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Felix A. Lucero, "El Día de San Ysidro," 2024, Oil on Canvas

Ritual, Ceremony, and Performance in the U.S. Southwest

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Mission Statement

Published annually by the University of New Mexico, *Chamisa: A Journal of Literary, Performance, and Visual Arts of New Mexico and the Greater Southwest* is an online, peer-reviewed, open access journal that showcases cultural production in the Southwest. The journal foregrounds multidisciplinary creative works of, both, well-known and lesser-known artists and writers with connections to historical and contemporary communities in this region of the country. The journal's main objective is to enrich our understanding of the value of the creative arts in the region by featuring the diverse views and experiences that shape the full range of esthetic expression.

Chamisa also highlights creative community partnerships to promote a greater awareness of the cultural and intellectual richness that characterizes life in the Southwestern states and provides a space where academics, creatives, community members, and others with ties to and/or interest in this region of the country can showcase their ideas, originality, and artistry. The arts of the southwest region are abundant, diverse, and often blur the boundaries between categories normally accepted as corresponding to the structural hierarchies of the art world. As these forms change, they enrich and redefine the cultural landscape. The journal seeks to capture the dynamic ways that the creative arts in this region have developed and continue to advance over time and in relation to its historically diverse communities.

Chamisa: A Journal of Literary, Performance, and Visual Arts of New Mexico and the Greater Southwest is sponsored by the Southwest Hispanic Research Institute (SHRI) at the University of New Mexico. Established in 1980, SHRI promotes multi-disciplinary research related to Latinx/Hispanic populations of New Mexico, the Southwest, and the United States, and offers an intellectual home for its faculty associates. It publishes a series of working papers and monographs, and supports and promotes public lectures and research seminars on Latinx issues. SHRI has over 50 UNM affiliated faculty members from the colleges of Arts and Sciences, Education and Human Sciences, Architecture and Planning, Medicine/Health Sciences, Fine Arts, Law, the Anderson School of Management, and University Libraries and Learning Sciences. The Institute is a member of the Inter-University Program for Latinx Research, a national consortium of Latino studies programs throughout the country, and is supported by the UNM Office of the

Vice President for Research and Economic Development. The Institute also acknowledges and welcomes support from, both, public and private entities and foundations.

Volume 4: Ritual, Ceremony, and Performance in the U.S. Southwest

Performative expressions have been part of human experience since prehistory. Humans externalize ideas, share stories, express belief, communicate social mores, define identity, and sustain order in ways accessible to a larger community. UNESCO defines rituals and ceremonies as follows: "Social practices, rituals and festive events involve a dazzling variety of forms: worship rites; rites of passage; birth, wedding, and funeral rituals; oaths of allegiance; traditional legal systems; traditional games and sports; kinship and ritual kinship ceremonies; settlement patterns; culinary traditions; seasonal ceremonies; practices specific to men or women only; hunting, fishing, and gathering practices and many more. They also include a wide variety of expressions and physical elements: special gestures and words, recitations, songs or dances, special clothing, processions, animal sacrifice, special food." In the Southwest, performative expressions may include, Indigenous ceremonies, traditional *Indo-hispana/o* rituals, religious rites of passage, pilgrimage, holiday festivities, popular celebrations, musical, theatrical, and/ or dance productions, and performance art.

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The Revival and Merging of Healing Rituals and Ceremonies used in *Curanderismo* Traditional Medicine

by Eliseo "Cheo" Torres and Mario Del Angel-Guevara

The Revival of Traditional Sacred Opening/Closing Ceremonies

Fig. 1. Dorene Dinaro, "Opening Ceremony at the UNM Main Campus," 2019, Digital Photograph

Historically, in the U.S. southwest and Mexico, life among Indigenous communities was structured by numerous ceremonies and rituals. Some communities started their day with an opening ceremony honoring the "4 directions," east, west, south and north. Later, father sky was added as well as mother earth, and one's heart was included as an additional direction. However, the term used to describe this ceremony has always been the "4 directions."

