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SANTA CRUZ

**BY LAND AND BY SEA: INDIGENEITY, MESTIZAJE, AND
NATIONALISM AT THE MEXICAN PACIFIC BORDERLANDS, 1750-1934**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

HISTORY

with an emphasis in LATIN AMERICAN AND LATINO STUDIES

by

Priscilla M. Martínez

September 2023

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ABSTRACT

“By Land and By Sea: Indigeneity, *Mestizaje*, and Nationalism in the Mexican Pacific Borderlands, 1750-1934”

By Priscilla M. Martínez

This dissertation explores the emergence and significance of Indigenous waterway sovereignty in the Mexican Pacific borderlands from 1750 to 1934. By breaking away from traditional perspectives, this study evaluates how Indigenous groups leveraged waterways and maritime spaces to oppose European, Mexican, and American forces. It illuminates the potency of waterways as reservoirs of power, casting light on the crucial role of Indigenous water sovereignty in rebuffing external domination. By resisting the enforcement of terrestrial borders, Indigenous-controlled waterways emphasized power disparities in the borderlands, illustrating the malleability and adaptability of racial categories in the late-colonial and early national phases in the Sonora and Baja California-US borderlands.

“By Land and By Sea” scrutinizes the legislative and political infrastructures guiding Indigenous actions and explores the aftermath of Indigenous maritime jurisdiction on the formation of Indigenous-Mexican *mestizaje* and racial undertakings of American and Mexican societies gleaned from historical narratives, archival sources, and oral histories, unveiling patterns of racial formation, power dynamics, and struggles for autonomy in the borderlands. The dissertation emphasizes the resilience and agency of Indigenous, Mexican *mestizo*, and Chinese

Mexican communities in the Mexican Pacific borderlands, emphasizing their resistance against national politics.

“By Land and By Sea” argues that Indigenous communities’ control of waterways was pivotal in linking disparate environments, populations, and economies, countering the imposition of terrestrial political boundaries in the Mexican Pacific region. By documenting the experiences of Indigenous communities in these regions over almost two centuries of societal shift, the dissertation provides a nuanced interpretation of borderlands history within a settler colonial context. The dissertation demarcates strategic geographical movements, fluid intra-tribal boundaries, and instances of Indigenous-Spanish cooperation, highlighting the co-existence of multiple sovereignties.

“By Land and By Sea” broadens our understanding of the region by emphasizing the significance of Indigenous waterway sovereignty. It underlines the essential role of waterways in linking communities, contesting political borders, and shaping resistance strategies. The dissertation also enriches our understanding of the Mexican Pacific borderlands, casting light on the complexity of power dynamics and the agency of diverse communities in their struggle for autonomy.

DEDICATION

To my grandparents, Andrea, Armando, Josefina, and Rodolfo, whose love, choices, sacrifices, and work ethic guided me to where I am today.

To my parents, Carlos and Maricela, who have loved, supported, and encouraged me without condition. You are my constants. Everything I am is because of you, and I love you both with my whole heart.

To my tia Laura, who always encouraged me to push past the boundaries I set for myself and seize my dreams.

To everyone who has ever felt like their life stories do not matter in the great scheme of things, they do. You are the true makers of history.

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This dissertation was truly a collective labor of love and community. I would first and foremost like to thank my parents Carlos and Maricela (née Ramirez) Martínez for their unconditional love and financial support from the moment I was born to this point. Growing up, my parents always fostered my intellectual curiosity, my love of reading, and were convinced I was destined to be a writer. I am proud to say that I am the granddaughter of migrant farmworkers in South Texas. My parents also worked the fields across the United States until they were in their early twenties. The Chicana/o/x Movement of the late-1960s and 1970s opened educational pathways for a generation of ethnic Mexican students like my parents that afforded them the opportunity to pursue higher education. In tandem with their strong work ethic, my mother became a beautician and business owner, while my father became a businessman and a lawyer with his own practice. Growing up, my grandparents—Armando, Andrea, Josefina, and Rodolfo—always instilled in me the value and power of an education. They told me that I could be anything I wanted to be, but that I had to start with a solid educational foundation so that the doors that had been closed to them on the pretense of a lack of formal education could not be levied against me. As I grew older, my parents built on this wisdom while also giving me the space to pursue my own academic interests to my heart’s content, which was not always easy as they fielded countless questions from family and acquaintances asking what exactly their daughter was up to in California. Even though my parents

might not have always understood my choices, they still encouraged me enthusiastically and trusted that I would come out the other side of this PhD program. I cannot thank them enough for their, often, blind faith that made this achievement even possible. I love you both with all my heart and I hope to continue to make you proud. Thank you to my brother Andrew for constantly checking in with me to see how I was doing. And, honestly, thank you for getting married and having offspring to distract my very traditional extended Mexican family from inquiring too much about the “big paper” that I had been working on for years. You have my undying loyalty for that alone. Thank you to my extended Ramirez and Martinez families for always encouraging me and saying you were proud of me even though I could see your eyes glaze over in real time as I explained my research. I love you all.

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I am eternally grateful for your efforts and support. You are not only my mentor but my family. I look forward to this next stage in our relationship.

I am also incredibly grateful to my committee members for their constant encouragement and support. Thank you to Dr. Catherine “Kate” Jones for helping me position and conceptualize of the long nineteenth century in my work. Our independent study during my second year of course work was such a foundational moment in my studies and in the conceptualization of my dissertation. Thank you for inviting me into your home to share a cup of tea and talk through some of the big questions of the nineteenth century. Thank you to Dr. Amy Lonetree for your constant reassurance and intellectual support throughout the years. Your “Critical Conversation in Native American History” seminar challenged me to push against the traditional containers of history and helped me step into the role of a scholar and create my own frames that reflected the narratives I saw in my sources. Our work together in HIS 9: Introduction to Native American History and our talks outside the classroom also pushed me to rethink historical narratives and taught me how to engage with Indigenous worldviews and Native sources in my own work. Thank you to Dr. Gabriela Arredondo for your unwavering encouragement and ever-present cheer throughout the years. Your mentorship and professional wisdom has proved invaluable to me. Our conversations and my coursework with the Latin American and Latino Studies department over the years have shown me that disciplinary divisions are arbitrary and often of our own making. History, like our human experience, is

fluid, messy, and inherently imperfect, and that we are all the better for it. Thank you for periodically reminding me of that throughout my project.

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moments. I will always support my local library. Reading is fundamental to understanding the human condition and started me on the path to higher education. We must continue to protect an individual—any individual’s—access to free books. Thank you to everyone who has helped me along my journey both named here and not. From the bottom of my heart, *muchisimos gracias por todo su ayuda y te amo mucho.*

CHAPTER ONE

Positioning the Mexican Pacific Borderlands

When, in 1983, Frank Miller stood before the US Select Committee on Indian Affairs, he might have shared with the panel a deeper, more complex historical understanding of his people’s cultural identity. But, for Miller, the goal of the Senate hearing was to secure tribal lands for agricultural development for his people—the Cocopah of eastern, western, and northern Arizona. “With the addition of the land,” Miller implored, “we will have a chance to build for the future.”¹ Without unifying the Arizona Cocopah, Miller imagined only fracture and impoverishment for his people. While bringing together the Arizona Cocopah held merit, Miller’s idea of tribal unification did not account for the generational cross-border movements that sustained cultural practices and ensured economic survival with the Mexican Cucapá, the southern kin of the greater Cocopah community. The Cocopah-Cucapá community saw themselves as a transnational, semi-nomadic people with mastery over maritime and riverine territories, including the Rio Colorado River, the Gulf of California, and the Pacific Ocean. Despite their transnational history and present-day cross-border practices, Miller’s idea of a reunified Arizona Cocopah replicated the American and Mexican state projects dividing the Arizona Cocopah from the Mexican Cucapá.

¹ Fred Miller, “Prepared Statement of Fred Miller, Sr. Chairman of the Cocopah Tribe,” Select Comm. on Indian Affairs, United States Senate, S. 2823, S. 2824, S.2862, at 25 (1984).

Had Miller conveyed a partially accurate history of the Cocopah, he would have further detailed the intricate ways the Mexican Cucapá and their Arizona kin were interdependent at the Senate hearing. Miller observed that while the Arizona Cocopah tribe productively used consolidated land, the tribal leader neglected to acknowledge the significant relationship between the Cocopah and the Cucapá concerning regional waterways. For centuries, the Cocopah-Cucapá exercised considerable power as anglers, navigators, and flash flood farmers in the Mexican Pacific. As the “people of the river,” the Cocopah-Cucapá had occupied the Rio Colorado Basin since immemorial. Yet despite centuries of colonial encounters and contact with state-makers and settlers in the region, the Cocopah claimed they “knew little of the government, just our own ways.”² This disconnection compounds further when considering how central the ancestral homeland of the Cocopah—Rio Colorado Basin, the Gulf of California where it drains, and the Pacific Ocean—was to Indigenous lifeways and Spanish colonial aspirations, Mexican industrial efforts, and the United States’ economic imaginations. While bodies of water are often used to mark the limits of power or delineate borders, the waterways of the Mexican Pacific region unified the region by connecting disparate environments, peoples, and economies. The Cocopah-Cucapá’s command over waterways in present-day Baja California Norte, Baja California Sur, southern California, western Sonora, and southwestern Arizona afforded them relative isolation from relocation, dispossession,

² Fred Miller, “Prepared Statement of Fred Miller, Sr. Chairman of the Cocopah Tribe,” Select Comm. on Indian Affairs, United States Senate, S. 2823, S. 2824, S.2862, at 25 (1984).

and constraints on territorial fishing rights. Some decades later, when Miller testified before the US Select Committee on Indian Affairs, he omitted the Cocopah-Cucapá's long-standing ability to convert water knowledge into tangible power in the Mexican Pacific that had unified and prefigured sovereignty at the borderlands. While Miller's testimony might appear isolated within the confines of Indigenous land claims, in reality, his community's legal argument harks back to nineteenth-century meanings of Indigeneity and Native political autonomy that undergird twentieth-century Mexican racial identities.

“By Land and By Sea” examines why Indigenous waterway sovereignty emerged at the Mexican Pacific borderlands in response to the imperial and national ambition to define what made up a border (e.g., land, waterway), who controlled what, and who crossed those borders. It asks why Indigenous people used waterways and maritime spaces to challenge European, Mexican, and American power and analyzes the various legal spaces of empire and the nation-state zones that emerged as Indigenous people responded to imperial and national politics and local conflicts. Importantly, “By Land and By Sea,” asks what Native command over maritime and riverine spaces can tell us about the American and Mexican racialization projects in the configuration of Indigenous-Mexican *mestizaje*. Within borderlands scholarship, historians use bodies of water to mark the limits of power and delineate borders.³

³ For more on Latin American frontiers, see Matthew Restall, *Beyond Black and Red: African-Native Relations in Colonial Latin America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005). Zacarías Moutoukias, *Contrabando y Control Colonial En El Siglo Xvii: Buenos Aires, El Atlántico y El Espacio Peruano* (Buenos Aires: El Centro Editor del América Latina, 1988). Alida Metcalf, *Family, and Frontier in*

Indigenous controlled waterways of the Mexican Pacific region, including present-day Baja California Norte, Baja California Sur, southern California, western Sonora, and southwestern Arizona, connected disparate environments, peoples, and economies defied the imposition of political land borders. Indigenous water sovereignty proved the critical limiting factor in the non-Native conquest of the greater Mexican Pacific region that centers on the dynamic role non-state actors wielded and the limits of colonization. Incorporating waterways as a basis of Indigenous authority reconfigures the multi-scalar contestations for power at the core of borderlands scholarship. It highlights the formation of race and racial categories in the late-colonial, early national borderlands that were more fluid and fungible than scholars previously thought. The modalities of water—from navigation to fishing to irrigation—proved critical to the settlement and colonization of the Mexican Pacific borderlands region as much as land. Within Baja California and Sonora, Indigenous authority over maritime territories and their extensive navigational knowledge posed a formidable challenge to the naval empires of European imperial powers. This

Colonial Brazil: Santana de Pamaiba, 1580-1822, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). Patricia Cerda Pincheria Hegerl, *Fronteras del Sur* (Berlin: Inst. Latinamericano de la Universidad Libre de Berlin, 1997). Washington Reyes Abadie, Oscar H. Bruschera, and Tabaré Melogno, *La Banda Oriental: pradera, frontera, puerto* (Montevideo: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 1965). For more on the historical emphasis of frontiers in American West history, see Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (1899; Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1966). Ray Allen Billington, *Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier* (New York: Macmillan, 1960). Reginald Horsman, *The Frontier in the Formative Years, 1783-1815*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1970). Ray Allen Billington, *America's Frontier Culture: Three Essays* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1973).

alternative account offers a distinct portrayal of Indigenous power and identity within the eventual US-Mexico borderlands. Yet, borderlands scholars privilege land-based social and political processes, thereby viewing the maritime movement and power exercised by Indigenous coastal people as tangential or unimportant to more extensive discussions on forming political borders.⁴ As a result, scholars' understanding of sovereignty remains asymmetrical, often eliding waterway geographies as forces that produced plural authorities.

“By Land and By Sea” uses the geographical framing of Mexican Pacific borderlands to represent the Pacific coast of Mexico’s western region which stretched from southern California to southern Arizona demarcated by the Colorado River system. This framing expands southward into Sonora’s riparian zones and littoral spaces along the Gulf of California across into the Baja Californian peninsula. Although the region in this dissertation is bound by Indigenous use of internal and coastal waterways, in the historiography and scholarship I am introducing this

⁴ See Herbert E. Bolton, *The Spanish Borderlands: A Chronicle of Old Florida and the Southwest* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1921). John Francis Bannon, *The Spanish Borderlands Frontier, 1513-1821* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974). Jay Gitlin, “On the Boundaries of Empire: Connecting the West to Its Imperial Past,” in *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America’s Western Past*, eds. William Cronon, George Miles, and Jay Gitlin (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992). For more on borderlands as a historical perspective, see Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aaron, “From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the People in Between in North American History,” *The American Historical Review* 104, no. 3 (June 1999): 814-841. Jeremy Adelman, *Frontier Development: Land, Labor, and Capital on the Wheatlands of Argentina and Canada, 1890-1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). Cynthia Radding, *Wandering Peoples: Colonialism, Ethnic Spaces, and Ecological Frontiers in Northwestern Mexico, 1700-1850* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

consideration to set it apart from Pacific Northwest and South Pacific historiographies. The usage of the Mexican State is referential in regards to modern-day geographical positioning and it also establishes a historical relationship between Native coastal communities and the eventual Mexican state. See Figure 1 for a Mexican Pacific borderlands that centers on internal and coastal waterscapes.



Figure 1: Map of the Mexican Pacific Borderlands. Drawn by the author.

Control over waterways and maritime spaces by the Kumeyaay-Diegueño, Cocopah, Mojaves, and Guaycura helped to thwart colonial resettlement projects.

Indigenous exercise of water sovereignty, command of critical freshwater sources, and maintenance of maritime knowledge of internal waterways reorient borderlands history to highlight Indigenous power and resilience in defiance of imperial and national authority, including the delimitation of political and cultural borders.⁵ Indigenous communities like the Mohave and Chemehuevi used the Rio Colorado Basin's labyrinthian riparian systems to evade Jesuit and other Spanish Imperial agents and delimit Native communities into expansive mission networks. Instead, Baja's coastal Indigenous communities selectively rotated in and out of missions during food shortages or selectively raided certain Spanish Imperial outposts. Baja's Indigenous communities wielded maritime spaces—a blend of land and seascapes—to their best advantage. They secured relative autonomy by continuing to farm along flood plains, retreat to protected interior waters, and fish along seashores seasonally.

⁵ For more on maritime history and changing conceptions of sea power and maritime space, see Nathan Perl-Rosenthal and Lauren Benton, *A World at Sea: Maritime Practices and Global History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020). This edited collection introduces the concept of “land and sea regimes” that highlight the sociospatial, sociopolitical, and cultural formations that emerge from maritime and terrestrial processes that link land and sea. See Margaret Schutte's essay, “Sailors, States, and the Creation of Nautical Knowledge,” that recategorizes maritime knowledge from a category of experience to a recognized, evolving scientific practice. Schutte's work shows how navigational and maritime knowledge was critical to state bureaucratic systems. While Schutte explores the recasting of knowledge as science within the context of European empires, my work will use this understanding to reconsider Indigenous water knowledge as a form of state power. Also, see David Iglar's chapter, “Indigenous Maritime Travelers and Knowledge Production,” which pulls Indigenous navigators into the center of maritime space and global history, albeit in pursuit of mutual discovery and knowledge production. See Jeppe Mulich's chapter essay, “Maritime Marronage in Colonial Borderlands,” highlighting how enslaved people's maritime movement in and outside of imperial control evidenced patterns of violence and cooperation in the Caribbean.

Water sovereignty in Sonora unfolded differently as the region's expansive riparian networks allowed non-Native imperial and national agents to challenge Indigenous control of significant waterways. Still, Indigenous communities like the Seri and Opata used amphibian raiding tactics to gain mastery over sea, land, rivers, and desert geographies. Such tactics helped Indigenous Sonorans counter imperial and national efforts to attach them to oppressive labor structures. Within these configurations of identity at the level of personal and collective experiences, "By Land and By Sea" asks what these stories about racial identity can tell us about the intersection of imperial and national state power and the choices confronted by and then made by Indigenous people at the Mexican Pacific borderlands to maintain Native ways of life.

During the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Sonora and Baja California, Indigenous control over waterways actively presented a formidable "Indian problem" for both Mexican and, to a lesser extent, American state authorities.⁶ As Mexican president Porfirio Díaz's regime (1876-1911) pushed to develop the *terrenos baldíos* (uncultivated lands) of the Mexican Pacific, the Mexican state reintroduced Spanish colonial ideas of race and class that fit comfortably alongside the logic of settler-colonialism.⁷ Under the rhetoric of *mestizaje*, embracing

⁶ For more on "land-sea regimes," see Lauren Benton and Nathan Perl-Rosenthal, "Afterward: Land-Sea Regimes in World History," in *A World at Sea: Maritime Practices and Global History*, ed. Lauren Benton and Nathan Perl-Rosenthal (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020).

⁷ Settler colonialism is the continuous process of settler states erasing and displacing Indigenous populations. This physical and cultural violence occurs in various ways. It can be explicit and violent—a physical removal or genocide—or carried out by

racial hybridity as Mexico's national character, Porfirian officials began implementing *indigenismo* policies to privilege whiteness over Indigeneity through Native erasure that bridges these earlier contests over power and identity to twentieth-century Mexican *mestizaje*.⁸ "By Land and By Sea" explores how late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century forms of *mestizaje* replaced earlier and more fluid racial configurations at the Mexican Pacific borderlands.

"By Land and By Sea" uses the geographical marker

obliterating language, customs, and lifeways. For more on settler colonialism, see Patrick Wolfe *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology* (London: Cassell, 1999). Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387-409. Patrick Wolfe, "Land, Labor, and Difference: Elementary Structures of Race," *American Historical Review* 106 (2001): 885-905. Lorenzo Veracini, "The Imagined Geographies of Settler Colonialism," in *Making Settler Colonial Space: Perspectives on Race, Place, and Identity*, edited by Tracey Banivanua-Mar and Penelope Edmonds (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 179-197. Lorenzo Veracini, "Patrick Wolfe's Dialectics," *Aboriginal History* 40 (January 2016): 249-260.

⁸ For more on *mestizaje* and *indigenismo*, see Alberto María Carreño, *Problemas indígenas* (Mexico, 1935). Juan De La Fuente, "Definición, pase y desaparición del Indio en México," *América Indígena* 7 (1947). Antonio Caso, "Definición del indio y de lo indio," *América Indígena* 8 (1948). Carlos Echánove Trujillo, *Sociología Mexicana* (Mexico: Cultura, 1948). Daniel Cazés, "Indigenismo en México: pasado y presente," *Historia y Sociedad*, núm. 5 (Primavera 1966): 66-84. Alfonso Caso, *La comunidad indígena* (México, Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1971). Evelyn Hu-De-Hart, "La comunidad china en el Desarrollo de Sonora," en *Historia General de Sonora IV* (México: Gobierno del Estado de Sonora, 1985): 195-211. Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, *México Profundo: Reclaiming Civilization* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996). Romana Falcón, *La naciones de una república: La cuestión de la Ley Indígena en las leyes y el congreso mexicanos, 1867-1876* (México: Instituto de Investigaciones Legislativas, 1999). Pablo Yankelevich, "Extranjeros indeseables en México, 1911-1940: Una aproximación cuantitativa a la aplicación del Artículo 33 constitucional," *Historia Mexicana* 53, núm. 3 (2004): 693-744. Javier Treviño Rangel and Pablo Hammeken, "Racismo y nación: comunidades imaginadas en México," *Estudios Sociológicos* 26, no. 78 (Sep.-Dec. 2008): 669-694.

By the turn of the twentieth century, Baja California and Sonora's coastal Indigenous communities found themselves caught between the colonizing forces of Mexico and the United States to remove them from their ancestral homelands. Through *indigenismo* policies, Mexican bureaucrats changed the legal-racial status of maritime Indigenous peoples to "Mexican," undoing generations of custom and legal precedent that emphasized historical and cultural differences between Mexicans and Indigenous people of Mexico. This cultural undoing and political recasting allowed the federal government to remove formerly Indigenous populations from the *terrenos baldios* (uncultivated lands). Removal ushered in the construction of the binational Imperial and Mexicali Valley Irrigation Project where both nation-states negotiated for water-use treaties and territorial rights for fishing on both a national and local scale that disposed Indigenous communities.⁹ These earlier racialization projects proved portable; they traveled across borders to configure mestizo and Mexican American identities beginning in the 1930s.

Mexican removal efforts corresponded with those north of its border. Federal officials in the United States actively used racial classifications to justify the relocation of Indigenous populations, including the Diné, Mohave, Hopi, and

⁹ For more on Indigenous sovereignty and the development of Mexican ethnic law, see Jeffrey N. Gesell, "Customary Indigenous Law in the Mexican Juridical System," *Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law* 26 (2014): 643-671. R. Aida Hernández, "Indigenous Law and Identity Politics in Mexico: Indigenous Men's and Women's Struggles for a Multicultural Nation," *Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 25, no. 1(2002): 90-109. Jorge A. Vargas, "NAFTA, the Chiapas Rebellion, and the Emergence of Mexican Ethnic Law," *California Western International Law Journal* 25, no. 1 (1994): 1-79.

Chemehuevi, from their ancestral lands to reservations located alongside the Rio Colorado.¹⁰ For communities like the Tohono O’odham and the Cocopah-Cucapá, the US Bureau of Indian Affairs officials, in tandem with US civil engineers, worked to reclassify transborder Indigenous communities as ethnic Mexicans to weaken Indigenous protections and to limit the number of allotment land claims.¹¹ The Mexican and American states used race to weaken Native land and water rights and deployed it against Mexican and Chinese communities in the region similarly.¹²

¹⁰ In 1831-1832, two US Supreme Court cases collectively referred to as the Cherokee decisions laid the groundwork for the special relationship between federal and state governments and Indigenous peoples. In *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831) held that Indigenous nations are not “foreign states” but “domestic dependent nations.” In *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832), the supreme court ruled that as “domestic dependent nations,” Native American tribes held sovereignty over internal affairs on tribal territory. See Richard B. Collins, “A Brief History of the U.S.-American Indian Nations Relationship,” *Human Rights* 33, no. 2 (2006). Under this special relationship, Native communities were subject to federal government “stewardship” and could be relocated to reservations under the guise of care. Before the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, the US government could determine requirements and thresholds for tribal eligibility.

¹¹ For more on US American Indian policies, see M. Annette Jaimes, “Federal Indian Identification Policy,” in *The State of Native America: Genocide, Colonization, and Resistance* (Boston: South End Press, 1992): 123-138. Frederick E. Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Nebraska University Press, 1989). Francis P. Prucha, ed. *Americanizing the American Indians: Writings by the “Friends of the Indian,” 1880-1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973).

¹² For more on race, class, and land reform in the Californias, see Gabino Vázquez, *The Agrarian Reform in Lower California* (Mexico, 1937). Robert Glass Cleland, *The Cattle on a Thousand Hill: Southern California, 1850-1870* (San Marino: Huntington Library Press, 1941). Eugene Keith Chamberlin, “Mexican Colonization versus American Interest in Lower California,” *Pacific Historical Review* 20, no. 1 (February 1951): 43-55. Sucheng Chan, *This Bittersweet Soil: The Chinese in California Agriculture, 1860-1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). María Elena Ota Mishima, ed., *Destino México: Un estudio de las migraciones asiáticas en México, siglos XIX y XX* (México: El Colegio de México, 1997). Miroslava Chavez-Garcia, *Negotiating Conquest: Gender and Power in California,*

Despite solidifying political borders by the 1930s, transnational Native communities still used local waters and regional land movement to maintain cultural ties and traditional customs in the same ways multiethnic communities along the U.S.-Mexico border banded together to challenge federal immigration policies. These understandings further complicate contentious border and state-making processes across land and sea by highlighting the intricacies of regional, late-colonial, and national relations of power and place. These power nodes and efforts to reconcile these types of authority determined by Indigenous people to challenge the long-standing notions that imperial and national sovereignty were forms of power defined foremost through imperial territorial control.

