



PREFACE

At six o'clock on the morning of September 30, 1999, church bells rang throughout the village of Chimayó, as they do every morning. But on this uncharacteristically cold day, the bells instructed more than 150 law enforcement officers to begin simultaneous raids on eight different houses in this small town in rural northern New Mexico. As helicopters hovered overhead, heavily armed officers on the ground broke down doors, shot guard dogs, and stormed houses. All told, they dragged thirty-one suspected heroin dealers from their homes, seizing their weapons and drugs as evidence. Federal agents, wearing black jackets with "DEA" (Drug Enforcement Agency) emblazoned on the backs, worked alongside plainclothes FBI officers, uniformed state troopers, and local law enforcement officers as part of the biggest interagency heroin bust in U.S. history. The Chimayó raid was part of a larger national crackdown, in which two hun-

dred people were arrested in twenty-two towns and cities across the United States, and which was dubbed Operation Tar Pit for the black, unusually pure strain of heroin that had caused a large number of overdoses across the country.

After the raid, residents of the town watched from their trucks, from behind curtains, and over fences. Caravans of unmarked vans and patrol cars drove up and down the narrow two-lane highway and through the complicated labyrinth of the town's unpaved streets, collecting evidence and transporting suspects. Attorney General Janet Reno announced that the raids had "dismantled a major heroin-trafficking organization operation in this county." She singled out Chimayó as an example of a traditional community saved by the operation, noting that between 1995 and 2000, more than one hundred local overdose deaths had been attributed to heroin. In fact, the Española Valley, which is made up of eight small rural communities on the western flank of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, has the highest per-capita drug mortality rate in the United States—more than Los Angeles or New York or any other major city, and over four times the national average.¹

For the residents of Chimayó, the bust was not much of a surprise; most people in this small, intimately connected valley know who is involved in these activities. Moreover, many smaller raids had been conducted over the past several decades, and there have been more in the few years since the "transformative" Operation Tar Pit. Residents of the valley live with constant news reports of someone's son or daughter having died from a drug overdose or a drug-related murder, traffic accident, or burglary. In fact, in this small area of fewer than fifteen thousand people, almost everyone I interviewed had lost someone they knew (dead or in prison) to substance abuse (figure 1).

But the issue of heroin use was not what had brought me to do my fieldwork in the neighboring town of Truchas. I came because some of the most intense rural resource conflicts in the country over the last century have occurred in northern New Mexico. Early struggles in the region manifested as explosive labor and racial movements, but recent conflicts, no less volatile, have coalesced more narrowly around forest resources, with two forests that dominate the region—the Carson and Santa Fe National Forests—emerging as the central battleground.

Since 1990, two U.S. Forest Service district headquarters have been burned and another bombed; three Forest Service vehicles have been torched; rangers have been shot at; environmentalists have been hung in



1. Ernie Archuleta injects some heroin on the grave of a good friend of his who died from a heroin overdose on May 31, 2004. Ernie visited several graves at the Holy Family Cemetery in Chimayó and took a shot of heroin on his last stop. "The valley is so beautiful you wouldn't even know what goes on here," Ernie said, referring to Chimayó as you look down on it when approaching it from State Road 520. "You are looking into hell." Photo by Luis Sánchez Saturno / *Santa Fe New Mexican*. Reprinted with permission.

effigy; old-growth stands have been intentionally cut and left to rot; and hundreds of signs and fences have been destroyed. Not surprisingly, this forest area is widely considered one of the most contentious federal landholdings in the nation: the Forest Service has described it as a "war zone," and the *New York Times* has called it a site of "low-level guerrilla warfare."²

Newspaper stories, institutional literature, and many academics argue that these recent conflicts have been sparked by resource disputes. Yet as violent conflicts over those resources are increasing, most rural communities in northern New Mexico are actually becoming less dependent on forest resources for their income. This trend is visible in Truchas, a small town at the upper end of the Española Valley surrounded by both national forests, where I spent twenty months conducting ethnographic research. Most of the employed residents of Truchas work at nearby Los Alamos National Laboratories, and most of the remaining residents work for, or rely on, the federal and state governments.³ But in spite of this shift in the source of their support, Chimayó, Truchas, and other towns in northern

New Mexico have become, in the local and national imagination, models for rural, resource-dependent communities struggling to protect their “traditional” forest, agrarian, and artisan livelihoods.

This paradox raises the central, deceptively simple question that underlies this book: Why does the forest in northern New Mexico incite such intense passion and protest? Or, more puzzling, why has this forest become the central arena for conflict when the livelihoods of regional residents have become less dependent on these forest resources? Images of traditional woodworkers, wood-heated adobe homes, and generations of weavers and herders contrast sharply with the nuclear laboratories, heroin raids, and gigantic gambling casinos that characterize the region today. These and many other aspects of the life and politics of northern New Mexico have become bound up with contemporary forest struggles. Therefore, this is not a traditional environmental story. There are no universal declensionist narratives of ecological degradation or catastrophe, no evil corporate or government giants, no simple stewards with traditionally ecological, noble identities.