For more than 20 years, the *Curanderismo* class at the University of New Mexico currently under the auspices of the Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies began the first day of class with an opening ceremony and ended the course with a closing ceremony. The invited healers, students, and community members speak on each of the directions and make offerings, such as flowers and fruits for a community altar. The class opening and closing ceremonies consist of the following:

- **Preparation of the offering (*ofrendas*)**: Students, community members, and healers bring offerings, such as seeds, water, corn, plants, flowers, incense burners (*sahumerios*), copal incense, obsidian stone, fruits, musical instruments, and other elements placed in the center of the altar during the opening circle ceremony. Seeds can represent our daily bread in certain cultural regions. Water is considered a sacred spiritual food that is a universal cleansing element. It is also used in the Christian baptismal ceremony. Some *curanderos/as* use different colors of corn, such as white, yellow, black, and red to represent the different cultures and races of the world. Plants and flowers represent mother nature's healing power

and follow a similar order of colors representing different emotions and energy, such as white for purity, pink for good will, and red for illness or love. The *sahumerio* or incense burner and the *copal* resin are used later during the ceremony for smudging the participants in the group circle. A red kerchief called *paliacate* covering the forehead may be used by many of the healers for energetic protection during the ceremony. Many of those in the ceremony may also use a red sash wrapped round their waist for protection from negative energy. Finally, Indigenous instruments, such as the rattle, the conch shell, and the drum are placed with the altar offering and also used during the ceremony in between the directions being honored. The sound of these instruments will be used in the transitioning of the directions.

- **Ometeotl**: After honoring each direction, the word *ometeotl* is said in unison, which is an Aztec word in the Nahuatl language that represents the god of duality of life and existence, such as day and night, and life and death.
- **Direction of the East**: The first direction that is honored is where the sun rises. The east represents the beginning of the day or an event. This is the direction where we acknowledge the beginning of a cycle. For each direction, permission is requested and thanks are offered.
- **Direction of the West**: The group then turns to the left, facing to the west, the direction where the sun sets. Thanks are given for the end of the day and the beginning of the night. To the direction of the west, the group may request a place for our bodies to sleep and rest.
- **Direction of the South**: The group turns to the left again, now facing the south, the direction of children and youth, of laughter, water, and warmth. This direction allows the young generation to continue the traditions of our ancestors.
- **Direction of the North**: Turning left, one faces north, the direction of wind and coldness, of elders and wisdom. The group honors the north for learning and wisdom derived from the ancestors and elders.
- **Direction of Father Sky**: The group faces the center of the circle with hands facing the sun. This direction honors Father Sky for the rain, the warmth from the sun, and the mystery of the universe.
- **Direction of Mother Earth**: The group faces the direction of Mother Earth and may kneel with hands touching the ground or stand with hands facing the earth. Mother Earth is honored for providing the food that nourishes our bodies and the plants used for food and healing. The group may ask for forgiveness for exploiting the lands and the rivers.
- **Direction of the Heart**: The group places their hands over their hearts, to offer appreciation for life and good health. Gratitude is shown for the continuous circulation of blood in our bodies.

A closing ceremony is performed at the end of the class or an event. The closing ceremony is similar to the opening ceremony with the exception that it is performed by turning to the right instead of to the left. In many events and ceremonies, including the *Curanderismo* class, what is opened has a closing. During the opening and closing ceremonies, everyone in the circle is smudged using copal incense to purify their energy and spirit.

The honoring of the Four Directions ceremony varies according to who is performing it. The opening and closing ceremonies are basically the same, but the order of the words and the directions may differ.

Reclaiming the *Temazcal* Sweat Lodge Ceremony

Fig. 2. Mario Del Angel-Guevara, "Mexican Sweat Lodge *Temazcalli* in Xochimilco, Mexico," 2022, Digital Photograph

The term *temazcal* comes from the Nahuatl word *temazcalli,* which means "house of sweat." The *temazcal* is a sweat lodge that has been used for centuries in the Indigenous communities of Mexico. The *temazcal* has been used for births, baptisms, weddings, anniversaries, and other important life events. The return of the rituals in the *temazcal* are evident in places like New Mexico, such as the HOY Recovery Program in Alcalde, where the judicial system mandates that people with addictions complete treatment, and possibly use the sweat lodge before being released to society. La Plazita Institute in the South Valley of Albuquerque, New Mexico, began offering *temazcalli* in 2019 to enhance their traditional healing services. LPI also provides Plains style sweat lodge for healing. Many of the people in the recovery program have committed offenses involving substance abuse and domestic violence. The experience and ceremonies of the *temazcal* have aided them in their recovery. Today, the *temazcal* is used to address behavioral health issues among the general public via recovery programs, such as the HOY recovery program and La Plazita Institute.

The authors of this article also recommend to the University of New Mexico's students to experience a *temazcal* as an optional activity during the intensive 2-week summer Curanderismo Institute course. The ceremonies performed before, during, and after the *temazcal* experience have made a revival in New Mexico, Mexico and some Native communities. In the communities of

Albuquerque and Bernalillo, *temazcales* have been constructed as a way to reclaim an ancient tradition that had been lost.