Miller and the Cocopah bring to the fore more significant issues within the history of Latin America and the North American West over the formation and sources of authority in the Mexican Pacific borderlands. Early Latin American scholars placed race at the center of their early histories. Scholars emphasized the racial divide between European settlers and Indigenous people. Latin American historians cast European as heroes and adventurers to tame barbarous lands and peoples. Early Latin American scholars reduced or removed Indigenous populations

1770s to 1880s (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004). William J. Bauer Jr., "We Are All Like Migrant Workers Here": *Work, Community, and Memory on California's Round Valley Reservation, 1850-1941* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009). Benny J. Andrés, *Power and Control in the Imperial Valley: Nature, Agribusiness, and Workers on the California Borderlands, 1900-1940* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2015). Verónica Castillo-Muñoz, *The Other California: Land, Identity, and Politics on the Mexican Borderlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016).

to the background of imperial encounters. Spanish colonizers, royal advisors, and Catholic explorers served as significant historical actors. Indigenous peoples, scholars contended, did not use any agency or power.¹³ Historians wrote nation-centered colonial histories and dismissed Indigenous resistance or autonomy as futile and ultimately inconsequential displays of power.

These histories were imperial facing and relegated Indigenous peoples as part of the environment that needed to be tamed in the same way historians of the American West conceptualized national frontiers. Scholars like Magnus Mörner placed Native peoples at the center of European imperial policy, but Indigenous communities were bound to colonial and, later, national states. This body of literature was imperial-facing and nationally focused. Mörner's works *Race Mixture in the History of Latin America* (1967) and *La corona Española y las foráneos en los pueblos de indios de América* (1970) served as a conceptual baseline for early Latin American scholars that focused on the rise and decline of the Spanish caste system. Early Latin American scholars cast Indigenous communities as non-state actors on the periphery of European imperial forces and later national forces. For Mörner, the worth of Indigenous incorporation in Latin American history was to underscore racial

¹³ For more on race and Indigeneity in Latin America, see Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1991). Bartolomé Arzá de Orsúa y Vela, *Historia de la Villa Imperial de Potosí*, edited by Lewis Hanke y Gunnar Mendoza (Providence: Brown University Press, 1965). Charles C.R. Boxer, *The Golden Age of Brazil, 1695-1750: Growing Pains of a Colonial Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962). David A. Brading, *Miners and Merchants in Bourbon Mexico, 1763-1810* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

prejudice about Anglo-America that counters national narratives of positive *mestizaje*.

Racial mixing and the establishment of an elaborate caste system, Mörner argued, were not an end, but a more extraordinary process of social acceptance. While Mörner claimed that his work tried to complicate common racial oversimplifications in Latin America, his claims that "...the individual's racial characteristics are beginning to lose their importance in society..." ultimately collapsed racial distinctions in preference for national solidarity.¹⁴ Like American West scholars writing concurrently with Mörner, stark racial and economic frontiers marked non-Native movements into Indigenous spaces with little to no attention to non-settlers and non-state actors.

During the 1980s and 1990s, Latin American scholars actively adopted social history methodologies that redirected their primary inquiries from imperial influence towards exploring Indigenous agency. Scholars like Cheryl English Martin, James Lockhart, and Florencia Mallon shifted previous discussions of Spanish caste systems to illustrate how Indigenous peoples and *mestizo* (people of Spanish and Indigenous heritage) used movement and local identity to exercise power within colonial and later national structures. Latin American social historians argued if viewed through the lens of movement, place, honor, and marriage, the racial categories espoused by the Spanish *sistema de castas* (society of castes) proved more malleable and porous than the previous scholarship depicted. Martin's book, *Rural Society in Colonial*

¹⁴ Magnus Mörner, *Racial Mixture in the History of Latin America* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1967), 149.

Morelos (1985), underscored the dynamic interrelationships between rural Indigenous and settler communities. Through a comprehensive analysis of the colonial practice of *congregación* (Indigenous resettlement programs), labor cycles, and regional migration, Martin illuminated the intricate changes taking place in the colonial context. Importantly, scholars like Martin complicated Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships from direct opposition to moments of calculated cooperation. Martin used demographic history to highlight the significance of Indigenous internal migrations in and out of Morelos's sugar industry. While Martin did not frame the Indigenous movement as an exercise of Indigenous sovereignty, she tethered the local inter-ethnic relationships to *patria chicas* (home countries) grounded in distinct regional identities.¹⁵

The work of ethnographic historian James Lockhart's *The Nahuas after the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth through Eighteenth Centuries* (1992) also represented a significant shift in Mexican and Latin American history and built on Martin's work.¹⁶ Lockhart's *The Nahuas, after the Conquest*, revisited the late-colonial interactions between Spanish imperial agents and Toluca Valley's Nahuatl community. Importantly, Lockhart argued that Nahuatl cultural change, Indigenous political organization, community relationships, and Native class structures are inherently powered interactions. Lockhart, like Martin,

¹⁵ See Cheryl English Martin, *Rural Society in Colonial Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985).

¹⁶ See James Lockhart, *The Nahuas after the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth through Eighteenth Centuries* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).

also detailed moments of Indigenous-settler cooperation that deemphasize direct conflict. Notably, Lockhart illustrated how continued Nahua language use, religious practice, and cultural customs upheld community continuity during moments of tense transition.

Historian Florencia E. Mallon builds on Martin and Lockhart's work *Peasant and Nation: The Making of Postcolonial Mexico and Peru* (1995) illustrated how Puebla's Indigenous communities used regional "communal traditions of struggle" under the Porfirian dictatorship to leverage fuller national participation in Mexico's national project in the post-revolutionary period in the 1920s. Importantly, Mallon highlighted how Indigenous groups wielded guerrilla resistance to shape the boundaries of their citizenship and their relationship to Mexican nationalism.¹⁷

While Latin American social historians showed how movement, place, and custom re-centered Indigenous power within colonial and national settings, they still framed Indigeneity as a condition to be reformed through racial mixing. Current Latin American scholarship has pulled away from the frontier narrative for Indigenous forms of resistance and accommodation. Andrew B. Fisher and Matthew D. O'Hara's edited collection of essays in *Imperial Subjects: Race and Identity in Colonial Latin America* (2009) highlighted the role of race, Indigeneity, and Blackness in contestations of power at the edge of imperial rule and remains a notable example of

¹⁷ See Florencia E. Mallon, *Peasant and Nation: The Making of Postcolonial Mexico and Peru* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

Latin American scholarship on race and identity.¹⁸ David Tavárez’s chapter, “Legally Indian: Inquisitorial Readings of Indigenous Identity in New Spain,” argued for the flexibility of late colonial *castas* that depended on highly diversified classification systems. Previous scholarship, Tavárez argued, posited the “primordial categories” of *español* (Spanish born), *indio* (Indigenous), and *negro* (African descent) as if these classifications were self-contained and self-explanatory. Instead, Tavárez illustrated how *castas* functioned on collective identity markers based on *sangre* (blood), *origen* (origin), *crianza* (upbringing), *lenguajes* (languages or dialects), *tierra* (land), and *clima* (climate).¹⁹ These markers of self-identification and ethnicity added complexity and nuance to Indigenous collective identity. Similarly, Cynthia Radding’s chapter, “The Many Faces of Colonialism in Two Iberoamerican Borderlands: Northern New Spain and the Eastern Lowlands of Charcas,” illustrated how historical processes of imperial conquest, strategic migration, and Indigenous survival made visible complex ecological, social, and cultural borderlands.²⁰

¹⁸ See Andrew B. Fisher and Matthew D. O’Hara, eds. *Imperial Subjects: Race and Identity in Colonial Latin America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009). For more on the historiography of race in Colonial Latin America, see also Andrew B. Fisher and Matthew D. O’Hara, “Introduction: Racial Identities and Their Interpreters in Colonial Latin America,” in *Imperial Subjects: Race and Identity in Colonial Latin America*, edited by Andrew B. Fisher and Matthew D. O’Hara (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009): 1-37.

¹⁹ See David Tavárez, “Legally Indian: Inquisitorial Readings of Indigenous Identity in New Spain,” in *Imperial Subjects: Race and Identity in Colonial Latin America*, edited by Andrew B. Fisher and Matthew D. O’Hara (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009): 81-100.

²⁰ See Cynthia Radding, “The Many Faces of Colonialism in Two Iberoamerican Borderlands: Northern New Spain and the Eastern Lowlands of Charcas,” in *Imperial Subjects: Race and Identity in Colonial Latin America*, edited by Andrew B. Fisher and Matthew D. O’Hara (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009):102-114. Radding’s

Importantly, Karen D. Caplan's chapter, "Indigenous Citizenship: Liberalism, Political Participation, and Ethnic Identity in Post-Independence Oaxaca and Yucatán," showed how the Mexican state's elimination of "Indigenous" as a racial identity did not correspond with localized reservations of the defunct colonial orders. Caplan illustrated how liberal policies like the breakdown of communal land ownership for individual privatization eliminated critical protections for Indigenous communities. The strength of Caplan's analysis was her focus on the tensions inherent and eventual confrontation between Mexico's liberal policies and local Indigenous political and cultural structures. Critically, Caplan argued that "...the elimination of the colonial category of 'indio' ...became a critical arena...for reimagining indigenessness."²¹

The thorough investigation of pockets of contestation and resilience demands scholarly concentration on the maritime encounters taking place within the borderlands of the Mexican Pacific.²² Latin American history has centered maritime

work pushes discussions of Indigenous communities' use of land and seascapes to exercise and contest power in many ways. See Cynthia Radding, *Landscapes of Power and Identity: Comparative Histories in the Sonoran Desert and the Forest of Amazonia from Colony to Republic* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

²¹ Karen D. Caplan, "Indigenous Citizenship: Liberalism, Political Participation, and Ethnic Identity in Post-Independence Oaxaca and Yucatan," in *Imperial Subjects: Race and Identity in Colonial Latin America*, edited by Andrew B. Fisher and Matthew D. O'Hara (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009): 226.

²² For more on historicizing sovereignty in ocean spaces, see Bernhard Klein and Gesa Mackenthun, "Introduction," in *Sea Changes: Historicizing the Ocean*, ed. Bernhard Klein and Gesa Mackenthun (New York: Routledge, 2004). For more on maritime spaces as imperial realms with legal codes and attempts at jurisdiction, see Lauren A. Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Benton blends ocean, coastlines, and riparian networks in the Western Hemisphere. Benton

history as critical to Spanish and other European imperial projects in the Western Hemisphere. Early iterations of maritime history focused on imperial military conquest, exploratory voyages, legal theory, piracy, and navigation.²³ Within Latin America, there are two geographically bounded centers of scholarship—the Iberoamerica Atlantic, which centered on imperial contestations and development of the Caribbean, and the Iberoamerican Pacific, which followed the Manila Galleons and burgeoning markets with China.²⁴ This body of literature was extensive and

introduces the concepts of ocean regionalism, or the series of ocean corridors that solidified into thicker maritime networks and quasi-sovereignty, where Indigenous relations to mountains and deserts prove distinct political spaces and “zones in perpetual transition” that challenged imperial maritime control. In particular, see Benton’s “Chapter 5: ‘Landlocked’: Colonial Enclaves and the Problem of Quasi-Sovereignty,” which centers on Indigenous challenges to Spanish imperial sovereignty in the Sonoran riparian region. Benton pushes against a moving frontier’s optic to view blended land and waterscapes as discrete zones or enclave territories. For more on “terraqueous histories,” see Alison Bashford, “Terraqueous Histories,” *Historical Journal* 60, no. 2 (June 2017): 254-72. Bashford argues for the collapsing of land and seascapes into meeting places of imperial and non-state actors. Also see Lauren Benton and Nathan Perl-Rosenthal, “Afterward: Land-Sea Regimes in World History,” in *A World at Sea: Maritime Practices and Global History*, ed. Lauren Benton and Nathan Perl-Rosenthal (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020). Benton and Perl-Rosenthal introduce the concept of “land and sea regimes” to push against land and sea considerations as “meeting places” or maritime space as an extension of land processes. Instead, the idea of “land and sea regimes” highlights and centers on the different configurations that emerged from maritime and terrestrial processes—movement, labor, captivity, trade networks, legal conflict, violence, and illicit trade—that spanned both land and sea.

²³ See Robert Scheina, *Latin America, A Naval History, 1810-1987* (US Naval Institute Press, 1982). Robert Debs Heintz Jr. and Nancy Gordon Heintz, *Written in Blood: The Story of the Haitian People, 1492-1971* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978). Enrique Cardenas de la Peña, *Historia Marítima de México, Guerra de Independencia, 1810-1821*, Vol I and II (Mexico: Lito Ediciones Olimpia, 1973).

²⁴ For more on the Spanish Atlantic and Caribbean maritime literature, see Ernesto Bassi, *An Aqueous Territory: Sailor Geographies and New Granada’s Transimperial Greater Caribbean World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016). Ernesto Bassi, “Beyond Compartmentalized Atlantics: A Case for Embracing the Atlantic from

sprawling, but the critical through line was that scholars viewed maritime space as unchallenged extensions of imperial spaces. Cases of piracy “on the high seas” were the only moments of lawlessness and undermined or contested sovereignty. Still, maritime scholars framed these challenges to sovereignty with piracy as legal slights rather than substantive tests of imperial control over ocean corridors. One exception was Lauren Benton’s seminal work *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400-1900* (2010), re-configured the ocean as “...a space of

Spanish American Shores,” *History Compass* 12, no. 9 (2014): 704-16. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998). Jeffrey Bolster, “Putting the Ocean in Atlantic History: Maritime Communities and Marine Ecology in the Northwest Atlantic, 1500-1800,” *American Historical Review* 113, no. 1 (February 2008): 19-47. Alejandra Boza Villareal, *La Frontera indígena de la Gran Talamanca, 1840-1930* (San José, Costa Rica: EDUPUC, 2014). Kit Cadin, *The Last Caribbean Frontier, 1895-1915* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, “Hybrid Atlantics: Future Directions for the History of the Atlantic World,” *History Compass* 11, no. 8 (2013): 597-609. Aviva Chomsky, *West Indian Workers, and the United Fruit Company in Costa Rica, 1870-1940* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996). William V. Davidson, *Historical Geography of the Bay Islands: Honduras Anglo Hispanic Conflict in the Western Caribbean* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974). For more on the Spanish Galleon trade history, see Gregory T. Cushman, *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific Worlds: A Global Ecological History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). Peter Gerhard, *Pirates of the Pacific, 1575-1742* (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 1980). Kris E. Lane, *Pillaging the Empire: Piracy in the Americas, 1500-1750* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1998). Floro L. Mercene, *Manila Men in the New World: Filipino Migration to Mexico and the Americas from the Sixteenth Century* (Diliman, Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2007). William Lytle Schurz, *The Manila Galleon* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1939). Leslie Bauzon, *Deficit Government: Mexico and the Philippine Situado, 1606-1804* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1970). Oskar Hermann Khristian Spate, *The Spanish Lake* (Australian National University E Press, 2004). Jay Monaghan, *Chile, Peru, and the California Gold Rush of 1849* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

interconnected passageways...crisscrossed by legal corridors...”²⁵ Benton exposed uneven legal geographies of various empires and showed how Indigenous coastal communities challenged multiple sovereignty.

Current maritime scholarship, best represented by Nathan Perl-Rosenthal and Lauren Benton’s *A World at Sea: Maritime Practices and Global History* (2020), built on Benton’s work and pushes against maritime spaces as closed or predetermined imperial holdings. This edited collection introduced the concept of “land and sea regimes,” and highlighted the socio-spatial, sociopolitical, and cultural formations that emerged from maritime and terrestrial processes that linked land and sea. Within the edited volume, Margaret Schutte’s essay, “Sailors, States, and the Creation of Nautical Knowledge,” re-categorized maritime knowledge from a category of experience to a recognized, developing scientific practice. Schutte’s work showed how navigational and maritime knowledge proved a critical part of state bureaucratic systems. While Schutte explored the recasting of knowledge as science within the context of European empires, my dissertation uses this understanding to reconsider Indigenous water knowledge as a form of state power. My work, like David Iglar’s chapter, “Indigenous Maritime Travelers and Knowledge Production,” pulls Indigenous navigators into the center of maritime space and global history in pursuit of mutual discovery and knowledge production. Jeppe Mulich’s chapter essay, “Maritime Marronage in Colonial Borderlands,” like my work, highlights how

²⁵ Lauren Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400-1900*, Kindle Edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), Location 82.

maritime movement in and outside of imperial control evidenced patterns of violence and cooperation in the Mexican Pacific borderlands. Recent scholarship like Natale Zappia's *Traders and Raiders: The Indigenous World of the Colorado Basin, 1540-1859* (2014) informs my understanding of distinct "Indigenous worlds" outside of Spanish imperial influence in the Mexican Pacific. Zappia's work layered the historiographies of the coastal maritime communities with Indigenous borderlands that underscored the relative autonomy Native communities of the Rio Colorado Basin maintained through extended internal landed and maritime networks. Importantly, Zappia, like my own work uses Indigenous movement and lifeways to push against the greater historiography of the American West that emphasizes landed borders and terra-centric borders of belonging.²⁶

For many within the "American West," the idea of borders and western expansionism began when eastern US settlers traversed the Mississippi River and ended on the beaches of the Pacific coast. For many scholars, the presence of non-Native peoples within the bounds of the American West assumed a sense of completion of colonization efforts. This was the same assumption guiding Frank Miller's story about Cocopah land claims that ignored the realities of repeated failed colonial and national efforts to subdue and incorporate the Mexican Pacific region into larger nation-states.

²⁶ See Natale A. Zappia, *Traders and Raiders: The Indigenous World of the Colorado Basin, 1540-1859* (Chapel Hill, 2014).

Scholarship concerning the Mexican Pacific regions calls for juxtaposing and layering disparate general national histories with more self-contained regional histories. The first significant trajectory of academic work concerns the formation of a Greater West or the establishment of a North American West. For early twentieth-century historians, exemplified by Frederick Jackson Turner, the history of the North American West became geographically restricted and teleologically bounded to the eventual national boundaries of the United States that recast the region's history in a "march of (Anglo) civilization" narrative erasing previous cultures and non-Anglo settlement.²⁷ Yet, historians like Hubert Bancroft, Herbert Bolton, and John Bannon conceptualized a unified and interconnected history of the American West and

²⁷ See Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (1899; Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1966). Frederick Jackson Turner, *Frontier and Section: Selected Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall, 1961). For more on critiques of Turner, see Howard Roberts Lamar, *Dakota Territory, 1861-1889: A Study of Frontier Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956). Howard Roberts Lamar, *The Far Southwest, 1846-1912: A Territorial History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956). Reginald Horsman, *The Frontier in the Formative Years, 1783-1815*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1970). Ray Allen Billington, *Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier* (New York: Macmillan, 1960). Ray Allen Billington, *America's Frontier Culture: Three Essays* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1973). Herbert E. Bolton, *The Spanish Borderlands: A* 1921). John Francis Bannon, *The Spanish Borderlands Frontier, 1513-1821* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974). William Cronon, George Miles, and Jay Gitlin, "Becoming West: Toward a New Meaning for Western History," in *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past*, eds. William Cronon, George Miles, and Jay Gitlin (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992), Jay Gitlin, "On the Boundaries of Empire: Connecting the West to Its Imperial Past," in *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past*, eds. William Cronon, George Miles, and Jay Gitlin (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992). John Mack Faragher, *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner: The Significance of the Frontier in American History, and Other Essays* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

Mexican North as a intertwined and cohesive Greater West or Spanish borderlands region defined by multiple overlapping imperial and national colonizing forces.²⁸ Bancroft, the progenitor of the Greater West idea, established Spanish colonization efforts to rethink regions to extend national histories beyond the Anglo settlement of the West. Yet, despite the variable environments and peoples in the Greater West, Bancroft believed that landed colonial expansion only occurred where agents of empire held power and sway. Bolton and Bannon expanded the notion of a Greater West to encompass a larger Spanish Borderlands that provided space for mobilization and negotiation of colonial efforts between various actors—Indigenous, priests, traders—and military officials.²⁹

²⁸ See Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of the North Mexican States* (San Francisco: A. L. Bancroft & Company, 1884). Herbert E. Bolton, *The Spanish Borderlands: A Chronicle of Old Florida and the Southwest* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1921). John Francis Bannon, *The Spanish Borderlands Frontier, 1513-1821*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974).

²⁹ For more on the development of borderlands studies, see John Francis Bannon, *The Spanish Borderlands Frontier, 1513-1821* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974). Juan Gómez-Quiñones, *Development of the Mexican Working-Class North of the Rio Bravo: Work Culture Among Laborers and Artisans, 1600-1900*, (Los Angeles: Chicano Studies Research Center Publications, University of California, Los Angeles, 1982). Jay Gitlin, “On the Boundaries of Empire: Connecting the West to Its Imperial Past,” in *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America’s Western Past*, eds. William Cronon, George Miles, and Jay Gitlin (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992). Samuel Truett, “Neighbors by Nature: Rethinking Region, Nation, and Environmental History in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands,” *Environmental History* 2, No. 2 (April 1997): 160-178. Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron. “From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in North American History.” *American Historical Review* 104, no. 3 (June 1999): 814-41. Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly, “On the Agency of Borderlands,” in *The Social Ecology of Border Landscapes* edited by Anna Grichting and Michele Zebich-Knos, (New York: Anthem Press, 2017), 19-36.

The mid-twentieth-century social turn and the rise of New West historians like Patricia Limerick shifted the direction of the discipline towards different colonization methods that debated the West as place versus process.³⁰ These conversations added nuance to the settlement processes of the American West at the exact moment they re-solidified a progressive narrative of the unsettled frontier to inevitable nation-state development. As a result, this narrow focus on determinism restricted historical exploration to the future political borders of the United States, ultimately neglected the rich history of Indigenous, Spanish, and Mexican settlements in the Pacific West region.

³⁰ For more on New West History, see Patricia Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1987). William Cronon, George Miles, and Jay Gitlin eds., *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992). Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Donald Worster, *Under Western Skies: Nature and History in the American West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991). Ramón A. Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away: Marriage, Sexuality, and Power in New Mexico, 1500-1846* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991). William Cronon, George Miles, and Jay Gitlin, "Becoming West: Toward a New Meaning for Western History," in *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past*, eds. William Cronon, George Miles, and Jay Gitlin (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992). Jay Gitlin, "On the Boundaries of Empire: Connecting the West to Its Imperial Past," in *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past*, eds. William Cronon, George Miles, and Jay Gitlin (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992). Stephen Aron "Lessons in Conquest: Towards a Greater Western History," *Pacific Historical Review* 63, no. 2 (May 1994): 125-147. Susan Lee Johnson, *Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000). Donald Worster, "The American West in the Age of Vulnerability," *Western Historical Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 5-16.

Similarly, early-twentieth-century Mexican scholarship focused on clearly demarcated periodization of Mexican history from colonial encounters to the Mexican Republic to the early nation-state, usually packaged as individual state histories. The most definitive work regarding Baja California or the Gulf of California region remains Pablo Martínez's *Historia de Baja California* (1956). Although Martínez conducted rigorous research, his work reads less than a historical analysis of the region's development and more of a chronology of bureaucratic-state endeavors in the peninsula. Martínez, like Turner, wrote from a nationalistic perspective that chronicled a march towards progress where Indigenous people disappeared by the beginning of the republican period, and all who remained were state agents. Similarly, celebrated Mexican historians like Daniel Cosío Villegas and Jesus Reyes Heróles cast Mexican history before the 1910 revolution as unapologetically bound to the idea that history functioned to unify a new nation.³¹ Regional scholars like Hector Águilar Carmen, writing concurrently in his work *La Frontera nomada: Sonora y la Revolución Mexicana* (1977), also tried to reimagine regional spaces as a march toward political awareness and mobilization culminating in the 1910 revolution. Within the last few decades, historians like American West scholars Jay Gitlin and David Weber began re-graphing trans-imperial and transnational projects onto the larger geographical scope of the Greater West, detailing the various groups and

³¹ See Daniel Cosío Villegas, *Historia moderna de México: La república restaurada* (México: Editorial Hermes, 1955). Jesus Reyes Heróles, *El Liberalismo mexicano* (3 volúmenes, México: UNAM, 1957-61).

ambitions involved in the colonization of the United States that pushed against the confines of the nation-state.³²

Mexican scholars like Frederick C. Turner, Charles Hale, and Arnolde Córdova viewed processes like nationalism and liberalism as necessarily fraught with contestations for power and control across and within Mexico's many regions relegated colonial legacies to the decided past.³³ These Mexican academics viewed their works as necessary tools to contextualize contemporary social problems that pushed back the pendulum of modern Mexican history to 1876 with the rise of Porfirio Díaz, not the 1910 revolution. While Mexican North regional scholars like Adrian Valdés, in his work *Historia de la Baja California, 1850-1880* (1973), had already prominently featured the crisis of liberalism as a definite turning point for the greater development of the region. Both U.S. and Mexican writers drew a decisive line between the histories of colonialism and nationalism that led to harsh breaks in periodization. These breaks did not interrogate transitional periods and the challenges associated with social, cultural, economic, and demographic change.