Instead, this is a story in which forest management, protection, exploitation, degradation, and restoration are inseparably tied to the social conflicts and cultural politics of class, race, and nation. This story is one in which mountain forests and Hispano bodies have become connected in surprising, troubling, and tenacious ways. The couplings are not defined only by resource dependence or use, though they are often formed through the material practices of production and consumption. They are more intimate than that; these linkages cross the boundaries between skin and fiber, and it is the multiple understandings of nature that make forests and bodies intelligible. Both forests and forms of human difference become infused with the logic of capital, racial biologies, and national boundaries. Polluted soils are related to degraded souls; national forests need to be protected from foreign bodies; board-foot quotas become the site of intense class politics.

This book examines the many forms these linkages take, their complex causes, and their powerful consequences: how they are produced—through which practices, strategies, and mechanisms they are formed—and why such strange and often audacious links are fashioned. In the course of their political struggles, social activists, Forest Service officials, environmentalists, and others create and contest these links in ways that not only shore up their various identities but reproduce their many inequalities. This book explores these assemblages of nature and difference

not as fixed phenomena but rather as contested articulations that are made and broken, remade and transformed, through the complex and passionate politics of everyday life.

The heroin raid in Chimayó became an unexpected watershed for me in the process of identifying these connections. The raids—and the subsequent conversations I had with residents about them—pointed to the close relationships between local forests and Hispano bodies. Some of these seemingly disparate topics became interconnected in the local, regional, and national discourses and practices surrounding the event. It was not as if the relationships had not been there before; it was merely that the apparent contrast between them had made them seem far more like separate worlds than like related topics. The material proximity was obvious. While working for La Montaña de Truchas Woodlot, a local restoration company that thinned forests and sold firewood, *latillas*, and *vigas*,⁴ I saw my coworkers inject heroin in the forest after work. And as a volunteer for the Truchas Fire Department, I witnessed the overdoses of friends, their families, and our acquaintances.

More compelling than any simple connection due to proximity, though, were the ways in which the Operation Tar Pit raid was related to all kinds of discussions of the forest. My first interview after the heroin raids was with a retired Forest Service forester who had worked in the region for more than twenty-five years and now lived in the nearby suburb of Española. During the interview, the forester's long, narrow, mostly expressionless face would grow animated, and his well-worn hands would begin to shake, as he spoke disdainfully about the environmentalists who were "destroying the forest industry" and about the Hispanos who were "unable to manage the forest or themselves on their own." He cited the heroin raid as an example of this ineptitude, stating, "It is their nature [to be attracted to drugs]; they cannot help it—that's why they need us to manage the forest. If they did it themselves, the forest would end up just like the communities up here—badly degraded and impoverished." He went on to reassure me that he was "not a racist" and it was "not their fault," then added, "they are just a different stock." He drew direct connections between the management of the forest and the management of the Hispano community, saying, "It is our [the Forest Service's] responsibility to be more involved with caring for and improving the community as well as the forest."⁵

That same day, I met with one of the leaders of the most prominent and controversial environmental groups in the region. He is an articulate man

who has lived in the region for over thirty years, during which time he has been in so many battles, and stood his ground so often and with such resolve, that he has become something of a legend among environmentalists—as well as a deeply despised target of many Hispanos and other social activists of the region. His group has lobbied to stop all logging on federal land in northern New Mexico. This position has not made him popular. He launched our interview with the observation that the raid helped demonstrate that “these people [Hispanos] are not traditional resource users, but loggers and forest users like anyone else. . . . They may have once been traditional, but they’ve lost that now.” When I pressed him on what, in his estimation, had been lost, he said, “The people’s culture has been so contaminated by the dominant culture that they’ve lost any traditional ties to the land.” He went on to say, “This is tremendously sad. . . . What they need to do is reconnect with the land, but I think Monday’s raid demonstrated that it may be too late for that.” Rather than acknowledge people’s individual and collective historic rights to the forest, he maintained that “these forests belong to the whole country. I feel bad that they are so poor [and] that they have so many social problems. I really do. If their use of the forest was still traditional, I might be willing to consider it—but it is not. These lands belong to the whole nation; they are not meant to serve as welfare for the people of northern New Mexico.”⁶

Just two days later, I ran into Salomon Martínez, at that time a member of the board of directors of La Montaña de Truchas Woodlot, on the high mountain back road that winds between Córdova and Truchas. He waved me down, and we ended up sitting in the shade outside his double-wide trailer and talking all afternoon. He paused between cigarettes and stories to turn on and off the rusty green oxygen tank on which his failing lungs depended. He was born and raised in the area and has lived his entire life there, with the exception of the years he spent away as a soldier during World War II. He is retired and lives mostly on welfare, but still does some odd jobs—selling firewood that his sons gather and carving *santos*, which he sells at Los Siete, a roadside craft store in Truchas. He talked frankly about drugs in the community and the difficulty of getting “clean” crew members who would show up for work on time every day at the woodlot. He expressed deep animosity toward the drug dealers and what they were doing to the community; he blamed the drug problem partly on the hippies who had established many communes in the area during the 1960s.

