

A PUEBLO SOCIAL HISTORY

Kinship, Sodality, and Community
in the Northern Southwest

Introduction

When sixteenth-century Spanish explorers first set foot in what is now Arizona and New Mexico, they encountered people who lived in large multistory apartment buildings of stone and adobe enclosing communal plazas, or courtyards. The Spanish referred to these people as Pueblos (Spanish for “towns”), no doubt to distinguish them from the region’s rancheria dwellers and nomads. Classifying people by settlement pattern and architecture, the most visible of cultural expressions, may be a natural thing for explorers to do, but the label “Pueblo” glossed over considerable cultural variability. The people the Spanish called Pueblos spoke at least seven mutually unintelligible languages (six are still spoken today) from four different language families, and their linguistic diversity was mirrored in many of their social, economic, and religious practices and institutions. They were not, in other words, a monolithic culture, but several different peoples who shared cultural practices.

Despite the diversity of their origins, the people we still call Pueblos have lived side by side in the northern Southwest for at least two thousand years. During that time, their societies have been shaped by an often harsh environment, a long history of mutual interaction, and Euroamerican conquest and colonization. The Pueblos have also shared more than a century of scrutiny by anthropologists, archaeologists,

and historians attempting to sort out and explain their convergent histories. It is likely that no other indigenous group in the world has been studied more intensively than the Pueblo peoples, unless the Pueblos' Navajo neighbors have earned that dubious distinction.

Ethnographic research among the Pueblos began in earnest in the second half of the 1800s and was particularly intense during the early 1900s, so by the middle of the twentieth century, several influential syntheses of Pueblo culture were available (Dozier 1970a; Eggan 1950; Parsons 1939; Spicer 1962). Meanwhile, a cadre of historians projected the story of the Pueblos back to encompass more than four hundred years of Euroamerican contact and conquest (Hackett 1942; Hammond and Rey 1940, 1953; Kessell 1979; Winship 1896). These historical narratives, assembled mostly from documents in the archives of New Mexico, Mexico, and Spain, were pushed back to the first millennium BC and beyond by archaeologists, who found an abundant and well-preserved material record of prehispanic Pueblo life. The wealth of data on Pueblo culture, from three thousand years ago to the present day, provides an ideal laboratory for the study of culture change. Few places in the world provide so much historical information, over so many centuries, on cultures that thrive today.

This book is about Pueblo social history—the development of Pueblo social, ceremonial, and political institutions—from the forager-farmer boundary to the beginning of the historical period. Until now, the traditional division of labor between archaeology (the study of ancient cultures) and ethnology (the study of living ones) has prevented the writing of an effective social history of the Pueblos. Ethnographers have constructed hypothetical social histories based mostly on comparative ethnographic data. More often than not, archaeologists have accepted those ethnographic narratives at face value. Ethnographers have rarely used archaeological data systematically in their reconstructions, and archaeologists have rarely challenged—and some have barely read—the ethnographic narratives, and then only if the contradictory archaeological evidence was overwhelming. As the disciplines of ethnology and archaeology drifted further apart in this postmodern era, the crack through which Pueblo social history had fallen became a chasm. I attempt to extricate Pueblo social history from the abyss by reuniting the two disciplines, if only for the scope and duration of this study. This narrowly focused work cannot restore the former alliances of American anthropology, but if there is any place in the world where disciplinary differences should be reconciled for the sake of the subject matter, it is the Pueblo Southwest.

When I first began work on this book, I decided to embrace Jerrold Levy's (1994a:242) call to "revivify old research agendas" and take up questions and issues that fascinated an earlier generation of Pueblo ethnographers. What are the differences between the Eastern and Western Pueblos, and how did those differences evolve? Is the Keresan bridge a declining or emerging Crow system?¹ What are Eastern Pueblo moieties, and when and why did they form? When and why did matrilineal descent groups form? Why did ritual sodalities appear, and what was the timing

of their emergence? Where did the katsina cult originate,² and why did it spread so rapidly through the Pueblo world? Why are the Pueblos so deeply invested in communal religion and ritual performance? There was a time early in the discipline's history when archaeologists and ethnographers discussed these questions and collaborated to find answers, but such collaborations rarely take place today.

Finding someone with whom to collaborate is part of the problem. Barely a handful of ethnologists work in the Pueblo region today, even as the ranks of Pueblo archaeologists have swelled into the hundreds. The inevitable archaeological specialization, along with the equally inevitable explosion in technical literature, means that archaeologists from one region of the Ancestral Pueblo world rarely keep up with the literature from adjacent regions. Scholars also specialize in one period of Pueblo prehistory while barely scanning the literature of other periods. Few archaeologists, even those working in the late prehistoric and protohistoric periods, are conversant with the ethnographic literature beyond the classic syntheses by Eggan (1950), Dozier (1970a), and a few others (although this seems to be changing).

