

## [Toruño Tanghetti on Hackel, 'Alta California: Peoples in Motion, Identities in Formation'](#)

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**Steven W. Hackel, ed.** *Alta California: Peoples in Motion, Identities in Formation*. Berkeley: Published for Huntington-USC Institute on California and the West by University of California Press, Berkeley, California, and Huntington Library, San Marino, California, 2010. vii + 357 pp. \$55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-87328-242-0.

**Reviewed by** Rosamaria Toruño Tanghetti (Sacramento City College) **Published on** H-Borderlands (August, 2012) **Commissioned by** Benjamin H. Johnson

In the fall of 2006, a group of distinguished scholars gathered at the Huntington Library in San Marino, California, to mark the launching of an Internet version of the magisterial California mission database, the Early California Population Project. Addressing a variety of topics ranging from Franciscan and Indian identity to politics, genetics, and historiography, these scholars revealed some of the new directions recently charted in California and borderlands history. As editor and historian Steve W. Hackel mentioned, “motion and identity” emerged as the two major themes in the papers presented there. It is indeed fortuitous that he assembled the longer, revised versions of these conference papers to produce his aptly titled *Alta California: People in Motion, Identities in Formation, 1769-1850*.

Collectively the essays serve as a prism that refracts the many ways scholars conceptualize “identity” as it relates to California and borderlands history. Hackel deftly organized the essays chronologically and thematically in four separate sections. Part 1, “Franciscan Identity in the Eighteenth-Century Borderlands,” features two excellent essays on Franciscan missionaries in Alta California and late colonial Sonora by Rose Marie Beebe, Robert M Senkewicz, and José Refugio de la Torre Curiel. These authors explore the personal and institutional sources of identity that informed missionaries’ attitudes and beliefs, and their relationships not only with indigenous peoples but also fellow missionaries, Spanish colonial settlers, and Spanish civil officials. Beebe and Senkewicz’s focus on the controversial Junípero Serra sheds a “more nuanced light” on the father president of the California missions and, by extension, other Franciscans with an eye toward moving “beyond celebration or condemnation” of this man (p. 17). In “What They Brought: The Alta California Franciscans before 1769,” Beebe and Senkewicz depict a multidimensional Serra by examining his life experiences in Mallorca, Mexico City, the Sierra Gorda, and Baja California. This is an essay about antecedents. Understanding the experiences and events that shaped Serra in the years before he and Gaspar de Portolá led the Sacred Expedition to Alta California in 1769 might not persuade Serra detractors to change their views on this man. But knowing that as Inquisition investigator in Mallorca in the 1740s Serra became skeptical of the sincerity of *conversos* (Jews who converted to Catholicism), helps explain his strict policy against allowing indigenous religious beliefs and practices to persist in Alta California’s missions. What Serra brought to Alta California was a deep-seated intolerance for any evidence of converts’ half-hearted acceptance of the one true religion. Not all missionaries shared this character trait. Indeed, as Beebe and Senkewicz pointedly demonstrate, not all Franciscans were of one mind.

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This, too, is one of the points that José Refugio de la Torre Curiel makes in his essay, "Franciscan Missionaries in Late Colonial Sonora: Five Decades of Change and Conflict," where he focuses on the group identity of three generations of Queretán missionaries (friars from the Apostolic College of Querétaro) between 1768 and the early nineteenth century. Acknowledging thematic similarity between the previous essay on Serra and his, Refugio de la Torre Curiel states that Queretán "Franciscans confronted their new challenges while deeply rooted in their past experiences" (p. 64). In this case, the decades-long conflict amongst these Franciscans stemmed from generational differences over how they understood their religious mission. Were they to link proselytization with complete control of all aspects of indigenous peoples' lives, as the first two generations of friars generally believed? Or, as the third generation of friars thought, was their work solely confined to transforming the indigenous peoples of Sonora into practicing Catholics? Refugio de la Torre Curiel does well to situate his story within the larger historical context of the Bourbon reforms. The changes implemented under Charles III designed to subordinate church to state had profound consequences throughout late colonial Spanish America, not the least of which was the expulsion of the Jesuits from the continent in 1767. And, the acceptance by some of Enlightenment ideas underpinning Bourbon reforms partially explains the Franciscans' generational conflict. Refugio de la Torre Curiel demonstrates how administrative changes imposed by Commandant General Pedro de Nava in the late 1780s regarding mission labor and the division of communal lands laid bare the competing visions even of first- and second-generation Queretán missionaries over the degree and kind of control they would exert over mission temporalities.

