

University of New Mexico

## UNM Digital Repository

---

Anthropology ETDs

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

---

Summer 5-1-2012

### Planting Seeds is a Metaphor: Being Agrarian, Agricultural Activism, and Emergent Identity in New Mexico

Elise Trott

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/anth\\_etds](https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/anth_etds)



Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Trott, Elise. "Planting Seeds is a Metaphor: Being Agrarian, Agricultural Activism, and Emergent Identity in New Mexico." (2012). [https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/anth\\_etds/70](https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/anth_etds/70)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Electronic Theses and Dissertations at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Anthropology ETDs by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact [disc@unm.edu](mailto:disc@unm.edu).

Elise Trott

Candidate

Anthropology

Department

This thesis is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication:

*Approved by the Thesis Committee:*

Erin Debenport, Chairperson

Michael Trujillo

David Dinwoodie

**“Planting Seeds is a Metaphor”:  
Being Agrarian, Agricultural Activism, and Emergent Identity in New Mexico**

by

Elise Trott  
B.A. in Anthropology

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Master of Arts  
Anthropology**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**May, 2012**

**“Planting Seeds is a Metaphor”:  
Being Agrarian, Agricultural Activism, and Emergent Identity in New Mexico**

by

**Elise Trott**

**B.A., Anthropology, University of Chicago, 2007  
M.A., Anthropology, University of New Mexico, 2012**

**ABSTRACT**

In recent years, small-scale agriculture and *acequia* (traditional ditch irrigation) practices have become a significant locus for the goals and agendas of multiple stakeholders in New Mexico, attracting political, scholarly, and popular interest from a wide variety of groups and individuals. For this reason, local *acequeros* (acequia irrigators) and farmers are constantly engaged in processes of boundary-making, identity formation, and negotiation over the limits, claims, and goals of their involvement in agricultural activism, as well as the involvement of others. This thesis addresses the content, meaning, and implications of the strategic identity formation and boundary-making practices of one organization at the heart of agricultural and irrigation activism in New Mexico, the New Mexico Acequia Association (NMAA), specifically through the lens of a community-based, collaborative research project called the Mayordomo Project.

Through the close analysis of interviews, events, and conversations that have taken place as part of the NMAA’s Mayordomo Project, I argue that NMAA discourses center around the formation of a potentially resistant identity which attempts to reformulate or transcend the conventional categories of ethnic and/or socioeconomic identity that have been inscribed by the region’s history of ethnic conflict, as well as by past ethnography, while also contrasting with commonplace tropes of “tri-cultural harmony” in New Mexico. I argue that what I call “agrarian” identity, as constructed by the discourses of the NMAA, can be usefully analyzed through some of the same theoretical frameworks that have been used to describe indigeneity as both a resource and a limitation, as well as a particular emergent structure of feeling characterized by connection to, and engagement with, place and past. Ultimately, I contend that agrarian identity does not simply represent a kind of multiculturalism through the elision of conflict nor an effort to create a naïve and primordial connection to the past, but rather an attempt to transcend historic boundaries of ethnicity and practice through an emphasis on shared experience and an ethic of engagement.

|

**Table of Contents**

**I. Introduction: Planting Seeds is a Metaphor.....1**

**II. Research History and Methods.....6**

**III. Blurring Boundaries: Agricultural Activism and the Construction of Nature and Difference.....15**

**IV. Insiders and Outsiders: The Question of Participation.....23**

**V. Being Agrarian.....33**

**VI. Emergent Identity and Structures of Feeling: Agrarian-ness through a Framework of Indigeneity.....42**

**VII. Ambiguity and Nostalgia: Agrarian Identity as a Resistant Subjectivity.....72**

**References.....82**

In Nuevo México, when we are born our mother literally gives us the light – ‘*Da luz,*’ we say in the language of our Iberian forebears. As soon as our eyes are accustomed to the brilliance, we memorize the features of her face. As we rise to walk upon the earth, we transpose her profile to those first intimate horizons: a house, a road, cottonwoods by a river, a distant line of hills beyond. Because we are human, we see faces in the rocks and clouds. Thus is human love transposed onto landscape. *Querer* means to want, to desire, to be in a place, with its people. In folk terminology, *querencia* is such a place, the center space of desire, the root of belonging and yearning to belong, that vicinity where you first beheld the light. *Querencia*, in collective terms, is homeland.

-Enrique Lamadrid (Gandert 2000:1)

We are the ones that are gonna govern our destiny... we are responsible for our destiny and what we want to leave our children. It is not be drafted by attorneys that aren't going to live here. You have no connection. You have no sense of home. We do. And we want... to govern our decisions.

-Gilbert Sandoval, Mayordomo, East/West Sandoval Ditch, Jemez Springs, NM

---

## **I. Introduction: Planting Seeds is a Metaphor**

In the winter of 2010, more than one hundred individuals from all over the state of New Mexico gathered at the Santa Fe County Fairgrounds in the State's capital to attend the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual *Congreso de las Acequias* [Acequia Congress]. These individuals included both local and national politicians, community leaders, activists, and academics, in addition to dozens of small-scale farmers and gardeners, both urban and rural, all of whom shared a common interest and investment in the protection and preservation of a form of traditional irrigation called *acequia* – or ditch – irrigation. At this event, organized by the New Mexico Acequia Association (NMAA), *acequeros* [acequia irrigators] and their families, friends, and supporters, gather yearly to celebrate their traditions, share their common experiences and struggles, and make plans, declarations, and governance decisions for the continuation of acequia irrigation networks and a host of accompanying agricultural and food consumption practices. The Congreso traditionally begins with a roll call in which delegates from local acequia associations (also simply called acequias) are recognized. Often, delegates are asked to bring water from their

acequia to pour into a communal vessel for the *Bendición de las Aguas* [Blessing of the Waters], conducted by a priest or community leader. The rest of the Congreso usually consists of workshops and presentations about various issues relating to agriculture and irrigation in New Mexico, as well as the recognition of local leaders and dignitaries, and a formal meeting for the passing of resolutions and declarations for the coming year. At the 2010 event, a workshop was held entitled “*Nuestra Herencia*” [“Our Heritage”], which focused on the ways community members could revive traditional relationships to the land. The NMAA staff running the workshop encouraged participants to think of one small commitment to make for the coming year, such as a commitment to plant a kitchen garden or to use more Spanish when speaking to their children or grandchildren. Participants were asked to write down their commitments on small, round pieces of paper that were meant to represent seeds. They were also asked to write down one way that they would work to achieve their commitment on another piece of paper shaped like a shovel. These little paper seeds and shovels were then attached to a banner with an acequia painted on it to represent the commitments of all the participants to the preservation of the acequia. However, at one point during the workshop, the conversation took an unexpected and somewhat combative turn. Several older acequeros, many of whom were well-known members of their communities, made spontaneous speeches about the many challenges facing traditional farmers and irrigators. These speeches touched on several often-referenced historical injustices, such as the incidences of American disregard for the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that ended the Mexican-American War and ostensibly protected the land holdings of Spanish citizens in the New World, as well as the Wilderness Act and the land claims of the National Forests. These individuals also mentioned a number of wide-ranging contemporary issues, such as racism against Spanish-speaking New Mexicans, climate change, and peak oil. As

other workshop participants attempted to bring the discussion back to the concept of small, individual commitments, several of the speechmakers grew somewhat agitated, standing up and raising their voices to be heard. The atmosphere grew tense. Finally, one young NMAA staff member, struggling to regain control of the workshop, gave an impromptu speech about the importance of focusing on small everyday actions rather than world events. Asking the pardon of the older speechmakers, “*con respeto*” [with respect], he argued that community members should perform all of their everyday tasks as if they were planting small seeds like their ancestors did. He explained: “Planting seeds is a metaphor for what we do as a community; planting seeds is an apt metaphor because of who we are, it’s the thought before the action, it’s the metaphor that gives us hope.” At this point, the workshop returned to its focus on individual commitments and ended without further conflict.

As the incident at this workshop attests, negotiation over the terms and methods of what I choose to call “agricultural activism” in New Mexico is a central concern at events and among individuals engaged in these efforts. At this workshop, all participants ostensibly shared the same concerns and goals – the preservation of a set of methods and practices related to community agriculture and irrigation. However, a fracture occurred between those who advocated an ethic of practical, small-scale, local, and individual commitment and those who wanted to focus on large-scale historic and global injustices. Significantly, this fracture does not necessarily represent an essential or enduring conflict for the individuals involved; the older speechmakers are certainly concerned with day-to-day practicalities and the younger staff members are often equally preoccupied with injustice on a larger scale. However, the brief conflict that occurred at this workshop is a vivid example of the complexity of the goals, ethics, and allegiances that characterize contemporary agricultural activism in New Mexico. As I will show, the experiences



of agricultural activists is further complicated by the rapidly increasing interest of community newcomers, academics, and other environmental, political, and food activists in acequias and their associated communities and practices.

Consequently, acequia activists are constantly engaged in processes of boundary-making, identity formation, and negotiation over the limits, claims, and goals of their involvement and the involvement of others. In this context, this thesis will address the content, meaning, and implications of the strategic identity formation and boundary-making practices of one organization at the heart of agricultural and irrigation activism in New Mexico, the New Mexico Acequia Association, specifically through the lens of a community-based, collaborative research project called the Mayordomo Project. This investigation will include two interrelated areas of inquiry. The first area of inquiry examines a pattern of discourse about what I have chosen to call “agrarian” identity and activity. In order to highlight this pattern of discourse, I will first analyze the way in which historical legacies of natural resource conflict and the increasing interest of “outsiders,” such as academics, activists, and new residents, have resulted in the need for boundary negotiation and the evaluation of categories of identity by acequia activists around the questions of participation and involvement. Through the close analysis of interviews and conversations that have taken place as part of the NMAA’s Mayordomo Project, I will argue that NMAA discourses center around the formation of a potentially resistant identity which attempts to reformulate or transcend conventional categories of ethnic and/or socioeconomic identity, while also contrasting with commonplace tropes of “tri-cultural harmony” in New Mexico, as they have been identified by other scholars (Gomez 2008; Horton 2010; Rodríguez 1989, 1990; Trujillo 2009). As I will describe, these discourses occur in a variety of settings, including project meetings, public events, and press materials, as well as conversations and formal

interviews. My analysis draws from these contexts in order to identify dominant motifs that point to the meaning of this agrarian identity, particularly as it contrasts with conventional categories of ethnicity and traditional practice that have been inscribed by the region's history of ethnic conflict, as well as by past ethnography. I will then go on to argue that agrarian identity, as defined by the discourses of the Mayordomo Project, can be usefully analyzed through a framework of indigeneity as both a resource and a limitation, as well as a particular emergent structure of feeling characterized by connection to, and engagement with, place and the past. Significantly, I do not argue that the communities or individuals at the heart of agricultural activism *are* indigenous, per se, but rather that their historical and political situation, as well as their everyday experience, can be usefully analyzed through some of the same theoretical frameworks that have been used to describe indigeneity. Secondly, I will begin to examine how discourses of "agrarian-ness" function within the agricultural activist community. In what ways do they provide new mobilizing strategies and new forms of resistance? I will argue that agrarian identity represents the kind of ambiguous and sometimes contradictory cultural form which David Samuels has called "expressive ambiguity" as a "cultural and political practice of refusal," specifically, "refusal to surrender to the unspoken codes of coherence" (2004:14). In this way, I contend that project participants are engaged in the formation of an emergent identity (what I call "agrarian") that explicitly attempts to resist both the definitional pull and the historical and political pitfalls of more conventional categories of identity, primarily those of ethnicity. In this way, agrarian identity does not simply represent a kind of multiculturalism through the elision of conflict nor an effort to create a naïve and primordial connection to the past, but rather an attempt to transcend historic boundaries of ethnicity and practice through an emphasis on shared experience and an ethic of engagement. I will also argue that discourses of agrarian identity and

engagement thus function as criticisms of the disenfranchisements and disillusionments of the present, as well as mobilizing strategies for community action and hope. Finally, I will end by posing the following question: If ethnic boundary-making – as a result of state action, political organizing, or the categorizations of anthropologists – can be seen as the kind of reification of colonial categories that has been identified in the post- and anti-colonial literature, can discourses of agrarian-ness be characterized as potentially decolonizing enunciations?

---

We're working on a method for how we're going to recruit, ...a learning process for people to become mayordomos. And what this involves is developing our own model of learning, our own model of passing on knowledge, passing on knowledge that's very indigenous to the acequia, knowledge that can only be learned by doing.

-Paula García, Executive Director, New Mexico Acequia Association

I also believe that it is through the re-emergence of these low-ranking knowledges, these unqualified knowledges... which involve what I would call a popular knowledge [le savoir de gens] though it is far from being a general common sense knowledge, but on the contrary a particular, local, regional knowledge, a differential knowledge incapable of unanimity and which owes its forces only to the harshness with which it is opposed by everything surrounding it – that it is through the re-appearance of this knowledge, of these local popular knowledges, these disqualified knowledges, that criticism performs its work.

-Michel Foucault (Mignolo 2000:19-20)

## **II. Research History and Methods**

The New Mexico Acequia Association (NMAA) is a grassroots, non-governmental organization based in Santa Fe, New Mexico, that works to protect and sustain acequias and other traditional agricultural practices, both through community development and political advocacy. The NMAA runs a number of programs that seek to defend and revive traditional agricultural practices in New Mexico communities, including acequia governance workshops, legal and technical assistance for farmers, ranchers, and water-users, youth outreach through

agriculture, and collaborative food and seed sovereignty projects with other grassroots organizations such as the Traditional Native American Farmers' Association, Tewa Women United, and Honor Our Pueblo Existence. The NMAA is also an active participant in policy advocacy and is a frequent presence at the state legislature.

In the fall of 2008, the NMAA began a collaboration with the University of New Mexico's Alfonso Ortiz Center for Intercultural Studies on a community-based, participatory research project called the Mayordomo Project, which seeks to address what project members call a "mayordomo crisis." The crisis is characterized by the widespread loss of detailed and locally particular knowledge about acequia practice traditionally held by the *mayordomo*, or ditch boss. Traditionally, the mayordomo is a respected member of his or her community who maintains irrigation ditches and infrastructure, organizes the equal apportionment of water to all community irrigators along a ditch according to traditional water-sharing ethics, and takes responsibility for dispute resolution and decision-making. As a result of outside pressures which are felt in rural communities throughout New Mexico, such as tourist development, an influx of new residents, rising property prices, and the necessity for migration from rural irrigation communities to urban centers for work, acequia community members point to a general lack of interest or participation in traditional agricultural and irrigation practices by younger generations. This lack of interest is particularly characterized by a general devaluation of the traditional local knowledge and authority of the mayordomo as the key figure in apportioning and delivering water to irrigators. As the old mayordomos retire and die, an increasing difficulty in finding replacements for the difficult, time-consuming, and traditionally unpaid or low-paid position presents a danger to the continued practice of acequia irrigation and associated agricultural practices. The Mayordomo Project seeks to address this issue by documenting the knowledge

and life experiences of New Mexico's mayordomos while developing a grassroots, hands-on method to recruit and train new mayordomos in the traditional ways of irrigation and agriculture. Project members include anthropologist, retired University of New Mexico professor, and former director of the Ortiz Center, Dr. Sylvia Rodríguez, several individuals from NMAA staff, including Executive Director Paula García, former Associate Director Kenny Salazar, and Special Projects and Mapping Specialist Quita Ortiz, Mr. Gilbert Sandoval – a mayordomo in the town of Jemez Springs, New Mexico, and his daughter, Juanita – a mayordoma-in-training, in addition to myself. After several months of planning and design from the fall of 2008 through the spring of 2009, a number of *pláticas*, or conversations, were recorded with mayordomos around New Mexico, primarily in the Embudo and Mora area. By the winter of 2010, 33 *pláticas* were completed. The majority of the *pláticas* were conducted by historian, journalist, and former mayordomo Estevan Arellano; the rest were conducted by project members and affiliated participants. The interviewed mayordomos received honoraria for their participation and gave their signed consent for the use of the *pláticas*. Many of the *pláticas* were conducted in Spanish and the remaining *pláticas* were in English or a combination of the two. A number of interviews were transcribed by former University of New Mexico Spanish professor, María Dolores González. The *pláticas* followed a fairly consistent set of questions developed by the team, covering each mayordomo's introduction to the position, his or her experiences and tasks as mayordomo, the best and worst aspects of the mayordomo position, and his or her thoughts on the future of the acequias. While the questions were consistent, the *pláticas* were rambling and conversational as the interviewer and mayordomos shared experiences, stories, and musings about the past, present, and future. In the fall of 2009, the Mayordomo Project team reviewed the *pláticas* and an analysis of the most important recurring themes and ideas was made. In the

winter and spring of 2010, a pilot internship project between Mr. Sandoval and his daughter began and the team decided to document this process with video recordings. The team participated in a number of documented visits to places in and around Jemez Springs, as well as to locations in New Mexico's Santa Cruz Irrigation District throughout 2010 and into 2011. During these visits, local mayordomos – primarily Mr. Sandoval, but also including Mr. Salazar, as well as two other mayordomos from the Santa Cruz area, Charlie Esquivel and Don Zoller – guided team members along ditches, dams, head gates, and diversion structures in their region, talking about the practical tasks of *mayordomía* [the practice of being a mayordomo], as well as telling stories about their experiences. Currently (Spring 2012), the team is primarily focused on developing a handbook and short film about *mayordomía*.<sup>1</sup> These and other details about the conception and execution of the Mayordomo Project can be reviewed in the official project report, drafted by Dr. Rodríguez, which can be found on the New Mexico Acequia Association website ([www.lasacequias.org](http://www.lasacequias.org)).

