Restoring Identity and Bringing Balance through Navajo Healing Rituals

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ABSTRACT

The primary focus of the ceremonies of the Native American Navajo tribe is to bring balance by re-establishing harmony or hózhó. This article proposes that significant psychological and emotional benefits result from the identity affirmation that occurs in these ceremonies. The ceremonies recalibrate patients regarding social and supernatural relationships, and their attachment to place and time, in what the author calls cosmographic orientation. The Enemyway ceremony is the primary focus of the article.

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INTRODUCTION

According to a Navajo legend, the deity Changing Woman told her twin sons, "Do not forget the songs I have taught you. The day you forget them will be the last; there will be no other days" (Haile, 1938, p. 12). Engulfed by American culture and penetrated by globalization, members of the Native American Navajo tribe have struggled to remember their songs and maintain that identity. In particular, traditional ceremonies provide the cultural bedrock that helps tribal members retain their identity. As I will demonstrate, this identity affirmation is an important function, albeit an unarticulated one, resulting from the primary purpose of these ceremonies, namely, producing healing for a variety of ailments – physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual.

In the search for healing, the Navajo people are pragmatic, often simultaneously turning to Western bio-medical solutions and traditional ceremonies.[1] Traditionally, bio-medicine has not valued ritual activities such as chanting, dancing and acting, as these activities lie outside its mechanistic and empirical paradigm.[2] However, it is my argument that Navajo healing ceremonies can provide an emotional or psychological healing that is often absent in bio-medicine. The Navajo concept of health and healing is much more flexible and does not oppose bio-medical practices, but rather provides a complementary application of healing. While participating in ceremonies that invoke healing, Navajos become re-grounded in their cultural identity. Indeed, the two are intrinsically linked, as identity affirmation promotes healing, particularly in a traditional Navajo sense.

The ideas presented here are not intended to encourage non-Navajos to replicate these native traditions. Indeed the ceremonies herein are described in much greater detail in the works of others (cf. Haile, 1938; McAllester, 1954). More importantly, the health benefits I propose would simply not work for foreigners. The context, methods and identify affirmation functions of these rituals inherently require that the patient (and practitioner) be Navajo.

My attempt to formulate a particular understanding of native healing is intended to benefit both the Navajo and those peering into their world. Indeed, I believe that although these ceremonies should not and cannot be replicated by others, they reveal interesting, even practical insights into the way music can function in informing identities in other communities. My well-meaning purpose here is driven, in part, by a recent movement among some anthropologists and ethnomusicologists to produce beneficial scholarship.[3]

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[1] Because of the problematic nature of the term Western, especially when dealing with Native Americans, I lean more heavily on the term bio-medical to denote the conventional Euro-American system of healing.

[2] Although some doctors or therapists may acknowledge some benefits in the ritual practice of medicine, it hardly seems common. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services provides limited guidance for medical staff who work in clinics and hospitals run by the Indian Health Service. Their website provides helpful information, although slightly misinformed, regarding traditional healing, but its primary focus is recommending ways in which medical staff can be more sensitive to patients needs and beliefs. These recommendations can hardly be described as providing direction for the complementary use of Euro-American medicine and Navajo healing ceremonies (U.S. Department of Health, 2011).

[3] Medical ethnomusicologist Benjamin Koen argues for this type of research in the first chapter of *Beyond the Roof of the World* (2009), and Maurice Bloch gently takes anthropologists to task for shying away from issues that help us understand human nature in *Essays on Cultural Transmission* (2005, p. 18).

The discussion of cosmographic orientation that constitutes the final part of this article is my attempt to answer a question that arose and persisted during my nearly three years living on the Navajo reservation. I taught high-school in Ganado, Arizona, a town nestled deep in the reservation. Here, the normal identity issues facing all teenagers seemed amplified by cultural discord. Most puzzling to me were my students who appeared to have fairly strong traditional roots, exemplified by the fact that they spoke the language, carried corn pollen with them, attended ceremonies and spoke of prayers, but who also identified with American heavy-metal music. These students often wore clothing exhibiting the names of their favorite bands. I was particularly struck by the contradiction between heavy metal music's glorification of death and my perception of the Navajos' powerful fear of the dead.[4] I became interested in these students' efforts to maintain a significant Navajo identity despite modernity's pervasive messages. My ideas articulated here result from my experiences on the reservation, including interacting with Navajo students, co-workers, medicine men and friends, and observing various rituals.[5]

In this article, I will first examine the Navajo concept of health and the healing function of ceremonial activities, specifically the Enemyway ceremony, and then turn to a discussion of the way these ceremonies affirm identity and aid healing. Music plays an important part in these ceremonies, and, therefore, it will be a recurring theme in the article. I fully recognize that my ideas are interpretations, but I believe that creating a coherent narrative is an essential step towards understanding. In doing this, I am following Clifford Geertz who believed that fashioning a narrative was a necessary means to reducing the "puzzlement" of complex interactions (1973, pp. 15-16).