Both these essays go a long way toward complicating the facile designation of "Franciscans." By focusing on individual, institutional, and generational sources of identity Beebe, Senkewicz, and Refugio de la Torre indeed "shed a more nuanced light" on these men and on the complex social interplay of missionaries, crown officials, and indigenous peoples in late colonial New Spain.

A secondary concern of the preceding essays, indigenous people take center stage in part 2. "After the Village: Indian Identity in Alta California" contains two fascinating essays by Lisbeth Haas and James A. Sandos. Both authors admirably tackle the challenging task of accessing the voices of indigenous Californians, voices barely audible in Spanish and Mexican archival records. Haas and Sandos illuminate how California mission neophytes managed to "exert certain forms of power and authority" even as their indigenous forms of political organization gave way under colonialism (p. 80).

Drawing on her extensive research on identity and indigenous Californians, Haas's essay, "Raise Your Sword and I Will Eat You," focuses on a Luiseño Indian scholar named Pablo Tac, a neophyte from Mission San Luis Rey who traveled to Rome in 1834.[1] There, he studied Latin grammar, philosophy, rhetoric, and humanities, skills he drew on to write a Luiseño grammar and dictionary, a history of his people and their customs, Spaniards, colonialism, and political defeat. As Haas argues, "Tac's history emphasized indigenous forms of power under colonialism and at the mission during the Mexican era" (p. 80). For example, Tac wrote on the ways indigenous people at the mission used dance to "access knowledge and power" (p. 99). According to Haas, "Dance offered a way for indigenous populations at the mission to continue to access power despite their defeat by the Spaniards" (p. 99). That the importance of dance to the indigenous people is rarely mentioned in Spanish colonial archives, as Haas states, attests to the importance of her work in bringing Tac's history to light. And yet, it is unclear exactly what kind of power mission Indians gained from dance

and how they deployed it to negotiate the circumstances of their lives. Despite Haas's impressive research, even Tac's writings are silent on some aspects of Indian subjectivity. A much stronger point regarding identity is that despite Pablo Tac's move to Rome--from which he never returned--and his transformation into a learned scholar, he never forgot who he was. His writing reveals the centrality of his ancestral land to his sense of self. As Haas demonstrates, he asserted indigenous ownership of the San Luis Rey mission lands, or Quechla, as Luiseños called their territory. In comparing Pablo Tac to other Indian writers, Haas places Tac amongst other Indian intellectuals who "mastered the content and form of colonial grammars and narrative form" and left a record of "their histories and language" (pp. 103-104). Lastly, as Haas writes, for Tac, "his writings ... were the basis of his views of identity" (p. 80).

Where Haas sees indigenous identity, authority, and power emanating from their writing and dance, James A. Sandos locates the source in music. His essay, "Identity Through Music: Choristers at Mission San Jose and San Juan Bautista," showcases the boon that the Early California Population Project (ECP) represents not just for early California historians, but also for genealogists, scholars, and others who desire access to the baptismal, marriage, and death records of California's missions. As Steve Hackel writes in his introduction, "the mission sacramental records speak to a colonial world that was in motion" (p. 5). Anyone who has reconstructed family and social networks using microfilm copies of the missions' sacramental registers will agree with Hackel and also recognize the challenge involved. Settlers, soldiers, and neophytes sometimes moved from mission to mission, making it difficult for historians to reconstruct individual life stories using sacramental registers. The ECP provides much easier access to this wealth of information. And yet, one must marvel at Sandos's intensive labor in recreating the social world of mission Indian choristers with this new, more accessible electronic population database.

Where Pablo Tac revealed his identity through his scholarship and writing, Aniceto Abendaño, Pedro Juan, José Antonio, Gaudiosa, and other mission choristers revealed theirs through music. According to Sandos, they saw their "musical roles and abilities" as "important to their identity" (p. 113). Moreover, they drew on their native musical tradition, a source of pride, as they adapted to the musical instruments and styles introduced by the Franciscans. As musicians, mission Indians gained status. And nowhere are the benefits of the ECP clearer than where Sandos skillfully uses the data therein to support this point. At Mission San José, for example, Sandos found that musicians--instrumentalists and singers in the choir--served as baptismal godparents and marriage witnesses with much greater frequency than fellow non-musician neophytes. Sandos suggests that mission residents perceived choristers as a mission elite, who could facilitate navigation "within the mission's social and religious structure" (p. 115).