Historically, the *temazcal* has been an integral part of the Indigenous communities of Mexico and the United States. The *temazcal* is a dome-shaped structure that symbolizes the womb of Mother Earth. Some traditional healers believe that the entrance to the *temazcal* should face East where the sun rises and there is a new beginning or a rebirth. This is more common in the Mexican *temazcal* tradition. The *temazcal* has 52 permanent volcanic rocks, representing the 52 weeks of the year, placed opposite the entrance. These rocks usually are referred to as "*abuelitas*" or grandmothers.

The *temazcal* tradition is diverse in the way the structures are built and the ceremonies performed. In addition to dome-shaped, *temazcales* can be square-shaped or under the ground, including as part of a home or a clinic, thereby giving access to the *temazcal* from inside the building. Many Native American *temazcales* are formed with twigs and blankets or animal hides placed over the structure. In Mexico, these *temazcales* are called *temazcales viajeros*, traveling *temazcales,* since they can be constructed in any location.

Places in Mexico, such as Tzapin Institute in the community of Texcoco, outside of Mexico City, and *Centro de Desarrollo Humano hacia la Comunidad* (CEDEHC) in the City of Cuernavaca offer a number of courses on the construction, ceremony, and usage of *temazcal* as part of their educational program for the community. The University of New Mexico's Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies Summer *Curanderismo* Traditional Medicine program offers a number of *temazcal* experiences facilitated and led by local healers in Albuquerque and Bernalillo, New Mexico.

Ceremonies are performed by a *temazcalero/a* who is a sweat lodge leader, before, during, and after the *temazcal* experience depending on the purpose of the sweat lodge. *Temazcales* can be specialized and conducted for different purposes, such as for healing emotions, dealing with grief, exfoliating the skin, and giving birth among other things. The warrior *temazcal*, for instance, was used in earlier times by Native Americans to prepare for war.

- **Before Entering the *Temazcal***: There is an offering before entering the sweat lodge that is given to Grandfather Fire in a permanent fire pit common to the Native sweat lodge. The offering can be tobacco or aromatic herbs that are placed in the fire. This is a common practice for the Native *temazcal* in the Southwest. For the Mexican *temazcal*, the 52 rocks are permanent and placed in a fire pit, opposite the entrance, and a ceremony may be done honoring the four directions as explained previously.
- **Entering the *Temazcal***: Upon entering the *temazcal*, the person asks for permission to enter and recites the word *Ometeotl,* which honors the duality of life. Upon entering the *temazcal*, the person may see a hole on the ceiling of the structure, known as the *ombligo*, the navel, signifying a beam of life and the umbilical cord.

- **During the *Temazcal***: During the *temazcal,* there are traditional songs, chants, storytelling, and emotional outbursts. In the Oaxacan tradition, during the *temazcal*, there may also be spiritual/energetic cleansing, or *limpias*.
- **After the *Temazcal***: Many times, the person is given herbal tea after the *temazcal*, wrapped in a blanket, and may receive a massage. As one exits, thanks are given to the spirit of the *temazcal* in a reverential manner for the experience and blessings received during the ceremony.

With the revival of the *temazcal*, one must select a trained *temazcal* leader who understands people's needs and health conditions. For example, those with high-blood pressure, with respiratory conditions, or with covid symptoms should refrain from entering a *temazcal*.

Spiritual and Energetic Cleansing Rituals

Fig. 3. Mario Del Angel-Guevara, "Elements such as Plants, *Sahumerio* Incense Burner, *Copal* Incense, Obsidian Stone, Eggs, *Mezcal*, and a Conch Shell for a *Limpia* Spiritual/Energetic Cleansing in Oaxaca, Mexico," 2021, Digital Photograph

Because of the recent COVID-19 pandemic, many people have experienced stress, anxiety, and other illnesses associated with the nervous system. Some individuals, especially Latinxs, have sought alternative methods of healing, such as energetic/spiritual cleansings, or *limpias* to treat the emotional and psychological consequences of prolonged isolation, death of a loved one, loss of employment and income, and other stressful events.

Limpias have been used throughout the world to treat illnesses, conditions, and emotional states associated with COVID. The countries that are using cleansings are found throughout Latin

America, including Mexico, and many countries in the Middle East and Africa. Courses offered at the University of New Mexico on *curanderismo* traditional medicine, discuss these cleansings in a 2-week intensive face-to-face class that allows students to learn and practice the art of cleansing one's spirit and energy.