It is useful to note that the Navajo are one of the largest native groups in the United States and occupy a massive reservation that covers parts of Arizona, New Mexico and Utah and is comparable in size to the Republic of Ireland. The Navajo refer to their native land as the Navajo Nation or the Dinehtah, and they refer to themselves as the Diné. Out of respect for them, throughout this paper I will refer to them by this name.

CONCEPTS OF HEALING

In Diné tradition, every ailment, whether physical, psychological or emotional, has its roots in the spiritual realm. The early researcher Father Berard Haile (1938, p. 12) described this connection, "Sickness, in native ideology, is not organic, but is caused by jealous and angry supernaturals who make demands upon humans which must be satisfied". Another related native concept is that of *hózhó* or "balance". A life that has *hózhó* possesses good health, beauty, peace and harmony (Iverson, 2002, p. 12). If a person does not possess *hózhó,* he or she is in discord with his or her physical and supernatural surroundings and is in a state of illness. And although the symptoms of an illness may be manifested either psychological or physically, an ill person may be referred to as confused, bewildered or frustrated (Haile, 1938, p. 89). This emphasis

[4] This is well documented; see, for example, Donald Sander (1979, p. 102).
[5] My 'fieldwork' more closely resembles that of Gary Witherspoon (1977), who has written some of the most insightful books and articles on the Diné, and who produced these after living for fifteen years on the reservation.

on the psycho-physical connection is unique when compared to Western medicine, where physical and psychological ailments are typically categorized and treated separately. In the Diné tradition physical and psychological maladies are one illness.[6]

The phrase "walk in beauty" is commonly used among the Diné, and embodies this notion of health and their cultural philosophy in general. The phrase"walk in beauty" is regularly said at home, school and community events, and is even printed on souvenirs. This motto is derived from the most commonly performed ceremony, the Blessingway, which may be performed several times in the course of a year, and can be requested whenever special blessings are desired. For example, a woman who is pregnant or a person who is leaving the reservation for long-term work may request the Blessingway. Part of the ceremony involves the important prayer: "Beauty shall be in the front of me, beauty shall be in the back, beauty shall be below me, above me, all around me" (Frisbie and McAllester, 1978, p. 219). The phrase "walk in beauty" encapsulates the Diné concept of health by emphasizing that good health (*hózhó)* is synonymous with balance, harmony, and beauty.

If an individual is ill or out of *hózhó* he or she must first seek a diagnosis. A diagnosis can occur when the patient's family arranges for an assessment from a medicine man or woman that specializes in diagnosis. Since diseases or disturbances result from the violation of a taboo, the offence of a deity or the possession of a ghost, individuals may not know the cause of their discomfort. Diagnosis requires an act of divination. A diviner will usually discuss things with the patient and may then attempt to identify the source using several means, including stargazing and most frequently "hand-trembling". In the latter activity the practitioner sings a song invoking Gila Monster, one of the assistants of the deities, "who gave the song in the beginning". During this song the singer's hand and arm begin to shake, and the particular motion of the shaking indicates the diagnosis for the illness (Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960, p. 148). Following the diagnosis, the family may arrange for a ceremony from a medicine man that specializes in the remedy for the diagnosed ailment.

Numerous ceremonies exist in the Navajo tradition. Some last only an hour, while most last several days and some as many as nine days. The Diné also refer to these ceremonies as "sings", the practitioner is often referred to as a "singer" (as well as the adopted term "medicine man"), and the patient may be described as the one "sung over". Each ceremony is usually described as a "chant" or "way". Gladys A. Reichard (1977, pp. 322-23) has identified approximately sixty-eight different ceremonies. Some of the most common ceremonies include the Enemyway, Blessingway, Nightway and the female puberty ceremony known as Kinaaldá.

A ceremony involves various activities and the intoning of numerous chants that the singer has learned and perfected through an apprenticeship. These chants are often performed within the traditional Díné home called a hogan. The chants are usually sung in a loosely metered melody that contains a limited number of pitches. They are generally unelaborated and also act as a memory guide and as a way of preserving order (Reichard, 1977, p. 288). The chanting may be accompanied by a drum or

[6] This is of course common among many cultures (Laderman and Roseman, 1996).

rattle, although these are not always mandated. Participants in the ceremony may also join in the singing of familiar chants.

