

RITUAL COMPADRAZGO AS AN INSTRUMENT OF INTERETHNIC AND SOCIAL ADAPTATION AMONG THE RARÁMURI IN NORTHWESTERN MEXICO AND ITS POSSIBLE CORRELATIONS TO LOCAL POLITICAL EVENTS

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Abstract: This paper pursues, on the basis of some field-works among the Rarámuri Indians and the mestizos in northwestern Mexico, namely in the ejido Munerachi and the small Mexican towns Batopilas and Creel, three principal aims: first, it generally outlines the concept of the Mexican ejido; second, it focuses on the application of the theoretical concept ritual (fictive) compadrazgo of the North-American anthropologists Eric Wolf and Sidney Mintz in Lower and Upper Tarahumara in the Indian and the mestizo communities; and, third, it tries to find some possible correlations of the ritual compadrazgo to local political events.

Keywords: Rarámuri; northwestern Mexico; ritual compadrazgo; ejido; social adaptation

1. Introduction

This study is the final stage of our ethnographic research among the north Mexican Rarámuri. Research was conducted in the communities located mostly in the part of the Sierra Tarahumara that can be considered nuclear due to greater ecological, demographic and general anthropologic differentiations – i.e., it is an area where the ethnicity of the Rarámuri and their resistance to modernity and mestizo society is stronger than in neighboring communities. The aim of this study was to show what changes have occurred in the lives of the Rarámuri since the Mexican Revolution, when Mexico was parceled out into thousands of socio-economic-political units called *ejidos*. Hundreds of thousands of native people from every ethnic groups of Mexico were incorporated into *ejidos*.

Our questions are: How did the Rarámuri, who live in the territory of ejido Munerachi,¹ adapt to these new *ex offi* conditions? What are the mechanisms affecting this adaptation? Can the incorporation of this particular intra-ethnic community lead to irreversible cultural and social shifts, or do the inhabitants develop adaptive institutions which successfully prevent deeper changes in their lives? Is ejido Munerachi a closed set of dispersive communities, a type of *closed corporate (peasant) community*,² where there is no significant movement of its inhabitants and no deeper structural changes, or is it (despite its isolation) a dynamic community, based on principles of solidarity and contact with the outside world? In addition, the study attempts to define, or least characterize in detail, the (intra)-ethnic identity of Munerachi Rarámuri and the way they define themselves in contrast to other Rarámuri, against the representatives of the municipal power in Batopilas and in relation to mestizos, creoles, whites and other native groups with which they interact. Finally, this study is also interested in whether there exists at least a minimal vertical social hierarchy in this seemingly egalitarian community, as some sociologists (including Rodolfo Stavenhagen) suppose. One of the essential questions in this area can be formulated in the following way: Has the community inside ejido Munerachi reached the phase in which some of its members have gained certain advantages that have moved them to social, economic, and political dominance over other members of this small community? Apart from the official political structures of the ejido, can parallel structures develop? These structures might be more or less latent, but *de facto*, they may have a greater influence on the social and political control in at least part of this community.

¹ Ejido Munerachi is situated in the district Batopilas, about seventeen kilometers north of Batopilas town in the south of the federal state Chihuahua in the region called Sierra Tarahumara. The population of the whole ejido was approximately in 2001 1350 inhabitants who lived in about thirty relatively independent communities in the area about 250-300 km².

² Eric Wolf (1955, 1956, 1957, 1966, 1986), and Robert Netting (1996), and other social scientists occupied by this type of communities are present particularly in the agrarian pre-modern as well as the complex societies. They are concerned with the type of egalitarian communities where the membership is allowed only to those who were born and educated within the territory of their own society. Such limitations can be further reinforced by forced weddings in this community. It is the whole community rather than one person who is a landowner and no individual person may negotiate the shared community land, mortgage it or misappropriate it in any way for the benefit of foreigners. Thus corporate communities represent mechanisms through which they balance out the differences among the members of these communities: either by reallocation of land – e.g., the Russian *mir*, near eastern community *musha'a* or on the basis of the legalization of exploitation of surplus funds during the local ceremonies such as in Mesoamerica, Andes or in Central Java in the past (cf. Wolf 1955: 452-471, 1956: 1065-1078, 1957: 7-12, 1966: 85-86, 1986: 325-329; Netting 1996: 220-221).

In the course of the field research in the territory of ejido Munerachi, it was necessary to undergo a one-day trip to the municipal center (Batopilas) when one of the Rarámuri fell ill and medicine was needed. We also did it for research reasons, however. Nearly every Rarámuri we met belonged to the group of the baptized (*pagótame*)³ Indians and were part of the institution called *compadrazgo* or *patronazgo*, which will be dealt with in this study. A meeting between a baptized Rarámuri man and his *padrino* (godfather) is a rather important event in the day-to-day life of a *ahijado* (godchild). Thus, we could not miss the opportunity to be present at several of these meetings and observe their conversations.

During our field research, we used the method of *involved observation*, often with active participation in local sacral and secular fiestas, community works and educational development as well as in a number of common, every-day activities (including recreational activities, collective games, swimming in the river, summoning children at the dormitory before lights-out, etc.). We combined these with *spontaneous* and *partly structured dialogues* that were an inseparable part of all the events in which we participated. Conversations with our main contacts almost always took place in Spanish. However, conversations with occasional respondents also took place in Rarámuri (approximately 10-20%), which is the language of the native inhabitants of the ejido. One important contact was our long-time friend Romaine Wheeler, who has lived in the territory of ejido Munerachi since the middle of the nineteen-eighties and knows all the aspects of Rarámuri life.

2. The Ejido: a General Concept

The *ejido* has its roots in the Latin words *exire* (go out, come out) and *exitus* (exit). It was originally used to mark the clear border or exit (“ejido”) between the inner, fortified core of the late medieval town (though in some cases this lasted up to the first half of the 19th century) and the part of the city that was located behind the walls. Hence, the original meaning was quite narrow as it described a series of gates built within a town’s fortification. They were cells which helped to strengthen the closeness and safety of the old city core against the growing population coming from outside.

³ Also *pagótuame*, *pagótukame* – first derived from *pagoma* či *pakoma* = “wash, wash up.” The significance of the term *pagó* changed to “baptize” later on arrival of missionaries (cf. Brambila 1980: 421).

The genesis of a Mexican or Latin-American ejido⁴ is quite different from the European concept. The European concept is connected with urban environment or understood as the *border area* between a town and the country. On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, in the Spanish colonies, the development of an ejido is usually connected to rural areas, even though initially town land was also concerned in the colonies. In the later post-colonial era and other phases of modern Mexican development, existence of original and future ejido land was closely connected to the problems of agrarian reform which have yet to be solved. In Mexico, the roots of the modern system of ejido can be traced in post-classic Mesoamerica, especially in the Aztec “empire,” where the highest speaker of the clan, a *tlatoani*, assigned land to each community, not to individuals. And yet, not even then was it a pure type of community ownership (called *calpulli* by the Aztecs) but instead it was a collective form of ownership with individual usage of parcels of land, located in the *altepetlalli* (village land). Apart from the communal (common) land, each family of a *calpulli* received a smaller plot to use. If the land was permanently cultivated, ownership of this plot was hereditary. If the land lay fallow for two years, the family lost it and the land was transferred back to the ownership of all the members of the respective *calpulli*. This system of communal ownership (which was not the only one among the Aztecs as there were also plots that were directly controlled by the state and the emblems from it were used by the *tlatoani*, temples, and palaces or were used for military purposes) was replaced by the systems of *encomienda* and *hacienda* in the colonial era. In this way, all Mexican Indians lost their land. In the best cases, they still worked on the land but for a new owner (*encomendero* or *hacendado*), in the worst cases, when the situation of the Mexican Indians got any worse than before, they were sent to work in mines. Later, in the postcolonial era, they were sent to work on coffee plantations in Soconusco (Tzeltals) or sisal haciendas in Yucatán (Yaquis), etc.

At first, the situation in central Mexico (Aztec areas) was not as critical as in the southern states (e.g., in Chiapas in the eighteenth century, in Yucatán in the nineteenth century, etc.) as the Spanish Crown tried to adapt indigenous forms of community ownership to new Spanish property conditions. Rudiments of the future ejido system of land ownership originate in this part of nuclear Mexico as early as the 16th century. The Crown introduced legal estates (*fundos*

⁴ The concept of ejido was perhaps mostly enlarged on the Mexican rural areas nevertheless we found out this administrative unity in many other Hispano-American countries as well.

legales) for each town which were located in the area 500 meters from church entrances. Community plots called ejidos were formed around these towns. These plots had to have an area of at least one square legua,⁵ they could not be stolen and they were controlled by the village (town) council. From the territorial perspective, ejidos were located on the peripheries of colonial towns where they were used by the town population as free pastures or woods (as it was in the medieval and early-modern Spain). The original Castilian ejido was probably much smaller than the colonial Mexican one, and it was located near the exit of the town. Thus in New Spain, ejidos were transformed to those lands which were called *altepetlalli* in the pre-contact era. *Altepetlalli* were characterized by a relatively great area and included not only cultivated (agricultural) land but also woods and pastures, i.e., the same cultural and natural resources which are administered by ejidos even now. The Spanish, however, did not respect the inner division of the village land within the original clan culture. This was similar to the north, in New Biscay where the Jesuits did not respect the pre-contact forms of ownership of the Rarámuri, Tepehuan, Concho, Warojío, and other groups. Apart from this early (primary) ejido system of ownership, which was even then incorporative (i.e., it became a part of Spanish colonial legislation), for some time there were also village plots which were gradually included in the administration of newly established counties (*municipios*). Gains/profits from these lands were not meant for further development of the community but became the main subsistential instrument for keeping the local colonial power and for paying tribute. In northern Mexico, where colonization was a bit later and had been ruled by the Jesuits since the second half of the 17th century, early forms of ejido land ownership were not very successful. Instead of them, central villages were installed. Central villages were usually bigger mission bases into which the majority of the native population of Chihuahua, Sonora and Sinaloa was concentrated either directly or at least economically [i.e., Rarámuri had to pay tribute to the Jesuits usually in the form of maize, beans or, later, in the form of animal products (milk, cattle, etc.)]. The system in the north, where the Aztec (Nahua) villages were at least partly autonomous, was probably more incorporative than in central Mexico where Rarámuri villages were fully dependent. Another difference between these two areas is that the Aztec village system was transformed locally. The Spanish managed to use the current infrastructure, which had existed at least from the second half of

⁵ i.e., approximately 30 km².

the 15th century, and thus did not need to practice the more violent politics of centralization. It could be said with little exaggeration that the same thing that the Spanish were doing to the Aztecs, the Aztecs had done to the Otomi, Toltecs, and other groups which they had conquered or cohabitated with – they took over the existing institutions which they further developed, modified and improved. In the north, Franciscans and then Jesuits, with the help of soldiers, gold-miners and other colonists, had a much more difficult position as they had to concentrate relatively small, nomadic groups (such as the dreaded Tobosos) who were living on a huge desert and semi-desert territory. The majority of this north-Mexican population had to be, unlike the Aztecs, settled first. However, this was not the case with the Rarámuri who lived as settled or semi-settled peasants even in the protohistoric era, and wandered only for the reasons of complementary subsistence or when they were pressed out by a strange element (nomadic tribes or Spanish colonizers and Jesuits). The Rarámuri sedentary way of life was quite different from the central Mexican ethnic groups (apart from the Aztecs, among the Tarascans in Michoacán, the Tlaxcaltecs, and many others) and did not take hold for many reasons. The Rarámuri were perhaps just entering the way of political centralization, which was made difficult by the continuing dispersion of individual local subgroups. Nevertheless, from historical sources, we even know the names of significant regional leaders (*seríames*) who led several big panarámuri uprisings. Stable Rarámuri villages were located relatively far from each other, or they were isolated by the numerous mountain valleys in the Lower and Upper Tarahumara. Thus, for their *pueblo centralization* politics, the Jesuits selected native villages (e.g., Sisoguichi, Carichi, Papigochi, Cerocahui, etc.) which had more advantageous strategic positions, i.e., villages that could be quickly connected to a communication network – in colonial times this meant by horse or mule paths. Of course in the majority of these cases, it was a violent or insensible interference which significantly changed the socio-economic system of Rarámuri families and villages. In fact, it was a *resettling* process even if it was not as dramatic as later during the porfiriato⁶ when relocation took place over longer distances. Despite this, it resulted in the series of general uprisings, which the colonial secular and church power in central Mexico did not have to deal with.

After the Jesuits left Mexico in 1767, their land and possessions were placed temporarily in the hands of the government. Then, in 1770 by order

⁶ The era of Porfirio Díaz's government from 1876-1911.

of the Spanish king, Marquis Croix issued a regulation that ruled to sell all the haciendas where the Jesuits had lived. The only exceptions were the ones belonging to Californian missions.⁷ After 1775, based on a decree, Indians were granted the right to own mission lands that they had lived on or been previously using. However, it was only in the second half of the 19th century, under the rule of Benito Juárez and after lengthy surveying, that Indian ownership of this dispossessed land was confirmed. Despite the fact that very little land was assigned to the Indians, the Rarámuri (e.g., those from Samachique in the central Tarahumara and its surroundings) remember Juárez' reforms as the period of hope, even if it was not ultimately fulfilled, since B. Juárez passed a constitution that liquidated collective landownership.

Despite the royal decree, indigenous communities continued to lose larger parts of their land until the end of the colonial era. Nevertheless, many villages (approximately 4,000) in central Mexico were able to survive to the year 1810. The situation concerning the land ownership of indigenous communities continued to worsen even after the Declaration of Mexican Independence. Moreover, polarization between private ownership of the land and the rural (especially indigenous) inhabitants increased as the governments of individual states started to issue colonization laws to sell off the land of abandoned communities. One of the first states to do so was the "Rarámuri" Chihuahua where a direct rule to parcel the indigenous land was issued in 1833.⁸ Disposal of indigenous plots was thus one of the political goals of liberal Mexican governments as they viewed them as a deterrents to market relations. In a circular from the December 12, 1856, Secretary of the Treasury Miguel Lerdo de Tejada explicitly explains the reasons why the indigenous community land should disappear. Based on one of Lerdo's laws (*La Ley Lerdo*) from 1857, article 27, the old colonial ejido plots (ejidos) were considered to be anachronistic and, together with rural estates of church corporations, were included in so-called *assigned estates* (*bienes adjudicables*), which were in fact transferred to the hands of the new latifundists.

The continually worsening situation of indigenous communities reached its peak in the second half of the 19th century under the rule of the dictator Porfirio Díaz, whose goal was to liquidate communal ownership completely. The

⁷ The script is situated in the Archivo Histórico Municipal de Chihuahua, collection *Colonial*, series Gobierno, carton 36, document 5 (cf. Meza Flores 2001: 25).

⁸ Similar laws were passed in the years 1825-1857 in Jalisco, in 1828 Puebla and the west-Mexican states followed, in 1830 México and in 1833 Zacatecas, etc. (cf. Bartra 1974: 111).

