



Grantmakers in the Arts

READER

Ideas and Information on Arts and Culture

Vol. 18 No. 1, Spring 2007



Taos: Where Cultures Met Four Hundred Years Ago

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2007 Grantmakers in the Arts Conference:
Taos Journey

Reprinted from the Grantmakers in the Arts **Reader**
Vol 18, No. 3 Fall 2007

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Early in our research on New Mexico, we were encouraged to look at its crops and cuisines for insight into how different cultures in the state have both come together and retained distinct traditions over centuries. In reading, we came across *Ancient Agriculture*, a text by Gabriel Alonso de Herrera that first appeared in Spain in the sixteenth century and later traveled from the old world to the new, influencing how agriculture is practiced in New Mexico today. In 2006, this historic text was compiled for publication by New Mexico poet, historian, and farmer Juan Estevan Arellano. We invited Arellano to bring his deep scholarship, intimate knowledge of the place, and literary sensibility to an essay that traces dimensions of the region's physical features and history – illustrating how different cultural threads come together in New Mexico's food, arts, and language.

Taos: Where Cultures Met Four Hundred Years Ago

Juan Estevan Arellano

Introduction: The Río Arriba Bioregion

Taos, the land of the red willows, means different things to different people. To the original inhabitants it signifies the red willows that grow in abundance along the banks of the creek that run through multistoried mud buildings on both sides of the creek, dubbed Pueblos by the first immigrants that were non-native to the area about four hundred years ago.

These first immigrants, who in today's political climate would be called "illegal aliens," first crossed *el río del Norte*, today's Río Grande (*Guadalquivir* in Arab, like the Guadalquivir in Sevilla), long before anybody thought of putting up a fence to keep them out. These immigrants named their new settlement Don Fernando de Taos when they built their new plaza a few miles south from the original inhabitants. Though driven out during the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, their descendents returned twelve years later with Don Diego de Vargas and have been here ever since. To the Indo-Hispanos who now live here this is home, this is where their heart is; to them it's their *querencia*, the place they love.

Then in 1846 a new set of "illegal aliens" made their way to Taos, but instead of from the south as had happened two hundred and fifty years earlier, these immigrants came from the east. They also spoke a different language, English instead of Spanish. Another ingredient was added to the pot of stew that has become Taos, the last outpost on the famed Camino Real de Tierra Adentro, the Royal Road of the Internal Provinces that begins in Mexico City. They also brought different ways of looking at the land and water and other natural resources, and different ways of expressing themselves through the arts.

Finally, in the early seventies of the twentieth century a group different from the local population, by now a mixed breed known as *mestizos*, made their way to Taos – the so-called hippies. Since, we have had an influx of land speculators, really nothing new to the area, and moreso, people from all over the globe. Again, nothing new, since

the early immigrants were not all Spanish, as history would lead us to believe. Rather, they were a group of a few *peninsulars*, *criollos*, *mestizos*, and Mexican Indians (four hundred families of Tlaxcaltecas) who made their way to the Río Arriba, the Upper River. This area, from *la Bajada* (the descent) south of Santa Fe and north to the San Luis Valley in southern Colorado (at one time part of New Mexico), today is known as the Río Arriba Bioregion.

Each group of new immigrants has added to the arts of the area. Those who came under the Spanish Crown introduced weaving by bringing with them the famed Churro sheep and their knowledge of natural dyes, as well as the written word. In the early twentieth century the first group of painters found Taos, and from there the mystique of Taos as an art center developed. Each group of new people into the region has also added a twist to the cuisine, though most of the ingredients we know today arrived with the first settlers. In fact, the new Fusion Cuisine, one could argue, started to develop with the introduction of the new crops brought in by the first immigrants, including chile. Though an American fruit, chile was not known by the Pueblos until it was introduced in the late 1500s.

Querencia: The Love of Place

The region to be covered by this essay is the Río Arriba (Upper River), for New Mexico was divided into the Río Arriba and the Río Abajo (Lower River) during colonial times. Prior to the Republic of Mexico becoming a nation in 1821, *la Nueva México*, the other Mexico, already existed not as a state but as a historical concept, that which was unknown. This other Mexico actually stretched from what today is Ciudad Juarez (historic El Paso del Norte) in Mexico to the birthplace of the Río Grande in the San Juan Mountains of southern Colorado. That's how the ancients referred to New Mexico in the 1500s. Using the same analogy, Ciudad Juarez and El Paso are also part of *la Nueva México*, for those lands were settled by the same group of people who came with Don Juan de Oñate in 1598.