The contents of the chants involve the creation legends of the Diné. Haile described the content of the ceremonies:

> … legends, songs, and prayers are chiefly concerned with the creation and placement of the earth and sky, sun and moon, sacred mountains and vegetation, the inner forms of these natural phenomena, the control of he-and she-rains, dark clouds and mist, the inner forms of the cardinal points and like phenomena that may be considered as harbingers of blessing and happiness. (Haile, 1937, quoted in Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960, p. 149)

The songs and activities within a ceremony are ascribed to various deities who created, performed and then taught the ceremony to humans. For example, authorship of the Blessingway is credited to the Holy People and specifically to the deity Changing Woman. She is one of the primary figures in Diné mythologies and her sons helped rescue the newly created humans. According to the mythology, the original Blessingway ceremony was held when the human race was created. Consequently, all other ceremonies refer back to this ceremony (Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960, p. 149).

Several items are worth emphasizing here. First, all ceremonies focus on the retelling of parts of the creation story. Thus, if a patient has abdominal problems, the curing ceremony will likely not address his abdomen, but will instead retell creation myths. These stories, after all, often depict individuals overcoming conflict and restoring balance. Although this may seem disconnected from the actual ailment, the Diné belief in the supernatural causes of illness makes the recounting of holy stories a fitting remedy. Second, the deities who were part of the original creation are also credited with first introducing the stories, chants and rituals activities to humans. Thus these ancient ritual activities purport power that can be harnessed when repeated.

The practitioner, or medicine man, is seen as a spiritual intermediary who helps the patient re-acquire balance. Although a practitioner may use physical remedies, such as herbal applications and emetics, massages and sweat-baths, the reenactments of these ancient chants invoke the greatest healing potential. When chanting the singer does not merely supervise and perform, he assumes control of a supernatural power and personifies the deity who created the song (Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960, p. 6). By invoking spiritual power the singer seeks to heal the discomforted patient. This healing event does not necessarily seek the removal of a physical ailment, although this may be a goal of the ceremony; its primary purpose is to re-establish beauty or balance (*hózhó*) in the patient's life.

The ritualistic use of music in these ceremonies has a profound spiritual basis. The medicine man assumes supernatural control partially because of the power of speaking and chanting. According to Gary Witherspoon:

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> Navajos believe strongly in the power of thought. The world was created by it; things are transformed according to it; life is regenerated from it. People are cured and blessed, vegetation is improved and increased, and health and happiness are restored by the power of thought […] According to the Navajo, speech is the outer form of thought, and thought the inner form of speech. (Witherspoon, 1977, p. 29)

Although these thoughts can be explicated through various forms of speech, such as prayer, singing is ascribed significant power. It is credited with the power to actually create. In multiple examples of the creation story, things (mountains, people, etc.) were actually sung into existence. For example, one of the most important deities, Changing Woman, was created out of turquoise by the Holy People through their singing sacred songs (Zolbrod, 1984, pp. 177-79). Singing can thus propel powerful thoughts into existence. Music's power will be discussed more below.

IDENTITY AND HEALING THROUGH THE ENEMYWAY CEREMONY

To understand the healing function of the ceremonies I will focus on the Enemyway ceremony – another commonly performed ceremony. The Enemyway ceremony is used as a remedy for patients who feel afflicted by foreign ghosts or enemies. Indeed, fear of possession is one of the greatest fears for traditional believers (Sander, 1979, p. 109). Even those who have converted to Christianity still express considerable fear of ghosts. The ceremony has in the past been used for warriors, including Diné soldiers who served in the wars of the United States. The ceremony also applies to anyone who has seen the corpse of a "foreigner", including remnants of the body (hair, bone, etc.). It may also be used if an individual has had close associations, including sexual relations, with a foreigner who has since died. Native witches, called skinwalkers, can also cause the haunting of individuals. Indeed skinwalkers are perhaps the most feared apparitions, since they are believed to be humans who practice black magic and assume animal-like characteristics and qualities.[7]

An afflicted individual who manifests symptoms of "weakness, bad dreams, feelings of danger, confusion, futility, loss of appetite, suffocating, fainting, dizziness and generalized anxiety" may need an Enemyway ceremony (Sander, 1979, p. 101). This is likely more acute in modern times, due to the increase association with foreigners, as many Diné regularly work off of the reservation during the week and only return on weekends. Thence, they regularly associate with "foreign" individuals who might possibly haunt someone if they become deceased. If any of these incidents have occurred and an individual begins to feel weak, agitated or troubled in their dreams, their family may request an Enemyway ceremony, which has the purpose of ridding the patient of a menacing ghost (Haile, 1938; McAllester, 1954).

