



PIOTR ZAZULA

FROM HISPANOPHOBIA TO HISPANOPHILIA: TRAVEL WRITING, TOURISM AND POLITICS IN LATE 19th- AND EARLY 20th-CENTURY NEW MEXICO

Abstract

At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries New Mexico's Hispanic intellectual elites, supported by Anglo-American enthusiasts of the Southwest's Spanish colonial past, launched a cultural campaign postulating the existence of New Mexico's "Castilian" nation, separate from the Mexican people south of the Rio Grande and free of local Pueblo Indian cultural infiltration. The campaign overlapped with the efforts of local politicians attempting to attain statehood status for the Territory of New Mexico. Applying Benedict Anderson's and Ernest Gellner's theories of collective identity-building and nations as "imagined communities," the paper points out to a similar nation-building pattern at work in late 19th-century New Mexico. In a broader context, in the case of the New World's Spanish-speaking nations the same identity-building mechanism can be seen operating in otherwise highly divergent national ideologies. Thus, contrary to their early 19th-century Latin American predecessors who attempted to construct interracial identities, New Mexican Hispanists consistently relied on the trope of "purity" in their descriptions of the racial characteristics, the language, and the folklore of Hispanic New Mexicans. The concept of racial purity resonated well with the fear of miscegenation, prevalent among American Congressmen ever since the US annexation of New Mexico. The very same concept, however, in a long run spelled out the demise of New Mexicans' "Castilian" identity, unable as it was to cope with the demographic and cultural changes in the area, resultant from a steady influx of Mexican immigrants. It seems that the Southwest's Hispanics' emphasis on their Spanishness is being replaced these days by their celebration of *mestizaje* and the resultant Chicano identity. The current trend, the paper argues, is not a foregone conclusion, however, and, in fact, could have been avoided had New Mexico's Hispanists shifted their semiotic emphasis from "Spanishness" understood along narrowly ethnic lines to *hispanidad* conceived solely in cultural terms.

Key words

Discourse; Hispanic culture; gentrification; hispanidad; identity; Mexicanness; nationhood; New Mexico; the Southwest

A nation is born when a few people decide that it should be.
Paul Ignotus, *Hungary*

1. Introduction

In 1912 New Mexico joined the Union as the only US state with two official languages: English and Spanish. The change of status from territory to statehood crowned more than 60 years of lobbying, campaigning and heated political debate. In the last three decades of the 19th century, New Mexico's Anglo-American and Hispanic political elites joined forces and intensified their attempts to attain statehood for their Territory. Their struggle was mostly a semiotic one. Since the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo the US Congress had been sceptical about the Southwest's eligibility for self-government. In the middle of the 19th century many Anglo-Americans "perceived Mexicans in general and New Mexicans in particular to be persons of mixed (Spanish and Indian) blood, to have inherited the worst characteristics of both races, and to be 'unfit' for U.S. citizenship or self-government" (Nieto-Phillips 2004: 53). The New Mexican Hispanic elites, allied by Anglo-American sympathizers, had to deploy an impressive array of rhetorical devices to convince the US Congress and the mainstream American public that Spanish-speaking New Mexicans were worthy of recognition as full-fledged US citizens. It was a daunting task, given how deeply-entrenched and wide-spread the negative stereotypes of Mexicans had been among Anglo-Americans at least since the 1840s.

Well-aware of those stereotypes, the pro-statehood campaigners created an altogether "new" semiotic alternative to the Southwest's undervalued Mexican identity. The alternative was "Spanishness" with its connotations of European gentility as opposed to Mexican "low-class" folk culture. In short, New Mexican Hispanics decided to gentrify themselves by calling themselves Spanish rather than Mexican. From the perspective of today's political science, these *Nuevomexicanos* created, as it were, a new nation or an "imagined community" of their own, to use Benedict Anderson's classic term (cf. Anderson 2006).

2. From print to patriotism: imagined communities in Latin America and New Mexico

It is impossible to determine today whether their tactic was a deliberately chosen ruse or if they actually did believe they were Spanish-American rather than Mexican. Given the nation-building mechanisms that had generated creole revolutions against the Spanish Crown in Latin America in the first two decades of the 19th century, it is not unlikely that the Hispanic elites of New Mexico at the end of the 19th century did genuinely believe what they were arguing. As Benedict Anderson points out, the emergence of early-19th-century Latin American national liberation movements is a fine example of how otherwise arbitrary administra-

tive divisions within a colonial empire can, in a long run, produce all-too-real “ethnic” or national communities. Anderson’s definition of a nation as a social construct, or an imagined community, seems particularly apt in the case of early Latin American republics whose nation-building political elites were made up almost exclusively of Spanish-speaking creoles, practically indistinguishable in race, speech, dress, and manners from their European counterparts on the Iberian peninsula. Quoting Gerhard Masur, Anderson notes that “each of the new South American republics had been an administrative unit from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century” (Masur 1948: 678). He adds that “In this respect they foreshadowed the new states of Africa and parts of Asia in the mid twentieth century, and form a sharp contrast to the new European states of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries” (Anderson 2006: 52). Given Spain’s consistently Eurocentrist administrative policies in the New World, it was poignantly clear to most upper-class creoles in Spanish colonies that their prospects of ever making a political career in the metropole were rather thin:

The pattern is plain in the Americas. For example, of the 170 viceroys in Spanish America prior to 1813, only 4 were creoles. These figures are all the more startling if we note that in 1800 less than 5% of the 3,200,000 creole ‘whites’ in the Western Empire (imposed on about 13,700,000 indigenes) were Spain-born Spaniards. On the eve of the revolution in Mexico, there was only one creole bishop, although creoles in the viceroyalty outnumbered *peninsulares* by 70 to 1. And, needless to say, it was nearly unheard-of for a creole to rise to a position of official importance in Spain. [...] If peninsular officials could travel the [career] road from Zaragoza to Cartagena, Madrid, Lima, and again Madrid, the ‘Mexican’ or ‘Chilean’ creole typically served only in the territories of colonial Mexico or Chile: his lateral movement was as cramped as his vertical ascent. [...] Yet on this cramped pilgrimage he found traveling-companions, who came to sense that their fellowship was based not only on that [political] pilgrimage’s particular stretch, but on the shared fatality of trans-Atlantic birth. Even if he was born within one week of his father’s migration, the accident of birth in the Americas consigned him to subordination – even though in terms of language, religion, ancestry, or manners he was largely indistinguishable from the Spain-born Spaniard. There was nothing to be done about it: he was *irremediably* a creole. (Anderson 2006: 56–57)

It took the mass arrival of popular press in the 18th century to turn this irritating experience of unjustified exclusion into a sense of *belonging* to a wider community of fellow unfortunates. The arrival of print-capitalism, Anderson argues, made it possible for the colonial administrative units to be imagined as nations, both in North and South America:

What were the characteristics of the first American newspapers, North or South? They began essentially as appendages of the market. Early gazettes

contained – aside from news about the metropole – commercial news (when ships would arrive and depart, what prices were current for what commodities in what ports), as well as colonial political appointments, marriages of the wealthy, and so forth. In other words, what brought together, on the same page, *this* marriage with *that* ship, *this* price with *that* bishop, was the very structure of the colonial administration and market-system itself. In this way, the newspaper of Caracas quite naturally, and even apolitically, created an imagined community among a specific assemblage of fellow-readers, to whom *these* ships, brides, bishops and prices belonged. In time, of course, it was only to be expected that political elements would enter in. (Anderson 2006: 62)