If, as Sandos demonstrates, the ECP greatly facilitates tracing life stories and reconstructing family and social networks, it also personalizes the many thousands of indigenous Californians who lived and labored in the missions. Not only can we know these individuals by their baptismal Spanish names--Pedro Alcántara, Lucas, Quintín--but also, when the recording friar noted, by their Indian names--Pucules, Yecpac, Vegess. And what are names if not one of the fundamental markers of identity?

Part 3 delves into national and casta identities of Alta California's settler population. Titled "Borderland Identities of Soldiers and Settlers," this section features two insightful essays by

California scholars Louise Pubols and co-authors John R. Johnson and Joseph G. Lorenz.

With characteristic elegance and a touch of humor thrown in, Louise Pubols examines the forging of national identities among the non-indigenous residents of Alta California from the end of Spanish colonial rule through the early years of republican Mexico. In "Becoming Californio: Jokes, Broadsides, and a Slap in the Face," Pubols persuasively demonstrates that "frontier spaces can foster especially fluid and contingent identities" (p. 131). For Mexican officials, fostering *mexicanidad* in the remote northwestern frontier was a challenge. A number of factors got in the way; Alta California's heterogeneous population--"divided along ethnic, class, and corporate lines" and lacking a full-fledged Creole society--fostered competing allegiances that worked against this nationalist goal (p. 132). The province's physical isolation, further exacerbated in 1781 when Quechán Indians blocked the land route from Sonora across the Colorado River, complicated matters even more.

Pubols ably develops her thesis on "becoming Californio" by drawing on her expertise in Mexican political history.[2] She contextualizes her argument within the broader narrative of early national Mexican history and thus links California to Greater Mexico. Beset by violent struggles between federalists and centralists, far off central Mexico's upheavals nonetheless reverberated in frontier California. She situates a nascent Californio identity in the years immediately following Mexican independence, when Mexican representatives arrived in Alta California to implement their nationalist program. California's native sons resented being viewed as foreigners and "uneducated rubes" (p. 141). And in seeking to distinguish themselves from these interlopers, native sons claimed their regional Californio identity over their Mexican national one. Pubols marshals a wealth of evidence to argue the various ways in which Californios asserted their regional identities and loyalties. Using words *mi país* or *mi suelo* (my country, my ground), native sons and daughters meant "California, not Mexico" (p. 146). The desire by native sons for local political control during these tumultuous years did little to foster loyalty to the nation. Indeed, throughout Mexico during this period, loyalty to the *patria chica* unleashed powerful centrifugal forces that threatened to dismember the young nation.[3] The politics of the early Mexican republic and the desire by California's native sons for local political control rendered the territory a "deeply contested space" where residents debated what it "meant to be Spanish, Mexican, or Californio" (p. 148).

If, as Pubols convincingly demonstrates, biology had nothing to do with Californio identity, it also had no bearing on the *casta* identities of Spanish colonial settlers, a point that anthropologists John R. Johnson and Joseph G. Lorenz reaffirm in their essay, "Genetics and the *Castas* of Colonial California." Before Alta California's colonists saw themselves as Californios, they used the term *gente de razón*, meaning "people of reason," to differentiate themselves from the indigenous population. Mission sacramental registers attest to this self-referential term by Spanish colonials who represented an assortment of *casta* identities, such as *español*, *mestizo*, and *mulato*. The centuries-long process in Spanish America of sexual mixing--*mestizaje*--between Indians, Spanish, and Africans gave rise to an elaborate nomenclature that identified people within a racialized hierarchy. Johnson and Lorenz conclude that in colonial California, "as long as a person could achieve the cultural status of being *de razón*, biological inheritance became unimportant in defining social identity" (p. 157).

These authors reveal the benefits of using new techniques of an emerging field within molecular anthropology, genetic genealogy, to underscore the social construction of identities. In particular, they compared the mitochondrial DNA evidence from 179 study participants to their research of

mission sacramental records to clarify the genetic origins of the settlers who arrived in California before 1790. Descendants of California's early Spanish colonial families, and other Mexican Americans participated in this study. Johnson and Lorenz explain the importance of mitochondrial DNA analysis in identifying forebears. Because m-DNA is "inherited only from one's mother," "it is unaffected by the mixing of chromosomes that results from mestizaje" (p. 161).