First, let's define *querencia*, for I have seen several definitions, starting with Covarrubias and his *Tesoro de la Lengua Castellana o Española*, the first dictionary of the Castilian language, published in 1611 in Madrid. He defines *querencia*, as "*término de cazadores, es el lugar adonde el animal acude de ordinario, o al pasto o a la dormida,*" a term used

by hunters, the place where the animal spends his time, either where he goes to eat or sleep.

The *Diccionario de la Lengua Española de Real Academia Española* defines *querencia* as “*inclinación o tendencia del hombre y de ciertos animales a volver al sitio en que se han criado o tienen costumbre de acudir,*” the inclination or tendency of man and certain animals to return to the site where they were raised or have a tendency of returning to. For our purpose it also means “affection,” “longing,” or “favorite place.” But it also implies a sense of responsibility to that place, a particular ethic toward the land. It is the place that people say “*conoce como sus manos,*” he knows like his hands.

It is that which gives us a sense of place, that which anchors us to the land, that which makes us a unique people, for it implies a deeply rooted knowledge of place, and for that reason we respect our place, for it is our home and we don't want to violate our home in any way. We like it pristine, healthy, and productive. Our philosophy is one borrowed from our Native American brothers, for we are brothers and sisters:

“We do not inherit the land from our parents, we have it borrowed from our children and grandchildren.” Now I have two grandchildren, which means I have an added burden to take better care of the land. Now I have to plant new raspberries and other fruits, like I did when my daughter was born so that in the same year she could eat fresh raspberries. That is now my task!

Querencia is a place where one feels safe, a place from which one's strength of character is drawn, where one feels at home. Even the bull in the bullring prefers a certain place within the plaza where he fixates his gaze and to which he will retreat once he is wounded to rest and feel safe.

William F. Buckley, in *Racing through Paradise*, writes, “The word doesn't translate. It is used in Spanish to designate that mysterious little area in the bullring that catches the fancy of the fighting bull when he charges in. He imagines it as his sanctuary: when parked there, he supposes he cannot be hurt....

“So it is, borrowing the term, that one can speak of one's ‘*querencia*’ to mean that little, unspecified area in life's arena where one feels safe, serene.”

Folklore tells us that “*no hay mejor querencia que tu corral,*” there is no better place than your corral – a typical saying

that alludes to where someone is raised, the place of one's memories, of one's affections, of things one loves and, above all, where one feels safe. The corral is not simply the space that surrounds the house and where all the things that one loves are; for us humans it's the metaphor for the patio of the house.

A popular song says:

Dicen que me han de quitar
They say they will take

las veredas por donde ando;
the trails through which I walk;

las veredas quitarán
the trails they might destroy

pero la querencia, cuándo.
but the *querencia*, the love, never.

But *querencia* doesn't always imply place, for it can also be a certain time of the day, a certain type of weather, music, art, literature, food, taste, or smell. As a writer I guess my desire to write is my *querencia*. Even if writing lies,

that in literature we call fiction. All artists, whether working in the plastic arts, performance arts, music, or literature, all know about *querencia*, that which they love to do.

Ask yourself: Where do I come from? Where do I feel most at home? Where do I feel most happy and relaxed? What is my ideal writing environment? Where can I write with my full powers? Like the wounded bull, I also have my sacred corner in the kitchen of my house where I feel safe to write.

In 1994 the translator of Freud's Complete Works proposed to translate the much discussed term *trieb*, previously translated erroneously as “instinct,” then corrected as “impulse,” like *querencia*. An illicit tendency to be loved, like an animal that one acquires and, if loved, “*pronto se aquerencia,*” quickly adapts to his new environment. Every time we would acquire a new animal, whether a dog, a cat, a cow, or a lamb, my dad would always say, “Take care of it until he becomes accustomed to us and the place”; in other words “*hasta que se aquerencie.*”

Trieb is a concept used to describe the place between the psychic and the physical, and, according to Freud, to describe one's first love – of literature, philosophy, ideology,

politics, or history; from the desired to the actual, to the real. But besides the psychic and physical it also is about the spiritual, it's about the soul.