³² See Jay Gitlin, "On the Boundaries of Empire: Connecting the West to Its Imperial Past," in *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past*, edited by William Cronon, George Miles, and Jay Gitlin (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992): 71-109. David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

³³ See Frederick C. Turner, *The Dynamic of Mexican Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968). Charles A. Hale, *The Transformation of Liberalism in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexico* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989). Arnolde Córdova, *La ideología de la revolución mexicana. La Formación del nuevo régimen* (México: Era, 1973).

Claudio Lomnitz and later historians argued that nationalism, often misinterpreted as a totalizing process, obscured regional experiences with state formations, particularly in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Lomnitz argued terms like center and periphery were distinct realities that were both relational and constantly being renegotiated and lead to different states of development.³⁴ The Mexican historian Cynthia Radding in *Wandering Peoples: Colonialism, Ethnic Spaces, and Ecological Frontier in Northwestern Mexico, 1700-1850* (1997) pushed against nationalistic periodization in favor of an Indigenous-centric, regionally focused examination of the Sonoran trans-imperial/transnational processes. Radding's work emphasized regional, ecological, and cultural distinctions that reimagined previously marginalized peripheral spaces as centers in their own right, mainly through the optic of Indigenous and regional political economies.³⁵ While Radding

³⁴ Claudio Lomnitz, *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico: An Anthropology of Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 191.

³⁵ For more on the development of Indigenous borderlands, see Ramón Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came the Corn Mothers Went Away: Marriage, Sexuality, and Power in New Mexico, 1500-1846*. (Paulo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991). Brooke S. Arkush, "Yokuts Trade Networks and Native Culture Change in Central and Eastern California," *Ethnohistory* 40 (1993): 619-40. Anna Maria Alonso, *Thread of Blood: Colonialism, Revolution, and Gender on Mexico's Northern Frontier* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995). Cynthia Radding, *Wandering Peoples: Colonialism, Ethnic Spaces, and Ecological Frontier in Northwestern Mexico, 1700-1850* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997). Gary Clayton Anderson, *The Indian Southwest, 1580-1830: Ethnogenesis and Reinvention* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999). James F. Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002). Juliana Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman: Indians and Spaniards in the Texas Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007). Ned Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006). Ned Blackhawk, "The Displacement of Violence: Ute Diplomacy and the Making of New Mexico's

did not include the Baja California peninsula or its Indigenous peoples, she alluded to maintained religious, cultural, and ecological ties between Native groups in Sonora and beyond into the Californias. Borderlands scholar Grace Peña Delgado, in her book *Making the Chinese Mexican: Global Migration, Localism, and Exclusion in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (2012), furthered Radding's premise by extending the periodization of the region into the early twentieth century and, significantly, by marking Sonoran regional developments as contingent on access to trans-Pacific, trans-imperial networks.³⁶ Delgado's analysis in *Making the Chinese Mexican* encompassed a wide temporal scope, actively spanning the nineteenth-century deliberations on *mestizaje*, the discourse aimed at assimilating Indigenous communities into the national fabric. By grounding these deliberations within the Sonoran context of the late 1800s, Delgado exposed the intricate interplay between notions of Indigeneity, blackness, and Chinese citizenship. Delgado, like Radding, discussed the importance of the Baja Peninsula's littoral spaces even as her principal analysis is on landed Sonoran transferred exchanges. Delgado and Radding called for a nuanced, critical approach to nineteenth-century colonization efforts.

Eighteenth-Century Northern Borderlands," *Ethnohistory* 54 (2007): 723-55. Pekka Hamalainen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven); Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexico War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010). Juliana Barr, "Geographies of Power: Mapping Indian Borders in the 'Borderlands' of the Early Southwest," *William and Mary Quarterly* 68 (2011): 5-46.
³⁶ Grace Peña Delgado, *Making the Chinese Mexican: Global Migration, Localism, and Exclusion in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 5.

Similarly, scholars of the Pacific Northwest grappled with shifting political and cultural boundaries where land and waterways receive a central focus.³⁷ By examining fluid maritime sovereignty in contested areas like the U.S.-Canadian

³⁷ For more on Indigenous maritime borderlands, see James R. Gibson, *Otter Skins, Boston Ships, and China Goods: The Maritime Fur Trade of the Northwest Coast, 1785-1841* (Montreal: McGill-Queen, 1992). J. Arnold, ed. *The Origins of a Pacific Coast Chieftdom: The Chumash of the Channel Islands* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2001). David Iglar, "Diseased Goods: Global Exchanges in the Eastern Pacific Basin, 1770-1850," *The American Historical Review* 109, No. 3 (June 2004): 693-719. David Arnold, *The Fishermen's Frontier: People and Salmon in Southeast Alaska* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008). William J. Barger, "New Players at the Table: How Americans Came to Dominate Early Trade in the North Pacific," *Southern California Quarterly* 90, No. 3 (Fall 2008): 227-257. Brian Rouleau, "Maritime Destiny as Manifest Destiny: American Commercial Expansionism and the Idea of the Indian," *Journal of the Early Republic* 30, No. 3 (Fall 2010): 377- 411. Karen Halttunen, "Grounded Histories: Land and Landscape in Early America," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 68, No. 4 (October 2011): 513-532. David A. Chang, "Borderlands in a World at Sea: Concow Indians, Native Hawaiians, and South Chinese in Indigenous, Global, and National Spaces," *Journal of American History* 98, No. 2 (September 2011): 384-403. Joshua L. Reid, "Indigenous Power in The Comanche Empire," *History and Theory* 52, no. 1 (February 2013): 54-59. James Eyre Wainwright, "Both Native South and Deep South; The Native Transformation of the Gulf South Borderlands, 1770-1835," Dissertation, Rice University (2013). James L. Hill, "'Bring them what they lack': Spanish-Creek Exchange and Alliance Making in a Maritime Borderlands, 1763-1783," *Early American Studies* 12, No. 1 (Winter 2014): 36-67. Lissa K. Wadewitz, *The Nature of Borders: Salmon, Boundaries, and Bandits on the Salish Sea* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015). Joshua Reid, *The Sea is My Country: The Maritime World of the Makahs* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015). Robert E. Bonner, "The Salt Water Civil War: Thalassological Approaches, Ocean-Centered Opportunities," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 6, No. 2 (June 2016): 243-267. Anna Grichting, "Social Ecologies and Borderlands," in *The Social Ecology of Border Landscapes*, edited by Anna Grichting and Michele Zebich-Knos, eds. (New York: Anthem Press, 2017): 1-16. Sophia Betsworth Hunt, "Grasping the Gulf: Conquest and Indigenous Power from Florida to the Yucatán in the Age of Revolutions," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Michigan (2017). Lily A. House-Peters, "Socio-Ecological Transformation in Riparian Zones: The Production of Spaces and Exclusions and the Uneven Development of Resilience in the Sonoran Borderlands," in *The Social Ecology of Border Landscapes* edited by Anna Grichting and Michele Zebich-Knos, (New York: Anthem Press, 2017), 107-130.

borderlands, scholars like Lissa Wadewitz further explored the natural limitations to conquest and, by extension, state control. Wadewitz argued maritime spaces offer an optic to re-center issues concerning Indigenous sovereignty and often darker conversations regarding Native access to resources. Historian Natale Zappia shifted the center of Indigenous maritime discussion from the Pacific Northwest to the Rio Colorado Basin. This new center emphasized the “interior world” of Native communities, including trade networks, travel routes, and waterways.³⁸ Zappia’s use of material culture, linguistics, and ethnographies of the Colorado River Basin transposed Indigenous lifeways into a more extensive history of the development of North American colonial—and later, early national—political economies that hinged on established Native trade routes. For Zappia, the concept of an “interior world” underscored Rio Colorado tribes’ knowledge of waterways and Native networks to accumulate and exercise power.

Regional Indigenous scholar Martha Micheline Cariño Olvera similarly emphasized regional ecological—both landed and maritime—restructuring with diminished Indigenous sovereignty and cultural cohesion in Baja California Sur. For Olvera, issues of nationalism factored less than the establishment of transnational capitalist economies that were the actual faces of Indigenous dispossession in the region. Similarly, US Indigenous history scholar Eric Meeks balanced transborder Indigenous belonging and the development of capitalist economies along the U.S.-

³⁸ Natale A Zappia, *Traders, and Raider: The Indigenous World of the Colorado Basin, 1540-1859* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 16.

Mexico border with Native resistant adaptation for communities like the Yaqui and Tohono O’odham in areas like Tucson and Nogales.³⁹ Verónica Castillo-Muñoz’s *The Other California: Land, Identity, and Politics on the Mexican Borderlands* (2017) chronicled agrarian land reform and transnational migration to the Imperial Valley. Castillo-Muñoz’s study began in the late-nineteenth century and established Baja California as a racialized and laboring landscape but did not to connect with the region’s failed colonial past.

My dissertation bridges these historiographical fields by focusing on the unbroken linkages between this region’s colonial past and its nationalist present by centering ethnic space and incorporating the Mexican Pacific, the Rio Colorado Basin, and Baja California peninsula into a larger-scale discussion of *mestizaje* and nationalism. My work pushes against this periodization and uses Indigenous understandings of time and space to recast this region as a series of transitions. When viewed through a broader Mexican Pacific borderlands frame, this critical historical realignment can make space for more complex conversations regarding Indigenous sovereignty, *mestizo* nationalism, and the meaning of borders as everyday people—Native, Mexican, Anglo, Chinese—navigate their daily lives that can sometimes transcend restrictive understandings of geography and time.

“By Land and by Sea” seeks to understand why Indigenous responses to non-Native settlement in the Mexican Pacific borderlands changed the Spanish imperial

³⁹ See Eric V. Meeks, *Border Citizens: The Making of Indians, Mexicans, and Anglos in Arizona* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007).

project in ways that dictated Mexico's national project and, by extension, the United States. The early nineteenth century represented a critical moment when the nascent Mexican Republic struggled to restructure itself after three hundred years of Spanish imperial rule in ways that embraced racial hybridity, or *mestizaje*, as quintessentially Mexican. During the independence period within the region, the rhetoric of *mestizaje* created a racially and ethnically blended national body politic that embraced whiteness over Indigeneity. Yet, the sparse population of the Californias created multilingual spaces where Native and non-Native populations negotiated the borderlands world they inhabited. While Mexico's dedication to a multiethnic national body seemed a dramatic rebuke of its colonial past, in practice, *mestizaje* still hinged on ingrained colonial forms that equated whiteness with power and privilege. While the Mexican state used the discourse of assimilation to erase and dispossess Native peoples, the United States used the explicit language of racial exclusion to establish strict hierarchies that placed Indigenous and later Mexican lifeways in direct opposition to Anglo civilization. The multiethnic realities in regions such as the Mexican Pacific borderlands, which had long thwarted colonization and stringent state control, presented a complexity that resisted easy assimilation into the nationalistic visions of *mestizaje* or violent assimilation embraced by either country. Amid the struggle for incorporation, the borderlands region flourished, prompting the need for a redefinition of physical borders and a reconfiguration of the boundaries of social and racial belonging. This process centered on the limitations and boundaries of an Indigenous-Mexican *mestizo* identity.

With this understanding, my work seeks to answer how was it that two nations, the United States and Mexico, that envisioned two radically different national projects in the early nineteenth century ended up with similar state policies regarding the regulation and restriction of (Indigenous and Asian) citizenship by the early twentieth century despite the creation of a broader network of kith and kin connections that unified the region. Examining local understandings of the environment and belonging will illuminate the ambiguity and contingency of state control to capture the complexities of everyday tensions in the Mexican Pacific borderlands. This approach redirects our attention to the intricacies of identity formation often obscured under assumed homogeneous national identities. By studying Indigenous, ecological, and primordial spaces in what eventually became the Mexican Pacific borderlands, the complexities of identity shed much-needed light on social and political belonging tensions. If we leave these narratives uncomplicated, state governments will continue to undermine Indigenous efforts for recognition and claims to sovereignty. Through this lens, the unresolved national responses to the “Indian Problem” within the Mexican Pacific borderlands by the US and Mexico have exerted and continue to influence the regulation and limitations of Indigenous citizenship by settler states. This influence stands in stark contrast to the lived realities of the borderlands, shedding light on the current concerns surrounding unauthorized movement across political borders.

My dissertation comprises six chapters and an epilogue that argues for rethinking the meaning of borderlands to accommodate both landed and maritime boundaries as

sites inherent in contestation and negotiation. Chapter One, “Positioning the Mexican Pacific Borderlands,” pushes against terra-centric approaches to state-making processes. My work argues for a reconceptualization of the Mexican Pacific—the landed and maritime spaces that include San Diego, California, Tucson, Arizona, Hermosillo, Sonora, and the Guaymas littoral and Baja California peninsula—as a distinct, highly contested borderlands region. My work pushes against terra-centric, colonial, and nationally bounded understandings of borderlands spaces by highlighting water’s centrality to Indigenous lifeways and non-Native colonization efforts. Water sovereignty in the Mexican Pacific proved critical to Indigenous power and mitigated non-Native encroachment onto ancestral lands in the early twentieth century. Indigenous identities merged, yielded, and reformed into blended *mestizo* communities that would historically and culturally anchor a distinct Mexican identity in this borderlands region. When layered, the disparate historiographies of race and Indigeneity in Latin America, maritime history, the American West, Indigenous borderlands, and the Mexican North bring the Mexican Pacific into sharp focus and at the center of more extensive discussions of sovereignty, power, belonging, and nationalism.

Chapter Two, “Haunted by the Ghost of Lake Cahuilla: Negotiating Plural Sovereignty and Indigenous Water Power,” examines the history of Indigenous communities in the Mexican Pacific borderlands. Focusing on their mastery of water resources after the evaporation of the prehistoric Lake Cahuilla, this chapter explores how its disappearance shaped Native resilience, adaptability, and challenges to

prevailing narratives of migration, integration, and racial identities in the region both before and after Spanish contact. Through the prism of Jesuit and Franciscan friars, like Father Jacob Baegert, a Jesuit priest stationed in Baja California in 1750, “Haunted by the Ghost of Lake Cahuilla” documents the unraveling of Baegert’s initial expressed excitement about his new missionary assignment in the California borderlands, when he exclaimed, “I was given the blessed California,” at the beginning of his post.⁴⁰ Initially, Baegert saw the Mexican Pacific region as a place of both personal and imperial promise, envisioning the spiritual work he could undertake in converting Indigenous people to Christianity and the potential for accessing material resources in fulfillment of a global Christian mandate. But soon after Baegert embarked on his journey through Sonora and Baja California, he encountered a challenging landscape characterized by harsh deserts and rugged mountains. The lack of navigable waterways and apparent unsuitability for large settlements left him disillusioned, questioning the feasibility of his mission in California.

Despite Baegert’s skepticism, Indigenous communities in the Mexican Pacific borderlands had thrived in this region for centuries, demonstrating their deep connection to the land and waterways. Their creation stories, such as those of the Diegueño and Yuma peoples, emphasized the territorial presence and geographic diversity of these Native communities. These stories revealed how Indigenous peoples had harnessed water resources and adapted their lifestyles to the environment,

⁴⁰ Jacob Baegert, Letter to George Baegert, 22 October 1750, in *The Letters of Jacob Baegert, 1749-1761: Jesuit Missionary in Baja California*, trans. Elsbeth Schulz-Bischof (Los Angeles: Dawson’s Book Shop, 1982), 86.

ensuring their survival and resilience. While Baegert saw the lack of water as an obstacle to colonization and settlement, Indigenous communities had developed their own systems of agriculture, fishing, and trade that relied on their profound knowledge of water. Their mastery of coastal and internal waterways facilitated their movement, strength, and influence in the region. Plural sovereignties emerged as a result, characterized by strategic geographical movement, flexible intra-tribal boundaries, and occasional cooperation between Indigenous and Spanish communities.

Regional power dynamics in the Mexican Pacific were intricately tied to the navigation and access to water resources. During the one hundred years marked by repeated failures in Jesuit-led colonization efforts, mission fathers gradually came to understand that they were being integrated into Indigenous societies, rather than achieving their intended goal of assimilating Indigenous populations into their own religious and cultural framework. Throughout the long nineteenth century, the contours of plural sovereignty in the Mexican Pacific borderlands fluctuated but remained a constant presence in the exchanges between Indigenous and non-Native actors. Indigenous communities maintained their autonomy and power structures, negotiating independently with Spanish officials and adapting to changing circumstances.

The disappearance of Lake Cahuilla solidified the Indigenous communities' semi-nomadic and decentralized lifeways, challenging Spanish colonization efforts and reinforcing the importance of water knowledge for their survival. The study of these dynamics not only sheds light on the intricate relationships between Indigenous

communities and the land but also expands our understanding of migration, integration, and the formation of racial identities in the broader context of the Mexican Pacific borderlands. It challenges the prevailing narratives of a desolate California by highlighting the resilience and adaptability of Indigenous peoples in the face of environmental changes. By examining the role of water in shaping power dynamics and how Indigenous communities navigated and used water resources, this research uncovers a complex and layered history of plural sovereignties. The enduring presence and mastery of Indigenous communities in the Mexican Pacific borderlands challenged Baegert's initial perceptions of California as an inhospitable place. The study of Indigenous water knowledge and its role in shaping power dynamics provides valuable insights into the resilience and agency of these communities. It also underscored the importance of water as a vital resource that influenced migration, settlement, and the arrangement of plural sovereignties in this region.

Chapter Three, "Changing Native Power in Baja California," examines the historical dynamics of secularization, Indigenous adaptation, and maritime development in Baja California's Mexican Pacific borderlands during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Focusing on the role of Miguel Constansó, a civil engineer, bureaucrat, and scientist, this chapter explores the underlying motivations and strategies employed by Spanish administrators to reshape the colonial landscape and suppress Indigenous cultures. Through an analysis of Constansó's 1794 report to the Viceroy of New Spain, this chapter uncovers the

explicit goals of reinforcing presidios and eradicating Indigenous traditions through integrating secular communities. Constansó's vision for colonial advancement and economic growth was accompanied by an ominous ambition to secularize the region and facilitate the obliteration of Indigenous cultures. Constansó's strategy to eradicate Indigenous practices in Baja California was to encourage intermarriage between Indigenous and white Spaniards, hoping to achieve this within a generation or two. This chapter argues that Baja California's secularization period, led by the military, marked a significant departure from traditional agrarian settler colonial models. It adopted a maritime approach to Indigenous incorporation and emphasized expedited Hispanicization through miscegenation and wage-labor systems. This shift in colonial policy aimed to blur the boundaries between racial and cultural identities and undermined Indigenous sovereignty.

“Changing Native Power in Baja California” also highlighted the tensions between secular authorities, such as Constansó, and mission fathers who advocated for limiting Indigenous labor to farming within mission communities. The tensions between secular authorities, such as Constansó, and mission fathers in Baja California were because of their conflicting views on limiting Indigenous labor. While secular authorities acknowledged the Indigenous people's proficiency in the sea and involved them in diverse activities such as navigation, sailing, shipbuilding, and mail delivery, the mission fathers insisted that the Indigenous people only perform farming within the mission communities. This clash of perspectives reflected the developing dynamics of Indigenous adaptation and resistance to colonial policies. The Guaycura

and Pericu communities, among others, demonstrated resourcefulness during this transformative period in Baja California. They capitalized on the escalating tensions between ecclesiastical and secular administrators, leveraging their maritime prowess and navigational skills to carve out a distinct space for themselves amid changing colonial priorities. By navigating the Mexican Pacific maritime spaces, Indigenous communities not only asserted their autonomy but also contributed to the persistence of Indigenous water sovereignty. Chapter Three reveals how Baja's Indigenous communities strategically distanced themselves from agrarian-based mission communities, maintaining their autonomy on their own terms. It underscores a shift in plural sovereignty, where Indigenous populations resisted state-endorsed racial mixing initiatives and preserved their cultural identity and maritime traditions.

Chapter Four, "Constructing *Indios Bárbaros* and Deconstructing Native Autonomy in Sonora," examines the intricate dynamics of Indigenous integration and the rise of *mestizo* nationalism in Sonora during the early nineteenth century. Focusing on the tenure of Ignacio Bustamante as Constitutional Lieutenant Governor of Sonora, this chapter investigates the challenges encountered by Mexican authorities in assimilating Indigenous converts into late colonial and republican societies and economies. Bustamante's 1832 report revealed his growing concerns about "*indígenas malos*" or "bad Indians."⁴¹ He sought to redefine racial and ethnic distinctions, emphasizing the appointment of "*hijos del país*" (*mestizos*) rather than

⁴¹ Consejo de Gobierno de 4 Junio 1832, Archivo General del Gobierno del Estado de Sonora, Tomo 55, Expediente 2, Documento Numero 34797.

“*indígenas malos*” to positions of local leadership. Bustamante’s apprehensions stemmed from the Indigenous uprising led by Juan de la Banderas in the Rio Yaqui region in 1827. The tenuous peace maintained through a political agreement with Banderas raised worries about the potential resurgence of “bad” Indigenous elements if Native communities could elect their own leaders. To mitigate these risks, Bustamante proposed provincial authorities select “*hijos de una paternal intención*” or “*mestizos* with national intention” for leadership roles. This emerging national discourse clashed with the existing balance of power between Indigenous and mestizo communities, which had preserved a delicate plural sovereignty. Early waves of administrators, soldiers, and non-Native settlers had taken a pragmatic approach to Indigenous integration, offering incentives such as land, labor, water, and protection to Native subjects. The collapse of the mission system and the emergence of new power contenders in the 1830s threatened this delicate equilibrium negotiated through plural sovereignty arrangements.

“Constructing *Indios Bárbaros* and Deconstructing Native Autonomy in Sonora” argues that Mexican authorities strategically employed racial categorization to facilitate the assimilation of Indigenous peoples into a settler colonial society, laying the foundation for the development of mestizo nationalism in the 1860s. These measures aimed to exert control over Indigenous labor and resources while marginalizing and dispossessing Native communities. The distinction between “*hijos del país*” and “*indígenas malos*” shed light on conflicts related to land and water rights and illustrated how state officials tackled the “Indian Problem” by imposing

rigid racial categories that later shaped Mexican national identity. During the early years of the Mexican Republic, Indigenous communities retained some control over water resources, despite facing restrictions on land and water access. An emergent discourse of racialization actively differentiated between the Native and *mestizo* populations, delineating distinct categorizations. This official state discourse positioned “bad” indigeneity in contrast to the perceived “good” modern *mestizo* identity, limiting the role of Indigenous communities within the framework of Mexican nationalism. As *mestizo* nationalism gained prominence, Indigenous peoples faced increased regulation of their movements and employment opportunities, severely curtailing their water sovereignty and labor prospects. The influx of settlers, coupled with the decline in Native populations, further eroded Indigenous water sovereignty and provided justification for the dispossession of Indigenous peoples by the 1870s. This vision of the Mexican republic echoed Bustamante’s earlier promotion of *mestizo* nationalism, underscoring the enduring impact of racial categorization on Indigenous communities in Sonora.

Chapter Four contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding Indigenous integration and the emergence of *mestizo* nationalism in Sonora. It sheds light on the multifaceted struggles faced by Indigenous communities in preserving water sovereignty and navigating the growing dynamics of colonial and republican societies. By examining the impact of racial categorization, this chapter underscores the challenges and consequences of Indigenous assimilation and the

subsequent exclusion of Indigenous peoples from the construction of Mexican national identity.

Chapter Five, “*Indigenismo* and Nationalism at the Water’s Edge,” explores the significant impact of Francisco Pimentel, a renowned Mexican intellectual of the mid-1800s, on Mexico’s approach to Indigenous integration and modernization. Pimentel’s work encompassed diverse fields such as literary criticism, Indigenous linguistics, and history. His historical analysis of Indigenous history played a crucial role in shaping Mexico’s understanding of *mestizaje* (racial and cultural blending), perceptions of indigeneity, and the necessity of industrial worker training during the period of modernization. Pimentel’s seminal publication in 1864, titled “*Memoria sobre las causas que han originado la situacion actual de la raza indigena de Mexico y medios de remediarla*” (Reflection on the Factors that have Contributed to the Current Condition of the Indigenous Population of Mexico and Proposals to Improve It), reflected his view that Indigenous peoples presented significant challenges to Mexico’s industrialization and modernization efforts.

According to Pimentel, the continued isolation of Indigenous communities and their adherence to traditional agricultural customs hindered economic progress. He proposed integrating Indigenous peoples into industrial work and reimagining the relationship between land and labor to stimulate economic growth and achieve modernization. Pimentel envisioned a new *mestizo* identity that would contribute to the economy while embracing Mexico’s cultural, Indigenous heritage, aiming to assimilate Native communities into Mexican society. Pimentel’s views on land and

labor aligned with the concerns of Mexican state officials during the era of La Reforma (1856). La Reforma aimed to modernize Mexico and bring it closer to the agrarian industrialized world. The implementation of these reforms often led to the dispossession of Indigenous lands, contradicting Pimentel's vision of harmonious integration.

