

After Artaud: Sante Judas

Given the time of year that Artaud visited the Sierra Tarahumara — 6-8 weeks between late-August and his return to Chihuahua City on October 7 — he would have missed the Semana Santa Easter Festival which, like other similar celebrations across Central America, features a Judas figure. As many writers, as well as Artaud himself, have pointed out, he most likely was only allowed to participate in one of the Tarahumara's less elaborate funeral ceremonies which may — or may not — have included the taking of peyote (or any of the other several local hallucinogenic substitutes).



Photo credits, clockwise from top-left: Bernard L. Fontana / Unknown / Bennett & Zingg / Unknown

Sacrificial Effigies of Judas

In the photos above, the Judas effigy's most obvious features are his phallus and beard, both pointing toward his role as an outsider (Tarahumaras are unable to grow beards) and his use, like the Booger Dance in North American tribes of the east coast, in bringing up the topic of sex — and thus fertility — through comedic display. A burlesque, in other words, the birds and the bees as well as a shameless catalyst for initiating more private rites and rituals.

It's a performance of fertility. Or else, just a staging of plain ol' horny pleasure. It's said that men shouldn't fall asleep in front of Judas because if he doesn't fuck you, he's gonna make you fuck him (at least one source indicates that the Tarahumara Judas traditionally had a carved anus as well as a phallus). But how this blends with the Good Friday/Easter Sunday reenactment of crucifixion-entombment-resurrection is probably lost to undocumented history. Judas definitely is and is not Jesus to the Tarahumara. And this Judas/Jesus is set afire — not resurrected — and destroyed at sunrise on the third day.

In the following quotations from primarily anthropological sources you will be able to find 1. Descriptions of the Tarahumara Easter celebrations and the role of Judas in them from the 1890s-2012; 2. How comedic sexualized pantomime — particularly regarding the anus — has served to resolve conflict and promote comradery within the culture and; 3. Accounts of Tarahumara beliefs, taboos and rituals regarding death as they may have been witnessed by Artaud. My primary conclusion is this: if Artaud didn't participate in this ritual and only cadged it from Lumholtz as Krutak suggests, then this is a... dead-end. If he did in fact gain enough of the Tarahumara's trust to be invited to a ceremony, I can almost guarantee you that someone, at some point, pulled up their loincloth and showed Artaud their butthole.

“Judas!” he cried to him: “You know how they value me,
Make haste and sell me, and finish haggling:
I am suffering, Friend! beaten to the ground.
Come! O you who, at least, have the strength of crime!” Nerval (in *Aurélia*, p.161)

[The Semana Santa celebrants] were divided into two groups called “Pharisees” and “Judases.” Their legs and faces were daubed with clay. ... The Tarahumara “Judases” carry two grass effigies of general human form which are sometimes burned. In this particular alone is the Indian custom similar to that of the Mexicans during their Holy Week who burn or explode effigies of Judas, a character hateful to them. Zingg (in *Behind the Mexican Mountains*, p.206)

The Judases and the Pharisees painted their legs in solid white or in stripes. They painted their faces also. They wore crowns like those of the *matachines*, only decorated with turkey or chicken feathers. (In other pueblos they use regular straw hats covered with turkey feathers.) Six small boys were painted from head to foot in stripes of red, white, and black. The dancer of the *pascol* wore clothes of cotton cloth, belts, and ankle rattles. He painted his face, head, and hands. Four men carried four small crosses and small painted poles adorned with a grass cross. Two grass dummies represented Judas. Bennet & Zingg (in *The Tarahumara, An Indian Tribe of Northern Mexico*, pg.313)

Saturday morning there was a general rest, during which six small boys were painted, hair and all, with stripes of red, black, and white... In Guadalupe pueblo, there is much more play between the Judas' and the Pharisees, which results in sham battles, beatings, robberies, and eventually in the burning of the dummies of Judas. (Bennett & Zingg, p.315)

On Holy Saturday morning, after the Fariseos have been "killed" in front of the church by Soldados, they arise from the "world of the dead" to carry the statue of Judas from the church to the field where the wrestling takes place. Here they once again engage in combat with Soldados. The movements seem much more akin to sexual intercourse than to battle, and the action takes place under the eyes of Judas who, with penis protruding, stands overlooking the performance. Kennedy & Lopez (in *Semana Santa in the Sierra Tarahumara*, p.56)