If one applies the above model to what happened in New Mexico in the late 19th century, certain parallels become apparent. The sense of a separate cultural, if not national, identity would probably never have materialized among Spanish-speaking residents of Santa Fe or Albuquerque if New Mexico had not been a separate administrative unit. Furthermore, its remoteness from Mexico City and the scarcity of its population must have created a particularly strong sense of in-group solidarity among the relatively few *Nuevomexicanos* who inhabited the Far North frontier of first New Spain and then Mexico. The very scarcity of the population, however, combined with widespread illiteracy made it impossible for the nation-building print-capitalism to take hold prior to the fateful 1848. Nevertheless, the political turbulence in the years immediately preceding the US takeover of New Mexico (the bloody, if unsuccessful rebellions, the assassination of the Governor, etc.) seem to indicate that a separate New Mexican identity was already in the making, awaiting, as it were, a more propitious social environment. The emergence of such an environment, i.e. of a numerous-enough, Spanish-speaking, press-reading, politicizing professional middle-class sharing an imagined national community with the upper-class landowners, was only a question of time. There are reasons to believe that if the US had not annexed New Mexico, some sort of political separatism would have emerged there anyway. As Andrés Reséndez puts it,

Mexico's first centralist constitution, known as the *Siete Leyes*, was promulgated at the end of 1836. For the next five years, Mexico lived through a tumultuous period, facing the Texas secessionist movement, a war with France, and continuous federalist uprisings between 1837 and 1841 in peripheral states and territories, including Alta California, New Mexico, Yucatán, and Tamaulipas. By 1840, it was clear that the first centralist experiment had failed. (Reséndez 2006: 241)

In sum, paradoxical as it sounds, social mechanisms very similar to those that had been behind the creole revolt against Spain in 1810 may have, several decades later, contributed to the construction of the “Spanish” nation on the part of Mexi-

can territory irrevocably lost to the US in the 1840s. The fundamental difference was that – unlike the all-inclusive foundation myths of national identity among the Argentinians, Brazilians, Chileans, Colombians, Peruvians, or Mexicans – the nation-building myth of “Spanish” *Nuevomexicanos* was implicitly exclusivist. New Mexico’s “Spaniards” would not even bother to pretend that the indigenous tribal populations of New Mexico were part of the new nation. That stood in sharp contrast to Old Mexico’s policy which granted the Puebloans Mexican citizenship.¹ All things considered, it seems that “Mexicans” from New Mexico began to identify themselves as “Spanish” in a self-conscious act of rejection of the standard associations with the word “Mexican.” There were two major historical conditions that had made this otherwise mind-boggling and – at least in the New World – unprecedented act of “retrograde” national identification possible.²

Firstly, Mexican Revolution was much smaller in scale and scope in the country’s Northern borderlands than at its centre. The already-mentioned scarcity of the population in general and that of the literate classes in particular made most of the revolutionaries’ slogans ring rather hollow in what was back then still largely a wilderness.³ It is a truism among political scientists now that widespread literacy promoting the use of a single commonly-spoken language and a politically-active intellectual elite communicating in that language constitute standard prerequisites for nationalist ideas to take hold within any large-scale cultural community (cf. Anderson 2006, Gellner 2008). Anderson talks of what he calls “print-languages” as a major factor in the nation-building mechanism.⁴ He thus traces back the origins of modern European nationalism to the 16th century when the combined forces of Reformation and capitalism began to generate the foundations of Europe’s first national communities. Reformation created a popular demand for printed texts in the local vernacular while the newly-emerged printing houses supplied the product. An extensive quote from Anderson’s classic study might be in place at this point:

These print-languages laid the bases for national consciousness in three distinct ways. First and foremost, they created unified fields of exchange and communication below Latin and above the spoken vernaculars. Speakers of the huge variety of Frenches, Englishes, or Spanishes, who might find it difficult or even impossible to understand one another in conversation, became capable of comprehending one another via print and paper. In the process, they gradually became aware of the hundreds of thousands, even millions, of people in their particular language field, and at the same time that *only those* hundreds of thousands, or millions, so belonged. These fellow-readers, to whom they were connected through print, formed, in their secular, particular, visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally imagined community.

Second, print-capitalism gave a new fixity to language, which in the long run helped to build that image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the nation. [...] Thus, while twelfth-century French differed markedly from that written by Villon in the fifteenth, the rate of change slowed decisively

in the sixteenth. [...] Third, print-capitalism created languages-of-power of a kind different from the older administrative vernaculars. Certain dialects inevitably were “closer” to each print-language and dominated their final forms. (Anderson 2006: 44–45)

That was clearly not the case on the Northern fringes of the rebellious Spanish colonies that were eventually to form the Mexican Republic. Admittedly, New Mexico did possess a linguistically- and culturally-homogeneous Hispanic population and an increasingly bilingual indigenous population made up of otherwise linguistically-diverse Pueblo tribes that could potentially be assimilated into the mainstream, farming and Catholic culture of the Southwest. Nonetheless, though the Spanish-speaking population would otherwise fit in the above model of national consciousness, it was largely illiterate. Besides, to most Spanish or Keresan-speaking farmers in the area the Comanche, Apache and Navaho raids, for example, presented a much more pressing issue than such abstractions as national liberty or democracy.⁵ Illiterate folks are usually less prone to argue about nationalism not because they are less interested in who and what they are but because nationalist ideas are as a rule promulgated via pamphlets, periodicals, and books. Modern nationalism is a product of modernity.⁶

Secondly, precisely as a result of the above-mentioned socio-cultural factors, the national identity of New Mexican (and Texan) *Hispanos* was often far more fluid and dynamic than many today’s Mexican or American historians, circumscribed by traditionally nationalist and thus ethnically-compartmentalized visions of national identity, are ready to admit. In his resolutely transnational history of the American-Mexican frontier, Andrés Reséndez tells a fascinating story of Spanish-speaking *Tejanos* fighting at Alamo side by side with Anglo-American Texans against the Mexican soldiers of General Santa Anna’s army. Needless to say, these *Tejanos*, shedding their blood for the “independence” of Texas, did not see themselves as traitors of the Mexican homeland or cynical turncoats siding with the Anglos for some imagined economic gains in the future. They apparently believed that politically-autonomous Texas would make a better home to both Spanish- and English-speaking Texans than the heavily centralized Mexican Republic ruled by a “patriotic” Mexican dictator. The Mexican Texans siding with Anglo-American Texans should thus be labelled federalist or secessionist rather than unpatriotic.⁷ Their rebellion against General Santa Anna’s authoritarian rule was a direct result of a prolonged political conflict between the federalists and centralists within Mexico. As Reséndez explains,

Mexicanness did not emerge full-blown immediately after 1821. Communities throughout Mexico remained deeply committed to local or regional attachments and understandably viewed with certain skepticism recent and abstract notions such as *mexicanola*. Mexico’s uneven economic development only deepened such local and regional attachments, putting the interests of such places as the Far North at odds with those of the national

government just as similar disparities led to sectional divisions in the United States. [...] A more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of how Mexico's Far North became the American Southwest needs to take into account these already existing core-periphery tensions to sketch credibly the peculiar insertion of Anglo Americans and Native Americans and how their actions shaped the ultimate outcome. (Reséndez 2006: 148–149)