As a people, we rural people, we are day persons; we wake up with the sun, and when the sun goes down, that night awakes, we fall asleep until the following morning, when we awaken with the dawn of the new day. We are workers of the land. But we also love our fiestas, and then it's okay if we party until the sun comes up the following morning. Every native Indo-Hispano knows the following words of this popular folk song:

Con música la luna se desvela
With music the moon loses sleep

y al sol se le hace tarde pa' salir.
and the sun has trouble coming up.

The New Mexico landscape is one of many contrasts: deserts, mountains, meadows, orchards, and gardens; dry as the bones in the cemetery, our final resting place. Fray Angélico Chávez

talks about the New Mexico landscape, comparing it to Palestine in *My Penitente Land: Reflections on Spanish New Mexico*. It is a place of many colors, textures, smells (*fragancias*), and

scents (*olores*). Part of what defines our *querencia*, which gives us this sense of place, is our food, contrary to those who say that there can be no sense of place in today's global experiment. And our food cannot be separated from how we work the land and how we water our crops. Being desert people, from the high plateaus of Pakistan, to the oasis of the Middle East, to the Chihuahuan desert, to the high desert of northern New Mexico, we know how precious water is and that it belongs to every living being. Again we learn from folklore: *para vos, para nos, y para los animalitos de Dios*; for you, for us, and for God's animals (and plants). Water is a *don divino*, a divine right, not a commodity to be sold to the highest bidder. This dry landscape, with a beauty only we might understand and find sustenance in, is what defines our *querencia*.

The Landscape that Defines Us

Part of what defines our sense of place is who we are as Indo-Hispanos, a mixture of the many bloods that was Spain in the 1500s, as well as in Mesoamerica. This mixture, this *tsimisturre*, today is known as *mestizo*. *Mestizaje* in New Mexico can be found not only in the classifications of people – be it coyote, mulatto, etc. – but also, and possibly even more, in how we work the land and how we grow

our food. What I call *agricultura mixta tradicional mestiza*, and what I have been trying to understand for more than twenty years, is like unraveling a *trenza* (braid) that has been so tightly knit that we see it more like a *chongo* (bun or knot).

Mary Austin and her group in Santa Fe, under the folk art designation of Spanish Colonial Art, convinced the local population in the 1930s that we were Spanish, and we bought her line, so much so that even today in the northern villages, people with Indian features will swear they are indeed Spanish. And vice versa, Indians (one-fourth Indian blood classifies them as Indian if on the rolls of an Indian nation), though they might look European, still refer to those who don't live on the reservation as "Spanish" even though they might have Indian features. It's this simplistic view of history, with no shades of gray, of Spanish and Indian and then Anglo, that causes a lot of unnecessary misunderstandings in the community. In a way it has become an inverted pyramid, with the Native Americans who were here first on the bottom rung, then the so-called Spanish, and finally the Anglos (anyone who

is neither Spanish nor Indian) as the privileged class. Recently the brown-colored immigrants, mostly Mexican Indians, have become the fourth rung; they are at the bottom.

Most of our agricultural traditions are Roman, Arab, and Mesoamerican, and also influenced by the Pueblos; the same with the food we eat. It is only recently that we have started to recognize our Arab and Sephardic Jewish connections and blood.

Since I am a descendent of the Martín-Serrano clan, I've always known I had Indian blood and my father never denied where he came from. Since very young I knew that my grandmother, whom I never met, had relations in Picuris, and my father would always say that his "*bizabuela Albinita era apache pura*"; she lived to be one hundred and five years old.

Most of our agricultural traditions are Roman, Arab, and Mesoamerican, and also influenced by the Pueblos; the same with the food we eat. It is only recently that we have started to recognize our Arab and Sephardic Jewish connections and blood.

"Agarra la pala y haz un tapanco en la cequiecita."

The above sentence is very simple, yet when broken down it tells us a lot about our language and who we are. Here we see the influence from different cultures, yet everyone in northern New Mexico who is a *mestizo* would understand. The basic structure is Spanish, and all the words are part of the Spanish language now, but when we start looking at the origins of the words, we find out, for starters, that *pala*, or "shovel," is a Latin word but also a Jewish verb, meaning "to separate." *Tapanco*, a word our ancestors

acquired on their travels up the Camino Real, means “a heap or pile,” from the Nahuatl *tlapantli*. *Cequiecita* is from *acequia*, that which gives water, from the Arab word *as-saqiya*, which I have traced back to Yemen. Even the word *agarrar* has its roots in the Arab, for it comes from *garrar*, which describes how a raptor curves its claws to grasp something. In that short sentence – “*Agarra la pala y haz un tapanco en la cequiecita*” – we use two words that originally came from Arabic, one with Latin and Hebrew (Jewish) roots, and one from Mesoamerica.

