

The Great Loom: Weaving the Cultural Landscape of New Mexico

Andrew Wiget

Before the people there was the land. High mountains in northern New Mexico fork southward, forming arms. One curls westward to embrace the high mesa and plateau land, while the other thrusts directly south to separate the dry grasslands of the east from the fertile valley carved by the Rio Grande.

Stories tell that the First People found this land when they emerged onto its surface, born from the womb of Mother Earth. The Spanish and later the Mexicans also found this land, as they wound their way north on horseback or in carretas, following the course of the long, wild river, and establishing a permanent connection — the Camino Real — between northern New Mexico and Mexico. Then, from Texas, California, Oklahoma, came still others, who were determined to transform the land and tame the river. And today people still come, on family odysseys that began in Italy, Lebanon, Iran, Czechoslovakia, India, Poland, Japan or Germany. In one short stretch, the Rio Grande recounts this history as it passes near old communities like San Juan Pueblo and Embudo, then the new atomic city, Los Alamos, and then Albuquerque, a city of a half-million people.

Since the beginning of this century, New Mexico, now advertised as the Land of Enchantment, has lured tourists with the beauty of broad, dramatically punctuated spaces, a vast sky and the promise of viewing cultures frozen in time. But an empty land and peoples out of time are false dreams. Societies use land in many ways, not all of them visible to rank outsiders. And liv-

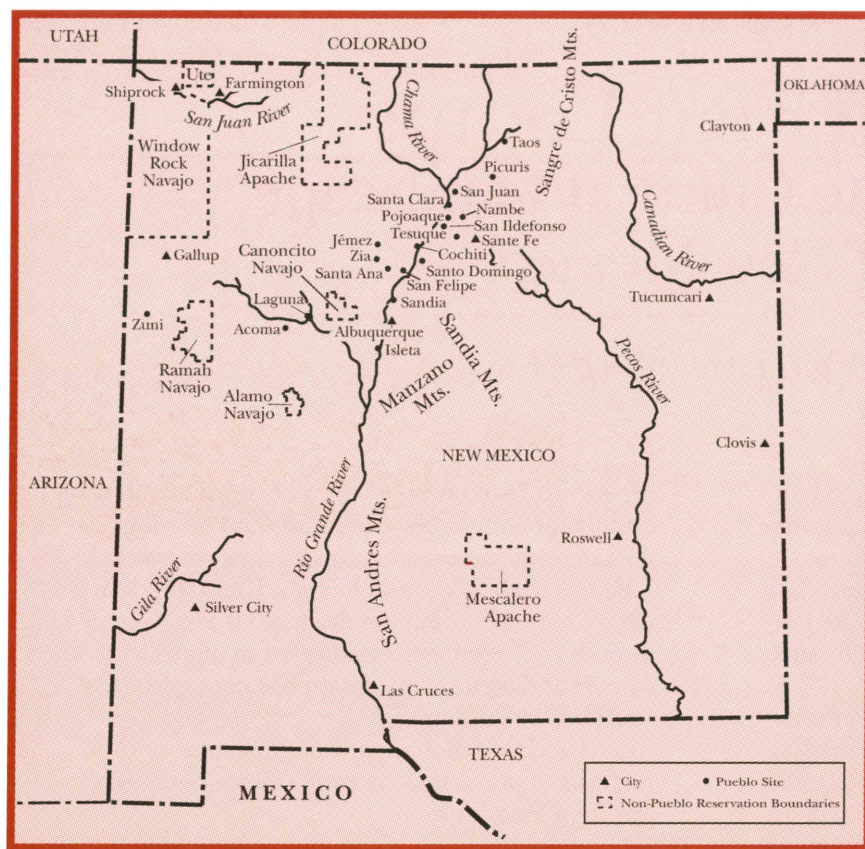
ing cultures are never at rest. This storied land is rather a great loom of space and time on which the complex social and cultural tapestry now called New Mexico is still being woven. The rich fabric that takes shape on the loom is not smooth and seamless, but knotted in places with contest and conflict. Its design has not been fixed beforehand but is still emerging, and strains to accommodate resisting elements into patterns of precarious harmony. It has been that way for a long time.

Contesting Visions: Resistance and Accommodation

Nearly 15,000 years ago, the first human eyes to look on this landscape searched the grassy plains for dark clouds of the now extinct herds of great bison. Much later, but still three millennia before the Christian era, maize agriculture was brought to the area, enabling a settled way of life. The permanent settlements later articulated with the vast Mesoamerican networks of trade and influence, and culminated in the Great Pueblo urban centers, probably multilingual and multiethnic, at Chaco Canyon and Mesa Verde. Internal social conflict in the context of climatic change later brought down this system, and the population dispersed from the San Juan Basin to establish the many pueblos scattered throughout northern New Mexico that are today inhabited by their descendants. Later still came the Navajo and Apache, the Ute and the Comanche.

