

Body, Ritual, and Knowledge: A Symbolic Approach to the Experience of Vulnerability in the *Rarámuri-pagótuame's* Self-Understanding

PABLO GALINDO CRUZ, Universidad Panamericana, Instituto de Humanidades, Aguascalientes, Mexico

GALINDO CRUZ, P.: Body, Ritual, and Knowledge: A Symbolic Approach to the Experience of Vulnerability in the *Rarámuri-pagótuame's* Self-Understanding
FILOZOFIA, 81, 2026, No 5, pp. 588 – 602



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International Public License.

This article analyzes how the *Rarámuri-pagótuame* – who constitute the vast majority of the Rarámuri population in Mexico's Sierra Tarahumara but live in extreme geographical dispersion – articulate a symbolic system that transcends technical reductionism. Drawing on Ernst Cassirer's symbolic forms, it argues that the foundation for symbolic relationships is vulnerability, not a flaw to be overcome. The study asserts that the *awí* (the Rarámuri dance) is a fundamental symbolic form through which the body has spiritual presence. Through this kinetic practice, the Rarámuri shape space, time, and the cosmic order, and transform biological fragility into spiritual flourishing. By challenging the disembodied scientific symbol, this research demonstrates that dance is a legitimate form of embodied knowledge, rooted in the rhythmic, communal, and cosmic responsibility of the dancing body.

Keywords: symbolic forms – *Rarámuri-pagótuame* – vulnerability – ritual dance – Ernst Cassirer

Introduction:

Cultural Mediation, Symbolic Forms, and Human Vulnerability

In *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Ernst Cassirer argues that objects are never simply “given” to consciousness (Cassirer 2021, 37) in a static or finished form but rather emerge from a process of “formation” (*Formung*) (Cassirer 2021, 37) that functions as a universal spiritual energy across all cultural domains. For Cassirer, this active process unfolds whenever a worldview takes shape, implying that the spirit does much more than simply react to external impressions; rather, it engages with them through “genuine spiritual actions” (Cassirer 2021, 27) that are equally foundational to both mythical and scientific thought. However, the author explains that modern Western society has prioritized a single direction of this process: the “exact” science of nature (Cassirer 2021, 38) and its abstract model of “scientific cognition” (Cassirer 2021, 77), considering it as the paragon of objective truth. Consequently, modern thought has systematically marginalized other valid forms of knowledge, such as myth, which, although it may seem to “sink into nothingness” (Cassirer 2021, 17) in the eyes of scientific reflection, it remains a legitimate “state of knowledge” (Cassirer 2021, 3) defined by its own “inherent, structural lawfulness” (Cassirer 2021, 4).

In contrast to the scientific view, this article argues that human vulnerability and moral virtue cannot be adequately understood through narrow conceptions that exclude mythical thought; rather, an approach considering symbolic forms rooted in concrete practices, myth, and tradition is required (Cassirer 2021, 4, 48). To demonstrate this, the article examines the self-understanding of the *Rarámuri-pagótuame* (the baptized Rarámuri). Ethnographically, this study focuses on the Upper Tarahumara (Alta Tarahumara, e.g., Sisoguichi and Pawichiki), where foundational fieldwork (De Velasco 1987; Robles 1991) was conducted. While acknowledging local variations in the Lower Tarahumara (Baja Tarahumara), the analysis addresses this shared pagótuame framework, viewing such indigenous traditions as highly sophisticated epistemological constructs (Cassirer 2021, 4 – 5). Within Tarahumara anthropology, dance constitutes the primary code for maintaining cosmic regeneration and reciprocity with the divine (*Onorúame*), as demonstrated in Bonfiglioli’s structural analysis of the yúmari (2008). Through their ritual practices, community cohesion, and sacred dances, the Rarámuri articulate a robust form of “embodied mind” (MacIntyre 2006, 88) that conceptualizes human fragility not as a flaw to be corrected but as a relational

domain where human flourishing becomes possible (Galindo Cruz 2025b, 153, 160).

