trees. Soon everyone had drunk one gourd (*labáka*) full of tesguino. The pungent smell of *wipáka* (native tobacco; *Nicotina*, sp.) began to waft through the air, as the men quietly puffed their corn husk cigarettes (*péwari*). Just as the drinking gourd went round the crowd, touching each person's lips, so too smoking was a communal, ceremonial act. Like tesguino drinking, it is not a symbolic *representation* of something, but actually *constitutes* an essential commensality.³⁹ Communal acts of smoking, eating, and drinking, especially of substances with psychotropic properties, are powerful modalities of body knowledge, corporeal gestures of sociality, sharing, and expressions of cultural identity. Each man takes a puff of the *péwari* and, using his right hand, passes it to his neighbor who in turn passes it along, or it may be smoked in fellowship back and forth between two or three men, or alternately handed to women who similarly smoke the tobacco among themselves. In contrast to Mestizos, it is significant that Rarámuri rarely smoke except in ceremonial drinking contexts, just as they never drink tesguino alone. In fact, smoking is so connected with the ceremonial consumption of maize beer that a conventional way to invite someone to a tesguinada is simply to ask them to bring some tobacco on a certain day, and even though no mention is made of tesguino, it is understood they are being asked to attend a drinking party.

Because tesguino drinking is an even more central embodiment of Rarámuri sociality than smoking, it conforms to a more formalized set of behaviors, particularly during the first half of a drinking party before people become intoxicated. This etiquette holds: (1) that one may serve others tesguino or be served by them, but should never serve oneself from the olla; (2) that a *labaka ro'úsa*, a dipper or scattering gourd used for dedicating the maize beer, also be used to ladle tesguino from the olla into the *labáka bahísa*, or drinking gourd, but that the drinking gourd itself should not be dipped into the olla of tesguino; (3) that one should not dally when offered the drinking gourd, which usually holds almost a quart, but get on with gulping down as quickly as possible the tingling sweet-bitter liquid so as to (4) say "thank you" (*natétera*) and pass the empty container back to the server, thereby allowing him to fill the gourd for the next person. The giving and accepting of tesguino, like all ritual gestures, is done with the right hand; only in the land of the dead, where everything is backwards, is the left hand used for these purposes.

Moreover, although one is always obliged to acknowledge being offered a gourd of tesguino, this by no means implies that one always must drink it. Nevertheless, given a norm stipulating that gifts are accepted unless one wishes to sever relations of reciprocity, people must be adept at skillfully manipu-

lating certain verbal and bodily arts of social interaction if one should not want to drink, yet still remain on good terms.⁴⁰ Such elaborate verbal and behavioral codes governing drinking etiquette may seem odd were it not for the fact that in addition to being the paradigmatic form of ritual commensality and public embodiment of reciprocity, tesguino also is regarded as the pre-eminent medicine (*owáame*) among Rarámuri. Rather than viewing tesguino as simply an alcoholic beverage, albeit a sacred one, I wish to highlight its Rarámuri conceptualization as their most basic *medicine*. From this perspective, it is therefore logical that Rarámuri would be as concerned with following precise prescriptions about how it should be properly administered as having recourse to a stock of socially acceptable excuses in the event they are not taking their “medicine.”⁴¹

After the first round had been distributed, Benito’s eldest brother, a man about eighty years of age, took me by the hand and led me inside the house where Benito’s brothers and sons were now starting to serve a second helping of tesguino to the guests. The three large ollas full of tesguino were placed on the dirt floor in the middle of the inner room. During the more formalized phase of tesguinadas, before people become too inebriated, men and women usually sit in different groups. Here, men were gathered outside around the front of the house, while the women sat on the ground beneath the trees on the other side of the wall towards the back end of the house. While Benito’s sons served tesguino to the men who were waiting out front, Benito’s elder brother meanwhile was passing gourds of maize beer through a large hole in the wall to the women on the other side. The first two ollas of tesguino were finished in several hours. People had three to four gourdfuls each, which allowed them to achieve the desired state of *bayóame rikú*, “beauteous inebriation.” This rosy glow is one whereby celebrants are getting drunk but not getting out of hand.

It is the attainment of this physiological state, a biological condition having to do with the body but a mode of being inextricably linked to Rarámuri concepts of the soul, which permits the escalation of the event to the next phase of the ritual—the curing ceremony. For it is held that once participants become “beautifully drunk,” some of a person’s souls begin to leave the body, easing communication not only among the celebrants, but also between humans and supernaturals.⁴² Consequently, people are more open to experience communion with the holy through the words and actions of the shaman. As such, they are also more receptive to the moods and images of beauty, sanctity, well-being, and order that are the goal of every curing ceremony through a felicitous performance.

The Curing Ceremony

Before the third olla of tesguino was opened, I saw that it was destined for a special purpose, since it was covered with an upside-down twilled basket (*wári*). The patient (Felipe) and an apprentice (Mauricio) who often assisted the shaman (Rufino) were preparing it for the imminent curing ceremony. A large gourd filled with parched maize kernels ground on a metate into a fine, dry cornmeal (Spanish, *pinole*; Rarámuri, *kobísi*) was set atop the *wári* covering

the mouth of the olla. Beside this gourd of pinole was placed an empty drinking gourd and a gourd dipper. Because the patient was male and three is a number ritually associated with men (four with women), Felipe and Mauricio took several pine shingles and began carving the wood into three long, skinny, curing crosses. Each of these was approximately sixteen inches long with about a two-inch cross-arm. Next, Felipe filled a gourd with water, sprinkled the dirt floor in the area around the olla, and then swept the space with a bundle of long grass used as a broom (*pichíríka*).

Felipe now took one of the wooden stumps that served as stools, which constituted the only furniture in the dwelling, and folded a homespun woolen blanket on top for cushioning. First he set this on the western side of the olla. Then, reconsidering, he instead placed this seat on the eastern side of the olla, facing the doorway, which is the customary place of honor, where the shaman was to sit. Mauricio, the shaman's apprentice, then told Felipe to arrange another stool with a blanket folded on top of it on the southern side of the olla. This was to be the seat for the patient, Felipe.

Mauricio then instructed Felipe to lean the three wooden curing crosses up against the olla. The placement of these was done with great deliberation and caution. Felipe first positioned the crosses in an incorrect manner. Under Mauricio's direction, these were then repositioned, leaning against the western, eastern, and southern sides of the olla. These positions marked the spots where key participants in the curing ceremony were to sit. The people were now summoned inside. Rufino, the *owirúame* (shaman, doctor, healer; literally "medicine-one") entered first. With great care and seriousness, he directed members of the curing party to the places they should sit. Rufino sat on the stool arranged for him on the eastern side. Parallel to him, on the right, were two musicians who were to play traditional music at Rufino's instruction during various phases of the ceremony. The man seated closest to Rufino played a Rarámuri violin (*rabéli*), and the other a homemade guitar. On the western side of the olla, opposite Rufino and facing him, sat his wife. Felipe sat atop his stool on the southern side; Mauricio squatted beside him; while on the northern side of the olla, facing Felipe, was a spot reserved for the violin player's wife.

Rufino opened the ritual with the ceremonial use of tobacco. Rolling a corn husk cigarette, he silently took several puffs, held the *péwari* in his hand, and motioned around the top of the olla in circular movements, letting the smoke waft over the curing paraphernalia, thereby purifying the ritual space and blessing the objects. He then called upon God's help by offering the smoke skyward, holding the *péwari* with an outstretched arm above his head and then drawing it back to his chest or *surachí*, literally "place of the heart," an area of the body that is important in Rarámuri ritual and worldview, often described, along with the head, as the seat of a person's largest souls.⁴³ The whole procedure was repeated several times before the *péwari*, beginning with the patient, was passed clockwise around the olla, each member of the curing party smoking for a few moments while they prayed in silence or low tones.

Rufino and his wife then began a dual performance of a highly stylized oratory. Continuing to stand with his wife sitting, Rufino broke into a rapid-fire

speech, which is the customary form of public sermons (*nawésari*), but unlike conventional *nawésari*, Rufino alternated his voice from nearly shouting to barely whispering. According to several family members who were standing beside me in the room, this paralinguistic oscillation—coupled by the fact that Rufino’s wife accompanied her husband with a simultaneous rapid banter of her own, also shifting back and forth between shouting and whispering—made for an overall chorus in which neither of their speeches could really be comprehended as discursive narrative events. As ritual performances, however, they clearly were dramatic speech acts evoking a context of strangeness that signaled mystical communication. Although their speeches could not be understood in their entirety, family members reported catching the gist of their orations, which asked God to care for one of his children, a direct reference to Felipe, the patient.