My involvement with the Mayordomo Project began in the fall of 2009. As a student in Dr. Rodríguez's Public Anthropology seminar at the University of New Mexico, I was given permission to listen to and analyze one of the project's recorded pláticas with a new mayordomo from the town of Dixon, New Mexico. My written analysis was circulated to project members and other acequia activists. I attended a project meeting, as well as the NMAA's annual Congreso de las Acequias event in December 2009, during which a panel was held to discuss the work of the Mayordomo Project. In the spring of 2010, I completed a written analysis of a second recorded plática. At that point, I was invited to officially join the project and assist in the

---

<sup>1</sup> In this way, the creation and circulation of new texts and dominant discourses for the specific purpose of reproducing culture in a particular way – what Greg Urban (2001) has called “metaculture” – are thus an important part of the Mayordomo Project. This process could be usefully analyzed by scholars of circulation (Lee & LiPuma 2002), though that investigation is beyond the scope of this thesis.

video and photographic documentation of the project's pilot internship and to help put together the short educational film about mayordomía. It was also understood that my work with the Mayordomo Project would potentially lead to a more extended scholarly work, which this thesis represents. Throughout 2010, I attended project meetings and participated in a number of field visits to the Jemez River Basin and the Santa Cruz Irrigation District with project members. I also attended several events, including the 2010 and 2011 Congresos de las Acequias in Santa Fe, New Mexico, the summer 2010 *Celebrando las Acequias* [Celebrating Acequias] event in Dixon, New Mexico, the Sixth Annual Owingeh Tah *Pueblos y Semillas* [Pueblos and Seeds] Gathering and Seed Exchange in the spring of 2011 in Española, New Mexico, and the First Annual Traditional Chile Summit in the winter of 2012 in Alcalde, New Mexico. Throughout 2011, I continued to participate in field visits and collaborated with project member Quita Ortiz and new project member David García to plan, develop, and edit the educational film. A short preview of the film was screened at the 2011 Congreso de las Acequias event, and the full length film will be completed in May of 2012. Throughout my participation in the project, project members and NMAA staff have graciously allowed me access to the recorded pláticas and transcripts for my scholarly work. I presented my proposal for this thesis to the team in the winter of 2011 for review and discussion among project members and a copy of my proposal is on file at the NMAA office. The team has also expressed continued interest in considering the ways in which this scholarly work may be able to contribute to the goals of the Mayordomo Project as a form of reflexive analysis and self-evaluation.

Since its inception, the Mayordomo Project has utilized a methodology of community-based, participatory action research (Nelson and Wright 1995; Wilmsen 2005). This methodology is defined in the official project report as a process “whereby a community of interest defines a problem it faces and seeks to solve through a collaborative, group process of investigation and action” (“Mayordomo Project”). The goal of participatory action research is to ground the investigative process in the real, concrete interests of a community of study. While the research may sometimes yield material for academic or scholarly work, the primary purpose of the research is to serve the community by attempting to answer the questions that the community wants to ask about itself. While my individual field research for this thesis has not followed a strict participatory research methodology, I have endeavored to follow the spirit of collaborative investigation that is at the heart of the Mayordomo Project. My research questions, though not developed collaboratively, have been reviewed and discussed by project members and they have expressed the conviction that they are in fact useful questions for the community. While there are numerous questions that a researcher could ask about these communities and practices, I have attempted to ask some of the questions that this community asks about itself. In this way, I have attempted to craft an analysis that employs the autochthonous categories, questions, and analytic tools that the community of study itself uses, an approach similar to one which Eva Marie Garrouette (2003) calls “radical indigenism.” Additionally, I have tried to be transparent in my research process, which has sometimes entailed an uneasy balance between being open about my thought process and developing conclusions while trying not to dominate the project with my own interests and agenda. Project members have been continually generous in encouraging me to pursue my research questions and in reassuring me that my work does represent a contribution to the Mayordomo Project as a whole.



In this context, the other primary methodology for my research has been one of participant observation at Mayordomo Project meetings, field visits, and events. My participant role consists of my presence at project meetings as an official team member and my contributions as a researcher to the continuing development of the project's goals. A primary element of my participation has been my role as one of the developers of the educational film about the mayordomo crisis and the work of mayordomos. This project is ongoing, and my participation is based on ascertaining and meeting the goals and desires of project members. Additionally, any work produced in this capacity belongs to the NMAA. At the same time, my role as a participant observer has consisted of observing and engaging in discussions with community members and activists at meetings, field visits, and events. Material for this thesis is drawn from these events and discussions, in addition to the recorded pláticas, the video documentation of Mayordomo Project field visits, and two formal interviews – one conducted by myself and the other by project member Quita Ortiz. Throughout this thesis, individuals who have participated formally in the Mayordomo Project and have signed consent forms, as well as public figures, such as politicians, are identified by name; all other individuals are not named.

Finally, my role in this type of highly participatory research has required me to be continually critical and reflexive about my own involvement. My presence in the Mayordomo Project as both a project participant and an outside scholar is openly acknowledged and embraced by NMAA staff. However, this dual position has required me to be continually critical of my engagement with socially complex, agenda-driven activism on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the equally but differently complex and agenda-driven world of academia. This ambiguous subject position is only complicated by my own identity as a native New Mexican. I have been very fortunate to be able to work with a group of individuals who are themselves

deeply critical and reflective about their activist work and their partisan stance within the region's natural resource conflicts. As I will discuss further on, much of their work is based on an unwillingness to adhere to traditional divisions between groups and communities, and a desire to interrogate the conventional source material of their identities and allegiances through multidisciplinary investigation. More than once they have pushed me to be less "romantic" and more realistic about the conflicts, ambiguities, and painful histories at the heart of agricultural and irrigation activism, while also encouraging me to give the benefit of the doubt to the participation and agendas of seemingly problematic others. I am aware that the level of collaboration and transparency that my research has enjoyed would not be possible with a less open and reflective group. Their willingness to be critical and open-minded has allowed me to be so as well.

A note about categories and terms: throughout this analysis, I refer to the formation of agrarian identity as part of a pattern of discourse about activism and advocacy centered on acequias, agriculture, history, ethnicity, and politics, that regularly takes place among members of agricultural communities throughout New Mexico. In this way, I conceive of the community of acequia and agricultural activists at the center of my analysis as similar to a speech community as defined by John Gumperz (1968) – a community connected by a common conversation and a common set of social norms. For this reason, it is important to note that "agricultural activists" are not a homogeneous group, and those whom I identify as such also have other contextually-based identities and memberships in other communities. Agricultural activism is thus not an unproblematic category of analysis, but it is one that is recognized by the groups and individuals whose discourse is analyzed here. Its precise definition and boundaries are, as I have already stated, part of the question I attempt to answer.

Additionally, much of my analysis centers on questions of ethnic categories and markers. As I will explain further on, ethnicity in this context is not essential, inherent, unproblematic, or homogenous, particularly in New Mexico, as many scholars have shown (Brooks 2001; Dunbar-Ortiz 2007; Rodríguez 1989, 2007). Nonetheless, ethnic categories make up a central locus and set of terms for discourse about natural resource usage in New Mexico; as such, they have profound political and economic implications and are thus constantly being defined, negotiated, and resisted. Throughout the text, there are a number of ethnic terms that are included when used by community members. “Native,” “Native American,” and “Pueblo” are used more or less interchangeably to refer to individuals with explicit affiliation to a Pueblo. Pueblo groups are also sometimes called “the tribes.” “Hispanic” is the most commonly used term to refer to New Mexicans of Spanish or Mexican descent who are often Spanish-speakers or the close relatives of Spanish-speakers, though many scholars prefer the terms “Hispano” or “Nuevomexicano”. “Anglo” is used to refer to individuals who are not perceived as having any other ethnic affiliation. I also occasionally use these terms in my analysis. However, in every case, they are used to reflect the discourses of community members rather than any inherent or essential identity.

Finally, a word on translation and transcription: throughout the paper, I have incorporated the voices of many project participants. All quotations from participants have been transcribed from audio or video recordings. I transcribed the majority of the quotations with the exception of the Spanish transcriptions, which were done by María Dolores González, though in a very few places I have slightly altered her transcription based on my own review of the recording. These transcriptions were made to carefully preserve many of the characteristics of New Mexican spoken Spanish. All translations from Spanish to English are my own. I have attempted to make

them as idiomatic as possible. Wherever Spanish was spoken, I have included the original Spanish and my own translation in brackets.

---

For in struggles over meanings and metaphors are material bodies that matter, and in changing bodies and materials are material differences that condition political possibilities (Kosek 2006:23).

### **III. Blurring Boundaries: Agricultural Activism and the Construction of Nature and Difference**

In the preface to his 2006 book investigating struggles over land resources within the National Forests of Northern New Mexico, Jake Kosek has pointed to “the 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” (xv). Nature and difference, Kosek argues, are mutually constitutive and infinitely complex. In this section, I briefly review the history of scholarship and popular interest that contextualize the imbrications of nature and difference in the context of natural resource conflicts in New Mexico, thus constructing the historical, political, and cultural background for contemporary agricultural activism. In this way, academic, political, and popular interest in acequia communities create a complex discursive field through which the participation of activists and community members is conceived, understood, and negotiated.

Throughout his text, Kosek shows how “understandings of the forest are not givens, but rather are the products of long histories and current struggles” (2006:280). In this way, Kosek indicates that concepts of nature are never inherent, pre-cultural, or one-dimensional. Rather, land, water, and natural resources are inextricably linked with histories of use, engagement,

struggle, and often, dispossession. Additionally, nature and its resources are often sites for the operation of power. Kosek points out that in many cases, “nature has been the primary target through which bodies and populations – both human and nonhuman – have been governed, and it has been the primary site through which institutions of governance have been formed and operated” (2006:25). Nature is, as Kosek shows, profoundly political and “infused with forms of social difference” (2006:22), along with the opportunities and limitations afforded by that difference. Additionally, struggles over natural resources are also necessarily struggles over ideologies – of wilderness, conservation, and the appropriate relationship between humans and the land. As Kosek explains, the result of these struggles is often “the transformation of seemingly mundane regional... politics into an extraordinarily complex and incendiary site of deep passions, contradictory historical legacies, and intense social protest” (2006:xv).

This is perhaps nowhere more true than in the forests, rivers, and mountains of Northern New Mexico. In New Mexico, as Kosek shows, “the region’s landscapes and identities are littered with the residue of its contentious histories and economies and their attendant struggles” (2006:7). Land and water resources, in particular, are inextricably linked with the multiple, often conflicting, always deeply felt discourses of loss and dispossession that are the legacy of New Mexico’s multiple colonial relationships, as well as with the region’s ongoing socioeconomic marginality, and ethnic and political strife. Many scholars have scrutinized the transformation of New Mexico’s land and resource conflicts into struggles over power, identity, and belonging. For example, as I have already indicated, Kosek’s work focuses on the ways in which “forest management, protection, exploitation, degradation, and restoration are inseparably tied to the social conflicts and cultural politics of class, race, and nation” (2006:x). Similarly, Sylvia Rodríguez has investigated the connections between ethnicity, socioeconomics, and the

construction of regional imaginaries in New Mexico, particularly through struggles over development and tourism. Her 2006 book, *Acequia: Water-Sharing, Sanctity, and Place*, explores the intersection of these phenomena with the operations of traditional acequia irrigation in the Taos Valley, pointing to the intimate connection between the control of water and exercise of power. In this way also, Joseph Masco (2006) has investigated the complex relationship between the nation and local Northern New Mexican communities in the context of land occupation and usage by Los Alamos National Laboratories (LANL). Significantly, Masco's work has pointed to the ways that land usage and ownership in New Mexico articulate differential forms of citizenship for Pueblo, Nuevomexicano and Anglo communities. Additionally, Masco's focus on the psychological and cosmological repercussions of LANL's presence has illustrated how these issues are powerfully formative in the communities' experience of power and identity in the present, as well as their visions for future survival and viability (2006:162). In these, and many other cases, multiple claims, multiple ideologies, and multiple narratives of past and future ownership, rights, and loss, are inescapable characteristics of land and water politics in New Mexico. Additionally, not only do these struggles intersect with questions of power, identity, citizenship, and community survival, but these questions are in fact often experienced and articulated by stakeholders in terms of concrete issues of land and water. In this way, struggles over nature are about more than nature, while profound issues of identity and belonging are both masked by, and articulated in terms of, nature and its usage. This paper aims to investigate one of these articulations in the context of contemporary agricultural and acequia activism in Northern New Mexico.

Like the sites examined by Kosek, Masco, and others, contemporary activism around agricultural and irrigation issues in New Mexico is also a case of nature articulating, and being

articulated by, issues larger than itself. As I have already mentioned, the work of Sylvia Rodríguez and other scholars, such as José Rivera (1999), have pointed to this fact. Additionally, as these scholars have noted, the communities at the center of these struggles are not unaware of the larger implications of their involvement. Rodríguez describes two Taos Valley acequia activists this way:

Both saw the acequia associations' struggle to survive as part of a global struggle over who will enjoy rights to a finite quantity of freshwater. Both understood how the right to use local water is tied to the right of traditional, place-based communities to endure and to have a voice in the future sustainability of their ecological habitats. Both realized that water issues are not simply economic – they are also about cultural identity, social welfare, and political self-determination (2006:xiv).

Here, Rodríguez points to the keen awareness of activists that their struggle is neither small-scale nor local in implication.

As the examples discussed here attest, the politics of nature and natural resources in New Mexico have been sites of extensive study over many years. For this reason, the experiences of New Mexican communities have been necessarily co-constructed with the narratives of those who study them. Rodríguez's and Rivera's works on the history and culture of traditional acequia irrigation, for example, are read and referenced in acequia activist circles. Their studies have become an inextricable part of the way participants in agricultural activism in New Mexico understand their own involvement. As Rodríguez has commented about her own work in the Taos Valley, ethnography in many ways has served to reify many characteristics of the ancient, fluid, and flexible system of acequia irrigation in the region (2006:xxiii). Similarly, popular images and texts have also played an important role in the construction of contemporary agricultural activism. Stanley Crawford's widely referenced book, *Mayordomo* (1988), has popularized local narratives about the intimate connection between water, land, and the

Nuevomexicano soul. Similarly, John Nichols' David and Goliath story *The Milagro Beanfield War*, originally published in 1978 and made into a 1988 movie directed by Robert Redford, which documents a small New Mexican community's struggle against the Texas land developer Ladd Devine through the symbolic act of irrigating an abandoned beanfield, have helped to launch those narratives into popular mythology. In these works, small-scale water politics have come to stand for sweeping narratives of independence, where scrappy locals band together to resist greedy outsiders or where solitary individuals find fulfillment in hard work and community. Of course, local individuals are not uncritical about the influence of these narratives. For example, one mayordomo – or ditch boss – commented that “when I read that book by Stan, Stan Crawford's book, it was just so romanticized and it was just so funny how after the first year [of being a mayordomo] I read it again and it was so silly. It was just so pastoral and romantic; it's nothing like that.” Nonetheless, these narratives are undeniably present in the daily work and experience of community members and activists. For example, many times while witnessing the characteristic sight of water bubbling gently out of the irrigation ditch gate and seeping into the rows of a planted field, Gilbert Sandoval – a mayordomo in the Jemez River Basin – would simply comment: “The Milagro Beanfield War.” In this way, just as the Southwest as a region has constructed its own identity in the image of Georgia O'Keefe and Fred Harvey, agricultural activism in New Mexico is inseparable from these popular images imbuing local struggles with large-scale political and spiritual significance. As Michael L. Trujillo has noted in a critical review of New Mexico ethnography, texts about New Mexico “cannot be understood without their contextualization within a discursive landscape permeated by a precursor social science literature, land-movement politics, and Anglo modernist longing”



(2009:101). As Trujillo points out about his own analysis, this thesis also contributes to that discursive field (2009:123).

Significantly, local resource struggles in New Mexico are not simply phenomena of limited regional interest. Many scholars, such as Shaylih Muehlmann (2009) and Kosek have commented on the way in which local “native” communities have often had to contend with the involvement of environmentalist groups who rely on the “natural” confluence of their agenda with the assumed interests of locals. In the context of an indigenous community in Northern Mexico, Muehlmann has noted that “environmental discourses both incorporate and erase indigenous subjects by assuming a ‘natural’ relationship between indigeneity and environmental sustainability” (2009:470). Muehlmann shows how struggles over local resource usage by this indigenous group is complicated by the involvement of environmentalist and other interest groups. Contemporary agricultural activism, similarly, is influenced and complicated by the ways in which it continues to attract increasing numbers of outside interest groups with ever diversifying goals and agendas. For example, the Arid Lands Institute at Woodbury College in Burbank, California, whose stated mission is “to shape answers and envision a future in which landscapes and communities are resilient in the face of regional aridity—environmentally, culturally, and economically” (“Mission”), has focused a number of programs on the acequia culture of New Mexico, including making contributions to an annual “Celebrando las Acequias” event and hosting a summer field school in the irrigation community of Embudo, New Mexico. Students who attend the field school in Embudo use their “field work and research into contemporary discourse on distributed energy, local economies, slow food, and integrated watershed management,” to “develop infrastructure proposals that employ the basic principles of sustainable, low-impact design, and extend the design principles + methods of landscape

urbanism” (“Summer Field Station”). In this way, the Arid Lands Institute envisions the acequia communities of New Mexico as models for future, potentially post-capitalist, resource management and urban design. Additionally, under the specter of “genetic chile” (Dudley 2010), New Mexico has also become an important locus for the fight against genetically modified and patented crops made by large, multinational biotechnology companies, such as Monsanto and Syngenta. Interestingly, even seemingly unrelated political issues are often interpreted in terms of water politics. This was notably true in the governor’s race of 2010, in which current New Mexico governor Susana Martínez’s ties to Texan gas companies were conceived as a threat to New Mexico’s watersheds. This can be seen in a YouTube video that was exchanged among acequia activists in the days leading up to the election that depicted a flowing water spigot eventually running dry, while a recognizably New Mexican-accented male voice wonders: “Should we really be putting a *Texan* in charge of New Mexico’s water” (“Don't Let Texans Like Susana Martinez Steal New Mexico's Water!” 2010)? In this way, Martínez’s ties to Texas were perceived as both economic and cultural, making her unsuitable to govern New Mexico’s culture and economy, embodied by water.