To achieve this objective, I present three sections: in the first section, I explore human corporeality and physical vulnerability, and I argue that the body serves as the foundational locus for all cultural and symbolic mediation. In Section II, I contextualize this theoretical foundation within the self-understanding of the *Rarámuri-pagótuame*, illustrating how the cultural concept of being “baptized” establishes an epistemological and ethical community that processes fragility through mutual interdependence (*kórima*). In Section III, I analyze how the Rarámuri ritual dance constitutes an expression of embodied knowledge, in which kinetic and traditional practices actively shape space, time, and the cosmic order. Finally, in the conclusions, I offer some synthesizing reflections on how this indigenous symbolic form provides a holistic path toward human flourishing that challenges the reductionist limits of modern technical abstraction.

I. The Lived Body as the Foundational Locus of Symbolic Mediation

The prevailing crisis in the contemporary understanding of human corporeality stems from a dualistic fragmentation that oscillates between rigid biological essentialism and a disembodied abstract culturalism. As noted in the introduction, modern epistemology has increasingly privileged the “scientific symbol” (characterized by its physical-mathematical abstraction) as the sole arbiter of objective reality (Cassirer 2021, 38). In doing so, it has systematically marginalized alternative models of understanding that arise directly from the experience of the human condition (Cassirer 2021, 17). In this section, I will argue that human corporeality – particularly in its state of vulnerability and physical fragility – is not merely a technical management issue, but rather the locus and condition of possibility for all symbolic and cultural mediation (Galindo Cruz 2025, 151). Within the architecture of humanity understood as a symbolic being, the vulnerable body is the essential field where existence is transformed into a network of meaning (Cassirer 2021, 27). This somatic approach opposes one-dimensional systems of understanding, such as reductionist materialism, which fails to do justice to human life outside the “natural habitat” of daily practices (Midgley 2005, 12, 16). Understanding the human condition requires a plurality of “maps” (historical, biological, and everyday) that prevent the spirit from being reduced to a mere, empty jumble of physical parts (Midgley 2005, 283, 355).

A. The Embodied Mind and the Spontaneity of Consciousness

By going beyond the idea of the body as a mere instrument, philosophy can assert that knowledge of objects results from a process of formation through consciousness (Cassirer 2021, 37). MacIntyre emphasizes that we are situated thinkers whose identity is rooted in a somatic history (MacIntyre 2006, 88). Therefore, a purely biological approach would fail to recognize the “self” as a product of the symbolic process (Cassirer 2021, 190). The vulnerable body serves as the basis of functional objectivity, fusing physical affect with the sign (Cassirer 2021, 338). Human fragility is articulated in expressive forms as the subject uses their body to give concrete form to their identity within a specific existential context (Galindo Cruz 2025b, 153). Far from being a mere impediment, vulnerability acts as a driving force behind this symbolic process: physical susceptibility compels the subject to transcend mere biological impulse and thus enter the realm of meaningful relationships.

B. The Two Masks: Nakedness, Concealment, and Bonding

The symbolic nature of the body is most evident in the ways society interprets somatic markers such as age, health, and nakedness. As Agamben points out, human nakedness is a condition marked by the “opening of the gaze” that follows the loss of the “veil of grace,” which carries an inescapable theological sign (Agamben 2011, 86). Unlike other species, whose bodily expressiveness is manifest – such as the plumage of birds or the spots of a leopard – and serves as biological markers of their being, the human body is naturally devoid of such indicators (Agamben 2011, 128; Galindo Cruz 2024, 168). This “metaphysical nakedness” makes the human face the most fundamental – and, simultaneously, the most exposed – point of expression, functioning not only as a biological surface but as the site of the vulnerability that underlies all formal language (Galindo Cruz 2024, 169). In the encounter with the Other, the face manifests as “extreme exposure, the indefensible, vulnerability itself” (Lévinas 1993, 175, 194).

For this reason, even when fully clothed, a person is always naked. The body’s permanent nakedness represents man’s total openness. Thus, there are only two types of masks: those that conceal the face, turning the wearer into a bandit or an executioner, and those used in cultural practices or to protect oneself from the climate or disease. The latter do not conceal but rather express the bond between what is most naked and open in man and his own community and environment.

