

Chapter 3

Early Spanish Explorations in the Southwest

The History of la gente was embedded in the oral tradition, but it had to be mined if one was to know the ways of the ancestors.

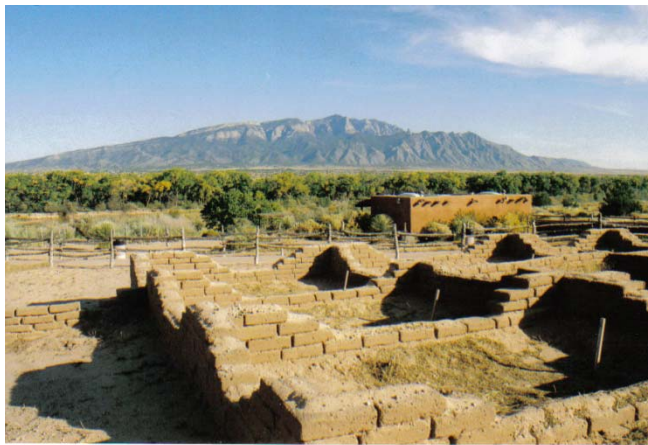
-Rudolfo Anaya, Jemez Spring

Culture Change, Diffusion, and Conflict

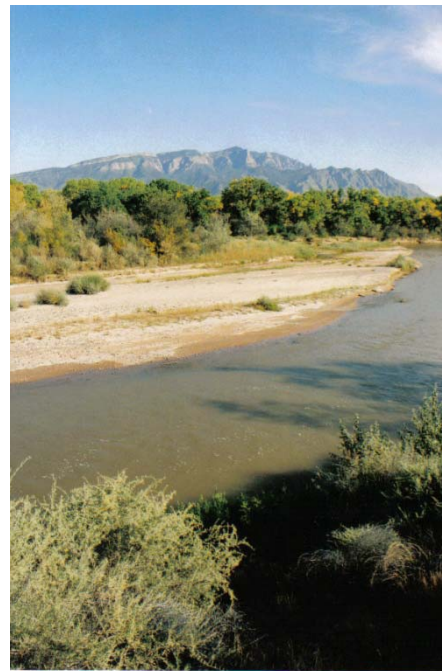
Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, survivor of the ill-fated Panfilo Narvaez expedition of 1528 which shipwrecked off the Gulf Coast of Florida, trekked on-foot across rugged terrain back to Mexico City (Gutierrez 1991:41-42). Along the way, he encountered the Native American inhabitants of the American Southwest. Upon his return to Mexico City, Cabeza de Vaca told stories of the richness and wealth of the pueblos. Stories then evolved to include cities of gold, which then prompted Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza (Gutierrez 1991:42) to act quickly. He chose Vasquez de Coronado to lead an expedition which would investigate the claims made by earlier explorers. Coronado then entered the Southwest and camped in the Pueblo of Hawikuh (Zuni) from July to November of 1540 (Gutierrez 1991:45). After leaving Hawikuh, the expedition party wintered in the Rio Grande Valley, where 12 Tiwa-speaking pueblos were discovered in the area of Bernalillo. This cluster of pueblos was now called the Tiguex Province (Sinclair 1951:5). Although the exact location of Coronado's winter camp is debated, most scholars believe that Kuauaⁱ was the pueblo in which Coronado's army was stationed (Morgan 1994:207; Stuart and Gauthier 1981:105).

The occupation of Coronado's army certainly placed a strain on everyday pueblo life for the Kuauans. Gutierrez (1991) attributes the choosing of Kuaua as the winter camp for the army because of its abundance of food. Spanish demands for food and clothing began to increase,

resulting in growing tensions among the native populace and the Spanish, leading to the Tiguex War of 1540-1541 (Flint 1999:218; Gutierrez 1991:45). The Coronado expedition party left the Rio Grande Valley in search of the fabled “Seven Cities of Cibola” northward, until reaching present-day Kansas before returning to Mexico City. Coronado’s expedition set the groundwork for the subsequent explorations into New Mexico.



Kuaua Pueblo at Coronado State Monument, Bernalillo, NM. Patrick Aguilar, 2006.



Rio Grande River at Coronado State Monument. Patrick Aguilar, 2006.