When the [Judas] figure was lifted out of its pine-bough bed the following morning, the intended destination was also announced: "Véngase, Aparóch, vamos a ver las luchas, (Come on, Grandfather, we are going to see the wrestling)." Such comments, whether directed to the figure, or simply to those listening, were never reverent or tinged with awe. They were conversational and familiar, although not disrespectful. Frequently, they referred to Judas' sexual prowess. ... Standing face-to-face, each wrestler firmly gripped the other's sash with both hands. The match ended when one managed to toss the other on his back, the winner often falling on top of the loser. When this happened, the winner made brief remarks and mimed copulation, much to everyone's delight. (Kennedy & Lopez, p.72-74)

The traditional Tarahumara garb for males consists of a loosely-wrapped loincloth, and the culprit's position at the orquéta exposes his genitals. The orquéta is used only during Holy Week when there are large numbers of people in the village, and the crowd actively participates in witty, loud discussions about the individual's sex characteristics, making this a very effective shaming device. (Kennedy & Lopez, p.76)

One is impressed by the complete foreignness of this fiesta in regard to the rest of the culture of the Tarahumaras. They speak of the Pharisees and Judas. The Judas use dummies which are sometimes burned in effigy. However, there is a complete lack of knowledge of the significance of these names. Even the maestro, who spoke Spanish well, knew little about them. It was a ceremony in which one knew when to parade and when to pray—that was all. (Bennett & Zingg, p.317)

... it seems obvious that if this custom was not assimilated into Holy Week celebrations when Lumholtz was in the area, it was been since. It may even be that the figures were originally introduced by the priests, and that during the Jesuit absence they were assimilated almost completely into the aboriginal system of "curing" (preventive maintenance) ceremonies ... The aura of sexuality which surrounds these figures, the sexual joking, the simulated copulation of the figures, the frequent construction of a penis on them, and the ritual burning in a newly plowed field, make it clear that Judas is a fertility figure. The construction of these effigies seems directly related to the central Tarahumara ritual concern: ensuring the production of crops in the coming year. (Kennedy & Lopez, p.57)

[The bottom of the Urique Canyon, the deepest *barranca* of all], was supposed to be a good place to see the Tarahumara Easter rites. They varied substantially from village to village across the Sierra but traditionally included body painting, all night drumming and dancing, ritual drunkenness, wrestling matches, mock battles, and the burning of a Judas effigy with a huge wooden erection. In some villages, mainly at the goading of priests and missionaries, the Tarahumaras were now charging tourists to film and photograph a brief sanitized performance of their traditional rites, with minimal drinking and a dickless Judas, but down in Urique Canyon, or so I had heard, in the villages of Guapalaina and the Guadalupe Coronado, Tarahumaras were still celebrating Easter with full pagan gusto. (Grant, p.198-199)

At the end of the Sisoguichic wrestling matches, Judas is attacked vigorously by the Soldados. During the attack his Western clothes drop off, revealing an outsized erect penis. He is represented as a non-Tarahumara (*chavóchi*) who is treated with derision, while at the same time he symbolizes the admired attributes of virility and procreative potency. The outward treatment of Judas is in keeping with Christian notions of killing the betrayer of Christ. Though it is clear that “Evil” is being symbolically attacked, it is also evident that Judas represents fertility as well. (Kennedy & Lopez, p.55-56)

The Fariseos at Sisoguichic also use reed flutes that are about twice as long as those of the Soldados. In the eyes of the Fariseos these flutes are phallic symbols and, in contrast with the short flutes of the Soldados, represent the virility of their organization. When the penis is carved for the Judas statue, it is as life-like as possible. It is clear that the Fariseo organization is deeply concerned with sexuality and fertility. While Judas is kept hidden at the north side of the Sisoguichic church, those who guard him must be careful not to fall asleep, for the Tarahumara Judas, in his excited state, may commit some inappropriate sex act. Indeed, if one of the guards does fall asleep, another Fariseo may pick up the statue and, much to the delight of the onlookers, place it on the sleeping guard and simulate copulation. (Judas is known to be extremely active sexually.) The astral motifs painted on the Fariseos’ drums and swords are associated with Judas, although the precise meaning of these is unknown. Judas himself, at Sisoguichic, has the sun painted on his hat. (Kennedy & Lopez, p.56)

Judas was leaning against the wall of the small adobe building. He was made of wood and straw, standing about eight feet high with a two-liter plastic bottle of murky corn beer for a bladder, old leather boots dangling on pieces of string, and a carved wooden erection about two feet long. The devils called him Papa and took turns hoisting him on their shoulders, with the erection jutting out over their heads like a ship’s prow. They danced around until his weight collapsed them into the dust, whereupon Judas’s bladder would fall out, or his penis would fall off, and the poor *capitán* would have to enforce his authority over the reeling crew of laughing, disobedient devils and get them to put Judas back together again. (Grant, p.218-219)