This constitutive openness, while defining our human condition, introduces an inherent fragility that transforms the understanding of physical vulnerability from an individual trait into a shared and relational aspect (Galindo Cruz 2025, 160). In this light, human fragility, as I noted above, is not a “technical flaw,” but rather the very ground on which human flourishing becomes possible (Galindo Cruz 2025, 160). Modern hyper-technical efforts to “erase the body” ignore the fact that identity is constitutively located within a specific somatic unit (MacIntyre 2006, 96). We do not “have” a body as a tool; we are situated thinkers who exist only as minds in particular bodies (MacIntyre 2006, 88; Galindo Cruz 2025, 159).

Ultimately, human flourishing depends on recognizing our radical dependence on others (MacIntyre 1999, 120). Because human bodies are “essentially,” not “accidentally,” social, no individual can navigate physical limitations alone. Survival and growth are contingent upon a caring community (MacIntyre 2006, 100; Galindo Cruz 2025, 160). By rejecting the dualism between the individual and the collective, we recognize that human self-sufficiency is nothing more than a “bad fiction” (Galindo Cruz 2025, 160). Caring for the body, then, is not about maintaining a machine, but about honoring the embodied mind that makes the world intelligible and moral, precisely through the recognition of its fragility (Galindo Cruz 2025, 161). This conceptual framework establishes the necessary foundation for understanding how Indigenous traditions, such as those of the Rarámuri, process fragility through this interdependence. In the realm of the ritual-symbolic, particularly in dance, masks – when used – do not conceal identity but rather function as a sign that connects the most open aspect of the human being with their community and with the mystery of their own beauty. In this way, dance transforms biological reality into an act of grace in which the body, transformed into a symbol, reveals to all the shared truth of the world that would otherwise remain unattainable.

II. The Rarámuri-pagótuame as an Epistemological Synthesis: Knowledge through Tradition and Community

The Rarámuri-pagótuame’s self-understanding represents a profound symbolic synthesis that goes beyond a mere religious label. For Ernst Cassirer, symbolic forms are not a static reflection of a preexisting world, but rather the very mode by which the human spirit achieves its “objectification” (Cassirer 2021, 37). For the Rarámuri of the Sierra Tarahumara, the term *pagótuame* (baptized) functions as an internal interpretive and epistemological matrix that actively shapes their

reality and defines what it means to be a “true man” in relation to the sacred, the community, and the inherent fragility of existence (Robles 1991, 60). Although the pagótuame constitute the vast majority of this indigenous group, they live in extreme geographical dispersion rather than concentrated communities, gathering only seasonally around mission temples for ritual purposes. In this section, I argue that the pagótuame identity, anchored in the primordial symbolic form of sacred dance, is a robust alternative to the technical and reductionist approach of the “scientific symbol,” as it offers an embodied mode of knowledge that processes human fragility not through mere management, but through a unity of mythical, spatial, and kinetic participation.

A. The Pagótuame Identity: Beyond Classification, Toward Mythical Congruence

To understand *Pagótuame* identity as an internal symbolic construct, it is necessary to examine its functional genesis as a “synthesis of resistance” (Robles 1991, 66). Rather than passively accepting colonial indoctrination, the Rarámuri “rarámurized the Christianity they received and Christianized their ancestral Rarámuri traditions” (Robles 1991, 58). In Cassirer’s terms, this was a sophisticated formation of consciousness (Cassirer 2013, 77); far from a passive tradition, this identity is an active self-understanding defined in ethical opposition to the *chabochi* (non-indigenous) model of non-humanity (Robles 1991, 75). As Cassirer notes, totemic classifications are “universal principles of the classification of the world” (Cassirer 2013, 18 – 19). Like the Zuni, the *Rarámuri-pagótuame* worldview organizes the universe (sun, moon, elements) through a system of “mythical congruence” (Cassirer 2013, 19, 37). In this system, being “baptized” is an ontological state that extends back to the origins of the world, collapsing linear history into a “mythical present” (Robles 1991, 51, 62). This identity distinguishes them from the *chabochi*, who are symbolically relegated to the “realm of those who live below” (Robles 1991, 75 – 76). This is not a mere prejudice, but a “real determination of being” (Cassirer 2013, 21). For the *Pagótuame*, the *chabochi* project is an anti-humanity of accumulation and pride that rejects the shared indigence of the human condition, whereas the *pagótuame* conception embraces vulnerability as the foundation of truth.