Marching under a cross and carrying a sword, Coronado entered the land in 1540 in his search for gold. He found villages of multistory dwellings clustered around a central plaza, and villagers who resisted his threats and would not bow to his authority. Coronado's foray inaugurated a half-century of expeditions that laid the foundation for Spanish colonization. In 1598

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Juan de Oñate led 129 soldiers and their families, 10 priests, 83 wagon-loads of supplies and several thousand head of livestock into New Mexico. This group established the first permanent European colony near the junction of the Chama and Rio Grande rivers. As a result of outrages he committed when Indians resisted, Oñate was removed from the governorship in disgrace. In 1610 Oñate was succeeded by Peralta, who established the capital at Santa Fe and laid it out with a plaza and a church according to the prescriptions of Spanish colonial law. Villages and haciendas followed, but resistance from the Utes and Apaches often forced the Spanish subsequently to abandon more remote ranches and to consolidate their population in villages. Pueblo Indians sometimes responded to Spanish requirements for forced labor, demands for tribute paid in corn and cloth, and the brutal suppression of their Native religion with sporadic acts of violence against missionaries and soldiers. As Spanish settlement extended the

authority of Church and Crown, Native resistance grew. It reached a climax in the Pueblo Revolt of August 1680, a successful, concerted attack of the many Pueblos against missions and posted troops of the Spanish colony's northern frontier.

Few settlers and no missionaries in the remote areas survived the Revolt, and the Spanish retreated southward to El Paso del Norte, the present-day Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. Many Pueblo peoples, anticipating the return of the Spanish, took refuge in the hinterland among the Navajos. The Pueblo Indians shared with their hosts a wealth of traditions rooted in agriculture and the worship of masked spirits, which today culturally distinguish Navajos from their Canadian Athabaskan relatives. When the Spanish returned and established themselves in force in 1692, they found the situation changed considerably. Many pueblos had been

abandoned, and losses from war and famine had significantly reduced the Indian population. After 1700 many of the increasing number of Spanish settlers were granted Pueblo agricultural land, and Native landholdings were reduced considerably. There began a long period of dense and pervasive interaction between the Spanish and Pueblo peoples, sometimes hostile, sometimes benign. Its legacy is widely seen today in surnames, foodways, a curandero's vast knowledge of local herbal medicines, and a Pueblo community's celebration of a village saint's day feast. After 1700 the Spanish increasingly turned their attention to subjugating the Apaches, Navajos, Comanches and Utes, who regularly raided both Hispanic settlements and the Pueblos, now perceived as Spanish allies.

When Mexico won its independence from Spain in 1821, Mexicans proudly claimed their mixed ancestry by fighting under the banner of the Virgen de Guadalupe. This image of the Virgin with a dark complexion had appeared to the Indian, Juan Diego, in 1531. The Mexicans defeated the forces of Spain, who fought under the banner of María la Conquistadora, an Old World image brought into battle against the Indians during the 17th century. The land

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Andrew Wiget is co-curator of the New Mexico program at the Festival of American Folklife, and associate professor of English and Director of the New Mexico Heritage Center at New Mexico State University.

THE VIRGIN OF GUADALUPE

Andrew Wiget

In the year 1531 — ten years after the Spanish under Cortés took the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan — the Virgin Mother of Jesus of Nazareth appeared on Mount Tepeyac and spoke in Nahuatl, the Aztec language, to an Aztec Indian named Juan Diego. She told him to tell the Spanish bishop of Mexico to build a church for her on the spot. After two failures to persuade the bishop, the Virgin made roses grow in December on an arid piece of desert and then told Juan Diego to take them in his cloak to the bishop. When he opened his cloak, the roses spilled out, revealing the Virgin's image. The bishop was persuaded and the image on Juan Diego's cloak is enshrined today in the church he ordered to be built.

Because of the Virgin's dark complexion, her Nahuatl speech, and her appearance on Tepeyac (also the site of a shrine dedicated to the Aztec earth-mother goddess Tonantzin), she celebrates the Indian inheritance of Mexico. Today, wherever people of Mexican descent celebrate with pride their heritage and their history of struggle for personal and national identity, the Virgen de Guadalupe appears as the mother of *la nueva raza*, "the new race."