Similarly, some Spanish-speaking New Mexicans did not view the annexation of their homeland by the US in 1846 as a national tragedy while others lamented the foreign invasion and the loss of national independence. In 1846, after General Stephen W. Kearny, the commander of the American military force that occupied New Mexico, had promised the local inhabitants US citizenship, Juan Bautista Vigil y Alarid (at that time Acting Governor of *Nuevo Mexico*) responded in revealingly ambivalent terms:

Do not find it strange if there has been no manifestation of joy and enthusiasm in seeing this city [Santa Fe] occupied by your military forces. To us the power of the Mexican Republic is dead. No matter what her condition, she was our mother. What child will not shed abundant tears at the tomb of his parents? [...] Today we belong to a great and wonderful nation, its flag, with its stars and stripes, covers the horizon of New Mexico, and its brilliant light shall grow like good seed well cultivated. (Sánchez 1967: 16)

Gregory Rodriguez explains this ambivalence as follows:

As in Texas a decade earlier, Mexicans who inhabited their country's northwestern frontier were not happy with their government's insistence on centralizing political power and often found their self-interest at odds with federal policies. Centuries of isolation from the authorities in Mexico City had not encouraged the development of a strong nationalist sentiment on the frontier. (Rodriguez 2008: 99)

All things considered, the rejection of the term "Mexican" as a label of self-identification evidently did not require any dramatic mental realignments on the part of New Mexico's *Hispanos*. Though patriotic purists in Old Mexico might have viewed that politically-loaded semiotic gesture as a manifestation of political opportunism and/or Machiavellian cynicism on the part of their New Mexican "compatriots," it is probably more justified to assume that the rejection was grounded in something much older than the exigencies of the pro-statehood campaign. However, the purely pragmatic considerations must have also affected the "Spanish" New Mexicans' ultimate choice. For by severing their disputable cultural ties with Mexicanness, the *Nuevomexicano* socio-political elites made it much easier for their Anglo-American counterparts to conceive of "Spanish Americans" as potential political partners, if not equals. Cutting the bond with

Mexico apparently helped to solve the problem of anti-Mexican prejudice. The New World descendants of Spanish nobles could no longer be called “greasers,” could they?

3. Anglo-American stereotypes of Mexicans and the fear of miscegenation

The anti-Mexican prejudice prevalent among 19th-century Anglo-Americans was grounded in two major stereotypes. One of them had to do with race. It seems that the spectre of miscegenation has always lurked behind the mainstream Anglo-American perspective on relations with Mexico, and the late 19th century was no exception. The prevalent opinion among the Congressmen ever since the war with Mexico had been that the Hispanic Southwest was inhabited by a “mongrel” race of “greasers” whose Indian blood and Catholic spirituality was incompatible with the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant social culture and political ideals. In 1848, while the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was being negotiated, Senator Calhoun went as far as urging his fellow Congressmen not to annex substantial swaths of Mexican territory into the United States because of Mexico’s racial (and hence cultural) incompatibility with the American nation:

[W]e have never dreamt of incorporating into our Union any but the Caucasian race – the free white race. To incorporate Mexico would be the first instance of the kind of incorporating an Indian race; for more than half the Mexicans are Indians, and the other is composed chiefly of mixed tribes. I protest against such a union as that! Ours, sirs, is the Government of a white race. The greatest misfortunes of Spanish America are to be traced to the fatal error of placing these colored races on an equality with the white race. That error destroyed the social arrangement which formed the basis of society. (Nieto-Phillips 2004: 52)

To convince the US Congress, then, and perhaps themselves, of their own “whiteness”, New Mexico’s Hispanic *politicos* joined forces with local Anglo-American Hispanophiles in a large-scale campaign celebrating New Mexico’s “Spanish” historical past and alleged cultural present. Travel writers, historians, and even folklorists such as Aurelio Macedonio Espinosa emphasized the Castilian elements of *Nuevomexicano* culture, downplaying its Mexican and Pueblo Indian affinities.

Arguably, such a shift of emphasis from the indigenous to the European aspect of the *Hispanos*’ group identity could have worked to their imagined political advantage only decades after the virtual disappearance of Spanish colonial power from the North American continent. Had Florida and California been still under Spanish rule at the end of the 19th century, references to “Spanish blood” would have hardly helped New Mexico’s *politicos* in their campaign for US statehood. But because Spain was no longer a political rival in the New World, both

Anglo-American intellectuals and the general American public were ready for some kind of nostalgic sympathy for the political plight of the noble “Castilian” gentlemen from New Mexico, the last living embodiments of a disappearing chivalrous culture. The nostalgia was, in a sense, comparable to the pro-Indian sentiments evoked by Freneau’s poetry and Cooper’s prose several decades earlier. (Once the Indians are no longer considered a viable threat to white colonization, they become ample material for the Noble Savages of Romantic literature.) In short, when the aforementioned Aurelio Macedonio Espinoza, a distinguished New Mexican linguist and folklorist, began to publish extensively on the Castilian purity of the variant of Spanish spoken in *Nuevo Mexico*, he did not have to worry too much about the *Spanish* ingredient of the Black Legend. Because by the late 19th century that stereotype would have been habitually associated with Mexicans, not Spaniards.

La Leyenda Negra, or the Black Legend of Spanish colonial rule, popular among English-speaking colonists in the New World ever since the 17th century, was the second major stereotype that the campaigners for New Mexico’s statehood had to face, even if the Legend’s negative focus had largely shifted from Spaniards to Mexicans. Josiah Gregg’s *Commerce of the Prairies*, published in 1844, is a good example of an influential text that marks the transition from Spain to Mexico as a source of negative connotations among Anglo-Americans. Gregg writes:

There is no part of the civilized globe, perhaps, where the Arts have been so much neglected, and the progress of Science so successfully impeded as in New Mexico. Reading and writing may fairly be set down as the highest branches of education that are taught in the schools; for those pedants who occasionally pretend to teach arithmetic, very seldom understand even the primary rules of the science of numbers. [...] From the earliest time down to the secession of the colonies, it was always the policy of the Spanish Government as well as of the papal hierarchy, to keep every avenue of knowledge closed against their subjects of the New World; lest the rights of civil and religious liberty should reach them from their neighbors of the North. Although a system of public schools was afterwards adopted by the republic, which, if persevered in, would no doubt have contributed to the dissemination of useful knowledge, yet its operations had to be suspended about ten years ago, for want of the necessary funds to carry out the original project. It is doubtful, however, whether the habitual neglect and utter carelessness of the people, already too much inured to grope their way in darkness and in ignorance, added to the inefficiency of the teachers, would not eventually have neutralized all the good that such an institution was calculated to effect. (Gregg [1884]2001: 132–133)

Even more sinister than the inadequacy of their civic organizations and the inferiority of their civilization was the fact that Mexicans, in Gregg’s view, were a morally suspect, if not downright inferior, race. Thus whatever social lustre

some of them may have acquired through training was merely a façade hiding an intrinsically malignant disposition:

The New Mexicans appear to have inherited much of the cruelty and intolerance of their ancestors, and no small portion of their bigotry and fanaticism. Being of a highly imaginative temperament and of rather accommodating moral principles – cunning, loquacious, quick of perception and sycophantic, their conversation frequently exhibits a degree of tact – a false glare of talent, eminently calculated to mislead and impose. They have no stability except in artifice; no profundity except for intrigue; qualities for which they have acquired an unenviable celebrity. Systematically cringing and subservient while out of power, as soon as the august mantle of authority falls upon their shoulders, there are but little bounds to their arrogance and vindictiveness of spirit. While such are the general features of the character of the Northern Mexicans, however, I am fain to believe and acknowledge, that there are to be found among them numerous instances of uncompromising virtue, good faith and religious forbearance. (Gregg [1884]2001: 147)