Under President Porfirio Díaz, who assumed office in 1876, Mexico's focus shifted towards modernization and nationalism. Díaz's policies emphasized *mestizaje* and *indigenismo* but prioritized foreign development and industrialization, often at the expense of Mexico's Indigenous peoples. Díaz's departure from Pimentel's vision of inclusive integration significantly influenced Mexico's trajectory towards modernization and shaped its policies towards Indigenous communities, favoring marginalization and erasure. By 1910, the Mexican Revolution perspectives of *mestizaje* superseded Pimentel's vision. The revolutionary era emphasized the erasure of Indigenous peoples in borderlands regions and promoted a form of *mestizo* hybridity that leaned towards whiteness. This shift in understanding *mestizaje* and indigeneity established the racial framework of Mexico during the revolution, influencing the dynamics of land, labor, and water that became central to the revolutionary discourse.

“*Indigenismo* and Nationalism at the Water's Edge” provides a comprehensive analysis of the evolving dynamics of race, land, and labor in Mexico, highlighting the tensions between Pimentel's vision and the realities of modernization and the late-nineteenth century. It underscores the complexities of Indigenous

integration and the changing perceptions of indigeneity within the context of Mexico's pursuit of economic progress and national identity. Chapter Five deepens our understanding of the impact of modernization efforts on Indigenous communities in Mexico and the legacies that persist to this day.

Chapter Six, "Arbitrary Borders: Chinese Tucson," delves into the captivating story of the Lee-Valencia family, which serves as a microcosm of the broader history of the Mexican Pacific borderlands, with Tucson, Arizona, as its focal point. Contrary to the prevailing pattern in regions such as the American Northwest, California, Peru, Canada, and Mexico, Tucson in the early 1900s exhibited unique dynamics amid the sweeping immigration laws and Sinophobia. Lee Goon, a Chinese migrant, and Jesus Valencia, an established Mexican resident, formed an unconventional bond driven by practical considerations and mutual necessity. Initially, Valencia employed Goon to manage his grocery store in Tucson, leading to a strong personal and commercial connection. As their relationship deepened, the Lee and Valencia families grew closer over generations. Unlike other regions, where anti-Chinese sentiments prevailed, Tucson's Mexican community displayed a unique acceptance of Chinese cultural differences and viewed Chinese entrepreneurs as economic allies rather than competitors. The close relationships and intermingling of cultures between Chinese migrants and Mexican Tucsonans played a pivotal role in integrating Chinese communities into Tucson's fabric during the early twentieth century. This chapter explores the implications of transpacific networks and local arrangements for the Chinese Mexican relationships in Tucson's borderlands.

The story of the Lee-Valencia family in “Arbitrary Borders” challenges traditional narratives’ stark exclusion and emphasizes the significance of everyday interactions in understanding the formation of resilient communities amidst stringent immigration laws and racialized regimes. It underscores the fluidity of race and ethnicity in the Mexican Pacific borderlands, where the concept of *mestizaje* did not conform to rigid institutional definitions. Chinese migrants in Tucson, unlike other Chinese diasporas, established strong ties with Mexican communities, constructing a distinct social fabric characterized by cultural amalgamation and a neutral stance towards racial categorization and ethnic boundaries. Chapter Six argues that these personal and commercial relationships facilitated a sense of civic belonging beyond traditional citizenship attributes. People built families, local businesses thrived, and they asserted political rights, even without having American citizenship. By the mid-1920s, exclusionary nationalism and nativist sentiments resulted in the racialization of Chinese, Mexicans, and Chinese Mexicans as perpetual outsiders or alien-citizens. This shift marked a significant departure from the earlier acceptance and integration of Chinese communities in Tucson.

Utilizing oral histories, this chapter investigates the intricate connections between Chinese and Mexican communities in Tucson’s borderlands, emphasizing the role of transnational networks, social dynamics, and racial contexts in shaping their interactions. This chapter offers valuable insights into the histories of transnational communities by comprehending the complexity of their relationships, aiming to overcome divisions perpetuated by border spectacles and challenging

established narratives. Challenging existing narratives and aims to transcend divisions perpetuated by border spectacles by examining everyday interactions and their socio-cultural implications, this chapter offers valuable insights into the histories of transnational communities. By delving into the specific experiences of Chinese Mexican families in Tucson's borderlands, this chapter enhances our understanding of the intricate dynamics of migration, integration, and the production of racial identities in the broader context of the Mexican Pacific borderlands.

“By Land and By Sea” disrupts traditional narratives that prioritize land-based processes and overlook the significance of maritime movement and power. It does so by exploring the intersection of water sovereignty and race in the Mexican Pacific borderlands. It underscores the weight of water as a vital resource that influenced migration, settlement, and the construction of plural sovereignties in the region. This research reveals the asymmetrical understanding of sovereignty and the omission of waterway geographies as forces that shaped plural authorities. This work contributes to our understanding of the complex dynamics of Indigenous resistance, power, and resilience in the Mexican Pacific borderlands. It emphasizes the role of water sovereignty in challenging imperial and national control, highlighting the multi-dimensional nature of colonization. By exploring the intersections of water, race, and power, this research provides valuable insights into the histories of Indigenous communities, the creation of racial identities, and the contestations over sovereignty in borderlands regions. This dissertation enhances our understanding of the broader

processes of colonization, cultural exchange, and Indigenous agency in the Mexican Pacific borderlands.

CHAPTER TWO

Haunted by the Ghost of Lake Cahuilla

“I was given the blessed California,” exclaimed Father Jacob Baegert, a Jesuit priest, after learning of his new missionary assignment at the California borderlands in 1750.¹ For Baegert, Spain’s northern frontier held both personal and imperial promise. While writing to his brother, George, also a Jesuit priest, Baegert imagined the spiritual work he was called to undertake in California. Baegert’s vision balanced two central goals. On the one hand, Baegert viewed himself as an essential participant in converting Indigenous people to Christianity in New Spain. On the other hand, Baegert held the belief that his missionary assignment in the “vineyard of the New World” had the potential to enhance non-Native access to material resources, thereby fulfilling a global Christian mandate.² As his fanciful hopes of a converted California blossomed, Baegert also sketched a plan for colonization. Imperial settlement, Spanish families to farm California, adjoined Baegert’s vision for the region. “I pray

¹ Jacob Baegert, Letter to George Baegert, 22 October 1750, in *The Letters of Jacob Baegert, 1749-1761: Jesuit Missionary in Baja California*, trans. Elsbeth Schulz-Bischof (Los Angeles: Dawson’s Book Shop, 1982), 86.

² Baegert, Letter to George Baegert, 22 October 1750, *The Letters of Jacob Baegert*, 86.

for God's protection in this task," the Jesuit wrote as he closed his letter to his brother.³

As Baegert trekked north toward the interior coast of the Gulf of California, his dream of a "blessed California" contrasted against the surrounding harsh desert and mountainous landscape. With each stretch of his five-hundred-hour journey, Baegert grew increasingly bewildered by the region's inhospitable geography. When Baegert crossed into Sonora, the arid, river-laden basin confused him. Where Baegert might have expected flowing water in riparian corridors to carry goods for imperial trade, seasonally shallow rivers unsuitable for transport greeted him instead. "All rivers which I have crossed have hardly any water," exclaimed Baegert. "They cannot carry boats; they have no riverbeds...."⁴ To Baegert, the lack of navigable waterways weakened Jesuit and Spanish imperial plans to incorporate California into greater New Spain. By the time Baegert reached the gulf shores of Loreto on the central coasts of the peninsula, his belief in a successfully settled California had begun to diminish.⁵ Frustrated, Baegert wrote to his brother, "The entire country... is a

³ Baegert, Letter to George Baegert, 22 October 1750, *The Letters of Jacob Baegert*, 86.

⁴ Baegert, Letter to George Baegert, 11 September 1752, *The Letters of Jacob Baegert*, 118.

⁵ Father Eusebio Kino, Letter to Father Juan Martínez, 20 April 1683, in *Kino Reports to Headquarters: Correspondence of Eusebio F. Kino, S.J. from New Spain with Rome, Original Spanish Text of Fourteen Unpublished Letters and Reports with English Translation and Notes*, translated by Ernest J. Burrus, S.J., (Rome: Institutum

veritable desert... It is full of mountains but without forests because of the lack of water...and farther toward the north the less.”⁶ From Baegert’s perspective, the absence of reliable fresh water and rainfall posed limitations on sustaining substantial populations of civilized life, a notion that seemed to be indicated by the apparent scarcity of large settlements observed by Baegert in the region. Sixteen months into his journey to Baja California, the priest confessed to his brother, “The dear water, the rain, is lacking.... Therefore, I think a thousand times...and cannot talk myself into believing that these countries are for people because it is not possible to live a human life in California.”⁷

But Baegert got it wrong. Since time immemorial, Baja’s Native communities have lived in the Mexican Pacific region, or the Mexican Pacific borderlands.⁸

Historicum Sovietatis Jesu, 1954), 31. In these letters, Father Kino chronicles his first foray into Californias. Kino’s descriptions are optimistic and highlight imperial aspirations for California. In his reports, Kino claimed, “The land is good, as is also the climate. There is an abundance of fish, wood, birds, deer, jackrabbits, etc. We have planted maize, melons, and watermelon etc... these Indians seem to me to be the most docile, affable, cheerful, and jovial in all America” (31). Reports like Kino’s were widespread and probably served as guides to subsequent appointees like Baegert.

⁶ Baegert, Letter to George Baegert, 11 September 1752, *The Letters of Jacob Baegert*, 119.

⁷ Baegert, Letter to George Baegert, 11 September 1752, *The Letters of Jacob Baegert*, 128.

⁸ I understand that the use of settler colonial terms like the “Mexican Pacific” and the “Mexican Pacific borderlands” are charged in nature, especially within the context of historical processes involving the displacement and erasure of Indigenous claims to sovereignty. Throughout this dissertation, I hope to utilize borderlands

Indigenous dominion over land and waterways was intrinsic to Native peoples' original sense of place, as suggested in the creation stories of the Diegueño and the Yuma.⁹ In Diegueño oral tradition, the first person, Older Brother Chaipakomat, rose from the "great primeval ocean" long before Baegert ever set foot in the Californias. At the beginning of the world, when Chaipakomat's younger brother returned to the deep, Chaipakomat believed his people needed something other than water to survive

methodologies to expose the inherent complexities encapsulated within these regional terms. However, for the purpose of geographical positioning, I will be utilizing both these terms. My use of the "Mexican Pacific region," will denote the maritime and littoral spaces spanning California's and Baja California's Pacific coasts as a general maritime region within North American geography and to position the Californias—the Baja California peninsula, in particular—within greater Pacific maritime scholarship. In a similar way, I will be utilizing "Mexican Pacific borderlands" to illustrate the navigation of both landed and maritime movement that includes the navigation of internal waterways and riparian networks like the Rio Colorado, the Yaqui and Sonoran Rivers, and the Gulf of California.

⁹ My use of "essential" here is grounded in both an Indigenous worldview and spirituality. See Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2nd ed. (New York: Zedd Books, 2012). Native belief systems are based on the fundamental understanding that humans do not inhabit spaces as individuals but in a community with their environments and homelands bounded by "... a relationship based on a shared 'essence' of life" (77). Through this Indigenous philosophy and worldview, Native religions believe their communities must protect their ancestral homelands. It is important to understand that this is a direct counter to Western understandings of environmental essentialism within Indigenous life, the belief that Native peoples somehow are born with an innate connection to nature. In contrast, this understanding of Indigenous philosophy from "inside the lodge," or within the frame of the Native worldview, highlights how Indigenous relationships to landscapes and waterscapes are intentional and honed. See Donald Fixico, "That's What They Used to Say": *Reflections on American Indian Oral Traditions* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017).

and flourish.¹⁰ So Older Brother created countless ants that soon transformed into solid ground and began populating the land and sea with all kinds of animals, the moon, and the sun. Then, mixing land and sea, Chaipakomat formed the region's first peoples out of clay. Content with his creation of Diegueño men and women, Chaipakomat transformed into a great snake and retreated to an island in the Pacific. Eventually, the Great Snake returned from the sea to teach his people song, art, dance, and basket making that proved critical to the Diegueño's sense of place. Native creation stories like Chaipakomat establish a territorial presence and map Indigenous geography and tribal diversity.

For the Yuma, like the Diegueño, the beginning was water. Then the water-dweller Kwikumat decided that the "world of water" was not enough for the people he created.¹¹ So Kwikumat thrust his finger into the water and stirred until dry land appeared and, from the mud, made the Yuma, the Kumeyaay, the Cocopah, and the Maricopa. The creation of Baja California's people highlights the tangible presence,

¹⁰ For the story of Chaipakomat and the Diegueño creation story, see "The Beginning of the World" in *California Indian Nights: Stories of the Creation of the World, of Man, of Fire, of the Sun, of Thunder, etc.; of Coyote, the Land of the Dead, the Sky Land, Monsters, Animal People, etc.*, compiled by Edward Winslow Gifford and Gwendoline Harris Block, 105-107 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990).

¹¹ For the story of Kwikumat and the Yuman creation story, see "The Beginning of the World" in *California Indian Nights: Stories of the Creation of the World, of Man, of Fire, of the Sun, of Thunder, etc.; of Coyote, the Land of the Dead, the Sky Land, Monsters, Animal People, etc.*, compiled by Edward Winslow Gifford and Gwendoline Harris Block, 107-112 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990).

regional diversity, and intertribal relationships within the Mexican Pacific. In the story of Kwikumat, a Yuma woman tells her creator that she wanted to marry a Cocopah man, to which the creator responds, “Don’t marry the Cocopah man for you and he are destined to dwell in different places.” Kwikumat’s words proved true as successive floods and the disappearance of a prehistoric lake scattered Baja communities to the mountains, the deserts, the delta, and shorelines. Still, Native stories like this underscored how—while Native lifeways changed over time to account for environmental changes, regional conflicts, and non-Native incursions on ancestral lands—the first peoples of Baja California have been and remain coastal communities.

By the mid-eighteenth century, when Baegert’s ship first docked at the coast of Loreto, the Cahuilla and the Mojave, among others, mastered Baja California’s important waterways, including the Pacific Ocean and riverine geographies. Before Baegert’s appraisal of Baja California, Indigenous peoples like the Tohono O’odham and the Cocopah developed a chain of internal waterways and systems of flash flood agriculture after the evaporation of the prehistoric Lake Cahuilla. Native communities like the Cochimi and Pericú also harnessed oceanic fishing streams as regular food sources and constructed a network of intra-Indigenous trade. Coastal peoples like the Chumash and the Haumalgua commanded local marine spaces for both regional movement and developed centralized island strongholds in the Channel Islands and

the Isla de Cedros, respectively. The habitability of the Mexican Pacific for scores of Native communities disproved Baegert's claims that California "was the most miserable place under the sun."¹² Steady access to water allowed Native people to maintain their semi-nomadic lifeways even after non-Native contact. Seasonal migrations inland during flood seasons and outward towards the coasts during cyclical droughts ensured a reliable stream of foodstuffs for their communities.¹³ Place linked Baja's Indigenous peoples to life. Indigenous place optimized survivability in the face of constant changes in the environment and the ecological geography. After the disappearance of Lake Cahuilla and before Spanish encroachment, Indigenous communities managed and held sway over landscapes and waterways. Coastal Native communities understood that a place-based mastery of the region's physical and navigable geography facilitated strength and influence in the Mexican Pacific. The region's Indigenous peoples understood that water knowledge ensured their survival and mitigated non-Native encroachment of ancestral lands through the long nineteenth century from the late 1750s to the early 1930s.¹⁴ What

¹² Baegert, Letter to George Baegert, 11 September 1752, *The Letters of Jacob Baegert*, 128.

¹³ Don Laylander, "The Last Days of Lake Cahuilla: The Elmore Site," *Pacific Coast Archaeological Society Quarterly* 33, no. 1 & 2 (Winter/Spring 2007), 19.

¹⁴ Throughout this dissertation, I will utilize the temporal framework of the "long nineteenth century" to span the years between the late 1760s to the early 1920s. Within the North American context, this term is closely associated with Barbara Young Welke's book *Law and Borders of Belonging in the Long Nineteenth Century*

developed over the long nineteenth century was a kind of layered, plural sovereignty where the limits of Indigenous, Spanish, Mexican, and U.S. power in the Mexican Pacific borderlands waxed and waned, solidified and slackened, blended and separated, dictated by the navigation of and access to internal and coastal waterscapes.

Both multi-scalar and diffuse, plural sovereignties manifested in three layered patterns—strategic geographical movement, flexible yet defined intra-tribal boundaries, and decisive moments of Indigenous and Spanish cooperation outside of military oversight placing imperial agents at the mercy of Native communities—that featured mastery over waterscapes as a defining factor. While plural sovereignty remained intact over time, its contours proved amebous throughout the long nineteenth century, contracting and expanding in the region through the Mexican

United States (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). In her work, Welke argues that traditional historical periodization preferences the development of a modern nation-states as inevitable, and in doing so, erases the intentional and sustained commitments of historical actors to maintain “borders of belonging” through legal precedents. Building on Welke’s central findings, this dissertation traces the ways in which Indigenous water sovereignty shaped Native subject status during crucial moments of imperial and national transitions. Though bound by strict legal codes as in Welke’s work, *By Land and By Sea* reorients the temporal and geographical boundaries of the Mexican Pacific borderlands to hinge on the exercise of or restriction of Indigenous water sovereignty within greater moments of plural sovereignty within the Mexican Pacific region during the long nineteenth century from 1769 to 1934.

national period.¹⁵ These three layers of plural sovereignty proved constant and ever present in most of, if not all, the powered exchanges between Native and non-Native actors in the region well into the early twentieth century. The Indigenous communities in the Mexican Pacific borderlands during European contact until the early 1800s actively demonstrated their plural sovereignty through the remarkable mastery of land, sea, and internal waterways. Diffuse and mobile power structures denied Spanish officials the ability to negotiate with a central political figure as each Native community dealt independently with Jesuit fathers particularly in Baja's southern regions. While hostilities or avoidance proved more the rule than the exception, the few Indigenous communities like the Guaycura that chose to enter the Jesuit missions to some extent still maintained their autonomy. Because the disappearance of Lake Cahuilla ensured that most Baja's Indigenous peoples depended more on fishing, hunting, and gathering rather than a place-based, year-round agricultural systems dramatically undercut Jesuit aims to co-opt or destroy Indigenous subsistence crops to force Native participation in the mission systems. The evaporation of the pre-historic lake cemented semi-nomadic, decentralized Native lifeways that proved an ever-present harbinger of doomed Spanish colonization efforts in the Mexican Pacific. What Spanish Imperial agents like Father

¹⁵ Benton, *A Searching for Sovereignty*, 31.

Baegert stationed in southern Baja, Father Francisco Garcés based in northern Baja, and Father Antonio Reyes assigned to northern Sonora in the last decades of the eighteenth century, came to understand was that, despite their best efforts, Spain was never able to gain complete control over the region. Moreover, whether acknowledging this reality to themselves or their superiors, imperial agents such as Baegert, Garcés, and Reyes were unable to ignore the undeniable dependence of settler survival on Indigenous water sovereignty, surpassing their own comprehension.

“In the beginning, there was no land. There was nothing but salt water, the great primordial ocean.” Thus begins the Kumeyaay account of the beginning of the world.¹⁶ At the Mexican Pacific borderlands, water was a central feature of Indigenous lifeways. The present-day Salton Sea marks the remains of the prehistoric Lake Cahuilla, whose shoreline perimeter stretched over a hundred miles long.¹⁷ Following the Little Ice Age (1350-1850), declining regional temperatures actively affected areas such as western North America, rendering them vulnerable to recurring

¹⁶ “The Beginning of the World,” *California Indian Nights*, 105.

¹⁷ Natale A. Zappia, *Traders and Raiders: The Indigenous World of the Colorado Basin, 1540-1859* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 28.

cycles of drought and flooding. These climatic shifts brought about significant alterations to the shorelines of Lake Cahuilla.¹⁸ From 1300 to 1450 CE, droughts and floods also remade agricultural and cultural patterns for Indigenous people in the region.¹⁹ As temperatures continued to lower from 1450 to 1500, a persistent lack of rainfall caused the region-defining shores of Lake Cahuilla to recede for the last time.²⁰

¹⁸ Zappia, *Traders and Raiders*, 28-29.

¹⁹ For more on the Little Ice Age, see L. Mark Raab and Terry L. Jones, *Prehistoric California: Archeology and the Myth of Paradise* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2004): 12-32. See also Natale A. Zappia, *Traders and Raiders: The Indigenous World of the Colorado Basin, 1540-1859* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014): 27-28.

²⁰ Susan L. Swan, "Mexico in the Little Ice Age," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 11, no. 4 (Spring 1981): 633-648.

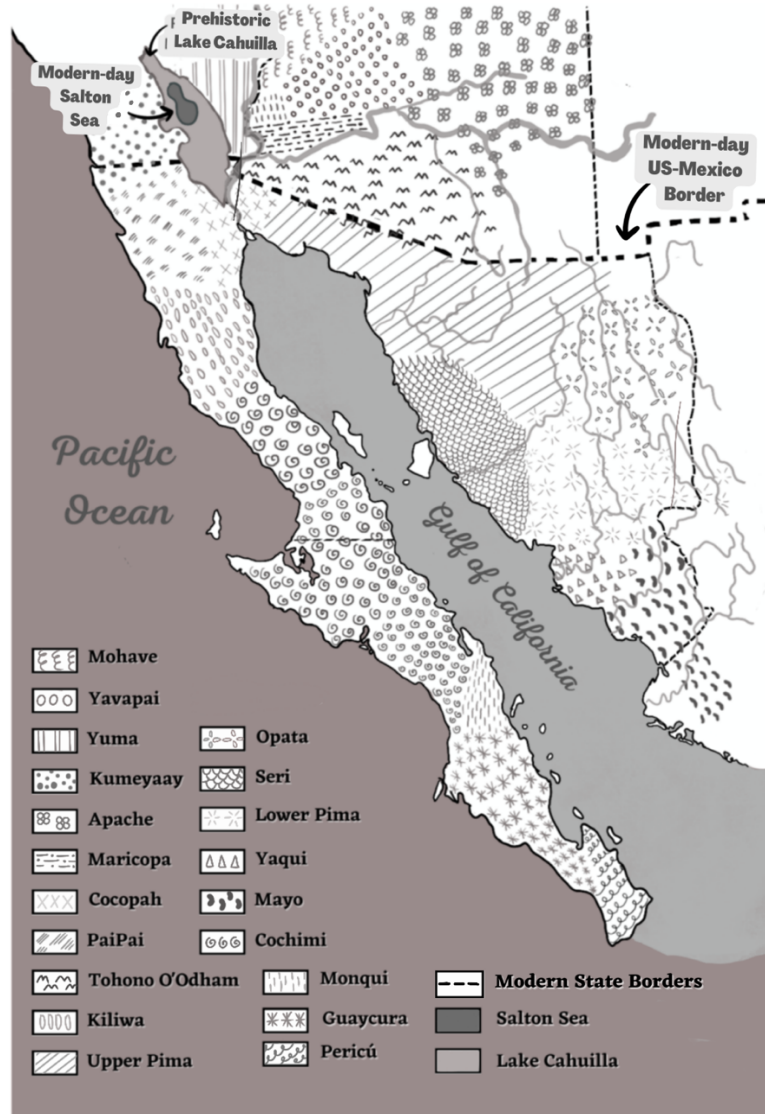


Figure 2: Indigenous Map of the Mexican Pacific Borderlands. Drawn by the author.

The disappearance of Lake Cahuilla served as a catalyst for migration to and emigration from the region. After the lake dried up, the Quechans, Maricopas, Kumeyaays, and Cocopah migrated southward to seek alternative water sources. Some Yuman-speaking communities like the Kumeyaay chose to settle on the coasts and deserts of northern Baja, while other Uto-Aztecan-speaking peoples like the Cahuilla migrated towards the Gila River in present-day Arizona or the Colorado desert region.²¹ Anthropologist Alfred Kroeber described the resettlement of Yuman-speaking people as the “Shoshonean Wedge” which marked the linguistic cleavage of the Yuman and Uto-Aztecan people.²²

We can see the significance of the regional separation of Native communities in the Yuman creation stories. The Yuman and Cocopah’s creation stories traced their origin to waterways, most likely Lake Cahuilla, or to the Gulf of California. Both histories focused on two brothers who rose from the water and found their way onto land. The Yuman story of Kwikumat and Blind Old Man vividly portrayed water as a dynamic force that both bestows and extinguishes life. When a Yuman woman wanted to marry a Cocopah man at the beginning of the world, her creator Kwikumat warned against marrying outside her tribe. But Blind Old Man encouraged the woman

²¹ Zappia, *Trader and Raiders*, 27-28.

²² Zappia, *Traders and Raiders*, 28. For more on the Shoshonean wedge, see Alfred Kroeber, *Uto-Aztecan Languages of Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas, 1934).

to discount Kwikumat's words and put her faith in him. The Yuma woman, lured by Blind Old Man's promises of food and wealth, denounced Kwikumat. Enraged, Kwikumat called forth a heavy rain to "cover the world with water" and destroyed everything except the Yuman man.²³ Kwikumat created and destroyed the world through flooding multiple times. With each re-creation, Kwikumat created more land and mountains to withstand the floods.