Acequia and agricultural activism also attracts participants in a number of different food movements, including Farm to Table, Food Democracy, and Slow Food groups, in addition to groups with less obvious connections to food and agriculture issues, such as anti-nuclear groups like Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety and Think Outside the Bomb. For example, both organizations sponsored booths at the Sixth Annual Owingeh Tah Pueblos y Semillas Gathering and Seed Exchange – an event sponsored by the New Mexico Food and Seed Sovereignty Alliance, which includes the New Mexico Acequia Association, the Traditional Native American Farmers’ Association, Honor Our Pueblo Existence, and Tewa Women United – which brings

together local farmers to bless and exchange heirloom seeds. In a local radio broadcast, the “CCNS News Update” of March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2011, Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety explained their presence at the seed exchange event in the context of both local nuclear issues and global environmental tragedies, specifically the disastrous 2011 tsunami and earthquake in Fukushima, Japan, which had occurred days earlier. The radio update stated:

The concerns of the New Mexico Food and Seed Sovereignty Alliance appear to be a long way from the nuclear power plants damaged last week in Japan by a combination of the strongest earthquake ever recorded and the violence of the tsunami. Perhaps there is a lesson here. Conference planner Pilar Trujillo says, "In these times of desperation and world-wide tragedy, it is more important than ever to learn how to take care of ourselves and each other. Instead of feeling hopeless, we can support the agricultural traditions that have been the foundation of our communities for centuries. Planting seeds and working with the land and water is the first step in our autonomy and healing" (“Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety”).

In this way, CCNS conceived of their involvement in the seed exchange in terms of a conflation between issues of nuclear safety, global tragedy and environment disaster, and local autonomy, all of which were embodied in the exchange of seeds between local farmers. This is a vivid example of the ways in which diverse interest groups unite their interests with those of agricultural and irrigation activism, making water and food politics a locus and an organizing symbol for a multiplicity of political and cultural concerns – national and global as well as regional – a process which has only accelerated with time. Consequently, agricultural activism in New Mexico has become a site where narratives of ownership, belonging and loss, as well as traditional ethnic, political, economic, and spiritual tensions increasingly intersect with the legacies of scholarship and the multidirectional pull of the hopes, fears, interests, and agendas of diverse stakeholders, characterized by cultural struggle and the negotiation of the local and the global.

In this context, the individuals and communities at the heart of agricultural and irrigation activism are faced with the blurring of boundaries between “insiders” and “outsiders,” as well as the tensions of complex allegiances and goals. They simultaneously face the exciting opportunities opened up by new and powerful allies as well as the potential diminution or erasure of their deepest interests behind the goals and agendas of more prominent or powerful others. Conversations with individuals in New Mexican acequia communities illustrate their preoccupation with these blurring boundaries and concerns over how to negotiate their involvement in agricultural activism, as well as the involvement of others. These local preoccupations will make up the focus of the next section.

---

Pues, se me hace a mi que las acequias mientras que haiga gente interesada... que sea gente, come te dijera, nativos. Es muy importante que entren nativos, porque los nativos por siquiera saben lo que ‘stá pasando. Sí entran nuevos pero no, no, no tienen la, la sabiduría que la gente nuestra tiene.

[Well, it seems to be that the acequias, while there are interested people... that there are people, as I told you, natives. It’s very important that natives get involved, because the natives at least know what’s going on. Sure, new people get involved, but they don’t have the knowledge that our people have.]

-Aarón Griego, Mayordomo, Acequia de la Plaza, Dixon, NM

#### **IV. Insiders and Outsiders: The Question of Participation**

As a result of the extraordinarily thick discursive field and the continuing growth of interest and involvement by outsiders in the activities of acequia and agricultural activists, the boundaries of identity and participation of these activists is complex and difficult to negotiate. In this and many other ways that I will describe, the question of who is “inside” and who is “outside” the struggle for agricultural and irrigation rights is complicated and blurred by

contemporary relationships and predicaments. In this section, I will briefly discuss a few ways in which agricultural activists and community members ponder the difficult issue of involvement: who belongs, who doesn't belong, which alliances are helpful, and which are potentially dangerous? These questions make up the context for the discursive construction of an identity that attempts to answer these questions in a practical and usable way, one which I am calling agrarian identity.

In the context of traditional agricultural and irrigation practices in New Mexico, conflicts and ambiguities about group formation and boundaries have been continually present and continually unclear. In fact, as Sylvia Rodríguez has shown, boundary maintenance and conflict have been formative of traditional irrigation customs. Sharing the water, she argues, is a practice that is rooted in conflict, explaining: "Had it not been for scarcity and a history of conflict, the customs would not exist. Their ongoing practice attests to a legacy of conflict and accommodation" (2006:48). These conflicts and accommodations historically took place between what are popularly considered the "native" groups of the region – the Pueblos and the Spanish-speaking Nuevomexicano villages, both of whom have continually relied on scarce water resources for their livelihoods and cultural survival. As Rodríguez has documented, these conflicts became even more fraught with the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century influx of tourism, amenity migration, and accompanying development in many historically isolated communities such as those in the Taos Valley and the Española Valley, as well as the increasing water needs of growing urban communities such as Santa Fe, Albuquerque, and Rio Rancho. The tensions and pressures of water usage are embodied in, and aggravated by, a process of water rights adjudication that is being undertaken by the state of New Mexico, as well as the worldwide transformation of water from a shared resource to a commodity (Rodríguez 2006:1). Under this

process, irrigation communities around the state must prove their historic rights and traditional usage of water in competition with other water users. The competitive aspect stems from the fact that the adjudication process follows the law of prior appropriation, a law which apportions rights based on who used water first. As Rodríguez has pointed out, the adherence to prior appropriation law has aggravated the changeable and historically negotiable relationships between Native and non-Native communities in the region by pitting them against one another for rights.

Also as a result of the adjudication process, communities must now deal on a regular basis with state representatives, such as the State Engineer, and are potentially facing state intervention into the traditional apportionment of water in the forms of metering, maintenance, and ditch management. This is almost universally viewed as an intrusion and insult. Mr. Sandoval, the mayordomo of the East/West Sandoval ditch in Jemez Springs, commented that:

...if you're going to start metering us, you're going to start micromanaging us... you're micromanaging people that have managed acequias for centuries and we know what we're talking about. We're not going to overwater our crops because it's detrimental to them. We know the... consumption rates for different vegetables take a little more, alfalfas take a little less or whatever – they all have a consumption rate that is optimum for their growth. If you exceed it or you deny it that much flow, it's detrimental to your harvest. So the farmers know how much water to put in their fields because they want to maximize their outflow. They're not going to go flood it and kill their harvest. It's dumb. But the State Engineer doesn't believe that; he believes that he knows better, since he's going to micromanage us to the point that is ridiculous and expensive, very expensive. Because who's he going to pay to come and do all that? And we're not going to do it for free; I'm not going to maintain no meters for him, I'm not going to pay for a meter for him, he can take me to court. But I'm not going to pay for them demanding me to put a meter at my expense, on my acequia, to tell me what to do when I already know what to do. So it's a fight...

Similarly, former associate director of NMAA and a former mayordomo, Kenny Salazar added:

Yeah, we're telling the State Engineer exactly what he just said. We're telling him we've managed our acequias for hundreds of years and we're the experts. I even told him, 'you're coming to our house and we don't trust you.' I told him just like

that, with those exact words. ‘You’re coming to my house and we don’t trust you. Period. You have to get our trust first, number one.’

In this way, intervention by outside experts and representatives from the state are viewed with distrust and indignation by acequeros and acequia community members. Forms of scientific and state-regulated water management are viewed as overly expensive ways to intrude on acequeros’ autonomy and traditional knowledge. However, it would be profoundly simplistic to conclude that all “non-traditional,” legal, or scientific forms of water management are rejected by communities. In fact, mayordomos, ditch commissioners, and community members embrace a number of “modern” forms of maintenance and management, including the use of various forms of state funding for infrastructure maintenance and construction, the standardization of by-laws, and the implementation of “water-banking,” a system of legally “banking” unused water rights with local acequia associations so that they can be apportioned to active water users. These practices require regular consultation with lawyers and with the state. Additionally, acequias all around the state have instituted pump systems and concrete ditches in place of traditional open ditches and head gates. While the relative merits of these different kinds of ditches are hotly debated, it is widely accepted that different communities need different kinds of ditches based on their individual particularities. Types of ditches can even vary from property to property. In the appropriate context, these forms of non-traditional management are openly embraced and encouraged by acequeros. As this makes clear, community members do not draw firm boundaries between “traditional” and “non-traditional” forms of management, nor do they refuse all state or legal interventions into acequia business. However, the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable forms of state and legal intervention are closely negotiated and policed, though by no means consistently or with full consensus from all community members.

The introduction of water-banking in New Mexico acequias points to another question of participation that is actively debated among community members and activists. One result of the state adjudication process is a pervasive concern that water rights will be lost as a result of disuse. Antonio Sánchez, a former mayordomo on the Acequia de la Plaza in Dixon, New Mexico, expressed this concern this way:

...say some of these people that are moving in and that can afford the property, they might think they want to farm or... in reality, they'll probably have a little garden or something but it's still a lot of work. And so they can't really farm it and, and pretty soon the adjudication's gonna happen and uh they're gonna take the water, no? They're gonna say 'you've forfeited your water rights' and... and then that'll be it.

Mr. Sánchez fears that lack of participation will result in the loss of community water rights. The only way to save the acequia, according to Mr. Sánchez, is participation. Even those *parciantes* [water-users] who are using water for “a garden that’s as big as my porch” are contributing to the long-term health of the acequia. In this context, Mr. Sánchez’s biggest concern about newcomers to his community is not that they are new per se, but that they might not use water. In response to a question about what he would change on the acequia, Mr. Sánchez states: “I guess just more participation by the *parciantes*... If I could get that changed then, then we might save it [the acequia], no? But without that, like they predict, it’s gonna go away.” Other activists and community members also emphasize that participation is the most important thing, urging people to plant even the smallest of gardens in order to guard against the potential forfeiture of their water rights.

However, not all individuals see the push for increased participation as unproblematic. Aarón Griego is another former mayordomo of the Acequia de la Plaza in Dixon and, at the time of the plática, was in the process of retiring after more than fifty years of service by training Mr. Sánchez to replace him. Like Mr. Sánchez, Mr. Griego was concerned about the lack of



participation on the acequia. He was particularly disturbed by an incident involving a breach in the side of the ditch which he describes as “el break más malo que estaba an la acequia desde que yo ‘stoy de comisión” [the worst break on the acequia since I’ve been on the commission]. Mr.

Griego comments:

...Yo te apuesto a ti que seventy percent de la gente no supo de la break eje. No supieron... Yeah, porque ‘staba mal mal, mal, le ‘staba diciendo a Antonio este es el break más malo que estaba en la acequia desde que yo ‘stoy de comisión. Y, pero la gente no, ‘hora lo que ha hecho Antonio es mayormente, estos new comers que ‘stán comprando propiedades ‘hora que no saben, los va a llegar por toda l’acequia enseñandoles todas las problemas para que...

[...I bet you that seventy percent of the people didn’t know about that break. They didn’t know... Yeah, because it was bad, bad, I was saying to Antonio, this is the worst break on the acequia since I’ve been on the commission. And... but people don’t... now what Antonio is doing is mostly, these newcomers that are buying property now that don’t know, he’s going to take them along the whole acequia teaching them about all the problems so that...]

Estevan Arellano: Que miren...

[So that they see...]

AG: Que miren, que miren. Porque muchos dicen después que salen: ‘Eii, yo no veo como el Aarón podía manejar con esta acequia solo.’

[So that they see, so that they see. Because a lot of people say after they leave: ‘Eii, I don’t know how Aarón could manage this acequia alone.’]

Mr. Griego finds it particularly troubling that a catastrophic event on the acequia, one of the worst in his fifty years of experience, could make so small an impression on the surrounding community. He also feels that few community members understand how much work he, as the mayordomo, undertakes to care for the acequia. Mr. Griego finds the lack of familiarity deeply problematic and wants to actively teach community members and newcomers to appreciate the importance of the acequia. Like Mr. Sánchez, he believes that participation is key:

No, nomás que yo considero, soy de Dixon, me voy a morir in Dixon, y yo considero l’acequia una de las cosas más importantes aquí en Dixon ahora mismo. Si no la protegemos va a haber broma. Porque se vamos abandonando

l'acequia vamos abandonado l'acequia eso, no, no 'stá bueno. Pero necesitamos más participación de la gente.

[No, just that, that, I consider, I'm from Dixon, I'm going to die in Dixon, and I consider the acequia one of the most important things here in Dixon today. If we don't protect it, there's going to be trouble. Because if we go abandoning the acequia, it's not good. But we need more participation from people.]

However, while Mr. Griego expresses the desire for increased participation, he is much more cautious than his protégé Mr. Sánchez about the kind of participation that is helpful and constructive:

Estevan Arellano: Creo que tu has sido como el mayordomo, comisión a la misma vez, por muchos años...

[I think that you've been mayordomo and commissioner at the same time for many years...]

Aarón Griego: Sí, 'stoy obliga'o, por que nadie quiere. Y luego uno va a la junta, y bueno, todo 'stán muy bien llegan a la junta y luego se decide que vamos a poner comisión o poner algún comité por alguna cosa, y: 'Ya me tengo que ir, yo trabajo,' y 'yo no puedo, 'toy muy viejo,' esto y lo otro, tú sabes como es, y yo lo que les ha dicho..., les digo: 'Ustedes debían de meterse, ustedes, los que son más viejos y entienden más.' Porque hemos tenido juntas de comisión, y yo me presto nomás pa'que haiga comisión, nomás, como el [name removed], él pos: 'Yo, nomás quiero ayudar,' y él no sabía ni 'onde 'stá l'acequia. Y esa es la problema que tenemos que los jóvenes no 'stán entrando y los viejos no quieren y luego muchos de los que entran de los nuevos quieren embocarse..., y me puse a pensar, figuré yo: 'Quién nos puede ayudar más en l'acequia? Quién nos puede ayudar?'

[Yes, I have to, because nobody else wants to. And then you go to the meeting and ok, everything's good, they come to the meeting and then it's decided that we're going to have a commission or some committee for some reason and: 'Oh, I have to go, I'm working,' and 'I can't do it, I'm so old,' this, that and the other thing, you know how it is, and I'm the one that's said to them..., I tell them: 'You guys have to get involved, you guys, that are the oldest and know the most.' Because we've had commission meetings and I volunteer just so that's there's a commission, that's it. Like [name removed], he's: 'I just want to help,' and he doesn't even know where the acequia is. And that's the problem that we have, that the young people aren't coming in and the old people don't want to and then a lot of the newcomers that are coming in want to get involved..., and I got to thinking, I figured: 'Who can help us the most on the acequia? Who can help us?']

For Mr. Griego, then, one of the most profoundly frustrating problems on the acequia is that the individuals that he believes should be involved in acequia governance, “los que son más viejos y entienden más” [the ones who are oldest and understand the most], tend to back away from responsibility. According to Mr. Griego, they are interested in the acequia, but when it comes to being on a committee or doing a job, they come up with excuses not to be involved. This is deeply troubling because Mr. Griego considers the involvements of *ancianos* [older people] and *nativos* [natives] to be extremely important:

EA: Qué imaginas tú del futuro de las acequias?

[What do you imagine is the future of the acequias?]

AG: Pues, se me hace a mi que las acequias mientras que haiga gente interesada...que sea gente, como te dijiera, nativos, es muy importante que entren nativos, porque los nativos por siquiera saben lo que ‘stá pasando. Sí entran nuevos pero no, no, no tienen la, la sabiduría que la gente nuestra tiene.

[Well, it seems to me that the acequias, while there are interested people... that there are people, as I told you, natives. It’s very important that natives get involved, because the natives at least know what’s going on. Yes, new people get involved, but they don’t, don’t have the knowledge that our people have.]

Similarly:

Sí, no, no, pero en este negocio de l’acequia la persona que la agarre de comisión vale más que tenga poca common sense de las acequias, que son las acequias, porque me va prestar mayordomo y no sepa ni ‘onde ‘stá, ‘onde ‘stá el arroyo, ‘onde ‘stá la represa y ‘onde ‘stá todo, tiene que tener poca conciencia.

[Yes, but in this acequia business the person that’s worth the most to the commission is the one that has a little common sense about the acequias – what acequias are, because they offer to be mayordomo and don’t know even where, where the arroyo is, where the represa is, and where everything is, you have to have a little knowledge.]

In these passages, it is clear that for Mr. Griego, willing participation is useful, but it is the participation of those who are familiar with the acequia, who “saben lo que ‘stá pasando” [know what’s going on] and have “poca conciencia” [a little knowledge], who are most valuable. Similarly, throughout the plática, Mr. Griego is particularly concerned with people who get

involved in acequia business without knowing what they're doing, such as the case of a new mayordomo who was seen walking the banks of the ditch "pero no llevaba ni pala, ni horquilla, ni nada" [but he didn't have even a shovel or a pitchfork or anything]:

EA: Yeah. Y a ese pobre nomás lo tiraron nomás, 'Aquí 'stá l'acequia'...

[Yeah. And this poor guy they just sent out, 'Here's the acequia'...]

AG: Eso es lo que pasó, 'Stevan, se prestan nomás pa' que haiga y luego ellos se les hace... 'I'm part of the community now.' Yeah, y 'soy mayordomo,' y ni saben 'onde 'stá l'acequia.

[Here's what happened, Estevan, they volunteer themselves just so there's someone to do it and then it seems to them... 'I'm part of the community now.' Yeah, and 'I'm mayordomo' and they don't even know where the acequia is.

Over the course of the plática, Mr. Griego mentions the problematic involvement of individuals who "ni saben 'onde 'stá l'acequia" [who don't even know where the acequia is] a number of times. These individuals recognize the importance of the acequia and want to be involved in order to be part of the community, but Mr. Griego is concerned that their enthusiastic but inexperienced participation may be harmful to the acequia. In this way, Mr. Griego grapples with a difficult issue: the participation of "outsiders" may be helpful and welcome, but it is the participation of "insiders" (ancianos, nativos) which he considers most vital and the loss of interest and knowledge among these ancianos and nativos that he considers most dangerous. Additionally, he suggests that simple participation is not enough to make an individual "part of the community."