Johnson and Lorenz's genetic study reveals that regardless of the *casta* identity noted in the 1790 census for Spanish California women, more than 80 percent of these descended from indigenous lineages from Mexico. In effect, they argue that "social identity ... did not necessarily reflect actual ancestry" (p. 182). The importance of culture and not blood, in the Spanish American context then, explains how a woman with indigenous ancestry a few generations removed could identify as *española*. Furthermore, as these authors suggest, in frontier Alta California *casta* identities became less important. Colonists "constructed a *gente de razón* social identity that eclipsed the old *casta* distinctions of their homeland" (p. 183). *Casta* differences amongst the settlers receded as they collectively sought to establish social distance from indigenous Californians.

The three essays that comprise part 4, "The Spanish Borderlands: Comparing National Perspectives," shift readers' attention to broader historiographic and regional perspectives. In his deeply satisfying "Fantasy Heritage: California's Historical Identities and the Professional Empire of Herbert E. Bolton," Albert L. Hurtado illuminates how the historical narratives we construct to give meaning to the past are the "most fruitful" sources of human identity (p. 197). Historical narratives indeed are powerful personal and national sources of identity, which is precisely why they are so fiercely contested, as Hurtado demonstrates.

Hurtado does this by skillfully revealing how prominent Spanish borderlands historian Herbert E. Bolton reoriented the Anglo-centric narrative of American history.[4] As Hurtado states, Bolton "intended to realign American history with the facts that he had unearthed in Mexican and Spanish archives" in order to portray "U.S. history in the larger context of the history of the Americas," a historical process, as Bolton saw it, spearheaded by Spain (p. 198). At the University of California, Berkeley, in the early twentieth century, Bolton indefatigably built an academic empire by training scores of graduate students. To do this, Bolton "needed money and allies" (p. 203). The Native Sons of the Golden West provided both. But not without strings attached. This fraternal organization founded in 1875 had a different narrative of California history. Their heroes were not the conquistadors and Franciscan missionaries of Spanish colonialism, but the forty-niners of the gold rush era. Hurtado reveals the delicate dance Bolton had to perform in asking the Native Sons for money while not offending the Anglo-centric sensibilities of some of its members who often objected to funding research on Spanish California. As Hurtado claims, the gold rush era was "central to the Native Son's self-image" (p. 203). Though Bolton had admirers in the Native Sons, internal organizational conflicts over funding threatened to end or limit graduate fellowships. In times like these Bolton mollified the Native Sons by highlighting all the scholarship on Anglo and gold rush history his students were producing. Competing visions of California's past, then, found expression not only in arguments over graduate funding but also in the scholarship produced at Berkeley under Bolton's watch.

If anyone believes that historians' interest in "identity" is a recent phenomenon, David J. Weber's historiographical tour de force is a necessary corrective. His essay, "A New Borderlands

Historiography: Constructing and Negotiating the Boundaries of Identity,” draws readers’ attention to how American scholars have dealt with the topic of identity in the history of New Mexico, another borderland of the Spanish and Mexican periods. While the early practitioners of borderlands history did not use the term “identity,” they were nonetheless interested in the “characteristics of groups or individuals. But rather than use the word “identity,” Weber informs, “they used expressions like regional or national character, character traits, or the word culture” (p. 215). Furthermore, first-generation borderlands scholars--Herbert E. Bolton, John Francis Bannon, Oakah Jones, to name a few--and Mexican scholars such as Woodrow Borah and Enrique Florescano, have “long described ‘identities in formation’ (the subject of this volume), without using the word identity” (p. 218). They saw “character as a fluid state that changes or adapts to physical and social environments” (p. 218).

Weber credits anthropologists Edward Spicer, William Merrill, and Frederick Barth with influencing how more recent borderlands historians think of identity. According to Merrill, as Weber quotes, “identity is, in essence ... who we think we are and who others think we are.... [I]dentity is the product of the interplay between these insider and outsider perspectives” (p. 219). Thus, the current generation is more concerned with understanding how people of the past understood themselves and their worlds and why. In addition, Barth’s work on ethnic identities informs historians’ concern with how individuals and groups construct, negotiate, and maintain identities.