During the three-day ceremony participants enact a mythological battle in which the patient impersonates the deity Monster Slayer and symbolically kills the agitating ghost. Although this myth has some violent themes, the ceremony involves very little that is macabre and instead focuses on restoring peace to the patient. Several researchers have observed that perhaps the most important result of a Diné ceremony

[7] My students were always full of skinwalker stories, especially late at night after bus trips or dances. One memorable story included an explanation of a method of inducing possession by shooting tiny bone fragments into victims through a blow gun. For a detailed study of witchcraft see Kluckhohn (1944).

is its psychological comfort (Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960, p. 164; Lewton and Bydone, 2000, p. 476). I propose that the Enemyway ceremony functions as a healing ceremony by re-centering the patient within multiple spheres of identity. The practitioners of the Enemyway attribute the healing to spiritual intervention. My explanation does not seek to prove or disprove this claim, but instead considers the content and structure of the ceremony and identifies the way these aspects bring about psychological comfort and healing.

SOCIAL SPHERE OF IDENTITY

Both the structure and content of the Enemyway facilitate healing by creating or reaffirming the patient's identity in a way that connects him or her with multiple levels of socialization, ranging from family to the supernatural. In addition to social relationships, the patient is also reoriented in terms of time and physical space. The combined effect of re-orienting a patient socially, temporally and geographically produces a powerful sense of self-worth. I describe this multi-tiered approach to establish the patient's identity as *cosmographic orientation.*

In the center of this orientation process is the individual's dynamic sense of identity. Uneasiness, confusion and a general sense of anxiety demonstrate an inner disturbance. The individual feels conflict, either with herself – so that she does not feel like herself – or perhaps with some "other" presence. For an individual who fears haunting and who has an inclination that she has somehow been exposed to a ghost, what might be typical bad dreams or uneasiness may be perceived and thus aggravated through fearful lenses. Healing one's identity may help alleviate the cause of the symptoms, whether an actual haunting or emotional turmoil. The ceremony asserts the true identity of the individual and thus excises foreign ghosts that foul the integrity of the individual.

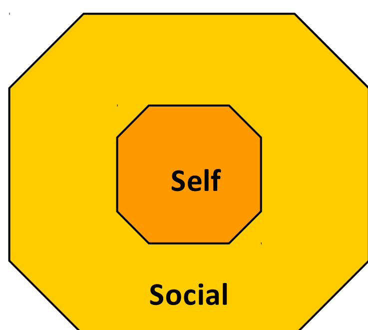

Figure 1: Social Sphere of Identity

The structure and activities of the Enemyway reaffirm the patient's association with society (see Figure 1).[8] At the most basic level, the ceremony involves sustained and often intense interactions with immediate and extended family. It is a family member, and not the patient, who must first seek the aid of a medicine man. Additionally, ceremonies can be very expensive, so before a practitioner is contacted, the family first seeks the financial assistance of the extended family (McAllester, 1954, p. 8). Throughout the ceremony, the immediate and extended family provide food and other forms of support. A ceremony renews family ties.

Once a medicine man has been contacted and his services secured, the patient's family then contacts another family to act as the "stick receiver". This family impersonates an opposing war party throughout much of the ceremony, and their involvement often necessitates the gathering of their extended family members.

[8] The octagonal shape of the figure models the shape of the traditional hogan home.

During the first day and first night, the ceremony takes place at or near the home of the stick receiver's family. Later in the ceremony both families also exchange presents. Thus the Enemyway ceremony encourages the participation of the patient's family and that of an additional family. These relationships remind the patient of the extensive and important role of kinship in Diné culture. Indeed, kinship is regularly stressed among the Diné. When an individual introduces herself in a traditional way, she will state her name and her clan. Throughout the ceremony the patient will be reminded more poignantly of her clan and her relationship to those of other clans.

Other friends of the family, even acquaintances and general community members, may participate in the public aspects of the ceremony. Both natives and non-natives sometimes refer to the public portion of the Enemyway as a Squaw Dance. It involves three nights of dancing that includes sway songs, dance songs and circle dance songs. Historically these dances were one of the few occasions at which mature girls and boys could freely mix and dance. During these dances the girls choose their dancing partner and then require their partner to pay money for the dance (McAllester, 1954).