When we examine closely our agricultural past, we come to understand how mixed our language, our techniques, our concepts regarding land and water are. In terms of Castilian influence there is very little; it is mostly Roman and Arab, what came from the Iberian Peninsula. Then from Mesoamerica the Tlaxcalteca influence is now barely coming to light, and we have always known about the Pueblo influence, but somehow that has also been left out of the history books.

Following the *encuentro* of the two hemispheres, the way the land was worked changed immensely, mostly due to the introduction of new techniques and tools. Possibly what made agriculture flourish, especially in the arid landscapes of northern Mexico and New Mexico, was the introduction of the *arado*, or plow. Before, the indigenous cultures relied mostly on the use of wooden tools, such as the *coa*, similar to our *cavador* or hoe. But the plow allowed the farmer to open up the soil, to loosen it and turn it over, and then deposit the seeds so they could grow.

Yet, the plow and hoe haven’t always gotten along, as can be seen in a very early *trovo*, a type of poetry that came from the poor who labored the soil, whose origins go back to North Africa. Titled “The Disputation between the Hoe and the Plow,” which comes to us from biblical times (W. H. Hallo, *The Context of Scripture: Monumental Inscriptions from the Biblical World*, Vol. 1, 2002). It has long been recognized as one of the first poetic statements of the common man against the rich and mighty. There are a total of twenty-six stanzas; here are a few of them:

Hey! Hoe, Hoe, Hoe, tied up with string;
 Hoe, made from poplar, with a tooth of ash;
 Hoe, made from tamarisk, with a tooth of sea-thorn;
 Hoe, double-toothed, four-toothed;
 Hoe, child of the poor, bereft even of loincloth.

“O Plow, you draw furrows – what is your furrowing to me?
 You make clods – what is your clod-making to me?
 You cannot dam up water when it escapes,
 You cannot heap up earth in the basket,
 You cannot press clay or make bricks,
 You cannot lay foundations or build a house,
 You cannot strengthen an old wall’s base,

You cannot put a roof on a man’s house.
 O Plow, you cannot straighten a street.
 O Plow, you draw furrows – what is your furrowing to me?
 You make clods – what is your clod-making to me?”

The Berbers also took this type of poetry to the Alpujarras south of Granada and it eventually made its way to Mexico, where it was not limited to tools of the trade and techniques, since there was by that time a big difference between the hoe and the plow. Here in New Mexico it surfaced as the “Trovo del Café y el Atole,” where coffee represented the moneyed interests and atole, corn gruel, the indigenous poor farmer. As with the plow and the hoe, in this *trovo*, Atole makes Café succumb. Here’s a sampling:

Por mi gracia y por mi nombre
 By my grace and by my name

Yo me llamo don Café.
 I am called Mr. Coffee.

En las tiendas más hermosas
 In the most luxurious stores

Allí me hallará usted.
 There you will find me.

A la América he venido
 To America I have come

Y es claro y evidente
 And it is clear and evident

Desde mi país he venido
 From my land I have come

A conquistar a tu gente.
 To conquer your people.

Verdad yo soy el Atole
 True I am Atole

Y a Dios le pido la paz.
 And God I ask for peace.

Café que recio vas.
 Coffee don’t go so fast.

También yo te dire
 I will also tell you

Que muchos en el estribo
 That many in the stirrup

Se suelen quedar apie.
 End up having to walk.

As can be seen in the examples of the two different *trovos*, one from biblical times and the other hundreds of years later and on a different continent, both deal with working the land, with techniques and crops, and they are almost

identical in that they both address the struggle between the poor and the mighty, and in both cases the underdog comes out on top. Therefore, we can see that agricultural techniques and crops have not just influenced the techniques and crops of other lands but also influenced the poetry of the common man, from North Africa to the Iberian Peninsula to Mexico, and eventually to New Mexico.