Yaqui of Sonora and part of the Yucatan Mayas unsuccessfully revolted against him. At the beginning of the 20th century, several hundred of the Yaqui were relocated to sisal plantations in Yucatán within the politics of the so-called *swallow migration*⁹ (the transportation of indigenous families and whole villages, similar to Stalin's later politics of relocation), where they almost died out. Only 2,000 individuals escaped to the USA, and others scattered in Sonora (cf. Spicer 1945: 274). People from other native Mexican groups were killed and their land was violently taken. According to some estimations, up to 90% of native communities in the area of Mesa Central lost their land at the beginning of the 20th century (cf. Bartra 1974: 112-113). In 1888 Díaz' government concluded a treaty regarding the exchange of plots with the Limantour brothers, who owned land in Lower California then belonging to the government, while the latifundists received a vast pasture area in Chihuahua, also located in the territory of the old Rarámuri ejidos, Arisiachi and Pichachi. The Limantours were unable to take over the pastures as there was a large uprising in Tomochi which affected post-Díaz governments and their respect of Rarámuri rights to land (cf. Meza Flores 2001: 32).

The first person to introduce the term *ejido* in the new context of agrarian reform was one of the leaders of the Mexican Revolution, Emiliano Zapata, who came with the request for people's ejidos in 1911 (cf. Reyes Osorio, et al. 1974: 434, Krantz 1991: 202). Porfirio Díaz was brought down in 1910 during the first phase of the Mexican Revolution. One of the first steps of the new post-revolution government was to issue a law regarding agrarian reform according to Article 27 of the new Constitution from 1917. Based on this article, the land belonging to private owners started to be nationalized and assigned to poor peasants or landless people in the form of a collective ownership called an ejido. However, this first post-revolution law did not specify the way of organizing possession of the land, or the way production should take place between individual users – *ejidatarios*. It also did not state the maximum area of a plot that a private owner could possess.

The greatest division of agricultural land in Sierra Tarahumara took place between 1920 and 1940 with its dominant form being the creation of a system of ejido. In this period, ejidos were founded more in Upper Tarahumara, while

⁹ Cf. namely Aguirre Beltrán 1992: 35, Aguirre Beltrán, Pozas 1954: 225, who define the swallow-migration as a type of alternative contact whose point is to move the indigenous people to the country estates lying far from their homeland and where they had to acquire new customs, modern ideas and practices with the aim of overcoming their ancient customs.

counties such as Guadalupe y Calvo and Guachochi,¹⁰ in which there are virgin forests, Nonoava, Morelos, Maguarichi, Guazapares and Batopilas were left out of this initial assignment of natural wealth. Chihuahua and Sierra Tarahumara especially profited in the period of Cardenism (during the rule of Lázaro Cárdenas between 1934 and 1940). From the “Tarahumara” counties, Carichi in Upper Tarahumara and Batopilas in Lower Tarahumara got the largest amount of land, which could have been the result of the armed native movement fighting for the land and justice at the end of the twenties (cf. Meza Flores 2001: 33-35, Lartigue 1983: 44). More than 20,000 hectares of agricultural land were divided among 11,000 ejidos¹¹ during Cárdenas’ administration (cf. Krantz 1991: 3) becoming a significant part of agrarian reform that this president aggressively executed and which should have helped to solve the question of Indians. Agrarian reform and establishing ejidos were a distinct demonstration of the new politics of indigenism – which in Cárdenas’ view meant the Mexicanization of the Indians. However, Cárdenas wrongly understood ejido collectivization as a powerful acculturation instrument. He thought that this collectivization and the ejidos’ inherently socialist way of farming would help *desacralize* the land and that this in turn would cause the indigenous ejido members to cut themselves off from their land in a natural way. Cárdenas, just like his predecessors and the majority of his successors, underestimated the strength of the roots with which the indigenous farmers in southern and central Mexico were and still are bound to their land. Therefore, even though the agrarian reform and the installation of the ejido system of control over the intercommunity natural resources were meant to be an instrument of indigenous mexicanization, they instead became an expression of new (or old-new intraethnic) social and cultural identity and resulting in greater biological reproduction of the native population of Mexico.

One of the essential questions we have to ask in connection with the ejido is: What is the place of indigenous ejido ownership in the context of modern capitalist production? R. Bartra 1974: 129-130 summarized characteristic features of Mexican ejidos into the following points: 1. The ejido is a product of the legal process of subsidies (*dotaciones*), on the basis of which the land that was confiscated from hacienda owners or part of it was taken away from the

¹⁰ Guachochi was until the sixties the part of the Batopilas district. After that a separate district came into being.

¹¹ More than one half of all the ejidos registered in the middle of the sixties (cf. Eckstein 1966: 58).

state is assigned to part of the inhabitants. Ejido land was not obtained in the classic capitalist way of purchase. In fact, it was an assigned estate, in many cases it was a re-assigned estate, and this was probably the case in several older communities inside ejido Munerachi. It is assumed that at some point the Jesuits officially “assigned,” for example, portions of forests, maize milpas and other plots to be administered by the inhabitants of Sorichique while *de facto* and perhaps also *de jure* the inhabitants of Sorichique had never lost these lands as nobody had been interested in them. The region of Batilopas was interesting for migrants because of its silver and copper, while agriculture and pasturage has never developed among the mestizos in this region. It was very similar in other home or subsidiary communities (ranches) as the ejido of Munerachi had been fully inhabited in 1930 when it was established. There were new borders established in order to prevent potential disagreements over the cultivated land, forest and submountain areas, but also over the potential ownership of newly found natural resources¹². 2. Using the natural resources of an ejido comes under a great number of prohibitions and restrictions which are connected to this kind of communal ownership. Not everyone can get a subsidy. Only the following community members are liable: those who have lived in the location where they are applying from at least for six months; those who usually work on their own land but do not own greater plots; and those who have been of Mexican nationality since their birth. Another restriction is the limited amount of finances each ejido member may invest into industrial, agricultural or business capital, e.g., the purchase of a simple irrigation mechanism or heavy machinery.¹³ Ejido plots cannot be sold or rented and their inheritance is also treated with special laws. These and other restrictions are the reasons why not all Munerachi Rarámuri are, or want to be, members of the ejido. The situation is similar in other ejido entities. 3. Ejido ownership is administered by a complex of state and para-state institutions, which thrust their own conditions upon ejido members. Each ejido has a firm organization structure, a hierarchic system of ejido authorities that is usually centered in the core of the ejido. It is usually, but not necessarily, the central community. As will be shown

¹² In nearby Cerro Colorado in the territory of ejido Munerachi new copper pockets were detected which provoked disputes among the ejido-members and the members of the Canadian corporation which discovered this copper-field. Discrepancies within the ejido are mostly between “modernists” and “traditionalists.”

¹³ E.g., the Mayo (Yoreme) people in Sonora and Sinaloa which are more like an agrarian-industry society today than only farmers.

later, for example in Munerachi, the ejido village (community) centralization is being relatively weakened by strong ejido peripheries such as Rancheria Sorichique, Cerro Colorado and Mesa Yerba Buena or by other relatively strong and independent communities such as Coyachique. The function of the ejido *seríame* is ruled by an irregular rotation mechanism influenced by such circumstances as current prestige, political influence, and natural authority inside the ejido rather than by a strictly set ejido centralization. However, all activities, and especially economic ones, are usually thoroughly controlled by the extra-ejido institutions. The most important of these institutions is the Department of Agrarian and Colonization Events (Departamento de Asuntos Agrarios y Colonización) but also the banks that grant ejidos loans. The banks situate their branches closer and closer to their customers (up to now there has been no bank opened in the county center of Batopilas and so the closest bank for the Munerachi ejido members is the bank in Guachochi). Until recently, Mexico had been a latently totalitarian regime. In real life, this meant that all ejido members were clients of the only party at power IRP (Institutional Revolutionary Party, PRI = Partido Revolucionario Institucional). Even though IRP lost the election to the federal parliament for the first time in Chihuahua in 1992 and in 2000, a representative of a different party won the presidential election after more than 70 years, Rarámuri from Batopilas, including the Munerachi Rarámuri, were supporters of the IRP candidates even as late as 2001.

As is visible from this short account, from the point of view of political science and sociology, an ejido cannot be simply considered a defined system of communal (collective) ownership. This was not true even in the Aztec power domain or in early colonial Aztec towns. An ejido is a form of organization where different kinds of ownership are mixed together: state (*nationalized*) – as almost all the land was nationalized after The Mexican Revolution and then distributed through the state back to the rural inhabitants who had, in many cases, been working on it for whole centuries (such was the case of some of the Munerachi Rarámuri); *corporative* – ejido plots are assigned to all who pledge to be the members of the ejido; *communal* – consisting of parceling the land to individual village units that are part of the ejido chain; and finally *private* – which is a kind of latent, though more frequently visible, form of intra-ejido ownership as it means the further division of the ejido and village land which is assigned to individuals or families, the members of which have the right to inherit it. These plots are becoming increasingly out of the control of the ejido, and their owners are using them not only for their subsistence

needs, but also for commercial purposes. The ejido is thus being transformed into both hidden and open forms of *small corporationalized private ownership* (*pequeña propiedad privada corporativizada*). Present-day ejido members are thus, despite all the restrictions, approaching another rural socio-economic type – *minifundistic* owners of small ranches and plots whose roots can be found at the beginning of conquista, as these owners were usually Spanish soldiers who had decided to settle in Mexico, marry indigenous women and were assigned smaller plots for their previous merits (cf. Whetten 1953: 118, Bartra 1974: 125).

3. Ethnography of *Ritual Compadrazgo* in Ejido Munerachi

The ejido has a specific structure of organization that is in many cases, including Munerachi, partly overlapping and partly mingling with the native political structure. This structure is partly independent from ejido authorities that were installed from outside. At the beginning, there was an allocation act that allowed several tens of communities to be semi-autonomous (i.e., their land ownership had been based on a principle of narrower communality,¹⁴ but at the same time they had a different (*de jure*) owner – state, private owner, or county). Suddenly, these communities found themselves inside a new, broader entity that could be described as an *inter-community corporative unit*. Ejido Munerachi, the only one in the Batopilas county, is very different from most of the ejidos in Sierra Tarahumara because it does not border with any other ejido. Thus it is an ejido enclave as other ejido entities can be found further in the north of the Batopilas county, particularly in Upper Tarahumara where ejidos were established mostly due to the unification of pastures in order to raise cattle instead of the more traditional growing of maize. Ejido Munerachi (cf. Meza Flores 2001: 88) is thus from all sides (especially in the direction of Urique county, Urique canyon, and in the direction to Batopilas) surrounded by small, independent, mostly Rarámuri ranchería communities based on transhumance which are, in many cases, not autarchic from the point of view of subsistence. Today, these extra-ejido communities are more socially

¹⁴ Before the installation of the post-revolutionary ejido, the people from the Chinivo community cultivated only their “common” land and they used natural resources freely in the neighbourhood of this community. After the installation of ejido, the Chinivo inhabitants were obliged to expand socially and “fuse” with adjacent communities within the frame of the unit within which they were found.

bound to sociological companies or to charity organizations¹⁵ (for which some anthropologists work in Chihuahua) than to nearby ejido (Munerachi) communities from which they were officially separated eighty years ago. The early history of ejido Munerachi is practically unknown. Conversations with several older Rarámuri contacts living on the western border of the ejido (Sorichique) reveal that some communities refused to become members of a unit organized by non-native structures. Other communities were included into the ejido territory from unknown reasons. This led to the breaking or weakening of some social, and especially familial, relations. To some extent, establishing the ejido led to contracting broader Urique-Batopilas sub-region in Lower Tarahumara into smaller endogamized enclaves. Before this, the exchange of wives had taken place on a bigger territory. This endogamous marital exchange is almost absolute on the level of ejido and on the level of some demographically stronger *ranchería* communities (i.e., Coyachique). Because the familial network in the ejido is growing denser, various inter-community and interpersonal antagonisms strengthen the intra-ejido solidarity in relation to extra-ejido Rarámuri communities that are dependent on a more open (“exogamic”) system of reproduction. This system of reproduction is only outwardly exogamic as the number of communities whose members get married is limited. Thus, the exchange is taking place in a relatively limited territory – its axis is part of the Urique River canyon. This “indefinable” microhabitat¹⁶ is not only populated less sparsely,

¹⁵ Probably the best-known and the most effectual social organization, according to our findings, which involves both the Rarámuri and the northern Tepehuan, is the COSYDDHAC (Comisión de Solidaridad y Defensa de Derechos Humanos, A. C.) based in Baborigame.

¹⁶ e.g., a great deal of the territory between Munerachi and the ejidos Guagueyvo, Guaguachique and Samachique is relatively sparsely settled almost exclusively by the semi-Christianized Rarámuri and some mestizos today as well who hide out for various reasons in face of justice. Although the local land *de jure* belongs to the Chihuahua state or to some private dealer, it is *de facto* the no man’s land, a certain vacuum or more precisely (*inter*)-*ethnic extra-marginal intermediary area* as we understand such space which is: 1. *extra-marginal* with the intent that it neglected not only by its legal users but by marginalized ejido’s neighbours as well; 2. *intermediary*, i.e., in principle located in certain “inter-space” from which there is no way out because their inhabitants are enclosed by organized related, political, economic or religious structure of the neighbouring hard-to-permeate ejidos, and 3. finally this intermediate area is minimal *ethnic* or *interethnic* space if mestizos or members of other indigenous groups (in this case, the northern-Tepehuan branch and one Warojío group) live here and where a “minimal ethnic program” take place despite many restrictions and natural disasters: e.g., enculturation conducted by members of family, kinship structure organized on the basis of intercommunity (exogamy) exchange of women which is continuously complicated due to weaker biological reproduction, interpersonal and interlocal economic solidarity during farm operations or more exacting domestic works, etc.

but also its area is much smaller than in ejido Munerachi. Ejido restrictions against these communities, which are located outside their borders, are not primordial but situational and formed by an “artificial” historicity which lead to the fact that natality is much higher in the ejido than it is outside. This is caused especially by the fact that when ejido members and their families fulfill the above mentioned conditions, they get quite high state subsidies meant for subsistence, but today also for non-economic activities, while other communities have to rely in many cases on help from non-governmental organizations, church institutions or irregular state “alms.” Occasionally, they might get help from ejido members whose economic situation is much better.

Another factor contributing to higher natality inside the ejido is a significantly lower infant fatality rate (though this is still not insignificant inside the ejido). Ejido communities can now rely more on Mexican health institutions,¹⁷ while the sick from other communities are taken care of by the native *owirúame*.¹⁸ There used to be many more of them in Sierra Tarahumara than there are now. We found in 2001 that in the nuclear Tarahumara there are only ten active specialized *curanderos* (*healers*).