There are many consequences of traumatic experiences such as those brought about by COVID and other life events, such as accidents, loss of relationships, grief, hopelessness, homelessness, addictions, PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder), and other traumatic experiences. People who have experienced many of these events may suffer from anxiety, loss of appetite, high levels of stress, insomnia, irritability, and difficulty concentrating. There are also professions that experience many of these symptoms, such as police officers, clergy, fire fighters, soldiers, physicians, nurses, paramedics, and others.

Traditionally and historically, *curanderos/as* and/or trained family members were knowledgeable in conducting *limpias*. Today, the practice of the *limpia* is being incorporated into some university classrooms with courses, such as the one mentioned above at UNM. Classes are offered in a variety of modalities, such as the Massive Online Open Courses with the Coursera.org world-wide platform at no cost to the student if audited. Additionally, a *curanderismo* class is also offered as both, an intensive 2-week face-to-face course during the Summer in English and Spanish, and as an online 3-week course also in the summer, available to the community through UNM's Continuing Education. Online credit courses for students enrolled at the University of New Mexico are also offered during the fall and spring semesters. These courses include well-known healers from Mexico, the United States, and other countries who demonstrate the techniques of doing a *limpia* using the following method and elements:

- **Preparation for the *limpia***: The healer or person doing the *limpia* asks for permission, while holding the person's hands to perform the cleansing ritual, which entails touching the person's body and manipulating their energy. During this time, the healer may ask the universe to help in performing the cleansing.
- **Performing the *limpia***: The healer will have available a number of purifying elements that will be used for the cleansing, such as aromatic plants, an egg, water, mezcal or *agua florida*, copal incense, and a candle. These elements are used by many *curanderos/as* in Oaxaca, Mexico, and may vary according to the region and local culture. In the Fidencista Healing tradition of Espinazo, Nuevo León, Mexico, *curandero/as* use a lime, and the *pirul*, California pepper tree. In New Mexico, many use *trementina* resin as an incense, a sap from the *piñon* tree instead of the *copal* resin incense. Some Native Americans use white sage smoke for the smudging instead of *trementina* or *copal* incense.
- **Plants**: Many of the plants used for a cleansing are aromatic. These plants may be considered spiritual plants with special properties that sweep away negative vibrations. Some of the most popular plants used for cleansings are rosemary (*Rosmarinus Officinalis),* rue (*Ruda Sp*.), California pepper tree (*Schinus Molle*), feverfew (*Altimisa Mexicana*)*,* sage (*Salvia Hispanica, Tilliaefolia, Salvia Sp.*)*,* basil (*Ocimum Basilicum*), and lavender (*Lavandula Sp*.). Individuals performing the *limpia* may use one or a combination of these

plants. The healer will sweep the body with the plants from head to toe and will ask the person receiving the *limpia* to stand barefoot on the plants after this ritual is done. After the *limpia*, the plants must be discarded and buried in a garden or thrown in a river or *arroyo*.

- **Egg**: An egg is one of the most common elements used in a *limpia* throughout the world. The egg is considered the largest living cell that can produce life if fertilized. Some believe that the egg is a sacrificial element that absorbs negative energy while it is being rubbed over the body in a circular motion. Some healers and trained people make small crosses with the egg on the joints of the body. Usually, there is a prayer, chant or song that is recited while gently rubbing the egg on the person. Healers may break the egg used in the ritual in a glass of water and will diagnose the forms of the egg white to see what caused the illness. Finally, the egg will be discarded by burying it in a garden, throwing it down the commode or in a river or *arroyo*.
- **Water**: Plain water or fragrant water such as *agua florida* may be sprayed on the plants or directly on the body. Water is considered a spiritual food and a universal cleansing element. In some churches, water is used for baptisms. The water, in contact with the body, may cause the person to startle and react; this instance is known as the "breath of life."
- **Incense smoke**: A smudging of the body is done with a number of incenses, such as *copal,* which comes from the *copal* tree in Mexico; sage, commonly used by Native Americans in New Mexico; sweetgrass, used mostly by the First Nations of Canada; and *tremetina* incense, usually used in New Mexico and obtained from the *piñon* tree. The smudging cleanses the body's energy and takes the negative energy to the heavens with the smoke where it returns to the universe to be converted into positive energy.
- **Candle**: A small candle may be given to the individual after the healing process and petitioned to be burned at home to destroy any negative energies that are lingering in the home or around the body of the person. Fire is considered a purifying element.

In summary, the *limpia* ritual is being reclaimed by many as a means of addressing behavioral health issues and cleansing one's body and spirit. In many *limpias*, family and community members are asked to participate and form a network that is caring and wishes the best for the person receiving the *limpia*. When a community supports the healing process, people receiving a *limpia* can make a connection between their spirituality, faith, and hope. Their spiritual and health needs become recognized and supported by others.