The Settlement of New Mexico: Cultural Imposition and Forced Acculturation

With Coronado's return to Mexico in 1542, no Spanish conquistadores came into the Rio Grande Valley for more than 50 years. In 1598, Juan de Oñate came to the Southwest and established Santa Fe as the capital of "New Spain." At this time, many land grants were given to several families in the Bernalillo area including the Perea, Bernal and Duran y Chavez families (Kloeppel 1970:2).ⁱⁱ According to Father Bill Sanchez, a former parish priest of Bernalillo's Our Lady of Sorrows Parish, Bernalillo was the third most important village in New Mexico at the time. Martha Liebert, director of the Sandoval County Historical Society, also states that the Gonzalez-Bernal, Duran-Chavez grants were given during this pre-Pueblo Revolt period.ⁱⁱⁱ

Along with Oñate came settlers and missionaries whose objective in this new land was to convert the Native Americans to Christianity. Tensions between the church and state began to arise in regards to who had control over the Native Americans. Atrocities were committed by the church, including the burning of kivas and the destroying of religious articles. The state, in turn, claimed ownership over the Native Americans and demanded their labor. A caste system was also established after the first conquistadores settled in New Mexico. The Spaniards were at the highest rung of the social ladder, and the Native Americans were at the bottom. The Native Americans served in the construction of Spanish buildings such as churches and houses. They also planted the crops and maintained the herds of livestock. The *encomienda* system was developed in which members of the Spanish aristocracy demanded food and blankets from the Native Americans, in exchange for education and safe protection from raiding nomadic tribes (Cirillo 1998:17). The demand for food and labor, coupled with the institution of the *encomienda* system resulted in growing tensions among the Native American and Hispanic communities.

Rebellion in the Rio Grande Valley

In response to the harsh demands of the Spaniards, the Native Americans of the Rio Grande Valley plotted rebellion. Under the leadership of a San Juan Pueblo medicine man named Pope, the Rio Grande Pueblos, which for 92 years lived under harsh Spanish rule, successfully rose up in rebellion on August 10 of 1680.

Originally, the rebellion was planned for August 13, but Governor Otermín was told of the plan of attack. Two young men from the Pueblo of Tesuque (Dry Spot) named Catua and Omtua were sent to each of the pueblos, carrying with them a knotted yucca cord marking the days until the uprising (Folsom 1973:21). Captured by the forces of Governor Otermín, Catua and Omtua were unable to deliver the messages of Pope to the southern pueblos. The plan for rebellion was then accelerated and at daybreak on August 10, 1680 the people of the Rio Grande pueblos succeeded in expelling the Spanish out of the Rio Grande Valley.

Pueblo/Hispano Relations in Bernalillo

According to oral tradition, prior to the Pueblo Revolt, the residents of Bernalillo were told in advance of the plans of rebellion.^{iv} Aguilar states that “the people that lived here [in Bernalillo] got along with the pueblo people that were in the area so they were told about the Pueblo Revolt and they were able to leave this area without being harmed.”^v A church was built in Bernalillo prior to the Pueblo Revolt named after San Francisco, which contained a small chapel in honor of Sandía Pueblo’s patron Saint Anthony. During the Pueblo Revolt, the church of San Francisco was burned, but the chapel of Saint Anthony remained.^{vi} Citing Fray Angélico Chavez, Kloeppel states that all Spanish settlers [in New Mexico] had perished on August 10, 1680 “except those in Bernalillo” (Kloeppel 1970:2).^{vii} All survivors of the revolt fled south to the present-day El Paso area. Many survivors also found refuge in the village of San Lorenzo,^{viii}

which has now been absorbed into the city of El Paso. According to Father Bill Sanchez, a mass was paid at the Cathedral in Mexico City on August 10, 1681 in thanksgiving for the safe flight of the colonists from the Rio Grande Valley.^{ix}

La Reconquista- “Gracias a San Lorenzo que nos salvó”

With intent to reconquer New Mexico, Don Diego de Vargas set out for Santa Fe in August of 1692 (Jenkins & Schroeder 1974:22). Lamadrid presents an explanation of the reconquest referring to the flight of the people of Bernalillo from the Rio Grande Valley 12 years earlier:

De Vargas made a vow to San Lorenzo to commemorate the suffering and triumph of the colonists with solemn dance and public celebrations. Today, the people of Bernalillo, New Mexico still observe the “promesa” to San Lorenzo every August 10 by performing “los Matachines,” the spiritual dance drama of the conquest. In a struggle of good and evil, of the old and the new, of the conquerors and the conquered, a new spirit is born, a new harmony is celebrated.
(Lamadrid 1994:17)