Another factor that affects or might affect the growth of the population is quite irregular on the community level. It is the improving economic situation of some (very few) ejido families who are not solely dependent on the regular yearly or half-yearly financial distribution from state or financial institutions. More and more Indians have financial means that they put into banks in Creel, Guachochi or Parral or Parral. Some of them even invest the money. However, most of their financial means (obtained legally from selling art objects, working in the woods, mills, and ejido buildings (or obtained illegally by growing marijuana) are used to improve their homes (traditional buildings from adobe with

¹⁷ The doctor and the nurse from the clinic of Batopilas to Munerachi periodically (every month) perform regular preventive medical examinations. They perform tests for malaria as a reaction to the death of six Rarámuri children in 1996 which we registered during our second research stay in the ejido within which the last “professional” *owirúame* ancient Luciano died in 2000. One problem of these preventive medical visits is the fact that they take place almost exclusively in the ejido centre in Munerachi where the people must have to go from a distance of 20 and more kilometres. This means practically that health barriers are imposed as for health in the ejido territory. As a reaction to this manifestation of the ejido “*kanirema centralization*” (*kanirema* is an abstract expression characterizing the healthy or physically satisfied person) the recurring tendencies appear in some communities aimed at a resuscitation of dying out existence of the community or the regional native healers (*curanderos*).

¹⁸ In reference to the healing practices cf., e.g., Merrill 1992: 179-219, Cardenal Fernández 1993, Anzures y Bolaños 1983, etc.

thatched roofs covered by leaves of the *sotole* palm¹⁹ tree are being replaced by brick houses with roofs from corrugated iron, etc.). An economically well-situated family can support more children and can send them to high school for Rarámuri in Guachochi or Torreón in Coahuila or to other towns (in Munerachi there are only two levels of primary school, so called *escuela primaria* and *secundaria*; the closest high school is in Batopilas, but for unknown reasons Rarámuri rarely send their children there).

Finally, the last observable factor to why natality is high in the ejido is the strengthening of the natural, and more or less unconscious, defense mechanism against the surrounding mestizo substrate. A strong ejido, which acts as a single, coherent social body, can better defend against the varied attacks from the outside. We have to realize that there are one fifth of potential voters in an ejido. These potential voters are mobilized before each election through campaigns organized by the candidates for local authority or higher political institutions (county, Chihuahua or federal parliament in Ciudad de México, etc.). These pre-election trips to the Tarahumara do not take the form of typical meetings in town squares, sport halls or cultural centers as the ejido either does not have these places or uses them for their own intra-ejido and intra-community activities. The strategy of these meetings is noteworthy as it is always a one-sided act from the side of the politicians. While a Czech elector in Prague has to put approximately the same effort in meeting the politician at the appointed place as the politician (if they want to meet, they both have to leave their homes or the seat of the party and come to the appointed place), the Rarámuri almost always stay in one place. They are practically almost completely passive, and their otherwise high mobility approaches zero. It is the Mexican politicians who are forced and obliged to show the effort. They have to undergo a number of one-day long marches in extreme climate conditions²⁰ in order to contract an uncertain alliance with the ejido and community

¹⁹ This palm has got similar leaves as the yucca.

²⁰ As early as June 2001 a delegation of about a 10 electoral candidates from the IRP to the Batopilas municipal council (plus the people who accompanied them) visited the central ejido community Munerachi. Their route proceeded so that they went eleven kilometres by car to the ejido settlement and the centre of one of the Batopilas sections Cerro Colorado. There they left the car and after short stop the majority continued to Munerachi up to river six kilometres by foot, some on the horse. They stayed in Munerachi some few hours and they got back in the afternoon by the same way to Cerro Colorado and in the evening they were in Batopilas again (total distance Batopilas-Munerachi-Batopilas is approximately 35 km, which takes about 6-12 hours by foot or 4-8 hours back and forth in the case of the motorized moving to Cerro Colorado).

authorities or with the individual native electors. These meetings are not accidental. They are carefully planned around a specific agreement between the ejido president or his representatives and the assistants of the political candidate. Even these verbal contracts usually take place on ejido land despite the fact that many meetings take place outside it – most frequently in Batopilas. What do these preliminary meetings consist of, why do they not take place in the county center and why are they still being organized when native representatives can persuade their subordinates themselves? These preliminary agreements are rather formal as they repeat regularly, but they are important because a date for visiting the relevant community has to be set. This matter cannot be underestimated even if the politician's assistant has to undergo a long journey pointlessly or have a conversation of only a few minutes and then return back. Rarámuri in ejido stay calm. They do not request an audience²¹ and they are aware of this advantage. In most cases, these “bilateral”²² dialogues take place. They are quite dignified and there is always a small *tesgüino* present (social life of all Rarámuri subgroups is connected with it). The ceremony of drinking *tesgüino* is one of the reasons why these meetings do not take place in Batopilas as the law enforcement would not have to like it. Drinking *tesgüino* often ends with bloody fights. If these take place out of sight of the relevant authorities, they are quietly tolerated.²³ This seemingly unimportant act is significant for two reasons: 1. it is the effort of the representatives of the “traditional” ruling party (IRP) to renew and strengthen the “permanent,” unwritten bilateral agreement. IRP members have never lost the mandate of *alcalde mayor* (mayor of town) or *presidente municipal* (county chairman). In Chihuahua and now in other states and on the federal level, IRP has lost these positions. Hence, they are now trying to keep the influence in those places where their position has always been very strong, which is also the case of

²¹ In the majority of other cases, Rarámuri – e.g., in inter-electoral term, on the contrary, must pursue and visit the political authorities in Batopilas, Guachochi, Parral, Creel, Chihuahua and, exceptionally, as far as Ciudad de México – e.g., when they apply for an increment of the allowance of *nixtamal* (pinole), bags of beans, or for the financial support, tec.

²² In fact, it is not necessarily concerned only with a two-sided act, that means that from every side several people may participate in the dialogues more persons but this number is generally well-balanced.

²³ If a major event occurs such as a homicide, murder or serious injury with the persistent effects, the ejido president is obliged to inform the representative of the Chihuahua government who detained the delinquent and they commit him to the Mexican justice. Before the foundation of ejidos all the criminal acts which took place in the territory of the native community were solved by the native political authorities.

Batopilas. This county, as it was said in the part concerning the demographic development of the region, is not populated very densely (approximately 2 – 2.5 inhabitants/km² compared to the average of 6-7 inhabitants/km² for the whole Sierra Tarahumara area) but its strategic position (Batopilas borders with the rich and agriculturally and industrially developed Sinaloa, it is close to the California Bay and to important Pacific ports), control over the woods (especially pine) and water resources make it more important than other demographically stronger counties. It could be said that, to some extent, those who have political power in Batopilas can control huge natural resources including poorly accessible marijuana (*chutama*)²⁴ fields that are the source of high (though illegal) revenues with little effort by local politicians and Indians. In this phase, politicians want to make sure that they have support from the ejido for a longer period. If they missed these short meetings, their growing political competition might use the opportunity to come to the ejido, i.e., members of a different party²⁵ who are attempting to break the “eternal” monopoly would come to talk to potential electors. According to the information obtained from older Munerachi men, political alliances between ejido Munerachi and the Batopi-

²⁴ *Chutama* = the regional name of marijuana. The young Rarámuri *chutamero* works one week which is sufficient for such a salary to sustain him three months. Thus the cultivation of marijuana reinforces in Mexico the forceful phenomenon of idleness (*la cultura del ocio*) – cf. Hurtado 2001. This fact is undoubtedly one of the reasons why Batopilas does not depopulate more. The young people with the vision of an easy allowance stay and risk being caught and imprisoned one day. On the other hand, the tours of inspection from the Chihuahua force, the regular Mexican army serving in the Batopilas region, presumably safeguards interests of the absolute minority of the local population who come to their economic resources legally. *Chutama* can be the rubber from the red weed from which heroin is produced (cf. Cajas Castro 1992: 24). These fields generally are in the possession of the Rarámuri allied to the local politicians. These Rarámuri people mostly belong to a pagan subgroup (e.g., from Cuervo). These politicians have been dealing with illegal cultivation of marijuana throughout Mexico until today and they share the yields with them. According to our informations there is no marijuana field in the territory of ejido Munerachi, nevertheless the absolute majority of ejido people reputedly have their “extra-ejido” milpas or at least they are the go-betweens among the makers and the drug dealers in the central Chihuahua from where the goods are transported farther north to the United States. The drug pushers of marijuana make use of, e.g., the royal road (*camino real*) leading through Coyachique, Rekomachi, around Kirare, Samachique and farther to the Upper Tarahumara.

²⁵ In the Batopilas region it is the Democratic Revolution Party (DRP) (Partido de la Revolución Democrática, PRD) founded not until 1989 but belonging to the three most influential Mexican parties (in addition to the IRP yet another, the National Action Party = Partido Acción Nacional, NAP/PAN from which the former Mexican president Vicente Fox Quesada rose). At the time of our stay the candidate of the NAP for chief magistrate tried get in the ejido Munerachi but he succeeded in persuading only those members of the ejido who have special social status such as the Munerachi teacher Ángel.

las branch of IRP²⁶ have existed since the establishment of ejidos. However, its roots might reach even further into history as many IRP representatives are the descendants of the insolvent Batopilas aristocracy that had come into existence during the last gold rush in the second half of the 19th century or even earlier.²⁷ 2. This prelude to a big performance (as the encounter of two different worlds is) is full of dramatic elements and has one more aspect. While the first one is on the political level, this one is more social. There is a face-to-face meeting where the ejido president meets the political candidate or his assistant and thus a certain intra-ejido advantage of the community where the negotiator comes from is strengthened or newly gained (apart from the ejido president it can be the president of the Cerro Colorado section, if he is a Rarámuri; sometimes it can also be the headmaster of one of the local schools or his deputy;²⁸ it can also be *siríame* position is in many aspects superordinate to the position of the ejido president,²⁹ or it can be someone he appoints). If we know which ejido community the negotiator of the date and the place of the pre-election meeting is from, or if we know which communities he is allied with,³⁰ we can quite easily estimate who in the ejido will be in a certain economic advantage in the relevant term of office. It is not accidental that the negotiators take turns before each municipal election which are very significant for the every-day life

²⁶ During its existence, the IRP changed its name twice. Between 1929 and 1938 it was called the Revolution National Party (Partido Nacional Revolucionario = PNR), between 1938 and 1946 the Mexican Revolution Party (Partido de la Revolución Mexicana = PRM) and since 1946 the Institutional Revolution Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional = PRI). The political orientation of this party is social democratic up to centric but actually it is broader.

²⁷ The roots of the present powerful Batopilas families probably date back to the late phase of the colonial era, e.g., kindred families of Bustillos, Monjarréz and some others with their offspring descended from older Rarámuri families in Coyachique, etc., and are up to the present relatively forceful and visible.

²⁸ The so-called *biniríame* or the Hispanized term *méstro*, i.e., the teacher or in this case the director (“chief-teacher”). The Rarámuri teachers have a special place within the ejido, community and generally among the Rarámuri people. It is often the specific social and intraethnic level which distinctively distinguishes them from the “ordinary” Rarámuri.

²⁹ Sometimes the function of the ejido president and the *siríame* can be double and if he is simultaneously section-chief even triple. But the Munerachi Rarámuri try to avoid this cumulation of functions because they are aware that such a president-chief magistrate-section-chief has at his hands relatively great political and economic power.

³⁰ In respect to the kinship system of the Munerachi Rarámuri there prevails at the level of the ejido the *matrilocal postmarital residence* (e.g., the Rarámuri men from the Munerachi community most often try to find women from Mesa Yerba Buena, communities which arose by separation from the original Munerachi village unit). At the level of the larger communities –e.g. Coyachique– the matrilocality there is not as intensive and young marrieds can quickly disaffiliate and found a new nuclear household (*neolocality*), etc

of the ejido.³¹ Here we can see an effort to keep a certain political and social balance inside the ejido which is probably influenced by the proclaimed social-democratic orientation of the IRP who this way affect, and to some extent weaken, the inner political interests of the individual ejido members. In spite of this, in order to remain loyal to Bartra, who claims that these communities are inseparably connected with the world's rural proletariat, social differences inside ejido Munerachi are increasingly more visible. We can observe traces of dominance of one community over another or one community unit (it does not necessarily have to be one family; two or more families can be connected) within such a community. These already existing social differences are clearly visible at such events as the pre-election meetings of ejido Indians and specific (IRP) mestizo political representation.

On Sunday, May 27, 2001, one of the biggest, preplanned meetings took place in the main ejido community in Munerachi.³² One day before that, we were told by one of the local teachers that a delegation lead by Emilio Bustillos Monjarréz, an IRP candidate to the Batopilas council, would come. The only purpose of their visit was to bring several bottles of tequila to the ejido leaders as a bribe. However, we have to view this apparent purpose in the context of social interactions as a part of a complex process based on specific interpersonal relationships. This process will be explained later. The chronology of the event and its characterization could be described as follows:

Saturday evening (May 26) about 20:00-23:00: there is a pre-visit tequila fiesta (“tequilinada”)³³ in the house of the organizer, Munerachi “owirúame”³⁴

³¹ Also elections to the local authorities have a certain significance even though not so great. This local authority resides under the Rarámuri group in the semi-Rarámuri village Guachochi where indigenous representatives from the different ejidos and theoretically also those who are living in the ranch communities outside of ejido can run as candidates directly. This is not in practice realized since Rarámuri living in the traditional communities, including of course the ejido village units as well, are not interested in active political life and, mainly, they are unable to orientate themselves in the political situation. The *mestizo-Rarámuri*, as we could correctly identify many Indians of Guachochi struggled successfully and for some political positions in 2001 and even one of them first (?) ran as a candidate for the Federal Council but to our knowledge without avail at that time.

³² As we wrote, canvasses of the IRP candidates were much more numerous in May and June in 2001 but we had the chance to participate only in this one which took place immediately at our base in Munerachi.

³³ We introduce this term as an expression of the acculturation “competition” of the pre-Hispanic *tesgüinada*.

³⁴ As noted previously all the ejido Munerachi does not have any native healer (*curandero*) now. The ejido authorities elected the ejido “doctor” with the support of Jesuits Alejandro García Cubesare which by this reinforced his intra-ejido position.

Alejandro García Cubesare. There are adult members of his family, some Rarámuri men who are related to him, very few women, and violin pascola music. The host organizes everything. He is the one who allots tequila to individual participants. There is a lively discussion in which the coming visit of the Batopilas politicians is being discussed;

Sunday (May 27) about 7:00-8:00: cleaning of the space in front of Alejandro's house, space in front of the school, church and dormitory;

8:00-8:30/9:00: first tens of Rarámuri men, young men and their female companions arrive at Alejandro's house. They start to drink the essential *suwí* (tesgüino);

8:30-9:00/9:30: more Rarámuri who have "friendly" relationships with Alejandro and other Munerachi inhabitants come to his house. They are mostly from Ranchería Sorichique, Chinivo, Santa Rita³⁵ and Repuchinare. Soon, there are about 50-60 Rarámuri men, women, children including infants in a 20-30 meter semicircle around Alejandro's house. Everyone tries to find a shady place as the temperature in the sun already reaches 40° C in the morning. They also want a place from which they will be able to see the "main event" – the dialogue between the candidate for the mayor and organizer Alejandro;

9:30-10:00: smaller groups of men are being formed. Young boys are rubbernecking around them and trying to find out what the men are talking about. A little further, women gather. Almost every one of them has at least one infant with her. Older women, who have no children with them, are preparing *suwí* in the shade of a smaller estate and they sample it quite often. It is visible that the men, who are the core of the negotiators, are a little bit tense even though the result of the meeting can be anticipated beforehand;

10:00-10:15: a Rarámuri man announces the arrival of the Batopilas delegation. They are coming across the bridge over the River Munerachi and they are slowly walking up the right bank towards the building³⁶ of the estate belonging to Alejandro García Cubesare. At about ten, people start to arrive.