Gregg's perspective is paradigmatic for most 19th-century Anglo-American analyses of Mexico. In keeping with the appearances of an unbiased, meticulously accurate and scientifically objective observer of the exotic Other, the American trader makes sure to point out exceptions from the rule. Hence his mention of the many virtuous Mexicans that exist as if against the grain of their own national culture. To give him full credit, Gregg does not limit himself to sheer excoriation. At several points in his book he does present carefully selected elements of New Mexican socio-cultural reality in a positive light. He writes, for example, of New Mexicans' hospitality, praises the equestrian skills of the *vaqueros* (cowboys), the hunting skills of *ciboleros* (buffalo hunters), the driving skills of *arrieros* (muleteers) and the spinning skills of the "females". As for the latter he even admits that "although many of them are about as broad-featured as the veriest Indian," some of them "possess striking traits of beauty" (Gregg [1884]2001: 146). Significantly, however, all these praises invariably concern the domain of the individual's physical skills, agility, or looks. Mexico's civic realm is entirely dismissed. The Anglo-American emissary of "true" democracy and a superior civilization clearly does not see in the Republic of Mexico a potential political partner.

One could see a similar mentality at work in Lieutenant James Simpson's report of his reconnaissance to the Navaho country in 1849. Simpson was part of a military expedition composed of US soldiers, New Mexican Hispanic militia and Pueblo Indian auxiliaries. Their mission was to pacify New Mexico's Navaho Indians. The Navahos, taking advantage of the 1840s' political instability in the frontier provinces, had intensified their sheep and cattle raids. Simpson's report was published by the popular press in 1852, which testifies to the general American public's ongoing interest in the newly acquired Southwestern territories. Like

Gregg, Simpson clearly considers himself an emissary of a superior civilization. Likewise, he strives to give his account an air of informed objectivity and thus does not dismiss, for example, the entire Pueblo Indian culture. His description of Hosta, the tribal governor of Jemez Pueblo as “handsome” and “magnanimous” smacks of the Noble Savage stereotype. (Simpson believed that the Puebloans were descendants of the Aztecs.) He also praises the Pueblo warriors who accompanied the expedition: “in their calm, reflective countenances, I think I can perceive a latent energy and power, which it requires only a proper political and social condition to develop and make useful” (qtd in Padget 2004: 31). The implied message is similar to that of Gregg’s text: some natives of New Mexico might make, if not good citizens, at least good scouts or good ranch hands for the enterprising Anglo bosses.

What most impressed Lieutenant Simpson, however, was not New Mexico’s rather sordid present but its mythic past. The Anasazi ruins in Chaco Canyon and Canyon de Chelly inspired him to speculate on the reasons for the abandonment of those once magnificent settlements. He even went as far as claiming that the aridity of the soil which must have forced the Anasazi to leave was a form of God’s punishment. As Martin Padget comments,

Thus “high” Indian civilization was consigned to pre-Columbian history and, three hundred years after the Spanish conquest, New Mexico was represented as a degraded environment where the land was infertile and the people lacked vitality. [...] He conjectured that the Navajos were a remnant of “Aztec stock” from before the period in which Chaco Canyon was created. Alternatively, aridity had caused the once unified ancient people to become more dispersed and mobile, and so they had come to live in hogans rather than pueblos. This sort of imaginative engagement with the ancient history of the Southwest helped shape an aesthetic through which the region’s past was romanticized in many later travelogues. In this regard Simpson’s narrative points the way ahead to travelogues published in the 1880s and 1890s by civilian writers such as Susan Wallace, Charles Fletcher Lummis, and George Wharton James. (Padget 2004: 31, 32)

A year after the publication of Simpson’s narrative, in November 1853, William Watts Hart Davis set out from Independence, Missouri to Santa Fe, New Mexico, just like Josiah Gregg two decades before him. Davis was to take up the position of District Attorney for the Territory of New Mexico. Half a year later the ambitious thirty-three-year-old lawyer (originally from Pennsylvania) was appointed Secretary of the Territory. In 1857 he published *El Gringo; or New Mexico and Her People*, a book based on his experiences of travel in the Southwest. Davis had a stronger sense of civilizing mission than either Simpson or Gregg and certainly much more confidence in the federal government. In fact, Davis believed that the beneficial influence of American laws and institutions might eventually effect “the regeneration of the people of New Mexico, morally, socially, and religiously” (qtd

in Padget 2004: 35). Like Simpson, he was prone to romanticize the glorious past of the Pueblo Indians while denigrating their cultural present. For one thing Davis did not believe in the Puebloans' capacity to record their own history or to govern themselves effectively. Besides, "degenerating as a race," the Puebloans were a doomed people because of too much intermarriage within the same pueblo; in this respect, Davis argued, "they seem to follow the example of the royal families of Europe, and their blood is losing strength about as rapidly" (qtd in Padget 2004: 38). So much for the blue-blooded lineage of the Aztecs' descendants.

Racial issues remain at the forefront of Davis's socio-political thought. As Padget explains,

In common with many Americans at this time, Davis believed that Hispanos in the mid nineteenth century had inherited their progenitors' racial characteristics. Mexicans, he claimed, "possess the cunning and deceit of the Indian, the politeness and spirit of revenge of the Spaniard, and the imaginative temperament and fiery impulses of the Moor." Thus they had "inherited a portion of the cruelty, bigotry, and superstition that have marked the character of the Spaniards from the earliest times" – traits that appeared "constitutional and innate in the race." (Padget 2004: 36)

In short, except for the Spanish politeness, the hopelessly mixed-blood *Hispanos* had, in the view of Davis and many other mid-nineteenth-century Anglo-American travel writers, inherited the worst traits of the white and Indian races that constituted the *mestizo* mix. Davis concludes his book with the remark that "the minds of the people [of New Mexico] are as barren as the land, with as little hope of being better cultivated" (qtd in Padget 2004: 35).

The dominant tone of the Anglo commentaries on the Southwest's *mestizo* population discussed so far makes one thing clear: miscegenation was generally abhorred in mid-19th-century White Anglo-Saxon Protestant America. Whatever positive stereotypes of non-Anglo New Mexicans popped up back then, they all had to do with either their Spanish or Pueblo Indian cultural affinities, the Mexican *mestizaje* or amalgamation being, by and large, dismissed. That is the legacy that Charles Fletcher Lummis would build upon. When Lummis was rediscovering, or perhaps, more precisely, reinventing the American Southwest in the 1880s it was those few positive stereotypes of Southwestern native culture that formed a natural basis for his further promotion of the region.

4. Anglo hispanophilia: Spain as a civilizing force in the writings of Anglo-American enthusiasts of "Castilian" New Mexico

The fifty years that had elapsed since Josiah Gregg's explorations of New Mexico had brought important changes in America's social and economic makeup. The industrialization of economy accompanied by a rapid growth of cities and their

sprawling slums created an intellectual environment in the East that was conducive to all sorts of nostalgia for the good old agrarian America, the land of happy farmers, the mythic country of the Jeffersonian dream. The Southwest and California, with their allegedly chivalric Spanish past, came to be seen as lands where the old myth was still alive. Thus travelling to the Southwest was supposed to be for the urban(e) Easterner like travelling back in time. The Spanish past seemed much more glamorous than the Mexican American present.