This ethical and epistemological distinction is best understood through what Alasdair MacIntyre identifies as “tradition-constituted inquiry,” in which rationality is inseparable from the social and intellectual history within which it is situated (MacIntyre 1988, 31). From this perspective, the *pagótuame* identity is not a static relic but a living argument across time (MacIntyre 1988, 40) that defines its own standards of justice and practical reason. While the *chabochi*

project prioritizes what MacIntyre calls the “goods of effectiveness” – external rewards such as wealth or power – the Rarámuri tradition focuses on the “goods of excellence” inherent in the ritual practice of dance (MacIntyre 1988, 32, 45). In this tradition, justice is not an abstract rule, but a virtue embedded in a shared framework that makes human actions intelligible precisely through the recognition of their cosmic interdependence and orientation (MacIntyre 1988, 22 – 23, 65).

B. Dance as a Foundational Symbolic Form of Objectification

The primary epistemological tool of the *Pagótuame* is not the abstract concept, but rather the sacred dance. For the Rarámuri, truth is not a theoretical deduction but something “brought to life” through their relationships (Robles 1991, 71). As Cassirer notes regarding the mythical mode of thought, all of nature is divided into names, and everything humans do expresses a communion of being in visible forms (Cassirer 2013, 19). In the Rarámuri context, dance (*awî*) is the supreme expression of communality, it is a memorial that actualizes God’s salvific action through human collaboration (Robles 1991, 104).

Although the Rarámuri ceremonial repertoire includes other pivotal dances such as the *yúmari* – extensively analyzed in Bonfiglioli’s structural ethnography (2008) – this study focuses primarily on the *rutubiri* (or *tutuguri*) and *matachines* as the core symbolic axis for processing cosmic order and colonial mediation. Dance operates according to the logic of *pars pro toto* (the part for the whole), a fundamental principle of mythical metaphor (Cassirer 2013, 23). Every step and every turn in the *rutubiri* or the *matachines*¹ is not merely a representation of the cosmic order, it is the order itself in its magical efficacy (Cassirer 2013, 22). The Rarámuri believe that if they stop dancing, the world will collapse and the sun will consume all life on Earth (Robles 1991, 104). Thus, being a *pagótuame* entails a profound responsibility in the formation of the universe. In the dance, the subject experiences a “true transubstantiation” and becomes the very divine or cosmic force that manifests (Cassirer 2021, 49). This kinetic knowledge challenges the modern “scientific symbol,” which privileges the disembodied observer (Cassirer 2021, 38), by demon-

¹ The *rutuburi* (also found in ethnographic literature under phonetic variants such as *tutuguri* or *tutuburi*) and the *matachines* are the foundational ritual dances of the Rarámuri. The former is an ancestral dance performed to ensure cosmic order, while the latter (performed during feast days) integrates colonial religious influences into the Rarámuri symbolic system.

strating that the most sublime truths are attained by the “embodied mind” in rhythmic coordination with the community and the environment.

C. Mythical Space and the “Pueblo” as an Intellectual System of Coordination

Pagótuame identity is centered around the ritual and spatial order of the temple. In the scattered settlements of the Sierra, the temple is the primary symbolic center (Robles 1991, 64). This corresponds to what Cassirer calls the “totemic structure of spatial consciousness” (Cassirer 2013, 26). Just as the Zuni organize their political and religious life according to the cardinal points, the “pueblo”² is an “original intellectual system of coordination” (Cassirer 2013, 26, 46).

In the temple and the surrounding spaces, the symbolic being finds its “functional circle” (Esparza 2024, 367); the community gathers to “help God” (Robles 1991, 104) sustain the world. Their celebration and dance give meaning to the world and prevent it from collapsing (Robles 1991, 104). This spatial orientation is not merely a geographical arrangement but a privileged frame of reference centered on the body as experienced within the community (Cassirer 2013, 41). While modern technology seeks to “erase the body” by overcoming organic barriers (Galindo Cruz 2025, 151; Cassirer 2013, 49), the *pagótuame* architecture of the “pueblo” emphasizes that flourishing is constitutively “localized” within a specific somatic and communal unit (MacIntyre 2006, 96; Robles 1991, 64).