While Rufino and his wife chattered away, Felipe sat still and was silent. As the patient listened intently to this eerie invocation, Mauricio went outside where the rest of the crowd was continuing the drinking party. He carried with him the gourd of pinole, with one of the three curing crosses stuck in it, going around the large patio cross erected on the domestic dance ground where earlier in the day Benito had opened the drinking party by offering *wiróma*, tossing libations of *tesguino* up to God and the four directions. There, gourd in hand, he methodically made three counterclockwise circuits. Meanwhile, at the behest of Rufino, the musicians began to play. Now Rufino took the other two curing crosses. One of these he placed inside Felipe’s shirt, resting the stem against his chest, “the place of the heart,” with the top protruding in front of his neck, the cross visible just below Felipe’s chin. Telling Felipe to hold the first cross in this position, Rufino now uncovered the olla, lifting the two other gourds and removing the upside-down basket. Taking the second cross in his hand, Rufino dipped the stem into the *tesguino* and proceeded to paint three maize beer crosses on each of the four sides of the olla, starting with the side facing him and moving counterclockwise. He then resumed his seat, holding the cross out in front of him, with the bottom touching the olla’s side and the top inclined toward his body at about a sixty-degree angle.

Mauricio now reentered the room carrying the gourd of pinole and said loudly: *kwíra-bá!* (“greetings!”). Everyone responded, saying *kwíra-bá* back to him in unison. He was then told to twirl around in front of the olla, on the western side, and to circle around the participants, twirling around at each of the cardinal points. When he started to go the wrong way, however, he was corrected by Rufino and his wife and sent in the other direction, being told to move always “to the right,” or counterclockwise. Mauricio thus made nine circuits around the participants and then sat back down beside Felipe. Periodically, the musicians played at the behest of Rufino. When they rested, Rufino and his wife resumed their dual oratory until the music began again. Now the violinist’s wife was summoned inside. Replicating the procedure when Mauricio reentered the curing area, there again was the *kwíra-bá* greeting, the counterclockwise twirling before the olla, and nine counterclockwise circuits around the group. She then sat facing Felipe on the other side of the olla.

The gourd with the pinole and the third curing cross stuck upright in the cornmeal was placed in front of Rufino. With the second curing cross still held

in his hand, Rufino made the sign of the cross in the air over the mouth of the olla and then circled the curing cross above the tesguino, a gesture he repeated several times, as he previously did with the tobacco. He next tossed this cross into the tesguino. It sank into the maize beer, hit the bottom of the olla, and then bobbed back to the surface. All eyes watched the silent disappearance of the cross into the sacramental liquid and its momentary reappearance, the cross jutting up above the mouth of the olla. Rufino began a low incantation and repeated the act of bouncing the cross in the olla three times.

With this sanctified cross, Rufino now began using physical techniques to cure the *okó suwába* or “all-over pain” that had gripped Felipe’s entire body. Rufino would attempt to empower Felipe’s aching body through a practice known as *uchémera*, which involves specialized methods for directly touching the patient’s body. The verb *uchémera* has a number of related connotations. It means to apply pressure, massage, or rub; it also means to put liquid, ointment, sap, or oil on something, especially for healing purposes, and therefore denotes anointing, greasing, painting, or daubing—meanings with particular resonance in religious and medical contexts. Rufino was now going to *uchémera* Felipe, using tesguino as the paradigmatic medicine and the aforementioned cross as the preeminent medical instrument. The former served as the healing liquid and the latter as an applicator stick and conduit for concentrating and directing sacred power.

First, Rufino rose to his feet, asking Felipe to do likewise. He then turned Felipe around and around many times in place; this twirling is denoted by the verb *kuríma*, meaning “to go in a circle” or “turn around.” Next, Rufino pressed the cross, still wet with tesguino, three times against the patient’s back and then three more times against his chest. Then he anointed the crown of Felipe’s head with tesguino, drawing a line with the stem of the cross as if it were a wand, from the nape of the neck to Felipe’s forehead and then from side to side. Periodically dipping the stem of the cross into the tesguino, Rufino used it to paint long streaks down Felipe’s right arm, hand, leg, and foot. He then pressed the wet cross to major joints along the right side of Felipe’s body, specifically his shoulder, elbow, wrist, knee, and ankle. The entire procedure was then repeated on Felipe’s left side. Felipe stood quiet and still as Rufino performed the techniques involved in curing by *uchémera*.

Significantly, the *uchémera* employed non-discursive means not only to connect, via the cross and tesguino, inner and outer aspects of a person’s identity, but literally to draw analogies between the body of the patient and the body of the olla. The points on Felipe’s body mentioned above which were anointed with tesguino by the curing cross are especially meaningful because, according to Merrill,⁴⁴ these correspond to places on the surface of the body where inside dwell a person’s souls. Furthermore, it will be noted that the way Rufino used the cross to mark Felipe’s body with tesguino—on his right and left sides as well as front and back—corresponded exactly to the manner in which, earlier in the ceremony, he used this same instrument to streak maize beer on all four sides of the body of the olla.

Then, from the olla that spatially had defined the center of the ceremony and had been the focus of so much ritual attention, Felipe finally was

served a gourd brimming with tesguino, which he gulped down immediately. At this point, the patient was now literally coated, internally as well as externally, with the Rarámuri's quintessential medicine. Maize beer had been painted on him outside and poured down his insides. The body of the man, like the body of the olla, not only contained the intoxicating liquid and exhibited lustrous surfaces anointed with sacred beverage, but now Felipe himself was actually a vessel of the holy, regenerative fluid.

From the olla to Felipe to the others in the room, the sacred drink now flowed to all, though it poured into the crowd along a hierarchy of structured relationships, highlighting channels of power based on principles of seniority, maleness, bloodline, and social ties among the assembled. First to drink were members of the curing party, beginning with Rufino and his wife. Then people were called into the room based on their kinship distance to the patient, Felipe. The first family member to be summoned was the patient's father, Benito, in whose house the ceremony was taking place and who had served as the senior *chokéame* or ritual host. Felipe's mother, who supervised the preparation of all food and beverage served at the *tesguinada*, was called next. Then his brothers, both younger, were summoned, the elder of the two being served first. Felipe had no children of his own, but his teenage stepson was called out next, along with Felipe's two wives. Rufino then asked Felipe's mother if she had any other children present, and when she responded by saying, "no," the drinking now expanded to include a wider circle of guests. An assortment of uncles, aunts, cousins, and friends filed into the room, each given a chance to drink from the olla.

A set procedure was followed for each person. They were served one at a time from the northwestern face of the olla, at a spot intermediate between Rufino's wife and the wife of the violin player. As each came up to the olla, they did *kuríma*, that is, they twirled or turned around several times, always moving to the right, or counterclockwise. Then each knelt down to accept the drinking gourd. If a man was wearing a hat he removed it, but not if he was wearing a headband. Soon everyone drank their fill and the olla was empty.

Rufino now picked up the gourd of *pinole* and again began to chant his personal curing song, which he later told me God taught to him when he visited heaven in his dreams.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, with his index and middle fingers he scooped up some of the *pinole* and placed it into the mouth of Felipe. Next he hand-fed *pinole* to his wife, then to his apprentice-assistant Mauricio, and finally to the violinist's wife. This completed, the low chant that Rufino had been singing periodically throughout the ceremony now boomed forth from his lungs with great gusto:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. <i>Ech-cho-ná, we semati kúراسí atí</i> | Over there, such beautiful
crosses standing |
| 2. <i>Semati atí, suwí choná</i> | Beautiful is, maize beer over there |
| 3. <i>Mapu nehá, asá suwí</i> | Where [one] gives, sits beer |

4. <i>Echì kúruì, bahí choná</i>	Those boys, drink over there
5. <i>We sematì, atí choná</i>	So beautiful, being over there
6. <i>Mi re'pá, mi rabó</i>	There on top, there on the ridge
7. <i>Ga'rá atí, nehé choná</i>	Well am I, over there
8. <i>Hiwera atí choná, seko-ri-chì</i>	Strength is there, in the olla
9. <i>Ma bahí, suwí choná</i>	Now drink, maize beer over there
10. <i>We sematì, atí choná</i>	So beautiful, being up on the ridge
11. <i>We sematì, kúrusì atí</i>	So beautiful, crosses standing
12. <i>We sematì, rawé-ware</i>	So beautiful, day dawning
13. <i>Mi re'pá, atí choná</i>	There on top, over there are
14. <i>Wa'rú wabé, kú-ru-sì</i>	Very large, crosses
15. <i>Mi re'pá, atí nehé ko</i>	There on top, I keep going
16. <i>We sematì, atí rabó</i>	So beautiful, being up on the ridge
17. <i>We sematì, atí choná</i>	So beautiful, being over there
18. <i>Mi re'pá, mi rabó</i>	There on top, there on the ridge
19. <i>We sematì, atí choná</i>	So beautiful, being over there
20. <i>We sematì, nawahí cho ko</i>	So beautiful, chanting going on too
21. <i>Mi re'pá, rabó aní</i>	There on top, on the ridge I say
22. <i>Beikiá kúruì, choná ená biré</i>	Three boys, over there walks one
23. <i>Mi re'pá, mi rabó</i>	There on top, there on the ridge
24. <i>Echiriwé, nawahí atí</i>	Thus, keep chanting
25. <i>Besá namókame, atí paní</i>	Third plane, being in heaven
26. <i>Echiriwe, nehé aní</i>	Thus, I say
27. <i>Mi re'pá, mi rabó</i>	There on top, there on the ridge
28. <i>Riósht natéterabá!</i>	God, Thank You!