It is believed that Bernalillo was re-settled by De Vargas in the autumn of 1695, at the “old site of the Bernal family” which was located “on the old estate called Bernalillo” (Espinosa 1942:318). According to the oral tradition of Bernalillo, it is at this time that the Matachines dance was brought from Mexico to Bernalillo to honor the safe flight from the valley during the Pueblo Revolt. As a result, the residents of Bernalillo now danced in honor of San Lorenzo, whose feast day occurs on August 10—also the same day as the revolt in which they were spared their lives (see appendix for the history of San Lorenzo). Citing Justin Rinaldi, also a resident of Bernalillo, Lamadrid states that the Matachines dance is significant in terms of the anniversary of the Pueblo Revolt of 1680. He states that De Vargas asked “all of the [Spanish] colonists that

came back to remember as a devotion of Thanksgiving to establish August 10 as a commemorative celebration in honor of Saint Lawrence” (Lamadrid 1994:17). Rinaldi also states that “Bernalillo is the only community that has kept this promise from the very beginning for three hundred and some odd years” (Lamadrid 1994:17).

Martha Liebert states that after the reconquest, many inhabitants of the earlier Gonzalez-Bernal, Duran-Chavez land grants returned to Bernalillo. Shortly after, the Perea (1800), Sandía Pueblo (1748) and Felipe Gutierrez (1742) land grants were given.^x Maria Rinaldi, a lifelong resident of Bernalillo and director of community development in the Town of Bernalillo, is involved in an economic revitalization project called ‘Main Street’ which markets and promotes cultural aspects and traditions of Bernalillo. According to Rinaldi, “Bernalillo became pretty heavily populated after the Pueblo Revolt when De Vargas came back in 1693. Bernalillo was the center of trade throughout the region.”^{xi} Liebert echoes this statement claiming that Bernalillo became a trading center because of its proximity to Angostura, which is just north of Bernalillo near Algodones, NM. In Angostura, a shallow crossing over the Rio Grande River was created by a gravel spill. According to Liebert, the crossing made it easier for animals and wagons to cross. In addition, Apaches would raid nearby haciendas. A torreón, or watchtower, was built in Angostura at the crossing in order to protect from raiding nomadic tribes. Liebert also states that the pueblo people from Jemez, Zia and Santa Ana would follow the “Rio Jemez” to the crossing at Angostura to trade with the Comanches during the fall and spring months.^{xii}

Rinaldi states that a large number of merchants also began to settle in Bernalillo. The lumber industry built a sawmill, which attracted people in search of employment from neighboring communities. It is believed that a wealthy landowner named Jose Leandro Perea,^{xiii} who granted all of the land to the Catholic Church for the convent and the Brother’s schools, was

approached by the railroad for the building of a rail yard on his property. He refused to sell his property, resulting in the rail yard being built in Albuquerque.^{xiv} The railroad was extended from Las Vegas, New Mexico to Albuquerque in 1880 (Jenkins & Schroeder 1974:64). Albuquerque then developed as the center of trade and industry in New Mexico. This certainly had a negative economic impact on Bernalillo, which for many years was not able to develop as rapidly as its neighbor to the south, with economic ramifications that remain evident to the present-day.

As time went on, Bernalillo continued to see jobs lost, and many economic opportunities bypassed. According to Rinaldi:

There have been a number of times, particularly post World War II, where Bernalillo was a ghost town, the lumber industry had closed down, the sawmill was shut down, I-25 was constructed bypassing Bernalillo. It was major, it had a major negative economic impact on the community and the community leaders in the late 50s and early 60s were approached by the highway department for the widening for what is now *Camino del Pueblo*/ New Mexico 313 and they did not know about the history of the town and they were sold an opportunity and they took it. They truly believed that the only way to save the community was to rip off the facades of the fronts of all the buildings through Bernalillo along Main Street and let that road come through in an effort to try to continue trade in Bernalillo.^{xv}

At this point, during the 1950s and 1960s, the number of participants involved in the Matachines dance began to decrease. Eddie Torres II, a former Monarca remembers a time when there were not enough dancers to complete the fiesta dances. This then prompted faithful fiesta participants to go out into the community and ask individuals to dance.^{xvi} Other participants of the dance remember that at about the same time dancers from Sandía Pueblo were invited to dance in the Bernalillo Matachines.^{xvii} This can be attributed to a number of factors including war, which had a definite economic impact on Bernalillo. Marta Weigle states that during the decades after World War I, the Hispanic population became urban, mobile and poverty stricken