Interestingly, in the case of these two mayordomos, opinions about useful involvement tend to divide along generational lines, with the younger mayordomo (Mr. Sánchez) expressing more openness to outside involvement, while the older mayordomo (Mr. Griego) is more cautious. However, this ambivalence about participation is characteristic of a number of the mayordomo pláticas. For example, one mayordomo commented on the importance of "gente que

saber algo” [people that know something]. He went on: “...y los que van a saber más son los que han ‘stado aquí toda la vida. Y estos que vienen de ‘fuera y si se prestan y que no saben pueden hacer más mal que bien. Más que sus intenciones sean buenas, you know, pero por falta de no saber pueden hacer cosas contra de lo como hacer la cosa” [the ones that know the most are the ones that have been here all their lives. Those that come from outside and get involved and don’t know how can do more bad than good. Even though their intentions are good, you know, but because they lack knowledge they can do things the way they shouldn’t be done]. This kind of boundary negotiation sometimes takes on ethnic overtones. For example, one mayordomo mentioned that saving the acequia would entail involving “la juventud de la raza de nosotros” [the youth of our people]. However, more often, mayordomos are simply concerned about a perceived loss of the knowledge of “los viejitos de antes” [the ancestors]. In this way, the negotiation of boundaries is a central preoccupation of mayordomos and community members, the urgency of which is only heightened by the growing involvement of outsiders, as I described.

The identity formation and boundary negotiation practices of the NMAA and the Mayordomo Project is set within the context of this preoccupation and ambivalence over the appropriate kinds of involvement and participation. As project participants and scholars have noted, the mayordomo is a significant figure in irrigation communities, not only as a traditionally prominent community leader, but also as the holder of intimate local knowledge of both the practical mechanics of geography and irrigation, as well as the intricacies of community relationships. Rodríguez memorably captures the centrality of the mayordomo in her description of ditch guides who “were like psychopomps leading me through the watery underworld, showing me where to walk and what to look for while they recounted the perils, strengths, and pitfalls of each place” (2006:xxii). As such, a good mayordomo is not only a practical necessity

for agriculture and irrigation; he or she also embodies the ideal of proper, healthy, and traditionally rooted engagement with community and land. The good mayordomo, in this context, is an ideal citizen. For this reason, the Mayordomo Project not only addresses the practical questions of what it means to be a mayordomo; it also inevitably engages with the crucial questions of boundary-making and identity formation discussed above. I argue that the NMAA, and the Mayordomo Project specifically, responds to these questions in a unique and sometimes unexpected way by visualizing an emergent identity that I choose to characterize as “agrarian.” An investigation of the meaning and content of “agrarian” identity will make up the next portion of this paper.

---

We have historically worked together with our native cousins and we understand the saying in Spanish ‘que una mano se lava la otra’ [that one hand washes the other].

-Native American and Nuevomexicano delegation from  
Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo, receiving the Acequia of the  
Year Award at the 2010 Congreso de las Acequias

## **V. Being Agrarian**

I have suggested that the discourses of the Mayordomo Project and their circulation represent the formation of an emergent identity – what I am calling “agrarian” identity – that speaks to the questions of blurring boundaries and problematic involvement that characterize contemporary agricultural activism. Interestingly, like the concerns of mayordomos, the vision of proper identity and engagement suggested by the discourses of the Mayordomo Project does not map along conventional categories of identity and group formation. For this reason, it is useful to first approach the meaning of “agrarian-ness” (as constructed by the NMAA and Mayordomo Project) by what it is not. In this section, I investigate two constructions of in-group and out-

group identity which are common in discourses about natural resource use in New Mexico: the definition of identity by traditional versus modern practices, and the definition of identity by conventionally conceived ethnic divisions.

First, though somewhat counter intuitively, I have already indicated that though acequia communities are in many ways communities of practice (Bourdieu 1977; Hanks 2005; Lave and Wenger 1991) that center around particular customs of agriculture and irrigation, the discourses of the Mayordomo Project do not necessarily construct a community identity based exclusively on practice, particularly on conventional categories of “traditional” versus “modern” practices. It is important to note that this perspective is characterized not by a devaluation of either traditional or modern practices per se, but rather by a clear-eyed process of merging traditional and modern practices into a sometimes ambiguously received but always practical hybrid system of water-sharing, dispute resolution, and ditch maintenance. For example, while project members Gilbert Sandoval and Kenny Salazar – both mayordomos – consistently expressed an affinity for traditional open and unlined ditches, they also consistently expressed admiration for other kinds of “modern” infrastructures, such as concrete-lined or piped ditches, reservoirs, dams, and locally-implemented metering systems, such as what Gilbert called the “Cadillac” system of pipes and reservoir that the project team viewed in the community of Ponderosa, near Jemez Springs. Interestingly, though the loss of traditional ditches in some communities was never left unacknowledged, Gilbert and Kenny were clear that modern systems were useful and vital adaptations to the contingencies of contemporary agriculture and irrigation. For example, while viewing the sophisticated Ponderosa system, Gilbert pondered the transition from a traditional to a modern system:

[In the past,] there was more sophisticated management, ‘cause they did have open acequias then, they didn’t have the pipe... And they had to be very

conservative in their use of water and, and, and they made it! And if they made it in those years without this type of infrastructure, it can be done if you use authority that is respected. And they, and, and they respected it out of need!... [T]his is where all these laws and different types of management and administration came from because they have tested and tested and tested and they came out with the most, the most efficient way of using water... We're only, we're only touching the very surface of the intensity of how those people handled the use of water. We're deriving from those experiences only some of the very top crust... of the, the intense work that these people did to live under those conditions and to, and to be able to share such a meager resource and yet provide for themselves...But now that they have such a nice system, it makes it easier for the mayordomo to, to be respected.

In this intriguing speech, Gilbert venerates the old ways of apportioning water according to need, musing about the authority and wisdom of the ditch managers and water-users of an undefined past, while also acknowledging the usefulness of the new system. Several times during the visit, he mused that it would be nice to have a similar system on his ditch; nonetheless, he maintained the position that such a system was only necessary because of the less knowledgeable apportionment practices of the present. In this way, Gilbert balances a conviction in the theoretical superiority of “traditional” practices with an undeniable admiration for sophisticated contemporary water-management systems. Technology, in this context, is a necessary and more or less adequate replacement for some traditional knowledge. Similarly, while viewing Kenny’s own system of piped irrigation lines in the community of La Mesilla, in the Santa Cruz Irrigation District, Kenny simultaneously lamented the loss of more aesthetically pleasing open ditches and the dramatic loss of participation by community members in cleaning and maintaining the ditch that had necessitated the piped system in the first place, while also explaining how useful the system was in conserving water and labor. Again, the convenience of modern technology imperfectly replaces the benefits of traditional systems, allowing for the coexistence of discourses of loss and veneration of the past with practical acceptance of, and genuine respect for, more modern systems, a coexistence which was characteristic of project members’ attitudes



toward ditch technology and practice. This coexistence was often exemplified in ditch structures themselves. For example, the acequias in the Santa Cruz Irrigation District are fed by the Santa Cruz Dam, which features a complex system of water control and release that is managed by Charlie Esquivel, a local *mayordomo*, who many admit is the only person who completely understands how to apportion water from the dam. In this way, a modern system of water control is managed according to the traditional *mayordomo* system, with one individual managing water according to his or her experience and sophisticated observations of weather, climate, and agricultural needs. Additionally, the ditch that feeds Mr. Esquivel's own fields, several miles down from the dam, boasts a head gate made of board and nylon string attached to a wire over the ditch, with a tree branch to hold it all in place, an arrangement which Mr. Esquivel described as "old school." "But," he commented, "that's how we do it here in Cuarteles." Mr. Esquivel's water management illustrates the practical simultaneity of sophisticated modern systems and traditional, local knowledge and customs. In this way, while acequia and agricultural activism is apparently based on a set of traditional agricultural and irrigation practices, *Mayordomo* Project members resist definition of their identities and practices by conventional concepts of traditional and modern.

A second significant way in which the *Mayordomo* Project and the NMAA explicitly resist conventional categories of identity and boundary formation is in their treatment of issues of race and ethnicity. For a full understanding of the significance of their position, a brief overview of the question of race and ethnicity in the context of natural resource politics in New Mexico is necessary here. Significantly, it is not my aim to theorize ethnicity as a consequence of political

mobilization and constructed tradition, as exemplified by scholars of tourism (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009; Silverstein 2003) and nationalism (Hutchinson and Smith 1995). The work of interrogating ethnicity in New Mexico in this way has in fact been undertaken by other scholars, most notably by Sylvia Rodríguez (1989; 1990; 2001). Consequently, my analysis is set within the context of Rodríguez's work on ethnicity as a political and economic construction. In contrast however, the aim of my analysis is not to show how assumed categories of ethnicity are constructed, but rather to explore how they are both employed and problematized, sometimes simultaneously, by acequia and agricultural activists.

As many scholars have noted, struggles over land and water resources in New Mexico have historically divided along ethnic lines. In the context of water politics, Rodríguez has shown how the relationships between Native American and Nuevomexicano groups have long been "ambivalent and contradictory." She explains: "The complex legacy of generations of face-to-face, ditch-to-ditch interaction between these distinct but intermingled peoples cannot be reduced to a simplistic binary reading. The specific incidents over water and ditch management that irrigators recall in tortuous detail reveal an eternal tension between recalcitrance and cooperation, estrangement and intimacy, interdependency and competition" (2006:55). Here, Rodríguez points out that the relationship between Native American, Nuevomexicano, and to some extent, Anglo agriculturalists and water users cannot be simplified to one of natural and complete opposition. However, the adjudication process based on prior appropriation law to which I have alluded has in many cases caused newly "adversarial relations" (2006:5) between the groups, which can "harden the perennial fluidity of these relationships into rigid and fatal opposition" (2006:9). This situation is reinforced by conventional understandings of ethnicity and race. As Rodríguez explains:

Both [Native American and Nuevomexicano] groups are subject to minority or subaltern status inside the United States but occupy very different categories or niches within the world ethno-racial order. In anthropological terms, these categories correspond to 'primitive' or 'tribal' or 'indigenous,' on the one hand, and 'peasant' or 'folk,' on the other. The scholarly predilection is always to study these two peoples separately, just as the adjudication of water rights opposes them as adversarial entities (2006:127).

In this way, groups which in fact share many practical characteristics and experiences, particularly those of U.S. "minorities," and which have historically been in relationship with one another, are categorically divided by scholarship and conventional ideas of racial identity. This state of affairs is, in many ways, a form of the "tri-ethnic" trap, a concept first named by J.J. Bodine in 1968 and elaborated by Rodríguez and other scholars (Kosek 2006; Masco 2006; Strickland 1998; Trujillo 2009; Weldes 1999). In Rodríguez's definition, the concept of the tri-ethnic trap describes a "dilemma in which Hispanos are confronted on the one hand with the devastating consequences of their land loss and subordinate status, and on the other with the Anglo glorification, advocacy, and imitation of Indian culture" (Rodríguez 1990:543). Rodríguez explores this predicament in the context of artistic representations of New Mexico cultures that, while coinciding with the economic and social marginalization of both Nuevomexicano and Native American communities, serve to venerate Pueblo culture while erasing that of the Nuevomexicanos. Similarly, in the case of water rights, prior appropriation law names Native American groups as the most senior water-users, placing primarily Nuevomexicano acequia associations in the position of having to defend their own water use from the more legally legitimate rights of the tribes on the one hand and the multiplicity of other junior users, include cities, corporations, and developments, on the other. This situation is strikingly similar to another instance of the tri-ethnic trap described by Joseph Masco in the context of land use by Los Alamos National Laboratories (LANL). Masco explains: "[A]s Anglo groups pursued

environmental laws on national forest land, and the Pueblos entered into formal negotiations with LANL over environmental and social impacts, Nuevomexicanos in the northern Rio Grande valley confronted a legal and political process that did not seem to recognize their unique cultural investments, allow their history, or care about their needs” (2006:188). In Masco’s analysis, the concerns of tribal authorities and environmental groups (which Masco identifies as primarily Anglo) left little room for the concerns of Nuevomexicano communities. Like the situation described by Masco, acequia communities find themselves with differential access to legal legitimacy. Most significantly, the tri-ethnic trap results in what some identify as a “means by which the Anglo majority [can] divide and rule the natives” (Rodríguez 1989:91). In all of these cases, by pitting Native American and Nuevomexicano groups against one another, opposition to cultural and socioeconomic domination of any kind (whether ethnic or otherwise) is minimized and relegated to intergroup conflict between culturally and economically marginalized peoples.

The awareness of differential legal recognition and the perception of the resulting internal conflicts as potentially divisive strategies by a wealthy, often urban and Anglo, majority are explicitly recognized by the members of the Mayordomo Project. For example, while discussing a significant conflict over water rights between Jemez Springs and the Pueblos of Zia and Jemez, which I will discuss at length further on, Gilbert explained:

Gilbert Sandoval: We got the letter from the Department of Justice telling us that ‘cease and desist from diverting water and you owe us 80 million dollars’ and, and, you know, where we formed the coalition to defend ourselves at the time. And so we blamed the Indians. We blamed them; they blamed us. And we became apart.

Sylvia Rodríguez: Divide and rule.

GS: ...we became like we said: ‘Damn it, we’ve lived together all these years, how come you turned on us?’

SR: Yeah.

GS: Vice versa. It wasn't until 1996, that drought that happened, that we were forced to get together and then we looked at each other and we said: 'Why did you start this mess?' 'We didn't start the mess, the government started the mess.' So the government pitted us against each other unknowingly... we need to protect our water rights from exterior forces like the urban areas in Albuquerque, Rio Rancho, Bernalillo, that are drilling wells and taking the water out from under our feet. That's who we need to fight! And in order to fight 'em, we need to unify. We can't fight them divided.

Here, Gilbert describes the process of finding his own community in adversarial relationship with the nearby Pueblos, a relationship that contrasted with their historical practice of coexistence and shared water usage. This relationship is explicitly understood as serving the interests of "exterior forces," namely the government and the urban developments of Albuquerque, Rio Rancho, and Bernalillo.

It is important to note that while the current alliance between Pueblo and Nuevomexicano groups in the Jemez River Basin is not the only example of friendly relationships between these groups, it is nonetheless extremely unique in its success in dismissing state attorneys and finding communally mediated solutions to water-sharing issues. As such, the Mayordomo Project considers the Jemez River Basin a model for Pueblo and non-Pueblo relations in other communities.

The emphasis on friendly ethnic relationships is present in many other official NMAA discourses. Though the NMAA's leadership is made up of primarily Nuevomexicano individuals from traditionally Nuevomexicano communities, the association features a substantial number of Anglo landowners as members, as well as several prominent collaborative projects with Pueblo organizations, such as alliances with the Traditional Native American Farmers Association, Tewa Women United, and Honor Our Pueblo Existence. Discourses of cross-ethnic unity are

often an explicit part of NMAA events. For example, at the 2010 Congreso de las Acequias, a Pueblo and Hispanic delegation from Ohkay Owingeh received the award for Acequia of the Year, saying: “We have historically worked together with our native cousins and we understand the saying in Spanish ‘que una mano se lava la otra’ [that one hand washes the other].” Both the 2010 Congreso and the NMAA’s 2011 seed exchange event featured Native American dancers in addition to Nuevomexicano music and performances. In this way, the identity and boundary formation practices of the NMAA and the Mayordomo Project explicitly resist conventional ethnic categories.

At the other extreme from complete opposition between ethnic groups is a discourse that has been characterized as “tri-cultural harmony,” popular in official state and tourist representations of the cultures of New Mexico. Michael Trujillo describes tri-cultural harmony as a “local brand of multiculturalism that elides the area’s simmering conflict along ethnic and racial lines” (2009:8). These discourses emphasize differences between New Mexico’s “three cultures” – Pueblo, Nuevomexicano, and Anglo – as colorful, natural, and harmonious, serving to reify ethnic and cultural differences while glossing over conflict between groups. Discourses of tri-cultural harmony also notably elide the existence of other populations, such as individuals of more recent Mexican descent whose identities are not recognizable by official discourses. However, I will argue that, despite its emphasis on multi-ethnic unity, the Mayordomo Project’s construction of agrarian identity does not fall into the trap of tri-cultural harmony. Rather than advocating multiculturalism per se, “agrarian” identity attempts to transcend traditional ethnic boundaries not through elision of conflict or alternative identities but through emphasis on shared experience and an ethic of engagement. In the next section of this paper, I move from the examination of what agrarian-ness is not to the consideration of what it is. I will argue that

agrarian-ness can be usefully analyzed through a framework of indigeneity as both a resource and limitation, as well as an emergent structure of feeling. I will argue that this way of looking at agrarian identity successfully theorizes its ambiguous qualities that so characteristically resist conventional categories of identity and group formation.

---

When knowledge and feeling are oriented toward something real, actually perceived, the thing, like a reflector, returns the light it has received from it... Each quality is so deeply incorporated in the object that it is impossible to distinguish what is felt and what is perceived.

-Jean Paul Sartre, quoted in Basso (1996)

## **VI. Emergent Identity and Structures of Feeling: Agrarian-ness through a Framework of Indigeneity**

In his 2004 analysis of country musicians in a small Texas town, Aaron Fox suggests the possibility that “indigeneity” might apply as a theoretical concept to the lived experiences of non-Native groups, such as the poor, white, rural community he studies. Fox argues:

Country music, as working-class culture, is a music of protest, accommodation, self-realization, and mythological fantasy. It articulates a structure of feeling I have come to view as comparable to ‘indigeneity,’ though not to a particular, aboriginally inhabited place (though emplacement is one of its principle cultural idioms) but to a particular historical social formation, to a moment in time (Fox 2004:319).

In this section, I follow Fox’s suggestion that aspects of indigeneity can be extrapolated as an explanatory framework to the situations and experiences of non-Native (i.e. aboriginal) groups. Much of the scholarly literature on indigeneity has examined what it means to be indigenous in terms of descent, experience, and practice. I argue here that this literature is useful for examining agrarian identity, not because agrarian individuals *are* indigenous per se, but because of revealing parallels in the discursive practice of rendering someone indigenous or agrarian, in

terms of sovereignty, citizenship, and the experience of daily life. It is important to note that my review of indigeneity literature is partial and strategic, rather than exhaustive.

In his examination of a 1970s legal battle over the legitimacy of the Massachusetts Mashpee tribe, James Clifford notes that notions of “culture” are widely biased toward “wholeness, continuity, and growth” (1988:338). Part of the Mashpee group’s difficulty in claiming tribal legitimacy, Clifford shows, is the internal variation in traditionally recognizable forms of authentic “Indian-ness.” Clifford explains:

The culture concept accommodates internal diversity and an ‘organic’ division of roles but not sharp contradictions, mutations, or emergences. It has difficulty with a medicine man who at one time feels a deep respect for Mother Earth and at another plans a radical real estate subdivision. It sees tribal ‘traditionalists’ and ‘moderns’ as representing aspects of a linear development, one looking back, the other forward. It cannot see them as contending or alternating futures (1988:338).