Squaw Dance songs are far more complex than the chants of the ceremony. The vocal range encompasses up to an octave and the music has a fairly active melody and rhythm. Usually two groups square off and participate in a friendly rivalry, which may involve newly composed songs. Most of the songs use only texts comprised of vocables, although some include a few lines of Navajo. It is not uncommon for these songs to include humor and reference modern day events and technology. General participants may also join in the singing of the sway songs and round-dance songs. The entertainment and dancing produces a positive setting that helps counteract the haunting and disturbed feelings of the patient. This festive aspect of the ceremony increases the circle of socialization and further re-orients the patient concerning his relationship with the Diné people in general.

As John Blacking notes of music in general, "The function of music is to enhance in some way the quality of individual experience and human relationships" (1955, p. 31). This can be seen in the Enemway ceremony, as music helps unify and reestablish relationships. During the more private parts of the ceremony family and close friends will participate in singing chants together. The monophonic singing of participants, led by the medicine man, creates an acoustical unity that helps shape notions of family oneness. During the more public portions, music and dancing serve as social gravity, drawing in extended relations and community members, who sing and dance in unity. Music's inherent time system synchronizes footsteps and singing, so that music generates community organization. Additionally, the dances reinforce notions of community through the singing of contextually-rich lyrics that both echo and shape complex social messages about Diné identity, including notions of gender. Blacking (1955, p. 232) asserts, and it is demonstrated here, that music is not just reflexive, it is "one of the means through which social structure is created".

SUPERNATURAL SPHERE OF IDENTITY

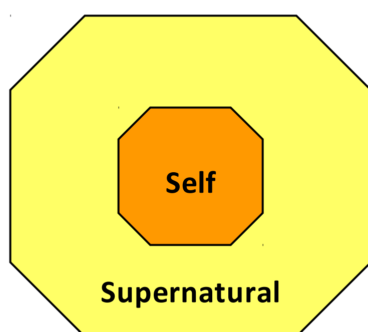

Figure 2: Supernatural Sphere of Identity

The content of the Enemyway also informs the patient of his or her relationship with supernatural beings, as the patient is taught about his or her connection to Diné deities (see Figure 2). As with most Diné ceremonies, the Enemyway recounts legends about the origins of the Diné. The ceremony is especially powerful because the patient and some of the participants re-enact portions of the Diné creation story.[9]

In the Enemyway, the patient and participants re-enact the mythology concerning the slaying of monsters by the Hero Twins as well as the legend about the war on Taos (McAllester, 1954, p. 8). According to the mythology, the deities First Man and First Woman created a race of humans, but this group was sexually promiscuous, resulting in the birth of monsters. Creatures such as Monster Bird, Monster Who Kills with His Eyes and Big Giant commenced to devour and terrorize humans. In response, First Man and First Woman created another deity named Changing Woman, who exposed herself to the sun and consequently conceived twin sons, named Monster Slayer and Born for Water (Zolbrod, 1984, pp. 86-180).

After acquiring supernatural powers from Spider Woman and their father the Sun, these twins set out to destroy the monsters. Slaying each monster in turn, the twins dramatically and successfully defeated all of the monsters. Following their victory Monster Slayer received the first Enemyway ceremony.[10] Hence all practitioners model their ceremonies after this original ceremony, and the patient imagines him or herself as Monster Slayer and even ritualistically acts the part of the deity (Haile, 1938, p. 22).

One of the most poignant parts of the ceremony is referred to as the "blackening". During this activity, which occurs on the third day, the patient is blackened with the charcoal from various herbs, adorned with bands made from yucca plants, and dressed to resemble Monster Slayer. The patient wears yucca wristlets (which represent Monster Slayer's long life), yucca shoulder bands (which represents Monster Slayer's bow), and a feather (which represents Monster Eagle) (McAllester, 1954, p. 22). Once adorned as Monster Slayer,[11] the individual then symbolically kills the enemy ghost.

Sixteen songs are sung during the blackening ceremony. In these songs the patient is referred to as Monster Slayer, but he is also called his other names, including Gazer on Enemy, Milky Way Boy and Rainbow Boy (Haile, 1938, p. 279). In other parts of the ceremony the patient is referred to as the grandchild of Changing Woman. Emphasizing the patient's representation of a god, the patient is often referred to in first person: "Because I am Monster Slayer boy, because I am long life boy, I live a

[9] This act of impersonation is common for Diné ceremonies.
[10] Black God is the author and practitioner of the Enemway (Haile, 1938, p. 35).
[11] If it is a female, a male relative will act as proxy (McAllester, 1954, p. 12).

long life, so I do" (Haile, 1938, p. 264). Gary Witherspoon (1977, p. 25) has observed that "ritual identification with [deities] neutralizes the contaminating effect of dangerous things or evil deeds and restores one to the good and harmony of hózhó". Singing these powerful songs, the patient figuratively embodies and performs the Diné creation story. The unelaborated chanting clearly communicates the patient's deistic association. Indeed, the simple but potent nature of the chant distinguishes it from the music of daily life and even from the public music and dancing of the ceremony.