D. Knowledge by Affect: Challenging the Causal Logic of Modernity

The concept of *pagótuame* directly challenges the hegemony of the modern “scientific symbol” by prioritizing “knowledge by affect” (*Conocimiento por el afecto*)³ (Galindo Cruz 2025, 18). Modern scientific thought, conceived from the perspective of the “functional member,” seeks to annihilate the integral form of order in order to construct a reality based on particular individual conditions (Cassirer 2013, 35). In contrast, the Rarámuri mode of knowledge corresponds

² The term *pueblo* is an ethnographic transcription of the Rarámuri pronunciation of the Spanish word *pueblo* (town). Due to the absence of the lateral liquid [l] in the Rarámuri language, speakers frequently substitute it with a retroflex or vibrant [r] when borrowing Spanish words. In this study, the term specifically designates the administrative and ritual center of the Rarámuri community, reflecting a linguistic and socio-spatial indigenization of colonial structures.

³ “Knowledge by affect” (*conocimiento por el afecto*) is an epistemological term coined by Jesuit missionaries in the Sierra Tarahumara, describing an approach in which truth is apprehended through relational and emotional community bonds rather than abstract logic.

to a “complex thought” that recognizes the “identity of being over all empirical differences” (Cassirer 2013, 36).

Thus, vulnerability acts as the catalyst for virtue: practices such as *kórima*⁴ – sharing – are not mere social traditions but manifestations of a much deeper reality: the radical recognition of interdependence (Galindo Cruz 2025, 1, 9). In accordance with the “sympathy of all things” characteristic of mythical thought, where particular events are merely a “mask behind which hides an identical form of the universe” (Cassirer 2013, 36), for the *pagótuame*, asking for help is not a source of shame because it is nothing more than the realization of a shared human truth: we are all in a state of perpetual debt to one another (Galindo Cruz 2025, 8 – 9). In this way, it challenges the “technocratic hubris” that perceives physical fragility as a flaw that must be corrected through technical manipulation (Galindo Cruz 2025, 160). In the *Pagótuame* understanding, human fragility is a “relational domain” that makes flourishing possible precisely because it demands the symbolic response of dance and communal unity.

Therefore, being a *Rarámuri-pagótuame* constitutes a sophisticated epistemological framework that objectifies the human spirit through a synthesis of myth and kinetic ritual. By rejecting the nominalist view that treats symbols as mere conventional signs (Cassirer 2021, 19), the *Rarámuri* inhabit a world in which dance and community are “effectively equal” to the reality they reveal (Cassirer 2021, 49). This symbolic arrangement provides an alternative way of inhabiting fragility, transforming biological lack into a terrain of profound spiritual flourishing. Caring for the body in this tradition means honoring the “embodied mind” that makes the world intelligible, social, and moral (Galindo Cruz 2025, 161). It is precisely this “embodied knowledge,” vividly manifested in the rhythmic memorial of dance, that allows the *Rarámuri-pagótuame* to inhabit their vulnerability not as a flaw, but as the ground for being the “true men on earth” (Robles 1991, 60; Cassirer 2013, 38).

III. The *Rarámuri* Ritual Dance as a Holistic Configuration of Reality

The contemporary crisis of the body – characterized by the fragmentation of somatic experience into either mere biologism or a disembodied asceticism – finds a radical counterpoint in the ritual practices of the *Rarámuri-pagótuame*. In

⁴ *Kórima* is the traditional *Rarámuri* practice of reciprocal sharing. Transcending charity, it functions as a social obligation in which radical interdependence creates a bond of communal solidarity.

the Western “scientific symbol,” the body is frequently relegated to being a passive substrate or a technical instrument to be manipulated (Cassirer 2021, 38; Galindo Cruz 2025, 151). However, this article argues that the sacred Rarámuri dance (*awí*) constitutes an internal epistemological configuration in which the body “thinks” and registers the cosmic order. In Ernst Cassirer’s philosophy, symbolic forms (myth, art, and religion) are not mere mirrors of a preexisting world, but rather “active configurations” through which the human spirit achieves objectification (Cassirer 2021, 37; Cassirer 2013, 5). For the Rarámuri, dancing is not merely an aesthetic or decorative performance, but a “construction of the world” (De Velasco 1987, 206). In this section, I will analyze the Rarámuri’s kinetic practices through Cassirer’s categories of mythical space and time, using the granular analysis of Magiman et al. (2026, 3 – 12) to demonstrate how traditional wisdom achieves a holistic understanding of human flourishing that is inaccessible to descriptive or mathematical sciences.