Some of the techniques that the current organic and sustainable-agriculture movement tout as innovative have been in practice by indigenous people for hundreds of years. Double-digging, as promoted by biodynamic practitioners, is nothing new to the *chinamperos* of Xochimilco. Last September while in Xochimilco doing research on the *chinampas* I noticed *campesinos*, who had never heard the term “double-digging,” turning the black organic soil with shovels to a depth of about twenty-four inches. It is here that the farmer will transplant the tiny plants he grows individually in his *chapínes*, also known as *almácigos*, or plant nurseries. The word *almáciga* or *almácigo* is also common in northern New Mexico among the older traditional farmers; it comes from the Arab *al-maskaba*, which means an irrigated piece

of land. What we see through these linguistic connections is that both hemispheres had similar techniques already in place, whether the

people used the word *chapín* or *almáciga*. Now, after five hundred years, the words are used interchangeably and understood by both the indigenous as well as the *mestizo* farmers. I remember that my mother always prepared her *almácigos* starting around St. Patrick’s, March 17, so they would be ready to transplant by early May.

It is not only in the techniques of preparing the soil and plants where we find the influence of other cultures, but also in how the land was divided and appropriated. The *mercedes*, or grants of land, were very similar to the Arab *alquerías*. Additionally, where a *merced* is composed of both irrigated and non-irrigated lands, we find the same type of land divisions in Arabic culture. What we call *ejidos*, or common lands (*harim* in Arabic), were composed of *sierra*, *montes*, and *llanura*; to the indigenous of San Geronimo Amanalco, by Texcoco, the *sierra* (mountains) were *pie de monte*; the *monte* (middle of the mountain) were *somantáno*; and the *llanura* (plains) were *planicie*. These same non-appropriated lands were known in Arabic as *mubaha*, where people could pasture their livestock and gather wood or wild fruits and plants. Then there were lands known as *muertas* or *mawat*, which appear to have been more like our Mexican *solares* since they were used for houses. These lands could be acquired by simply living on them, but none could be alienated or sold. If left vacant for two years, the claimants could lose the

use of the land, similar to the situation with land grants (although that period was four years) and like the land grants, *solares* permitted both livestock production and intensive agriculture, the latter in the irrigated portions of the land. To the Arabs, appropriated lands were known as *mamluka*, which would be similar to our *suertes*, or irrigated pieces of land.

Acequias: Veins that Give Life to the Arid Landscape

What provided the intensive agriculture was the *acequia* system, which is an elaborate and complex system of managing the water. The same as in contemporary New Mexico, the water was diverted from the river, starting at the *toma*, or where the water was taken by *presa* or *azud*, and from there it was moved by the principal canal known as *acequia madre*, or mother ditch. From there it was conducted to the planted fields via *acequias secundarias* or *menors*, also known as lateral ditches. These laterals then were diverted into *hijuelas*, which run parallel, and *cabeceras*, which are horizontal ditches, and then to the

brazos and eventually to the *ramos* to irrigate the *bancales*, *bancos*, or *ancones*, three different types of terraces. The *bancales* were terraces on slopes, the *bancos*

were bigger and usually in valleys, and the *ancones* were small terraces, coves along the riverbeds. To irrigate the terraces, the *regadera* or *compuerta* was opened (to let the water in) or closed (to stop the flow). Then the *escurriduras* were picked up at the end of the furrows, also known as *carreritas* or *surcos*, and from there to the *desagues* and taken back to the river. The *acequias*, like the veins in our body, take the water to the last corner of the land.

The lands below the *acequias* were known as *suertes*, since they were allotted to the settlers by lottery or luck. *Suertes* could then be divided into *altitos*, or the highest terrace right below the *acequia*; then came the *joya*, jewel, the most fertile piece of land, followed by the *vega*, where most people kept their domestic animals, although they could also be used for corn patches or *milpas* – a Nahuatl word. Finally came the *ciénaga* or wetland. A *ciénaga* can also be used for growing crops if it is drained or *sangrada*, similar to when one is injured and blood has to be let to relieve the pain and pressure. It must be noted that not all *suertes* contained all of the land divisions mentioned above; some might have them all, others two or three only. In San Miguel Tlaxipan, also near Texcoco, these land divisions are known by the size of the plants or trees growing: (1) *arboles grandes*, such as *aguacate* or avocado, then (2) *arboles medianos*, such as pears and apples; (3) where *plantas arbustas* such as romero and ruda are grown; (4) where the

flowers grow, *plantas de flores*; and finally, (5) where *plantas rastreras*, such as *hierba buena*, mint, is grown.