Kluckhohn and Leighton describe this association with the supernatural, noting that:

> … in the height of the chant the patient himself becomes one of the Holy People, puts his feet in their moccasins, and breathes in the strength of the sun. He comes into complete harmony with the universe and must of course be free of all ills and evil. (Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960, p. 165)

The effect of this representation is to powerfully impress the psyche of the patient. Acting in a re-creation of the beginnings of the Diné reminds the patient that his people were created by powerful gods, and his life is an extension of these supernatural origins. By participating in a ceremony that Monster Slayer received, including hearing the same songs, and even dressing as Monster Slayer, the patient may perceive of himself as having an affinity with the divine: he or she becomes a participant in the eternal. Thus in the chants and actions of the Enemyway the patient's circle of socialization widens to a cosmic circumference.

TIME SPHERE OF IDENTITY

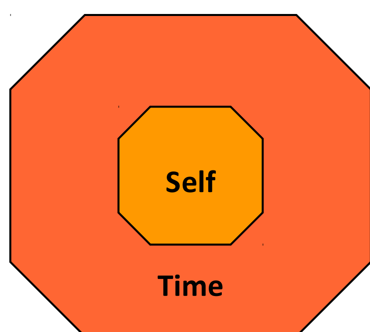

Figure 3: Time Sphere of Identity

Identity can also be shored up by establishing the individual's relationship to time, and in the ceremonies, the patient is often emplaced within a broad context of time (see Figure 3). Each ceremony has seasonal restrictions, with some being performed year round, and others, such as the Enemyway, only occurring at certain times of the year. Because the chants and activities derive from the creation myths, the patient becomes more conscious of the deep past. This awareness of the past is heightened by the patient's enacting history, so that these stories become intertwined with the immediate reality. Also, most ceremonies last several days, with much of the chanting done at night, so that during the ceremony a new sense and pulse of time is established that separates the activities from the routines of daily life. Following a ceremony, certain restrictions are often placed on the patient for a period of several days. Mircea Eliade (1961, p. 69) has observed that religious rituals remove the participants from temporality and inserts them into "mythical time reactualized by the festival itself. Hence sacred time is indefinitely recoverable, indefinitely repeatable." As the ceremony restores mythical time, the act also heightens awareness of the present, so that the patient becomes more aware of his place in time.

The rhythms of the chants themselves, which tend to be highly repetitive, are essential for creating a new sense of time, even invoking a sense of timelessness. Blacking (1955, p. 34) has commented, “the essential quality of music is its power to create another world of virtual time”. Thus during and following the ceremony the patient enters a liminal state that resynchronizes his or her chronological position by disrupting his or her normal expectations of time and re-contextualizing them within a grander time scheme.

PLACE SPHERE OF IDENTITY

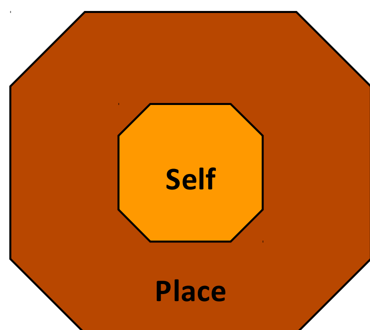

Figure 4: Place Sphere of Identity

Finally the ceremony re-orients the patient’s sense of place (see Figure 4). In the ceremony the patient is reminded of his physical position in relationship to the homeland of the Diné, and also in concordance with his position in the cosmos. Significantly, most Diné ceremonies occur within the hogan. This symmetrical octagonal structure is designed according to traditional prescriptions. Outside the hogan, the Diné legends emphasize the topographical features of their traditional homeland, the Dinétah. The places described in the creation stories exist in the area that includes the current Navajo Nation,[12] so that the patient is physically located in the sacred places described in the songs. The area is oriented according to the four cardinal directions, with four different mountains representing the outer boundaries of their homeland. Nearly every large topographic feature on the reservation has a mythological connection, so reminders of the creation story constantly surround a Diné individual on the reservation. The sacred places of the Dinétah contrast the profane spaces outside the traditional borders.[13]

The chanting in the Enemyway refers to specific topographic features (Haile, 1938, pp. 38-39). In the creation story these features were sung into existence, and a parallel performance occurs in the ceremony, as the images of places are recreated in the minds of participants. Additionally the four cardinal directions are regularly and repetitiously used in the description of events, so that the patient is sonically and geographically surrounded. Occasionally the chants also refer to a celestial object such as the Milky Way (Haile, 1938, pp. 67, 279). Thus the patient is reminded of his place within his family hogan, which is situated within the sacred topography of the Dinétah, which is in turn described in a cosmic context. Cosmographic references re-orient the patient in his quest to seek balance.