Los Danzantes of Tortugas carry the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe into the Casa del Pueblo for an all-night wake, El Volorio. Photo by Pamela Bamert



Frank Alderet's *bajado* (lowrider) carries the image of the Virgin on the hood. Photo by Miguel Gandert



Wood *santos* carving of the Virgin of Guadalupe by Sabatina Lopez Ortiz. Photo by Lyle Rosbotham



Chetro Ketl, an Anasazi site in Chaco Canyon, was inhabited from the 9th to the 12th centuries.

Photo by Lyle Rosbotham

spread out under a new flag, but the relative isolation of northern New Mexico meant that little would radically change. This was not true of the south.

In the late 1830s and early 1840s Mexican settlement began in earnest along the river between El Paso del Norte and Socorro. Land grants were issued to colonize the Mesilla Valley, an area coveted for its agricultural potential but heavily contested by the Apaches. The name of Las Cruces, New Mexico's second largest city, memorializes a small forest of crosses on a mesa along the Camino Real, where Spanish colonists were buried following a fight with Apaches.

Newer colonies like Doña Ana, whose recently planted orchards had just begun to bear their first fruit, were soon swept up in what American history books call the Mexican War. When the war ended in 1848, all the land east of the Rio Grande had become American territory.

The Mexican government offered land grants west of the river to its former citizens who wished to remain Mexican. In this way Mesilla was established, but in 1854, when the Gadsden Purchase Treaty was signed in its plaza, Mesilla too became American territory. With American acquisition

came new enterprises — railroads, ranches, large farms — that transformed the landscape and dispossessed its peoples.

But southern New Mexico is and always will be *sin fronteras*, without borders. Nowhere is this fusion of peoples and traditions more evident than in the community of Tortugas, south of Las Cruces. Founded by Tigua families from Juarez and Ysleta del Sur whose ancestors survived the Pueblo revolt and fled south with the Spanish, the community of Tortugas preserves traditions of Tigua origin, those of Hispanic people from Zacatecas and other regions of Mexico, and those of several Mexican Indian peoples. Today, El Paso, Texas, founded as a result of the Mexican War, and Ciudad Juarez, Mexico (the old El Paso del Norte), have a combined population of more than a million and a half people, and together with southern New Mexico — from Columbus eastward through Las Cruces and the Mesilla Valley to Carlsbad — they form a single zone of social, cultural and political exchange.

Contested Spaces on a Storied Land

Broad sweep of the earth under a brilliant sky, rugged mesas in bold relief against a moun-



A cowboy herds cattle on the Bell Ranch ca. 1946. Photo courtesy Harvey Caplin Estate

tain-rimmed horizon: this land shines like an invitation. Where cottonwoods and willows followed watercourses, multiplying in shallow stretches to form thickets, or *bosque*, agriculture was possible, and clay for homes and pottery was at hand. The uplands and mountains provided good hunting, and later good pastures for sheep and cattle. And those whose eyes could peer beneath the earth found turquoise, silver and copper, and later oil, gas and uranium.

To the unknowing eye, New Mexico seems a vast and empty land, but even its most remote regions are culturally mapped; they are claimed by the imagination and the economy of more than one group and are often subject to competing visions. The lava-flows south of Grants, which Hispanic settlers called *El Malpais*, or The Badlands, because they were unsuitable for farming or grazing, are a sacred place to Navajos, Zunis and Acomas who recognize there the fossilized blood spilled when the Great Monster was killed by the Culture Hero Twins. Today, it is also a national monument, developed with hiking trails and campsites for recreational purposes. And the scars of the nation's largest uranium mine, the Jackpile, which closed in 1982, continue to dese-

crate the base of Mount Taylor, sacred to Navajos and Pueblo Indians alike.

The contest of cultural visions does not result solely from differences among ethnic groups. Listen to the late Joe Pankey, who ranched the arid lands near Truth or Consequences (formerly Hot Springs):

When I come here [in 1921] there weren't hardly any weeds in the country. And the big high wind, I guess — I don't know how else they got here — brought in a world of seed, brought in wheat seed, filaree and Indian wheat, all from Arizona. There's other different plants come in, too. I don't know where they come from, but some of them's cow feed and some of them's not....And dry farming didn't do the land here no good. Didn't have enough moisture. Farmers plowed up all the native grasses, then walked off and left it. Then the wind got to blowing on it, kind of swept it off, and all kinds of noxious weeds grew back.

When I was a boy, there was a lot of wildlife. But there wasn't any game protection, and people killed 'em all off....They

THE KLOBASE FESTIVAL OF DEMING, NEW MEXICO: A Time to Celebrate and Remember

Stephan Moore

The history of the Czech and eastern European community of Deming began in the 1920s with the arrival of many immigrants from south Texas, who were for the most part poor cotton farmers of Czech ancestry looking for better farming lands. Most immigrants brought a strong sense of Czech community and culture, and for a time, Deming was considered a trilingual community of English, Spanish and Czech speakers.