He believes that “a few dozen rotten individuals pollute the whole community,” but he claimed that the larger problem was twofold. First, he

feels that “La Floresta [the U.S. Forest Service] has taken our land” and that “we have forgotten our ties to the land.” As a result, “people are forgetting how to do real hard work. . . . They are not out in the woods or in the mountains any more.” He lamented that “a lot of kids hardly know how to use a chainsaw any more. . . . They make more money cleaning up the Labs and working for the Pueblos [in the casinos], or selling drugs, than they do working in the woods.” He leaned back, looking out toward the mesa. “It may bring more money into some pockets, but it doesn’t last. And it makes us weaker as a people. . . . We fight more amongst ourselves, complain more, and work less. We need our land back.”⁷

As I thought about the connections, I decided to go and see Lauren Reichelt, who works for Rio Arriba County on public health issues and is very involved in the regional debate around drug consumption. Lauren is a longtime social activist, deeply involved in social and health-related issues not just in Rio Arriba County but across northern New Mexico. She is well versed in policy and frequently speaks at marches, on local radio talk shows, and at county meetings. I asked her about heroin addiction in the valley, and she pointed to what she considers its underlying causes: the lack of social services in the region and the class divisions between Los Alamos, home to the richest and best-educated New Mexicans, and the neighboring towns, home to some of the poorest and least educated people in the country. She believes, like many others here, that people remain tied to the land, and that if we are going to help them deal with their problems, we are going to have to help foster that connection. To Lauren, the basic issue is simple: locals need to get their land back.

“If they had a resource base, they would not be in the place they are in right now,” she told me. She sees a direct connection between individual health, social illness, and the land. She is also supportive of an effort to turn one of the drug dealers’ compounds into a type of back-to-the-land work camp for youth, modeled on the old Depression-era conservation work camps. The goal of these camps would be to take troubled youth “back” into the forest. She and others believe that this would “help build bridges between the past and the present,” “reestablish people’s ties to the land,” and “help restore the cultural and biological health of the region.” Lauren put it this way: “What is good for the community is good for the forest, and what is good for the forest is good for the community.”⁸

It was through the lens of the raid, and through these and hundreds of subsequent discussions, that the forest became visible to me in new ways. It became apparent that the seemingly separate topics of the heroin raids

and forest politics are held together by a resonance of images and phrases linking nature and body. The body, with its natural tendencies, affinities, and propensities, was repeatedly tied to the nature of the forest, with its conditions, processes, and health. The raid was articulated in the same context as longstanding conflicts over the forest—so much so that knowledge about the raid and its social implications informed the ways in which people talked about the forest and its management. In this way, the forest again became intelligible through the lived social practices of the Hispano community.

The history of production, distribution, and consumption of heroin across nations and borders, into the streets and arroyos of Chimayó, and through the veins of Chicano bodies, has had profound effects on the region, as has been chronicled by others.⁹ Though a detailed analysis of the politics of these histories and economies is beyond the scope of this book, its presence is scattered throughout the stories in this book. For this reason I start the book with the raids and the subsequent conversations through which the centrality and connections between the natures of the forest and of Hispano bodies first became clear to me and radically changed the way I understood the nature of forest politics in the region.¹⁰

This book attempts to challenge the brazen claims about, and the undisputed silences between, the nature of bodies and the nature of forests. Nature and difference are held together by common social histories: nature's repression, management, and improvement form well-worn paths that have defined the savage against the saved, the wild against the civilized, and the pure against the contaminated. These common histories create possibilities for couplings that animate contemporary debates about colonial legacies in troubling ways. Moreover, they do so with such regularity that these couplings and dichotomies come to be understood as common sense.

These histories also provide a rich collection of material—in the form of idioms, metaphors, and practices—used to understand and make intelligible disparate natures. In this study, I try to follow nature on its traverse between the terrain of racialized bodies and bounded nations, to watch the way it makes sense of both federal institutions and fiery passions, to observe how it moves through international circuits of trade while at the same time reaffirming the boundaries of tradition. To do this, I question the assertions of these various linkages, the immense authority granted to nature, and the strict binding and fixing of social difference. The heroin raid in Chimayó, particularly people's voicing of it in terms of the forest,

points to ways in which nature spills beyond the boundaries of natural objects and shows how forms of difference exceed the narrow confines of skin, community, and class. The result is the transformation of seemingly mundane regional forest politics into an extraordinarily complex and incendiary site of deep passions, contradictory historical legacies, and intense social protest.