The type of agriculture we have in this type of land division – whether in New Mexico, Mexico, Spain, or the Middle East – is irrigated agriculture watered by acequias (known as *yuras* in Ladakh, India, where our *presa* is known as a *raks*). Our *mayordomo* in New Mexico is known as a *cequier* in Valencia, an *aguador* in Chihuahua, and in Ladakh he is the *chud-pon*; different names but the same responsibility. *Chud-pon* is derived from *chu*, meaning “water,” and *pon*, “appropriator.”

Then we have natural agriculture, known in New Mexico as the *jardin rizo* or *ricia*, which describes plants that are self-sown on a yearly basis without humans having to plant them. Here is where people gather the wild asparagus, purslane (*verdolaga*), and the *quelites*, including those related to the wild amaranth (known as *quelite juz* or *quelite del burro*, and in Mexico as *quintonil*), and the *quelite pardo* in New Mexico and *quelite cenizo* (a relative of the quinoa plant) in the *chinampas*.

As with our agricultural traditions, our cuisine is also a mixture. Even when inviting someone to eat, we have different ways of extending an invitation. If someone is working for us, we usually call to him

or her, “*Vengan al pipirín* (*¿pipiripao o pipirrana?*).” When I was growing up – and still today – to friends I say, “*Vamos al refín*,” to which someone will add (“*al refíne*”), “*Ya, vamos a echarnos un hueso*,” though “Let’s go have a bone” doesn’t sound as appetizing. Of course, if it’s an elderly person, or a lady, someone I am not very familiar with, out of respect I would say, “*Vengan almorzar*” if it’s breakfast. (In most Latin American countries breakfast is known as *desayuno*, yet in New Mexico we refer to it as *almuerzo*.) At noon, it’s “*Arrimensen a comer*,” though now we might say “*lonchar*” instead of “*almorzar*”; of course, for supper it’s still “*cena*.” “*Meriendas*” have been replaced by the English word “snacks.” And let’s see where the word *almorzar* comes from: *al* is an article from the Arab and *muerzo* corresponds to the Latin name *morsus*, which means “a small bite,” a *bocado*.

The cuisine of New Mexico, then, is also a mixture of Middle Eastern, Mediterranean, and American ingredients and techniques. For example, let’s look at the *tamal*, which is a Mesoamerican invention, although improved with the introduction of ingredients from other continents. For what would a *tamal* be, especially in northern New Mexico, if it didn’t have pork and if the *masa* (dough)

was not prepared with lard or pork fat known as *manteca*. Of course, the main ingredient is corn, and when it’s prepared as *nixtamal*, or corn flour, and mixed with *manteca*, it gives the *tamal* a certain fluffiness it wouldn’t have otherwise. Then, of course, the red chile mixture with pork is what makes the filling so appetizing. Chile is from the Americas, but pork, of course, was introduced from the other side of the Atlantic, as was beef, lamb, and goat meat. Finally, the *tamal* is wrapped in a cornhusk, though it can also be prepared in a banana leaf (bananas were introduced by Arabs to Spain, then brought to New Spain) and steamed.

But there are other foods that are common in New Mexico, as well as Mexico, Andalucía, and the Middle East that are always part of feast days, including the Pueblo feasts of northern New Mexico. Here I am referring to *capirotada*, or bread pudding, whose main ingredients are toasted white bread made from wheat, cheese from cow or goat milk, almonds or walnuts, and raisins, which come from grapes. These are all ingredients native to the Mediterranean and Middle East that now have become

as much a part of the New Mexico cuisine as tamales. *Arroz con leche*, or rice pudding with milk, is another Middle Eastern dish, as are *buñuelos*, more commonly known as *sopaipillas* or, to the Pueblo and Navajo, as frybread. Among

the Navajo there is nothing more traditional than mutton stew, yet prior to the arrival of the Spanish Crown and its settlers, it would have been impossible to make. Why? Simply look at the ingredients: mutton, onions, carrots, cabbage – all of which came with the new settlers.

The utensils are also a mixture of the different worlds: we have the *metate* made of stone, the *jicaras* made of clay, the *jumate* from gourds, the *olla chicharronera* made of copper, not to mention the fork, spoon, and knife. No wonder our agriculture and our cuisine are known as *la agricultura viajera*, for what would Italy be without tomatoes, Ireland without potatoes, and us without coffee and beer, which, incidentally, is an Egyptian invention? This is only a very brief overview of our *mestizaje* when it comes to our food, and how we grow our goods, our agricultural traditions.