Kwikumat's cycles of creation and destruction correspond with scientifically documented cycles of flooding and evaporation of the prehistoric Lake Cahuilla from 1200 to 1600.²⁴ During his cycle of creation and destruction, Kwikumat created Rattlesnake, who bit and killed the Yuman man. As punishment, Kwikumat threw Rattlesnake into the northern ocean. Kwikumat then resurrected the Yuman man from death, only to destroy the Yuman people and all others with fire as retribution for internal warfare. Before Kwikumat destroyed the people through floods, Kwikumat's son, Kumastamxo, interfered to save a small group of people. He hid them in different places, some in snow and some in the mountains.

²³ "The Beginning of the World," *California Indian Nights*, 109-110.

²⁴ Jerry Schaefer and Don Laylander, "The Colorado Desert: Ancient Adaptations to Wetlands and Wastelands," in Terry L. Jones and Kathryn Klar, *California Prehistory: Colonization, Culture, and Complexity* (Lanham: Alta Mira Press, 2007). Zappia, *Traders and Raiders*, 29.

The mass drownings enraged Kwikumat's daughter, Frog, and she murdered her father. With his last words, Kwikumat implored Kumastamxo to continue the brutal killings. But Kwikumat's son refused. Instead, Kumastamxo slew the Rattlesnake, who had grown into a ferocious sea monster. Upon Rattlesnake's death, the serpent's blood turned into gold, his venom into silver, his head into gravel beds, and his body transformed into mountains. Victorious, Kumastamxo thrust his spear into the earth and etched the Rio Colorado River and its delta. He promised, "There will never be another [flood]; for I shall take this great body and place it along the shore about the whole world, and above it the water shall not rise."²⁵ Kumastamxo then built a house for the Yuman people in the mountains and taught them about culture, history, and ways to master their new environment. As Kumastamxo carved out the expansive waterways of the Rio Colorado River, he returned to the water source and sang. "This is my water... This is my river... We love its water. We love its driftwood. It shall flow forever."²⁶ Once Kumastamxo formed the Colorado River, he built two rafts and rode down the river with a medicine man from each group of people—the Maricopa, the Diegueño, the Yuma, and the Cocopah. As they rode down the river, Kumastamxo stopped to allocate land and water to each tribe.

²⁵ Herbert W. Luthin, ed., *Surviving Through the Days: Translations of Native California Stories and Songs: A California Indian Reader* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 481.

²⁶ Luthin, *Surviving through the Days*, 483.

Kumastamxo sent the Yuma to the north, the Wallapai and the Havasupai to the northeast, and the Chemehuevi to the northwest. The Cocopah were sent to the south, and the Diegueño and the Kawai were guided to the west. To the east, Kumastamxo directed the Maricopa.²⁷ He instructed them not to cross certain parts of the river. Through their actions, Kumastamxo effectively demarcated the territorial, riparian, and marine borders of the region.

The story of Kwikummat and his children showed that water can give life and take it away. It also supported the notion that Indigenous understandings of sovereignty were place-based.²⁸ Like Kumastamxo, Indigenous coastal communities

²⁷ Academic re-creations of the prehistoric lake place the Cahuilla's maximum northernmost shoreline near present-day Indio, California, and its southernmost shore near Puebla, Sonora. Archeological excavations of historic indigenous pits scattered around the Sonoran Desert indicate that the disappearance of Lake Cahuilla influenced the regional development of the Mexican Pacific borderlands. The resultant ethnic shifts and cultural changes dramatically affected the lifeways of the desert Kumeyaay-Diegueño, the western Kumeyaay-Diegueño, Cahuilla, Luiseño, Mojave, Quechan, and Cocopah. See Layler, 17.

²⁸ This approach to Indigenous place aligns with the New Western Historians' rethinking of place and process. My work rejects the scholarship of American West scholars writing in the late-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries, such as Frederick Jackson Turner, who defined Western history by its relation to the process of frontier settlement where Anglo Americans conquered the savage frontier and rushed in civilization. In the late-1980s, New West historians, led by Patricia Limerick, were skeptical of the singular concept of the frontier as the central tenet of the American West, called for a redefinition of the West and introduced "place" and "process" as a common language for discussing historical frameworks for approaching and conceptualizing of the West. For New West historians, the American West remained a distinct region with unique relationships to conquest rather than a homogeneous landmass only given meaning by Anglo Americans' settler-colonial process of

used their relationship and control over waterways to establish homes and places for themselves and their descendants. As Kumastamxo said to his people, “Because you are good people, I want you to find a good place to stay... This is my homeland.”²⁹

Even after generations of environmental change and migration from 1450 to 1550,

“civilizing” a western frontier, as exemplified by historians like Turner. See Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft* (San Francisco: A.L. Bancroft and Company, 1882). Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1966). Frederick Jackson Turner, *Frontier and Section: Selected Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall, 1961). Howard Roberts Lamar, *Dakota Territory, 1861-1889: A Study of Frontier Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956). Howard Roberts Lamar, *The Far Southwest, 1846-1912: A Territorial History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956). Reginald Horsman, *The Frontier in the Formative Years, 1783- 1815*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1970). Ray Allen Billington, *Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier* (New York: Macmillan, 1960). Ray Allen Billington, *The American Frontier* (Washington D.C.: Service Center for Teachers of History, 1965). Ray Allen Billington, *America’s Frontier Heritage* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966). Ray Allen Billington, *America’s Frontier Culture: Three Essays* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1973). Herbert E. Bolton, *The Spanish Borderlands: A Chronicle of Old Florida and the Southwest* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1921). John Francis Bannon, *The Spanish Borderlands Frontier, 1513-1821* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974). For the New Western History, see Patricia Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1987). William Cronon, George Miles, and Jay Gitlin eds., *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America’s Western Past* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992). Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Donald Worster, *Under Western Skies: Nature and History in the American West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991).

²⁹ Luthin, *Surviving through the Days*, 483.

Indigenous communities maintained their tribal borders and cultural autonomy through their relationship to regional waterscapes.

Indigenous conceptions of sovereignty as tied to both land and water warrant a reconsideration of border formation. Native tribes in the Mexican Pacific borderlands actively controlled waterways and unified the region by connecting diverse environments, peoples, and economies, defying the influence of Spanish colonialism. The Kumeyaay, Diegueño, Cocopah, Mojaves, and Guaycura tribes actively exercised control over waterways and maritime spaces, successfully preventing colonial resettlement projects. Native exercise of water sovereignty, command of critical freshwater sources, and maintenance of navigational knowledge of internal waterways reorient borderlands history to highlight Indigenous power and resilience in defiance of imperial and national authority, including the delimitation of political and cultural borders.³⁰ Baja California Indigenous communities like the Mojave and

³⁰ For more on maritime history and changing conceptions of sea power and maritime space, see Nathan Perl-Rosenthal and Lauren Benton, *A World at Sea: Maritime Practices and Global History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020). This edited collection introduces the concept of “land and sea regimes” to highlight the socio-spatial, sociopolitical, and cultural formations that emerge from maritime and terrestrial processes that link land and sea. See Margaret Schutte’s essay, “Sailors, States, and the Creation of Nautical Knowledge,” that re-categorizes maritime knowledge from a category of experience to a recognized, growing scientific practice. Schutte’s work shows how navigational and maritime knowledge was a critical part of state bureaucratic systems. While Schutte explores the recasting of knowledge as science within the context of European empires, my work will use this understanding to reconsider Indigenous water knowledge as a form of state

Chemehuevi navigated the labyrinthian riparian systems of the Rio Colorado Basin to evade Jesuit and other Spanish Imperial agents and delimit Native communities into expansive mission networks. Along the Pacific coasts of Alta and Baja California, the Chumash and the Huamalgüeños exercised water sovereignty by maintaining clear, defensive maritime borders for centuries from their island strongholds in the Channel Islands and the Isla de Cedros, respectively.³¹ Water sovereignty, in Sonora, unfolded differently as the region's expansive riparian networks allowed non-Native imperial and, later, national agents to challenge Indigenous control of major waterways. Indigenous communities like the Seri and Opata used amphibian raiding tactics to gain mastery over the sea, land, rivers, mountains, and desert geographies. Such tactics helped Indigenous Sonorans counter imperial and national efforts to attach them to oppressive labor structures, at least for a time.

power. Also, see David Iglar's chapter, "Indigenous Maritime Travelers and Knowledge Production," which pulls Indigenous navigators into the center of maritime space and global history, albeit in pursuit of mutual discovery and knowledge production. See Jeppe Mulich's chapter essay, "Maritime Marronage in Colonial Borderlands," highlighting how enslaved people's maritime movement in and outside of imperial control evidenced patterns of violence and cooperation in the Caribbean.

³¹ Matthew R. Des Lauriers, "The Spectre of Conflict on Isla Cedros, Baja California, Mexico," in *Trekking the Shore: Changing Coastlines and the Antiquity of Coastal Settlement*, ed. Nuno Ferreira Bicho (New York: Springer, 2011), 204-219: 205-210.

Incorporating waterways as a basis of Indigenous authority reconfigures the multi-scalar contestations for power at the core of borderlands scholarship.³² Yet, borderlands scholars privileged social and political processes that were land-based and viewed the maritime movement and power exercised by Indigenous coastal people as tangential or unimportant to larger discussions on the formation of political borders.³³ Still, Indigenous people within the Mexican Pacific borderlands used

³² See Herbert E. Bolton, *The Spanish Borderlands: A Chronicle of Old Florida and the Southwest* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1921). John Francis Bannon, *The Spanish Borderlands Frontier, 1513-1821* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974). Jay Gitlin, "On the Boundaries of Empire: Connecting the West to Its Imperial Past," in *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past*, eds. William Cronon, George Miles, and Jay Gitlin (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992). For more on borderlands as a historical perspective, see Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aaron, "From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the People in Between in North American History," *The American Historical Review* 104, no. 3 (June 1999): 814-841. Jeremy Adelman, *Frontier Development: Land, Labor, and Capital on the Wheatlands of Argentina and Canada, 1890-1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). Cynthia Radding, *Wandering Peoples: Colonialism, Ethnic Spaces, and Ecological Frontiers in Northwestern Mexico, 1700-1850* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

³³ For more on Latin American frontiers and terra-centric understandings of bordered lands, see Matthew Restall, *Beyond Black and Red: African-Native Relations in Colonial Latin America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005). Zacarías Moutoukias, *Contrabando y Control Colonial En El Siglo Xvii: Buenos Aires, El Atlántico y El Espacio Peruano* (Buenos Aires: El Centro Editor del América Latina, 1988). Alida Metcalf, *Family and Frontier in Colonial Brazil: Santana de Pamaiba, 1580-1822*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). Patricia Cerda Pincheria Hegerl, *Fronteras del Sur* (Berlin: Inst. Latinamericano de la Universidad Libre de Berlin, 1997). Washington Reyes Abadie, Oscar H. Bruschera, and Tabaré Melogno, *La Banda Oriental: pradera, frontera, puerto* (Montevideo: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 1965). For more on historical emphasis of frontiers in American West history, see Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American*

waterways and maritime spaces to challenge European, Mexican, and, later, American power. The modalities of water—from navigation to fishing to irrigation—as much as land proved critical to the settlement and colonization of the Mexican Pacific borderlands region. Indigenous use of landscapes and waterscapes unsettled Spanish legal understandings of colonial sovereignty that emphasized strategic, albeit uneven, control over multiple geographies. The tension between abstract, legally rooted colonial ownership of landscapes and the real, place-based Indigenous mastery over waterscapes generated pockets of contested power that operated less like a violent clash of two powers along bordered corridors and more like a deliberate dance of hybrid arrangements to ensure community survival that manifested in strategic spheres of multi-layered plural sovereignty.

Still incomprehensible to the Jesuit missionaries re-entering the region in the mid- to late-eighteenth century, Lake Cahuilla's disappearance prompted major ecological shifts and dramatically restructured Indigenous lifeways. As a result, Native communities grappled for generations to transition from sedentary clan structures to semi-nomadic livelihoods that hinged on access to and mastery of

History (1899; Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1966). Ray Allen Billington, *Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier* (New York: Macmillan, 1960). Reginald Horsman, *The Frontier in the Formative Years, 1783-1815*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1970). Ray Allen Billington, *America's Frontier Culture: Three Essays* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1973).

regional waterways. Centuries of honed water knowledge afforded various opportunities for the Mexican Pacific's myriad Indigenous tribes to leverage power in the form of plural sovereignty. The incorporation of Indigenous maritime mastery into borderlands frameworks allows plural sovereignty to address the pervasive specter of the "Ecologically Noble Savage," which contends that Indigenous people are inherently closer to nature and that Native communities have an innate harmonious relationship with their environments.³⁴ Critically, plural sovereignty maintains that Indigenous water knowledge developed intentionally after centuries of community struggle as Lake Cahuilla evaporated. With this fundamental understanding, the inherent possibilities underscored within plural sovereignty can reorient the axis of power in complex geographical regions like the Mexican Pacific borderlands that afforded Native and non-Native actors equal agency as their communities navigate pragmatic and strategic decisions.

Nevertheless, for later imperial agents like Baegert writing in the 1760s, he viewed the semi-sedentary, semi-nomadic lifeways of Indigenous people in the

³⁴ Sarah Rodrigue-Allouche, "Conservation and Indigenous Peoples: The Adoption of the Ecological Noble Savage Discourse and Its Political Consequences," MA Thesis, (Uppsala University, 2015): 11-14. For more on the "Myth of the Ecologically Noble Savage," see Kent H. Redford, "The ecologically noble savage", *Orion Nature Quarterly* (Summer 1990): 25-29. See P. Nadasdy, "Transcending the debate over the Ecologically Noble Indian: Indigenous Peoples and Environmentalism," *Ethno History* 52, no. 2 (2005): 291-331.

Mexican Pacific as proof of his growing suspicions that California was uninhabitable. “It is not possible for [Native peoples] to live together, for California is not a land,” exclaimed the Jesuit, “but...a veritable purgatory, if not a hell...”³⁵ The enduring presence of Native communities throughout centuries of unsuccessful colonization efforts demonstrated the significant regional influence they held in Baja California. This influence was characterized by their ability to assert mastery over waterscapes, which translated into political and cultural power well into the beginning of the nineteenth century. Indigenous cultivation of water sovereignty in the interior Native world of the Mexican Pacific set the foundation for one pillar of plural sovereignty—strategic geographic movement—that developed in the region throughout the long nineteenth century.

During the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Indigenous control over maritime space and profound navigational knowledge in Baja California and Sonora rivaled the dominance of European imperial naval empires. Native exercise of plural sovereignty Indigenous oral traditions established a long history of presence for the Native communities of the Mexican Pacific anchored in knowledge, navigation, and use of land and water. While regional and place-based conceptions of place undergirded Indigenous notions of community and autonomy, Spanish imperial

³⁵ Baegert, Letter to George Baegart, 11 September 1757, *The Letters of Jacob Baegert*, 137.

agents operated under Westernized legal codes encased in Eurocentric rhetoric bolstered by the Catholic Church doctrine. The spiritual conquest of unsettled areas like the Californias and Pimería Alta, modern-day Arizona and Sonora, spurred the Spanish Crown to assign these problematic territories to the Jesuit order in the late-seventeenth century. For missionaries like Baegert working in the Mexican Pacific borderlands in the late-1700s, California's promise and the Crown's renewed Jesuit-led colonization campaigns stemmed from a shared imperial vision best articulated by Father Eusebio Kino, one of the most famous missionaries, explorers, and ethnographers in the Church's foothold of Pimería Alta. Importantly, Kino believed, like Indigenous peoples, that mastery over waterways and littoral spaces held the key to the Mexican Pacific's future.

As a cartographer and spiritual leader, Kino envisioned a unified Spanish imperial world to merge lucrative Chinese-Philippine galleon markets with the Spanish homeland. Seven years before establishing the first Jesuit mission in Baja California, in 1690, Kino foresaw the imperial crossing of the Sea of California as an initial step in actualizing his expansive global vision with the Californias at its center. For Kino, the Pacific and the California waterways held the potential to link China, the Philippines, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Europe together. Kino's trans-Pacific aspirations, grounded in legal codes and strategic uses of geography, were a dimension of empire-building that worked with specific arrangements of sea routes

and controlled littoral zones.³⁶ From Sonora, Kino frequently wrote about the possible prospects of crossing the Gulf of California for the Spanish empire, “...through these...conquests [we can establish a] port of call for the ship of China or the Philippine galleon, and at the same time some commerce for these provinces..and perhaps...it will be possible to open a way and shorter water route to Spain.”³⁷ Like other explorers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Kino believed that the Californias held a northern passageway—the Strait of Anian—that joined the Pacific and Atlantic oceans.³⁸ Spanish claims and markers for sovereignty hinged on strategic territorial and often symbolic presence. For centuries, colonial entities believed the Baja peninsula with its long coastlines could unify New Spain’s interior and radiate outward to recenter and secure Spain’s exclusive Pacific rights.

To rationalize renewed colonization efforts, imperial agents centered discussions on the spectrum of barbarism displayed by the Americas’ Indigenous peoples in an attempt to reconcile their abstract legal claims to maritime corridors while dismissing the actual place-based littoral control Native communities held. This debate over the status of Native peoples within the greater Mexican imaginary

³⁶ Lauren Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 30.

³⁷ Kino, *Kino Reports to Headquarters*, 213.

³⁸ See Herbert Bancroft, “The Northern Mystery and Imagined Geography, 1500-1595,” in *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft, Vol. 27: History of the Northwest Coast, Vol. 1: 1543-1800* (San Francisco: A. L. Bancroft, 1884).

became a conceptual through-line throughout the late-imperial period into Mexico's Republic period during the reign of Porfirio Díaz in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Within the context of New Spain, the late-eighteenth century's dominant views of Indigenous peoples can be reduced to the dichotomy of the "good Indian" and the "bad Indian" that informed and dictated imperial agents."³⁹ So called "good Indians," as championed primarily by spiritual leaders and theorists, cast Native peoples as generally hardworking, peaceful, and docile with a great intellectual capacity to rival any Spaniard. Under this view, Native peoples were not innately inferior but were, instead, the victims of Spanish cruelty or corruption.

Despite the romanticization of Native peoples in regions like central New Spain, where the likelihood of Indigenous revolts appeared low, Spanish imperialists adopted the concept of "bad Indians" in peripheral regions such as the Mexican Pacific borderlands. This classification was used to encompass communities like the Apaches, Seris, and Kumeyaay, who actively engaged in open rebellion against Spanish rule.⁴⁰ While growing late-eighteenth century Enlightenment thought debated in Europe but originating in New Spain began recasting perpetually infantilized Native peoples as capable beings "*con razon*," *indios* remained, for the purposes of

³⁹ David J. Weber, *Bárbaros: Spaniards and Their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), Kindle Edition, Location 555-730.

⁴⁰ Weber, *Bárbaros*, Location 715.

colonization, a distinct legal category.⁴¹ Imperial agents in Baja California and Sonora dedicated themselves to the spiritual conquest of Indigenous peoples along and within the Mexican Pacific borderlands.

Spanish imperial agents, influenced by European legal traditions like the Doctrine of Discovery, disregarded securing control over internal waterscapes. Instead, they focused on establishing coastal defenses against other European empires, seen as the primary threats to Spanish sovereignty. As a series of legal decrees, papal bulls served as the Christian Church's foundational legislative documents, which held that only Europeans and their descendants carried an innate and legally protected humanity that manifested in the right to own land and property in the Americas especially over peoples deemed incapable of, in the mind of Spanish theorists, "reason" like its Indigenous peoples.⁴² Grounded in this rhetorical foundation, the legal precedent established by the Doctrine of Discovery held Native peoples as limited subjects within New Spain's interior with abbreviated rights to property and their labor. As a result, in the Americas, newly empowered Enlightenment Spanish Imperial bureaucrats sought to convert Native subjects not solely into Christian vassals of the Crown, but also, more importantly, into productive taxpayers and to strengthen commercial ties with independent Indigenous nations

⁴¹ Weber, *Bárbaros*, Location 689.

⁴² Weber, *Bárbaros*, Location 703.

particularly in the Mexican Pacific borderlands.⁴³ Folding independent Native peoples at the frontier of Spanish control proved difficult when the institutional tools of empire—like *presidios*, or military outposts, and missions—remained understaffed with limited local influence in the wake of the more diffuse nature of plural sovereignty in the region. The significance that imperial officials attributed to resolving the question of the alleged inherent barbarism of the Native peoples in the region actively shaped official Spanish policy, influenced their perceptions of local sovereignty, and led to a failure in acknowledging the substantial power wielded by Indigenous through water sovereignty in regions such as the Californias and the Rio Colorado Basin.

In the estimation of Spanish imperial agents, a maritime conquest of the Californias relied on commanding the Pacific Ocean and the Gulf of California—vast bodies of water with extensive coastlines. Yet, centuries of failed colonization later demonstrated that true power in the region ultimately resided in the Indigenous mastery of internal waterways and littoral spaces. By exercising control over land routes and, more significantly, waterways and coastal areas, Indigenous communities were able to bypass and evade colonial agents.⁴⁴ The semi-nomadic lifeways of many

⁴³ Weber, *Bárbaros*, Location 566.

⁴⁴ See Jeanne E. Arnold, *The Origins of a Pacific Coast Chieftdom: The Chumash of the Channel Islands* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2001). Miguel Leon-

Mexican Pacific tribes evidenced Indigenous proficiency in utilizing both land and water routes.⁴⁵ Historian Cynthia Radding writing on the Rio Sonora region and the Native territories and communities surrounding the Yaqui and Mayo rivers used the lens of social ecology to link social structure to resource allocation.⁴⁶ Radding, in her work on colonial and early national Sonora, underscored how Indigenous peoples' mastery of their environments translated to tangible power, "Through [Indigenous peoples'] struggle for survival, they developed a discourse which juxtaposed their own cultural and ecological standards to the colonial project."⁴⁷ Ecological realities shaped how Indigenous peoples used resources and structured their communities. With colonial Sonora, riverways—access to and knowledge of them—dictated Indigenous life and colonization efforts. With plural sovereignties developing in the region, Spanish imperial agents learned the limits of their control in the Mexican Pacific borderlands.

Portilla and Gabriel Gomez Padilla, "Baja California: geografía de la esperanza," *Artes de México* 65: Misiones Jesuitas (Junio de 2003): 64-71.

⁴⁵ Zappia, *Traders and Raiders*. 47-49. Cynthia Radding, *Wandering Peoples: Colonialism, Ethnic Spaces, and Ecological Frontiers in Northwestern Mexico, 1700-1850* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

⁴⁶ Radding, *Wandering Peoples*, 3. Thomas D. Rogers, *The Deepest Wounds: A Labor and Environmental History of Sugar in Northeastern Brazil* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 5-13. Rogers uses the term "laboring landscapes" to identify enviro-social change within the *zona de mata* in Brazil.

⁴⁷ Radding, *Wandering Peoples*, 3.

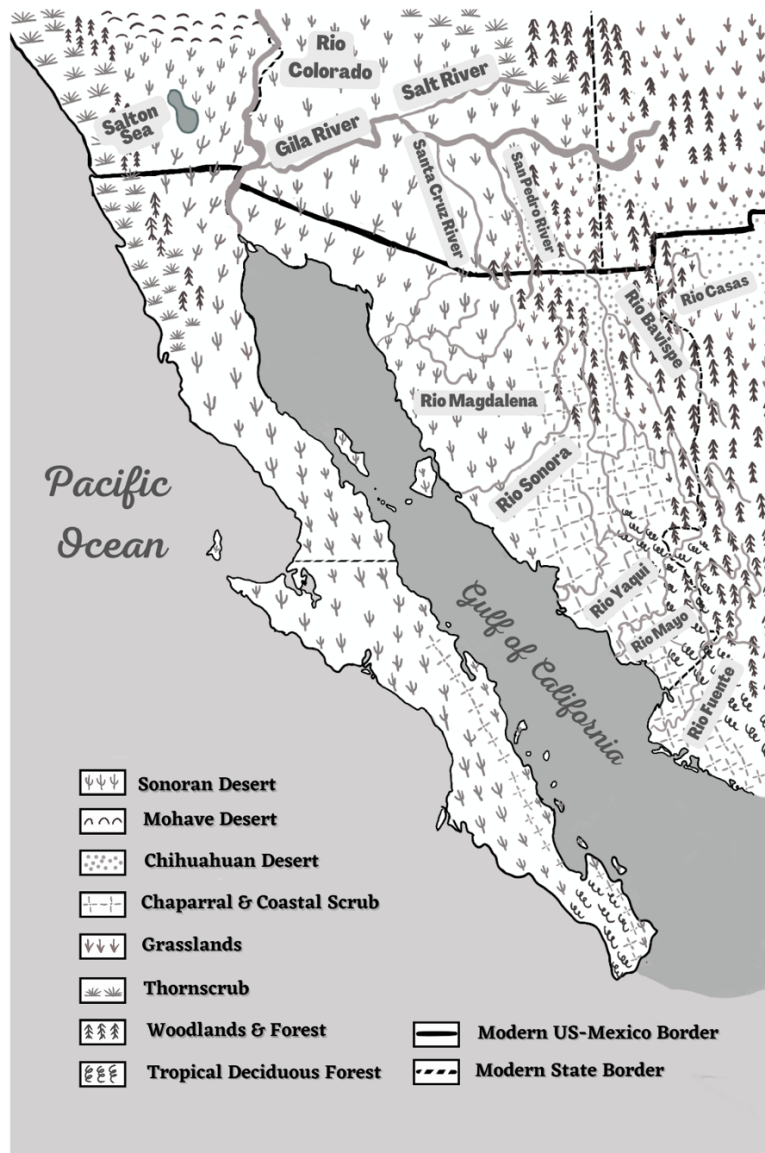


Figure 3: Ecological Map of the Mexican Pacific Borderlands.
 Drawn by the author.