The first Klobase Festival was held in 1928 to help provide financial support for The Holy Family Catholic Church. It was organized by Frank Kretek Sr., Rev. J. Yannes, Victor Kostelnick and their families.

Klobase is a Czech word for the Bohemian sausage that is the main food served to participants in this event. Men smoke klobase and barbecue beef overnight, while women bake pies and cakes and make potato salad.

The Festival occurs on the third Sunday in October, a day that includes games, a large dinner of klobase and beef, traditional Czech and eastern European polkas and hops, and bingo.

The Festival has developed through the years from a small gathering of families to a large public event. In 1991 close to 3,000 celebrants attended the Festival. During the early years of the Klobase Festival all of the food was prepared at home, usually on a farm, but now, due to new health regulations, the food must be prepared in

a central location. The central location actually increases the socializing attendant on the event.

The Klobase Festival provides an occasion for members of the community to come together and to celebrate the end of the cotton growing season. Some Festival participants live in other counties and even other states, but every year they make the trip to Deming.

Stephan Moore is a graduate student in history at New Mexico State University.



Men spend several days preparing sausage for the Klobase Festival in Deming. Photo by Stephan Moore

killed deer here until you couldn't rest. Just big packs of people came. And the bears, they got them too, you know. Not much chance of anything to increase. And the mountain lions, if they hear about them, they'll be on their trail, too....The hunters, sometimes they tell me to get off my land. Oh, I have a helluva time with 'em. (Parsons and Garney 1987: 15-16, 42-43)

Family ranchers like the Pankeys hardly ever make ends meet; their average profit margin over a ten-year period is about one percent. They continue to ranch because they appreciate the wholeness of a life traditionally adapted to a diffi-

cult but compelling landscape.

Family ranching has been substantially altered by the industrialization of the beef industry. In some places in the state cattlemen use helicopters to manage vast ranges, and some elements of cowboy culture, such as saddlemaking and bootmaking, have become high art, priced beyond the reach of working cowboys. But many of the values and practices of traditional cowboy life can still be found on the small family ranches that survive in New Mexico. In some areas family ranchers work together on spring and fall roundups, with the men doing the branding in teams (rather than using the mechanical brand-

BLACKDOM

Philippa Jackson

In the 1840s Henry Boyer, a Free Negro from Pullman, Georgia, traveled to the Southwest while serving as a wagon driver in the Mexican-American War. He returned to Georgia and passed on stories of the Southwest and its wide open spaces to his family, including his nephew Francis Boyer.

Inspired by these tales, in 1896, Francis and fellow schoolteacher Dan Keyes walked from Georgia to New Mexico and founded the town of Blackdom. Blackdom was once home to 300 people who were drawn there by articles that Francis had written for southern newspapers promoting the idea of a self-sufficient community far from the persecutions of the post-Civil War South. Most who came were interested by the promises of free land. Like those who followed them, they came looking for a place to live, work, prosper and raise a family far from the ever-present racial oppression of Georgia.

The community center in Blackdom housed the school and several church congregations and was built with funding from the local school district — a contribution believed to be in response to local concerns about Black and White children attending the same school. “Once there were more than a few, they’d do anything to keep us apart,” relates Mr. Boyer.

It was the scarcity of water that finally caused families to give up on the dream of the all-Black town of Blackdom. By 1920, the year of its legal incorporation, families had begun to drift away. Some families moved to nearby Vado, others to Roswell, Las Cruces and even Albuquerque.

Philippa Jackson is coordinator of the New Mexico program at the Festival of American Folklife.



Hazel Parker works on a quilt in her Roswell, New Mexico, home.
Photo by Gwendolyn Mintz

ing chute), the women serving out large meals of beef and beans and pie, and the families together dancing at the end of work to familiar fiddle music rooted in the Ozarks and Appalachia.

The coming of the railroad was a boon to ranchers. Herds formerly driven to local markets in New Mexico were now taken to railheads at Magdalena and Fort Sumner for shipment back East. By 1891, railroads had acquired nearly 3.5 million acres of land, including right-of-ways — nearly three times the total amount of government land sold to individuals. The railroad had a profound impact on all the people and land of New Mexico. The Navajo Reservation was

“checkerboarded,” with alternating sections of land allocated to the railroad and to the Indians, seriously and permanently disrupting family and community life. Many Indians left traditional agriculture behind for wage labor on the railroads. The railroad also brought immigrants to the state and powered the boom in health-seekers and tourists at the beginning of this century. Towns like Deming and Clovis were born with the railroad. And railroad lore is very much a part of the state’s cultural profile.