One reason for this was the wide-spread Anglo-Saxon racial prejudice of which apparently even Lummis, one of the greatest enthusiast of all things Southwestern, never entirely rid himself. We must grant him one credit, though: he did evolve. Between September 1884 and February 1885 Lummis walked from Cincinnati, Ohio, to Los Angeles, California. On his way he would send letters to an Ohio newspaper, as a self-appointed “tramp across the continent”. When he arrived in Southern Colorado, in 1884, he described the local Mexicans as “a snide-looking set, twice as dark as an Indian, with heavy lips and noses, long, straight, black hair, sleepy eyes, and a general expression of ineffable laziness. [...] Their language is a patois of Spanish and Mexican. These may be poor specimens along here. I hope so. Not even a coyote will touch a dead Greaser, the flesh is so seasoned with the red pepper they ram into their food in howling profusion” (Lummis 1991: 97). Hardly had Lummis set foot on Southwestern soil than he began to use the offensive term for a Mexican American without giving it a second thought. In his letter to a newspaper back East he merely explains that “A Westerner would no more think of calling a ‘Greaser’ a Mexican, than a Kentucky Colonel would of calling a negro anything but ‘nigger’” (Lummis 1991: 90). It seems, as Martin Padget rightly points out, that Lummis arrived in the Colorado with “his racial prejudice already formed” (Padget 2004: 120). Soon, however, his opinion changed and in the next letter, written in Santa Fe, he stressed the hospitality and friendliness of the local “Mexicans”. Years later, in his book *A Tramp Across the Continent* (published 1892) he asked: “Why is it that the last and most difficult education seems to be the ridding ourselves of the silly inborn race prejudice?” (Lummis 1892: 75) and painstakingly explained:

In Colorado the Mexicans are much in the minority, and are frequently nicknamed “greasers” – a nomenclature which it is not wise to practice as one proceeds south, and which anyway is born of an unbred boorishness of which no Mexican could ever be guilty. They are a simple, kindly people, ignorant of books, but better taught than our average in all the social virtues – in hospitality, courtesy, and respect for age. They are neither so “cowardly” nor so “treacherous” as an enormous class that largely shapes our national destinies; and it would be a thorn to our conceit, if we could realize how very many important lessons we could profitably learn from them. I speak now from years of intimate, but honorable, personal acquaintance with them – an acquaintance which has shamed me out of the silly prejudices against them which I shared with the average Saxon. (Lummis 1892: 76)

At this point we must remember that Lummis is talking about the working-class *mestizo* population. His concession smacks of a patrician's benign, if patronizing, acknowledgement of the Noble Savage's virtues. A Noble Savage, however, is not a good candidate for a full-fledged citizen and Lummis must have been well aware of that. That is why in his numerous writings (30 monographs, 275 articles and dozens of editorial columns) he championed the heroic, chivalric, and civilizing tradition of Spain's presence in the New World. The association with a civilizing power was crucial indeed. To counteract the Black Legend, Lummis, together with other Southwest enthusiasts (such as the writer Helen Hunt Jackson or the historian Lebaron Bradford Prince) contributed to what John M. Nieto-Phillips calls the White Legend:

The White Legend was, of course, a powerful racial trope that downplayed mestizaje and venerated institutions that, in theory though seldom in practice, regulated race relations, such as the church, the presidio, and the rancho. Readers of popular literature would come to know the colonial frontier as a kind of biracial paradise wherein enterprising Spaniards carved out frontier communities among the "savages" and undertook to teach them the "blessings" of civilization and Christianity. This imagined pastoral replicated all the virtues of plantation society whose demise even some Yankees had come to lament. (Nieto-Phillips 2004: 151)

Helen Hunt Jackson's best-selling novel *Ramona* (published in 1884) presented the Spanish colonial era as the Golden Age of the Southwest. The novel's message was clear: Native Americans fared better under the Spanish colonial administration than under the Anglo-American one. The mission system, in Jackson's view, helped California Indians to learn the white man's ways and thus to blend gradually with the Spanish society. Unlike the United States, then, that forcefully relocated entire aboriginal tribes or isolated them on reservations, colonial Spain was both a more efficient and more benevolent civilizing power. In a similar vein, Lummis wrote: "We talk of the cruelty of the Spanish conquests; but they were far less cruel than the Saxon ones. The Spanish never exterminated. He conquered the aborigine and then converted and educated him, and preserved him with scholarship, humanity, and zeal" (Lummis 1892: 95).

Perhaps the most influential book by Lummis was *The Spanish Pioneers* (1893) in which he argues that,

the Spanish pioneering of the Americas was the largest and longest and most marvelous feat of manhood in all history. [...] The Spanish were not only the first conquerors of the New World, and its first colonizers, but also its first civilizers. They built the first cities, opened the first churches, schools, and universities; brought the first printing-presses, made the first books; wrote the first dictionaries, histories, and geographies, and brought the first missionaries. (Lummis [1893]1920: 11–12, 23)

5. From hispanophilia to *hispanidad*: transnational identities of the *hispanistas* and the concept of cultural amalgamation

Once New Mexico had been granted statehood it was the *Hispanos*' turn to take over the "Castilian" master narrative from Anglo-American Hispanophiles, making sure that it became part of the mainstream political discourse in the US. Joining the Union was for the Hispanic intellectual elites, in a way, like joining a gentlemen's club – the very act presupposed the existence of a shared interactive social and, more importantly, axiological plane. The Spanish-speaking political elites of the American Southwest had correctly located the potential for axiological rapport with their Anglo-American counterparts in the aforementioned realm of patrician nostalgia for the chivalric ways of the pre-industrial past. Their all-too-correct diagnosis was that as Spanish gentry they would, in the eyes of most US Congressmen, make far better American citizens than as Mexican democrats. It may be seen, of course, as both ironic and paradoxical that the feudal credentials of the conquistadors were deemed superior to the democratic credentials of fellow republican revolutionaries. Still, whatever the reason, the potential master narrative of two fellow republics establishing a new political order on the American soil apparently did not resonate either with US politicians or the American public. The Hispanics had to be *gentrified* in public discourse, before they could be viewed as eligible for American citizenship.

No *Nuevomexicano* had probably done a better job at this propagandist task than the already-mentioned linguist Aurelio Macedonio Espinoza, a major champion of *hispanidad* in New Mexico. As a contemporary American historian puts it:

If Hispanophilia involved a "foreigner's" fascination for things Spanish, *hispanidad* entailed claiming ownership, most notably, of Hispanic history, language, values, beliefs, and culture. It was to identify with these as the basis of one's identity. It referred, literally, to one's "Hispanicity". [...] In its broadest sense, *hispanidad* was a sentiment, a sensibility, and a self-perception among Spanish-speaking peoples that took shape in specific cultural and political contexts, and in contradistinction to "Anglo Saxon" culture. Its manifestation in New Mexico, however, was far more complex than this. (Nieto-Phillips 171)

The apex of the gentrification campaign in the Southwest were the first three decades of the 20th century. A prominent *hispanista*, Espinoza acted as one of the intellectual mentors of the highly-educated, upper- and middle-class *Nuevomexicanos* who attempted to popularize *hispanidad* among their compatriots. John M. Nieto-Phillips's definition of a *hispanista* is as follows:

From the 1890s through the 1930s, a loose affiliation of lettered *Nuevomexicanos*, whom I shall refer to as *hispanistas*, gave voice to this sentiment

[i.e. *hispanidad*] and sought, actively, to engender it among their compatriots. In history texts, they exalted the conquistadores as their ancestral forebears; in speeches, they defended the Spanish language as a symbol of their colonial heritage; in academic treatises, they claimed to retrace their regional idioms and folklore to the Iberian peninsula; and in grade school practices and policies, they honored and sought to preserve the cultural traditions of their students. In doing so, New Mexico's hispanistas became authors of their own heritage. (Nieto-Phillips 2004: 171–172)

This “loose affiliation of lettered Nuevomexicanos [and *Nuevomexicanas*]” included, besides Espinoza, the historian Benjamin Maurice Read and the educators Aurora Lucero and Adelina Otero-Warren, to mention only the most prominent names. Their appeal to an imagined community of the past was, indeed, unprecedented in scale, if not intention.