Soon after awakening on Holy Saturday morning we learned the reason for the added length and hilarity of the ritual. A straw figure of Judas had been made the day before, and Judas, complete with a large wooden penis, had put in an appearance. (Fontana, p.149)

The clothes—consisting of hat, shawl, neckerchief, sweater, and trousers—were saved. The straw and wooden penis were put to the torch and burned. Evil, if that is what Judas represented, had been dispatched. (Fontana, p.150)

The priest did not dare interfere too much in the Tarahumara rituals. He recounted how another cleric, several years before, had tried by force to stop these “pagan” practices. The Fariseos, in keeping with the Easter theme of burlesque and sexuality, threatened to castrate him. Terrified, he fled the village that night. ... Other evidence that the Tarahumaras regard the Holy Week rituals as affirmations of their community identity can be seen in the customs relating to the Judas figures. Despite the fact that these effigies are regarded with some affection, they also have negative associations with the *chavóchi*. In many areas they are dressed in ragged mestizo clothing, and much of the ridicule and aggressive action taken against them, including their destruction and burning at the end of the ceremonies, may be interpreted as symbolic aggression against the Europeans’ violent three-hundred-year trespass on the Tarahumaras’ culture. Even the promiscuous and prodigious sexuality associated with Judas seems symbolic of the aggressive behavior and lack of control of the mestizos which, though envied to some degree, is also ridiculed. (Kennedy & Lopez, p.58)

Sexualized Pantomime within Tarahumara Culture

From John G. Kennedy’s field notes describing Tarahumara beer parties:

He parted the split even wider and pointed to his rectum, inviting the *hombre-mujer* to try it, but the latter only smiled. ... She picked up a cob too, and tried to thrust it toward the old man’s rectum. Kennedy (in *Tarahumara of the Sierra Madre*, p.110)

Jesús pushed Patricio saying: “You are not so strong, I will screw you.” (Kennedy, p.112)

He threatened to rape him, then threw him to the ground face down, jumped on top of him, and moved his buttocks up and down as he laughed wildly. (Kennedy, p.113)

His loincloth was half-off, exposing his genitals. (Kennedy, p.115)

Rodrigo was sitting by the *tesgüino olla* when Seledonio rushed up to him and began making hip thrusting gestures toward his face while laughing loudly. He took off his loincloth and placed his flaccid organ close to Rodrigo’s face. Then he turned around and pointed to his bared rectum which he pushed up close to Rodrigo, laughing gleefully all the while and asking him to try it. Finally he grabbed the older man and thrust him outside the house, where, to the amusement of some, he forced him down on all fours and

simulated copulation with him. ...Rodrigo appeared to be playing a disliked role; his behavior was much more restrained than that of Seledonio. He was enduring the indignities without resistance. (Kennedy, p.121)

The above excerpts from my notes clearly illustrate the operation of the psychosocial dynamics of the beer party. ... I observed that the Tarahumara etiquette of *tesgüino* drinking requires that all adults present drink as much beer as possible. (Kennedy, p.123)

[In typical *tesgüinadas*], it will be remembered how the interplay may take the form of a contest where two men taunt each other with threats or offers of anal intercourse. (Kennedy, p.197)

The term *mutcímuli* refers to a “joking” relationship with a brother-in-law or a sister-in-law. The relationship is a humorous one and consists of rather obscene play and speech between the parties concerned, which increases in boisterousness at the *tesgüinadas*. The play consists of obscene jokes, attempts to lift the woman’s skirts, touching private parts, pulling off clothes, wrestling, and numerous other tricks which would never be tolerated in other relationships, even that of man and wife. When men and women, or men and men, are playing with each other at a party, and the watchers are enjoying the fun a great deal, it is almost a certainty that the entertainers are *mutcímuli*. The word itself is slightly vulgar in meaning, but is in common and good usage among the Tarahumaras. (Bennett & Zingg, p.222)

There are no celibates among the Tarahumaras. Virginity is neither particularly prized nor essential for marriage. ... Despite the promiscuity, there is very little prostitution; and the idea of it seems to have been introduced from outside, rather than being basically Tarahumara. (Bennett & Zingg, p.230)