SOUNDING IDENTITY

A symbol of this cosmographic orientation occurs early in the ceremony. During the preparatory stages of the ceremony select participants make a drum by stretching

12 The Navajo were one of the few Native American groups that were able to retain their traditional lands.
13 For an example of the myth-laden topography, two typical-looking mesas lie near Ganado High School that from a distance to the north resemble the heads of snakes. An associate of mine learned from a Diné hitchhiker that indeed two massive snakes had been nearing each other for combat when they were turned into stone. Most books on the Diné include some commentary about the importance of place. For a clear description of its significance see Wyman (1957, pp. 36-39). See also Eliade’s (1961) discourse on sacred and profane spaces.

buckskin over an earthen pot. Multiple songs accompany this process (Haile, 1938, pp. 16, 279). When the drumhead is attached, the practitioner sings five songs. During the first four songs he beats on the north, then east, south and west sides of the rim of the drum. On the fifth song he beats in the center of the drum. This sonic event symbolizes the cosmographic calibration that the patient will undergo in the ceremony.

Sound serves an important role in this process of re-orientation. The patient and participants are encompassed in sacred sounds. During the nighttime dances the voices of the singers fill the night and encourage socializing and frivolity. In the more subdued setting of the hogan, the medicine man intones sacred, healing melodies that envelope that patient. Indeed songs for the Diné are often associated with images of a covering or blanket. For example, a horseman riding at night may sing a song that "covers" him and provides protection against the evils of the night. Concerning this example, Gladys Reichard (1977, p. 288) asserts that "a song moving out into the space immediately surrounding an individual […] establishes a zone of protection that gives comfort, for within it is the person who dissipates the evils by the compulsion of sound and words at the same time that he buoys up his own spirit". This notion extends to the healing purpose of singing within a ceremony. As the singer chants he drives out evil and establishes harmony, beauty and balance in the patient.

Each song emphasizes its function within the ceremony through repetition. While preparing the drum, for example, multiple songs are sung. Within each song, key ideas are repeated, sometimes literally and sometimes with parallelisms. The third song, for example, emphasizes the sounding of the drum:

> A nice one, a nice, a nice one now gave a sound,
> a nice, a nice, a nice one now gave a sound, so it did.
> Now I am Changing Woman's child when a nice one gave its sound, so it did […]

Each of the songs performed during the creation of the drum is nearly identical except for specific keywords that describe the creation of the drum. Here are the beginning texts of nine of these songs, demonstrating the repetitiveness of the chants:

1. A nice one is preparing it for me […]
2. A nice one has prepared it for me […]
3. A nice one now gave its sound […]
4. The sound of a nice one has now gone forth […]
5. The sound of a nice one has now ceased […]
6. From a nice one beauty now extends […]
7. From a nice one beauty is now spread out […]
8. Come, my child, come! […]
9. Come, my child, come! […]

(Haile, 1938, p. 263)

These nine highly-repetitive songs, only one set from many in the ceremony, imprint the messages of the songs in the patient's mind. This repetition creates an almost hypnotic sense of stability and establishes a sense of timelessness. It also may help to alter the "psychic patterning" of the mind (Sander, 1979, pp. 246-47). The blanket

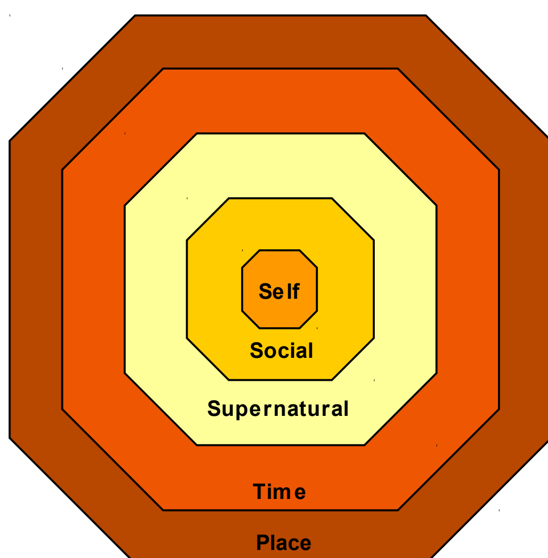

Figure 5: Cosmographic Orientation and the Spheres of Identity

of sound surrounds the patient, constantly affirming psycho-social identity within overlapping spheres of sociality, time and place (see Figure 5). Thus the patient becomes immersed in an atmosphere of security, balance and beauty.