The railroads also transported workers and materials to and from the many mining districts that sprung up around the state in the last quar-



Drummers accompany Comanche dancers at the San Ildefonso Pueblo patronal feast, January 23, 1992. Photo by Philippa Jackson

ter of the 19th century. Indians had mined turquoise long before the coming of the Europeans, and the Spanish had copper mines almost as soon as they arrived. Silver and gold were mined in southern New Mexico, giving rise to stories of lost mines and buried treasures. The Apache leader Victorio is said to have buried a treasure of stolen gold bullion in a mountain named for him located now on the White Sands Missile Range; an active recovery effort is still underway. At Lake Valley's Bridal Veil mine the silver lode was so rich, it is said one could hold a candle to the wall of the shaft and melt sterling out of the rock. And to mining boomtowns came colorful figures such as Hillsboro's famous madame, Sadie Orchard, reputed, among other things, to have released her employees during the flu epidemic of 1918 to serve as nurses, and, for reasons best known to herself, to have set off a stick of dynamite beneath the chair of her husband's friend.

Today, extractive industries are still a critical element in New Mexico's economy. Gold and silver have gone, but "black gold" was found in southeastern New Mexico in the 1920s and began an oil and gas boom in the region that has survived several setbacks. And a new yellow ore — uranium — was an important resource especially in the 1970s and 1980s. These industries have shaped a body of workers' occupational lore focused on skill and danger, but have scarred the land badly and altered the lives of its



Elizabeth Taliman with niece Shannon Vigil, and daughter Zonie Miera, participate in festivities of San Ildefonso Feast Day. Their family is of Cochiti, Navajo, San Ildefonso and Hispanic heritage. Photo by Philippa Jackson

inhabitants forever. This is especially true in the uranium belt of northeast New Mexico, where Indian land and Indian health has been ruined by the mining and the milling of the yellow ore. It is no wonder then, that Leslie Silko, the prominent novelist raised at Laguna, has compared the blast pattern left by the first atomic blast at Trinity Site in White Sands, New Mexico, to an evil sandpainting that celebrates death not life.

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SEEKING LIFE

Tito Naranjo

A Hopi potter, Al Qoyawayma aptly expressed Pueblo reverence for the land when he said about earth and clay, "I know that some of the clay may even contain the dust of my ancestors — so — how respectful I must be and think, perhaps I too might become part of a vessel, someday!" (Trimble 1987).

The Tewa Pueblos of north central New Mexico practice a philosophy of daily life that they refer to as *Gi Woatsi Tuenji*, "We are seeking Life." Complementary to Seeking Life are the concepts of *Tsigikan*, *Tsekana Kanpo* or "We have been loved, we have been honored (by our supernaturals)." These concepts signify actualization and fulfillment in Seeking Life.

Seeking Life is process, practiced in a relative and bounded sense by children, adolescents and young adults, who have yet to "blossom" as Tewa. Flowering occurs sometime in adulthood when individuals become full Tewas. This flowering renders them completed or "finished" people: life's many experiences have taught the adult Tewa the multiple meanings of Seeking Life.

Life experiences in traditional contexts are necessary keys to this Tewa processual way of living. A primary experience necessary for actualization (the process that leads to "flowering") is connectedness with the land, *Nambi Gia*, our Mother Earth. Every Tewa adult has learned the spiritual essence of all so-called "inanimate" objects and living organisms, which include dirt, rock, trees, grass, sky, clouds, air and animals; all move in synchronized cycles of life. One's own life also becomes an extension of these generalized yet specific life forms. A natural consequence of this perspective is reverence for the entire context, which in contemporary America is called the ecological environment.

Another example of the implications of Seeking Life is taken from the sky, when a cloud is not a cloud. A cloud is personified as a spirit, and so when thunderheads amass over Southwest summer skies, a Tewa will say, "They (supernaturals) are preparing to visit us. We hope they will bless us today." While on a walk, the same Tewa may find a stone of pleasing shape or colors. With cupped hands, the stone is swooped past his open mouth as air surrounding the stone is

inhaled. The stone may be returned with these words, "Thank you, you have shared your spirit and life with me today." Taking breath, *haa honde*, recognizes the spiritual essence of supposedly inanimate objects.