³⁵ At the time of our stay, Santa Rita belonged to the prominent communities within the ejido mainly because the ejido siríame and the section-chief descended from this submontane mesa while five years ago it was, in light of the intra-ejido influence, a rather marginal village. Santa Rita, which lies about 4–5 km from Munerachi and some 500-600 meters higher in the direction of Mesa Quimova, belongs to those ejido communities which the IRP rival candidates "must" separately visit during their canvassing on the basis of an agreement with another negotiator.

³⁶ Alejandro has a small grange (grain storage) beside his farmhouse. He also has a small corral for a herd of goats.

Nine of them walked from Cerro Colorado, including the candidate himself and the section secretary, one of them is riding a horse.

10:15-10:30/11:00: Alejandro and his company greet all the members of the delegation with a gentle handshake³⁷ and he speaks a few introductory words in Spanish. Most of the people are standing further away and waiting to see what is going to happen next. This is the phase of stillness when everybody stands and almost nobody speaks. Perhaps it is due to weariness and rest after the difficult journey from Cerro Colorado. However, it also has the effect of some kind of social acclimatization, which is important for both sides.

11:00-11:30: first toasts of *suwí* follow after the short “acclimatization break.” Rarámuri housewives, who are responsible for the “refreshments” at the meeting, start to bring out pumpkin containers³⁸ that are typical for drinking *tesguino*. They give these containers to their husbands who distribute them to their guests.³⁹ At this moment, I slowly move towards Alejandro’s house so I can watch the event that should reach its peak in a moment. More toasts between the members of the delegation and main organizers follow.

11:30-12:00: after about thirty minutes, the mood is more relaxed, first on the “stage” then also in the “audience” created by the Rarámuri. My estimate is that, at one point around noon, there are about 60-70 adults or young Rarámuri in both of these spaces, most of whom are men. In total, there are about 80 people. No other people come which means that, from Munerachi itself, there are not even a half of its adult population and adolescents (about 25 people). Other people come from close communities that are a part of the similar social network. Participants in the dialogues almost always stand, as if they were in a hurry or on guard (candidates’ bodyguards are always in the delegation).⁴⁰

12:00-12:30: the atmosphere in the “audience” is becoming more and more relaxed and spirited. Most of the audience has not even approached

³⁷ When Rarámuri meet, they very strictly adhere to the custom of gently touching each other’s fingers and palms rather than shaking hands. That manner of greeting has a symbolic character. If somebody shakes hands he expresses certain violent intentions whereas a mild touch often only of fingers, not the whole palm, expresses quiet and non-violence. During a moment of drunkenness this custom is not adhered to so strictly.

³⁸ The capacity of this vessel is normally 0. 2 – 0. 5 liters whereas they try to lend “novices” like me much smaller vessels.

³⁹ Traditionalist Rarámuri women never directly hand out the vessel with the *suwí* on the *chabochi* but always pass it to a Rarámuri man. We noticed this habit during our first stay in Mesa Yerba Buena in 1992.

⁴⁰ The cases of fist fights between Rarámuri and *chabochi* are relatively common without reference to their political connection.

“the stage.” “The event” is more and more static and boring – it consists of slow drinking. The audience drinks much more. The event is approaching its climax – giving the present of the case of tequila and smaller supplies of *nixtamal*⁴¹ in case of drought. Before 12:30 I move closer to the “stage” as I want to observe the actors from both sides but, on the other hand, I do not want to miss what is happening behind me and in the “backstage.”⁴²

12:30-13:00: the main “show” has finished. Short debates in small groups take place. Rarámuri guests, who drink a lot and fast, are in most cases drunk. Only now I am noticed by some of the members of Batopilas agitation group. Mostly they just greet me by nodding their heads and, other than that, I have a longer (about 15 minutes) conversation with the candidate for mayor Bustillos Monjarréz⁴³ who has, apart from the teacher Ángel, become my main contact in this part of the ethnographic research. Because of this short meeting, I have broadened my horizon of knowledge about the situation in the ejido, and especially the relations between ejido and mestizo county structures.

13:00-13:15/13:30: the whole event seems quite chaotic and uncoordinated even though all the dialogues have taken place in a friendly spirit. At about quarter past one, the first delegates walk down to the school and, after that, the rest of the delegation leaves. They leave Munerachi very slowly, unobtrusively, almost unnoticed and without the company of their hosts who stayed in place and continue in negotiations. In the end, the delegation did not even go for the lunch that they had arranged in Cerro Colorado. After the Batopilas mestizos leave, both groups (main actors and onlookers) start to mingle and talk together. They keep drinking *suwí*. The space between the school and the church is quiet. It is Sunday and only those dormitory children who

⁴¹ The *nixtamal* (the Nahuatl word is a compound of *nextli* “ashes” and *tamalli* unformed corn dough, “tamal”) is a corn-flour which is made from dry broken maize kernels soaking and boiled in an alkali solution, generally in limewater when the outer coat is separated from the kernel. The process of nixtamalization has been known in Mesoamerica since as early as the pre-formative period. For example, the people from the southern-Guatemalan Pacific coast knew it between 1500–1200 B.C. It spread from here all over Mesoamerica and abroad. The contemporary Rarámuri are more and more dependent on industrial nixtamal because their reserves of corn are decreasing.

⁴² We understand as “backstage” such a covered space where the majority of “viewers” and “actors” stood. In this case it was small porch in front of Alejandro’s house entrance. Here a short but decisive scene proceeded which confirmed the contrasting act between one of Alejandro’s men on one hand and Bustillos’ assistant on other hand.

⁴³ In the end, he became a Batopilas mayor in June 2001. He had earlier carried out this function from 1989 till 1992 and from 1995 till 1998. He intends to be put up as candidate for the fourth time this year, when the mandate of his successor ends.

live in distant communities and stay in Munerachi for weekends (Guimayvo, Gavilana) are getting ready for lunch.

13:30-16:00: there are still some local people and guests in Alejandro's house. They stay until there are *tesgüino* supplies that have been prepared especially for this purpose. I take advantage of this calm atmosphere and I have a conversation with a 22-year-old Rarámuri young man from Santa Rita, Lázaro Villegas Quimare, who, because of matrilineal residence, married into the small *ranchería* community, Papatate. It was the only community that was willing to accept him after he had killed his friend during a wild *omáwari suwí*⁴⁴ in Huisuchi four years before. Conversation with the young Rarámuri "murderer" ended my observation of this seemingly purely political pre-election event. At about 16:00 *omáwari* definitely ends as *sekori*⁴⁵ is probably completely finished by now. Even the last family groups head towards their homes. After 16:00, life in the community returns to normal.

This relatively short section of the every-day life of the Munerachi Rarámuri and gradual uncovering and analysis of its hidden meaning clarify the functioning of the ejido and extra-ejido social network. It has been said that a visible feature of such meetings is their political aspect: candidates for important political positions in the local council come to the "chosen" community to meet their "traditional" electors. In this sense, the meaning of the meeting is the same or very similar to a pre-election meeting taking place in any democratic country.⁴⁶ However, there is a great difference. Batopilas candidates did not come to pledge publicly what they want to change in the ejido and in the county. They did not explain how they want to improve the living conditions of many Rarámuri families living in poverty below the subsistence level and they did not assemble the majority of the ejido inhabitants and introduce their program. Nevertheless, they came to Munerachi and they will continue to appear there. A purpose is hidden behind this seemingly nonsensical or useless act, however. It is essential to see the strengthening of *fictive inter-ethnic relational bonds* between the mestizo and Rarámuri behind these regularly repeated

⁴⁴ *Omáwari suwí*, i.e., the *tesgüino* feast.

⁴⁵ *Sekori* is big crock in which the Rarámuri women leave *suwí* to ferment some days or weeks.

⁴⁶ There has been relatively too little emphasis on the fact that Mexico appeared outwardly to be a democratic state, but, in fact, the Mexican revolution introduced absolute rule (IRP) which disintegrated only in the nineties. The well-known Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa, after he had made the acquaintance of Mexican reality, stated in 1990 that the Mexican regime was "a perfect dictatorship" ("una dictadura perfecta").

journeys of Batopilas IRP members. In Latin America, this is a deeply rooted institution of *ritual (ceremonial, fictive) kinship (compadrazgo ritual, ritual co-parenthood, compadrinazgo, patronazgo, double baptism, etc.)*.

4. The Concept of *Ritual Compadrazgo*

North American social anthropologists have been developing this concept since the beginning of the nineteen fifties (cf. Mintz, Wolf 1950, Foster 1953) and sixties (cf. Foster 1961, 1969, van den Berghe, Colby 1961, Colby, van den Berghe 1961, van den Berghe, van den Berghe 1966, Deshon 1963, Ingham 1970, Gudeman 1971, Ravicz 1975², Middleton 1975, Keesing 1975, etc.). This issue was developed in connection with Rarámuri only recently, for example, Slaney 1997 or Levi 1999. Despite the relatively large amount of anthropological studies based on empiric research, G. Foster pointed out that there still is a lack of theoretical works that would analyze various forms of fictive kinship (cf. Middleton 1975: 461).

This specific type of social culture has its roots even in pre-colonial Mesoamerica: in Mayan villages in Yucatán its traces were discovered by Robert Redfield and Alfonso Villa Rojas (1934). Jacques Soustelle (1935) discovered the traces in Otomí. However, the oldest evidence of ritual kinship probably comes from the first missionaries, Franciscan Diego de Landa from the Yucatán area, Bernardino de Sahagún from Aztec environment, and an author and one of the early Jesuit missionaries in north Mexico areas in the first half of the 17th century Andrés Pérez de Ribas (1645);⁴⁷ Ralph Beals (1934) noticed this while reconstructing the pre-Spanish cultural features of the Cahita of Sonora – cf. Ravicz 1975²: 238.⁴⁸

It seems that one of the oldest and best-described institutions of fictive kinship in Mexico is Yucatán *hetzmek*,⁴⁹ beginning in the pre-Spanish period.

⁴⁷ His best-known publication is the monument *Historia de los triunfos de nuestra santa fe entre la gente más bárbaras y fieras del nuevo orbe: conseguidos por los soldados de la milicia de la Compañía de Jesús en las misiones de la Nueva España*. México, D. F.: Siglo XIX, firstly published in 1645 which is the first compact colonial “ethnography” of northern Mexico, above all, the Sonora ethnic groups (Yaqui, Mayo, etc.).

⁴⁸ The first anthropological reference at all about *compadrazgo*, at least from the point of the Mexican milieu, derives from the classic of anthropology, E. B. Tylor, who refers to it in one of his older works *Anahuac: or Mexico and the Mexicans, ancient and modern*. London: Longmans, Green, Reader & Dyer, 1861: 250-251 (cf. Gudeman 1971: 45).

⁴⁹ *Hetzmek* is the compound of two words: *jet*'s = “facilitate, alleviate.” and *mek* = “embrace.”

Its original purpose was to create a ritual alliance between two unrelated couples. This institution got a more syncretic dimension immediately after the arrival of Spanish clergymen as it was transformed into a new socio-religious structure. Native forms of ritual kinship gained a new dimension connected to Christianity; more specifically, with the act of baptism which was done at the age of three months (girls) or four months (boys). At this occasion “new parents” – godparents (*padrinos*) are chosen for the baby. Since the moment of baptism, a new permanent fictive (ritual) relationship is created. Its primary purpose is to give the child physical and mental skills and useful advice for the future. Mostly a married couple becomes godparents of the child. However, it is very common now that in *compadrazgo*,⁵⁰ the man is a godfather (*padrino*) of a boy (*ahijado*), and a woman is a godmother (*madrina*) of a girl (*ahijada*).

The *compadrazgo* has their roots in the southern European (Spanish, Portuguese, Italian or south Slavonic) social system but they were also well-known in medieval and modern Czech state and other countries in central Europe. Spanish clergymen first introduced it in the countries of Latin America in the early colonial era. It helped them penetrate the native social organization of various groups. Gradually, a dual social or socio-religious structure was created as the clergymen tolerated the original institution of ritual kinship. Apart from the Yucatán Mayas, this dual occurred strongly in the Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Otomi, Zapotec or Tarascans, societies (i.e., in larger Mexican indigenous groups). During the 16th and 17th century, it was spread among all the groups (Lacandons are probably the only exception) and it became an inseparable part of the process of Catholicization.

5. Rarámuri and *Ritual Compadrazgo*

Ritual compadrazgo was most likely brought to the Tarahumara in the sixteenth-eighties. Joseph Neumann and Juan Maria Ratkaj were two of the initiators.

which expresses symbolically the sense of this initiatory transitional ritual which takes place to this day in some Mayan communities in Yucatán: to introduce the children to a new period of life and to prepare them to be good workers. Furthermore, during this ritual, they stand up with someone's aid and then they symbolically stretch out their legs again.. This will help them later to be good walkers, quick runners and not knock their knees (cf. Peón Arce 2000: 54-77, Redfield, Villa Rojas 1934: 189).

⁵⁰ Some authors introduce in place of this more known Spanish term *compadrinazgo* which they consider as more concise (cf. Ravicz 1975²: 238), evidently with the intent that it insists more on the rituality and the non-consanguineous (fictitious) affinity which the expressions the *padrino* and the *madrina* (pl. *compadrinos*) describe better.

Even though we do not have direct testimony, it can be said that Batopilas Rarámuri were introduced to *compadrazgo* only during the 18th century. It was probably only after the town was founded in 1708. We know that in 1740, after there was a great fire, the church was built (cf. Pareja 1883: 30). At that time, the town had been more or less consolidated and it flourished due to its silver resources. It is known from various indications that the local Jesuits were greatly honored. This enables us to state that even in this first phase of the existence of Batopilas, there were ritual bonds between the families of Spanish colonizers and families of Rarámuri *pagótame*⁵¹ established from the initiative of the Jesuit clergymen just as it had been happening in the Upper Tarahumara. As far as northwestern ethnic groups are concerned, this institution is very strong even now especially among the Yaqui.