When archaeologists explore ethnographies, it is usually to search for comparative analogies to serve as aids in interpreting the past. The method I use is explicitly historical rather than comparative; I employ the Pueblo ethnographies as historical destinations rather than as sources for comparative analogies. My goal is to bring data from archaeology to bear on questions such as those posed above and, by doing so, to shed light on some venerable archaeological puzzles. There are undoubtedly some circular traps in the method I propose, but I believe that working back and forth between present and past, and back again, is the most productive way to proceed—especially when dealing with practices and institutions that leave behind so little in the way of tangible material remains. In this approach, the most plausible social narratives of the past are those that contribute most to our understanding of social variability in the present.

Connecting the Pueblo present and past is problematic. Many archaeologists have concluded that Euroamerican control of the Southwest over the past four hundred years has so altered Pueblo social, ceremonial, and political organizations, primarily through depopulation and forced assimilation, that modern Pueblo organizations are shadows of their former selves. Ethnographers of the Pueblos have embraced similar assumptions. The canonical explanation of ethnographic differences and similarities proposed by Fred Eggan (1950) assumed that the principal east-west axis of Pueblo social-ceremonial-political variability mostly dates to the past four hundred years as Spanish assimilation programs that succeeded on the Rio Grande were largely rejected by the Pueblos to the west. Although Eggan's acculturation model has been challenged in the ethnological literature (e.g., Fox 1967b), its effect on archaeological research agendas has been profound. To this day, archaeologists pay scant attention to Eastern Pueblo social-political organizations because it is assumed that they have been "tainted" by the adoption of Spanish marriage practices and social-political institutions.

I will have more to say about historical disjunction in subsequent chapters, but here I must say that, for me, the most startling thing about the Pueblos is that many of their traditional cultural practices, especially in the more conservative realms of kinship and religion, have been preserved despite four hundred years of unrelenting attempts to “modernize” them. The automobile, television, and universal education may eventually achieve what forced assimilation programs failed to do, but for now—and certainly when most of the historical ethnographies were being compiled, before villages were electrified and television antennas sprouted from every rooftop—most Pueblo communities are still enacting centuries-old religious traditions and observing kinship practices whose roots may stretch back nearly two millennia.

Archaeologists spend their professional lives studying ancient worlds, but we live in the modern world and view the past as if from a speeding car. It is easy for us to forget, if we ever knew, that the pace of change can be vastly different in small, kin-based societies and that we, in fact, are the “other.” When we see Western Pueblo butterfly hair whorls (still in common use in the first half of the twentieth century and still seen on ceremonial occasions today) depicted in a rock art panel executed nearly 2,000 years ago or on a ceramic bowl fired 1,300 years ago, we might stand in awe, but we should not be surprised. Hair whorls were worn by marriage-eligible maidens. When land, houses, and rank-validating ceremonies are passed through lines of mothers and daughters, the time when a girl is ready to perpetuate the lineage is an important occasion in the life of the community. Such a time is bound to be celebrated in stories, communal rituals, and visual art. This is not to say that things never changed in the past. We must be careful not to fall prey to a previous generation’s assumption that prehistory is about behavioral fixity and cultural stasis. Change is always happening because the agents of change, behaviorally modern humans, are always challenging old behaviors and generating new ones. Archaeologists must be careful, however, not to project our own experiences of change on non-industrial cultures of the past or the present.

My thesis, briefly stated, is that Pueblo social history involved the interaction of two species of nonresidential organizations: corporate kinship groups and ritual associations, or sodalities. If we can understand how and why these two kinds of organization emerged and how they interacted, contested, and negotiated common social, economic, and political domains over the past 1,500 years, we should be able to explain much about the Pueblo social practices and institutions that have survived into modern times. Processes we see playing out in the social history of the Pueblos have been repeated in cultures the world over as organizations based on kinship principles yielded to a variety of non-kinship organizations. Groupings based on kinship principles were broken up, their powers and prerogatives challenged and eventually usurped, until kinship was replaced as the central organizing principle of most cultures and communities. In the words of Robin Fox (1993:x), “the war between kinship and state, between kinship and contract, and between kinship and rampant individualism, is one of the great movers of history; perhaps more so than

the war between the classes or between the colonizers and the third world. Indeed, it may well encompass these.” In the case of Pueblo social history, I would amend Fox’s list to include the war between kinship and ritual association. Kinship’s contest with competing organizations and ideologies is an old story, and a version of that story played out in Pueblo social history—and its effects, arguably, still shape Pueblo social practices today.

This is not to say that the environment, conflict, exchange, migration, new technologies and foodways, and contact with other peoples, among many other things that archaeologists study and debate, were not important factors in the shaping of Pueblo society. No single theory of cultural process will ever explain how Pueblo societies came to be what they are. The historical contingencies that hung over every event in Pueblo history helped shape Pueblo social practices and institutions and are an essential part of the explanatory narrative. History matters, which is why I devote the second part of this book to a detailed historical narrative. But processes that are repeated again and again in human history are profoundly important as well. If our goal is to explain social history, as opposed to merely describing it, we need to be cognizant of these recurrent processes. We need to understand when and why they emerged and how they interacted through time against a backdrop of historical contingencies to influence the shape of contemporary cultures and communities.