Working in different fields, these *hispanistas* produced texts highly diverse in style, scope and subject matter. What the otherwise different enunciations of Espinoza and Read have in common, though, is the dominant conceptual trope or the fundamental conceptual metaphor – that of “purity” understood as resistance to contamination. Underlying the concept, was – surprisingly enough, one might argue – the belief in the existence of a *transnational* cultural community, one unified by its use of the Spanish language and its steadfast adherence to Spanish culture and Catholic religion. Whether located in New Mexico, Chile, Venezuela, or Spain, the *hispanistas*, in Fredrick B. Pike's words, “shared an unassailable faith in the existence of a transatlantic Hispanic family, community, or *raza* (race)” (1971: 1). Notably, the word *raza* should not be understood here in biological terms but rather as a metaphor for a community whose internal social, linguistic and religious bonds are so strong that they are habitually perceived as an organic given rather than as cultural constructs. Spanishness thus construed may include “true” Spaniards (or *peninsulares*), mixed-bloods (*mestizos*) and people of other races (e.g. the descendants of African slaves or indigenous tribal populations). It is a “race,” then, “shaped more by common culture, historical experiences, traditions, and language than by blood or ethnic factors” (Pike 1971: 1).

From such a colour-blind perspective, however, the dividing line between Spanish Americans and Mexicans seems rather blurry and problematic, that is far too arbitrary for anyone attempting to define their Spanish-Americanness *in opposition* to Mexicanness. That is probably what pushed the aforementioned concept of purity into the foreground in the writings of New Mexican *hispanistas*. Operating in the highly race-conscious (if not race-obsessed) America of the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, they resorted – whether inadvertently or self-consciously we shall never know – to essentialist discourse on nationality and culture.

As a professor of Romance Languages at Stanford University in the years 1909–1946, Espinoza could pontificate on the undiluted and uncontaminated Spanishness of *Nuevomexicano* culture with an air of scientific objectivity. Born

of Hispanic parents and raised in the Southwest, he combined professional expertise with personal experience:

Aurelio's interest in language and folklore originated in his youth and during the summers he spent in the mountains of southern Colorado with his uncle, Ramón Martínez, a shepherd. There he came to know the folklore of the area's Nuevomexicano shepherds and ranchers, and [as his son later put it] "listened with interest" to their traditional cuentos, ballads, and verses. As Aurelio matured, his love of folklore and language deepened, inspiring him to study these subjects at the university level. In 1898, Aurelio enrolled in the University of Colorado, Boulder, where he majored in philosophy and minored in Romance languages. On graduating four years later, he accepted a professorship in modern languages at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, a post he held for nearly eight years. From 1902 to 1910, he traveled extensively through northern New Mexico and southern Colorado studying the Spanish phonology and morphology of the region and recording folktales. Those research trips provided much of the material for his later studies of Spanish language and folklore. (Nieto-Phillips 2004: 179)

What recurs both in Espinoza's writings on New Mexican folklore and the talks he gave at the Historical Society of New Mexico is the thesis that *Nuevomexicano* culture is not only distinctly different from the Mexican culture south of the border, but that it displays pervasive affinities with Castilian language and folklore. Local Native American intrusions, in turn, are so few as to be practically negligible. While the mainstream Mexican culture was commonly viewed as a hybrid consisting of Spanish, *mestizo* and Indian elements, its New Mexican counterpart was allegedly pure of such admixtures.

In a 1907 talk, Espinoza introduced the English-speaking world (in New Mexico and abroad) to the distinctive Spanish language and folklore of Nuevomexicanos. He emphasized three points: Nuevomexicanos possessed a language and folklore rich in Castilian archaisms that dated to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; Nuevomexicanos' geographic isolation, combined with their long occupation of the land and resistance to Indian linguistic and cultural influences, had perpetuated those archaisms; and while Nuevomexicanos' Spanish contained few Indian elements, it had adopted many English words and had also infiltrated the English language. Each of these characteristics supported Espinoza's overall contentions that Nuevomexicanos were the descendants of the Spanish conquistadores and that their archaic language and folklore were evidence of their Spanish identity and cultural steadfastness. (Nieto-Phillips 2004: 180)

Significantly, the only foreign influences Espinoza allowed for were borrowings from English. These, however, were duly counterbalanced by the New Mexican

Spanish infiltrations into the English language. The political implications were clear: Spanish and Anglo New Mexicans are cultural peers capable of coexisting within a single state as equals. That is probably why Espinoza emphasized the high-culture affinities of New Mexican Spanish. In an ingenious, if somewhat strained, twist of academic logic, Espinoza posited the existence of a “folklore” whose “folk” was actually patrician in origin. Consider the slightly contentious tone of the following excerpt: “The Spanish language as spoken to-day by nearly one quarter of a million people in New Mexico and Colorado, is not a vulgar dialect, *as many misinformed persons believe*, but a rich archaic Spanish dialect, largely Castilian in source” (Espinoza 1911: 1–2, emphasis mine). In his 1909 doctoral dissertation entitled *Studies in New Mexican Spanish* Espinoza argued that *Nuevomexicano* settlers had, over the course of three centuries, “preserved many [...] classic forms [of peninsular Spanish] with remarkable tenacity” (qtd in Nieto-Phillips 2004: 180). Again, the word “tenacity” implies some sort of conscious resistance to non-Spanish influence on the part of heroic Hispanic pioneers rather than a depersonalized linguistic process.

Another *hispanista* who stressed the essential Spanishness of *Nuevomexicano* culture, thus downplaying its Native American contributions, was Benjamin Maurice Read, a bilingual historian raised in a mixed Anglo-American and Mexican family. Read’s prolific output, composed mostly in Spanish, coincided with the rapid growth of Spanish-language press in the Southwest. The belated arrival of print capitalism must have intensified, if not engendered, the nation-building process (cf. Meyer 1996). As far from an antiquarian hobby as one can imagine, Read’s interest in the Spanish past of New Mexico had all the trappings of a political mission. A quintessentially revisionist historian, Read attempted, first and foremost, to rekindle *Nuevomexicanos*’ pride in their European ancestry.

Read felt compelled to undertake the writing of New Mexico’s past to correct the “inaccuracies” that plagued Anglo Americans’ writings. With missionary fervor, he set out to expose the “truths” of New Mexico’s history, expressing contempt for the “striking contradictions” in the writings of “English-speaking authors.” Knowing little Spanish, he wrote, they often resorted to incorrect translations of Spanish colonial documents. As a self-labeled “*historiador mexicano*,” Read declared himself better-equipped than “American” historians to preserve the original spirit and meaning of the primary documents. Moreover, histories written in Spanish, he insisted, best preserved the original meaning of Spanish documents. (Nieto-Phillips 2004: 189)

Like Espinoza, Read employs a similar, if not the same, conceptual trope – that of purity. Only this time it is the alleged purity of a proper hermeneutic interpretation of texts written in Spanish, one that preserves the linguistic mystique, or the spirit, of the original. For Espinoza, the potential contaminations are Indian and Anglo intrusions into the “Castilian” folklore of New Mexico. For Read, Anglo

misinterpretations of Spanish colonial documents pose a similar threat, polluting, so to speak, the crystal-clear message behind the sublime history of Spanish colonization.