This issue in connection with the Rarámuri has been researched especially by Frances Slaney who studied the question of *double baptism* in the Panalachi region in the eastern part of the current Rarámuri habitat. This Canadian social anthropologist noted that, in some places, Panalachi Rarámuri still observe the pre-Christian habit of *fire baptism* as part of the complex life cycle connected mostly with agriculture. This ritual has its sequence and is conducted by a specialist in agrarian cults. In colonial times, this ritual was prohibited by the Jesuit clergymen who considered it to be the instrument of “devil’s threats.” In the 17th century, apart from this original cult feature, the “classic” form of baptizing by holy water (*water baptism* or *pagó*⁵² in Rarámuri) was also spread. It failed to disappear even after the Jesuits had left. Spicer 1997: 505 mentions that during the 19th century, when there were almost no clergymen, the native rituals became independent again. However, even he admits that the Catholic ritual of baptism had spread its roots among the descendants of the baptized Rarámuri and has survived until now. Unlike Slaney, current Jesuit missionary Pedro de Velasco Rivero, who focused on ethnography of dance, religious (syncretic and native) rituals in the region of the Upper Tarahumara, questions the occurrence of any rituals symbolizing baptism, cleansing, etc. that are con-

⁵¹ A specialized study that would examine ethnographically or theoretically some forms of the *compadrazgo* among the Batopilas mestizos and the Munerachi Rarámuri, as far as we know, is not yet known. Our conclusions are based here above all from our ethnographic investigation in May and June 2001 whereas we appreciate that we could have realized only some manifestations of this social organization.

⁵² In Rarámuri *pagó* means above all “wash,” “wash up,” “purify,” e.g., some subject with water. This term began metaphorically to be used after the introduction of baptism with the meaning of “to baptize” as well.

nected to water despite their great importance for agriculture: “...no poseía un simbolismo vivificante sino que más bien se le temía – y se le teme aun hoy día – como una fuerza destructora y mortífera.”⁵³ Also for this reason, introducing water baptism among Rarámuri was not automatic (cf. Velasco Rivero, S. J. 1987: 74).⁵⁴ As the first missionaries and some ethnographers in the 20th century recorded, reasons for fear of water can be found in ecological and climate differences between these two main ecosystems (plateau of Upper Tarahumara and hot valleys of Lower Tarahumara⁵⁵). In general, there is more rain in the mountain areas which causes more frequent floods followed by landslides and erosion. Once fertile pluvial mountain valleys often change into silt that destroys crops. It could be said that because of this, people migrate to towns. Earlier, when urban migration was not possible, the upper Tarahumara had probably moved to neighboring mountain valleys where they had to face a similar fate later. Not water itself but its unwanted abundance in the certain phase of the yearly cycle made these Rarámuri worried about their future at least twice a year. Thus, the Rarámuri had developed a continuous fear of this climatic balance between the subterranean and terrestrial, which had probably started long before they moved to their colonial and current habitat. This fear is still deeply rooted in the “upper” subgroups. On the other hand, rain is quite rare in the lowlands and valleys of the Lower Tarahumara. It is a substance which is valued by all the communities. Batopilas Rarámuri who live in the lowlands also fear the ecologic balance but for exactly opposite reasons. They fear that the rain might not come at all. Hence, if the inhabitants of, e.g., ejido Munerachi are scared, they are scared by the lack of water, not water itself. There is a stream called Munerachi which runs through the community of Munerachi. It does not dry up in the dry season and, due to its clean water, the inhabitants use it for recreational purposes, fishing, diving, etc. Munerachi people are definitely not scared by water. However, those members of the

⁵³ “... it wasn’t any life-giving symbol, rather they were afraid of it – and even today they are – because of its destructive and mortal force.”

⁵⁴ According to Velasco Rivero, S. J. the old (colonial) indications that talked of the use of water for this purpose do not exist. It is rather on the contrary: we have many data about how water, according to the Rarámuri imaginings, harms and has negative magic power, which T. de Tardá y Guadalajara noted as early as in the late seventeenth century, or venomous snakes based on the legends live in it, which the ethnographers Bennett and Zingg noted in the Samachique area, etc. (cf. Velasco Rivero, S. J. 1987: 426).

⁵⁵ It is impossible to make the equation “altiplano = Upper Tarahumara,” “valleys and canyons = Lower Tarahumara” because the altiplano area overlaps its territory and on the other hand we find many canyons in the territory of the Upper Tarahumara.

ejido who live in alpine mesas and rarely come to the valley (e.g., people from La Gavilana, Mesa Quimova, Sorichique) share the same fears as people from the alpine mountain nikas in the Upper Tarahumara. Differences in the perception of the water element have religious consequences: in the Panalachi area, Carichi, Bocoyna, Creel and in other areas of the Upper Tarahumara, water baptism is not very frequent. The same is true also for the inhabitants of ejido Munerachi who live in higher altitudes. This means that *ritual kinship* is not very frequent either. Most of the cases of this type of social relation was observed among those inhabitants who permanently live in the lowlands or who cyclically change their residence, but their life is connected to the lower part of their microhabitat socially, culturally, and ecologically.

Some ethnographers who did field research among the Rarámuri attempted to study both types of baptism as two independent variables because they viewed the parallel existence of this “double baptism”⁵⁶ as a kind of *collective schizophrenia* (cf. Fried 1969, 1977: 267). They failed to realize the baptisms’ symbolic organic coherence of structure: Rarámuri perceive the world as a unified whole full of binary oppositions. This is still one of the most important ones: fire (*na’i*) = sun (*rayénari*) = terrestrial world = masculine element vs. water (*ba’wi*) = moon (*mechá*) = water (subterranean) world = feminine element.⁵⁷ Mexican Indians, not only Rarámuri, frequently identify this binary opposition with Virgin Mary of Guadalupe and her native denominations (e.g., Warupa in Rarámuri – a garble of the Spanish expression Guadalupe). These two worlds have to exist next to each other in harmony and balance so that life on earth can be possible, harmonic and balanced. This Rarámuri ritual thus attempts to create climatic balance by using symbolic forms, making sure that the family small fields are repeatedly and regularly prosperous and individual can lead a good life.

By accepting Christianity and its act of baptism by “holy water” which was subsequently syncretized (if not even *synthetized* as it was in the case of for example Chiapas Tzeltals),⁵⁸ Rarámuri enter the road of “second ethnic-

⁵⁶ Slaney somewhat simplifies when she speaks about the *double baptism*, because the first case is not concerned with baptism but evidently with the ancient symbolic agrarian ritual connected with the Cult of the Sun which is identified as fire which she awakens (cf. Slaney 1997: 282).

⁵⁷ One more principle is extended in the cosmology of Panalachi Rarámuri. It is identified with the female element – the serpent – connected, as we mentioned, among the other northwestern groups with water, rain and the cult of fertility.

⁵⁸ Cf. Maurer 1984. Among the Tzeltals but among the Yucatán Maya as well exist both religious “levels” side by side as more or less equivalent and culturally balanced, i.e., neither of these levels is superior or inferior to the other.

ity". On the ethnic level, it is quite symbolic as it does not have a very strong influence on an overall change of ethnicity, unless it is followed by further steps that could lead to such a change [permanent migration, acculturation with the mestizo (monolingual) environment, etc.]. This "second ethnicity" thus mostly reveals itself on an individual, social level as it directly concerns the native newly-baptized, parents and godparents (*padrinos*). Based on the ritual, which is called *water baptism* (we could also speak about the second baptism) by Slaney, they all enter a permanent ritual (fictional) kinship. By the ritual connection of *padrinos* with *padres* they become *compadres* and the institution of *ritual compadrazgo* is established.

On a general level, ritual compadrazgo has several main features: 1. relationships between the biological parents and the fictional parents are based on *bilateral principles* (mutual rights and obligations – respect (*respeto*) is the most important one) that stress the ritual character of the dual system and its crucial importance to the social structure.⁵⁹ 2. *Padrinos*, who are often chosen by parents,⁶⁰ will determine the first social *status* of the child by their assisting at the baptismal font. The act of baptism can take place in three different places: traditionally in church where the act is conducted by a professional Roman Catholic priest. Then it can take place at the home of the biological or social parents where the Catholic priest may again conduct the act. However, it is more frequent that, in the case of baptism at home, a native clergyman conducts the act. If none of them is available, the padrino can take their place. 3. During this act, the baptized child gains a "double personal identity": parents give the child a name and the child also gets a name of a saint who will become the child's patron saint. 4. More than entering the church life, the act of baptism is the setting of the relationship between the child and all its godparents. Within this institution, there are obligations the child has to his/her godparents. These obligations within *compadrazgo* are often more important than the obligations to the Catholic Church even though ideally, padrinos should oversee the child's socialization within the church.⁶¹

⁵⁹ The *compadres* must carry out many obligations after closing of the social affinity. Among the Rarámuri mutual aid is obligatory during all rural works and with it connected rituals, a house construction, organization of community or ejido works, preparations of political or religious events, etc.

⁶⁰ Where the choice of *padrinos* by the parents of a child prevails, some authors speak about the *compadrinazgo* accentuating a larger share of the padrinos in the socialization of the baptized child.

⁶¹ This check on the religious development of the baptist is particularly valid where the padrinos are mestizos or ladinos and the godson (*ahijado*) is indigenous but, e.g., among the Batopilas or the Munerachi Rarámuri the institution of social affinity is more complicated.

These four features were selected as they are the most important for the analysis of ritual kinship on a more general level in the researched subarea (ejido). It is important to remember that each of these features might be different among the individual native Mexican groups as well as within one indigenous group or even within a subgroup of the same ethnic group like was shown among the Rarámuri. We also cannot forget that apart from these features there are many individual differences. Some of these will be discussed and analyzed in the following section.

6. Fictional Kinship in Ejido Munerachi (Munerachi, Mesa Yerba Buena)

Let us now go back to the meeting in Munerachi described above. In order to better interpret this event, it is essential to answer the questions that have been asked in connection with it. First of all: Why does this meeting take place in front of Antonio García Cubesare's home? What is the real (hidden) meaning of this meeting and how to place it in the broader context of the ejido or in community events? At first, we had thought that the event had a purely political and promotional purpose. This was partly true especially for those inhabitants of the ejido who came from other communities in order to take part. After the pre-election event ended, and after several conversations, we learnt that there is a relation between Emilio Bustillos Monjarréz and the family of Alejandro García Cubesare. Referring to the theoretical concept of Sidney Mintz and Eric Wolf (1950), this relationship could be labeled as an expression of *vertical solidarity* which is based on connecting people from two different social classes. Originally, Mintz and Wolf suggested that, when communities are closed (*self-contained*) or when they constitute the only social class in a class society, *compadrazgo* becomes primarily an intra-group mechanism. However, if the communities consist of several juxtaposed social classes, then this institution helps to organize exchanges between the classes. Predominance of one of these patterns depends on the meaning and frequency of socio-cultural and economic mobility, which can be real or presumed (cf. Mintz, Wolf 1950: 358, Gudeman 1971: 45). The case that was observed in Munerachi does not come under any of the types mentioned above, as in this case the institutionalization of social kinship is not developed inside one community. It is not intra-community or intra-group kinship and thus, in this case, it is not the "instrument" of strengthening adaptive mechanisms of persons who share a mutual *intra-ethnic*

space and usually belong⁶² to the same social class. In Munerachi, we can now find all three main “types” of ritual kinship. However, they all have other varieties and all mingle together.

The first type is the *horizontal, intra-group, intra-ejido* type of kinship. Before certain social stratification, this used to be the only type as almost all the inhabitants engaged in it. It did not matter whether they were or were not ejido members (people from the community Kirare might be an exception, but we do not have direct information about this community). In Munerachi, this type is in the hands of the native inhabitants. It is a pre-Hispanic socio-cultural feature, and it is horizontal as the exchange takes place among more or less socially equal partners.

The second type is the *vertical inter-group extra-ejido* system of fictional kinship. On the general level, this type is characterized by creating a fictional relation between a member of mestizo (Ladino) society [it is usually a man (padrino) but it can also be a woman (madrina) or both at the same time (padrinos)] and the baptized child and its parents. Biological parents and padrinos become compadres. The different social and economic position between mestizos and the majority of Munerachi Rarámuri, as well as the fact that they belong to different social classes, set the verticality of this relation. This exchange is also interethnic and it usually originates and is developed outside the borders of the native community or the ejido. It usually takes place in the Batopilas church where the Munerachi children are baptized. During baptism, there is at least one biological and one new (fictional) mestizo parent present. This type of ritual kinship is the only one connected with the act of water baptism.⁶³

⁶² Neither the Rarámuri in ejido Munerachi are a homogenous social mass because within the ejido there are also social differences.

⁶³ Maybe the only exception within the scope of this type of the “ritual extended family” is the North American white man Romayne Wheeler, who was socially affiliated as an *ahijado* into his new family not on the basis of a Catholic baptist ritual but on the basis of the Rarámuri custom when the *tesgüino* feast was ordered in Rancheria Sorichique in ejido Munerachi on the occasion of Romayne’s ritual affinity. This is perhaps only a case of the vertical (in this case with the exception that is concerned with intra-ejido alliance) inter-ethnic and inter-group fictitious affinity in the territory of ejido Munerachi when a member of one (higher) social level was adopted by the family members from a lower (Rarámuri) social level. The mestizos from Cerro Colorado were not brought in, to our knowledge, in 2001 on the intra-ejido fictitious social plexus. This is probably due to the fact that practically each Munerachi Rarámuri family at the time when they began to settle (they are mostly recent immigrants from Veracruz as noted previously) was already long ago part of the *regional plexus of compadrazgo*.

The third type is currently marginal and is the *vertical intra-group intra-ejido* system that is approaching the second type. This is due to a fast “mestization” on the part of the Rarámuri population in the territory of the ejido. We encountered this type during our first stay in Tarahumara in 1992 when doing a shorter research in the community of Mesa Yerba Buena. We put this type in a separate category, but we could as well consider it to be a variant of the first as it originated a relatively short time ago and its form is still developing. The origin of this intra-community social division can be seen in several factors: one is found in the building of a dirt road in the second half of the nineteen-eighties which originated as a diversion from the main road connecting Creel and Batopilas. This road leads only to the lower side of the community where most of the people now live. In this place, there is an elementary school, a small CONASUPO⁶⁴ grocery shop which also sells other basic goods, a volleyball and basketball field, a church of the Virgin Mary of Guadalupe, a small prison and most importantly, *komeráchi*.⁶⁵ The community of Mesa Yerba Buena can be characterized as a vertical sedentary location divided into two parts (subcommunities). The lower (main) zone is located on the *mesa* itself at an elevation of 800m. In this horizontal part, almost every important political, economic, social, and cultural event of the community takes place. The second (upper) part consists of ten to twelve dispersed estates located in a much bigger vertical territory at about 1,000–1,600m above sea level, 3 to 6 kilometers away from the lower part.⁶⁶ During the nineties, several families succeeded (apart from other things thanks to economic help from ritual relatives) in moving to the lower part of the community. In this way, they were able to escape poverty and growing social marginalization. For various reasons, a few families have not succeeded at this inner, local migration

⁶⁴ CONASUPO (*Compañía Nacional de Subsistencias Populares = National Company of Popular Subsistences*) is a vertically integrated distributional system of the basic commodities which is mainly wide-spread in the marginal (above all indigenous and rural) areas of Mexico. It is also an autonomous public company which competes with the private distributors and vendors who also invest in the developmental programs in the backward regions of the country where almost all the territory of Sierra Tarahumara belongs, including mestizo cities such as Batopilas (for more details, cf., e.g., Tharp Hilger 1980: 471-494).