A. Rite is the Earlier, Myth the Later

A fundamental principle of Cassirer’s phenomenology of mythical consciousness is the ontological priority of action, which asserts that “rite is the earlier, myth the later” (Cassirer 2021, 49). From this perspective, the narrative component of myth is often merely a “light veil” or an “outward reflection” of an internal event experienced primarily through worship and sacrifice (Cassirer 2021, 227). This philosophical position aligns with the empirical reality of the Rarámuri world described by De Velasco, where there is a marked primacy of action over content. Rarámuri religiosity rests on ritual continuity – not on dogma – where rites take precedence over myths (De Velasco 1987, 187). In the *awí*, the body does not represent a belief but rather enacts reality. As Cassirer observes, “in the dance, the dancer does not represent the god but instead becomes and, in fact, is the god” (Lofts 2021, XXIV). This “law of concrescence” – or the coincidence of the members of a relationship – means that the symbol and the symbolized merge into an “immediate coalesced unity” (Cassirer 2021, 265, 292). When the Rarámuri dance the *Rutubiri* or the *Matachines*, they are not merely carrying out a tradition, but are participating in a *dromena*, a sacred action “effectively equal” to the cosmic forces it invokes (Cassirer 2021, 309 – 310). Kinetic art is the primary means of objectifying the relationship between the human spirit and the divine, making the word of God visible through movement.

B. The Body as the Navel of the World

Cassirer defines mythical space not as a geometric abstraction of interchangeable positions but as a “structural space” endowed with qualitative accents of the sacred and the profane (Cassirer 2021, 377; Cassirer 2013, 31). In this symbolic architecture, space is a “schema” through which qualitative differences are translated into spatial images (Cassirer 2021, 378 – 379). The Rarámuri dance is the supreme tool for this spatial orientation.

Every turn and movement in the ritual dance serves as an “intellectual system of coordination” (Cassirer 2021, 377; Cassirer 2013, 31). As De Velasco points out, the *awí* is a “construction of the world” that establishes a network of divine and human relationships, prioritizing symbolic bonds over technical transformation (De Velasco 1987, 206). This kinetic art manifests the “structural thinking” of myth, in which every part “is” the whole (Cassirer 2021, 266; Cassirer 2013, 36). Within this symbolic framework, the dance floor becomes a microcosm where the entire spatial world is constructed according to a certain model (Cassirer 2013, 37).

This kinetic experience of time provides a holistic understanding of human flourishing that resists modern, disembodied culturalism. In dance, the Rarámuri are “true men” precisely because they collaborate with God in the “formation” of the Universe (Robles 1991, 58, 60; Cassirer 2021, 37). Their flourishing is not measured by individual accumulation or material progress – which they associate with the inhumanity of the *chabochi* – but by the community’s ability to “keep God propitious” (De Velasco 1987, 139) through a ritual commitment in which dance is the key to their collective salvation and their place in the afterlife (De Velasco 1987, 137, 178).

C. Mythic Time and the Kinetic “Now”: Collapsing History into Presence

The quantification of time (Cassirer 2021, 132) is fundamentally alien to the *awí*. Mythic time is a “feeling of phases” apprehended only through the image of life, which is rhythmic and sacred (Cassirer 2021, 133 – 134). The *awí* operates within a “mythical present” that collapses linear history into the absolute origin (Robles 1991, 62).

Robles characterizes dance as a “memorial” (1991, 104). This aligns with Cassirer’s reflection on myth: “the past itself no longer has a ‘why’: it is the ‘why’ of things” (Cassirer 2021, 130). Each ritual cycle – whether the winter ritual or the Holy Week *matachines*, in which “soldiers” and “Pharisees” fight – is not a historical reenactment but an immediate “effective event” (Cassirer 2021, 50). Through dance, the Rarámuri inhabit the “now” as a moment of functional

objectivity in which human beings and the divine are “integrally interwoven” (Cassirer 2021, 17 – 18).