In chapter 1, I present a brief history of ethnographic and archaeological research on the Pueblos, from the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century anthropologists to the postmodern approaches of recent years. I conclude the chapter with a plea for archaeologists to become, again, scholars of general kinship theory and the historical Pueblo ethnographies. In chapter 2, I lay some essential theoretical groundwork for understanding ethnographic Pueblo variability, by examining the two principal nonresidential organizations of the Pueblos—descent groups and sodalities—and how these two kinds of organization have interacted to influence the structure of Pueblo communities. Included in this chapter is an attempt at a jargon-free overview of descent theory, written primarily for archaeologists whose brief encounter with kinship as undergraduates may have convinced them to pursue a career in archaeology instead of cultural anthropology. In chapter 3, I present a summary of Pueblo ethnographic destinations and how ethnographic variability has been explained and an extended discussion of Eastern Pueblo moieties, which may be the most misunderstood of all Pueblo social-political institutions.

Chapter 4 begins the historical narrative by examining the evolution of corporate descent groups during the pithouse-to-pueblo transition. I describe how matrilineal organizations may have evolved to control scarce arable land resources during the eighth century and how the germ of ritual sodalities may have emerged as early sedentary villages formed in upland refugia during a regional drought. In chapter 5, I examine five centuries of social and political change in the core San Juan region of the northern Southwest, which culminated in the tenth- and eleventh-century Chaco

phenomenon that would restructure the social and political landscape of the Ancestral Pueblos. One of the goals of chapter 5 is to reframe Chaco as a historical process, as opposed to a cultural and historical singularity. In chapters 6 and 7, I examine the late prehistoric and protohistoric periods, the most dynamic periods of Pueblo social history, which set the stage for the emergence of the modern Pueblos. I explore the causes and consequences of depopulation on the Colorado Plateau between 1130 and 1300 and the appearance of social and ritual novelties in the late prehistoric period when the Pueblo population coalesced along the Rio Grande and the southern edge of the Colorado Plateau, and I challenge some of the standard explanations for the emergence of ethnographic Pueblo cultural variability. In the final chapter, I take the discussion of ritual-based political organizations beyond the Pueblo world and speculate about practices and institutions in other parts of the greater Southwest.

Before launching my small craft onto the vast sea of Pueblo social history, let me share a few thoughts about methods and ethics. Many early students of Pueblo culture observed Pueblo ceremonies and interviewed Pueblo community members and then published detailed accounts of what they saw and recorded in their journals, complete with illustrations of costumes, masks, altars, the interiors of kivas and society houses, various ritual paraphernalia, and so on. Pueblo community institutions are strongly theocratic, and the ritual knowledge that validates Pueblo authority structures is protected by multiple layers of internal and external secrecy. To publish detailed accounts of that secret knowledge is to undermine the moral authority of the institutions that integrate and help preserve Pueblo communities. With these facts in mind, I need to be clear from the outset about the kinds of information that are presented in this book and how that information was obtained.

This book is not a compendium of Pueblo ritual practices. I have never sought to acquire such knowledge, and what little I have gleaned over the years will never be published or shared in a classroom. That said, in a book on Pueblo social and political history, it is impossible to avoid approaching the boundaries and occasionally taking a sideways glance at secret ritual practices. This book expounds at some length on Pueblo ritual associations, especially how such groups may have first emerged, how they intersected and interacted with kin-based organizations early in their development, and how they functioned in the past and still function today to help organize and integrate Pueblo communities. Despite the focus on ritual organizations, however, there will be little mention in this book of the rituals that are performed, the liturgies that are memorized and recited, or the details of costuming, prayer, altar preparation, and so on. These details are not known to me and are entirely peripheral to this work's main focus, which is to explore how the various forms of Pueblo kinship and ritual organizations first emerged and how they evolved over 1,500 years to create some of the most resilient community organizations ever described by anthropologists.

This book was written because I am curious about the Puebloan social past and want to know how Pueblo social systems evolved over the millennia. But it was also

written because I think that a deeper understanding of the history of Pueblo social and political organizations may enhance our comparative understanding of cultural evolution and the construction of moral communities and sustainable lifeways. I believe that these insights can be explored and described with sensitivity, without publishing secrets or compromising bonds of trust and friendship, or else I would never have started down these paths.

All the information contained here has come from more than forty years of archaeological observations and reviews of the published and unpublished literature on Southwest history, prehistory, and ethnology. I was born and grew up in the Southwest, I have lived here my entire life except for a few sojourns in the east, and I have friendships with a number of Pueblo people, whose privacy I respect. The only Pueblo community members I consulted during the research leading up to this book were my anthropological mentors and colleagues Alfonso Ortiz and Edmund Ladd, both of whom have, sadly, passed on. I asked no other Pueblo friends or acquaintances any questions about their native cultures and communities unless we happened to be collaborating on a publication, an education program, or a museum exhibition. If observations or insights were occasionally volunteered, they did not get recorded in my journals, and they do not appear in this book. This rule I have strictly followed throughout my research and writing. I hope that if this book contains any errors, as it surely must, or insights, as I hope it does, my friends can forgive me for both.