The curing party now performed a counterclockwise round dance (*awí kurí-ka*, literally, “dance in a circle”) around the empty olla in the following order: the shaman, the patient, the musicians playing their instruments, the apprentice-assistant, the shaman’s wife, and the violinist’s wife. As elsewhere in the ceremony, this sequence again evidenced structures of symbolic classification illustrating not only the complementarity of male and female, as well as senior and junior principles, but the primacy of the former in each of these pairs—distinctions which are also replicated in Rarámuri sibling terminology. The men danced by keeping up a powerful syncopated rhythm, alternately stamping each foot on the ground, while the women followed behind them, stamping more gingerly with a hop-step of their own.

Now that the participants were “beautifully drunk” and moving about, formality gave way to more ludic elements, a sequencing mechanism that often signals the close of rituals. At one point, Rufino took the violin (which belonged to Benito) and played it for awhile before returning it to the normal violin player. As he danced, several people encouraged Felipe by calling out to him, “*iwérasa!*”—meaning “be powerful” or “have strength!” After innumerable times going round the olla, Rufino had everyone stop dancing as he playfully shouted out, “*kípu hú*” (how many?), to which Mauricio answered “*ochéech*” (again!), making everyone laugh as they resumed dancing. This call and response, which stopped and started the dancing, went on several more times during the next twenty minutes as people went round and round, until they visibly tired from the vigorous dance. Rufino then shouted “*Ríosh Natéteraba!*” (God, thank you!), which finally halted the circle dance. Afterwards, when I asked participants how many times they had circled the olla, they said they did not know, and suggested that I ask the shaman and his apprentice. When I asked Rufino and Mauricio, they said that was a matter only between themselves and God.

When the round dance was over, Rufino handed the gourd of pinole to Felipe, saying “*kórisa, má kusawíma,*” (take this gift, now your health will be restored). Felipe replied “*natéteraba*” (thank you), accepted the gourd with his right hand, transferred it to his left and then passed it on to Rufino’s wife, saying to her “*kórisa, kuyáma*” (take this gift, give back in return). This was a continuous motion from the shaman to the patient to the shaman’s wife, who finally emptied the pinole into a square of white muslin. In both word and deed it was a beautiful and graphic illustration of the Rarámuri concept of “reciprocal exchange,” or *nakuríwa*, literally meaning “something which goes in a circle”—even the seating arrangement of the three actors formed a semi-circle around the olla. Later, Rufino was additionally given five thousand pesos for his services.

Treatment Protocol

After the ceremony, Rufino took Felipe aside and the two quietly conversed for awhile. Later, Felipe told me that Rufino had given him specific instructions as to how he should continue the therapeutic process on his own and how it was important for him to heed this advice if Felipe wanted to get well.

Felipe said that he was supposed to continue working on his body with the curing crosses, that he should rest but also try to get back to work little by little, beginning by laboring alongside his father and brothers in the family's cornfield. Since he was now healed, he should no longer feel sad or depressed (*o'móna*), but instead feel happy (*ganire*) and be at peace (*kirí hu*). He was enjoined to be true (*bichíwame*) and giving (*neháame*) with God and other members of the community, showing these dispositions by hosting another tesguinada and sacrificing a goat during the fall harvest. Moreover, Rufino told Felipe that he would recover his lost bakánawi, which would be instrumental in his eventual recovery. Felipe was instructed to pay close attention to his dreams, for through them the bakánawi would reveal its magic, imparting renewed strength and vitality by showing Felipe empowering images, songs, and dances. Felipe was to learn these, being able to see, hear, and feel them even when he was not dreaming, directed to re-experience the vision and its power at will in his daily life, especially whenever he needed a boost. In general, Rufino's message to Felipe was that he could regain a working identity by normalizing his relations as a moral Rarámuri on the one hand, and by attending closely to even small signs of returning power on the other. For in recognizing that power was contingent on relationships, Felipe would slowly regain his health.

The day after the curing ceremony, the two curing crosses were stuck upright in the wall of Benito's house. The third curing cross was placed at the bottom of the empty tesguino olla, the mouth of which was covered with a basket and topped with folded blankets, where it remained for the next three days. One cross was thus in the belly of the olla, while two touched a series of points on the patient, replicating again the complementary notions of outside/inside, body/soul, tesguino olla/healing person—and how all of these dualities are connected through the cross, conduit for protective, curative power. Following Rufino's advice, during this period Felipe increasingly became an active participant in his own therapeutic process. Each morning, as soft rays of sun filtered through the trees, Felipe blessed himself with the two curing crosses, by touching them to all the parts of his body that had received the uchémpera treatment during the ceremony. He also began singing portions of Rufino's curing chant.

Eleven days after the ceremony, Felipe came to my hut at night to tell me that he had begun to have beautiful bakánawi dreams, filled with inspiring songs. He explained that even though his bakánawi was still missing, it was now calling out for him. Over the course of several nights, Felipe said that he had been taught by his bakánawi a personal healing song: the Chant of the White Horse Woman. Space prohibits presentation of the complete text of this chant, but here it is sufficient to note the following. The sublime grace of the horse has impressed people worldwide, irrespective of culture, but in the Sierra Tarahumara, those who own and ride horses convey specific messages of wealth and status, power and prestige. In Mexico, equestrian prerogatives have long been associated with the elite. The animal, therefore, is particularly auspicious in this context. Described as continually singing and dancing throughout the chant, the White Horse Woman mimetically invigorates the

exhausted Felipe, renewing and energizing the man through successive iterations of her beauty and stamina. Appearing again and again, standing upright, stomping backwards, dancing with high steps, her repeated presence imparts strength, confidence, and power.⁴⁶

Twice in the chant Felipe sang: “How frequently, she empowers here!” (*kípu wésa, uméro enaí*), the verb *uméro* meaning to have power or ability; to be capable of doing something; to possess might, potency, force, or capacity. In the second part of this same phrase he sang, *népi ga’rá níkú gawé rosákame!*, “the greatest help is the white horse!” Elsewhere in the song, the White Horse Woman shows Felipe the path of power and recovery, not only by pointing it out, but by bringing her magic towards him, chanting:

<i>Enaí, ech aní, bowé ga’rá hú</i>	Here,” she says, “is a good trail.”
<i>Wé simí, bayóame awí</i>	She keeps on going, beautifully dancing,
<i>Echi ka, gawé rosákame</i>	Towards this way, the white horse.

In closing, she reveals that one can reevaluate apparently negative situations into positive outcomes, showing that bad luck can be transformed into good. In the end, as she disappears, the chant enjoins its listeners to believe, by employing a term (*bichí*) that is also the root for the word “true” (*bichíwame*).

<i>Kípu wésa, mitiwá enaí-che</i>	How frequently, misfortune is here, yet
<i>Népi ga’rá hú, échi aní muhéri</i>	“It is really good,” so say you.
<i>Mukí ga’rá hú, muhéri</i>	Woman, you are good.
<i>Má kowána, ko bichí</i>	Now move backwards, believe
<i>Echi gawé rosákame!</i>	That is the white horse!

Several days later, Felipe did in fact recover his lost bakánawi, as Rufino had predicted. According to Felipe, it was because he was able to concentrate on the song, focusing on its words and images of constant encouragement. He also had regularized his relations with family members and others in the community, which included doing more cooperative labor and wearing a white loincloth and woolen sash over his pants, as Rufino similarly had advised. Two weeks after the curing ceremony, Felipe was telling people he had regained his power and was healed.

DISCUSSION: THE RECOVERY OF A WORKING IDENTITY

The Empowering of Bodies and Embodying of Power

Heeding the call for greater specificity in anthropological discourse by writing “ethnographies of the particular,”⁴⁷ I have purposefully subordinated the project of theorizing to a microsociology of fine-grained description. Nevertheless, I do wish to point out some salient patterns. By analyzing both discursive and corporeal aspects of curing, I now draw together the major themes of the therapeutic process discussed above, a study in processual healing concerning the ironic case of the powerless body of a Rarámuri leader.

The subsequent discussion examines how bodies are empowered by placing them in association with specific agents, sites, and practices held to embody power in Rarámuri ritual and worldview.