(Weigle 1976:97). World War II definitely had a negative impact on New Mexico, especially Bernalillo with the out-migration of many of its residents (Weigle 1976:97-98). Rinaldi attributes this to the fact that people, many who had gone to war and had seen much of the world outside of Bernalillo, began to equate their small town with poverty. Because Bernalillo was slow to develop, many people left to larger cities in search of employment, which thus had an effect on the Matachines dance, decreasing the number of dancers.

The number of participants involved in the Matachines dance slowly began to increase and along with this increase, the dance began to undergo gradual changes over the course of a decade or so, in overall appearance, style and importance. The Matachines dance began to appeal to the youth of Bernalillo, which can attest to the increase in participants. Torres states that previous to the 1960s, dancers in Bernalillo wore attire similar to “Sunday’s best” including suit jackets and pressed trousers. A move was made that all dancers were now required to wear white shirts and black trousers in order for all dancers to appear more uniform and formal.^{xviii} The Abuelo role also evolved from a clown-like figure to a more dignified leader of the dance. In 1955, when Torres began dancing, he remembers the Abuelo dressed as a clown, in “old clothes and an old hat, like an old man.”^{xix} Aguilar, referring to the Abuelo character when he was a child, states:

The Abuelo used to do a lot more talking and would make fun of the Monarca as he was in the *batalla* where, in the Malinche [dance], the second part when he’s on his knees every time that the Monarca was going down, he would say things to, like to mock him, and then when he was standing up he’d act like he was winding up a clock, to help him to get up, so people would join in and laugh, or he would message his leg, or his back or something and then he’d wind him up so he could get him up the kneeling position. So people would you know, there was just that community humor that existed. Now that went on for a few years after I became involved but then as the

Abuelos changed, they stopped doing that. The Abuelos used to be older men, and they used to you know make signs and jokes about the Monarca not being able to get up from the kneeling position.^{xx}

Aguilar also mentions a character called la *Perejundia*, which once existed in Bernalillo, was omitted from the dance. La *Perejundia* is usually played by a male cross-dressed as a female, who plays the wife of el Abuelo. She gives birth to a child during the course of the performance and can be seen in Taos, Arroyo Seco, Alcalde, Picurís, and San Antonio (Rodriguez 1996:151).

Again in the 1970s, the dance began to undergo major changes, including the introduction of women *danzantes* and the doubling of *filas*. Previous to the 1970s, it is believed that two *filas* existed in 1946. After this year, the structure was changed back to one *fila*.^{xxi} At the time, the Bernalillo Matachines dance group consisted of 12 dancers, including one Monarca, one Malinche, one Toro and one Abuelo. In order to compensate for the increasing number of people interested in dancing, two *filas* were again created, this time permanently. Commenting on this expansion Torres states:

At that time I got Justin Sisneros to be my next, he was next in line so I got him to be my second in command, which is second Monarca. He took care of one *fila* and I took care of one, one *danza*. We worked on it to where we would all be even, and we'd make signs to start even. We added another Abuelo and another Toro and two more Malinches.^{xxii}

When Torres took on the role of Monarca in 1974-75, a woman named Lala Acosta approached Torres asking permission to dance the Matachines. Permission was denied since there had been no women involved.^{xxiii}

Acosta began dancing the Matachines in 1966-67 and after dancing for 10 years in la *corrida* asked to join the *fila*, along with three other women: Vicentita Perez, Loyola Perez and Vange Lovato.^{xxiv} Acosta states that women had been involved as Matachines dancers before,

however, that involvement was restricted to the corrido only. According to Acosta, women were allowed to join la danza in 1977-78,^{xxv} when Augustine and Mary Gauna had the santo in their home. When asked about this drastic change to the structure of the dance, Acosta states “when we’re dancing, there are not men and women, we’re danzantes.”^{xxvi}

Throughout time, the Bernalillo Matachines dance has seen the number of participants fluctuate. Thanks to neighboring pueblo communities, along with faithful participants of the dance, the dance continued to be performed. Because of these faithful followers of San Lorenzo, Bernalillo prides itself as being the original, longest lasting Matachines dance of the Rio Grande Valley. Those that have participated in the dance have shaped and molded it, incorporating certain elements such as women dancers (1975) and two filas (1975). Elements were also changed with the dignifying of roles, with the complete omission of the Perejundia character. These changes have served as the elements that can be seen in the Matachines performance today.