In this way, conventional interpretations of culture can only accommodate variety in authentic Indian-ness in terms of a linear narrative of culture loss. An individual who, at different times, claimed to be a real estate developer and a medicine man could only be conceived of as someone who started out as a traditional Indian and who became more modernized and therefore, less Indian. This view of things simply cannot account for individuals who appear to become more traditional over time, or who have gone back and forth between more and less traditional. Additionally, it cannot accommodate a group with such internal variation in forms of authenticity: either the whole group must be continuously and almost identically Indian or the whole group must be heading toward culture loss and modernity. In this way, the Mashpee group’s difficulty was not only its appearance of relative cultural assimilation to an American lifestyle, but also its inability to adhere to a linear and uniform narrative. Interestingly, Clifford points out that the need for a teleological narrative of culture loss or survival was exhibited by both the defense and the prosecution in the Mashpee case. As Clifford describes: “Life in



Mashpee over the centuries was given two heroic shapes and outcomes. Shubow [the lawyer for the Mashpee] recounted ‘an epic of survival and continuity.’ St. Clair [the opposing lawyer] celebrated a ‘slow but steady progress’ toward ‘full participation’ in American society” (1988:333). In this way, the requirement for wholeness and continuity was inscribed across the entire proceeding by both parties. Most significantly, the primary problem for the Mashpee was not so much that they were wholly Americanized rather than wholly Indian, but that they were *not wholly either*.

In New Mexico, Native American and Nuevomexicano communities have similarly experienced the requirement for cultural wholeness and/or linearity in order to be perceived as culturally legitimate. As theorists such as Kosek and Trujillo have pointed out, Nuevomexicano communities are consistently characterized as being either organically rooted to culture and place, or as suffering from the effects of culture loss – the first a narrative of wholeness, and the second, one of linearity. Kosek describes the widespread characterization of Nuevomexicano communities as defined by their deep and unmovable attachment to place, despite the actual history of labor migration and social change in the area, a characterization which “is part – either implicitly or explicitly – of almost every major work in Northern New Mexico in the last one hundred years” (2006:111). According to this depiction of Nuevomexicano communities, “the conception of rootedness goes beyond a relationship of dependence to link people and community to place as an intrinsic characteristic of Hispanos” (2006:107). This conception, Kosek explains, “is also commonly rationalized as either cause or consequence of Hispano isolation, poverty, backwardness, tradition, strength, and resistance. This yoke between people and landscape continues to be a defining factor, and intrinsic characteristic, and a natural tendency that binds race, nature, and place” (2006:111-112). As Kosek describes,

Nuevomexicano communities are understood in terms of an imagined unmoving, timeless, and authentic connection to place, whether that connection is perceived as resistant or pathological. Accordingly, loss of this connection is perceived as assimilation or social malaise. Michael Trujillo points to the overarching desire for wholeness and continuity in cultural authenticity in the context of drug use in Northern New Mexico. Trujillo analyzes the concept of “culture as cure” for perceived social ills. According to Trujillo, discourses around the cause of drug abuse in Northern New Mexico’s Española Valley “draw implicitly and explicitly on the concept of culture to explain the conundrum of a perceived extreme social malaise in a place defined by its strong cultural heritage and conceptualize a growing cultural deficit, especially among the young, and its material underpinnings as the cause of illicit drug use” (2009:86). Consequently, “the notion of cultural renewal becomes a panacea for social problems” (2009:90). Interestingly, an opposing but equally linear narrative about drug use among Nuevomexicano communities is also prevalent. According to this opposing viewpoint, “a major theory about the cause of New Mexico’s overwhelming social problems... suggests that belonging to the land generates cultural shackles that hold people down and constitute a central factor in a ‘culture of poverty’... Hispanos are seen as victims of their own cultural heritage of belonging” (Kosek 2006:113-114). In this narrative, drug users and the poor are not victims of culture loss but of the inability to modernize. The cases described by Kosek and Trujillo rely on the same type of linear narrative of cultural wholeness or cultural loss identified by Clifford in the Mashpee case to explain contemporary social forms and problems. Conventionally recognizable forms of cultural wholeness are again privileged over other possibilities, and problematic realities – those that do not fit into holistic cultural narratives – are elided. Here, cultural authenticity exists on a continuous spectrum from more to less traditional; groups and individuals can move from one

end of the spectrum to the other, but they cannot exist at multiple points at once. As a result, as Trujillo comments, “culture has become a reified object that you either have or you have lost” (2009:88). Here again, as in the Mashpee case, it is important to note that this act of confining groups to one-way narratives of authenticity is perpetrated as often by those who are sympathetic to the groups as by those who are not. As Trujillo points out, Northern New Mexico has a long history of being portrayed as a haven for culturally whole, coherent, and resistant cultures. However, Trujillo argues, the unintended consequence of these “empathetic” representations can be “the de facto containment of Nuevomexicanos’ proliferating and increasingly complex subject position(s)” (2009:122). Trujillo is thus concerned with the way coherent narratives elide the real complexity of contemporary subjectivities. Nuevomexicanos, like the Mashpee, are complex individuals with stakes in both tradition and modernity. As such, they are not passive victims of culture loss, but active agents attempting to cope with social change and the contingencies of daily life. The problem with these active agents is that they “undermine the tidy and nostalgic narratives of culture and culture’s functionalist wholeness” (Trujillo 2009:91).

Significantly, holistic and linear narratives of authenticity are not simply imposed from outside, but actually become central to the way that individuals experience their own lives and communities. For example, as Kosek explains, the reinforcement of images of Hispano rootedness to land has caused individuals “to understand themselves and to be understood by others in relationship to particular notions and histories of the landscape” (2006:112). This emphasis on wholeness is significant both theoretically and practically, the consequences of which have been explored extensively by scholars of indigeneity (Basso 1996b; Biolsi 1995; Blu 1996; Menzies 1994). In her 2010 article, “The Double Bind of American Indian Need-Based Sovereignty”, Jessica Cattelino calls for a reexamination of the way the United States federal

government interacts with Native American sovereignties based on certain conceptions and expectations of what it means to be indigenous. According to Cattelino, the relationship between the United States government and Native American governments is a political and economic relationship that is reckoned in terms of culture. In the case of the Florida Seminole, as Cattelino describes, discussions over whether the tribe's growing wealth should disqualify them from a sovereignty-based relationship with the federal government illuminates significant underlying differences in how indigeneity is conceptualized. Though the conflict played out on the level of economic and political relations between the tribe and the federal government, Cattelino shows that the real issue at stake was a deep-seated inability to recognize the possible coexistence of economic wealth and authentic "Indian-ness". The coexistence of these factors was impossible according to the narratives of linearity and wholeness that constructed indigeneity for the federal government. As Cattelino describes: "Indigenous economic success was a mode and sign of whitening... 'real' Indians remained poor" (2010:244). In this way, the economic wealth of the Florida Seminole was automatically perceived as a sign of culture loss, which in turn called into question the validity of their political autonomy. According to Cattelino, "so long as American Indians are economically dependent, their political independence largely goes unchallenged, but any economic independence in turn threatens their political autonomy." (Cattelino 2008:8) "Real" Indians were poor; therefore, wealthy Indians were no longer real, nor politically distinct.

Interestingly, Cattelino's analysis of the expectation that "real" Indians should not be economically innovative or wealthy implicates not only the federal government, but also other theorists of indigeneity. She points to other, not necessarily critical, examinations of tribal gaming that conceive of gaming wealth as an "emergent form of life" (2010:235). While she recognizes the usefulness of Michael Fischer's concept of emergence as an analytic framework

in the context of tribal gaming, Cattelino wonders why theorists are so quick to label indigenous wealth as an emergent cultural form, asking: “Why does indigenous wealth so often appear to be emergent in the United States relative to indigenous poverty” (2010:235)? In his 2004 analysis of Apache performances of contemporary country music on the San Carlos Apache Reservation, David Samuels asks a similar question. In his work, Samuels addresses the adaptability of Apache identity to contemporary forms of consumption and expressive practice. Identity is fluid, Samuels argues, in that it can be attached to, and read off of, multiple signs from multiple contexts. However, Samuels notes: “[T]he interesting question is not, ‘Why are San Carlos Apache identities fluid?’ but rather, ‘Why does the fluidity of Apache identity make people uncomfortable when the fluidity of other identities doesn’t?’ The ability to choose and refashion one’s identity is a privilege accorded to some, but not all” (2004:234). In this way, Samuels questions the use of fluidity as an analytic category, not because it is inaccurate but because it appears so novel in the context of indigeneity. Samuels thus critiques approaches to indigeneity that react with surprise to expressions of agency. As all these theorists note, interpretive approaches that preference transparent and essential continuities between bounded groups and cultural forms are consistent neither with the political-economic contingencies nor with the felt experience of everyday life. Modern identities are not formed from whole and distinctive continuities but from the contradictory and rapidly changing materials of daily life. Narratives of wholeness and continuity are thus “clumsy tools for exploring contemporary expressions of cultural identity” (Samuels 2004:6). Additionally, as indicated above, narratives of wholeness are not only inaccurate, but also often detrimental to the concrete needs and desires of indigenous people.

As I have already indicated, these issues are not merely of conceptual interest. Debates over possible termination of the Florida Seminole's federally recognized sovereignty based on their economic success exhibit the way in which differing conceptions of what it means for a group to possess indigenous culture have very real material effects on their livelihoods and well-being. Crucially, these kinds of narratives are often the way in which legitimacy is both gained and lost, as well as formative of groups' understandings of themselves. In a 2009 article, Shaylih Muehlmann points to another case in which individuals attempting to live functional modern lives are subjected to, and constrained by, closed narratives of cultural authenticity. In her article, Muehlmann analyzes a conflict over the traditional fishing rights of an indigenous group called the Cucapá in the Colorado Delta of Mexico. Legally, the Cucapá are allowed to fish in a biological reserve area; however, environmentalists and others have expressed distress at the way the Cucapá insist on "fish[ing] like Mexicans" with motorboats and nets rather than with spears and bows, like Indians (Muehlmann 2009:472). Additionally, not only were the Cucapá fishing like Mexicans, they were fishing with their Mexican relatives. As Muehlmann points out, the Cucapá were acting in a way that made good sense based on their economic situation: they were attempting to make a livelihood for themselves and their relatives. However, a problem arose around popular sentiment that the Cucapá "were not adequately performing their indigeneity" (2009:468). The Indians were neither preserving their supposed separateness from other cultural groups, nor were they performing recognizably traditional Indian roles. As Muehlmann notes, they were acting based on economics, not on culture. For this reason, the legitimacy of their fishing rights came into question. Additionally, as Muehlmann describes, the Cucapá's attempted usages of their fishing rights violated preexisting ideas of the natural alliance between indigenous resource use and environmentalist goals. Initially, the Cucapá were presented by the

environmentalists as an endangered species, one that lived peacefully and harmoniously with pristine nature. In the context of a widespread push for increased multiculturalism by the government, this strategy was useful for both the Cucapá and the environmentalists, winning concessions in terms of usage rights; however, as it became increasingly clear that the Indians did not have the same views on the preservation of pristine natural resources as the environmentalists, their relationship became conflicted. In this way, Muehlmann argues that “[t]he Cucapá have a place in environmental discourses but only insofar as they are represented, or represent themselves, as yet another endangered species that needs to be defended” (2009:474). Here again it is possible to see a deep-seated desire by the government, environmentalists, and others, to fit an indigenous group into a linear narrative – in this case, a narrative of endangered species and nature conservation. Clearly, cooperation with this narrative helps to achieve certain rights for indigenous people. However, the same narrative limits their ability to act in their own interest in severe and ultimately untenable ways. The Cucapá are thus allowed to fish but they are not allowed to fish in a way that produces a livelihood, and they are not allowed to provide for their non-Indian relatives. In this way, while cooperating with this narrative helps to win indigenous people some rights, it thus also limits their behavior in ways that ultimately nullify the benefits they have accrued by “acting like Indians”.

The case of the Cucapá powerfully recalls a series of incidents described by Kosek in his analysis of Nuevomexicanos’ struggle for rights to use forest resources. At one point in his analysis, Kosek describes a number of protests that took place through the 1960s and 70s to the 1990s over the rights of Nuevomexicano communities to use National Forest land for logging. The success of these protests sometimes varied widely. According to Kosek, their differential success had much to do with their complicity in narratives of cultural continuity and authenticity.

For instance, in the aftermath of a successful 1996 protest on Borrego Mesa, where activists drove onto Forest Service land to cut fuel wood in defiance of environmental groups, local newspapers “all focused on the ‘traditional cultural bond’ between Hispanos and the forest generally and firewood specifically” (2006:128). This traditional bond was felt by almost everyone involved to constitute a legitimate and inalienable claim to certain forms of land use. However, Kosek compares this successful protest with an earlier event that took place in Santa Fe. At this event, Northern New Mexico activists targeted the leaders of an environmentalist group, the Forest Guardians. Over the course of the protest, activists burned the environmentalists in effigy with protest rhetoric that centered around differential access to jobs and legal recognition based on class- and race-bias. In this case however, “[i]n the eyes of many who had supported the demonstration on Borrego Mesa, Hispano activists were no longer voicing their concerns in a ‘socially acceptable’ manner and, therefore, no longer deserved public support” (2006:132). Though the racial and class-based elements of the conflict between Forest Guardians and the surrounding community was widely recognized, this particular protest was unequivocally denounced in the press. Kosek argues that:

...these events were testing grounds for popular support of two different notions of belonging. Links between people and the land were more easily supported when they invoked tropes of timeless cultural ties to nature and an idealized past... When the community bond was represented in the press as political, and particularly as tied to a history of racial and class struggle, broader popular support for the struggle dried up (2006:132).

In this way, land-based protests by Nuevomexicano communities were only successful as long as they “did not disrupt essentialized notions of the bond between Hispanos and the forest” (2006:133). Protests that tapped into the economic inequality and labor struggles of the area were unacceptable because they did not “fit within the essentialized images of Northern New



Mexicans as traditional villagers” (2006:139). Significantly, forest protests after the unsuccessful Santa Fe event took quieter, more culturally acceptable forms. Kosek concludes:

There is no doubt that this opened many doors, but I think it also drastically limited activists’ fields of political engagement. Traditional forest knowledge is acceptable; burning critics in effigy is not. Organizing around the preservation of tradition and the forest is acceptable; organizing around race and class is not. This presented a particularly difficult scenario for many Hispano subjects: how to be simultaneously modern and traditional, how to perform an authentic, nonconflictive Hispano identity as traditional and multicultural. There is no doubt that this effort was broadly rewarded, in terms of recognition by politicians as diverse as Al Gore and Newt Gingrich, in terms of funds from foundations, and in terms of technical and administrative support from nonprofits working in northern New Mexico. What were lost or silenced were the possibilities of addressing or demanding certain rights and creating certain political forms and alliances (2006:140).

This powerfully recalls Muehlmann’s analysis of the Cucapá’s struggle for rights. In both cases, as Muehlmann suggests, “policies that pay lip service to ‘indigenous rights’ instead of affirming class-based political organizing... radically constrain for indigenous groups the possibility of gaining control over the resources at stake by reserving the final judgment over what constitutes ethnic difference” (Muehlmann 2009:476). In other words, both cases illustrate the way in which narratives of authentic belonging and cultural coherence, which in many ways provide groups with the ability to organize and demand certain rights, also serve to obscure relations of political-economic inequality and thus actually severely limit the ability of communities to mobilize, claim their rights, and determine their own way of making a living. These groups are thus concretely and materially vulnerable to outside judgments of their authenticity and legitimacy.

Significantly, the practical limitations of these definitions of cultural authenticity extend to relationships within and among groups as well. For example, Rodríguez echoes the observation that narratives of authenticity do serve as a resource for communities, commenting that “[t]he elaboration and defense of cultural difference is a strategy that promotes community

solidarity and asserts a claim to place” (2006:127). However, drawing on the work of James Scott (1985) and Michael Kearney (1996), she goes on to explain that “the irony is that the unitary univocal, essentialized identity articulated through such resistance serves also to entrench participants’ subaltern status... By reifying these categories of difference, anthropologists, political activists, and others participate, however unintentionally, in reinforcing their power to contain” (Rodríguez 2006:127). Here, Rodríguez indicates that the very narratives of cultural difference and authenticity that allow groups like the Cucapá, the Seminole, and Nuevomexicano acequeros to demand rights, recognition, and sovereignty from the state are in fact also tools of containment of those same rights, recognition, and sovereignty by the state. By limiting the resources of these groups to a narrow definition of authentic difference, they are thus compelled to place bounds on innovation and change and to constantly police the boundaries of their difference. In this way, as Kosek describes, narratives of cultural wholeness and linearity that are central to group identity are both a resource and a limitation, they “are fabrications, loosely based on historical fact, that inform daily practices. They are both content and adhesive, binding together individual’ understandings of themselves and their relationship to others... [They] can stabilize social forms by creating continuity between the past and the present, but they can also threaten these very forms of self and community” (Kosek 2006:59).

As I have already described, members of the Mayordomo Project are aware of the operations of these understandings of cultural difference, particularly in the case of conflict between Pueblo and Nuevomexicano communities in the Jemez River Basin. Operations of the state, like the adjudication that reinforces prior appropriation law, demand that communities base their legitimacy on continuity of residence, practice, and water usage. Their rights to water are based on their historical residence and traditional practice. For this reason, acequia communities

are compelled to prove their cultural difference and continuity through the documentation of “priority dates” – the dates on which water was first diverted to serve the irrigation community, and the authenticity of their water usage throughout time. Though substantial efforts are underway to protect acequia communities’ usage of water through documentation of by-laws, there remains some anxiety among agriculturalists and irrigators that modern irrigation practices like pumps and drip systems might endanger communities’ traditionally based rights to water. However, as the Jemez case indicates, the biggest consequence of the requirement that communities base their rights on continuity is the resulting creation or aggravation of adversarial relationships between Pueblo and non-Pueblo communities. I will turn to a more extended discussion of that case here.