Recovery is linked to the recuperation of a working identity, manifested through ethnically polarized valuations of the body linking ethics and aesthetics, goodness and beauty, Rarámuri and God. Rarámuri say their bodies are “black” (*chókame*), whereas the bodies of Mestizos are contrasted as “white” (*rosákame*), although this is not a value-neutral coding. On the contrary, the linking of body color and ethnicity is tied to a moral dimension, reflecting Rarámuri ideas about separate creations of Indians and non-Indians: the Rarámuri were made by God and fashioned from clay; hence they are the color of the earth. By contrast, the devil made non-Indians, forming their bodies from ashes; hence they are white.⁴⁸ If clothing is a kind of social skin, then Felipe’s ethnically coded sartorial choices represented an inversion of the kind of dress, and implicit morality, normally associated with Rarámuri bodies. Put simply, Felipe had been acting “white” (i.e., non-Indian).

Indigenous views of the meaning of work and its relation to an ethnic division of labor are equally significant for cultural constructions of identity and well-being. Rarámuri stereotypically describe non-Indians as lazy, greedy, and stingy—regarding them as people who work inside at desks writing papers or who buy and sell as merchants. By contrast, Rarámuri typically say their work consists mainly of “planting and dancing” and of generously sharing the fruits of their energy with friends at ceremonies, drinking parties, and feasts. Noteworthy is that the Rarámuri pride themselves on the very physical labor stereotypically disparaged by town-dwelling non-Indians, saying that this strength and vitality was given to them as a gift by God and is demanded of them in their fields. In preceding the curing ceremony sequentially, the working *tesguinada* hosted by the patient Felipe’s father naturally modeled a healthy Rarámuri identity for Felipe, showing him the path to recovery. The joy of physical labor was celebrated along with togetherness and the exchange of words, laughter, and drink. A complete identity, therefore, is not only one which is whole, in both body and soul, but one that *works*, engaging a fully functioning self with the give and take of social life.

The embodiment of a working identity is accomplished by putting the patient, Felipe, directly in contact with *powerful agents*, *powerful sites*, and *practices of power*. Powerful agents are cultural entities, instruments, authorities, substances, beings, and personnel that are causative sources for transformative reactions in other beings. Powerful sites are spatio-temporal loci of ritual attention. Practices of power are varieties of performance and experience.

Powerful Agents

The first kind of powerful agent that deserves mention are the obvious objects of ritual, which constitute the medicines and instruments of curing. Here, this included certain plant substances or products, such as *tesguino*, cornmeal (*pinole*), tobacco, and *bakánawi*, as well as certain articles, such as crosses, *tesguino* ollas, and drinking gourds. Other types of powerful agents operative in

the therapeutic process are not objects, but rather empowering beings or personnel, figures of authority, encouragement, or control. Key players here included God, souls, bakánawi, the White Horse Woman, the shaman, his wife and apprentice-assistant, the musicians and violinist's wife, as well as family, friends, and relatives of the patient. In different ways, contingent on their relationship to Felipe, each of these were actors who served as models or conduits of strength, contentment, and well-being.⁴⁹

Powerful Sites

Powerful sites are loci for the convergence of cultural, natural, and supernatural forces. In healing rituals, the most obvious site for the inscription of power is the patient's body. Felipe's physical woes reflected that, as a prominent member of the community, the political symptoms of the region were literally embodied in him, the body politic manifesting itself through the patient. The express intention of Felipe's curing ceremony, therefore, was to empower him. This was achieved by ritually reinvigorating his souls, which in turn imparted new strength and vitality to his aching and exhausted body. Chief among these bodily reinvigorations were the procedures involving uchémpera, or healing by touching, anointing, and pressing the tesguino-moistened cross to the points on Felipe's body where the souls reside. Another series of procedures focusing on the body were those acts which were carried out on the bodies of ritual participants as well as the body of the tesguino olla. Tobacco smoke was passed by the shaman first over the mouth of the olla and then was taken into the mouths of each member of the curing party. There also was the painting of crosses on the sides of the olla followed by the pressing of a cross against the patient's chest and back, and the coating with tesguino, both internally and externally, of the bodies of olla and patient. Symbolically, the bodies which partook of these ritual acts became, like the tesguino olla around which they sat, vessels of healing power.

Besides the human body, other sites are also important loci for the inscription of power. Spatially, the most salient place for the Gentiles is the awírachi,⁵⁰ the household dance ground or domestic ritual patio, which in some way is involved in virtually all ceremonies conducted in the rancherías. Since tesguinadas are multipurpose occasions, a large work party may be drinking outside, while a curing ceremony may be in progress inside the house. While these may appear to be separate functions, involving different people, places, and sets of behaviors, in fact they are integrally related and frequently overlap. Ritual performances on the dance patio outside were symbolically linked with the curing ceremony inside, further connecting the work party with the healing ritual. The tesguino used in the curing ceremony inside the house earlier had been consecrated by Benito, the patient's father, on the dance patio outside, just as Mauricio, the shaman's apprentice-assistant, took cornmeal from inside the house outside around the awírachi, as well as walking the curing cross around the patio cross three times counterclockwise. Mauricio explained that in circling the awírachi three times he was walking around each of the three disks of the upperworld. This connected God on the

third level of heaven, to whom the cornmeal was first being offered, with the curing party on the surface of the earth, who would be fed the cornmeal later in the ceremony. Overall, a mundane inner room of an ordinary house was sanctified in a double sense: first, because it was the focus of the entire healing ritual and, second, because it was metonymically connected to the overt ritual area of the awírachi via the physical movement of sanctified food, drink, and bodies. The connection between health, strength, and beauty—associated with crosses, mountain tops, tesguino, the third plane of heaven, the three boys, and the dawning day—is likewise the subject of Rufino's curing chant. Agents of power thus oscillated between the two sites of power, connecting the implicit cosmology of the awírachi outside with the explicit beauty and vigor of the ceremony inside.

Time, as well as space, is also a dimension where powerful sites are found, especially at points of meaningful cultural and natural conjunctures. For the Rarámuri, like many agricultural peoples, time is inextricably conjoined to the daily and annual cycles of the sun, which in turn are linked to their notions of God. The divine, for the Rarámuri, is a dual concept consisting of a male aspect, known as *Onorúame* (The One Who Is Father), and a female aspect, known as *Iyerúame* (The One Who Is Mother). *Onorúame* is associated with the sun (*rayénari*), while *Iyerúame* is indexed by the moon (*micháka*).⁵¹ As the embodiment of the dominant aspect of God, and the primary marker of time, the sun is the most fundamental physical entity of order and potency in the Rarámuri universe.⁵² It is therefore significant that Felipe's curing ceremony took place when the sun was at an especially favorable position in the sky, representing a convergence of diurnal, seasonal, medicinal, and agricultural cycles of renewal.

Felipe's curing ritual began around midday. That is, a ceremony intended to impart strength to a weakened individual was performed when God, whose source of strength is embodied in the sun, was highest in the sky, at the zenith of his own radiant power. The fact that it took place on June 25 is also noteworthy, for two reasons. First, this date is during the week when the sun is also at its highest point in the annual cycle, occurring only four days after the summer solstice (June 21), and second, it is only one day after Día de San Juan (June 24). This period, when elders of Cuervo observe the sun setting in the same spot for about a week, is of vital importance for agricultural reasons, and Rarámuri customarily hold tesguinadas as offerings to God for the rains which begin at this time, inaugurating the planting season.⁵³

Practices of Power

Vitally important for the restoration of Felipe's health and identity are practices of power, for it is only through these that the aforementioned agents and sites are put into action. The most basic and pervasive motif of normal Rarámuri social life is the practice of reciprocity, an ideal of dynamic balance evidenced in their economic, social, political, and religious subsystems. Besides the exchanges of prayer, offerings, and thanksgiving that occur between Rarámuri and God, there are obvious social exchanges that take

place between households in alternately being hosts and guests at various *tesguinadas*. Yet reciprocity also is manifested between persons within any given ceremony in the elaborate rituals of giving and receiving described above in the work party and subsequent curing ceremony. Although elements of reciprocity are evident throughout the ritual, a microanalysis of the final moments is enough to show the principle in sharp relief.

The last line of the curing chant together with the final ritual transactions involving the cornmeal pinole underscore via discursive as well as bodily actions the primacy of reciprocity as a practice of power. Rufino begins his chant by singing of the giving and receiving of *tesguino* beside crosses (lines 1–4), effectively mirroring in words the exchange of maize beer that constitutes a critical part of this and virtually all other Rarámuri rituals. Yet after portraying scenes of strength and beauty (lines 5–20), he shifts rhetorically, gradually directing attention towards the zenith, the ultimate source of that power (lines 24–28). Finally, by closing his chant with the statement *Riosh natéteraba*—meaning “thanks be to God” or literally, “God, thank you”—Rufino was acting “as if” the petition for health already had been granted at that moment. Here, Rufino was acknowledging a cycle of reciprocity with God, persuasively communicating to Felipe that now he was healed by expressing gratitude to God for the receipt of his gift.