⁶⁵ The greater Rarámuri communities have a place generally called *komeráchi* (which is probably derived from the Spanish word *comunidad*). There all the important community events take place. They are generally of profane character, while the *tesgüino* feasts take place mostly on the land of some family or other.

⁶⁶ Only this one community on the eastern fringe of the ejido has by estimation 40 km² or perhaps a little more.

and thus are trapped in social isolation. It could be said that they have to face a *second marginalization* as the community itself is placed in a high level of marginality. In 1992, these differences that had originated only shortly before, were so strong that the relation between the lower and the upper inhabitants was reminiscent of social interaction between the indigenous and mestizos in many ways. This ethnically, linguistically and culturally purely native community has been so socially dichotomized that this rapid phenomenon could be called *social mestization*. In some individual cases, this has led to temporary *social parvenuism* – disruption of once firm intra-community and family commonality. During a very short time, blood-related relatives have stopped communicating. When one of the men got rich due to closer relations with the Batopilas retailers (e.g., by selling his wife's products in CONASUPO and thus creating a bigger demand for her *watowéke*⁶⁷), the “parvenu's” brother stayed “under the overhanging rock.”⁶⁸ Lower Yerba Buena has quickly become an estranged social space for the inhabitants of the upper part and so they attempted to avoid it. The events of modernization brought about a multiple process that has disturbed old social stability, intra-community social cohesion, and economic egalitarianism. At first, the community was divided into two antagonist subcommunities, “lower” and “upper.” This was due to “mestization” tendencies which were started by the penetration of modernizing elements to the lower “half.”⁶⁹ Then there was a short adaptation phase during which two differentiated social groups were formed. Their different social status could be observed well during various celebrations taking place in *komeráchi*. One of the Mexican holidays was administered by the ejido authorities, supervised by some Batopilas politicians, and assisted by all the

⁶⁷ The Rarámuri women produce many baskets and scuttles of different sizes from natural material, above all from the leaves of *sotole* (*ru'yáka*), a botanic kind of agave. These products are sold by vendors in shops such as the Artesanías Tarahumara in Batopilas but above all in Creel, Guachochi, Chihuahua, etc. Sometimes the Rarámuri women themselves vend them in places frequented by tourists (e.g., railway-station Divisadero, the falls nearby Cusarare, etc.).

⁶⁸ This is how one of the native informants living in the low part of Mesa Yerba Buena alluded to the dwellings of some upper inhabitants of the community.

⁶⁹ In 1992, Mesa Yerba Buena had a permanent population of approximately 120, including children younger than five. Some of these people spent part of the year in Batopilas where they later wanted to move indefinitely. The approximate proportion between “lowers” and “uppers” was 70:50. The majority of the inhabitants were concentrated in the lower part. It is impossible to say that 70 persons of lower Mesa Yerba Buena were socially and economically at a higher level than 50 persons from the upper part of the subcommunity. Some families from the lower part lived socially on the fringe and their status was closer to the upper subcommunity.

inhabitants of the lower part. The ceremony consisted of several short political-historical speeches that were presented in front of the Mexican flag held by several older Rarámuri pupils. The speeches were in Spanish and they were delivered by one of the Rarámuri teachers and a regional politician. The whole event took place around the same time as the Cárdenas mexicanization of the indigenous people. While all the inhabitants of the lower subcommunity were direct actors in this event, the people from the upper parts, if they were present, stood further away, at the brim of or right behind the line of *komeráchi*, and they simply watched. The spread of this social gap was so rapid that that Patricio⁷⁰ and his relatives, who came to visit from another ejido community, were prevented from taking part in this acculturation ceremony by their own shyness and fear.

However, this social isolation cannot be perceived as resistance to acculturation or as defence against the penetration of modernity into the minds of the native inhabitants of the upper Yerba Buena subcommunity. This social intra-ethnic *splitting* was precipitated by rapid external events. It did not originate because of a spontaneous and slow process of adaptation. This new situation from the beginning of the nineties could perhaps be compared to the same period in our society after the break-up of a would-be egalitarian social system when some people got rich quite quickly and became, though often for a very short time, the same social parvenus as the Rarámuri from lower Yerba Buena. Both cases have the same principle: At the turn of the eighties and nineties in Yerba Buena, and after 1989 in Czechoslovakia, a social class of parvenus originated very quickly. This was not as evident in Tarahumara as in the post communist countries of central and southern Europe. Nevertheless, the result was the same in both cases: arrogance by these *nuevos ricos* towards “plebs.” On one hand, the inhabitants of upper Yerba Buena became even more marginalized than they had been during the period of communitary commonality; on the other hand, the fact that they were in this artificially created social isolation does not mean that they gave up the possibility of social approximation to mestizo society. It was quite different. The feelings of subordination inside one’s own community make some inhabitants of the upper part travel the 20-kilometers to the county town of Batopilas more frequently. They offer their services for various municipal jobs and some of them have been successful after some

⁷⁰ Patricio Gutiérrez Luna from the upper subcommunity was our main informant during the stay in Mesa Yerba Buena in November 1992.

time.⁷¹ Patricio and some of his relatives have *resocialized* in the mestizo environment, but they have not succumbed to this cultural mestization. They have strengthened their intra-ethnic identity and despite the division of the territory, they have become respected members of the community. Even those who used to overlook them few years ago respect them. Thus, the social differences originally caused by different positions within the processes of acculturation were demonstrated at the level of “artificial” mental supremacy from the side of the lower (“we live like mestizos”) rather than at the level of negation of mestizo culture from the upper (“we would also like to live like the mestizos but we can’t as we live in the upper part) – cf. Halbich 1998: 61.

Over the past ten years, the gradual partial cultural (economic) and social mestization of some of the men from the upper part of Yerba Buena, which consisted of their engagement in the process of small accumulation of capital (work for county authorities or private companies), has wiped out the old social differences to an extent.

Probably caused by the penetration of elements of modernization, two types of ritual kinship have developed in Yerba Buena in the last twenty years. These types are known from Munerachi but here it is doubled in some cases: 1. the older type – fictional kinship between Batopilas mestizos and Rarámuri (*vertical, inter-group extra-ejido*). This most common type of ritual relation, where a mestizo becomes a patron of the baptized child, had probably existed even before the community of Mesa Yerba Buena was founded. Ancestors of the native settlers used to live in Munerachi, and before that they had lived even closer to Batopilas and thus they had been in closer contact with mestizos. However, after founding the ejido of Munerachi and settling of one group in Mesa Yerba Buena, their relationships were disturbed and contacts were broken for several decades. They were renewed only after the new road was built and the community was not in isolation anymore. Some Batopilas and Rarámuri families from the lower part established ritual kinship based on the principles of *compadrazgo*. Mestizo padrinos were then consciously strengthening the occurring social differentiation of Yerba Buena ejido members, and they supported the creation of a hidden intra-ethnic border between the inhabitants of the lower and upper part that meant splitting the community into two

⁷¹ In 1992 P.G. Luna, a poor unemployed “upper” resident supported his family by selling small art products. In 2001 he was a day-laborer; he worked more in Batopilas than in M. Y. Buena where he lived with his extended family in a new little house in the upper part.

subcommunities.⁷² A detailed analysis of the reasons for re-establishing these social relations lead us to the conclusion that it is due to economic and political interests. Small deposits of silver were discovered in the river valleys in the territory of the community. Members of a supranational mining company wanted to access these deposits and so got together with some Batopilas citizens who then approached the local foremen who were leading the community and had certain authority in the territory of the whole ejido. From 1992 to 2001, there were some ruptures after the real purposes of these “ritual” relations. The situation got better only after all the parties (company representatives, “selected” mestizos and representatives of the community and ejido authorities) pragmatically agreed to co-operate and share the stake of exploiting the ejido’s mineral resources. During this time when the two disunited parties did not communicate much and the social relations between the native *ahijados* and Batopilas *compadres* were broken, some inhabitants of the upper part were mestized in the way described above. That is how the second (sub)type of ritual kinship was developed in Mesa Yerba Buena.

However, the *vertical-horizontal intra-group* kinship cannot be considered fictional as it was formed in many cases between the members of one bigger family. Then the following question has to be asked: Why did this unexpected return to social bonding occur? One of the answers is the understandable reaction of the lower inhabitants who felt cheated and they stopped believing in the *horizontal* social adaptation to the mestizo way of life. The second reason was the fact that they started to realize that they were becoming estranged from their relatives and they tried to renew old relationships and communication. The last, but perhaps the most important, reason was the pragmatic purposes – the attempt to have more influence over the share of the possible fortune from silver and other metal deposits in the bed of the local stream. In order to prevent the situation when the company representatives and mestizos would look for allies in the upper part of the community, it was essential to renew old family relations. This rare type of social *compadrazgo* was established mostly by a pre-Hispanic ceremony of drinking *tesgüino* or sometimes by Catholic water baptism directly in the communities or in Batopilas’ church.

This fast social *demestization* was not simple and direct as many of the upper inhabitants had been ritually connected to Batopilas’ mestizo families.

⁷² Personal communication with the emeritus Jesuit missionary P. Gallegos, who has worked on missions in Sierra Tarahumara since 1959 (Batopilas, June 2001).

However, there was a certain advantage and that was that contacts with these families were quite sporadic and they had become more formal. People from upper Yerba Buena thus did not feel as loyal to their Batopilas padrinos as in other ejido communities (in Munerachi or among some families in Coyachique, Santa Rita or Sorichique). In this situation, nothing prevented the “reconciliation” process between the two “differentiated” subcommunities to be successful even though it was undoubtedly based on pragmatic reasons. One of its visible results was a certain weakening of the social parvenuism as the family relationships would not be renewed if there had not been at least a formal evening of social gaps. Starting in the second half of the nineties, this *mixed (double)* type of social kinship started to appear in Mesa Yerba Buena. Within this type, one native *ahijado* had at least two *padrinos*: one older mestizo parent who was fictional (ritual), and one native parent who was a blood-related person. This subtype is unique not only in the ejido but it probably does not even exist in other sub-regions of the current Rarámuri habitat. We could name it *schizophrenic compadrazgo* as it best describes its nature – a real disunity of these relations. Despite the broken contacts mentioned above, this institution still has its rules and obligations. This new social situation complicated old bilateral “contract” relations and became the starting point for the strengthening of social positions for people from the lower part. Their position was strengthened within the community, but it also influenced their relationship with mestizo padrinos who started to be overshadowed. Thus, there is a very interesting paradox: on one hand, repeated (though more hidden and perhaps not very strong) social superiority led to the strengthening of an intra and extra-ejido ethnicity. On the other hand, because this “second godparenthood” could not occur only formally, i.e., “once in a blue moon,” it had to be constantly revitalized in the spirit of the “ancient”⁷³ Rarámuri tradition which required regular strengthening of ritual and social cohesion. These dramatic and quickly changing social events could perhaps reflect the thesis of Radcliffe-Brown regarding the development of any community. When the members of this community get into a conflict or they are estranged for some reason, things return to the same *social equilibrium* after some time. However, we think that the situation in Mesa Yerba Buena is more complex or at least more ambiguous. In any

⁷³ We think that the Rarámuri custom of the ritual reinforcing of social relations dates back to the time when they lived a sedentary life but in small, relatively isolated little groups separated by natural barriers, that is, most probably shortly before the arrival of the Spaniards.

case, even such a small community of not even a hundred permanent inhabitants is not a stable and static social body where no social divergences or strong interpersonal and inter-family disagreements could take place. Even this small village community, which has been socially coherent for many years, is not completely immune to changes and pressures caused by the external social environment; local, extralocal and economic interests attempt to penetrate this community if this community controls (or shares the control of) natural resources. In this case, it shows that if the inter-community or inter-group alliance is not based on *social horizontality*, then at the moment when this dominance is obvious, leaders of the community and instigators of the social stratification provoke the process of renewing the original intra-community unity – social equilibrium. At the same time, it is apparent that these individuals want to keep a certain social dominance within the community and so look for such a mechanism of *regeneration* that will secure their future dominance. Outwardly, in relationship to mestizo society, which they have to co-exist with in some way, it might seem that this is an expression of so-called Durkheim *mechanic solidarity* as a mechanism of defense which is introduced by every community at the moment of external peril. However, development in the community up to now shows that once the social equilibrium is disturbed, it is very difficult to return to the original situation. In other words, the process of return to intra-community social horizontality is initiated. This horizontality has holes, though, and it is bent to some extent. Generally, all the Rarámuri subregional groups (from the mountains or lowlands, upper or lower, based on transhumance sedentary, ejido or extra-ejido, pagótame or pagan) are *communities of fiestas* (cf., e.g., Kennedy 1963,⁷⁴ Velasco Rivero 1987, Bonfiglioli 1995, etc.), which are the basic and constantly repeating mechanism of socialization that strengthens and renews the inner social commonality. In the period when the inhabitants of lower Mesa Yerba Buena started to be mesticized, this mechanism was strongly weakened as the rotation method of organizing *tesgüinadas*, which made the community stick together, was being abandoned. Even in this most important socio-cultural feature, the village community was split into the “rich” *tesgüinadas* organized by the inhabitants of the lower part and “poor” or even no fiestas accompanied by ritual drinking in the upper part. Apart from

⁷⁴ E.g., J. Kennedy 1963: 24 estimates that each Rarámuri consumes about 100 days a year in activities connected with *suwí* drinking. Whereas the pagan community Aboréachi lies in the Batopilas district, it is possible to suppose that it is similar to some communities of ejido Munerachi.

this social splitting, local inhabitants also suffered a smaller disaster⁷⁵ caused by a deluge of water during the period of rains. This led to a local humanitarian catastrophe. Some lost their houses and their food supplies for the dry period, but more importantly, small maize milpas, pastures, palms and other plants, from which many artistic or utility goods were made, were completely destroyed. These places had to undergo a several-year-long recuperation. The affected were helped partly by the state of Chihuahua, less by the Jesuit mission in Creel,⁷⁶ but almost by nobody from the lower part, which was not damaged by the silts of mud and stones. This catastrophe brought together the families from the upper part which were forced to permanently or temporary leave their homes and move somewhere else within the upper part. In some cases two or more complete or incomplete nuclear families moved in together⁷⁷ into one suitable place where they built new homes together. The principle of “mechanic solidarity” really occurred only at the moment when interests of several richer Rarámuri started to be endangered by mestizos, mestizo-Rarámuri and the mining company. Tescúinadas, the organizing of which is a very prestigious matter in Rarámuri society, could be due to the natural disaster held only in the lower part (there were some exceptions though). They could be organized only by those families who had either an abundance of crops meant for their own consumption, or they could afford to buy enough corn *nixtamal* in the CONASUPO store or in one of the Batopilas shops.⁷⁸ After all the social upheaval that happened in Mesa Yerba Buena in the last twenty years, it seems that Mesa Yerba Buena still suffers from certain *social schizophrenia* inside the community. Its inhabitants found themselves in a chaotic

⁷⁵ This landslide happened in M. Y. B. in the summer months (June-August) of 1991.