Religious ceremony and dances bring life to individuals and the community in a ceremonial completion of Seeking Life. Any dance with religious significance must include the use of *Tse*, or evergreens, which symbolize the circularity of life and especially of water. Of all evergreens, the douglas fir is revered as an intermediary to supernaturals who bring Tewa the good life. A small douglas fir always stands in kiva corners during practices for ceremonial dances and receives the cornmeal offered to it by all dancers. After the tree is so used, it is returned to the Rio Grande, whose water takes the spirit of the fir and recycles it — through the circularity of water — to ocean, to clouds, to rain and to its return back to all fir trees. Sometime in a person's late maturity in Tewa thought, all pieces of oral tradition come to fit together, and adults come to realize that they are a part of the context and everything in their context is a part of themselves.

On any ordinary day when a Tewa stands and offers cornmeal to thank supernaturals as the first glimmer of light defines the Sangre De Cristo Mountains on the eastern horizon, this prayer may be uttered.

Ye who are not humans
Ye who are spiritual beings
I thank you for strength
strength given to my arms
strength given to my legs
strength to think good thoughts.
I thank you for life today.
May it be in unity with
this ground upon which I stand.

A Tewa has been seeking life. A Tewa has found life.

Tito Naranjo, from Santa Clara Pueblo, is a free-lance writer living in Mora, New Mexico.

Citation

Trimble, Stephen. 1987. *Talking with the Clay*. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press.

Life on the Land

In New Mexico, land, water and people are intertwined in ancient, profound and intricate ways. Nowhere is this more immediately visible than in the cultivated fields, the verge that lies between the village and the open space of mountains, desert and range. Fields may be intimate environments, like the historic Zuni waffle gardens, whose enclosed, raised bed construction conserve the water carried to it in pots like an offering. Fields may be planted in flood plains, with small diversion dams, to channel runoff to the thirsty corn. They may be dry farms, unirrigated plots ranging from an acre of Indian corn to more than 100 acres of soybean. They may be long strips of irrigated land, subdivided within a plot held by an Hispanic family for more than 200 years, which cling to the branches of the *acequia madre*, the mother ditch. Or they may be vast fields of cotton linked within an elaborate irrigation district to Reclamation Service dams.

Fields are often not only a source of food, but a focus of faith and community responsibility. Some Indians plant prayer feathers in their fields to bring rain, and they sing and dance for the growing corn that eventually becomes their flesh, a gift of Mother Earth. In northern Rio Grande Pueblos, social organization often reflected division between the summer and winter seasons: the communities were divided into groups known as Squash and Turquoise people, and through them community labor was mobilized to tend the elaborate irrigation systems established before the coming of the Spanish.

Elsewhere, Hispanic villagers cluster behind the image of San Ysidro, patron saint of farmers, as their procession winds its way from church to the blessing of the fields. The first collective work undertaken by the founders of these small villages was to construct acequia irrigation and build a church. Historically, field and church were also brought together in the role of the *mayordomos*, who were responsible for supervising the work on the ditches, the distribution of water, and the production of a village saint's day fiesta.

And in another place, on the dry lands of the Llano Estacado, an Anglo dowser feels the power of the water witch in his hands pulling the wand down towards the water that waits for crops. Meanwhile, others worry that water allotment overages on the Pecos River — for which Texas must now be compensated — will restrict their own productivity.

Historically, the meeting place for these

divergent interests has been the village plaza. The familiar town square of an English village, widely replicated in New England, originated in the common ground set aside for grazing cattle, later evolving into a park-like setting for human socializing. Both the Spanish colonial plaza and the Pueblo Indian plaza, on the other hand, independently began as open spaces for people to come together for a wide variety of activities: political action and public gossip, markets and trade fairs, and sacred processions and ritual dance.

The Spanish village plan as set forth in the colonial decrees of Philip II required new settlements to maintain a central block of public space. An adjacent block was dedicated to the church, which fronted the plaza, and another adjacent block was given over to government business. The other two sides of the public space were occupied by commercial activity and occasionally by residences, though most residents received quarter-block allotments, which they enclosed with walls closely fronting the principal street.

The church anchored the plaza and consecrated its space with faith. From the church a saint's day procession went out carrying the saint's image through the plaza and into the historic core of the community. From the church *Las Posadas* began: a combination of novena and folk drama on the nine days before Christmas, the procession reenacts, in village streets and homes, Mary and Joseph's search through Bethlehem for lodging. Before the doors of the church *Matachines* danced in honor of a saint or the Virgin of Guadalupe, and dramatized the struggle between grace and evil and the protection accorded to the pure soul for her safe deliverance into the arms of Christ. And in the plaza might also be reenacted — on horseback and with much spectacle — folk dramas about the victories of colonization: *Los Moros y Los Cristianos*, commemorating Spain's ancient struggles with the Moors, and *Los Comanches* and the 19th-century *Los Tejanos* celebrating victorious combat against Indians and Texans, more contemporary opponents. Through all these enactments, the plaza was both historicized and sanctified, its space transformed by performance. In these events the presence of the church sanctioned the community's continued existence, while in a crowd its members publicly renewed the collective faith and memory.