Weber’s authoritative discussion of work by current scholars such as Ramón Gutiérrez, Ana Alonso, Ross Frank, Gary Clayton Anderson, James Brooks, Andrés Reséndez, and Juliana Barr underscores how this recent work builds on earlier scholarship as it reveals new ways to think about identities. “Recent writers,” Weber asserts, see identities as “not simply shaped by one’s origins and slowly modified by one’s new physical and social environments,” but as “situational, fluid, and multiple” (p. 224). Why, as this volume reveals (and Weber asks), are scholars so concerned with identity? Simply: because it matters. For example, Weber reveals the political uses of identity in his discussion of *The Language of Blood: The Making of Spanish-American Identity in New Mexico, 1880s-1930s* by John Nieto-Phillips (2004). The creation of a Spanish fantasy heritage at the end of the nineteenth century served Anglo American political goals well. New Mexican Anglos seeking admission to the Union as a state believed their chances better if Congress perceived the territory’s Hispanic residents as Spanish rather than Mexican.

Weber ends with a discussion on how the linguistic turn, influential beginning in the mid-1980s, resulted in a greater self-awareness by borderlands historians about the “role that they play in constructing and negotiating identities” (p. 228). And he provocatively suggests that this new self-awareness may cause historians to forsake the word “identity” as we discover new words to analyze and think about the “multiple forces that have shaped, and continue to shape, the construction and negotiation of identities” (p. 229).

Hackel’s finely edited volume concludes with an impressive essay by historian Sylvia L. Hilton. In “Identities and the Usable Pasts of Colonial Borderlands: Spanish Historians and the North Pacific Frontiers of the Spanish Empire,” Hilton discusses her exhaustive analysis of six hundred individual scholarly works on the Spanish empire’s far-flung North Pacific frontier published in Spain between the mid-eighteenth century and 2008. She is concerned with the relationship between historiography and nationalism. And she asks, “What role do lost imperial peripheries play in ‘national’ identities and historiographies?” (p. 235). A very small one, she concludes. The empire’s North Pacific frontier and

its peoples “have existed only tenuously in Spanish historical consciousness, as once forming part of Spain’s imperial frontiers but having little if any impact on the formation of Spanish national identity in Spain itself” (p. 268). Hilton explains why the North Pacific frontier has generated such little interest amongst Spanish scholars: geographical remoteness, the perception that little economic or political benefit derived from this peripheral frontier, the inability of Spaniards to perceive a shared cultural identity with indigenous people, and the short time--1769-1821--when Spain occupied this region all contributed.

What, then, compelled scholars to study a region that “existed only tenuously in Spanish historical consciousness?” Nationalism, of course, but only partially, Hilton asserts. In truth, the interplay between national perspectives and professional, birthplace, or ethnic identities, she argues, inspired individual scholars to pursue a variety of topics. Hilton ably discusses the various themes--missions, maritime explorations, international rivalry, science, and ethnology--that reflect the national perspectives of various scholars. Furthermore, her comprehensive study reveals researchers’ identities, sometimes overlapping, to explain why certain scholars chose specific areas of inquiry. In considering professional identities, for example, she found that members of religious orders predominantly published studies on California’s missions and missionaries. Naval officers edited, compiled, and authored works on maritime expeditions and their protagonists. Mallorcan scholars were drawn to study their fellow Balearic islanders, missionaries such as Palóu, Payeras, and Serra. Hilton’s larger point is that an awareness of these professional, birthplace, and ethnic identities will caution against perceiving this body of Spanish scholarship as solely reflective of a “single national perspective.” Further, she links her analysis to the overarching theme of this volume when she suggests that “historiography, like many other human endeavors, may simultaneously reflect and serve multiple individual as well as collective interests and identities” (p. 266).

Steve W. Hackel is to be commended for assembling these insightful essays by leading scholars of California and borderlands history that illuminate the myriad ways in which scholars think and write about identity. Instructed by Hackel, no doubt, many authors referenced the work of their fellow contributors in their essays. In so doing, these essays replicate the lively and convivial intellectual exchange between presenters and audience enjoyed by people fortunate enough to have attended the Huntington Library conference. Readers interested in glimpsing the direction of future studies of California’s past are well advised to begin here.

#### Notes

[1]. Lisbeth Haas, *Conquests and Historical Identities in California, 1769-1936* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); *Pablo Tac, Indigenous Scholar: Writing on Luiseño Language and Colonial History, c. 1840* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

[2]. Louise Pubols, *The Father of All: The de la Guerra Family, Power, Patriarchy in Mexican California* (Berkeley: University of California Press for the Huntington-USC Institute on California and the West, 2009).

[3]. Michael C. Meyer, William L. Sherman, Susan M. Deeds, *The Course of Mexican History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[4]. For a fuller discussion on Bolton, see Albert Hurtado, *Herbert Eugene Bolton: Historian of the American Borderlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

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