D. The Body as a Symbolic Vessel

To understand how the body “thinks” during dance, we must examine a granular analysis of kinetic practices. Although Magiman et al. examine the Buket Hudoq tradition, their approach provides a methodology for interpreting Rarámuri motifs as tangible community values (Magiman et al. 2026, 2). These motifs are visual manifestations of collective memory and social development (Magiman et al. 2026, 3 – 4). The *matachines* are embodied ideas in which the performer becomes a vessel for spiritual presence (Magiman et al. 2026, 4, 10). For example, the *rutuburi* movement – giving turns – acts as a spiritual renewal that ensures harmony in the ecosystem (Robles 1991, 72, 104, 97; Magiman et al. 2026, 11). These movements reflect a social structure in which free and creative individuals organize themselves through multiple interdependencies (Robles 1991, 126). Through rhythmic effort and collective coordination, the body encodes environmental wisdom (Magiman et al. 2026, 11), demonstrating that human bodies are essentially social (MacIntyre 2006, 100) and that no isolated individual can overcome fragility (Galindo Cruz 2025b, 153, 160).

E. Dance or Die

In *Dance or Die* [*Danzar o morir*], De Velasco (1987) shows that the gravity of the ritual imperative is central: for the Rarámuri, the “gravest sin” is to stop dancing, as it represents an ontological failure to fulfill the body’s role in maintaining the cosmos. Stopping the dance breaks the natural reciprocity that unites humans, nature, and the divine (De Velasco 1987, 206), for “the feeling of the community of all living things effaces all visible differences” (Cassirer 2021, 226). The *awí* acknowledges human fragility as the condition of possibility for symbolic mediation; while the scientific symbol seeks to erase the body through technical manipulation (García Barrón 2025, 171), dance celebrates it as the “indefensible cry” of existence (Lévinas 1993, 75). The physical exhaustion of dancing all night without sleep somatically represents a radical dependence (Robles 1991, 126), proving that flourishing depends on the community’s recognition of physical limitations. While science describes the “how” of movement through biomechanical equations, it cannot access the “what”: the spiritual action and the functional whole that make the world religiously intelligible (Cassirer 2021, 288). The kinetic wisdom of the *Rarámuri-pagótuame* proves that truth is not something to be mastered by a sovereign subject, but

rather something “brought to life” (Robles 1991, 71) through the “believing-and-complying” (*believing in it and complying with it*) (Robles 1991, 70) of the dancing body, in which ritual takes precedence over myth (De Velasco 1987, 178).

In short, the Rarámuri ritual dance constitutes a “sophisticated ritual synthesis” that transcends the aesthetic and sociological (Robles 1991, 58). Through Cassirer’s philosophical lens, we see the *awí* as a “form of intuition” that shapes space, time, and reality into an organic whole. It is an act of “objectification” in which the body “contemplates” its own fragility and its responsibility within the cosmic order.

Magiman et al. (2026, 4) confirm ritual movement as an “active approach in social development” and “educational tool” for environmental stewardship. This kinetic wisdom offers a model of human flourishing based on “reciprocity and harmony with nature,” values that resonate with the goals of global sustainability (Magiman et al. 2026, 12). Caring for the body in the Rarámuri tradition honors the “embodied mind” and returns to the moral and intelligible world (Galindo Cruz 2025, 161). Dance is not an escape from reality, but rather the sacrament itself through which the *Rarámuri-pagótuame* inhabit their vulnerability and transform it into the realm of their deepest spiritual and social flourishing.

Conclusions

This article has argued that the *Rarámuri-pagótuame*’s self-understanding constitutes an epistemological framework that challenges modern technical reductionism (Cassirer 2021, 39 – 40; Robles 1991, 58). By considering vulnerability as a relational domain, the tradition emphasizes that flourishing is inseparable from our condition as localized, somatic, and thinkers (MacIntyre 2006, 88). Thus, fragility is the essential foundation for shared existence, which becomes moral and intelligible through recognized limitations (MacIntyre 1999, 5). Moreover, dance functions as an ethical response to Levinas’s “indefensible cry of the Face,” the very beginning of intelligibility (Levinas 1993, 75). In *awí*, the body “thinks” by prioritizing an infinite responsibility toward the neighbor over the individualistic *conatus essendi* (Levinas 1993, 149). It is through the mask of culture that, without concealing our vulnerability, we identify with others. This epistemology and kinetic rituality validates the critique of one-dimensional systems and demonstrates that understanding human nature requires a return to shared practices and living traditions.