Historically, Indian pueblos had one or more plazas, often indistinguishable from other open

spaces in the community until the Spanish erected mission churches near them. Pueblo plazas were associated with kivas, chambers partly or entirely underground, where the men prayed and prepared themselves to become the masked spirits who dance in the plaza. Today some pueblo plazas apparently have no defining characteristics. Others feature a *sipapu*, a small hole in the plaza floor, most of the time so discreetly covered by rock that it passes unrecognized by the unknowing eye. It indicates that one or more kivas are nearby.

Just as the cruciform plan and vast vertical spaces of the Gothic cathedrals are architectural metaphors for the Christian mystery of death and resurrection, so also do the kiva and sipapu represent a mystery, for the Puebloan peoples believe they emerged from the womb of Mother Earth into the daylight of the Sun Father. Origin, life, power and history emerge on a vertical axis linking sun and earth, just as the thirty or so masked spirit dancers emerge from the darkness of the kiva into the light of the plaza on a ladder through the kiva roof. Their emergence consecrates the space they occupy.

A blending of Pueblo and Hispanic traditions occurs at El Santuario de Chimayó. The original site was a Tewa Indian shrine: when the Twin Gods slew the Great Monster, fire burst from the earth and hot springs bubbled up; when they receded only mud was left, which had curative powers. Later this Native belief in the healing powers of the local earth merged with a Hispanic belief in cures attributed to Nuestro Señor de Esquipula. The figure appeared to a prominent Hispanic landowner, some say out of the ground itself, others say as an image of clay, and the man was healed. Later the Santo Niño de Atocha came to replace Nuestra Señor de Esquipula as the patron of the shrine. The chapel of the Santuario was built at the beginning of the 19th century and is adjacent to a room in which pilgrims collect the sacred earth. In this belief in the restorative powers of the earth, Hispanic and Pueblo traditions are powerfully fused.

For both the Catholic and the Pueblo believer, the plaza is a focal point in a larger sacred landscape sustained by rituals, narratives and shrines. Sacred places anchor cultural worlds and are collectively tended. Attendance at sacred events and access to consecrated spaces has always required more than simply good intentions. Participation requires knowledge and responsibility, not self-assumed but conferred by a community of believers. Respectful visitors

THE SEPHARDIC LEGACY IN NEW MEXICO:

The Story of the Crypto-Jews

Stanley M. Hordes

After 500 years of secrecy, groups of Hispanic crypto-Jews, or hidden Jews, are now beginning to emerge from the shadows in New Mexico and other parts of the southwestern United States.

These crypto-Jews descend from Sephardic Jews forced to convert from Judaism to Catholicism in Spain and Portugal in the 14th and 15th centuries. While some sincerely converted, many others secretly held on to their ancestral faith. To escape persecution by the Holy Office of the Inquisition, many of these *conversos* migrated to the Spanish colonies in the 16th and 17th centuries, settling in metropolitan centers such as Lima and Mexico City. Once the Inquisition established itself in these New World capitals, however, it became necessary for the crypto-Jews to seek refuge in more remote parts of the Spanish colonial frontier, including New Mexico.

Secret Jews came with the first colonizing expeditions to New Mexico of Gaspar Castaño and Juan de Oñate in the 1590s, as well as with the later trading ventures in the 17th and 18th centuries. Many of these families passed on their Jewish consciousness from generation to generation down to the present day; others eventually lost their Jewish identity but continued to practice vestiges of their ancestral faith without knowing why.

Stanley M. Hordes, Ph.D., is a consulting historian engaged in a research project, "The Sephardic Legacy in New Mexico: A History of the Crypto-Jews."

should be aware of a dismal history of cultural depredation. It was only this past year, for example, that the Zuni tribe was able to recover the last of its War God images. These had marked sacred space on Zuni land for centuries until they were stolen from their shrines and scattered across the globe to serve the wishes of social scientists, art collectors and aficionados. The annals of such abuse grow longer every time a shrine is disturbed or the value of a ceremony is discounted, or the right of a community of faith to define its own practice is ignored.

Weaving Time and Tradition

Different ways of organizing and performing a single craft, just like different meanings given to the same land, can index a history of cultural values. This is certainly true of weaving in New Mexico.