Still, in 1750, Baegart's arrival in Baja California marked the beginning of the Spanish Crown's renewed colonization efforts in the region despite the looming specter of centuries of failed conquest. Assigned to Mision San Luis Gonzaga between Loreto and La Paz, Baegart found himself in one of the most remote locations in New Spain. After a couple of years living in California, Baegart realized his inability to harness freshwater sources undermined his larger spiritual and economic aims. Critically, Baegert realized that his agricultural fantasy of fertile fields and expansive vineyards to export foodstuffs to New Spain and Europe conflicted with the Crown's lack of controlled waterways in Baja California. "When I had only heard of California and had not yet seen it," confessed Baegert, "I thought it would have vines growing as in Alsance (a village in France)."⁴⁸ Baegert understood that any hope of fertile fields lay in securing internal freshwater sources. "However, there are only four missions where one can find some water," Baegert admitted even as he worked towards creating the foundation for an agricultural mission community at San Luis Gonzaga.

Most European imperial representatives, including Baegert, insisted that enforcing a strict governing regime created workable European agricultural forms, no matter the climate or physical geography. The region's arid landscape, seasonal

⁴⁸ Baegert, Letter to Father George Baegert, 11 September 1752, *The Letters of Jacob Baegert*, 134.

rainfall, limited freshwater supplies, and lack of an internal river network worked against the priest's vision for colonization. "There is an incredible and unspeakable lack of rain," bemoaned Baegert.⁴⁹ With little water, the priest encouraged residents to balance their water intake with the tasks of hydrating their fields and their livestock. Lamenting the death of a dozen of his goats, Baegert confessed that he feared the lack of drinkable water also marked his mission's cattle and horses for death. After months of struggle, Baegert conceded, albeit grudgingly, that control over the region required mastery of the peninsula's waterways. To the priest's continued frustration, Baja's Indigenous peoples—and not the Crown—were the keepers and stalwart protectors of waterways' knowledge after centuries of movement and strategic adaptation to shifting environmental conditions. Indigenous navigational and maritime skills proved critical to life in Baja California. Yaqui sailors often ferried Spanish agents between Sonoran and Californian missions across the Gulf of California. Baegert began his travels by crossing the Gulf of California on a small craft canoe, and observing that, "In the middle of the sea I could not see either of the twin shores though they have high mountains."⁵⁰ Baegert's unease and resolve to

⁴⁹ Baegert, Letter to Father George Baegert, 11 September 1752, *The Letters of Jacob Baegert*, 129.

⁵⁰ Baegert, Letter to George Baegert, 11 September 1752, *The Letters of Jacob Baegert*, 150.

never undertake that journey across the Gulf of California indicated that Spanish imperial agents yielded to Native authority in matters of water and navigation.

If Baja California's geography, environment, and limited internal water sources hindered imperial colonization efforts, it was Native communities' exercise of plural sovereignty in the cycling in and out of Baja California's mission systems that all but stalled the project altogether. Baja California's mission systems functioned as semi-autonomous spaces that bore the imprint of larger Spanish imperial claims to sovereignty. Because of Indigenous waterway command, mission sites, presidios (military garrisons), and outposts in Baja California stood as zones of uneven authority suggestive of divided sovereignty shared by the Crown and Indigenous Californians.⁵¹ Guaycura people of the Magalane plains and the coastal La Paz regions, Baegert's primary parishioners, selectively cycled in and out of the Spanish mission. Baegert shared that his "flying Guaicuran [stet] army of parishioners" selectively entered his mission system from three different geographical groups.⁵² According to Baegart, the Guaycura lived in distinct familial groups to the north, east, and west of the mission, expanding as far as a twenty-four-hour journey in any direction. Baegert posited that these geographical placements were contingent on

⁵¹ Benton, *A Searching for Sovereignty*, 2. 29.

⁵² Baegert, Letter to George Baegert, 11 September 1752, *The Letters of Jacob Baegert*, 153.

the availability of freshwater and foodstuffs. Baegert considered coastal Guaycura the richest of the three “brigades” because they not only benefited from easier access to fish and marine wildlife like turtles and crabs, but they also used their geographical knowledge and access to protect internal freshwater resources to evade compulsion into mission labor systems. “The [coastal Guaycurans] Indians have the greatest advantage of it because they have to come to the mission every three or four weeks,” lamented Baegert, “After fourteen days they return from whence they have come and the camp of San Luis is re-occupied with another brigade.”⁵³ Baegert’s recognition revealed that the Guaycuran people’s mastery over littoral spaces and seascapes possessed the potential to undermine conventional colonization tactics, which aimed to enclose and subjugate Indigenous communities. While Indigenous peoples chose to enter select missions to exploit Jesuit food stores, these pragmatic Native choices to cycle in and out of mission systems on their terms illustrated how plural sovereignties manifested in the Mexican Pacific.

Small ceremonial rituals within the imperial space of Jesuit missions also underscored plural sovereignties at work. During periods when the Guaycura were in residence within the mission, they nonchalantly engaged in Catholic rituals like prayers and communion, but then, “[Away] from the church, they ran helter-skelter as

⁵³ Baegert, Letter to George Baegert, 11 September 1752, *The Letters of Jacob Baegert*, 154.

fast as possible into the woods to look for food.”⁵⁴ Later in the evening, the Guaycura returned to the mission for evening prayers and dinner. While Indigenous peoples entered the mission to exploit Jesuit food stores, these pragmatic Native choices to cycle in and out of mission systems on their terms illustrated how plural sovereignties manifested in the Mexican Pacific. Not only did the constant movement frustrate mission models that sought to keep Indigenous peoples as Christianized labor pools, but the Jesuit acceptance of Indigenous water-based mobility solidified the uneven nature of Spanish sovereignty in the Mexican Pacific. Instead of admitting defeat, Jesuit fathers recast the small ceremonial acts or their recital of prayers as recurring proof to support Spanish claims of discovery, possession, and continued supremacy.⁵⁵ While Baegert might have been candid about his inability to complete his agricultural and spiritual mission in California, other Jesuit fathers continued to oversell these administrative acts of prayer or confession as proof of Spanish control in the region despite increasing Indigenous resistance and armed rebellions across Baja California and Sonora.

The Rio Colorado region, in particular, operated as a distinct space of Indigenous sovereignty and power as open rebellions also reinforced functioning

⁵⁴ Baegert, Letter to George Baegert, 11 September 1752, *The Letters of Jacob Baegert*, 154.

⁵⁵ Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty*, 23.

plural sovereignties. “The California missions do not go into that area where the peninsula joins the rest of America, that is at the Rio Colorado,” Baegert explained to his brother, “[The] Pima are not yet brought to order.”⁵⁶ Baegert’s letters provided a survey of open Indigenous rebellions in the Mexican Pacific borderlands from the Seri in Sonora to the Apache in New Mexico and Sonora. To Baegert, the northern Baja region stood as a recognized Indigenous seat of power. Armed rebellion and Indigenous evasion, underscored by mastery over waterways, slowed Spanish colonization efforts to a glacial pace. “The effort to extend the missions and... Christianity farther to the north moves very slowly,” conceded Baegert, “especially because of the condition of the country and because of the lack of soldiers, without whom you cannot succeed with Americans.”⁵⁷ Still, for nearly one hundred years, from 1697 to 1769, the Jesuit Order maintained precarious settlements in the Baja Peninsula. Increased rebellions, a fracturing northwestern frontier, and imperial suspicions of Jesuit motives prompted the Spanish monarch Charles III to expel the Jesuit order, including Baegert, from the Americas in 1768. For nearly a century, Native dominion over waterscapes proved a stark contrast to the Spanish Imperial agents’ understanding of waterways as strategic corridors and pathways for European

⁵⁶ Baegert, Letter to George Baegert, 11 September 1752, *The Letters of Jacob Baegert*, 159.

⁵⁷ Baegert, Letter to George Baegert, 4 October 1754, *The Letters of Jacob Baegert*, 168-169.

empires. Colonization efforts in Baja California revealed Spain's abstract notions of the legal right to claim dominion over strategic landscapes crumbled before Indigenous peoples' effective control over key waterscapes. Native negotiations of non-Native encounters framed their later dealings with late-colonial mission systems and early national bureaucracies. The Spanish monarchy tasked the assessment of abandoned Jesuit missions in the Mexican Pacific to the Franciscan and Dominican orders. New Franciscan administrators like Fray Francisco Tomás Garcés and Fray Antonio Maria de los Reyes struggled to identify why colonization remained tenuous in the region.

Similar to the Jesuits before him, the Spanish Crown also tasked Franciscan Fray Francisco Tomás Garcés with assessing "the last Christian settlement" at Misión San Xavier del Bac, in present-day Tucson, Arizona, New Spain's northern-most frontier in 1768.⁵⁸ An agent of both church and state, Garcés undertook multiple "entradas," or reconnaissance trips, to map the Rio Colorado and Rio Gila regions in the early 1760s as the Bourbon Reforms swept through Spain's colonial holdings.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Fray Francisco Garcés, *Diario, de las ultimas peregrinaciones del Padre Fray Francisco Garcés, hasta la provinvia del Moqui y noticias de varias nuevas naciones exparcidas hasta el Rio Colorado en California, 1777*, MS AZ 416, Special Collections, University of Arizona Library, Tucson, AZ: 5.

⁵⁹ From 1768 to 1779, Garcés undertook six entradas into the Mexican Pacific borderlands. Over the years, Garcés visited the Tohono O'odham and the Opas along the Colorado and Gila River. He pushed further west and followed the Colorado

Garcés' fifth entrada from 1775 to 1776 proved the most extensive and significant as the missionary trekked over two thousand miles of desert, mountains, and internal waterscapes in southern Arizona and northern Baja California. While contact with and eventual spiritual conversion of the Mexican Pacific Native people comprised Garcés primary assignment, his secondary goal entailed securing a landed route between Sonora vis-à-vis the Rio Colorado straight through to important Alta California ports in Monterey and San Francisco.⁶⁰ As the Bourbon Reforms in Spain's imperial center pushed more overt secular ambitions, Garcés' *entradas* sought to establish legal authority in the Mexican Pacific borderlands to set the groundwork for economic futures. For, in tandem with geographical boundaries like rivers, religious frontiers translated to legal representations of political authority. As a maritime empire, Spain believed that riverine regions, like the Rio Colorado, held immense promise for imperial ambition.

While centuries of attempted conquest of Baja's lower peninsula failed to inspire sustained military attention of imperial Spain, the extensive riparian waterways of the Rio Colorado reinvigorated the Spanish Crowns aspirations for a Californian Pacific passage to the Philippines and China. Regionally, the imperial

River to its basin feeding into the Gulf of California. In 1774, Garcés joined Captain Juan Bautista de Anza's expedition into southern California.

⁶⁰ Francisco Garcés, *A Record of the Travels in Arizona and California*, translated by John Galvin (San Francisco: John Howell Books, 1965), v-vi.

state viewed rivers as active gateways to rich interior realms, as well as avenues for expanding littoral trade routes and facilitating military settlement of bordered lands. Within European law, even symbolic control over rivers and critical ocean corridors defined political institutions and justified military defense against both Indigenous denizens and circling imperial powers. Mappings of geographical frontiers and colonial presence not only signaled legitimacy to global empires, but the notations of boundaries also attempted to shape regional hegemony between Native communities and Spain's religious bureaucrats.

Religious and cultural differences between Spanish settlers and Native nations materialized into discernable boundaries. Iberian imperial agents viewed the clash between the Catholic faith and Indigenous lifeways as critical to shaping colonial law. Colonial legal and social structures formalized categories of difference and inscribed onto these constructions practical and material meanings.⁶¹ Differences in language, style of dress, ritual practices further informed boundary differences between natives and non-natives. Within the greater Iberian imperial project in New Spain, the Crown and the Church believed, according to historian David Tavárez, that Indigenous people occupied a “double subjecthood”—an individual's local identity and as a

⁶¹ Andrew B. Fisher and Matthew D. O'Hara, “Introduction: Racial Identities and Their Interpreters in Colonial Latin America,” in *Imperial Subjects: Race and Identity in Colonial Latin America*, edited by Andrew B. Fisher and Matthew D. O'Hara (Duke University Press, 2009), 13.

member of a strictly defined, imperial legal construct.⁶² Though this dual subjecthood operated in the urban centers of New Spain, on the northern periphery, subjecthood, and sovereignty operated in diffuse and layered ways with water and maritime space acting as a conduit for power. For Spanish agents like Garcés, unsettled or unnavigable riparian networks served as geographical markers of the limitations of imperial law.⁶³ Descriptions of littoral borders illustrated plural sovereignty at work by marking the limitations of colonial control, and by extension, the geographical edges of where Indigenous sovereignty began. More complex still, the diffuse nature of Native power also revealed an intricate network of intra-tribal boundary making through clearly understood water borders.

Reading against the bureaucratic weight of colonial sources, Baegert's letters and Garcés' travel journals exposed plural and layered sovereignties at work in the

⁶² David Tavárez, "Legally Indian: Inquisitorial Readings of Indigenous Identity in New Spain," in *Imperial Subjects: Race and Identity in Colonial Latin America*, edited by Andrew B. Fisher and Matthew D. O'Hara (Duke University Press, 2009), Tavárez argues that the colonial classification system, or the *castas*, were pliable and flexible. *Castas* hinged on an arrangement of multiple markers of identity---*sangre* (blood), *origen* (origin), *lenguajes* (languages or dialects), *crianza* (upbringing), and relations to *tierra* (land) and *clima* (climate). As a colonial subject, an Indigenous person's status hinged on their position within their local social network. In addition, Tavarez argues that "...an Indian was twice a person and twice a legal entity..." as Indigenous identity also functioned as a legal construct within the Spanish legal system (93). In tandem, these two identities posed a legal conflict between Indigenous autonomy and constitutional law (95).

⁶³ Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty*, 7.

Rio Colorado. Though Garcés' goal was to prepare Rio Colorado's peoples to be subjects of the Spanish Crown, his writings tell a different story of an isolated representative of a foreign state at the mercy of regional Indigenous power. Embedded in both Baegert and Garcés' texts were an explicit acknowledgement of Indigenous mastery over internal and coastal waterways that reconfigured regional equations of power and sovereignty. Garcés' year-long journey throughout northern Baja California and northern Sonora exposed the myriad ways plural sovereignties operated in the region. Just as Baegert's writings of lower Baja illustrated how Indigenous communities used geographical and water knowledge to sidestep the brunt of Spanish colonization efforts, Garcés' writings mapped the ebbs, flows, limits, and communal borders of Indigenous water sovereignty in the more densely populated Rio Colorado region. Dispersed social and geographical tribal organizations unsettled Spanish plans to negotiate with a centralized Native leadership to either negotiate with or conquer. Coupled with mixed subsistence and economic systems rooted in hunting and gathering, seasonal and flash flood farming, and riparian and coastal fishing, diffuse Native power structures hindered Spanish bureaucrats' ability to leverage power and coerce Native communities to negotiate borders, resources, and settlements.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ David Weber, *Barbaros: Spaniards and Their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), Kindle Location 849-852.

Garcés witnessed complex intra-tribal relationships, documented Indigenous navigation of clearly delineated community borders, and reflected the multi-scalar awareness of larger existential threats like violent Apache and Comanche raids to coastal regional Native lifeways. Despite imperial claims to the contrary, in each display of plural sovereignty, Garcés illustrated how Spanish imperial agents did not dominate frontier hierarchies even after a hundred years of colonization efforts. Instead, the diffuse realities of uneven power underscored how Spanish subjecthood yielded to Indigenous sovereignty. Within the Mexican Pacific, riparian and coastal corridors functioned as distinct legal spaces of empire that juxtaposed imperial dreams of expansion with the realities of Native water sovereignty that was internally complex and well-defined. Through the prism of water sovereignty, regional tribes like the Pima, Yuma, and Cucupá maintained sovereign borders despite Spanish and Apache incursions. Native guides for imperial agents like Garcés served as geographical experts and diplomats that blurred the lines between vassals and subjects of the Crown and their own respective Native communities.

Garcés' movement in and out of Native borders rested on Indigenous navigators, like his guide Sebastian, who held and closely guarded knowledge over internal waterways. While Garcés bore the weight of Spain's imperial ambitions, it was Native guides like Sebastian, who served as gatekeepers into the region, which was a common practice but can be reframed within the context of Indigenous water

sovereignty. Garcés wrote often of his guide Sebastian, from central Sonora and most likely Pima or Seri, and his extensive water knowledge and diplomatic skills in dealing with Rio Colorado communities. On one *entrada* encounter, Garcés wanted to visit with a Cucupá agricultural community, but his guide Sebastian “[was] full of misgivings...[and] begged me not to stop ... because fodder was scarce and the water was in place where the animals could not drink.”⁶⁵ In this instance among many throughout his travels, Garcés had no choice but to yield to Sebastian’s environmental expertise and water knowledge. This encounter also illustrated Sebastian’s regional geographical knowledge of the Rio Colorado basin even though his primary residence was in central Sonora.

The second illustration of plural sovereignty at work in the Rio Colorado Basin are Garcés’ detailed accounts of intra- and intertribal borders, where regional tribes like the Pima, Yuma, and Cocopah maintained and respected sovereign borders that echoed Indigenous oral sources and creation stories. Importantly, within the context plural sovereignty in the region, Garcés’ account introduced the addition of the Spanish military and Native raiding bands like the Apache and Comanche into

⁶⁵ Fray Francisco Garcés, *Diario, de las ultimas peregrinaciones del Padre Fray Francisco Garcés, hasta la provinvia del Moqui y noticias de varias nuevas naciones exparcidas hasta el Rio Colorado en California, 1777*, MS AZ 416, Special Collections, University of Arizona Library, Tucson, AZ. Entry for December 18, 1775.

discussions of plural sovereignty that began to draw distinctions between “good” and “bad” Indians in critical ways. Garcés shared one encounter when tensions between the Spanish military clashed with the Kumeyaay communities in the lower Rio Colorado Delta while Garcés and his Native guides were staying with some Cocopah families upriver. “A [Kumeyaay] Indian arrived and ... was reported to us, that two or three nations had joined together to fight the Spaniards of the seacoast... but had done nothing to the Spaniards who had passed through Yuma territory because they knew them to be their friends,” recounted Garcés.⁶⁶

This matter-of-fact exchange between Garcés, the Cocopah, and the Kumeyaay messenger acknowledged and recognized layered and relational powered relationships between not only various Native communities but also within different Spanish groups. Importantly, it rested with Native communities on whether to engage with non-Native forces in the region. As Garcés continued narrating this encounter, he relayed how Indigenous leaders wielded water power to their best advantage, “[The Native leaders decided that] if those Spaniards should join with the ones of the coast, and together they should make war on the Indians, then the Indians would

⁶⁶ Fray Francisco Garcés, *Diario, de las ultimas peregrinaciones del Padre Fray Francisco Garcés, hasta la provinvia del Moqui y noticias de varias nuevas naciones exparcidas hasta el Rio Colorado en California, 1777*, MS AZ 416, Special Collections, University of Arizona Library, Tucson, AZ: Entry for January 3, 1776.

defend themselves and strip the Spaniards of all that they had.”⁶⁷ Through the exchange witnessed by Garcés, the active presence of plural sovereignty became evident as Native leaders firmly believed in the mutual benefits of coexistence between Native and non-Native communities. They expressed their commitment to non-aggressive actions, emphasizing that any aggression would only be provoked. Moreover, this exchange illustrated tribal alliances in place in the Rio Colorado Delta, “The [Kumeyaay] Indian said he was bringing this message on behalf of his nation because the [Kumeyaay] knew the [Cocopah] here to be old friends, his nation did not ask these [Cocopah] to take up arms, but to be neutral if there should be war.”⁶⁸ Importantly, Garcés’ account also underscored how peace and or stasis were also a conscious and strategic step taken by Native communities. From this exchange, imperial agents like Garcés began to understand the critical role Indigenous water sovereignty played in the colonization of the region, “It is easy to see how important it is for us to have on our side the nations of the river, so that we can not only go

⁶⁷ Fray Francisco Garcés, *Diario, de las ultimas peregrinaciones del Padre Fray Francisco Garcés, hasta la provinvia del Moqui y noticias de varias nuevas naciones exparcidas hasta el Rio Colorado en California, 1777*, MS AZ 416, Special Collections, University of Arizona Library, Tucson, AZ: Entry for January 3, 1776.

⁶⁸ Fray Francisco Garcés, *Diario, de las ultimas peregrinaciones del Padre Fray Francisco Garcés, hasta la provinvia del Moqui y noticias de varias nuevas naciones exparcidas hasta el Rio Colorado en California, 1777*, MS AZ 416, Special Collections, University of Arizona Library, Tucson, AZ: Entry for January 3, 1776.

through to our Monterey establishments but also provide for their subsistence...”⁶⁹

Indigenous water power not only afforded different power arrangements in Mexican Pacific borderlands outside of the Native/ non-Native binary characteristic of frontier histories, but it also underscored the tension between abstract, legally rooted colonial ownership of landscapes and real, place-based Indigenous mastery over waterscapes. These generated pockets of contested power operated less like a violent clash of two powers along bordered corridors and more like a deliberate dance of hybrid moves to ensure community survival that manifested in strategic spheres of multi-layered plural sovereignty.

Garcés’ diary entries also documented Indigenous tribes engaged in regional trade and diplomatic relationships decidedly outside of Spanish control. While northern Baja California rested on the edge of Spanish legal control, river land regions like the Rio Colorado proved legally complex sites of layered sovereignties. As Garcés began his year-long journey from Tucson moving northwest towards the Tucson Mountains, he describes stumbling upon strategically placed *lagunas lloventuza*, or rainwater pools, created by the Oitapars, who occupied a former

⁶⁹ Fray Francisco Garcés, *Diario, de las ultimas peregrinaciones del Padre Fray Francisco Garcés, hasta la provinvia del Moqui y noticias de varias nuevas naciones exparcidas hasta el Rio Colorado en California, 1777*, MS AZ 416, Special Collections, University of Arizona Library, Tucson, AZ: Entry for January 3, 1776.

Tohono O’odham village vacated years earlier due to Apache raids.⁷⁰ Garcés’ casual observation highlighted how populations might transition in and out of localities, but Indigenous water sites persisted as crucial markers of Native presence.

For imperial agents like Garcés and Native communities alike, river regions and internal waterways functioned as inherent sites of contested sovereignty and instability. Throughout his diaries, Garcés claimed that some Native communities, like the Pimas at the *ranchería* San Juan Capistrano, greeted Spanish presence with enthusiasm and requested a means to counter Apache raids. Nonetheless, engaging with Apache raiders entailed inherent legal risks. On the one hand, open declarations of war implied a sort of equal footing as a contending power that afforded opposing parties the power to sue for peace. An option often exercised by various Apache bands like the Chiricahua Apache in 1786 in east Sonora and the Mescalero Apache bands in Chihuahua and the Mexican Apache near Tucson in 1787. The resolution to “open war” conflicts meant adherence to negotiated peace treaties as Spanish forces did not have the manpower to take on massive Indigenous empires like the Apacheria and Comancheria.⁷¹ Within the context of empire, even the imperial recognition of

⁷⁰ Fray Francisco Garcés, *Diario, de las ultimas peregrinaciones del Padre Fray Francisco Garcés, hasta la provinvia del Moqui y noticias de varias nuevas naciones exparcidas hasta el Rio Colorado en California, 1777*, MS AZ 416, Special Collections, University of Arizona Library, Tucson, AZ: 5.

⁷¹ For more on the Comancheria and Apacheria, see Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

“rebellious Indians,” and, arguably, those communities deemed outside of Spanish control though maybe not openly antagonistic, granted a kind of automatic subjecthood under European law that posed legal and political dangers in contested borderlands spaces like the Mexican Pacific. Because, while not always followed, to deem groups as “rebellious” in ways that call for legal or military response, European law by default granted a preliminary recognition of subjecthood. As subjecthood was recognized, distant riverine and coastal regions like the Mexican Pacific deftly balanced their dubious promise with legal risks, posing territorial challenges to projected imperial sovereignty.⁷² This wariness regarding Indigenous rebellion and unrest proved a significant concern for Spanish imperial agents stationed in the Sonoran borderlands region.

Fray Antonio Reyes arrived in Sonora in 1772 to assess the Crown’s colonial project in northern Baja California and northern Sonora. In the wake of Jesuit expulsion in 1767, the Franciscan order tasked Reyes to inspect the missions in the greater region of Sonora and provide the Crown with an account of their condition. As Fray Reyes studied the missions along the Colorado, Gila, and Yaqui Rivers, he confirmed what the Jesuits concluded years before their expulsion: Spanish control in the Mexican Pacific remained precarious and uneven. Reyes attributed the Crown’s

⁷² Lauren Benton, *Search for Sovereignty*, 64.

limited missionary project in the region to the inability of the Jesuits to convert Indigenous peoples to Catholicism. From Sonora, Reyes bemoaned the unfulfilled project of Crown and Church. “It is impossible... for [the Indigenous people] to be instructed and catechized as they should,” given the secular nature of governing structures. As Reyes assessed the missions in Sonora and Baja California, the priest’s frustration grew. At the heart of his dismay lay the freedom of Indigenous people exercised from within and without colonial structures. While Reyes recognized the inability of missionaries to contain Indigenous peoples within mission sites, his frustration suggested that Indigenous people carved out lifeways apart from the Crown.