Austinian speech act theory and performative approaches to ritual would further point out the illocutionary force and perlocutionary consequences of this statement, namely, that in this context saying something is also doing something.⁵⁴ Giving thanks is conventionally understood as acknowledging receipt of a gift already bestowed. That is, saying “thank you” itself performs the action of thanking. Other phrases in the chant likewise mark them as performative utterances. The words do not beseech God for health, hoping for some cure in the future, but on the contrary, actively constitute health by persuading, commanding, and proclaiming wellness in the present. Note that at four key points in the chant (lines 7, 15, 21, and 26) the first person singular pronoun (“I”) is conjoined with verbs that are in the active present tense. Announcing, “Well am I, over there” (line 7) or “There on top, I keep going” (line 15), the chanter creates a mood of health and vitality not only by manifesting it through the words of the song, but also because the chant itself transports us “there.” Visual and auditory cues add to the effect. Rufino rose from a seated position to perform his chant, standing tall and erect while singing in a loud, clear voice that likewise communicated strength. The magical power of the healing song is that it cures the patient, and thus *works*, in a double sense. First, in a perlocutionary sense, it works because Felipe is persuaded by the chant, performatively demonstrating his recovered vitality by joining others in a vigorous round dance. Second, the chant works in an illocutionary sense, because when Felipe later repeated the song over the next few days, Felipe himself became the “I” of the chant. Thus, by simply uttering the words of the song, the patient gradually pronounces himself “well” and able to “keep going.” Indeed, he says he is “there on top.” The chant for strength is its own accomplishment.

Similarly, the pinole exchanges enact a ritualized performance of power and reciprocity, demonstrating an expectation that the existing exchanges

between shaman and patient will continue as part of an enduring set of reciprocal relationships. The giving and receiving of pinole is socially significant in itself because it is the most basic of all Rarámuri foods and most common item reciprocated for favors among friends. It is also symbolically significant because, like *tesguino*, it is made from maize—the staff of life. Moreover, while in the ritual it may seem as if the patient is politely declining the pinole by apparently giving it back (accepting it from the shaman and passing it on to the shaman's wife), in actuality the pinole originated from Felipe's family, yet ended up in Rufino's. In addition, at the very moment that the patient is in the act of giving, he is also asking for something to be given back at some point in the future. Since normalcy requires that an individual be part of the give and take of everyday life, the work of recovery places the patient at the point of power. To become healthy is to become an active agent in one's own recovery, accepting the responsibility of maintaining reciprocal social relations. Healthy persons are receptive as well as generative.

More generally, the Rarámuri conceive of an overarching reciprocity existing among cultural, natural, and supernatural orders. The relations of reciprocity which the Rarámuri hold as the norm among themselves also serve as the model for their relationships with supernatural entities. This reciprocity, however, often implies an asymmetry in power, which in turn is harnessed for the purposes of healing. When Rufino fed Felipe the pinole, the gesture modeled the feeding of a child by its parent, which similarly replicates the nourishment provided by God for his children, the Rarámuri. Correspondingly, just as God and the *bakánawi* spirits help the families of Benito and Felipe, so they are expected to reciprocate by making offerings to them. Both humans and deities are embedded in relations of cosmic balance and reciprocity. Maintaining balanced reciprocity among different dimensions of reality is the fundamental goal of Rarámuri ritual. Well-being is predicated on harmony and a sense of encompassing cosmic wholeness.

Because there exists a dynamic equilibrium among different orders of reality, it is particularly noteworthy that plants, animals, and humans all participate in cognate idioms of health and illness through the contiguity of their relations. Since "curing" something and "caring" for something are closely allied concepts in Rarámuri worldview, crops, livestock, and people all require periodic curing ceremonies and are healed in similar ways.⁵⁵ Almost every Rarámuri ceremony is in some manner connected to the notion of healing:

since the concept of "curing" is so much broader for the Tarahumara than it is for us. It includes almost all the ritualism among the Gentiles and a great proportion of *Pagótame* ritual as well. For example, for both groups the annual ceremony for assuring rain and a good crop is called "curing," as are the rituals for protecting people and animals against lightning and disease. Additionally included as curing are all those acts embraced by our own medical meaning of the term.... fertilization of the fields with animal dung is also called curing.⁵⁶

The gathering on June 25 at Benito's household was held not for three separate reasons, but for three functions which all had to do with curing.

Held during the auspicious days of the summer solstice when at sunset God “dances on the same mountain” along the horizon for about a week to inaugurate the planting season, the event was: (1) the annual ceremony for assuring rain and a good crop; (2) a medical treatment for Felipe; and (3) a time for constructing a new corral on Benito’s field, thereby fertilizing the plot with dung from his herd of sheep and goats. Since the Rarámuri’s model of curing encompasses practices of balanced reciprocity and dynamic equilibrium among different orders of existence, Felipe’s curing strategically was linked with the curing of crops and livestock. Because it occurred when human and natural cycles of regeneration converge during the summer solstice, Felipe participated in the ecological transition from dead dry season to growing wet season. This underscores not only that Rarámuri healing is postulated upon a contiguity of relations among diverse entities in the cosmos, but that the encompassing relationship between the patient and the environment upon which he and all Rarámuri depend is critically linked to the position of the sun.

The patient’s assumption of responsibility in the overall therapeutic process exemplifies another practice of power in the work of recovery. Felipe’s curing was linked not only to practices of reciprocity, as seen above, but also with his ability to actively identify with normative behavior that occurred before, during, and after the curing ceremony. Rarámuri healing embraces practices of power that transcend the ostensible curing event itself. During the work party that preceded the curing ritual, as well as during the treatment protocol that followed it, Felipe was presented with corporeal, visual, and auditory models of healthy bodies and right action. More importantly, he incorporated these images of power and protocol into a vision of himself as a revitalized decision maker taking steps to follow the “good trail” he had been shown by his bakánawi spirit guardian. Conceptualizing the embodiment of power as transtemporal recovery means recognizing the interdigitation of therapy as event and therapy as process. Overall, it means interlacing the healer’s imposition of order and the patient’s assumption of responsibility into a single model of wellness, not only recognizing a difference between sickness and health, but manifesting a readiness to exchange the former state for the latter.

The assumption of responsibility is seen not just in the events that preceded and followed the ritual, but even in the patient’s direct involvement in the initial preparations for the curing ceremony. Felipe was asked to set up the seats upon which the ritual participants sat, as well as position the three wooden curing crosses, in a particular order. But after placing these articles incorrectly, he was instructed by the shaman’s assistant to reposition them again, an important reminder to Felipe that recovery involves the recognition of prescribed behaviors and his own willingness to take an active role in correcting his past mistakes.

The final practice of power which I briefly mention is the ritual conveyance of an ordered universe, integral to the patient’s recovery through his involvement in the stereotyped performance of Rarámuri principles of structure and precedence, recognizing wholeness in the perception of patterns. Through a condensation of meaning, the curing ceremony shows in high relief some of the most basic axioms of Rarámuri worldview: the interrelationship between cosmological and moral orders; the unity of ethics and aes-

thetics; health and harmony. The cross is an icon of divinity and the body is a vessel of the soul. Crosses and circles describe the geometry of sacred centers, so movements which follow these patterns summon holiness, renewal, and transformation. Community is restored by eating and acting together. Healing requires touching—and listening, speaking, twirling, dancing, and sometimes just being still. Throughout the curing process, the aforementioned powerful agents, powerful sites, and practices of power are invoked. Yet they are most eloquently drawn together, and most richly elaborated in terms of underlying principles of order, through the performance of the healing chant and subsequent communal dancing. The primacy of beauty, height, maleness, strength, movement, the right hand, counterclockwise circuits, and multiples of three receive numerous iterations and enactments. Detailed analysis of the verbal and bodily symbolism of these principles is beyond the scope of this paper. A few examples, however, will suffice to show their significance.

Rufino's song is replete with parallelism, the pairing of couplets, a characteristic of ritual language among diverse peoples both ancient and modern throughout the world.⁵⁷ Redundant verbalizations of distance, beauty, and height in Rufino's chant combine to impart the message that splendor is above, up is an orientation of power, and the shaman knows the way to heaven. Gradually the song carries its listeners, as if climbing a mountain step by step, in the new light of the "dawning day," upwards to God, source of magnificence and strength. The curing chant is all about continually going higher and cresting a summit, directing attention "over there" away from illness and pain in the present, to the "beautiful" places in the distance, "there on top, there on the ridge." The emphasis on physical ascension towards the peaks, and from there to the third and highest realm of heaven, where God lives, effectively communicates the image of *getting over* one's illness, *surmounting* one's infirmity, and *rising above* one's pain. In sum, the chant manipulates the powerful rhetoric of *transcendence* as a persuasive language for healing.