⁷⁶ The Jesuit mission in Batopilas does not now have an influence on the events in the Rarámuri communities in this district or strictly speaking its membership does not make it possible to go to the native settlements in order to baptize, to celebrate mass or only to visit. Therefore the Jesuits from Creel and Norogachi shuttle back and forth although the Batopilas region does not belong formally to the jurisdiction of these missions.

⁷⁷ This was the case of the family of Patricio Gutiérrez Luna which was involved in the flood. At the time of our stay in November 1992 eleven people from three nuclear families lived together below a small overhanging rock with a simple shelter which measured some 5 m². Later in the years 1996 and 2001 we were not directly in the community M. Y. B. but on the basis of an interview with P. G. Luna in April 2001 in Batopilas we found everyone disaffiliated and each family had its own little house near the lower part.

⁷⁸ Rarámuri try to make tescúino from the self-cultivated corn which they consider as sacred and as a gift of the supreme god *Onorúame*. The store-bought nixtamal or provisions acquired from resources other than their own dramatically lowered their social prestige as compared to their community neighbors.

state resulting in an inability to orientate well in the current maze of intra- and extra-community or intra-ejido interests. Because of this, as a community unit, they enter a certain isolation from socially related communities inside ejido Munerachi, and from their ritual patrons in Batopilas, and even from their own relationships. Within the whole ejido, Mesa Yerba Buena is one of the economically richest communities. However, due to its social schizophrenia undoubtedly caused by the territorial division, it is in such social isolation that its foremen are not even considered for more important ejido positions. Only the future socio-economic development in the county of Batopilas will show whether there is enough of a microethnic feeling being formed to lead into a break from the mother ejido.⁷⁹ Economically, this would mean shifting to the minifundist way of production relationships which work now.

Let us now return to the second (*vertical inter-group extra-ejido*) model of social kinship observed and studied in the territory of ejido Munerachi. This type of social and interethnic relation is most common in ejido Munerachi and can be found in all the types of ejido communities. Mesa Yerba Buena (in which the situation is more complicated), Kirare and some other smaller ranchería communities in mountain valleys and mesas (e.g., Urichique) are exceptions.

Based on the conversations and further observations in and out of the ejido environment, we can conclude that the main reason for the Munerachi meeting from May 27th, 2001, was not mere cheap political promotion, but instead an elaborated expression of bilateral relations that were established long ago between the “colonial”⁸⁰ family of Bustillos and the “sedentary”⁸¹ family of García Cubesare. Thus it was a *ritual of symbolic compadrazgo*, the organization of which was essential not only for primarily political purposes but also as a result of mutual obligations resulting from the families’ old ritual connection through Catholic water baptism in Batopilas’ church. This alliance is quite

⁷⁹ In fact, it is not simple to leave the ejido formally because this one is *de jure* in the ownership of the founder, i.e., of the Chihuahua state which is not interested in the process of the economic and partially political independence of the partial ejido entities.

⁸⁰ Emilio Bustillos Monjarréz is a descendant in direct line of one of the first immigrants to Batopilas in the middle of the 18th century. The Bustillos continue to belong to an esteemed family with a high social status at whose hands the economic and political power are concentrated, not only in the district but in the county.

⁸¹ The García Cubesare family belong rather to the more sedentary families in Munerachi who do not make a practice of vertical agriculture and pasturage. Antonio is the grandson or great-grandson of one of the first inhabitants of the Munerachi community founded probably in the early 20th century.

a complex maze of mutual social relations that have their detailed rules and so-called timetable that depends on the number of Catholic holidays (especially Semana Santa and La Guadalupana, but also celebrations connected with local saints – St. Martin de Porres, Corpus Christi, San Juan Bautista, etc.). If these holidays take place in the ejido komeráchi, they are always syncretic or perhaps synthetic (?) and they are often connected to a certain phase of the yearly agrarian cycle. These socio-religious relations are not being kept in their pure (religious) form within the mestizo-Rarámuri compadrazgo. If they take place in Batopilas' church or at Easter in a nearby church in Satevó, they become a mere formality. Apart from these socio-religious relations, there are also other reasons that are more visible and have essential meaning for interethnic and intersocial balance.

The majority of Rarámuri families from ejido Munerachi have their socio-ritual mestizo counterpart in Batopilas. Occasionally, their counterparts are found in towns that are further away, but these connections are being weakened.⁸² The frequency of family meetings within the institution of compadrazgo thus differs depending on many variables: one of them is the *time period* when the kinship was established. If a relation like this has been continuing for several generations, the social bond between these families is usually much stronger than in the families where compadrazgo was established only short time ago. Another factor is a different *level of traditionality* in Rarámuri families. The level of traditionality seems to be much stronger at the ejido periphery (e.g., Ranchería Sorichique, Ranchería Urichique, San José, La Gavilana, Ocorare, etc.) than in its core (Ranchería Munerachi, Santa Rita). This strong traditionalism is surprising, for example, in the most populous ejido community Sorichique. There is a natural path from Sorichique and Samachique and then further to Upper Tarahumara. Several years ago, one of the four or five schools that are in the ejido was built in a daughter community in Huisuchi. Teachers in this school are mestizo or mestizo-Rarámuri and they commute.

⁸² If, e.g., the ahijado from Coyachique has his padrino in Creel or outside Batopilas such connection is reminiscent most of all of "adoption at a distance" because the ritual relatives practically do not meet and the mestizo godfather sends presents to his godson (e.g., cash) through another transmitter (Rarámuri or mestizo) who may go to the Upper Tarahumara and he transfers these presents at a pre-arranged point. The other case of the weakening or even the "dissolution" of the alliance is permanent migration of the Rarámuri families to Chihuahua or other big cities where there generally occurs an absolutely new socialization process whose one pattern is the finding of new inter- or intra-ethnic fictitious relatives (cf., e.g., Ramos Escobar 1997). The less common cases of the severing of ties is the migration of mestizo families from Batopilas to Chihuahua or much farther.

The inhabitants of Sorichique are not resistant to other elements of modernization – e.g., Centro Coordinadora de la Tarahumara installed a distribution system for drinking water in huge plastic barrels in Chihuahua; people take medicine brought from the Jesuit mission in Creel, etc. The main reason for their social traditionalism, which is reflected in preferring intra-ethnic fictional kinship, is probably the fact that the best maize in the whole ejido is “traditionally” grown in their milpas in horizontal valleys of the plateau. Maize, as the most holy “object” of Rarámuri life, is also *the most adhesive* social factor in almost every native community, and it is strongly ritualized. It is generally true that those members of the ejido whose lives are more connected to the agrarian cycle and especially maize are more bound to their land and contact with their mestizo ritual relatives (if they have any) is very limited and occasional.

A newer factor that is known in nearly every country of Latin America is the “retraditionalization” of religion. Ideas from non-Catholic and even non-Christian denominations and religious sects enter the pagótame of Rarámuri households with greater intensity. As a result, compadrazgo relations are ending as the implantation of new denominations is incongruous with preserving the rituals. This phenomenon appeared in some communities of ejido Munerachi, especially in Coyachique, in the middle of the nineteen-nineties.⁸³

Another frequent reason for weakening or canceling the ritual relation is the worsening *economic situation* of mestizo padrinos who are then not able to pay for the expenses they promised to cover for their ahijado. In those cases, there is an attempt to find a different and richer padrino. In some cases, an ahijado’s biological family might have *extreme requirements* – e.g., when a Rarámuri family requires more food supplies than the padrino family is able to provide, or when an ahijado’s parents request education out of Batopilas county, etc.

Most of the meetings, motivated either by “secular” or religious reasons, take place in the house of the padrinos or in a church in town. When the compadrazgo ritual is connected to a political (pre-election) meeting, it takes place in the *komeráchi* of an important ejido foreman or in the *komeráchi* of one of the politician’s ritual relatives. We could see the last case in Munerachi before the election in 2001. Based on observations of this meeting and of several other “bilateral” meetings, we can draw some **general conclusions**:

⁸³ During our stay in Coyachique in 1992 all the local inhabitants were pagótame (baptized Catholics) while in 1996 and 2001 some individuals converted to a Protestant denomination.

1. In fact, the institution of compadrazgo is in its basic form a *dyadic (bilateral) contract* (usually with these relations: *compadre-compadre*⁸⁴ a *padrino-ahijado*),⁸⁵ usually there are also some other accompanying individuals who are caught in the compadrazgo social network.⁸⁶ This contract is based on *asymmetrical reciprocity* (cf. Foster 1953: 9, Gudeman 1971: 46) given by the different social status (social verticalism).

2. Unlike the ejido, ritual dyadic compadrazgo is not a corporative social body but is based on the *selection* of patrons. This choosing of ritual relatives from the side of the natives then might be, and often is, a certain regulator of the intra-ethnic (intra-community) relations in the native population as well as mestizo community. That means that a higher social status on one side of the dyadic bond within one's own community might increase the status of the second side of this bond in the local society. This was also the case of the *compadres* we observed.

3. In most of the cases, the asymmetric (vertical) reciprocity means social dominance of the mestizo element. However, if a native compadre gains certain social prestige and influence in his community or in the whole ejido, certain *social status approximation* can be observed. This means that the social gaps seem to disappear in the compadre-compadre bond. The above-mentioned Munerachi ceremony has to be understood along the same lines. The roles of native compadre, host, and meeting organizer combined in one person demonstrated his social, economic, and political superiority over a certain part of the ejido and his community, even though he held no official position at that time (he was a semi-official distributor of medicine from outside).⁸⁷

4. This type of compadrazgo can also be perceived as a (rather weak) *element of acculturation*. This element, however, does not lead to a cultural change.

⁸⁴ Mintz, Wolf 1950: 341 focus more on this tie which is the decisive principle of compadrazgo which some authors (cf. Gudeman 1971: 46) rightly criticized because the relation padrino(s)-ahijado(s) is much more important.

⁸⁵ E. Bustillos Monjarréz and A. García Cubesare are each other's *compadres* and the former is simultaneously the *padrino* of the Antonio's eldest son Rubén, who is his *ahijado*.

⁸⁶ The number of individuals who are connected through the compadrazgo institution can be very high. So, e.g., Julio de la Fuente (1949) found out during his field-work in the Zapotec Mountain community Yalalag that the parents and grandparents of a ten-year-old child could be the godfathers (*compadres*) of as many as sixty people. (cf. Ravicz 1975²: 249). Ralph Beals 1946: 100-104 stated that the majority of the people in Tarascan Cherán had 20-25 *compadres*, Robert Redfield 1941: 222-223 reckoned about a thousand *ahijados* in relation to one *padrino* (!).

⁸⁷ A. García Cubesare was not introduced into this function by the ejido authorities but by Creel Jesuits who provided medication to ejido Munerachi.

It is quite the contrary in many cases: cultural characteristics of a socially weaker group (Rarámuri in this case) might be significantly strengthened and declining cultural expressions of the native community might be revitalized. Interethnic compadrazgo thus unknowingly helps to renew those cultural characteristics which have been forgotten by the community (e.g., some families have given up organizing *tesguinadas* for economic reasons or they have had to reduce their number—hence their social intracommunity status was decreased). Mestizo-indigenous godparenthood is thus primarily a social mechanism (an expression of social identity) which can influence the weakening or strengthening of cultural identity.

5. The type of relation that we could see in the case of compadrazgo between Bustillos Monjarréz and García Cubesare can thus be named a *transitive type* between the complementary and symmetric schizmogogenesis (cf. Bateson 1935). An originally socially unbalanced relation has changed into a more symmetric (more equal, horizontal) form of mutual contact. According to Bateson, this type of contact can be observed among European nations, villages, clans, etc. It seems that both sides of the dyadic contract have become part of one community without having had to leave their own microhabitat permanently.

6. In order for compadrazgo to be at least partly socially horizontal, it has to be *mutually advantageous*. Obligations resulting from the ritual kinship have to be acceptable for both parties of the contract even though in fact, one of the sides can be in a more advantageous position at some point (as we could see in the Bustillos Monjarréz – García Cubesare case). As said above, most of the compadrazgo meetings take place in Batopilas. Theoretically, even this pre-election meeting could have taken place in the house of a mestizo protégé or in the open space in the center of the town that is meant for these purposes. All the ejido members could have been invited to this space and they could have been introduced to the program of the IRP candidate who is traditionally elected by the Munerachi. If this had happened, it probably would not have influenced the election results. Nevertheless, it is necessary that the ritual communication took place in the home environment of the native part of the contract party. Thus, the Bustillos Monjarréz – García Cubesare and many other similar meetings can be perceived as a *symbolic social ritual*. Its main purpose is to strengthen the prestige within one's own community or ejido by making this "family" meeting public. By organizing such a meeting, the importance of the native ritual partner is also demonstrated—prestige is strengthened in the

relation to him. Even though the meeting had a great significance from a social perspective, to some extent, it seemed quite comical – as a certain persiflage of the fictional kinship that was viewed by a large audience of native guests.⁸⁸ Actors of this meeting probably did not realize the ridiculousness of the situation, but we perceived it as a certain *act of humiliation*, a hidden revenge for the continuing differences in both neighboring communities.

7. Finally, the institution of the mestizo-Rarámuri compadrazgo has an obvious *extending sociability character* as local interethnic and intersocial spaces are being widened, extended and interconnected so that one social space grows into another and vice versa. Because of compadrazgo,⁸⁹ the ejido and Batopilas habitat are growing externally and coming together in a social sense as we can observe the process of a certain *social spatial coalescence* that brings advantages to both sides. In this sense, this is probably a subtype that was named by Mintz and Wolf 1950: 357 *compadrazgo de voluntad* (godparenthood based on mutual agreement established in order to strengthen local intersocial bonds), i.e., establishing fictional kinship with the aim of preventing aggression in the territory of the relevant subregion.

7. Upper Tarahumara and the Causes of the Disintegration of Interethnic Relations

Mestizo-Rarámuri ritual kinship, which is confirmed formally especially by water baptism, is not that common in the subregions of Upper Tarahumara (Creel, Bocoyna, Sisoguichi, Panalachi, Carichi, Cusarare, Tomochi, etc.) or in some areas of Lower Tarahumara (Balleza, Nonoava, etc.) even though it is here where the pagótame Rarámuri live. Reasons for this cannot be found in the fact that Rarámuri from these areas are generally lukewarm to the Catholic way of baptism or are so scared of water that they refuse it for this reason. It is true that at least the Rarámuri from the plateaus are often afraid of water,

⁸⁸ The road from Cerro Colorado to Munerachi is not simple. It is full of natural obstacles and it is hard to imagine that anybody had the courage to walk there voluntarily or because of some electoral votes. The arrivals had to come to the Cubesare house, which lies only some meters above the level of the community komérachi, where local meetings or other meetings with the mestizo visitors take place.