Yet, for all the similarities between the two *hispanistas*, there is one important difference: Read has no problems with referring to himself as Mexican. The difference between Read's and Espinoza's understanding of *Nuevomexicano* Spanish identity shows what could have become of *hispanismo* if it had followed on Read's rather than Espinoza's tracks. Read was no racist, and his idea of Spanishness is entirely cultural, not biological. This proves that the founding myth of *Nuevomexicanos*' Spanish identity, despite its racist façade, was pliable enough and thus potentially innocuous by today's standards of political correctness. There is, after all, a long tradition of cultural Spanishness in the New World. As Gregory Rodriguez, citing Patricia Seed, explains in his commentary on the gradual disintegration of the otherwise meticulously crafted colonial caste system in Spanish America,

By the end of the eighteenth century, "The distinction between descendants of Indians and descendants of slaves, however clear in theory, had become hopelessly muddled in the real world of New Spain." Even the Audiencia, the highest court in the Americas, "refused to define race on the basis of physical appearance or biological heritage, but defined it rather on the basis of social standing. One who was wealthy, whatever his physical appearance, was 'Spanish'; 'race' was only useful as an index of social status if it was not tied to great wealth or influence. If physical appearance was at odds with social status, social status took priority." (Rodriguez 2008: 54)

By a fine twist of historical irony, race became "useful" again for the aspiring "Spanish-Americans" in the American Southwest. Especially if it was not "tied to great wealth or influence," as was the case with working-class *Nuevomexicanos*. Their alleged Spanishness was thus construed as the only available token of "white" social status; hence probably the concerted efforts of Hispanic educators to include the "folk" element in the postulated Spanish-American nation. Aware of their minority status in the US, Hispanic intellectual elites could not afford to construct a "white trash" of their own.

Unlike Espinoza and Read, Aurora Lucero and Adelina Otero-Warren did not employ the concept of purity as their central argumentative trope. In fact, the two *Nuevomexicanas* did what seemed just the opposite – it is the metaphor of "amalgamation" that recurs in their texts. Rather revealingly, however, this amalgamation has nothing to do with what today's Latino activists refer to as *mestizaje*, that is the melting pot of indigenous and white races and cultures. Lucero perceived New Mexico as a place where the two cultures – "Castilian" and "Anglo-Saxon" – would inevitably merge, producing a new, presumably better culture and society. Looking forward to that kind of amalgamation, she predicted that "the union of the calm, businesslike spirit of the Anglo-Saxon with the sanguine, chivalrous

enthusiasm of the Castillian will be such a blending of all that is best in human nature” (qtd in Nieto-Phillips 2004: 201). Lumping all the non-Hispanic Americans into one allegedly homogeneous Anglo-Saxon mass – even though at the beginning of the 20th century the US society had already included substantial numbers of, say, Irish, Italian, and Slavic Americans – Lucero in an equally sweeping gesture glosses over the predominantly *mestizo* racial makeup of New Mexico’s “Castilians”. The implied message is clear: the future New Mexico is going to be a melting pot of two white “races” of equally-good pedigrees. Not surprisingly, as a teacher of Spanish for over thirty years and superintendent of education for San Miguel County in the mid-1920s, Lucero was an outspoken proponent of bilingual education in the Southwest.

Like her cousin Aurora Lucero, Adelina Otero-Warren (also married to an Anglo American) not only championed bilingualism in New Mexico’s public life (as a teacher and superintendent of education for Santa Fe County in the years 1917–1929), but was very active in politics, becoming, finally, the first *Nuevomexicana* to run for Congress; she lost the election but only after winning in four of the five largest *Nuevomexicano* counties (cf. Nieto-Phillips 2004: 201). What makes Otero-Warren a *hispanista* is, first and foremost, her belief in the socially-universal claims of “Spanish” cultural identity in the New World, allegedly transcending the boundaries of class and social background.

Significantly, the postulated classless character of Spanish-American identity was, in fact, predicated on the concept of gentrification, which in itself is, of course, a far cry from what is usually associated with an egalitarian ideal. A *reductio-ad-absurdum* of such a perspective was voiced in 1914 by a columnist for *Harper’s Weekly* who painstakingly explained to his Anglo-American readers that the “Spanish people of New Mexico [...] are not of the mixed breed one finds south of the Rio Grande, or even [in] Arizona. [...] Indeed, it is probable that there is no purer Spanish stock in Old Spain itself” (qtd in Nieto-Phillips 2004: 170).

6. A “collective promise”: nation as a project

It is the implicitly exclusivist (and thus potentially contentious) ideal of a “blue-blooded” nation, one could argue, that proved self-defeating for the long-term political effectiveness of *hispanidad* in the Southwest in general and New Mexico in particular. As Józef Tischner put it, though in an altogether different context, a nation always begins with some kind of promise. The promise, in turn, engenders “[...] a shared, collective hope. Just as a promise given to the individual creates an individual hope, so a promise given to many creates a nation’s hope” (Tischner 1991: 44). The collective promise, in other words, is a founding myth of an imagined community, a challenge of sorts, or, more precisely, a project which can be realized only by the type of large-scale community that is commonly referred to as nation.

Such a community, then, is not defined in biological, organicist, or essentialist terms as an extended family of sorts. Indeed, the choice of terms has huge consequences for the subsequent concepts of national tradition and patriotism. As Tischner compellingly argues, a truly binding national tradition does not entail an automatic, passive act of inheriting one's language, customs, and symbols of identity:

The [national] promise and the [attendant] hope have been out there before me. The land which I claim as mine had been made ready for plowing long before I showed up. It does not mean, however, that I am to accept passively the hope and its legacy that have been passed on to me. On the contrary – accepting that hope presupposes freedom of choice. I am constantly faced with a choice. I can reject the promise any time. I can accept it in its entirety or only in part. I can leave the land, sell it, leave it uncultivated. [...] That is why freedom is crucial to any national tradition. The sense of freedom permeates such a tradition as a constitutive plane on which other values can be based. You do not inherit your Homeland like you do your sex or the color of your eyes. You inherit your Homeland like a freedom-oriented promise. “You can, if you want to...” It's not like you “have to,” whether you want it or not. You can, but only when you want to. (Tischner 1991: 45–46)

It follows that it takes a sustaining collective promise for the national project to take hold, a promise that proves effective not just temporarily but also in a long run and against all the potential social, political, cultural, and demographic odds. The Spanish-American project lacked that kind of sustainability. Effective as a tactic, it failed as a strategy. Good enough to facilitate the acceptance of New Mexico into the Union, it was not compelling enough for the constantly growing Spanish-speaking masses of the American Southwest. Predictably, it was the exponential increase in the number of Spanish-speaking migrants from Mexico in the 20th century that spelled the demise of the “Spanish” myth in *Nuevo Mexico*. Given how pervasive the *mestizaje* trend has always been in Mexico, turning a blind eye to it by *Nuevomexicanos* was obviously self-defeating. The newly-arrived Mexican migrants, in turn, not only must have felt excluded from the “Castilian” community but, in all likelihood, intuitively sensed the disingenuous nature of the allegedly friendly attitude towards “Spanish” New Mexicans displayed by their Anglo-American compatriots.