In conclusion, being a *pagótuame* offers a path to knowledge in which the body is a symbolic vessel, not a mechanical instrument. By rejecting the “technical transformation” of the body in favor of building relationships, the Rarámuri demonstrate that human identity is constitutively situated and essentially social (De Velasco 1987, 206; MacIntyre 1999, 8). Thus, this indigenous symbolic form provides a holistic vision of flourishing that recognizes radical interdependence as the foundational basis for being a “true man” on earth (Robles 1991, 58, 71).

Bibliography

- AGAMBEN, G. (2011): *Desnudez*. Trans. by M. Ruvituso – M. T. D’Meza. Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo editora.
- BONFIGLIOLI, C. (2008): El yúmari, clave de acceso a la cosmología rarámuri. *Cuicuilco*, 15 (42), 45 – 60. Available at: <https://revistas.inah.gob.mx/index.php/cuicuilco/article/view/4407>
- CASSIRER, E. (2013): The Form of the Concept in Mythical Thinking. In: Lofts, S. G. – Calcagno, A. (eds. and trans.): *The Warburg Years (1919 – 1933): Essays on Language, Art, Myth, and Technology*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1 – 70.
- CASSIRER, E. (2021): *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 2: *Mythical Thinking*. Trans. by S. G. Lofts. London and New York: Routledge.
- DE VELASCO RIVERO, P. (1987): *Danzar o morir. Religión y resistencia a la dominación en la cultura tarahumara*. 2nd ed. Mexico City: ITESO – UIA – CACSTAC.
- ESPARZA URZÚA, G. A. (2024): Body, Illness and Symbol in Ernst Cassirer. *Filozofia*, 79 (4), 365 – 379. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31577/filozofia.2024.79.4.2>
- GALINDO CRUZ, P. (2024): A Look at War from the Perspective of a Defenseless Man. In: Chołaszczyński, K. – Klafka, Z. – Wiśniewski, J. (eds.): *Catholics on War and Peace*. Toruń: Publishing House of the Academy of Social and Media Culture, 167 – 180.
- GALINDO CRUZ, P. (2025a): Kórima: An epistemology of charity from the Sierra Tarahumara. *Perspectiva Teológica*, 57 (2), e05675. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20911/21768757v57n2e05675/2025>
- GALINDO CRUZ, P. (2025b): Embodied Mind, Social Body: A Reflection on Human Corporeality. In: Rivadeneyra, R. – Doval, V.-I. (eds.): *Cuerpo y persona. El futuro de la unidad humana*. Mexico City: Editorial NUN – Sapientia, 151 – 161.
- GARCÍA BARRÓN, L. A. (2025): El cuerpo transhumano, la vejez y la muerte: una discusión psicosocial a partir de tres estampas. In: Rivadeneyra, R. – Doval, V.-I. (eds.): *Cuerpo y persona. El futuro de la unidad humana*. Mexico City: Editorial NUN – Sapientia, 163 – 179.
- LÉVINAS, E. (1993): *Entre nosotros. Ensayos para pensar en Otro*. Trans. by J. L. Pardo. Valencia: Pre-Textos.
- MACINTYRE, A. (1988): *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press.
- MACINTYRE, A. (1999): *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*. Chicago: Open Court.
- MACINTYRE, A. (2006): What is a Human Body? In: *The Tasks of Philosophy: Selected Essays*, vol. 1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 86 – 103.

- MAGIMAN, M. M. – ALLI, H. – ABU BAKAR, F. (2026): Revealing the Symbolic Role of Buket Philosophy and Cultural Motifs in Social Development in Sarawak. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 13 (1), Article 2623392. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2026.2623392>
- MIDGLEY, M. (2005): *The Essential Mary Midgley*. Ed. by D. Midgley. London and New York: Routledge.
- ROBLES, J. R. (1991): Los rarámuri-pagótuame. In: Marzal, M. M. (ed.): *El rostro indio de Dios*. Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 41 – 132.

Pablo Galindo Cruz
Universidad Panamericana
Instituto de Humanidades
Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer 101
20296 Aguascalientes
Mexico
e-mail: pgalindoc@up.edu.mx
ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-9556-3217>