Native people maintained connections to strategic streams and coastal spaces for sustaining life outside of mission labor regimens. Strategic avoidance and open rebellion allowed Indigenous communities to create clear zones of “barbarous pagan” control. Minor acts of planting specific seasonal crops against mission fathers’ orders pointed to Indigenous engagement with local waterscapes. These actions and choices evidenced Indigenous water sovereignty at work in the Mexican Pacific. Indigenous communities’ ability to sustain and flourish outside of mission control was based on their knowledge and mastery over internal waterways.

Within his assessment of Sonoran missions, Reyes meticulously recorded detailed notes on local geographies and actively documenting the potential of internal

river systems to revitalize the Crown's colonization endeavors in New Spain's northern frontier. Writing from Mission San Miguel at Ures, Reyes shared his continued vision for an agricultural future, "The *arroyos* of Sonora and Oposura enter and come together in this valley.... There is an abundance of good land for irrigation."⁷³ Yet, Indigenous control over seasonal rivers like the Yaqui and the Rio Sonora and their extensive control over major riparian networks like the Rio Colorado and the Gila generated uneven legal zones within the Spanish imperial project. While Reyes may have perceived these spaces as lawless zones awaiting Spanish imperial order, the recognition of Indigenous water sovereignty in action allowed for an interpretation of Reyes's preconceived notions as visible flashpoints of plural sovereignties. These flashpoints, one represented by Indigenous and the other by the Spanish, existed in a state of tension with each other.⁷⁴ The "uninhabitable spaces" of the Rio Colorado, the Gulf of California's coastal regions, and Sonora's complex river systems not only bore the imprint of Indigenous water sovereignty, but they also functioned as identifiable borders of authority. During his assessment of Mission la Purisima Concepcion at Caborca, Reyes delineated clear borders between Spanish

⁷³ Fray Antonio Maria de los Reyes, "Report on the Missions of Arizona and Sonora: a report on the existing conditions in the Missions of Sonora administered by the Fathers of the Propagation of the Faith college of the Holy Cross in Queretaro, Mexico," Translation and Biographical Sketch by Kieran R. McCarthy, [1772], MS AZ 261, Special Collections, University of Arizona Library, Tucson, AZ: 30.

⁷⁴ Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty*, 37-38.

and Indigenous zones of control. “To the south is the uninhabited territory of Lower Pimería, and to the north of the settlements of the Papagos and the other pagan nations of the Gila and Colorado Rivers...,” Reyes detailed in his report.⁷⁵ By clinically documenting the positional relationship of each mission to crucial geographical markers, Reyes actively mapped the boundaries of Spanish control while simultaneously reinforcing the borders of Native sovereignty.

Indigenous water sovereignty proved the critical limiting factor in the Crown’s conquest of the greater Mexican Pacific. The importance of pre-existing Indigenous structures in Spanish colonial efforts became vividly clear as the primordial movements and customs of semi-nomadic Indigenous peoples—Diegueño, Yuman, Pima, Seri, Opata, Cochimi, Tohono O’odham, Cucapá, Apache, Navajo, Yaqui—made it difficult for colonial, and later national, bodies to incorporate the region and its Indigenous peoples as subjects. The Spanish Crown launched repeated colonization efforts over centuries in Baja California and Sonora. But imperial aspirations of a trans-Pacific port for Manilla Galleons or an arable agricultural region fractured in the wake of an arid landscape and scarce, albeit complex, internal waterscapes. While Spanish imperial agents refused to adjust their plan for colonization, Indigenous communities dedicated multiple generations to honing their

⁷⁵ Reyes, “Report on the Missions of Arizona and Sonora,” MS AZ 261: 56.

adaptation skills. The disappearance of Lake Cahuilla in 1500 propelled Native communities to restructure their relationships to land and water dramatically. Increased encroachment into ancestral lands prompted Indigenous communities like the Yuma and the Cocopah to translate their accumulated, extensive knowledge of the region's waterways. By the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth century, dual sovereignties had not only emerged in the region but had taken center stage as Spanish imperial power waned in the Mexican Pacific. As this work suggests, the maritime movement and power exercised by Indigenous coastal people are important to our understanding of border formation and Indigenous belonging. The disappearance of Lake Cahuilla prompted generations of Indigenous communities to command waterways for their survival and adaptation to the environment, which proved resilient in the face of Spanish colonialism and, later, Mexican nationalism.

Precedents of “peaceful” and “hostile” Indians outlined by late-imperial officials like Baegert, Garcés, and Reyes began to lay the groundwork for changing ethnic and racial configurations that occurred in the Mexican Pacific borderlands in the early nineteenth century as the region transitioned from late-imperial mission-centric segregated communities to integrated early-republic settlements. As the wave of independence swept through Mexico in the first two decades of the nineteenth century, the ripple effects of revolution in the burgeoning nation's interior bore more subtle, yet no less definitive effects in the Mexican Pacific borderlands. For in

territories like Sonora and Baja California, the presence of the Spanish Crown had been spectral, at best, and, at worst, it was non-existent to Indigenous communities in open and continued rebellion or evasion. To Native communities in general, whether they were tethered to *rancherías* or actively fighting and evading non-Native settlement, the mission systems still represented the most visible symbol of the state in the Mexican Pacific borderlands both before and after Mexican Independence in 1821. Sonora and Baja California underwent a process of secularization that extended for approximately five decades, from the 1780s to the late 1830s. As the missions gradually secularized, they brought forth diverse economic relationships and racial classifications for Indigenous peoples in the early nineteenth century.

CHAPTER THREE

Changing Native Power in Baja California

Upon setting foot in Baja California in 1768, Miguel Constansó brought with him expertise and a visionary perspective that etched an indelible mark on the Mexican Pacific borderlands. A Native of Valencia, Spain, Miguel Constansó—a civil engineer, bureaucrat, and scientist—answered the summons of New Spain’s newly appointed inspector general, José de Gálvez.¹ With every blueprint he sketched, bureaucratic reform he steered, and geographical insight he excavated, Constansó’s handiwork sculpted the Mexican Pacific borderlands. Despite the outward display of a vision focused on colonial advancement and economic growth, there was an underlying current of ominous ambition. Constansó, in his 1794 report to the Viceroy of New Spain, detailed his scheme to reinforce the presidios of Baja and Alta California.² Constansó stressed the significance of secularization as a vital tool in the obliteration of Indigenous cultures. He maintained a steadfast conviction that the establishment of integrated secular communities held the potential eradicate the cultural practices of Indigenous peoples in Baja California within a span of

¹ Manuel P. Servín and Miguel Costansó, “Costansó’s 1794 Report on the Strengthening New California’s Presidios,” *California Historical Society Quarterly* 49, No. 3 (Sept. 1970): 221. This is a translated reprinting of Constansó’s 1794 Report.

² Servín and Costansó, “Costansó’s 1794 Report on the Strengthening New California’s Presidios,” 221.

“twenty to twenty-five years.”³ Constansó’s assertion rested on the premise that intermarriage between natives and Spaniards, or individuals of white descent, had the potential to give rise to subsequent generations who exhibited minimal traces of their Indigenous heritage.

The phrase “barely... a trace of Indian” encapsulated the leading motivation driving secular Spanish administrators such as Constansó, who administered the Spanish Californias region between 1770 and 1810.⁴ Baja’s military-lead secularization period signifies a monumental shift in colonial policy from slow cultural integration towards expedited Hispanicization through miscegenation and wage-labor systems regarding its Indigenous subjects. Notably, administrators like Constansó, under the canopy of secularization, spearheaded changes in institutionalized racial categories for Native and mestizo populations. With the settlement of Alta California ever present, secular administrators diverged sharply from the more traditional agrarian settler colonial models unfolding concurrently in Sonora and embraced a maritime approach to Indigenous incorporation. Despite previous intentions obliterate Indigenous traditions, secular authorities—and eventually Constansó for Alta California—recognized the pivotal role of Indigenous sailors navigating Mexican Pacific maritime spaces. This change of stance sparked

³ Servín and Costansó, “Costansó’s 1794 Report on the Strengthening New California’s Presidios,” 227.

⁴ Servín and Costansó, “Costansó’s 1794 Report on the Strengthening New California’s Presidios,” 227.

resentment among Mission fathers who staunchly upheld the belief that Indigenous work ought to be limited to the land, specifically focused on farming, and confined within the boundaries of assigned mission communities. Native populations, such as the Guaycura and the Pericu, demonstrated resourcefulness by capitalizing on the escalating tensions between ecclesiastical and secular administrators. During a transformative period in Baja, the dynamic interplay of colonial policy, Indigenous adaptation, and maritime development highlighted how Native communities astutely leveraged their maritime prowess and navigational skills to carve out a distinct space for themselves amid changing colonial policies and priorities.

The sustained autonomy Indigenous communities in Baja adeptly maintained on their terms evidenced a strategic change in plural sovereignty. Native communities successfully distanced themselves from agrarian-based mission communities, even as Bourbon administrators fervently pursued secularization initiatives of state-endorsed racial mixing. Under Constansó's plan, Baja California's secularization agenda aimed to disrupt Indigenous mobility to undermine Native sovereignty and blur the boundaries between racial and cultural identities. Constansó's keen interest in maritime activities in Alta California, combined with population restrictions, inadvertently ensured the persistence of Indigenous water sovereignty in the Mexican Pacific's littoral spaces. Instead of total cultural erasure, the military, recognizing the maritime skills of the Native population, enlisted them as navigators, sailors,

shipwrights, and mail couriers, through creative racial and labor categorization at the expense of an agricultural future for the region.

The elusive adaptability of Baja's Indigenous communities proved an essential model for Spanish, and later Mexican administrators, as Native peoples navigated and negotiated their autonomy and sovereignty amid the complexities of anti-Indigenous secular policies. The uneven racialization and categorization of Indigenous communities, influenced by their selective integration into predominantly maritime-based settler labor systems, provide a different view of Spain and Mexico's settler colonial project. Contrasting with the agrarian structures seen in neighboring borderlands communities like Sonora, Baja's Indigenous communities demonstrated remarkable adaptability and resilience in their maritime approach to the changing settler colonial and socio-economic frameworks. Mexican administrators were unsettled by the capacity of Baja's Indigenous communities to navigate and challenge these shifts. As a result, regional state makers like Costansó gleaned a critical lesson during Baja's early secularization project. To undermine Indigenous water sovereignty, government officials used racial and labor classifications strategically to advance state interests, even at the expense of the welfare of Indigenous communities.

The church and missionary establishments greatly influenced the socio-cultural fabric of societies in Spain and, later, Mexico. Due to their power dynamics and

critical role in shaping societal norms, these institutions possessed a deep-seated significance. The Church's sphere of influence varied across regions, with their impacts on the Indigenous lifeways being limited, particularly in the Mexican Pacific borderlands. The influence of the church and missions in the Mexican Pacific borderlands, although foundational in Spain and Mexico, were not as impactful on Indigenous practices as one might expect. Despite their considerable influence over societal norms and behaviors within their countries of origin, these social institutions ultimately failed to enact substantial transformations in the traditional Indigenous lifeways of the Mexican Pacific borderlands. Enduring Indigenous communities revealed resilient cultural and social structures that withstood the test of time. Native foundations, deeply ingrained through generations, displayed a remarkable ability to resist external influences aimed at reshaping them. The limitations of such influences became evident, as Native communities steadfastly maintain their distinct heritage and traditions.

A pivotal turning point occurred in these borderlands with the process of secularization.⁵ During this period, the authority and responsibility for establishing

⁵ The literature surrounding the secularization process in Mexico is deep and extensive. For more on the secularization process broadly in the Californias, see Manuel P. Servín, "The Secularization of the California Missions: A Reappraisal," *Southern California Quarterly* 47, no. 2 (June 1965): 133-149. W.B. Campbell and J.R. Moriarty, "The Struggle over Secularization of the Missions on the Alta California Frontier," *The Journal of San Diego History* 15, no. 4 (Fall 1969) [Last accessed June 9, 2023]: <https://sandiegohistory.org/journal/1969/october/struggle/>. David J. Weber, *Bárbaros: Spaniards and Their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006). Lisbeth Haas, *Saints and Citizens:*

the parameters of citizenship within the region shifted from the religious to the secular sphere. Military and political administrators, not religious figures, took over this duty, at least theoretically. This shift was significant as it denoted a move from religious to political structures shaping the citizenship norms within these communities. The definition of Indigenous subjecthood, and subsequently Mexican citizenship, was viewed through a new lens by these state officials. Unlike the religious norms that had sought to integrate Indigenous populations by encouraging adaptation to racialized Christian customs, these officials defined citizenship differently. They focused more on the participation of Native and mestizo populations in local economic markets. Besides this, state administrators posited that including these populations in local economic systems was a more crucial indicator of integration into the larger society than adherence to particular religious customs. This approach to defining citizenship differed from previous norms, which hinged mainly on racialized Christian customs.

The influence of the Spanish Crown in Baja California, particularly among the persistently defiant Indigenous communities, was notably minimal. These Indigenous communities, irrespective of their affiliations with *rancherías* or their active resistance against non-Indigenous settlements, predominantly perceived the mission systems as the primary embodiment of state authority in the Mexican Pacific

Indigenous Histories of Colonial Missions and Mexican California (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

borderlands. Following the dissolution of these mission systems, the systematic process of secularization instigated a significant transformation in economic relations and racial classifications for Indigenous populations.

State administrators experimented with diverse strategies in the Mexican Pacific borderlands to encourage semi-nomadic Indigenous communities to adopt a settled lifestyle within integrated communities alongside non-Indigenous inhabitants. Within Baja California, the military authorities put forward a strategy that involved proposing maritime conscription as an alternative to agricultural labor. This approach allowed Indigenous communities to engage in local markets through wage economies based on maritime activities. Whereas in Sonora, state officials employed a different approach, providing incentives such as land ownership, guaranteed access to water, and protection from military and Indigenous aggression. Despite the differing strategies in Baja California and Sonora, there was a shared consensus among regional administrators: integrating Indigenous communities was essential for realizing their larger nationalistic objectives for Mexico. The seemingly straightforward rhetoric of secular officials belied the complexity of the challenges they faced during the region's secularization period. The stringent segregationist ecclesiastical policies rendered sustained interactions between Native and non-Native populations challenging that prevented rather than fostered close-knit mixed unions needed to achieve Hispanicization and *mestizaje*.

Over the span of six decades, beginning in the 1770s and extending until the late 1840s, the process of secularization gradually unfolded in the region of Baja California.⁶ Secular administrators in the 1770s and 1780s actively struggled with ecclesiastical fathers as they argued over the classification of race and labor for Indigenous peoples. The disagreements primarily revolved around choosing between an agrarian or maritime future for the Baja peninsula. Throughout the 1790s, debates persisted among secular administrators, such as Constansó, regarding the slow pace of secularization and the secular push for integrated *doctrina* communities encompassing Native and non-Native populations in one township. While Constansó's initial assignment was to convert the Californias—both Alta and Baja—into agrarian settlements, the harsh environments cause Constansó to abandon that aspect of his assignment. Instead, he dedicated himself to building agrarian settlements in Alta California. This relegated Baja's peninsula as a maritime stop over point in the eyes of late imperial administrative agents even as ecclesiastical officials still championed

⁶ For more on the secularization process in Baja California, see Lee M. Panich, *Narratives of Persistence: Indigenous Negotiations of Colonialism in Alta and Baja California* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2020). Natale A. Zappia, *Traders and Raiders: The Indigenous World of the Colorado Basin, 1540-1859* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016). David Piñera Ramirez, *Ocupación y uso del suelo en Baja California: de los grupos aborígenes a la urbanización dependiente* (Mexico D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico, 1991). Everardo Garduño, *En donde se mete el sol: historia y situación actual de los montañeses de Baja California* (México, D.F.: Consejo Nacional para a Cultura y las Artes, 1994). Luis Aboites Agiolar, *Norte precario: poblamiento y colonización en México, 1760-1940* (El Colegio de México Centro de Investigaciones y estudios superiores en Antropología social, 1995).

a viable agrarian future in central and southern Baja. Yet Costansó understood that Spanish imperial ambitions also remained constrained by the persistent small population of the Baja California peninsula that stalled state-endorsed miscegenation. By 1800, state makers redirected their focus to settling Alta California, concentrating their efforts on port cities like San Francisco, Monterrey, Santa Barbara, and San Diego. This shift effectively halted settler colonial initiatives in southern Baja. Between 1800 and 1824, attention shifted northward to the Rio Colorado region in northern Baja. Mexico's 1824 Colonization law and segregation order redistributed mission lands, leading to new regional dynamics and racially defined relationships with land and water.

For over a century, mission fathers viewed Baja California's ecclesiastical blueprint through four stages aimed at Native assimilation. The inaugural stage necessitated constructing and sustaining mission sites to anchor a settler presence and initiate contact with Indigenous communities. Subsequently, these communities were designed to transition into *reducciones* or *conversiones*. These entities served as satellite hamlets housing newly Christianized Indigenous people, characterized by isolation under missionaries' exclusive supervision and authority. While in isolation, these communities remained exempt from Crown taxes, despite their unpaid labor sustaining the missions. The third stage—the *doctrina*—communities function as a fusion of missions and secular parishes, with mission fathers implementing Hispanicization practices, Spanish cultural practices, and religious practices.

Financial support for the *doctrines* stemmed from Crown funding, local market commerce, and a synthesis of settler and Indigenous sliding tax scales devised to expedite the assimilation of Native populations. The final stage involved forming fully integrated towns where Spanish and Indigenous populations coexisted and worked together without mission fathers' mediation. Indigenous individuals actively earned wages and contributed as taxpayers evidencing their complete socio-economic integration. The mission communities in Baja California grappled with stagnation, unable to move beyond the initial two stages of development.⁷ Centuries of efforts fell short in achieving a meaningful incorporation of Indigenous communities into the fabric of settlement and progress, held at bay by Native water sovereignty.

For Baja Californian Indigenous communities, missions epitomized seasonal forced labor, amalgamated multi-tribal settlements, and zones where Christianity steadily eroded Indigenous traditions. Sustained Native resilience stemmed from Indigenous food security as semi-nomadic peoples avidly pursued hunting, gathering, and fishing, primarily beyond the confines of their rancherías, satellite Indian villages outside mission premises. Religious orders strove to transform the semi-nomadic and semi-sedentary Native communities into sedentary societies through *congregación*. The practice of consolidation entailed the resettlement of Native populations into

⁷ David J. Weber, *Bárbaros: Spaniards and Their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006) Kindle Edition, Location 5320. Lisbeth Haas, *Saints and Citizens: Indigenous Histories of Colonial Missions and Mexican California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014) Kindle Edition, Location 1593-1632.

Christian enclaves. Yet, in the sparsely populated regions, these ambitious endeavors were met with resounding failure. For Baja's Spanish, *gente de razón* or *españoles*, and *mestizo* communities, mission systems stood as dedicated sites for assimilating Indigenous populations, relatively insular agricultural economies, and ineffectively managed regional trading hubs. Californian political and military trailblazers viewed mission fathers as impediments to tapping into the essential, unrestrained, and vulnerable Indigenous labor force. Conversely, the crumbling mission systems, illustrated by the derelict sites peppered across the Baja peninsula, constituted a hurdle for military and state officials striving to assimilate and dominate Indigenous communities.

Baja California's arid environment necessitated a different secularization and economic incorporation approach. Other regions like Sonora emphasized folding Native wage-earners into agrarian or mining work; however, military officials emphasized Indigenous maritime labor instead of established, profitable haciendas in Baja California. Following the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767, which advocated for the segregation of Indigenous communities from the potentially corrupting influence of settler society, the Mexican Pacific witnessed a religious shift in power. This transfer of authority placed the Dominican order in control of Baja California and the Franciscans in charge of Alta California and Sonora, leading to the establishment of novel labor and racial relationships between Native peoples and Spanish military officials.

Late-imperial officials like engineer Costansó envisioned a settled, connected regional borderlands that positioned Native assimilation into regional economies as the deciding factor in the success of Spain's colonial project.⁸ Writing from Cabo San Lucas in 1794, Costansó's official report to the Viceroy Marqués de Branciforte about the state of the Californian project and the recurring Indian Problem.⁹ To colonial engineers such as Costansó, the task of establishing a safe settlement for Spanish families proved to be a formidable obstacle that, even after more than a century of colonization, remained elusive and uncertain. "In my judgment, the first thing we should consider is populating the territory. Of what value are immense areas of territory to us if we do not populate them...an insufferable load without...receiving any benefit," wrote Costansó.¹⁰ Alongside his late-colonial administrator contemporaries, Costansó saw the mission project as a decided failure and was frustrated by the ecclesiastic commitment to Native isolation, "There are missions which are over one hundred years old... there are scarcely any other inhabitants except those Native to the territory whose inconstancy must be continually observed so that the restless ones do not flee and disturb the tranquility of the land."¹¹ By the

⁸ Janet R. Fireman and Manuel P. Servín, "Miguel Costansó: California's Forgotten Father," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 49, No. 1 (March 1970): 3-6.

⁹ Servín and Costansó, "Costansó's 1794 Report on the Strengthening New California's Presidios," 227.

¹⁰ Servín and Costansó, "Costansó's 1794 Report on the Strengthening New California's Presidios," 226.

¹¹ Servín and Costansó, "Costansó's 1794 Report on the Strengthening New California's Presidios," 226.

turn of the nineteenth century in Baja California, ambitious colonists like Costansó witnessed rapid secularization and the ousting of mission restrictions on Native engagement in local economies. “[A]ided by the paternal love and Christian zeal of His Majesty...as time passes, those distant lands will be seen to prosper, benefitting the state. But without trades and industry, the Indians will never be able to be men and useful vassals,” Costansó confessed in his report. Although Costansó’s report was presented as an economic plan to establish a stable local economy, it set a precedent for the Baja and Alta California’s racial project.

Costansó’s racial project hinged on three core tenets that reflect administrative ideals for the future racial composition of “vacant lands.” During the initial stage of secularization and Native incorporation, blended *doctrina* communities actively sought to attract Spanish or *mestizo* master craftsmen and colonists. In exchange for their commitment to teach Indigenous individuals and illustrated products crafted by themselves or their apprentices, these individuals received mission food rations.¹² The use of mission resources not only chipped away at the economic power of pastoral administrators in the Californias but also tried to provide some resource security in a region of famed instability. As asserted by Costansó, the establishment of Spanish and *mestizo* communities in the Californian borderlands marked a pivotal milestone,

¹² Servín and Costansó, “Costansó’s 1794 Report on the Strengthening New California’s Presidios,” 227.

signaling the initiation of the subsequent phase in the region's overarching racial project.

Despite preceding Mexico's social *mestizaje* project by several decades, the second phase of the Costansó racial blueprint established the settler colonial expectation of erasing and displacing indigeneity after several generations of racial mixture. Costansó's goal of gradually whitening and Hispanicizing Native populations was inseparable from Indigenous economic incorporation. The new Californian administrators were neither dedicated to preserving nor reinforcing racial hierarchies. Instead, they committed themselves to creating racially integrated yet culturally Hispanic frontier communities. Most importantly, secularization did away with Indigenous legal protections like access to communal lands and Native labor restrictions. According to individuals like Costansó, the perceived "Indian Problem" was rooted in Native peoples' determination to uphold their Indigenous traditions, which resulted in their independence from Spanish local economies and private land ownership. Overcoming this challenge necessitated finding ways to integrate Native communities into the Spanish system. Costansó's 1794 report delved into his intricate racial plan for the regions of Baja and Alta California. Within this detailed account, he expounded upon his strategies for managing the complexities of race, addressing the Indigenous populations, and integrating Spanish settlers, all with the aim of shaping the future of these territories in alignment with his vision:

Experience has demonstrated the fertility of the Spaniards, and the persons of mixed blood in this kingdom are much greater than that of the Indians. Perhaps this is so because when they are reduced to a civilized life or a less wild existence, they procreated much less; or because when they intermarry with Spaniards or white persons, there is generally produced from the second or third generation some individuals who barely have a trace of Indian since they are reared among Spaniards and their language, habits, and customs no longer differ from ours...it is evident that the number of Indians in New Spain decreases at the rate that the mixed-blood multiply. The same thing will happen in mission towns if families of farmers and craftsmen are placed there in the manner which has been proposed. The Indians will be civilized much faster. In twenty to twenty-five years, the missions will...cease being a burden to the Treasury, and their citizens will reach a point of contributing large sums to the Royal Treasury.¹³

Costansó saw racial mixing as the most practical form of immediate secularization that not only anchored Native peoples in *doctrina* communities but also had the added benefit of transferring Spanish economic and cultural values. Costansó's plan contrasted starkly with the ecclesiastical relegation of mixed Native and non-Native sexual and marriage relationships. Jesuit policy dictated that unmarried secular soldiers be sent to Sonoran and Sinaloan missions in search of

¹³ Servín and Costansó, "Costansó's 1794 Report on the Strengthening New California's Presidios," 227.

criolla wives or second-generation Spanish women born in colonial spaces.¹⁴ Upon marriage, Spanish settlers often return to Baja Californian missions, if they adhered to the mission system and its principles that effectively maintained segregation from Indigenous parishioners and reinforced social separation. By the turn of the nineteenth century, the Jesuit commitment to Native and non-Native cultural and social segregation ensured mixed unions between Native and non-Native community demographic growth as both populations waxed and waned parallel. Making Costansó's plan for the racial conquest of the Mexican Pacific aspirational rather than grounded in the region's realities, not unlike the ecclesiastical administrators he sought to depose but in different ways.