To repeat: *hispanidad* as such did not preclude the construction of a transnational “ethnic” identity. In fact, the tradition of such an interracial “Spanish” identity was – to repeat again – already out there. An all-inclusive and thus all the more flexible and adaptable “Spanish-American” identity would have probably fared much better in the face of imminent *mestizaje*. It is doubtful, however, whether interracial “Spaniards” would have seemed patrician enough to US senators and their predominantly White-Anglo-Saxon-Protestant constituencies back in 1912. The chivalrous “Castilians” were much better candidates for compatriots.

In other words, what, in a short run, made the Spanish-American project politically effective contributed, in a long run, to its cultural dwindling, if not demise.

The project is an instructive case study, both for political scientists and aspiring nationalist activists of various persuasions. If we accept the premise that nations are imagined communities, the collapse of the Spanish-American Dream raises an important question: Can any community “imagine” itself into nationhood? Let us consider some surreal scenarios. Suppose that, one day, a substantial number of Polish Americans from Chicago or Chinese Americans from Los Angeles declare themselves to be members of a hitherto unheard-of Black-African nation. It is safe to assume, I think, that their enunciations would be greeted, at best, with sneers. While there are apparently no limits to human imagination, there are patent limits to what can be imagined as a nation.

That is probably why the dominant response to the *hispano* myth among New Mexico’s Hispanics has been critical. Representative of the criticism are two letters to the editor which appeared in the Los Angeles Times in 2000. The letters were written in response to an article by José Cárdenas (“Roots and Reality,” 25 January 2000) describing a project launched by some Latinos who had formed a genealogical society whose aim was to research their Spanish roots. Jerry Pusey from Oceanside wrote: “Wonderful article and a lesson to all of us about wanting to be something we’re not or in forgetting that part of us that isn’t fashionable” (qtd in Nieto-Phillips 2004: 207). In a similar vein, Steven Valdivia from Albuquerque commented: “Thank you for an enlightening article. I am a Valdivia who argues with others here in New Mexico about the lineage issue. I tell them their ancestors would have had to fly here on a 747 more than 400 years ago to escape mixing bloodlines with so-called Mexicans. Your article is the education we all need” (qtd in Nieto-Phillips 2004: 207).

The above excerpts demonstrate how much depends on whether we view a nation in organicist, i.e. essentialist, or in constructionist terms. To an essentialist patriot the phrase “imagined community” smacks of an insult. Likewise, most critiques levelled against the “Castilian” myth of *Nuevo Mexico* stress its mythical, that is empirically unsustainable character. Yet, as one could argue, the ultimate logic behind Benedict Anderson’s controversial term is that, at the end of the day, what matters is the political praxis engendered by the collective imaginings rather than their truth value. The critics of *hispanidad* have beaten *hispanistas* at their own game, but that, in a way, is beside the point. The point is that New Mexico’s Spanish-American myth is doomed to failure because it does not cater to the psychological needs of an ever-growing number of Spanish-speaking Americans in the Southwest. Ever since the 1970s that myth has had a powerful rival in the US – the Chicano myth of Aztlán, which does not celebrate racial purity. It celebrates *mestizaje*.

Notes

- 1 It should be remembered that at the same time the Mexican Republic established official monetary rewards for Apache scalps, which were duly collected by bounty hunters, both Mexican and American. This ambiguity in the treatment of local Native American tribes reflected a major difference between Spanish and Anglo-American types of colonization. In general, Spanish colonial policies, and later those of the Mexican Republic, were – unlike those of the United States – assimilatory in spirit. Once the nomadic Indian hunters turned to farming and converted to Catholicism they were habitually regarded as fellow citizens. During the colonial period, for example, Hispanicized nomads were granted the status of *genizaros*, which, in turn, enabled them to procure land grants (cf. Swadesh 1974: 42–46).
- 2 Indeed, the opposite trend was the norm in Latin America. In 1821, San Martín, the liberator and subsequent national hero of Peru, decreed that, “in the future the aborigines shall not be called Indians or natives; they are children and citizens of Peru and they shall be known as Peruvians” (Lynch 1973: 276). A bold statement indeed which – though in a long run corroborated by subsequent developments of Peruvian national identity – had little grounding in the socio-cultural realities of the 1820s.
- 3 “Forced to forfeit its claim to Texas, Mexico also surrendered [in 1848] its entire northwest territory. In total, it was forced to give up 947,570 square miles of land, almost half its national territory. Yet despite its great expanse, less than 1 percent of the Mexican population had lived there. Those who did, however, became the first Mexican Americans” (Rodríguez 2008: 99).
- 4 That is why, Anderson argues, national governments (especially those of newly-formed nation-states) are as a rule insistent on establishing a dominant print-language that would work as a unifying agent: “Today [i.e. in 1983], the Thai government actively discourages attempts by foreign missionaries to provide its hill-tribe minorities with their own transcription-systems and to develop publications in their own languages: the same government is largely indifferent to what these minorities *speak* (2006: 45).
- 5 Because of the frequency and ferocity of Apache raids in Arizona, for example, “the impoverished Mexican aristocracy of Tucson welcomed the American annexation” (Officer 1960: 13). Gregory Rodríguez notes that, “In New Mexico [in the 1840s], chronic political instability caused some Mexicans to look with favor at the prospect of an American takeover. There had been a series of insurrections in the territory in the years leading up to the Mexican-American War. A governor was murdered, his successor was executed, and civic life was in disarray” (2008: 100).
- 6 Ernest Gellner writes: “Mankind is irreversibly committed to industrial society, and therefore to a society whose productive system is based on cumulative science and technology. [...] Agrarian society is no longer an option, for its restoration would simply condemn the great majority of mankind to death by starvation, not to mention dire and unacceptable poverty for the minority of survivors. [...] We do not properly understand the range of options available to industrial society, and perhaps we never shall; but we understand some of its essential concomitants. The kind of cultural homogeneity demanded by nationalism is one of them, and we had better make our peace with it” (2008: 38).
- 7 “Not surprisingly, the federalist opposition [to centralism] crystallized especially around peripheral state governments that had enjoyed enormous autonomy under the Constitution of 1824. Silver-rich Zacatecas refused to embrace centralism and was compelled only by threat of force, as General Santa Anna personally took command of a body of federal troops to end Zacatecas’s defiance. The states of Guerrero and Yucatán also resisted centralization. Coahuila and Texas followed closely along these same lines. [...] The dramatic floor debates, poignant letters, and legislative work during 1834–6 have left us a paper trail of the depth of this conflict that ultimately resulted in the separation of Texas from the Mexican Republic” (Reséndez 2006: 153).

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PIOTR ZAZULA is a poet, translator, and literary scholar, who obtained his Ph.D. in American literature from the University of Wrocław in 1997. He published two poetry volumes in Polish (*Sonet dla zakonnicy*, 1997, and *Lista cudów*, 2000) and numerous academic articles in English (published in Poland, Czech Republic, Germany, Austria, and Ukraine). In the years 1993-94 he was a Fulbright Visiting Scholar at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, where he did postgraduate research on contemporary Native American literature and local tribal cultures. His academic interests include contemporary American poetry (especially ecopoetry), Gnostic spirituality, political philosophy, and the ethnic cultures of the American Southwest.

Address: Dr. Piotr Zazula, ul. Czajkowskiego 65/2, 51-171 Wrocław, Poland. [email: piotr.zazula@op.pl]