Across the buttocks of the village teacher were the letters N-O-S-E. *No sé*. I don’t know. The women were getting drunker and drunker and one grandmother held a corn cob at her groin like a penis and chased around a little boy. I had read about this joking sexual relationship between Tarahumara grandmothers and grandsons but was nonetheless startled to see how raunchy it was. She pinned the boy against the wall and pretended to hump him, producing good-natured laughter all around. (Grant, p.218-219)

Devils ran after children with their AK-47 barrels sticking out between their legs like erections. They wiggled their painted asses in the laps of unwary spectators, dry-humped each other, pretended to threaten people, snatched their possessions, and sometimes refused to give them back, all the time whooping and making that stylized laughing sound, “Heh-heh-heh! Hah-hah-hah!” (Grant, p.220)

Tarahumara Beliefs and Rituals Regarding Death

The Land of the Dead is a land of opposites. There night is as the day of the living. The moon is the source of heat and light. When it is cold on earth, it is warm in the Sky World. The dead sow in winter, and reap in March. (Zingg, p.91)

Another difference from the normal fiesta is that a small fire of pitch pine is made near the small cross beneath the end of the table, where the belongings of the deceased are piled. ... The in-law joking partners place little bowls of beans and of meat and small bundles of tortillas in the rafters of the house of the deceased. The ghost eats these when he returns for his death fiestas. The “joking relatives”* must dance and play violin music, and they are responsible for handling the possessions of the dead person. The immediate family is relieved of all obligations for these ceremonies because of the particular danger to them from the ghost. ... In another instance of reversal, they dress in the clothing of the opposite sex** and dance up to his belongings, kicking at them and making obscene jokes and remarks. (Kennedy, p.172-173)

*See widely available sources for further info about the anthropological term “joking relationships.” In this instance, it consists of pairings that are at least one step removed from parent/child, yet within an older/younger dyad (i.e. grandfather/grandson and uncle/niece, but also non-blood relations such as mother-in-law/son-in-law). Given the large orphanage in Norogachi that Zingg describes, as well as the schoolhouse that Artaud and others note, one can only hope that there might be a little teacher-on-student, benefactor-on-orphan and priest-on-altar boy action, as well.

** I have found no other description of transvestism within Tarahumara death rituals but one could surmise it is related to the reversals imminent to the “land of opposites.” But combining the idea with the lonely dead’s ability to “lure the living to join them” one wonders if the cross-dressed joking relatives, protected enough to be able to handle the ghost’s possessions, are cast as counter-lures distracting and seducing the dead away from their most significant others. Or, given the situation wherein the widow/widower is already under the ghost’s spell, do the transvestite joking relatives attempt to seduce the living person out of the spell?

In this instance they simply thought that because [the deceased] had offended a [revered hallucinogenic] plant, his soul had gone off on a journey from which it would not likely return. They certainly hoped that it wouldn’t, since for them the dead return only to harm. (Zingg, p.89)

The belief is that the dead may want to harm survivors, because they are lonely and would like to have the company of their relatives. (Fontana, p.81)

Death is accepted as a fact of life, and mourners are not given to overt expressions of grief. Except that she should not have relations with men nor remarry until her deceased husband is in heaven, there are almost no restrictions placed on widows.

... The outstanding emotion of survivors is not grief, but fear. The dead are capable of all kinds of mischief. They can lure the living to join them; spoil tesgüino; kill cattle and sheep; spit and blow in the faces of people to make them ill; suffocate people; eat food that has been prepared for a feast. Because the dead are supposed to travel about at night, only shamans can travel safely after dark. Other Tarahumaras do not like to travel at night. (Fontana, p.85)

The illustration following my bibliography is of the Pompidou archive dossier for Artaud's "The Hanged Woman," 1945*. Does this drawing feature something like a Judas effigy being hanged from a beam protruding from God's exposed ass?

At the very end, a digital collage/sketch of my own which tries to accentuate this theory.

In the above quotations, all underlining and parenthetical notes are my own.

-- Richard Hawkins, Sept 2016

Bibliography

Bernard L. Fontana, *Tarahumara: Where Night is the Day of the Moon* (1981); Richard Grant, *God's Middle Finger: Into the Lawless Heart of the Sierra Madre* (2008); John G. Kennedy, *Tarahumara of the Sierra Madre* (1996); John G. Kennedy and Raúl A. López, *Semana Santa in the Sierra Tarahumara: A Comparative Study in Three Communities* (1981); Gérard de Nerval, *Aurélia & Other Writings* (1996); Wendell C. Bennett and Robert M. Zingg, *The Tarahumara, An Indian Tribe of Northern Mexico* (1976); Robert M. Zingg, *Behind the Mexican Mountains* (2001)

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