The primacy of maleness—already discussed in reference to the sun, the order for tesguino consumption, and participation in the dance—appears in several places. At first, Rufino sings about how "those boys" are drinking tesguino far above. Towards the end, as the lyrics move from mountain tops into the upperworld, the chant says "three boys, over there walks one." Felipe interpreted this line to mean Benito's three sons, and the reference to the one who walks alone as signifying Felipe himself, since he was the patient. The shaman's apprentice-assistant said that it referred to God and his two helpers, conventionally represented by three crosses on the dance patio, while the other shaman attending the ceremony told me it referred to Rufino and his two spirit helpers walking in heaven. Combining the poetics and politics of healing, Rufino avoided specifics altogether when I asked him what the phrase meant. Instead, he simply kept pointing above with his index finger, telling me that the chant's images describe what he sees in heaven through his dreams. In sum, the chant indexed maleness (as well as the number three, which is ritually associated with men), while simultaneously exploiting polysemous qualities inherent in any generic principle, allowing different people their own interpretations and the possibility, as with Felipe, of seeing themselves in the song.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined ritual healing among the Rarámuri of northern Mexico by using a case-study approach to suggest that the recovery of a working identity is contingent upon the embodiment of power in the therapeutic process. It has made a contribution at both an ethnographic and theoretical level by introducing new material on Rarámuri curing practices as well as interpreting these data in light of an analytic of power and process. Beginning with a discussion of the social antecedents and political troubles that were somatized in the patient as symptoms, I went on to explore how these social tensions, bodily pains, and psychological conflicts eventually were worked out via the patient's request for ritual intervention and adherence to treatment protocol. More broadly, through the framework presented here I analyzed the processual empowerment of a "powerless" body, ironically belonging to a prominent member of the community, through the patient's exposure to powerful agents (causative sources for transformative reactions in other beings), powerful sites (loci of ritual attention), and practices of power (modes of performance and experience). Although power may be regarded as concentrated in certain persons, places, times, or entities, it is ultimately a *relational* concept of control concerning the ability to produce an effect.

This article responds to the recent call by Csordas and Kleinman for more studies which seek to trace connections among therapeutic, political, and spiritual power by observing that healing is a process that transcends the discrete therapeutic event.⁵⁸ By following a case from its historical roots to a paradigmatic display of health—first in a ceremonial work party and then in a curing ritual—through successive corporeal treatments and positive visualizations, I have argued that the recuperation of a working identity, physically, psychologically, and socially, depends upon a patient's ability increasingly to become an active agent in his or her own recovery. Responding to findings that there may exist "links between passivity and disease,"⁵⁹ here I have suggested that healing is associated with symbolic and normative activities. Among other things, this implies engaging in relations of reciprocity, assuming responsibility, and developing a growing anticipation of one's returning health. In sum, I have explored in Rarámuri ritual and worldview "healing as a mode of empowerment wherein small changes can mean the difference between effective coping and defeat, between endurance and the remoralization of lived experience and the passive acceptance of despair."⁶⁰

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NOTES

1. Thomas J. Csordas and Arthur Kleinman, "The Therapeutic Process," in *Handbook of Medical Anthropology: Contemporary Theory and Method*, eds. Carolyn F. Sargent and Thomas M. Johnson (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 19.

2. *Ibid.*, 19.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*, 19–20.

5. Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret Lock, "The Mindful Body: A Prolegomenon to Future Work in Medical Anthropology," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 1 (1987): 6–41. Recent studies which build on the work of Scheper-Hughes and Lock include Andrew Strathern, *Body Thoughts* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996); and Paul Stoller, *Sensuous Scholarship* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997).

6. Scheper-Hughes and Lock, "The Mindful Body: A Prolegomenon to Future Work in Medical Anthropology," 31.

7. The event-centered approach to social and symbolic analysis taken in this essay has been informed by Thomas Csordas and Elizabeth Lewton, "Practice, Performance, and Experience in Religious Healing," *Transcultural Psychiatry* (forthcoming); Victoria Bricker, *The Indian Christ, The Indian King: The Historical Substrate of Maya Myth and Ritual* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1981); Pamela Feldman-Savelsberg, *Plundered Kitchens, Empty Wombs: Threatened Reproduction and Identity in the Camaroon Grassfields* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1999); Kenneth M. George, *Showing Signs of Violence: The Cultural Politics of a Twentieth-Century Headhunting Ritual* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Gary Gossen, *Telling Maya Tales: Tzotzil Identities in Modern Mexico* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Carol Laderman and Marina Roseman, eds., *The Performance of Healing* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Stanley J. Tambiah, *Culture, Thought, and Human Action: An Anthropological Perspective* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985); Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967); John Watanabe, *Maya*

Saints and Souls in a Changing World (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992); Evon Z. Vogt, *Tortillas for the Gods: A Symbolic Analysis of Zinacanteco Rituals* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993).

8. Mary-Jo Del Vecchio Good, Paul E. Brodwin, Byron J. Good, and Arthur Kleinman, eds., *Pain As Human Experience: An Anthropological Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

9. For excellent collections of essays on the ethnography of power, see Raymond D. Fogelson and Richard N. Adams, eds., *The Anthropology of Power: Ethnographic Studies From Asia, Oceania, and the New World* (New York: Academic Press, 1977); and W. Arens and Ivan Karp, eds., *Creativity of Power: Cosmology and Action in African Societies* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989).

10. A notable exception is the discussion of “empowerment” as a salient performative act involved in spiritual healing; Thomas J. Csordas, *The Sacred Self: A Cultural Phenomenology of Charismatic Healing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994): 45–49.

11. Tara AvRuskin, “Experiences of Recovery in an American Community Residence,” unpublished manuscript in author’s possession; Athena McLean, “Empowerment and the Psychiatric/Ex-Patient Movement in the United States: Contradictions, Crisis and Change,” *Social Science and Medicine* 40:8 (1995): 1053–1071; Norma C. Ware, Robert R. Desjarlais, Tara L. AvRuskin, Joshua Breslau, Byron J. Good, and Stephan M. Goldfinger, “Empowerment and the Transition to Housing for Homeless Mentally Ill People: An Anthropological Perspective,” *New England Journal of Public Policy* 8:1 (1992): 297–314.

12. McLean, “Empowerment and the Psychiatric Consumer/Ex-Patient Movement in the United States,” 1056.

13. Ware, et. al., “Empowerment and the Transition to Housing for Homeless Mentally Ill People: An Anthropological Perspective,” 310.

14. *Ibid.*, 301–302; see also Larry Davidson and John S. Strauss, “Sense of Self in Recovery from Severe Mental Illness,” *British Journal of Medical Psychology* 65 (1992): 131–145.

15. Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison (New York: Norton and Company, 1967); Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, trans. James H. Belle, John R. von Sturmer and Rodney Needham (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969); Marshall Sahlins, “On the Sociology of Primitive Exchange,” in *Stone Age Economics* (London: Tavistock Publications Ltd., 1985), 185–275.

16. Richard N. Adams and Arthur J. Rubel, “Sickness and Social Relations,” in *Social Anthropology*, ed. Manning Nash, Vol. 6 of *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, gen. ed. Robert Wauchope (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967), 333–356.

17. Stefani Paola and Augusto Urteaga, “La Población de la Sierra,” *Ojarasca* (1993): 20–21.

18. Fieldwork was conducted in the summers of 1985 and 1986, and again from January 1988 to August 1989. Brief visits to the Sierra were also made in December 1994 and April 1997. Pseudonyms are used throughout this paper to protect the privacy of individuals.

19. Luis González Rodríguez and Don Burgess, “Los Tarahumares,” in *Tarahumara*, Luis González Rodríguez, Don Burgess, and Bob Schalkwijk, eds. (Mexico City: Chysler de Mexico, 1985), 43; Jerome M. Levi, “Pillars of the Sky: The Genealogy of

Ethnic Identity among the Rarámuri-Simaroni (Tarahumara-Gentiles) of Northwest Mexico,” Ph.D. diss. (Harvard University, 1993); William Merrill, “Conversion and Colonialism in Northern Mexico: The Tarahumara Response to the Jesuit Mission Program, 1601–1767,” in *Conversion to Christianity: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation*, ed. Robert W. Hefner (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 129–164; Thomas E. Sheridan and Thomas H. Naylor, eds., *Rarámuri: A Tarahumara Colonial Chronicle* (Flagstaff, AZ: Northland Press, 1979).