CONCLUSIONS

According to Diné mythology, singing has its origins in crying. The first singing developed out the crying of Changing Woman. During a moment of loneliness and isolation, "she cried, and from her crying came a song" (Reichard, 1977, p. 284). Illness is compounded by its inherent loneliness, and physical or psychological maladies seem to inevitably produce emotional turmoil. Although the healing of physical disease through traditional Diné ceremonies may be difficult to perceive from a bio-medical perspective, its emotional and psychological benefits are substantive, though significantly different from the practice of psychology.

At a time when an individual may feel most vulnerable and isolated, Diné healing ceremonies help provide a personal and cultural grounding for the individual. Family and friends come together, and social relationships are re-affirmed in ways that connect the individual to those in the present and the past. The patient also reconnects to the sacred soil of the reservation – he is literally grounded and given a sense of place. Spiritually he (re-)learns principles and beliefs and develops an affinity with the supernatural. In all these ways, the ill patient experiences emotional comfort and reassurance, resulting in a reduction in loneliness and psychological turmoil. Indeed *hózhó* is achieved, and the individual is prepared to "walk in beauty".

Although individuals seek healing ceremonies, these rituals also help address the general social stress of cultural dissipation or "deterritorialization" (Appadurai 1996, pp. 37-38). Dozens of people are typically involved with a ceremony, and all reap similar identity-affirmation benefits. This type of general social healing seems especially pertinent in the twenty-first century. Family disintegration is a significant issue for many. Due to the lack of job opportunities on the reservation, many parents are forced to work in the distant cities of Albuquerque, Flagstaff or Phoenix. For many this means that one or both parents are away during the week and only return home on weekends. Issues of alcoholism and drug use that continue to plague the Diné in unusually high proportions further compound the problems caused by the fraying family.[14] Ceremonies re-unite families in powerful symbolic and practical ways. Most participants seem to perceive ceremonies as sacred but fun social activities, especially the public dancing of the Enemyway, but this entertainment

[14] Many Navajo youth are left with considerable amounts of unsupervised time (sometimes weeks at a time), which encourages drug use, alcohol use and sexual promiscuity.

functions in a deeper way, bringing healing to the patient and reminding all of the participants of what it means to be Diné.

Because of contextual reliance of the ceremonies, they would not apply to non-Diné, who would not share the same biological and geographical genealogy. Indeed, the healing ceremonies themselves require the integrity of place. For an outsider, reorienting oneself to a foreign people, place and their hereditary mythologies would be absurd.

The ceremonies may even have mixed value for some Diné in modern times. Some younger Diné are not fluent speakers of the Navajo language, although they often understand conversations at a basic level. The result of having the ceremony done in a secondary language could cause interesting and varied ramifications for the patient. For non-fluent speakers, their close familiarity with the language could re-awaken familial memories and strengthen cultural ties. Indeed, thinking in the Navajo language could have significant cognitive ramifications in shaping the way the patient perceives the ritual actions in the ceremony and even provide a traditional lens for viewing and rethinking the activities and events of regular life. For patients less familiar with the language, it is difficult to imagine the benefits of the ceremony, as many of the symbols of language would be lost. Such unfamiliarity could minimize the effect or even possibly induce a greater sense of unease and even alienation with the culture.

However, there may be some principles that may have applications for non-Diné who may be questioning our sole reliance on the paradigm of biological mechanisms.[15] I will only mention a few possible principles, each of which could be explored in greater depth. The idea of cosmographic orientation causes me to reflect on the increasingly transient nature of individuals and families, who often become disconnected from geography, family, community and the supernatural. The appealing Diné concept of hózhó seems to require a grounding in place, time and society. Because we may not possess such visceral roots, we may need to more consciously connect to places. We might make similar efforts to understand our own family histories and the histories of our often plural cultures, which in addition to linking social circles can help establish a sense of time and our place in it. The stories of Monster Slayer and his brother also imply a need for mythology. In our age of dethroning "great men", the Diné accounts of heroes may indicate an inherent human need for these powerful stories, whether they be tales of mortals or immortals.[16] And finally, meaningful music can provide a medium for communicating social and supernatural connections, for grounding us in time and place, for reinforcing rituals, and for establishing identity and balance in our often fractured world.

15 For examples of this turn towards complementary and alternative medicines see Koen (2009) and Seybold and Hill (2001).

16 Bronislaw Malinowsky (1948, p. 79) in his description of myths said that myth was a "vital ingredient of human civilization; it is not an idle tale, but a hard-working active force".

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