The Jemez River originates about 65 miles northwest of Albuquerque, New Mexico, at the confluence of the East Fork Jemez River and San Antonio Creek. The river flows south between the Jemez Mountains and the Nacimiento Mountains before joining the Rio Guadalupe near Cañón, New Mexico. Along the river, from north to south, are the communities of Jemez Springs (population: 375), Jemez Pueblo (population: 1,958), the village of San Ysidro (population: 238), and Zia Pueblo (population: 646)<sup>2</sup>. Near the village of Jemez Springs is located the East/West Sandoval ditch, an historic acequia that diverts water from the Jemez River to serve landowners in and around Jemez Springs. Significantly, though the East/West Sandoval ditch has a diversion point farther north on the river, the most senior water rights are held by the Pueblos of Zia and Jemez. Because of their older priority date on the river, the Pueblos have the right to enforce a “priority call” – a kind of cease-and-desist notice – on the village of Jemez Springs in the event of water shortage. In the mid-90s, the state was hit with an intense drought

---

<sup>2</sup> United States Census (2010) <http://quickfacts.census.gov>.

and a priority call was made by the Pueblos. Unprecedentedly, and seemingly out of the blue, the community of Jemez Springs received notice from the Pueblos' lawyers to immediately stop using water. The three communities fell into an intense and contentious litigation process. However, part of the way into the process, Gilbert and the governors of Zia and Jemez decided to call off their lawyers and work out a mediation together. Gilbert explained: "[W]e just assumed there was enough water, and we just opened up our head gates and watered to our needs, without regards... There was no communication. And I didn't understand that, you know, I thought... I was fat and happy. But when '96, when they gave us a restraining order to stop us from doing that, then of course I made it a point to visit. It was very eye-opening; it was an eye-opening experience." For Gilbert, it is clear that the most striking part of the 1996 drought situation was finding himself in conflict with the Pueblos and then coming to the realization that the Pueblos were not the enemy. He explained:

... we go to eat at each other's houses for fiestas, and all of a sudden we were torn apart. And then we realized, 'you're not the enemy are you?' 'No you're not, we're the neighbors.' So let's get together and fight the exterior forces. And that's where we're at now. It's been very emotional, it's been real rewarding and, and everything but we finally came to that conclusion that we're fighting for our God-given resource that should be shared, not fought over.

Additionally, Gilbert is clear about the fact that conflict between the Pueblo and non-Pueblo communities was caused by the intervention of the federal government. Though he expresses the belief that the government did not intend to pit the communities against one another, he stated:

And of course it, most o' this is done through the Department of Interior which are the stewards of the native tribes and they'll initiate the, the, the work. Well once the- does that and, and it identifies the tribes as the plaintiff and you as defendants, right away you kind of take that as an enemy. You take them as an ene-, "you're suing," or "you're trying to take something valuable from me – my water, my irrigation," simply because they have priority water because they've used it from time immemorial... And it, it develops antagonism. And then you have to fight that. I had to fight that. The only way I could fight it was through

diplomacy and talking to them: “No, we, we’ve been living together for four hundred years.” We have to live in, in harmony, you know, why fight?

At another time, Gilbert and his daughter Juanita discussed the role of the federal government in

Pueblo/non-Pueblo relations:

Gilbert Sandoval:... the Department of the Interior is the one that is the steward for the Pueblos and they, they are our biggest roadblock to reaching a settlement with the tribes. The tribes themselves and the governors and the people they, they agree: “Yeah, this is the way we need to do it,” ‘cause they were raised here and they were raised with us and whatever. But then the Washington representatives, what you can call the Federal team, they come in, along with the Department of Justice and they said: “Well, no, this is not beneficial to the tribes, we need to redo it.” And so they keep throwing stumbling blocks and the Pueblos resent that because in essence what they’re telling the Pueblo leaders is that “you’re not smart enough to take care of yourself. We need to intervene for you.” And it, it insults them and they feel that. “We know what is best for us.” “Oh no you don’t, we know what’s best for you.” And consequently it affects all of the negotiations that we’re doing.

Elise Trott: What does the Department of the Interior consider to be beneficial to the tribes, that they don’t agree with?

GS: Well they’re, they’re dead set on the tribes have to have all the water because they were here and they were native and they are, they have rights from time immemorial.

Sylvia Rodríguez: So Interior supports that?

GS: Mmhm. But the tribes keep telling ‘em “but there’s treaties,” you know, “there’s treaties.”

Juanita Revak: “We’ve got neighbors.”

GS: “We can’t kick the, the non-Indians away from here again. They’re already here! They’ve been here for four hundred years, we’ve learned to coexist.”

SR: Some tribes, not all the Pueblos have that attitude I don’t think. Or at least their lawyers don’t.

GS: Well their lawyers don’t because that’s their bread and butter. That’s another contributing factor to the prolonged business of adjudication because the, the attorneys, you know, “What do we do now if we get a settlement, we’ll lose our job!” And you know, Peter Pino [governor of Zia Pueblo] from Zia said, you know, he told me: “We’ve already, you know, raised all his whole family, put all

their kids through college and now we're paying for his retirement and we're still paying!" 'Cause contrary to popular belief, the federal government does not pay those attorneys; the Pueblos have to pay their own attorneys. The Department of Interior and Department of Justice supplement those attorneys with their own. And a lot of times even the attorneys from the Pueblos and the attorneys from the Department of Justice and the federal team, they don't agree. Because basically more that the attorneys for the Pueblos, that are here locally, understand the Pueblos' needs and the people coming from Washington, they really don't understand, they just say: "Well no the tribes deserve all of this. They deserve it because they, you know, the Europeans or the Spanish, whatever, they came in here and they took it away from the Indians. They took the land, they took the water, they took everything." And the...

ET: Why do you think that's their position? I mean do you think that there's like something in it for them to be positioned that way, or...?

GS: Well, they have their, their policy you know, the whole... they need to justify their position and stand up for the Pueblo. "Oh we're the heroes because we..."

JR: What they don't get is that in this area for four hundred years or whatever, they're intertwined, the Pueblos and the non-Indians. There's a lot that you know married into the Pueblos and so it's all intertwined and you can't just take a black and white stance.

GS: It's actually promoting discrimination.

ET: Because it's saying that they can't decide for themselves?

GS: They're emphasizing that there's a difference in ethnicities. And because of your ethnic background you deserve more than some... It's very un-American.

JR: And it's weird for me because I grew up with them, went to the pool and went to Pueblos and everything, I've never seen anything different, but they try to make, they try to draw a line, that there is a line and there isn't, there is... they're a part of our community. There's a lot of the people on the Pueblo that I care for very much, I work with them everyday, I've known them forever and I couldn't see us being: "Sorry can't talk to you!" (laughs).

Here, Gilbert and Juanita express a very strong conviction that the federal government is the root of their conflict with the Pueblos and that, surprisingly, the Pueblos in fact take the side of the non-Pueblo communities as their neighbors and friends. This is not necessarily a widespread opinion of the relations between Pueblo and non-Pueblo communities and the Jemez case is in

many ways unique. However, Gilbert and Juanita's opinion of government officials' motivations is particularly striking. While, Gilbert cites the popular opinion that government lawyers are just involved in the extended process for their own financial gain, he also expresses the opinion that they think they are being "heroes." According to Gilbert, the government lawyers believe that the Pueblos should have all the water rights because of their "rights from time immemorial." In this view, later usages, treaties, and customary arrangements that are accepted by Pueblo and non-Pueblo residents are not viewed as valid by the government. By privileging both contemporary American legal structures and conventional concepts of cultural continuity while eliding other forms of belonging and cultural existence, this situation recalls the concept of the "tri-ethnic trap." However, in this case, even the concept of the tri-ethnic trap is overly simplistic as the individuals caught in the "trap" are not defined by their ethnicity per se, but by their shared residence, experience, and water-sharing practices. In other words, while the Jemez case might initially look like a classic version of the tri-ethnic trap – a Nuevomexicano community being marginalized by American dominance and veneration of Pueblo legitimacy; the situation is in fact much more complicated. As Gilbert expresses, the marginalized entity in the Jemez case is not an ethnic group, but rather a practical system of water use, based on a shared residence, history, and ethic of use that, in this case, happens to cross ethnic boundaries. Here, it is the local and the contingent that is marginalized by conventional understandings of legal legitimacy on the one hand, and cultural authenticity on the other. Gilbert expresses this predicament in his frustration with what he sees as ethnic discrimination, which he interestingly calls "un-American." In this way, the tri-ethnic trap can also be seen as a form of overdetermination based on conceptions of wholeness. Consequently, it is local autonomy and contingency that are caught in the "trap."

In this way, theories of indigeneity which illuminate the ways in which indigenous groups experience their own identities as both a resource and a limitation are also useful in theorizing the political, economic, and cultural predicament of agricultural and irrigation communities in New Mexico. The reliance on cultural wholeness and authenticity as a resource for rights and sovereignty, as well as the experience of incoherence between these narratives and the actual contingencies of daily life and relationships are a central aspect of the negotiation of identity and group boundaries for these communities. By accepting linear narratives of culture, these communities do make some gains in contemporary land and water politics; however, those gains also place profound limits on the ability of communities to define their own usage and relationships with other stakeholders. Additionally, these narratives elide significant realities: not only the historical relationship between Pueblo and non-Pueblo communities, but also the way in which the federal government's supposedly un-biased execution of the adjudication process privileges some forms of belonging and ownership over others. However, the Jemez case suggests a way in which communities might try to step outside the bounds of these conventional narratives of cultural wholeness. In the next section, I will argue that the Jemez litigants and other agricultural activists choose to resist conventional identity markers by tapping into a shared structure of feeling, what I call agrarian-ness, and which falls under what many community members call *querencia*.

According to Aaron Fox, "indigeneity" as a theoretical concept includes an experience of the world framed by a particular structure of feeling that emphasizes a deep connection to a place and/or time, one which potentially characterizes the experience of groups which are not recognizably indigenous or aboriginal. As many other scholars have documented, the



significance of belonging and sense of connection to the past is central to the self-definition and experience of many Northern New Mexican communities. Jake Kosek has argued that strong “feelingful” (Samuels 2004; Stewart 1988, 1996, 2007) connections with their Spanish past and the still mourned loss of land to the federal government and the National Forest after the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo formed the Nuevomexicano villages of his study into a cohesive community, bound “not so much by their ties to the land and shared practices of production but by their shared memories of loss and longing for the land” (Kosek 2006:32) which “have become central sites around which people organize and protest inequalities” (2006:50). Kosek suggests that the Nuevomexicano communities he studied exhibit a staunch allegiance to a particular moment in time, one that Fox might suggest is “indigenous” in quality. However, as I have already discussed, the centrality of memory and loss to Nuevomexicano communities is as often a form of cultural essentialism as it is a true characteristic of Nuevomexicano life. In contrast, other theorists of indigeneity suggest that connection to place and past is in fact a form of contemporary engagement with place in terms of the past, rather than a pathological preoccupation with loss. For example, Keith Basso argues that Western Apache indigeneity is experienced through a distinctive form of engagement with the world. In his classic study of Western Apache conceptions of landscape, morality and wisdom, Basso argues that authentic “Apache-ness” is contained in the “indigenous cultural forms that the landscape is experienced with, the shared symbolic vehicles that give shape to geographical experience and facilitate its communication – its re-creation and re-presentation – in interpersonal settings” (Basso 1996:109). As Basso describes, these cultural forms are rooted in stories about the ancestors and the way they moved through, and engaged with, space. Places are thus experienced through memory, and engagement with place is understood as being connected symbolically, if not

literally, with the actions and goals of the ancestors. Though the relationship of the Western Apache with the landscape is arguably traditional and continuous in a way that complies with linear narratives of authenticity, it exists on the level of everyday feeling and engagement in addition to conformity with preexisting cultural forms.

Similarly, Sylvia Rodríguez has described the way in which acequia communities are structured by an engagement with “architectonic” – “culturally constructed or animated” – spaces (2006:102). She explains: “Architectonic refers to a structure of experience or feeling evoked through long-term interaction between people and a place. The term signifies an ethnographer’s version of a folk model that expresses a people’s relationship to the landscape and architectural space they inhabit, cherish, and symbolically own” (2006:103). As Rodríguez describes, this process takes place largely through the confluence of ritual and agricultural action. Through both ritual procession and the everyday actions of agriculture and irrigation, community members move through their communities in ways that reinscribe their presence on the landscape in the same ritual and agricultural forms that their ancestors did. This, Rodríguez states, “is a process whereby the ditch-based population inscribes itself, through time, upon the topography or landscape of the Taos basin. It is a process that produces local subjects and shapes them into moral subjects. The ditches and the practices that maintain their functionality and communal meaning represent the historical process through which the natural topography becomes a cultural landscape” (2006:76). Additionally, as community members inscribe their histories onto space, those historically connected spaces also form community members into “local subjects” (Rodríguez 2006:80).

In the same way, contemporary agricultural activists understand their involvement with space, place, and nature as echoing the movements of the agriculturalists of the past. At the 2010

Congreso de las Acequias, New Mexico Speaker of the House Ben Luján got up to speak to the gathered delegates from acequias all across the state. He said: “You know for a while there we were losing sight of really the interests that our acequias deserved. Now we have all of you that are in our different communities involved and that’s the way it should be, that’s the way our *antepasados* [ancestors] wanted us to be, and that’s the way that they formulated and were able to sustain themselves.” Similarly, many mayordomos and irrigators conceive of their work as echoing the work of the antepasados. At the annual spring cleaning, or *limpia*, of the Fresquez ditch in Cuarteles, New Mexico – part of the Santa Cruz Irrigation District, the mayordomo Charlie Esquivel and his assistant, David, described their connection to the process of cleaning the acequias:

Charlie Esquivel: ...we don’t mind, we don’t mind what we do here every year. We get to meet the farmers, we get to talk to the people how it went last year in their gardens and so it’s a fun day. I myself and David also, we’ve been coming to this ditch since we were probably like twelve or thirteen years old. So both of us have probably worked this ditch for more than thirty years... I got my sons here; he’s got his sons here. Usually I even have a grandson here. My uncle was the mayordomo before me. My grandfather was the mayordomo before my uncle. So we have a deep tradition here with the Fresquez ditch.

David: A deep history.

CE: And so, that’s why we’re still at it and...keeping up the land.

At the same ditch cleaning, a parciante named Joseph Romero explained:

I’ve been doing this, oh ever since I was a youngster... And my dad used to, I used to go with him to clean the ditches. He would help me, show me how... as I grew older boy every year I would look forward to it, money in my pocket, put money in my pocket and it’s eventually turned into like a traditional, traditional stuff.

My property is, it’s a few miles up north but we, we help communities helping each, communities helping communities no? Making sure that acequias are, are will be clean for the springtime and make sure that everybody gets the water and has the least problems possible to get their, everyone gets water, no? And it’s a lot of youngsters and oldsters... but we teach the younger generation what the whole thing, acequias. And we, this has been going on for, the 1800s

probably. And as far as I can remember and even before I started doing this it has been going on, no? My, one of my younger boys is here today with me too and his kids probably will be doing this too, as long as there's acequias, no?

Mr. Romero describes the ditch cleaning as a community event that echoes the actions of past generations. Interestingly, in this and many other conversations, acequeros often seemed to move discursively from recollections of working on the acequia as children with their fathers, grandfathers, or uncles, to musing about the history of the acequia and the actions of the antepasados and vice versa. In this way, acequeros take obvious pleasure and pride in their sense of participating in the actions of the past, a sense which often somewhat conflates their own past and that of the ancestors. Just as importantly, they simultaneously envision their children continuing to do things the same way. Juanita Revak, the mayordoma-in-training in Jemez Springs, reflected on the reasons she wanted to learn to be a mayordoma by referencing “the memories that I have growing up here and seeing our fields always green, watching my grandfather in the field.” She describes: “We, as kids used to spend a lot of time with him while he was walking the fields and, and turning out the water to different portions of the, of the different fields, and just having that water flowing all the time. We used to, in the summertime, put boats and race them, you know, and I don't want to see that end, and that's something that I want to be able to pass on to my grandkids.” In this way, belonging and identity are expressed not simply through remembering the past, but through continued acts of cleaning, maintaining, and irrigating, which are experienced as the reinscription of the community's identity onto the landscape. Significantly, as Basso's and Rodríguez's work both suggest, the value of these acts for individuals does not derive necessarily or exclusively from convictions that they are literally doing what the ancestors did, but also at least in part from the sense of continuation, of reinscribing actions that stretch into both the past and the future. This reinscription is part of

what community members commonly call *querencia* (Arellano 1997), which refers to both a kind of ancestral love and understanding of the land and community, and also the land and community itself. The love of the land and the community and a desire to perpetuate the actions and philosophies of the antepasados are commonly linked in discourses about agriculture and irrigation. These expressions of *querencia* are thus an integral part of what I am calling agrarian identity. However, as I have already indicated, agrarian identity based on *querencia* is not simply an allegiance to the traditional and ethnic; it also manages to encompass modern practices and multi-ethnic unities. This too is usefully analyzed by reference to theorists of indigeneity.

In his study of Apache performances of popular country music, David Samuels expresses a particular interest in claims to indigeneity that “[aren’t] expressed through practices that observers from the outside can recognize as qualitatively distinct from their own, coming from a different history of tradition” (Samuels 2004:233). According to Samuels, even theories of hybridity that analyze the mixing of traditional and non-traditional elements in the expression of identity tend to imply that “identification with identifiably ‘Indian’ elements is necessarily more primordial, more meaningful, and more powerful than identification with other elements” (2004:260). In contrast, Samuels explores the possibility that indigeneity can be expressed not only through adding “identifiably ‘Indian’” elements to non-Indian elements, but by engaging with non-traditional materials in unique ways. In the context of Apache performances of popular music, Samuels explains: “Apaches were not ‘being Apache’ or ‘expressing identity’ only when they added identifiably traditional or Apache elements to a popular song form” (2004:133). Rather, “Apache-ness” was expressed through particular engagements, associations, and attributed meanings that appropriated popular songs into Apache life. In this way, Samuels’ work opens up the possibility that indigeneity can be experienced as internally coherent and authentic

by individuals and community members without containing recognizably or traceably traditional elements at all. For the Apache that Samuels described, for instance, indigenous identification was experienced most authentically through a feeling of connection to the past. However, according to Samuels, “neither persistence of practices that are indexically related (or relatable) to a prior lifeway nor a representation of those practices is necessary for people on the San Carlos Reservation to feel deeply connected to the past” (Samuels 2004:54). Samuels claims that in contemporary reservation life, it is not necessary for recognizably traditional elements to be present in expressive culture at all for community members to feel authentically connected to their Apache identities. He explains: “Rather than an empirical continuity of material form, what counts...is the continuity of feeling evoked by expressive forms” (2004:11). In this way, indigeneity is experienced not as a distinctive and clearly identifiable cultural form, but as a particular kind of feeling and a unique way of engaging with the world. Samuels terms this continuity of feeling “feelingful iconicity”.