20. Considerable internal variations exist among both Pagótame and Gentile subgroups. Just as Pagótame communities sometimes have been “described to represent a continuum of acculturation and change,” as noted by Thomas Weaver and Olivia Arrieta, “Tarahumara Easter Ceremonialism and the Mesoamerican Civil-Religious Hierarchy,” in *Performing the Renewal of Community: Indigenous Easter Rituals in North Mexico and the Southwest United States*, eds. Rosamond B. Spicer and N. Ross Crumrine (New York: University Press of America, 1997), 430, so too similar differences obtain among the Gentiles. For example, ranchos in the Barranca de San Rafael and on the eastern slope of Cuervo mountain were said to be “more Gentile” than were those on the western face of Cuervo mountain due to the latter’s closer association with the pueblo of Satevo. Nevertheless, the Gentile community of western Cuervo buried their dead in caves rather than cemeteries. They also exhibited a less complex political organization, based on the number of positions in the civil hierarchy, than that seen in Pagótame pueblos, but more complex than the Gentile ranchos of Inápuchi, as described by John Kennedy, *Tarahumara of the Sierra Madre* (Pacific Grove, CA: Asilomar Press, 1996), 208. The point is that Gentile communities, like Pagótame ones, exhibit a range of variation.

21. Carl S. Lumholtz, *Unknown Mexico: A Record of Five Years of Exploration among the Tribes of the Western Sierra Madre, in the Tierra Caliente of Tepuc and Jalisco, and among the Tarascos of Michoacan*, Vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1902); Carlos Basauri, *Monografía de los Tarahumaras* (Mexico City: Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, 1929); Wendell C. Bennett and Robert M. Zingg, *The Tarahumara: An Indian Tribe of Northern Mexico* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935).

22. Carmen Anzures y Bolaños, “Medicina Tradicional entre los Tarahumaras,” *Revista Medicina Tradicional* 1:4 (1978): 39–47; Robert A. Bye, Jr., “Hallucinogenic Plants of the Tarahumara,” *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* 1 (1979): 23–48; Bye, “Medicinal Plants of the Tarahumara Indians of Chihuahua, Mexico,” in *Two Mummies From Chihuahua, Mexico: A Multidisciplinary Study*, San Diego Museum Papers No. 19, eds. Rose A. Tyson and Daniel V. Elerick (San Diego, CA: San Diego Museum of Man, 1985), 77–104; Jacob Fried, “The Relation of Ideal Norms to Actual Behavior in Tarahumara Society,” *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 9 (1953): 286–295; Fried, “The Tarahumara,” in *Ethnology*, ed. Evon Z. Vogt, Pt. 2., Vol. 8, *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, gen. ed. Robert Wauchope (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), 846–870; González Rodríguez and Burgess, “Los Tarahumares,” 1985; Fructuoso Irigoyen Rascón and Erasmo Palma Tuchéachi, *Cha Oko! (Me duele mucho!)* (Chihuahua: Centro de Estudios Regionales de la Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua, 1985); Allen G. Pastron, “Aspects of Witchcraft and Shamanism in a Tarahumara Indian Community of Northern Mexico,” Ph.D. diss. (University of California, Berkeley, 1977); Campbell W. Pennington, *The Tarahumar of Mexico: Their Environment and Material Culture* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1963);

Francisco M. Plancarte, *El problema indígena Tarahumara* (Mexico City: Memorias del Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 5, [??] 1954); Enrique Salmón, "Tarahumara Healing Practices," *Shaman's Drum* 24 (1991): 34–45; Salmón, "Decolonizing Our Voices: A Tarahumara Scientist Explores the Validity of Indigenous Knowledge," *Winds of Change* 11 (1996): 70–73; Spencer L. Rogers, "Tarahumara Shamanism," in *Two Mummies From Chihuahua, Mexico: An Interdisciplinary Study*, San Diego Museum Papers No. 19, eds. Rose A. Tyson and Daniel V. Elerick (San Diego, CA: San Diego Museum of Man, 1985), 105–110; I. Thord-Gray, *Tarahumara-English, English-Tarahumara Dictionary and an Introduction to Tarahumara Grammar* (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1955); Pedro de Velasco Rivero S.J., *Danzar o Morir: religion y resistencia a la dominacion en la cultura Tarahumara* (Mexico City: Centro de Reflexion Teologica, 1983).

23. John Kennedy, "Tesguino Complex: The Role of Beer in Tarahumara Culture," *American Anthropologist* 65 (1963): 620–640; Kennedy, *Inápuchi: una comunidad tarahumara gentil* (Mexico City: Instituto Indigenista Interamericano, 1970); Kennedy, *Tarahumara of the Sierra Madre: Beer, Ecology, and Social Organization* (Arlington Heights, IL: AMG Publishing Co., 1978); Kennedy, *Tarahumara of the Sierra Madre: Survivors on the Canyon's Edge* (Pacific Grove, CA: Asilomar Press, 1996); Jerome M. Levi, "Review of W. L. Merrill, *Rarámuri Souls: Knowledge and Social Process in Northern Mexico*," *Man* 25 (1991): 574–575; Levi, "Commoditizing the Vessels of Identity: Transitional Trade and the Reconstruction of Rarámuri Ethnicity," *Museum Anthropology* 16 (1992): 7–24; Levi, "Pillars of the Sky"; Levi, "The Bow and the Blanket: Religion, Identity, and Resistance in Rarámuri Material Culture," *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 54 (1998): 299–324; Levi, "Hidden Transcripts among the Rarámuri: Culture, Resistance, and Interethnic Relations in Northern Mexico," *American Ethnologist* 26 (1999): 1–24; Levi, "Indigenous Rights and Representations in Northern Mexico: Rarámuri Silence and Transflective Display," in *At the Risk of Being Heard: Indigenous Rights, Identity, and Postcolonial States*, eds. Bartholomew Dean and Jerome Levi (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, forthcoming).

24. Kennedy, "Tesguino Complex."

25. Kennedy, *Tarahumara of the Sierra Madre: Survivors on the Canyon's Edge*, 177–178.

26. Frances Slaney, "Death and 'Otherness' in Tarahumara Ritual," Ph.D. diss. (Université Laval, 1991); Slaney, "Double Baptism: Personhood and Ethnicity in the Sierra Tarahumara of Mexico," *American Ethnologist* 24 (1997): 279–310.

27. William L. Merrill, "Thinking and Drinking: A Rarámuri Interpretation," in *The Nature and Status of Ethnobotany*, ed. Richard I. Ford, Anthropological Papers, 67 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Museum of Anthropology, 1978); Merrill, "The Concept of the Soul Among the Raramuri of Chihuahua, Mexico: A Study in World View," Ph.D. diss. (University of Michigan, 1981); Merrill, "The Raramuri Stereotype of Dreams," in *Dreaming: Anthropological and Psychological Interpretations*, ed. Barbara Tedlock (Santa Fe: School of American Research, 1992), 194–219.

28. William L. Merrill, *Rarámuri Souls: Knowledge and Social Processes in Northern Mexico* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988).

29. *Ibid.*, 112.

30. *Ibid.*, 95.

31. Kennedy, *Tarahumara of the Sierra Madre: Survivors on the Canyon's Edge*, 165–168.

32. Merrill, *Rarámuri Souls*, 121–151.

33. In the 1890s, Lumholtz documented several short chants with words and pre-

sented these in *Unknown Mexico*, 338. Thirty years later, however, Bennett and Zingg suggested that the chants had degenerated into jargon: “It is a common claim that the chants possess words, but that only jargon is sung, since the real words are kept secret by the chanter. It is true that intelligible words are not sung. Monosyllables and humming comprise most of the chants” (*The Tarahumara*, 272). Nevertheless, Don Burgess, working in the Baja Tarahumara area, has published several collections of songs in Spanish as well as Rarámuri, *Ralámuli Wikala (Canciones de los Tarahumaras)*, 1st edition 1973, 2nd edition 1994. Laurent Barbier recorded an interesting healing song titled “Sixth Chant of the Scraping Stick,” which was “sung during a magical cure with *bakanoá*” (i.e., *bakánowa*, a variant pronunciation of *bakánawi*). It appears in González Rodríguez, et. al., *Tarahumara*, 167. Unfortunately, the Rarámuri text is not reproduced, nor is there any accompanying discussion.

34. For the different plants identified as *bakánawi* and a discussion of how the Rarámuri substitute words for powerful subjects—especially the names of certain plants, animals, places, and people—as a way to code their worldview, see Levi, “Hidden Transcripts among the Rarámuri,” 8–9.

35. Kennedy, “Tesguino Complex”; Merrill, “Thinking and Drinking”; Slaney, “Double Baptism,” 282–283.

36. On the surface, no distinction was made between those who worked and those who rested. There seemed to be no ill feelings between those men who were working, already sweating under the sun, and those who were watching, sunning themselves as they lazed about on the ground. On the contrary, there was a steady banter between the “doers” and the “sitters”—everyone talking, laughing, and joking. Not five minutes would go by without a burst of laughter issuing forth from the crowd. According to Benito, just to show up at a tesguinada to which one is invited is enough; one’s mere presence is sufficient to demonstrate that one is responsive to the *chokéame*’s call. Nevertheless, in actual practice, as the *chokéame* distributes the maize beer, those whom he wishes to honor often are people who have contributed more labor or resources, and these individuals are consequently called to drink ahead of the others or sometimes even given their own pot of tesguino to redistribute as they see fit.