⁸⁹ On the basis of our investigation in 2001 we estimate that in ejido Munerachi the majority of the population participate in the system of mestizo-native ritual affinity (about 80%, maybe more). The community Kirare is of course an exception as well as M. Y. B. where the *mixed (parallel) type* of the ritual affinity is developing now.

however, they usually accept baptism. In many cases, they do it in churches in town rather than in their communities which is very different from those in Batopilas who are often baptized in their *kari*.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, the act of “direct baptism” is more common here. The priest baptizes the child without the assistance of mestizo social relatives. In these cases, a child’s biological parents or his blood-related relatives are the child’s godparents.

The reason why the ritual mestizo-Indian *compadrazgo* has not taken root in these areas or why it has not been institutionalized can be found in several factors. Upper Tarahumara and the eastern and south-eastern part of Lower Tarahumara are a more open space, and now, thanks to more quality roads, they are more apt to the migration processes of the indigenous, mestizo, and creole population. This means that mutual relations between the two basic ethnic and social groups (Rarámuri and mestizos), if they ever existed, are more and more often being disturbed or are dying out under the influence of the movement (lasting several days, seasons or permanently) of both parts of inhabitants to large towns. This spontaneous and often very wild social mobility⁹¹ within the Upper Tarahumara habitat practically disables establishing narrower and stable neighbor (interethnic) bonds. A good example of this is Creel, the most dynamically developing town of the northern Tarahumara subarea. Creel consists mainly of immigrants as 90% of its inhabitants come from different parts of Mexico, and now also from the USA and Europe. These people settled in Creel only twenty or thirty years ago. The situation in Bocoyna and Nonoava is very similar to Creel. On the contrary, the Batopilas microregion, thanks to its enclosed natural space, is more stable from the perspective of social mobility. There can still be found descendants of several “old resident waves” of mestizos with very close relations to local Rarámuri. The coexistence of mestizos and Rarámuri in the north does not require establishing complex social bonds in the form of fictional kinship as this subarea is being melted in the postmodern flow of uncontrolled social mobility by its inhabitants.

Even though the institution of *compadrazgo* is very rare, or at least less transparent, in these northern subregions, it does not mean that there would be no contact between the local Rarámuri and the majority mestizo group.

⁹⁰ *Kari* = in Rarámuri “house,” “dwelling:” more or less in accordance with how we understand it.

⁹¹ We understand the “savage” form of the social mobility to be the chaotically organized migration processes whose result is the creation of the tens of ghettos on the fringe of Chihuahua, Ciudad Juárez and some other cities.

Mestizo Creel⁹² was founded at the beginning of the twentieth century, at the close of the porfiriato. For a long time, it was an inconsequential village where the first regional *aserraderos* (lumber mills) were established. Since the middle of the sixties, it has become one of the new-found tourist centers. It was the bases of further expansion to the natural and “ethnic” reservation, Barrancas del Cobre, on the boundary of Upper and Lower Tarahumara. At the beginning of the eighties a bigger tourist boom started, and Creel and its surroundings became the centripetal space for thousands of Rarámuri who had permanently settled outside the plateau. Wide horizontal valleys surrounding Creel have become home for hundreds of Rarámuri immigrant families who have quickly adapted to two means of subsistence: *traditional* (growing maize) and *modern* (both sexes are engaged in tourist activities, men can also work in the wood industry). Local Rarámuri were thus involved in a regular (legal) process of capital accumulation and started to partake directly (and for payment) in both the modernization of the whole area and also its uncontrolled exploitation. Because many Rarámuri men and women are employed as paid workers in lumber mills and shops of *Artesanías Tarahumara/Rarámuri*,⁹³ there have been some radical changes in interethnic relations. When compared to occasional meetings within the institution of compadrazgo, the intensity of mutual relations between mestizos and Rarámuri is much stronger as it is often daily and omnipresent. If we perceive compadrazgo as an element which strengthens social stability and, to some extent, gives Indian compadres a feeling of their own importance in the relationship to mestizo society, then in those areas where this institution has disappeared or is very weak, we cannot speak about this stability. Mutual relations are usually based on a strict relationship between employer (in most of the cases it is a mestizo, creole or a white person) and worker (Indian, mestizo, or creole). This means that any Rarámuri employee working in the lumber mill could be dismissed based on the employment contract just as any other employee. In the middle of the nineties, there was a massive wave of dismissals as hundreds of lumber mills were closed down in a short time due to the reckless felling of pines and oak trees. In

⁹² E.g., 5000 permanent population lived in Creel in about 2000. The majority were mestizos, creoles and white men. Rarámuri had their shabby dwellings on the fringe of the village below the cave dwellings in the surroundings of Creel.

⁹³ These are small shops with the regional „ethno-products” whose sale was in the nineties on the increase but the market with these products is saturated now and their distribution is more and more difficult (with the exception of the production of violins).

this situation, the gaps between these two groups showed once again. While, due to their great social mobility⁹⁴, mestizo employees quickly moved to other lumber companies in other subregions⁹⁵ of Rarámuri or completely changed fields⁹⁶, Rarámuri employees must have experienced a “cultural shock”; instead of commuting from their unfinished houses in the valleys of Onárasí, San Ignacio, Gonogochi, Arareco to their work in Creel or Bocoyna, they suddenly found themselves without jobs and unable to understand what was going on and why. The progressing process of socio-economic inclusion stopped, and they had to face social exclusion and cultural readaptation. These “mestizo-Rarámuri” (some of them spoke better Spanish than Rarámuri) had to return to their desolate maize milpas, to the horizontal shepherding of cattle or raising poultry. Some of them (only a minority) succeeded in readaptation (deacculturation) and returned to their “culture of maize” and *tesgüinadas*. Nevertheless, most of them did not know how to cope with this unexpected situation, and they have been oscillating between the “culture of tequila” and the old tradition. In the majority of cases, it is the Rarámuri men who have existed between the village and town, and thus they find themselves unable to fully integrate into the modern social space and also unable return to the places where they used to be socialized and encultured. Unlike men, women are usually not touched by modernity. Their everyday life is still centered on bringing up children, selling small art objects for little money, and making corn griddle cakes for personal use and profit. One of the most typical result of massive unemployment is the disintegration of the Indian family unit. There are more and more *matrifocal* Indian families as it is typical for other Mexican families. Rarámuri men have adopted patterns of behavior that are characteristic of the mestizo *machos* who leave their wives, with whom they usually had many children⁹⁷, and start new

⁹⁴ On the basis of a passing inquiry we found out that the majority of immigrants moved to Chihuahua from many federal states of Mexico (e.g., Baja California Norte, Sonora, Sinaloa, Michoacán, Veracruz, Oaxaca, etc.).

⁹⁵ About ten years ago the majority of saw-millowners moved from the area around Bocoyna, San Juanito and Creel to the southern subregions of the colonial Tarahumara to the districts of Guadalupe y Calvo, Guachochi or Morelos.

⁹⁶ Those mestizos who did not find a place in new lumbering companies moved to cities where they opened, e.g., small night clubs, eateries (among others, the known *tortillerías*) or they work as laborers, etc. Some of them stay in the rural milieu, e.g., as staff in the extensive fruit haciendas of the Chihuahua new latifundists.

⁹⁷ In Baja California Sur in June 2001 we met a Mexican man who had 17 children with his first wife in Sinaloa Culiacán. This did not stop him from leaving them and starting a new family. He had no information about his original family.

families thousands of kilometers away. In many cases, these men change their identities. Only the close future will show us where this development might lead. Today, it seems that mestizo-Rarámuri tend to permanently leave their native communities and ranches and stay in towns where they often struggle even more than in their milpas. It seems that exchanging suwí (tesgüino) for tequila, scarves for *sombreros* or sandals *aká* for shoes is so tempting for many men that their assimilation (no matter how chaotic it is) is inevitable.

The relatively new phenomenon of Rarámuri *machoism* has another negative social consequence: the movement of large matrifocal families (often more than ten members) to large towns, especially Chihuahua, where there are several hundreds of them living in many marginal districts. In some cases, the families split: one part stays in the original habitat, the other moves out permanently. As many native inhabitants leave Upper Tarahumara, mestizos are starting to gain a majority in this subregion as the social movement of this group is much more intensive than in the indigenous group. If in the first case, the following pattern can be traced: *immigration: short time settlement : repeated migration* ; in the case of the (upper) Tarahumara, *longer time settlement* is followed by *permanent* or *short-term migration* to towns. These are only a few explanations for the development of social contacts between the Rarámuri and the majority society in some subregions of Upper Tarahumara and the county of Batopilas.

8. Conclusion

We can conclude that local Rarámuri tend to be influenced by mestization, acculturation, and assimilation. However, because these processes are more spontaneous and chaotic and not based on any social or interethnic “contract”, there are also huge social status gaps where the “pure” Tarahumara stand on the lowest level of the social hierarchy. Nevertheless, those we called mestizo-Rarámuri are probably in a less advantageous position as they have been uprooted from their native environment but have not quite assimilated to the new one. The new social environment, where the largest part of the population are mestizos, considers these mestizo-Rarámuri to be an inferior group that has been encultured in a different context and so is without a culture and thus unable to be integrated to current circumstances. The social interaction of these three basic groups (mestizo, mestizo-Rarámuri or meso-Rarámuri, and “pure” Rarámuri) can be best observed in the pedestrian area in the center of

Chihuahua, where clearly separated *microislands* are formed. These *microislands* communicate rather sporadically (if at all), and thus there has not been any significant exchange of information or the creation a local commonality⁹⁸.

On the other hand, the well-developed institution of *compadrazgo* among the mestizo citizens of Batopilas and many current Munerachi ejido members (in many cases descendants of Rarámuri inhabitants from the pre-ejido period⁹⁹) is the result of a complex history of regional social relations. These relations have been developing in certain history sinusoids since the end of the 17th century when both groups (mestizos and Indians) were coexisting in the region for the first time (until the beginning of the 20th century, the area was inhabited by Rarámuri, Tubar and northern Tepehuan who have recently started to immigrate or re-emigrate to the area, and thus have helped to increase the slowly growing demographic majority of the native population). In certain periods, blacks, mulatos, zambos, North Americans, and people from many European countries moved to the area. After the great displacement in the area, which took place after the Mexican Revolution and the last gold rush at the turn of the nineteen-tens and twenties, the ethnic dichotomy (mestizos and Rarámuri) as we now know it has been gradually established in the county of Batopilas. This dichotomy will probably soon be equal in numbers. An obvious Rarámuri population explosion, coupled with an apparent mestizos demographic stagnation, helps to create (together with the neighboring county of Urique where the Rarámuri population is also increasing) a very unique

⁹⁸ Totally different socially urban space formed, as we have already seen, e.g., in Ciudad de Guatemala or in Ciudad de México and in the other Latin American metropolitan cities in which the native population is more represented. In these metropolitan centers some indigenous groups created their own (intra-urban) social space, generally concentrated around the market place where the social, cultural and economic resurgence of these groups proceed. The Chihuahua Rarámuri are disunited and so few so that they could form a similar homogenous socio-cultural "area" in the center of the capital. Therefore they live in smaller groups more or less in the same way as in their original habitat.

⁹⁹ The older "pre-ejido" intra-ethnic substrate is hardly identifiable. We consider as the oldest inhabitants of the Munerachi habitat the members of families in which there occurs at least in one of two surnames the native anthroponym which can be patrilinear as well as matrilinear, i.e., if a Rarámuri has two surnames (which is not always the case) there can be a male Spanish surname followed by a female native surname, and vice versa. Thus we register among the Munerachi Rarámuri names like Antonio García Cubesare, Marcos Mendoza Químare, Serafina Químare Recalache or Mario Villegas Mendoza, etc. Thus, e.g., *químare* (*kímare*) can mean "ninth" or even maybe "nine stones" (*kima* or *kimakói* = "nine," *re* *či* *ree* = "stone"). Mainly in the land registry of Ranchería Sorichique we find some toponyms and anthroponyms which contain the word "stone" in their name. The first names are almost exclusively "Christian," derived from a Christian patron saint and they are given out in most cases within the subtype *compadrazgo de rosario* (cf. Ravicz 1975²: 248).

bond between these two socially differentiated groups. This bond seems to have a tendency towards *horizontal social convergence*. As there are still deep social, economic and cultural differences¹⁰⁰ between these groups, we do not attempt to claim that there might be a future status equalization (general and complex social change) between at least some Munerachi families and mestizo families in Batopilas while keeping the mutual “*cultural status quo*.” In any case, we suppose that the social processes in the interactions between Batopilas and ejido Munerachi are so strong that they might lead to social change in individual cases without significant effects on the cultural patterns of these groups.¹⁰¹

Ritual compadrazdo between the Batopilas mestizo and Munerachi Rarámuri is perceived as a *socially adaptive mechanism* practiced for the reasons reflecting the demographic situation in this, till now, isolated social space. Ritual compadrazgo between the Batopilas mestizos and Munerachi Rarámuri can be understood as a *socially adaptive mechanism* developed, to some extent, for the reasons reflecting the demographic situation in this isolated social space. Local mestizos and Rarámuri establish ritual kinship and, through real or presumed social balance, help to keep a permanent, no matter how relative, social harmony and thus they prevent serious interethnic conflicts. Most importantly, by *tending* to social change, they can maintain their cultural and ethnic identity. As P. Bourdieu said it in his *Distinction*,¹⁰² the meaning of such a *social contract* like compadrazgo kinship is searching for a meaningful “*existence in space, if only like one point, individual in space*” which by itself, it means “*to differ, to be different*” (cf. Bourdieu 1998: 16). Motivation of such action is thus not the effort to be different, as Bourdieu point out, but it is the awareness that staying (being) in a certain social space as one of its means to be different.

¹⁰⁰ All the important political functions in the Batopilas district and the decisive share of its legal economic richness are almost exclusively in the hands of the local mestizo elites.

¹⁰¹ E.g., J. H. Steward 1955: 53 referred to the fact that social change does not always need to lead to cultural change while on the contrary the latter almost always produces social change. We illustrate: if a Rarámuri shifts his status to the level of one Batopilas mestizo, e.g., on the basis of his political function in the ejido and in the section which is territorially its part it need not necessarily lead to a change in the traditional culture of clothing (the native officer who reached a certain social status in the region continues to wear a head scarf, *tagora* and *aká* and only rarely dresses like a mestizo – tights, shirt, hat and leather nailed shoes). If a mestizo has more connections with Rarámuri individuals, that does not mean that he becomes a *suwi*-drinker and that he prefers to drink it to *aguardiente*, *tequila* or *lechuguilla*, etc.

¹⁰² See his book *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984.

Ritual compadrazgo can strengthen this awareness, especially in the regions like Batopilas, as it usually keeps all the actors within the boundaries of their social and intraethnic space and does not prevent them from being *different* and it does not significantly affect their personal and cultural integrity.

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