Creating a New Integrated Health Model

Fig. 4. Mario Del Angel-Guevara, "Universidad Intercultural Tribal College in San Felipe del Progreso, Estado de México, México," 2022, Digital Photograph

Pioneers that have merged traditional and modern medicine in Mexico and the United States include Dr. Andrew Weil, Dr. Arturo Ornelas, and Dr. Guillermo Mendoza Castelán.

Dr. Andrew Weil, a graduate medical doctor, from Harvard University received his medical degree in 1968. An internationally recognized pioneer in Integrative Medicine, he founded the Andrew Weil Center for Integrative Medicine at the University of Arizona. *Time* magazine featured Dr. Weil three times. His videos and publications have been disseminated worldwide. He focuses on traditional medicine treatments and holistic approaches to healing the mind, body, and spirit.

Dr. Arturo Ornelas Lizardi is an internationally renowned promoter of traditional and modern medicine from Mexico. He is the founder of El Centro de Desarrollo Humano hacia la Comunidad (CEDEHC), a community school of traditional medicine in Cuernavaca, Morelos, Mexico that offers modest tuition and scholarships to meet the needs of community learners at home and abroad. He is an important innovator in merging integrated and traditional medicine. Ornelas Lizardi studied in Europe where he obtained his doctorate at the University of Geneva and later did field work with the Latin American World Health Organization. To date, CEDEHC has graduated thousands of healers with knowledge in traditional methods, as well as specialists in Mexican herbal medicine. CEDEHC's curriculum is similar to those offered in many universities and medical schools. As a learner of traditional medicine, Dr. Ornelas Lizardi addresses the various systems of the body, such as the nervous, digestive, lymphatic, and musculoskeletal systems, as well as anatomy, mental health, and other healing areas.

Dr. Guillermo Mendoza Catelán is a faculty member at the Universidad Autónoma de Chapingo's Traditional Medicine and Natural Therapies Program. He is also the President of Instituto Tzapin, School of Complementary Medicine, which focuses on the research, teaching, and publication of integrated techniques from traditional and holistic medicine. The school offers low-cost training on traditional methods of healing and collaborates with a number of health clinics and physicians. The school coordinates a number of annual community-based traditional health fairs. These traditional health fairs are very popular in Mexico where professionals in the health sciences, such as physicians, nurses, midwives, physician assistants, massage therapists, chiropractors, and others attend and participate to learn more about traditional methods of healing to be incorporated into their practice. Dr. Mendoza Castelán has published a number of books, including an encyclopedia listing hundreds of healing herbs traditionally used in Mexico and that address the scientific information regarding the plant's properties, methods of preparation, dosage, side effects, and clinical studies.

As pioneers of traditional and integrated medicine, Doctors Weil, Ornelas Lizardi, and Mendoza Castelán have influenced the revival and merging of medicines in clinics, such as the health clinic of Universidad Intercultural in San Felipe del Progreso, Estado de México. The clinic at Universidad Intercultural has accomplished what countries, such as China and India have already done, rendering health services at low or no cost to the population by offering choices of traditional and modern therapies and methods to treat different illnesses.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have mentioned four main topics in traditional medicine that incorporate rituals and ceremonies. The first is a ceremony that honors the directions. Although the ceremony is called the four directions, it could be up to six or more directions according to the region or culture performing them. This ceremony is used to open an event whether it is community-based or family-based and honors the east, west, south, north, Father Sky, and Mother Earth. Some may add one's heart as the seventh direction.

A second topic in this article is the revival of the sweat lodge called *temazcal*. The article discusses the ceremony of the *temazcal* and explains how rituals are performed before, during, and after experiencing the sweat lodge.

The third topic covers the ritual of the energetic/spiritual cleansings ceremony called *limpias*. The revival of this ritual was performed during the aftereffects of COVID and other traumatic experiences that are observed in behavioral health issues and professions.

A final topic discusses the merging of traditional medicine using rituals and ceremonies, as well as their merging with modern allopathic medicine. The three pioneers that have researched and published on traditional medicine are also discussed, including, Dr. Andrew Weil from Arizona, Dr. Arturo Ornelas Lizardi from Cuernavaca, Mexico, and Dr. Guillermo Mendoza Castelán from Texcoco, Mexico.

Authors of this article encourage researchers and students to continue on the path of the revival of traditional medicine and the merging of both traditional and modern healing practices, especially in the United States to meet the needs of both the migrant community and this country's diverse population.

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