So far we have seen New Mexican cuisine, agriculture techniques (including land division and the appropriation of water resources through the use of *acequias*), the poetry of the *campesinos* – all a mixture of many cultures; from India we got the watermelon, from the Middle East the apricot (or *albaricoque*, another Arab word), from the Iberian Peninsula our meat culture based on domesticated

animals, and from the Americas the five main ingredients that are central to New Mexican cuisine: *maiz*, *chile*, *calabazas*, *frijol*, and *tomate*.

Conclusion: The Mediterranean Meets Mesoamerican

Ricardo Legorreta, Mexican architect, in a December 21, 2005, article in the *New York Times* titled "A Modern Space in Mexico City's Historic Center," admonishes, "You cannot deny your parents. You cannot deny your history, your roots."

For material objects were not the only items that made their way from Spain to Mexico and then to New Mexico. Probably the most important immaterial entities that traveled from the south to the north were the ideas and philosophies as to how people related to land and water use in an environment that was new although very similar to that of the Iberian Peninsula. To understand these ideas one has to unravel the *trenza*, or braid, one strand at a time; but for this system to work, the strands have to be braided together.

When Legorreta talks about not denying your parents, history, and roots, he is referring to the Arab influence that reaches back to the Spanish colonizers' Moorish past. In trying to understand the so-called New World, it is usually a black-and-white dichotomy of Spanish (Castilian) versus Indigenous (i.e., Mesoamerican) influence. And even here, Mayas and Aztecs take most of the credit while the Tlaxcaltecas who came with the early Spanish settlers are not even mentioned, though they settled early on in Santa Fe, probably as far back as 1600 and also in Albuquerque, at Atlisco, as in the Atrisco land grant. But history is not that simple; there are lots of shades of gray in the palette. It is only recently that the Sephardic, or Crypto-Jewish, tradition has begun to be studied. What for all practical purposes is not even mentioned in scholarship is the Muslim influence, though about a third of all Spanish words are derived from the Arabs.

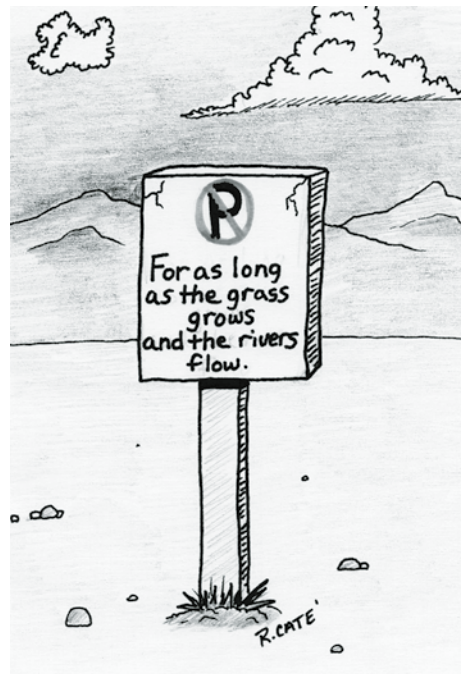
With the introduction of the Churro sheep, art-making in New Mexico changed forever, but possibly nothing changed art-making more than the introduction of an alphabet in the form of the Spanish language, along with the pen, ink, and paper.

But of all the arts, the culinary arts were probably influenced more than any other in northern New Mexico by the mixing of colors, textures, taste, and smell. The landscape, the desert, and the high sierra have all influenced the arts of the Río Arriba Bioregion, from Villagrás's epic poem about New Mexico written in the early 1600s, to John Nicholas's *Milagro Beanfield War*, to my picaresque novel, *Inocencio: Ni pica ni escarda pero siempre se come el mejor elote*. Or Georgia O'Keefe's paintings, the same as

Ed Sandoval's pastoral images of the *acequias* – they were all influenced by the luminous landscape. The same can be said of Michael Martin Murphey's, Cipriano Vigil's, or Reyna's music.

In terms of the cuisine, whether you eat at Antonio's, Michael's Kitchen, or Joseph's Table, the ingredients are the same as those you would find at a Native American feast or an Indo-Hispano fiesta – the mixture of Native American and Mediterranean flavors, textures, and colors all mix to nourish our bodies, mind and spirit. For what is art if not the celebration of life in all its tonalities, sounds, and tastes?

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Cartoonist Ricardo Caté of Santo Domingo Pueblo draws "Without Reservations," a weekly cartoon that appears in the Santa Fe New Mexican.