It is indigeneity in this sense that speaks most powerfully to the agrarian identity articulated by the Mayordomo Project. At the end of one of our field visits to the Jemez, Gilbert mused about the way he imagined the life of the antepasados:

Their life wasn't easy. They had to come in and estab... they had to come in and clear fields; they had to come in and build acequias. They suffered hunger and they suffered hard work and they suffered... so therefore they were very close to their Maker. Their whole dependence depended on their faith and, because it's a moral, it's an uplifting sense in your mind, you know, having an ally in your Maker. And your Maker provided you water and the earth and the ability, the intellect to be a human being and you know.

In this statement, Gilbert both imagines the lives of the antepasados and connects his own life experience with the feelings he imagines the antepasados feeling. In this sense, he creates what Samuels would call “feelingful iconicity” – indicating the past by feeling the way the ancestors

felt. Many times, Gilbert's reflections on his experience as a mayordomo would suggest a close connection in his mind between his own experiences as mayordomo and the imagined experiences of the antepasados. In this way, Gilbert points to the experience of agrarian-ness as one of feelingful engagement with the world, engagement that is resonant with connections to the past. This sense of feelingful engagement is in fact institutionalized by the NMAA's Core Values, one of which, according to a 2010 Declaration, states: "We believe that our acequias will remain resilient by remaining rooted in centuries of traditions while also involving new community members who embrace the culture and customs intertwined with our acequias" ("Declaration of Core Values"). Interestingly, while this Core Value emphasizes the importance of "rootedness" in the culture and customs of the acequia, it places an equal importance on contemporary engagement with culture and customs, an engagement which, significantly, can be learned. In other words, without devaluing traditional rootedness in the land usage and culture of the past, the NMAA's Core Values emphasize appropriate engagement in the present, thereby opening up the possibility of meaningful "non-traditional" engagement.

Significantly, as Samuels indicates, this feelingful engagement can occur despite changing material and cultural circumstances. A lengthy portion of a conversation I had with Gilbert and his daughter is worth quoting in full for the fluid way in which their discourses of agrarian feelingful engagement apply to different circumstances throughout time:

Gilbert Sandoval: ...those are the enjoyable portions of the work when the water's already running and you're irrigating and you see it running and you see things grow. But basically for, it has a very profound history, you know, from way back when it was settled here in this property, it was settled by my grandmother's ancestors way back when the Queen of Spain was giving out land grants ...for the people to work the land and sustain themselves. And they moved in when everything was wild here, the fields were not leveled, it was you know just native vegetation growing and they had to level the lands, construct the acequia as a primary infrastructure for them to sustain themselves... You know when you think of that history from possibly the early 1700s when they came in and started

settling the area in the name of the Queen of Spain and went through the history of changing governments from Spain to Mexico to the U.S. as a territory and then becoming a state and all of that, and these acequias were the infrastructure most important to the people. And I lived through the period of time where we depended on the acequia to sustain ourselves, 'cause all of these fields that you see right now, the houses there, my house and Juanita's house, they weren't there, these were all fields that we planted with vegetables that my mother stored for winter and it all came about by the lifeline of the acequia, not only for irrigation but my mother used it to draft water to wash clothes, for drinking purposes, we carried it in buckets. I lived through the period of time when we didn't have piped water into the house and so we carried it in buckets, during the winter when the ditch wasn't running and then, it was our, a relief to have the ditch running 'cause it's a lot closer than the river was to carry buckets of water, it was a lot closer. And the dependence on that water running there became a part of our life. We did it year after year after year, the cleaning of the ditch in the spring, the fixing it, making sure it was running, fighting the storms and the floods when it silted in, but maintaining it and keeping it clean. So many years I did from the time I could barely handle a shovel, that was a routine job that we needed to do, all of us members of the family participated. And I find it hard to divorce from it and say "oh I don't, I don't need the acequia because I can go down to the grocery store, I don't really need it." If I, if I turn a blind eye and say "well I don't enjoy the greenness of the vegetation growing whether it's a landscaped field or a landscaped yard, no I don't enjoy that," you know, "I can, I can live with a desert-like aesthetically unpleasing surroundings and environment." So it isn't a matter of sustenance anymore, but it's a matter of principle, it's a matter of the profound need of living the life that you lived and enjoying the beauty that comes with it, and of course the very core food that we eat. The reason of planting a garden now is probably more a hobby than a real need. But that hobby yet produces food from the land that once you taste it, it just has a totally different taste than the one you buy commercially in a supermarket. You could go to the farmer's market, I guess and get it from some of the people, but there's a certain need of you growing it yourself and, and having it and the little kids... Andrew my, one of my great-grandsons...

Juanita Revak: He loves seeing grandpa's garden... I pick him up after work and we come and he's "let's go for a walk" and then he's "let's go see grandpa's garden, let's go see what's in there." And he comes to check the size of the pumpkins. He comes to see if the tomatoes have turned red, if the corn is ready to pick, he keeps checking the corn to see if it's ready to pick. So he has an interest in, he's always shown an interest since he was little 'cause he wants to be up on the ditch when it's running, he wants to be in the garden when they're growing, he wants to grow things. And that's something that I want to encourage in him and we see it, and you know, sometimes you listen to the news and you see things that, it may be that it's not so much for fun to plant gardens coming in the future, it's probably gonna go back to being a necessity if the economy keeps going the way that it's going. You know us living out here in the way we do, it's gonna



become more of a necessity for us to get back to planting our gardens and learning how to provide sustenance for ourselves and not rely on a grocery store.

GS: It's not a complicated thing, and it becomes enjoyable. To me it's enjoyable 'cause I enjoyed many many hours with my grandfather when he was the mayordomo on our ditch. And then my dad served as a mayordomo... He's the one that taught me most of the physical things to do and how to notice the muskrat holes and cover them up and, and he explained to me the importance of maintaining the banks' integrity so that we wouldn't lose the water... And just the mere walking the ditch is an enjoyment, it's a peaceful excursion up the ditch, seeing all kinds of wildlife... And with me it grew from our acequias to the threat of losing our acequias on the adjudication process 'cause it came with a lawsuit against us from the Pueblos... And so it became to me a basin-wide responsibility that I took on to protect the acequias from the non-tribal members in the Jemez Valley and it's been very rewarding and it's long... But the acequias prevail. They're resilient. The Pueblos understand the need for those acequias, the importance of it because they rely on them, the ranchers; the larger tracts of land like San Ysidro rely on them for income. That's their sustenance, that's where they get their money to live on and when you see them struggling to make a living through agriculture or through ranching or whatever, the acequia is the key. They have to have that water. Otherwise their business or their way of earning a living would not exist in their homeland, if it wasn't for the acequia, the lifeline for the forage that they need for their sustenance. And it's something that my grandfather alluded to when I was very young. When the welfare system came by and I guess... it was a lady from Bernalillo. They go by income or registered income, maybe by submitting income tax records or whatever. Well, according to the welfare directives, my grandfather's income was way below par; he was in, in the poorest of the poor. So she came to the house to offer him assistance through welfare. And he sat with her and he grasped what she wanted but he took it as an affront to his ability to provide for his family, rather than to see, "you're telling me I'm poor? How can I be poor? I have my home, I have my land, I raise my food... I don't see that I am starving, I am hungry, there's food on our table every day. And I have money, I earn enough money to buy the necessities that I can't raise myself"... And the other thing when he would talk to me was not so much that and pride or feeling embarrassed about, but saying, "you know these people come and they fail to even recognize the work that we do and the independence that we have and they fail to recognize that and they categorize us as indigent or unable to live right and so they're introducing to us a way of life that may ruin our incentive to be independent and the, is that's what's coming, you know, in the future, where when you grow up, is it gonna be easier for you to take advantage of these government programs that sustain and say "well why I just stay on government programs?" you know, "if I'm poor, I'll be able to get food stamps, I'll be able to get the welfare and, and I won't have to work. It's easy!" And says, "I hope you don't do that, I hope you have the, you know, the self respect that you will go out and work for what you get, because hard work never hurt anybody and be proud that you can do that." And so that came as a part of the whole

responsibility of the land and the acequia and I was very interested in maintaining that. And I learned by following him on the acequia, and my dad, we would clean the ditch after school and after work when time to clean was 'cause we, at that time we didn't hire anybody, we did it ourselves.

There are numerous important points to note about this conversation. First, as I have already described, Gilbert makes a clear connection between the work on the acequia that he finds enjoyable and the lives of the antepasados when they settled the land and dug the first acequias. That was the time, he stated, when the acequias were absolutely vital for existence. Then, he recalls his childhood when life was more difficult and they had to carry water in buckets. This reminds him of the way in which contemporary life demands so much less labor for water and food. Here, he states that he cannot conceive of life without maintaining the acequia, even though it may no longer be vital for subsistence. Repeating a statement that he made several other times, Gilbert insists that even though acequia irrigation and agriculture might be just a hobby in contemporary life, it is still just as important to maintain. In this context, traditional agriculture and irrigation are no longer matters of subsistence but rather matters of coherent personal and community experience on the land. It is the feelingful engagement with land in a particular way that matters, whether that engagement is a matter of subsistence or not. Juanita then interjects to express the belief that her grandchildren also experience the importance of agriculture and will continue to maintain the acequia. Thinking about her grandchildren reminds her of the possibility that small-scale agriculture might become a vital practice again under the threat of climate change and war. Gilbert then falls back to musing on his family's history of working on the acequia, connecting the daily maintenance of the ditch with his own work in the adjudication process with the Pueblos. In this way, all of the work – from maintaining the acequia to resolving disputes with neighbors – is conceived of as part of the vital engagement that Gilbert experiences with land and community. He then draws a contrast between his own

community and the Pueblos, who both understand the importance of the acequia, and the welfare lady from Bernalillo who told his grandfather that he qualified for federal assistance. He points out the inadequacy of federal forms of observation and management that cannot recognize his independence and self-sufficiency. Finally, he recalls his grandfather's exhortation that his family maintain their independence, most powerfully symbolized by working on the acequia. In this way, Gilbert and his daughter draw a strong connection between the historic usage of the land by the antepasados, the aesthetic enjoyment of the physical labor and running water in the present and future, and the importance of independence and autonomy. In this way, feelingful engagement, vital subsistence, and community autonomy are layered over, and intertwined with, one another. This conversation richly elaborates the dimensions of *querencia*, which remain resilient despite material and cultural changes.

A second way in which agrarian identity taps into feelingful engagement as the most important indicator of appropriate engagement in agriculture and irrigation – one which the NMAA's Core Values have already indicated – is its ability to encompass non-traditional outsiders. In the same conversation cited above, Gilbert explains that part of his job as a *mayordomo* is to teach newcomers about the appropriate way to engage in the community and with the land. He explained:

Gilbert Sandoval: There's an influx, different people you know, the old residents get old and they leave or they grant the land to their heirs and their heirs leave and then new people come in. They buy those parcels of land and they come and they see the beauty of the canyon or they see the beauty of the greenness and the vibrant foliage and they want to become a part of it because they bought land. And it's a whole educational process for them, 'cause they don't understand, they see the beauty, the surface, but they don't see, they first have to be initiated into the village, into the community and into the traditions and the culture of why is it green and pretty and why are the homes landscaped and they have fruit trees and they have flowers and gardens and, "how can I be a part of that?" And this is a great opportunity for a *mayordomo*, because these people come curious and it's a

pool of people that you can grasp and hopefully say “well this is why and this is how” and then make them a part of it, so that they become a help...

Elise Trott: So the mayordomo is sort of the person who can teach new people how to be, you know, members of the community and...

GS: Exactly, by making them look at the benefits of the water, they came because they saw the aesthetically pleasing sight of a greenery, of a foliage-filled, you know a garden. Well yeah that comes with a price. That comes with being active in this particular infrastructure. And draft from them, maybe a pool of people that'll be supportive and from there get future mayordomos. That's the only thing I can see as a viable alternative to maintaining those acequias is that you need to, to educate them in the values of that acequia and why it is running in our modern times.

In this way, Gilbert shows how “indigenous” feelingful engagement is in fact something that can be possessed by individuals conventionally considered “outsiders,” such as new and Anglo landowners. He argues that outsiders’ ability to appreciate the beauty of the land is in fact the first step to learning how to engage appropriately with the community, an engagement that must be taught by more “traditional” community members, like himself. He in fact views this responsibility to teach newcomers as a significant duty in his job as mayordomo. While Gilbert’s sentiments are not universally shared by acequeros, they were colorfully echoed by an NMAA staff member, who criticized the tendency for community members to rely on their family’s history in the region for legitimacy, stating: “That’s all bullshit. It doesn’t matter how long you’ve been here or what color your skin is, it’s about how you honor the land.”

In conclusion, the agrarian identity articulated by the NMAA and the Mayordomo Project is eloquently expressed by Samuels’ concept of feelingful engagement. As I have indicated, one of the most distinctive features of this formation of identity is its ability to encompass changing material circumstances and the entrance of outsiders. In this way, it attempts to resist the conventional categories of identity that have historically structured natural resource conflicts in New Mexico, such as ethnicity and the opposition between traditional and modern practices.

Consequently, I believe that agrarian identity exhibits what Raymond Williams (1977) has called the residual and emergent: residual in its connection to forms of the past which “still seem to have significance because they represent some areas of human experience, aspiration, and achievement which the dominant culture neglects, undervalues, opposes, represses, or even cannot recognize” (1977:123-4) and emergent in its incorporation of “new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship” (1977:123). In its refusal to be relegated to a past cultural form defined by a socially acceptable narrative of wholeness and continuity and its emphasis on action in the present, agrarian identity represents an example of what Michael Trujillo has called “an emergent Nuevomexicano structure of feeling” in its attempt to manage “a still usable past, an undetermined present, and an unforeseeable future” (2009:130). For this reason, I will conclude by arguing that agrarian identity represents an ambiguous, and therefore resistant, subjectivity.

---

Planting seeds is a metaphor for what we do as a community; planting seeds is an apt metaphor because of who we are, it's the thought before the action, it's the metaphor that gives us hope.

-NMAA Staff Member

## **VII. Ambiguity and Nostalgia: Agrarian Identity as a Resistant Subjectivity**

I return here to David Samuels, who argues that “to say that San Carlos Apaches have held onto or lost certain traditions is not the same as saying that they have held onto or lost their identity. Identity is no longer tied exclusively to practices that are objectifiable as traditions, important as they are” (2004:244). As the cultural theorist Stuart Hall has argued, “Cultural identity...is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as the

past” (2004:45). Similarly, linguistic anthropologist William Hanks has observed: “Practice as inscribed in time is always de-totalized, in that it remains unfinished and emergent” (Hanks 1987:681). Every cultural form is thus “partial and transitional” and always “subject to revision” (1987:681). Raymond Williams also insists on the importance of recognizing process and emergence over finished events and formations. The difficulty with emphasizing process over finished form is that it poses the problem of what Samuels calls “the source materials of identity” (2004:233). Samuels asks: “Is it possible to stake a claim to identity that isn’t expressed through practices that observers from the outside can recognize as qualitatively distinct from their own, coming from a different history of tradition” (2004:233)? As Samuels points out, identities that are based on forms of feelingful indigeneity – indigeneity that doesn’t necessarily look like indigeneity – appear ambiguous and problematic. Similarly, when agrarian identity refuses to define itself according to conventional identity markers, it becomes problematically ambiguous for many. For some, it appears to become unmoored from the “traditional” practices and identities that, as I have argued, provide a resource for struggles over rights at the same time that they limit the possibilities of those struggles. For others, it sounds like a form of simple multiculturalism, or an echo of romantic essentialist narratives of tri-cultural harmony. In this way, discourses of agrarian identity might be received as incoherent, watered down, or “selling out.” However, as Samuels argues, the profound ambiguity of these forms does not necessarily imply unfathomability or fundamental incoherence. Rather, ambiguity represents a “cultural and political practice of refusal – refusal to make discourses and contexts coincide too predictably, refusal to surrender to the unspoken codes of coherence” (Samuels 2004:14).

In this way, I argue that by remaining ambiguous in its embrace of multiple ethnicities and both traditional and modern practices of agriculture and irrigation, agrarian identity as

articulated by the NMAA and the Mayordomo Project represents a practice of refusal to the categories that scholars, government officials, and the dominant culture have traditionally relied upon to understand and contain the lives and relationships of acequeros. Instead, agrarian identity is an articulation where “[t]wo or more meanings are held together but not fused. Rather, both meanings persist and refuse synthesis” (Trujillo 2009:142). In this way, agrarian identity “ask[s] [others] to find meaning in unresolved ambiguity as well as clarity, in disjunctures as well as resonances” (Samuels 2004:175). Rather than complying with more easily acceptable narratives of cultural wholeness and ethnic essentialism, agrarian identity locates its particular brand of authentic experience in a form of engagement with land and community that is as practical as a mobilizing strategy as it is culturally and spiritually compelling as a way of life. In this way, agricultural activists in New Mexico seek to interpellate what Benedict Anderson would call an “imagined community” (2006 [1983]) through the circulation of discourses about agrarian life and identity, in which community members can imagine new categories of others who share their experience and ethic of engagement.

It is important to note here that my analysis of agrarian identity as a resistant subjectivity is not part of an attempt to set up an essential dichotomy between a contemporary, morally superior, and politically unproblematic stance (agrarian identity) and the outdated, racially divisive outlooks of the past. Significantly, discourses of agrarian-ness are both deeply practical and political. As I have shown, they are motivated as much by the practical contingencies of contemporary water politics and the influx of newcomers to traditional communities as by any more romantic concepts of authenticity and multiculturalism. When Mr. Sandoval and his daughter discuss their relationship with the Pueblos, they are not describing romantic ideals but rather practical realities, realities that are particular to the Jemez River Basin. Similarly, the

move to resist conventional ethnic categories is also deeply practical. Mayordomo Project participants are keenly aware of the failures of natural resource struggles of the past which I have described here; consequently, their mobilization of discourses of shared agrarian identity is motivated by a desire to avoid the political pitfalls of the past and to open up new political possibilities for themselves and their descendants. Consequently, throughout this analysis, I am dealing not with essential truths, but with assumed categories and interested actors. As in Eric Hobsbawm's (1992) discussion of invented tradition and Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs' (2003) analysis of Herder's influence, I am showing how political actors utilize discourses in the service of advancing particular stances. Additionally, as I have already stated, the mobilization of agrarian identity in these communities does not obviate the multiplicity of other identities and subject positions that individuals experience and activate. Accordingly, the political mobilization of shared agrarian identity in the context of New Mexico water politics can and does coexist with other subject positions, such as national, racial or ethnic, and gender identity, though it may test and problematize the boundaries of those identities.