Oracio Mora and Charles Aguilar (Center Figures). Courtesy of the Sandoval County Historical Society.



L-R: Eddie Torres, Patrocina Jaramillo, Cisto Castillo, Randy Torres, Frank Jaramillo. Courtesy of the Sandoval County Historical Society.



Masked Danzante, 1967. Courtesy of the Sandoval County Historical Society.



Mr. and Mrs. Philomeno Lucero , 1958. Courtesy of the Sandoval County Historical Society.



Jose Felipe Castillo, Father Lammert, 1920. Courtesy of the Sandoval County Historical Society.



Native Americans leading fiesta procession, circa 1920. Courtesy of the Sandoval County Historical Society.



Matachines in procession, circa 1920. Courtesy of the Sandoval County Historical Society.



Ophelia Mora, 1967. Courtesy of the Sandoval County Historical Society.



L-R: Gloria Mora, Charles Aguilar, Annie Lucero, Ocaris Sandoval, Susie Candelaria, Perfeta Gonzales, Margaret Estrada. Courtesy of the Sandoval County Historical Society.



Three Musicians L-R: Luciano Aguilar, Tom Nieto, Tony Lucero, 1967. Courtesy of the Sandoval County Historical Society.



L-R: Paul Montoya (hat), Tranquilino Gutierrez, Eddie Torres, S. Candelaria, Pam Madrid, Debbie Archibeque, 1967. Courtesy of the Sandoval County Historical Society.



L-R: Eva Sanchez, Isaac Carabajal (gun), Heraldo Montoya (carrying saint), Mimi Montoya (carrying saint), Margaret Estrada (arco), Elizabeth Carabajal (arco), Fita Montoya (carrying saint), Debbie Archibeque (carrying saint), Angie Aragon (behind), 1967. Courtesy of the Sandoval County Historical Society.



Comanches. L-R: Lily Valdez, Tranquilino Gutierrez “El Coco”, Frances Valdez, Dec. 25, 1959. Courtesy of the Sandoval County Historical Society.

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- ⁱ Kuaua Pueblo lies on Bernalillo's west side, on the west bank of the Rio Grande River at the present-day Coronado State Monument. As research has progressed, it is now questionable whether Kuaua was the exact location of Coronado's camp. Recent scholarship now points to the location of the camp at Santiago, which lies to the south of Kuaua; Martha Liebert, personal communication, December 2006
- ⁱⁱ Father Bill Sanchez, interview with author; Maria Rinaldi, interview with author
- ⁱⁱⁱ Martha Liebert, personal communication, December 2006
- ^{iv} Eddie Torres II, interview with author
- ^v Charles Aguilar. Interview with author
- ^{vi} Father Bill Sanchez, interview with author
- ^{vii} Recent scholarship regarding this statement has questioned the validity of Chavez' statement, moreover the validity of Kloeppe's argument and citation of Chavez' alleged claim has also been challenged.
- ^{viii} Father Bill Sanchez, interview with author; Eddie Torres II, interview with author
- ^{ix} Father Bill Sanchez, interview with author
- ^x Martha Liebert, personal communication, December 2006
- ^{xi} Maria Rinaldi, interview with author
- ^{xii} Martha Liebert, personal communication, December 2006
- ^{xiii} Maria Rinaldi, interview with author
- ^{xiv} Maria Rinaldi, interview with author
- ^{xv} Maria Rinaldi, interview with author
- ^{xvi} Eddie Torres II, interview with author
- ^{xvii} Leonard Prairie, interview with author; Charles Aguilar personal communication, September 2006
- ^{xviii} Eddie Torres II, interview with author
- ^{xix} Eddie Torres II, interview with author
- ^{xx} Charles Aguilar, interview with author
- ^{xxi} Eddie Torres II, interview with author
- ^{xxii} Eddie Torres II, interview with author
- ^{xxiii} Eddie Torres II, interview with author
- ^{xxiv} Lala Acosta, personal communication, September 2006
- ^{xxv} Lala Acosta, personal communication, September 2006
- ^{xxvi} Lala Acosta, personal communication, September 2006

CHAPTER 4 NOTES