37. This corroborates Merrill, *Rarámuri Souls*, 71–72, although some people I spoke with said there were more, and others less, than seven planes. The word *namókame* is related to the verb *namoma*, which refers to things being on top of each other, further explaining why the cosmos is sometimes analogized to a stack of tortillas. That the dance patio symbolizes the three planes above in Rarámuri cosmology is also encoded in the words of a short chant recorded by Bennett and Zingg, *The Tarahumara*, 269, who transcribed *namó* as the word for the cosmic planes.

38. Gary H. Gossen, “Temporal and Spatial Equivalents in Chamula Ritual Symbolism,” in *Reader in Comparative Religion: An Anthropological Approach*, eds. William A. Lessa and Evon Z. Vogt (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), 116–129.

39. Tobacco may have the body of a plant but, according to one myth, its inner essence is that of a Rarámuri man. Moreover, the tobacco’s man-like “soul” not only enjoys conversing with other anthropomorphized items comprising the men’s traditional fire-making kit and leather tobacco pouch, but yearns to assume the form of smoke exhaled from human mouths and noses during drinking ceremonies. Like other Native peoples elsewhere in the Americas, the Rarámuri accord the ceremonial smoking of tobacco a special place in ritual and worldview.

40. Thus, without insulting these gestures of kindness, there are numerous ways one may politely decline invitations to drink via various circumlocutions. The most direct method is just to say, *ma bosá* (“already full”). Alternately, one may say nothing at all and simply acknowledge the offer by touching the gourd while gently returning it to the giver. This is but one example of a large and important sphere of customary transactions known as *kuyama*, meaning “to give again” or “return giving.” In this case, the giver is now free to drink the *tesguino* himself or offer it to another person. If the giver is still insistent, however, the recipient may oblige the generosity by taking a few sips, but then pass along the gourd to one of his neighbors to finish. Another conventional ploy, often used by *chokéame* who are repeatedly offered gourds brimming with *tesguino* as a show of gratitude for their hospitality, is to decline politely by uttering the word *nasayéke*, which in this context basically means: “Let’s see who can drink more. You go first.” This expression allows the person euphemistically to transform a decline to drink into a faux competition implicitly understood by the giver as an exchange whereby only one party will actually be in play.

41. Although *tesguino* is regarded as the paradigmatic medicine among the *Rarámuri*, cures, of course, are not always efficacious. Explanations of failed cures range from misdiagnoses of the cause of the illness, to improper performance of healing rituals, to saying that the patient disregarded the instructions of the shaman after the ceremony. One *Rarámuri* theory, however, explains differential success in terms of a foundational myth expressing a relationship between proper human behavior and the therapeutic potency of *tesguino*. According to the narrative, God taught the *Rarámuri* to make *tesguino* because it was a universal medicine, a panacea for whatever troubled his children. Yet, rather than employing it as a healing sacrament drunk in moderation to achieve the delicately balanced state of “beauteous inebriation” (*bayóame rikú*), some people eventually began to abuse the drink, brewing enormous quantities, imbibing until they lost their senses and had “colossal headaches” (*wé waurí okó mo’óra*), making the people “mean” (*parúame*) and “ugly” (*cháti*). This in turn caused them to argue and fight with each other, which distressed God greatly. Seeing its potential for abuse, God therefore withdrew some of its potency so that *tesguino* was no longer as strong as it was originally. For this reason, today maize beer is not the infallible miracle cure it once was in the beginning.

42. Levi, “Pillars of the Sky,” 418; Merrill, “Thinking and Drinking”; Merrill, *Rarámuri Souls*, 108–111; Slaney, “Double Baptism,” 286.

43. Merrill, *Rarámuri Souls*, 88.

44. *Ibid.*

45. This is the conventional claim made by *Rarámuri* shamans in the Cuervo district as to how they learn their curing songs. It also helps explain the variation found in curing chants among different shamans.

46. Significantly, Merrill likewise mentions an association between horses and *bakánawi* in the context of a curing ritual. In describing one *bakánawi* ceremony, he writes that at about 2 a.m., the shaman who had been chanting stopped to announce that the *bakánawi* spirits which were afflicting the souls of the patient were approaching. But before conversing with them he “interrupted his singing to exclaim, ‘Here they come! One is riding a pinto horse,’” *Rarámuri Souls*, 126. Kennedy likewise notes that where he worked, horses were symbols of power: “horses are an important aspect of wealth and prestige ... some important men demonstrate their prestige by riding into a community gathering on

horseback," *The Tarahumara of the Sierra Madre: Survivors on the Canyon's Edge*, 96–97. He writes that more horses were owned by Mestizos than Rarámuri, and among the latter, Pagótame owned some, while Gentiles owned none.

47. Lila Abu-Lughod, "Writing Against Culture," in *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, ed. Richard G. Fox (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1991), 149–157.

48. For another explanation, grounded in a different myth, of why Rarámuri have dark bodies whereas non-Indians have light ones, see Levi, "Hidden Transcripts among the Rarámuri," 6.

49. The distinction between the two subcategories of potent entities, however, should not imply a distinction between inanimate objects and animate beings. Tobacco and bakánawi, for example, have the physical morphology of plants, but contain an inner essence or human-like soul which causes many Rarámuri to classify them in the same category as powerful sorts of people.

50. The awírachi is a small flat area outside, near the dwelling, ideally circular in shape though occasionally squarish. Depending on the ceremony, there may be anywhere from one to four crosses and/or pine saplings erected on the awírachi, sometimes cloaked in white muslin. Ollas of tesguino are also placed there, as well as a ritual table or "altar" to hold offerings of various foods, herbs, minerals, and other "medicines." It is also the site where all animal sacrifices and initial offerings of tesguino are made, as well as the most common place for chanting and dancing to occur, in both night and day. The awírachi's indexical relation to the sun, divinity, and Rarámuri cosmology, referencing both the creation of the world and the disks of the cosmos, already has been discussed.

51. The idea that a supreme being can embody opposing, yet complementary, aspects is widespread among indigenous peoples in Mexico. Rarámuri conceptions of the twofold nature of the almighty is in fact reminiscent of Ometeotl, the "Aztec God of Duality, who resided in the highest level of heaven from which he/she created the cosmos and continually creates life," David Carrasco, *Religions of Mesoamerica: Cosmivision and Ceremonial Centers* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990).

52. Although balance between these two celestial bodies is necessary for cosmic harmony, the solar aspect is regarded as the stronger presence, just as maleness is accorded precedence in ritual contexts. Thus "God" is often glossed *Tata Riosh*, "Father God," or sometimes just *Riosh*, from Spanish *Dios*, as seen in the last line of Rufino's curing chant. The term for day (*rawé*), as well as times of the day (for instance, *nasiŋa rawé*, "noon" or "midday"), linguistically derive from the word for the sun (*rayénari*). Moreover, the sun denotes both spatial and temporal equivalents; *mapu machina rayénari* can mean either "east" or "sunrise" depending on context. The idea that the sun is a primary principle in Mesoamerican views of language, ritual, and cosmology is also widespread; for example among the Tzotzil of Chiapas, see Gossen, "Temporal and Spatial Equivalents in Chamula Ritual Symbolism" and *Telling Maya Tales*.

53. In the Catholic calendar, the Día de San Juan is associated with water symbolism since it is the Feast of St. John the Baptist. Not surprisingly, in many parts of the Sierra, Tarahumara people regard this day as the time when the searing heat of the dry season supposedly gives way to the first rains of summer, thus initiating the growing season. At Cuervo, it is also recognized that this falls during the time of an agriculturally significant astronomical event, since both summer and winter solstices are care-

fully observed as signs of changing seasons. Male elders pointed out the two spots along the horizon where the sun stops and reverses its direction at the farthest reaches of its annual north-south trajectory across the sky.

54. For a cogent explanation of speech act theory as applied to ritual, see, Tambiah, *Culture, Thought, and Social Action*, 78–79, 135.

55. Merrill, *Rarámuri Souls*, 137–145.

56. Kennedy, *Tarahumara of the Sierra Madre: Survivors on the Canyon's Edge*, 147.

57. On the function of parallelism in ritual language and its widespread occurrence, see Tambiah, *Culture, Thought, and Social Action*, 140–142.

58. Csordas and Kleinman, “The Therapeutic Process.”

59. David Gutman, *The Human Elder in Nature, Culture, and Society* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 50; Todd Dundras and Sue Fisher, eds., *The Social Organization of Doctor-Patient Communication* (Norwood, NJ: Albex, 1993).

60. Csordas and Kleinman, “The Therapeutic Process,” 19.