At this stage of my research, my focus has been to investigate the way in which discourses of agrarian identity that circulate among members of the Mayordomo Project and agricultural activists more widely relate to and resist other forms of identity construction that are active in natural resource struggles in New Mexico. Thus far, my analysis has explored the relationship between the positive categories drawn by past struggles as well as past ethnography and the seemingly new categories in formation. Consequently, I have attempted to define what agrarian identity is and what it is not. However, it is important to note that agrarian identity is



being enunciated as resistant not only to former categories but also (and perhaps primarily) as an oppositional position within contemporary water politics. As I have described, it is an oppositional position that differs from those that divide along lines of ethnicity and practice. Consequently, the next question to be asked is: if agrarian identity is not necessarily oppositional to ethnicity or modern practice, what is it oppositional to? This question is beyond the scope of my analysis at this point; however, I would like to suggest a direction for future investigation.

In his 1988 analysis of *la plática de los viejitos de antes* [the talk of the elders of bygone days] in the Northern New Mexican town of Córdova, Charles Briggs argues that quotations, proverbs, and stories that were told and received as part of an ancestral body of discourse were, for Córdovans, a way to “confront the present with a value-laden interpretation of itself” (Briggs 1988:1). Briggs suggests that employing the talk of the elders constituted a dialectical process of reinterpreting the present through the perspective of the past. In this way, the talk of bygone days was significantly *not* an attempt to preserve an essential continuity with a romantic concept of the past, but rather a way to comment on the circumstances of the present through a socially acceptable form of evaluation and moral analysis. This analysis through the words of the past, Briggs argued, was particularly aimed at capitalist modes of production that were criticized by Córdovans as disruptive and alienating to their social and cultural life. In this way, *la plática de los viejitos de antes* can be understood as constructing what Fredric Jameson has called an “aspiration to totality” (Jameson 2011), a new subject position or category of identity which, though a creation of capitalism, also presents a new perspective from which the totality of capital can be observed and interrogated. Similarly, in her 1988 essay on nostalgia, Kathleen Stewart argues that, by “positing a ‘once was’ in relation to a ‘now,’” nostalgia conceptualizes the present, creating a “frame for meaning” (1988:227). The practice of nostalgia, she argues, is

especially relevant in the culture of late capitalism, a culture she describes as being characterized by “loss and unreality” (1988:228). She explains:

As Jameson (1983) has argued, the cultural decentering and fragmentation of our present is experienced as a breakdown in our sense of time. As a result, the present rises before us in the ultravivid mode of fascination – a fascination that is experienced as a loss, an unreality (or what Baudrillard [1981] calls ‘hyperreality’). In a world of loss and unreality, nostalgia rises to importance as ‘the phantasmal, parodic rehabilitation of all lost frames of reference’ (Foster 1985:90) (1988:227-8).

In this sense, the world of late capitalism imposes itself on individuals as a sense of loss and disorientation. Nostalgia, Stewart argues, is a way of conceptualizing that disorientation through the evocation of a time when things were not yet lost. It provides an orientation, a positionality. Stewart explains: “To narrate is to place oneself in an event and a scene – to make an interpretive space – and to relate something to someone: to make an interpretive space that is relational and in which meanings have some direct social referents” (1988:227). If late capitalism creates a world of flatness and fragmentation, this kind of nostalgia restores a perspective, a stance from which to view the world. In this way, it “shatters the surface of an atemporal order and a prefab cultural landscape” (1998:227). Consequently, Stewart argues that the nostalgic discourses of the Appalachian villagers she studies do not simply represent the desire for a romantic past, but rather, they are attempts to retain discourses of the past as oppositional forms to understand the present. She explains:

[Appalachian villagers] live in the bodily realization of knowing one life and also another life that displaces the first. Theirs is at each moment a double vision – two cultures differentiated through lived experiences of loss (Said 1984). And the two worlds, nostalgically, narratively, juxtaposed, constitute their mode of representation. Not a ‘traditional’ mode, but the thoroughly postmodern mode of the exile (1988:236).

Significantly, Stewart shows that this community’s retention of residual forms in the present day is not “traditional” in the conventional sense of the world, but completely postmodern, a realistic

articulation of their place in the late capitalist world. It is, in other words, a structure of feeling which is also an accurate representation of their place and predicament within the capitalist totality.

Michael Trujillo, similarly, describes a complex and apparently contradictory cultural formation that in fact articulates a deeply modern vision of the world. Trujillo examines the strange and uncategorizable works of the 20<sup>th</sup> century New Mexican embroiderer Policarpio Valencia, which, as Trujillo describes, contain both traditional and “transgressive” elements, combining conventional New Mexican folk genres and sayings with unconventional physical materials. Over the course of his analysis, Trujillo argues that Valencia’s work embodies a “dialectical tension” between the traditional past and the rapidly industrializing present. He states: “I posit that the riddle these embroideries pose is that of an internally differentiated subjectivity that both splits and merges and harmonizes and argues among itself” (Trujillo 2009:148). In this way, according to Trujillo, “Valencia is a modern subject and his embroidery is the allegorical working through of modernity’s contradictions. The source of these works’ great and mesmerizing power is the dialectical shock such contradictions evoke” (2009:129). Consequently, the work of Policarpio Valencia can be seen as similar to the traditional discourses of the past in Stewart’s Appalachian communities. Both cultural forms combine aspects of the past and the present to create apparently contradictory articulations of present exile and displacement. Valencia’s embroideries, therefore, can also be seen as embodying an aspiration to totality, an emergent and potentially resistant enunciation of the realities of capitalism.

Stewart’s and Trujillo’s analyses seem to expose potential responses – small-scale and humble though they may be – to Walter Benjamin’s exhortation to “wrest tradition away from a

conformism that is about to overpower it” (Benjamin 1968[1955]:255). As both residual and emergent structures of feeling, Appalachian discourses and Valencia’s embroideries are forms of retaining the past as a part of the present. They do not employ nostalgia as a simple rhetorical device; nor do they cling to the past blindly. In contrast, they employ the past as a perspective, a “frame for meaning” (Stewart 1988:227) from which to view and articulate their lived experiences of capitalism. Consequently, their double vision of the past and the present is their way of being absolutely modern. Here, these ambiguous forms recall Erin Debenport’s 2011 article on “the first Indian soap opera,” (2011:87) written by Pueblo students in a Tiwa language class, in which she argues that the use of traditional language forms does not necessarily indicate the expression of conventional meanings, while unconventional forms are as capable of expressing traditional meanings as non-traditional meanings. In this way, Debenport also shows how forms and meanings are fluid in the hands of strategic contemporary actors, embodying the embrace of both past and present.

Clearly, the agricultural activists of the Mayordomo Project and the NMAA are also explicitly oriented toward honoring and preserving traditions of the past. However, as I have argued, it would be incorrect to characterize their work as exclusively conservative. In contrast to other organizations, the NMAA also strives to create new social forms by initiating outsiders into traditional practices, incorporating the traditions of others, and selectively embracing useful technological innovations, such as pump and drip systems. Philosophically, the NMAA combines traditional visions of land stewardship with “non-traditional” ethics of conservation, community development, and activism. In this way, the retention of traditional forms is a way of coping with present experiences of exile, disenfranchisement, and cultural confusion, experiences which are characteristic of late capitalism itself. Like Appalachian discourses and

Valencia's embroideries, the work of the NMAA too is a deeply modern articulation that employs the past as a concern of the present. Consequently, the concept of nostalgia as an aspiration to the totality of capitalism and its effects is a potentially useful way of understanding what the NMAA is trying to construct itself in opposition to. In these forms, as Stewart expresses, "nostalgia becomes the very lighthouse waving us back to shore – the one point on the landscape that gives hope of direction" (1988:229). Agrarian identity as a potential aspiration to totality is a study which remains to be undertaken.

With the understanding that the mobilization of agrarian discourses is practical and not simply ideological, I turn finally to the last question of my analysis: whether or not agrarian identity can be considered a form of decolonization. Raymond Williams provides a crucial word of caution about the existence of emergent forms under late capitalism, explaining that "[t]he area of effective penetration of the dominant order into the whole social and cultural process is thus now significantly greater" (1977:126). Emergent forms, Williams argues, are easily and quickly incorporated into the dominant culture. Nonetheless, he maintains that emergence is still possible, arguing that "[e]lements of emergence may indeed be incorporated [into the dominant culture], but just as often the incorporated forms are merely facsimiles of the genuinely emergent cultural practice" (1977:126). In his 2000 book, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, Walter D. Mignolo theorizes the nature of what he calls "border thinking" as a form of decolonization. Crucial to border thinking, Mignolo argues, is the transformation of dichotomies. He argues:

This, in other words, is the key configuration of border thinking: *thinking from dichotomous concepts rather than ordering the world in dichotomies*. Border thinking, in other words, is, logically, a dichotomous locus of enunciation and,

historically, is located at the borders (interiors and exteriors) of the modern/colonial world system (2000:85, emphasis in original).

Decolonization, Mignolo argues, comes from the borders between dichotomies and consists of transcending those dichotomies through their enunciation. In this way, border thinkers make an attempt at “changing the terms of the conversation as well as its content” (Mignolo 2000:22). In this sense, I would argue that agrarian discourses might represent a kind of border thinking. As I have argued, these discourses arise in part from the failure of old categories and divisions to accurately represent experience and provide political possibility. For this reason, I suggest that agrarian discourses are very much an effort to change the terms of the conversation about identity in New Mexico and its relationship to rights and citizenship, from a conversation about ethnicity and traditional practice to one about shared experience and an ethic of engagement. Consequently, the question of whether agrarian identity represents a form of decolonization is one which should continue to be asked in this context, though whether it is in fact *received* as decolonizing by community members and others is outside the scope of my analysis.

I began my analysis with a quotation from an NMAA staff member, who argued that: “Planting seeds is a metaphor for what we do as a community; planting seeds is an apt metaphor because of who we are, it’s the thought before the action, it’s the metaphor that gives us hope.” As I have argued, the work of the NMAA and the Mayordomo Project is profoundly rooted in conceptions of the past, but it is also an active work of criticism, an interpellation of a particular vision of community, and a discourse of political mobilization. In this way, for the *acequeros* and agricultural activists of the NMAA and the Mayordomo Project, planting seeds is a metaphor of both the past and future, as well as an action in the present of criticism, opposition, and hope.

## References

- Anderson, Benedict. 2006 [1983]. *Imagined Communities*. Verso.
- Arellano, Estevan. 1997. *La Querencia: La Raza Bioregionalism*. *New Mexico Historical Review* 72(1):31-37.
- Basso, Keith. 1996. *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1996b. *Wisdom Sits in Places: Notes on a Western Apache Landscape*. *Senses of Place*. Santa Fe: School of Advanced Research Press, 53-90.
- Bauman, Richard and Charles L. Briggs. 2003. *Voices of Modernity: Language Ideologies and the Politics of Inequality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Benjamin, Walter. 1968 [1955]. *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. New York: Schocken Books.
- Biolsi, Thomas. 1995. *The Birth of the Reservation: Making the Modern Individual among the Lakota*. *American Ethnologist* 22(1):28-53.
- Blu, Karen I. 1996. "Where Do You Stay At?" *Homeplace and Community among the Lumbee*. *Senses of Place*. Santa Fe: School of Advanced Research Press, 197-228.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Briggs, Charles. 1988. *Competence in Performance: The Creativity of Tradition in Mexicano Verbal Art*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Brooks, James F. 2001. *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands*. Durham, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Cattelino, Jessica R. 2008. *High Stakes: Florida Seminole Gaming and Sovereignty*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2010. *The Double Bind of American Indian Need-Based Sovereignty*. *Cultural Anthropology* 25(2):235-262.
- Clifford, James. 1988. *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Comaroff, John L. and Jean Comaroff. 2009. *Ethnicity, Inc.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety. Accessed February 28, 2012. <http://www.nuclearactive.org/news/031811.html>.
- Crawford, Stanley. 1993. *Mayordomo: Chronicle of an Acequia in Northern New Mexico*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press.
- Debenport, Erin. 2011. As the Rez Turns: Anomalies within and beyond the Boundaries of a Pueblo Community. *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 35(2):87-109.
- "Declaration of Core Values." New Mexico Acequia Association. Accessed April 4, 2012. <http://www.lasacequias.org/declaration-of-core-values/>.
- "Don't Let Texans Like Susana Martínez Steal New Mexico's Water! 2010. YouTube video, 0:30, September 13, 2010. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gXMCok3eIOg>.
- Dudley, Chris, dir. 2010. *Genetic Chile*. 61 mins. Bullhorn Journal.
- Dunbar-Ortiz, Roxanne. 2007. *Roots of Resistance: A History of Land Tenure in New Mexico*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Fox, Aaron A. 2004. *Real Country: Music and Language in Working-Class Culture*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Gandert, Miguel. 2000. *Nuevo México Profundo: Rituals of an Indo-Hispano Homeland*. Santa Fe, NM: Museum of New Mexico Press.
- Garrouette, Eva Marie. 2003. *Real Indians: Identity and the Survival of Native America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gomez, Laura E. 2008. *Manifest Destinies: The Making of the Mexican American Race*. New York: NYU Press.
- Gumperz, John. 1968. The Speech Community. *Linguistic Anthropology: A Reader*, ed. by Alessandro Duranti, pp. 66-73. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Hanks, William F. 1987. Discourse Genres in a Theory of Practice. *American Ethnologist* 14(4):668-692.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2005. Pierre Bourdieu and the Practices of Language. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34:67-83.
- Hobsbawm, Eric J. and Terence O. Ranger (eds). 1992. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Horton, Sarah Bronwen. 2010. *The Santa Fe Fiesta, Reinvented*. Santa Fe: School of Advanced Research Press.



- Hutchinson, John and Anthony D. Smith (eds). 1995. *Ethnicity*. Oxford University Press.
- Jameson, Fredric. 2011. *Representing Capital: A Reading of Volume One*. Verso.
- Kearney, Michael. 1996. *Reconceptualizing the Peasantry: Anthropology in Global Perspective*. Westview Press.
- Kosek, Jake. 2006. *Understories: The Political Life of Forests in Northern New Mexico*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Lave, Jean and Etienne Wenger. 1991. *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lee, Benjamin and Edward LiPuma. 2002. Cultures of Circulation: The Imaginations of Modernity. *Public Culture* 14(1):191-213.
- Masco, Joseph. 2006. *The Nuclear Borderlands: The Manhattan Project in Post-Cold War New Mexico*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- “Mayordomo Project.” New Mexico Acequia Association. Accessed February 29, 2012. <http://www.lasacequias.org/mayordomo-project/>.
- Mignolo, Walter D. 2000. *Local Histories/Global Designs*. Princeton University Press.
- “Mission.” Arid Lands Institute. Accessed February 28, 2012. <http://aridlands.woodbury.edu/about/mission.html>.
- Muehlmann, Shaylih. 2009. How Do Real Indians Fish? Neoliberal Multiculturalism and Contested Indigeneities in the Colorado Delta. *American Anthropologist* 111(4): 468-479.
- Nelson, Nici and Susan Wright (eds). 1995. *Power and Participatory Development: Theory and Practice*. London: Intermediate Technology Publications.
- Rivera, José A. 1999. *Acequia Culture: Water, Land, and Community in the Southwest*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press.
- Rodríguez, Sylvia. 1989. Art, Tourism, and Race Relations in Taos: Toward a Sociology of the Art Colony. *Journal of Anthropological Research* 45(1):77-99.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1990. Ethnic Reconstruction in Contemporary Taos. *Journal of the Southwest* 32(4):541-555.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2006. *Acequia: Water-Sharing, Sanctity, and Place*. Santa Fe, NM: School for Advanced Research Press.

- \_\_\_\_\_. 2007. Tourism, Whiteness, and the Vanishing Anglo. *Seeing and Being Seen: Tourism in the American West*, ed. by David M. Wrobel and Patrick T. Long, pp. 194-210. Lawrence, KA: University of Kansas Press.
- Samuels, David W. 2004. *Putting a Song on Top of It: Expression and Identity on the San Carlos Apache Reservation*. Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press.
- Scott, James. 1985. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. Yale University Press.
- Silverstein, Michael. 2003. The Whens and Wheres – As Well As Hows – of Ethnolinguistic Recognition. *Public Culture* 15(3): 531-558.
- Stewart, Kathleen. 1988. Nostalgia – A Polemic. *Cultural Anthropology* 3(3): 227-241.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1996. *A Space on the Side of the Road*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2007. *Ordinary Affects*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Strickland, Cyd. 1998. Aspects of Diversity, Access and Community Networks. *Proceedings Cultural Attitudes Towards Communication and Technology*, ed. by Ess, C. and F. Sudweeks, pp 135-46.
- “Summer Field Station.” Arid Lands Institute. Accessed February 28, 2012. [http://aridlands.woodbury.edu/about/summer\\_field\\_station\\_2009.html](http://aridlands.woodbury.edu/about/summer_field_station_2009.html)
- Trujillo, Michael. 2009. *Land of Disenchantment: Latina/o Identities and Transformations in Northern New Mexico*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press.
- Urban, Greg. 2001. *Metaculture: How Culture Moves through the World*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Weldes, Jutta et. al. 1999. *Cultures of Insecurity: States, Communities, and the Production of Danger*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Williams, Raymond. 1977. *Marxism and Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wilmsen, Carl. 2005. Perils on the Road to Participatory Research in Community Forestry. *Urban and Community Forestry: Working Together to Facilitate Change*, ed. by Zhu H. Ning and Kamran K. Abdollahi, pp. 49-56. Southern University.