When the Spanish arrived, they found the Pueblo Indians weaving cotton into *mantas* (shoulder blankets women wore as dresses), men's sleeved or sleeveless shirts, breechcloths, and dance kilts. Cotton thread was spun on a spindle made of a long slender rod, with a disc, or whorl, at the bottom to serve as a weight and a base on which to gather the thread. The rod, wrapped with cotton, was twirled between the thigh and the hand of the spinner, and the thread wound on the whorl. The thread was then dyed with vegetal dyes and woven on a vertical loom. Belts were woven on a narrow waist loom.

The Spanish introduced sheep into New Mexico and wool soon became the fibre of choice for weaving. With it came wool carding, indigo dye, and crochet work done with needles instead of hand-looping.

Spanish weaving in New Mexico was done on large treadle looms capable of producing lengths of cloth of up to 275 feet, as one 1638 invoice of material made in Santa Fe for sale in Mexico indicates (Boyd 1974). Such practice clearly reflects a mercantile orientation to cloth production. The vertical loom of the Pueblos simply cannot be used to produce on such a scale, and Indian resistance to adopting the treadle loom, at the same time they accepted other aspects of Spanish weaving technology, suggests that they continued to see weaving as essentially domestic production for local use and small scale trade. It is not clear whether the spinning wheel came to New Mexico with the Spanish. If it did, it was soon replaced in Spanish weaving practice by the rod-and-disc spindle of the Pueblos, which was easily adapted to wool (Boyd 1974). Why this happened is not clearly known, but it may be a result of using young Indians taken as slaves for spinning.

By 1700, wool weaving was widespread among the Rio Grande Pueblos, the western Pueblos of Acoma, Laguna and Zuni, and the Navajo, who



A woman weaves on the Navajo Reservation ca. 1943. Photo courtesy Harvey Caplin Estate

Annie L. Pino spins yarn in her home on the Ramah Navajo Reservation. *Photo by Andrew Wiget*

probably learned weaving from Pueblo weavers they took as captives or from those seeking refuge among them after the Pueblo Revolt. Navajo weavings had become prominent trade items by the early 18th century, but Pueblo influence on them was limited to the technology itself; Navajo weavers did not adopt Pueblo designs. In the early 19th century when hostility between Navajos and Spanish colonists increased, Navajo children were taken as captives or purchased from the Utes. As weavers they produced the "slave" or "servant" blankets in Spanish homes on Indian vertical looms. In one scholar's view, "the presence of these Navajo weavers in Spanish households may help to account for the appearance of Navajo-style terraced figures and for the design distribution on some treadle-loom blankets" of the period (Kent 1983). Navajo design featured a large central figure with quarters of that figure replicated in the corners, a pattern that mirrors the Navajo view of the cosmos as centered on a principal sacred mountain, with another mountain anchoring each of the four directions.

Late in the 19th century, Rambouillet-merino sheep were introduced to replace the churro sheep used up to that time for wool. At the same time, commercial dyes began to replace vegetal dyes, and the local intimate knowledge about the multiple uses of local plants consequently began to decline. The shorter, oilier, curlier merino wool meant more time for processing and more sheep to produce needed quantities. Sheep herds increased through the 1920s, until they were dramatically, often violently, reduced among Indians and Hispanics alike, by the implementation of the Taylor Grazing Act. In the past decade Hispanic weavers of Ganados del Valle and the Ramah Navajo Weavers Association have reintroduced the churros in their communities. They also are strengthening fragile but viable traditions of vegetable dyeing and are



cooperating in new strategies to control economic and aesthetic values in their weaving practice.

Unquiet Land, Uncertain Future

Five hundred years after Columbus, the complex engagement between Europe and America, which his voyage has come to symbolize, continues to produce patterns of accommodation and resistance. Conflicting uses and meanings for the same land seem inevitable in New Mexico, where more than 70% of the land is managed by the state or federal government, and where a significant percentage of local income is derived from tourism. Multiple-use policies for public lands, driven by the belief that no one should be denied access to anything, permit the recreational development of lava-flows near Grants, which are held sacred by the Navajos, Zunis and Acomas. They allow the consideration of siting an asbestos landfill near the sacred mountain where the Navajo culture heroine Changing Woman



Irene Jaramillo and son, Dave Jr., completed the lowrider "Dave's Dream," as a tribute to their husband and father in Española, New Mexico. Photo by G. Benito Cordova

emerged into this world. While ranchers and environmentalists argue over killing coyotes and the amount of damage cattle do to grasslands, Indians displaced from the same land look back across a fence at sacred sites desecrated out of ignorance or greed.

Cultural traditions are not immutable heirlooms passed down from one generation to the next. We shape traditions by the conflicted choices we make today, weaving a design that can never be wholly foreseen.

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