Californian missions and presidio communities remained minimally populated at the turn of the nineteenth century. Though missions occupied the most considerable swathes of arable coastal lands along the Gulf and Pacific coasts, ecclesiastical administrators actively stifled the growth of secular towns and private ranches until the 1780s, when military administrators entered the region in mass.¹⁵ The 1790s ushered in a decade of regulatory transitions as secular administrators like Costansó strove to minimize ecclesiastical limitations on local markets. "Above all, it [is] of the greatest importance to initiate the navigation of the coasts of Sonora, New Galicia,

¹⁴ Pablo Martínez, *Guia Familiar de Baja California, 1700-1900: Vital Statistics of Baja California* (Mexico: Editorial Baja California, 1965), 27.

¹⁵ David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 264.

the Californias, and...all the coasts of the South Sea...Maritime trade on the West Coast does not exist today,” Constansó wrote in his 1794 report.¹⁶ According to an 1810 report from the Contador general Fernando Navarro y Noriega, ethnic *españoles*, or the *gente de razon*, the population of Alta California’s four presidio districts rose steadily from 900 in 1790 to 1,800 in 1800, to 3,200 in 1810.¹⁷ Critical port missions and eventual civil settlements, like San Diego, illustrated the growing ethnic complexities of *doctrina* communities. Late imperial administrators like Costansó believed maritime trade and settling port communities were the keys to building local markets and expediting Native secularization. As an outpost presidio in 1773, San Diego supported a community of 76 individuals. San Diego’s population grew from 933 in 1790 and stabilized in 1800 with 1,511 inhabitants as military officials and recruited settlers relocated to the California borderlands. San Diego’s population, in 1810, rose slightly to 1,611.¹⁸ After a decade of war, the total 1821 census count for San Diego remained steady at 1,622.¹⁹ Despite the sporadic presence of military vessels, imperial policies hindered private civilian ships from engaging in

¹⁶ Servín and Costansó, “Costansó’s 1794 Report on the Strengthening New California’s Presidios,” 228.

¹⁷ Herbert Howe Bancroft, *The History of California, Vol. 2, 1801-1824*, (San Francisco: The History Company Publishers, 1886), 158.

¹⁸ Robert H. Jackson, *Indian Population Decline: The Missions of Northwestern New Spain, 187-1840* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), 172-174. See population totals for Alta California Missions in Appendix 4.

¹⁹ Jackson, *Indian Population Decline*, 172. See population totals for Alta California Missions in Appendix 4.

regional commerce. Constansó believed commercial fishing for salmon, sardines, tuna, and other fish had the potential to “make these colonies flourish and...prepare them to... depend on themselves.”²⁰ Indigenous communities had long held this knowledge for centuries, while Spanish secular administrators were just starting to grasp the importance of waterscapes in shaping the future of Baja California’s regional economy, particularly regarding the establishment of mixed settlements and the integration of Indigenous populations.

Baja California missions, however, remained relatively underpopulated, particularly in central *cabecera* communities. By 1800, Baja California’s Indigenous population totaled approximately 4,000 Native peoples and 800 *españoles* and *criollo* persons, racially understood as white with no Native blood.²¹ The combination of Native population decline, relocation, and more militant open rebellion did compel central desert Native communities like the Cochimi to be increasingly pulled into settler communities in Alta California.²² Many Cochimi and north central Cocopah peoples became desert guides for Spanish military officials seeking landed routes to join Sonora with the Californias. Meanwhile, the steady influx of non-Native settlers into Baja California’s growing gulf-facing port cities like Loreto, La Paz, and Cabo

²⁰ Servín and Costansó, “Costansó’s 1794 Report on the Strengthening New California’s Presidios,” 229.

²¹ Martínez, *Guía Familiar de Baja California*, 27.

²² Norma Cruz González, “Population Counts and the Invisibility of the Natives of Baja California,” Annual Meeting of Western Historical Association. San Diego, CA, 2017.

San Lucas also pulled southern coastal Native communities like the Guaycura and the Pericu into mixed settlements through military conscription. During that time, numerous Indigenous men from Baja California were enlisted to serve as guides and laborers for frontier missions in Alta California. Similarly, in lower and central Baja California, Native men were compelled to become trans-gulf sailors, tasked with managing mail and supply vessels within the region.²³ Indigenous sailors used maritime service to their advantage as they stepped into forced conscription to create new social and economic pathways within settler communities.

Importantly, Indigenous conscription into and adoption of naval and navigation work afforded Native families a different form of independence from communities in an open rebellion that ushered in a new form of plural sovereignty in the region. The shift from informal to formal recognition of Indigenous peoples as common laborers revealed increasing tensions between settler society in the form of the military and the mission systems, but it also exposed new understandings of racial categorization in Mexican Pacific society. Under Jesuit oversight which championed segregation between Native and settler populations and discouraged Indigenous labor outside of mission duties, they paid Native work operated unofficially. Albeit informal, Native guides and navigators were still highly sought after by private and Crown-sponsored military officials undertaking *entradas* into Alta California despite

²³ W. Michael Mathes, "Baja California Indians in the Spanish Maritime Service, 1720-1821," *Southern California Quarterly* 62, No. 2 (Summer 1980), 118-119.

expressed religious condemnation of the practice. It became common practice for Spanish sea captains to pull Indigenous navigators from already sparse Baja Californian missions or *visitas*, or settlement outposts not large enough to host a mission community, to serve on Spanish ships as a sort of borrowed workers from mission estates. Under compulsion of the Crown, mission administrators were obliged to accommodate military requests for assistance in pursuit of the more significant imperial mandate of a settled and navigable Californian frontier.²⁴ The ecclesiastical restrictions on Native maritime labor in the early eighteenth century unveiled the underlying principles of the weakened racial project that unfolded in the Mexican Pacific.

A notable example of this occurred in 1721 when Juan de Ugarte, a renowned Jesuit missionary and explorer, embarked on a voyage with a diverse crew comprising over eighteen natives from Baja California, a Yaqui individual, and two Filipinos. Their collective objective was to navigate a route connecting the Californias via the Gulf of California and the Rio Colorado.²⁵ Yet, despite the efficacy and normalized, albeit informal, practice of utilizing Indigenous guides and

²⁴ Aidé Grijalva, Max Calvillo, and Leticia Landín, *Pablo Martínez: Sergas californianas* (Universidad Autónoma de Baja California y Instituto Sudcaliforniano de Cultura, 2006), 110-116. See also Richard Steven Street. "First Farmworkers, First 'Braceros': Baja California Field Hands and the Origins of Farm Labor Importation in California Agriculture, 1769-1790," *California History* 75, No. 4 (Winter 1996/1997): 306-321.

²⁵ Peter Masten Dunne, *Black Robes in Lower California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 160-163, 171-176, 189.

navigators, Jesuit leadership restricted Native maritime service employment to curb settler and military influence over Native communities.²⁶ As mission communities began to collapse amidst calls for independence at the turn of the nineteenth century, Indigenous navigators proved ever-critical to life in the region as they often constructed and navigated longboats from the Sonoran-Sinaloa coasts to Baja California.²⁷ Under the tenure of the Franciscan and Dominican orders, Indigenous maritime service shifted from informal to formal after the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1768.²⁸

While the port of San Blas, in modern-day Sinaloa, operated as the late-colonial naval outpost for the Californias, the Dominican order, who took stewardship of Baja California while the Franciscan order settled in Alta California, attempted to make the Gulf of California a key site for regional travel and trade. Notably, the Presidio of Loreto and the mission at Rosalia served as growing ports to foster Indigenous navigated routes between Baja's interior coasts and Sonora and Sinaloa's coastal regions.²⁹ For both the Franciscan and Dominican orders, the construction of settler societies took precedence over their dedication to isolated mission

²⁶ Mathes, "Baja California Indians in the Spanish Maritime Service, 1720-1821," 115.

²⁷ Roberto Ramos, ed. *Tres Documentos Sobre de Descubrimiento y Exploración de Baja California por Francisco Maria Piccolo, Juan de Ugarte y Guillermo Straford* (Mexico: Jus, 1958), 20-21.

²⁸ Mathes, "Baja California Indians in the Spanish Maritime Service, 1720-1821," 115.

²⁹ Mathes, "Baja Californian Indian in the Spanish Maritime Service, 1720-1821," 115.

communities that completely separated Indigenous and *mestizo* communities. Unlike the Jesuit order before them, the Dominican order, in particular, pushed for Indigenous incorporation into agricultural work, livestock raising, and regional mining economies as imperial oversight loomed over increasingly unproductive Baja Californian missions. Despite mounting pressures, Dominican administrators did not like the physical and economic mobility afforded to Native seamen by military maritime service and pearl fishing.³⁰

Movement outside mission communities necessitated greater Indigenous exposure to settler societies, often leading to violent encounters between Native and non-Native peoples and a third party for Indigenous people to voice their discontent. As the military presence intensified in the Baja Peninsula, Indigenous communities found themselves subjected to frequently abusive interactions with settlers, caught amid the jurisdictional conflict between mission and secular authorities during the early nineteenth century. The use of Indigenous labor by secular administrators persisted through the practice of coerced conscription, whereby Dominican-led mission communities leased Indigenous individuals to fulfill military

³⁰ Sanford Alexander Mosk, "Spanish Voyages and Pearl Fisheries in the Gulf of California: A Study in Economic History," PhD Dissertation (University of California, 1931), 223-224.

responsibilities.³¹ These duties encompassed guiding expeditions and facilitating navigation for supply runs across the Mexican Pacific region.

Within the Mexican Pacific, the growing debates over Indigenous capacity for and racialization of their labor made visible the dual and diverging interests of the military and settlement-minded Crown clashed with the mission administrator's dedication to confining Indigenous labor to agricultural work. But as the Spanish Crown embroiled itself in foreign conflicts with the newly independent United States, England's increased interest in securing other North American holdings, and the Napoleonic Wars developing in Europe, New Spain's naval department turned their full attention towards the defense of Alta California's lucrative Monterrey port. Even as foreign pirates and privateers roamed and preyed on Manilla galleons in earnest in the late-eighteenth century Mexican Pacific, with the Crown's attention on Alta California. The shift in resources and personnel to Alta California meant that burgeoning Baja California's port cities like Loreto needed to curtail growing labor shortages while being able to maintain increasingly autonomous regional operations. For naval administrators, like Loreto's presidio commander Joaquin Cañete, the answer to increasing labor shortages was to open maritime positions to Native

³¹ Richard Steven Street, "First Farmworkers, First 'Braceros': Baja California Field Hands and the Origins of Farm Labor Importation in California Agriculture, 1769-1790" *California History* 75, No. 4 (Winter 1996/1997): 306-321.

navigators and seamen.³² With the approval of Governor Felipe de Neve in 1775, naval commanders began conscripting Native peoples into maritime service from Baja mission communities. Serving as much-needed navigators and seafaring crew members, Indigenous navigators were frequently pulled from mission communities before critical harvest season, further creating tension between the secular state and the Dominican mission system.

Within naval communities like Loreto, caste status held little meaning in the face of military and maritime labor shortages. Immediately following the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767, along with their segregationist policies, administrative leaders like Visitor General José de Gálvez opened maritime work to Indigenous mariners, navigators, and guides.³³ As a matter of necessity, Baja California Indians played a significant role in the exploration and settlement of Alta California for jobs in navigation meant relative autonomy from mission oversight as the staffing of trans-gulf service fell under the jurisdiction of the burgeoning regional naval department based in San Blas, in modern-day Sinaloa.³⁴ Though underdeveloped, Baja Californian ports like Loreto, La Paz, and Cabo San Lucas were important stopover

³² Mathes, “Baja Californian Indians in the Spanish Maritime Service, 1720-1821,” 114. Juan De Dios Bonilla, *Historia Maritima de Mexico* (Mexico City: Litorales, 1962), 169-178.

³³ Mathes, “Baja Californian Indians in the Spanish Maritime Service, 1720-1821,” 116.

³⁴ Mathes, “Baja Californian Indians in the Spanish Maritime Service, 1720-1821,” 119. Juan De Dios Bonilla, *Historia Maritima de Mexico*, 182-187,

sites and recruitment centers for Native labor.³⁵ Fray Francisco Palóu, a Dominican priest, wrote of the growing military habit of commandeering Native workers and removing them from missions communities for secular purposes beginning in the late-1770s and continuing into the 1820s, "...the [Native-manned] canoes of the missions of San Borja and Mulegé came after corn for the missions the governor and royal commissary took possession of them under the pretense of royal service. [They] detained...them in Loreto for about a year...making use of...the Indians for fishing..."³⁶

The military use of Native conscription for navigational work meant that mission communities maintained a claim over Native persons in the eyes of the Crown. Mission quotas borrowed workers needed to be returned to their *rancherías*, and some fathers placed limitations on what kinds of Indigenous labor workers to supply runs, mail delivery, and founding missions in Alta California.³⁷ Critically, mission fathers feared that work outside of the *rancherías* heralded the eventual loss of Native workers and the continued depopulation of already minimally populated Baja Californian missions, "...the Indians of the missions should not serve on the [*barcos*] of San Blas, but on the launches of missions, so that the Peninsula might not be depopulated little by little."³⁸ While mission fathers concerned themselves with

³⁵ Dunne, *Black Robes in Lower California*, 425-427.

³⁶ Palóu, *Historical Memoirs of New California*, Vol. 1, 119.

³⁷ Mathes, "Baja Californian Indians in the Spanish Maritime Service," 117.

³⁸ Palóu, *Historical Memoirs of New California*, Vol. 1, 101. Pablo L. Martínez, *Historia de Baja California* (Mexico City: Editorial Baja California, 1956), 214, 254.

ensuring a steady agricultural labor force, religious leaders like Palóu framed the conscription as disrupting mission life and the quasi-racial, quasi-spiritual project of helping Indigenous communities transition from neophytes to complete Christian subjects of the Crown.³⁹

The consistent predicament in Baja California involved the task of convincing Indigenous families to establish residency within missions, while the enlistment of Native individuals into the military compounded the strain on an already scarce labor pool. Father Palóu lamented, “From this, great injury resulted to the missions and the sailors, for they were deprived of the right to live in their missions with their wives.”⁴⁰ The loss of Native men also meant that mission fathers took drastic efforts to compel sailors’ returns by holding their families de facto hostage within mission communities. Native communities faced the added challenges of limited supplies and conscription, all while bearing the brunt of heightened epidemics caused by the influx of settlers into and movement throughout the Mexican Pacific region.

Conscription from missions and incorporations into greater economic systems in port communities like Loreto meant that Native peoples, were either forced into or

Evelyn Hu-DeHart, *Missionaries, Miners, and Indians: Spanish Contact with the Yaqui Nation of Northwestern New Spain, 1533-1820* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1981), 94-103.

³⁹Everardo Garduño, *En donde se mete el sol: Historia y situación actual de los indígenas montañeses de Baja California* (San Ángel: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1994), 88.

⁴⁰ Palóu, *Historical Memoirs of New California, Vol. 1*, 119.

opted into mission life, interacted with larger groups of settlers rather than just mission fathers. As settler and Indigenous populations intermingled, the emergence of racialized labor categories became evident. Native peoples, albeit officially under mission supervision, found their full integration into regional economies limited, preventing them from fully participating in economic activities. Native peoples, classified as neophytes due to their Christianized status, maintained a certain degree of protection against severe mistreatment and abuses from secular settlers.

During the shift from late-colonial to early-Republic in the Mexican Pacific, the dynamic placement of Indigenous people within settler communities, regional economies, and state subjecthood resulted in tangible opportunities for mobility. Native peoples, particularly those skilled in water-related activities, employed their expertise to navigate and adapt to the transformative changes taking place during the shift from late-colonial to early-Republic in the Mexican Pacific. Indigenous seamen primarily operated as mail service and supplies couriers that navigated the inner waterways of the Gulf of California from Loreto and San Jose del Cabo to port cities in Sonora and Sinaloa.⁴¹

Within the Mexican Pacific in the early-nineteenth-century Independence period, plural sovereignty continued to ebb and flow among the missions, the military, and Indigenous communities that played out most visible in the region's

⁴¹ Mathes, "Baja Californian Indians in the Spanish Maritime Service," 117. Martínez, *Historia de Baja California*, 259-271.

littoral spaces. For *criollo* and wealthy *mestizo* populations that comprised the nascent Mexican republic's leaders, they turned their attention towards crafting a distinct Mexican identity that both incorporated Native populations into the nation's labor force while, at the same time, limiting Indigenous influence and leadership in the new nation's military and political systems. Confronted with the compounding difficulties of constrained resources and forced conscription, Native communities also endured the devastating impact of intensified epidemics resulting from the arrival and movement of settlers across the Mexican Pacific region. The confluence of these migrations, coupled with forced conscription, led to a significant decline in the Indigenous population of the Baja California peninsula during the early nineteenth century.⁴²

As a sparsely populated and underdeveloped colonial holding, the Californias and Sonora experienced the Independence period differently than the war-torn interior. As the fires of revolution reached the shores of the Gulf of California and its adjoining deltas, deliberations concerning the region's political trajectory centered more around identifying the successors to assume the reins of monarchical rule, rather than displaying genuine dedication to preserving the Spanish Crown. Just like in the interior, there were split factions in the Mexican Pacific. The top echelon of military,

⁴² Martínez, *Historia de Baja California*, 275-282, 294-301. Jackson, *Indian Population Decline*, 69-82. See David Piñera Ramirez, *Ocupación y uso del suelo en Baja California: de los grupos aborígenes a la urbanización dependiente* (Mexico D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico, 1991).

administrative, and ecclesiastical officials, as well as the wealthiest subclass of merchants, miners, and *hacenderos* (private landowners), sided with the monarchy to preserve the status quo. Yet, even among the pro-royal faction, there persisted a notion that the monarchy was expected to transfer control temporarily to colonial institutions, encompassing viceregal *audiencias*, royal courts, and other locally established political structures.⁴³ Similar to the situation in the interior, the pro-Independence factions in Baja California and Sonora consisted primarily of capable middle-class *criollos*—ethnic Spaniards born in the Americas—who commonly occupied moderate government, military, and clerical roles. The pro-independence *criollo* factions in Baja California and Sonora claimed that municipal councils were the region’s true direct representatives.⁴⁴

While the struggle for independence in the Mexican Pacific borderlands further emphasized the sustained autonomy of the region, it also reinforced the importance of water sovereignty and littoral control in the Gulf of California and critical riparian sites like the Sonoran deltas. Due to the inability of pro-royalist forces to exercise direct control over the Mexican Pacific, the Spanish military resorted to imposing comprehensive blockades to further isolate the Californias. As Ignacio Ormaechea, provisional general of California, wrote in 1814, “...the insurrection has

⁴³ Francisco Altable and Edith Gonzalez Cruz, ed., *La Independencia y la Revelación Mexicana en la península de Baja California*, 8.

⁴⁴ Francisco Altable and Edith Gonzalez Cruz, ed., *La Independencia y la Revelación Mexicana en la península de Baja California*, 25-34.

upset both ports [in San Blas and Acapulco]...and until the royal forces reconquer them... the provinces of the Californias... [the region's] inhabitants have been unable to receive [support] or leave due to the absolute scarcity of ships...and delayed communication."⁴⁵ The increased isolation, as Ormaechea expressed, heavily affected Spanish clerical and military officials who had relied heavily on provisional support from Sonoran and Sinaloan ports and missions. Reporting from Loreto in the late 1810s, Fernando de la Toba, the presidio commander and future governor of Baja California, admitted, "The prison's warehouse is devoid of necessary goods to clothe the troops and marines...in sum, there is an utter lack of everything essential for providing the nation's best service."⁴⁶

Pushed to these dire circumstances, the military presence in Baja, California, stopped defending regional ports like Loreto from foreign vessels and openly welcomed illicit trade in the Gulf of California even as official missionary and military outposts continued to shrink in their increased isolation. Amidst the war for independence, which fueled a surge in regional reliance on clandestine and private trade, affluent landowners and miners in southern Alta California and the coastal

⁴⁵ "Expediente que contiene información acerca de la escasez de viveres en Baja California debido a los bloqueso de la Guerra de Independencia y por la falta de busques en buen estado," 1814, Archivo General de la Nación, *Californias*, Vol. 21, Exp. 17, fojos 499-508.

⁴⁶ "Report from Fernando de la Toba," as quoted in *Breve history de Baja California* edited by Marco Antonio Samaniego López (Mexicali: Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, 2006), 52.

areas of Sonora actively indulged in the acquisition of luxury contraband goods. While private vessels were an accepted part of life in the Mexican Pacific as the reality of non-productive commercial agriculture under the missionary system, due to Spain's distraction with the independence conflict, "*barcos de comercio libre*," or private vessels, were able to navigate almost entirely free from royal regulations and oversight as military and mission communities grew to rely even more heavily on contraband packages.⁴⁷ As "*barcos de comercio libre*" became a symbol of hope for *criollo* communities, offering an avenue to bypass bureaucratic oversight from pro-monarchy and military forces, they also underscored the Crown's persistent failure in promoting permanent non-Native settlement. A sentiment felt at the highest levels of regional leadership. Writing from Loreto in 1814 at the height of Mexican independence, Felipe de Goicoechea, the provincial governor of Baja California, wrote to the viceroy of New Spain about the continued need for supplies and access to consistent maritime trade across the Gulf of California. Goicoechea's plea highlighted the pressing issue of "*el gran falta*," or "the great need," faced by Baja California in the aftermath of disrupted regional trade.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Dunne, *Black Robes in Lower California*, 156-158.

⁴⁸ Felipe de Goicoechea al Señor Virrey de Nueva España, 11 January 1814, "*Expediente que contiene información acerca de la escasez de víveres en Baja California debido a los bloqueos de la guerra de independencia y por falta de buques en buen estado*," 1814, Archivo General de la Nación, Californias, volumen 21, expediente 17.

Goicoechea disclosed in his message that damaged boats had unloaded sailors on random beaches to scavenge for wood and tar to repair their ship. Settler families found themselves on barren shores, desperately searching for stray cattle to sustain themselves. Importantly, Goicoechea revealed that only one ship had successfully reached Baja California with essential supplies and foodstuffs, despite the region relying on three ships for the survival of mission and military communities.⁴⁹ Goicoechea closed his letter by cryptically stating that, besides food shortages, there were “*demás urgencias*,” or “other emergencies,” that urgently required the government’s immediate attention.⁵⁰

Goicoechea’s plea for immediate aid provided a window onto the Mexican Pacific’s continued isolation, particularly for its non-Native populations. The failure of the state to provide stability for the settlers it saw as critical to regional development also showed how creative struggling communities had to become to survive. For *criollos*, *hacenderos*, high-ranking military, and mission leadership, they were able to capitalize on *barcos del comercio libre* (free trade ships) as well as

⁴⁹ Felipe de Goicoechea al Señor Virrey de Nueva España, 11 January 1814, “*Expediente que contiene información acerca de la escasez de víveres en Baja California debido a los bloqueos de la guerra de independencia y por falta de buques en buen estado*,” 1814, Archivo General de la Nación, Californias, volumen 21, expediente 17.

⁵⁰ Felipe de Goicoechea al Señor Virrey de Nueva España, 11 January 1814, “*Expediente que contiene información acerca de la escasez de víveres en Baja California debido a los bloqueos de la guerra de independencia y por falta de buques en buen estado*,” 1814, Archivo General de la Nación, Californias, volumen 21, expediente 17.

foreign British and South American pirates. For poorer *mestizo* and Indigenous communities living in and outside the region's struggling mission systems, isolation meant varying degrees of independence. As the Spanish Crown grappled to maintain control over their colonial territories, the introduction of *barcos del comercio libre* in the Mexican Pacific exemplified how water sovereignty and control translated into absolute power within the region. Ports in Baja California and Sonora, along with settler missionary and military communities, considered private or even pirate vessels as crucial for their survival, surpassing the significance of state-sanctioned entities. Mexican Pacific communities regarded the missions as enduring symbols of a failed state, representing a need to either find alternative routes or, in more extreme cases, to seize control.

As both the Crown and revolutionaries, struggled to control sea lanes and maritime corridors, Indigenous communities maintained critical control over Sonoran and Rio Colorado internal waterways and control over the Gulf of California's littoral spaces. Within the context of settler communities in Baja California, Indigenous employment as navigators and boatsmen became a primary source of Native labor within the early-nineteenth-century Mexican Pacific. During the independence period, the growing presence of *barcos de comercio libre* led to a heightened dependence on Indigenous navigators who played a crucial role in guiding these smaller ships across the Gulf of California and the Mexican Pacific. Spanish reliance on Native seamen had been a longstanding, albeit informal, practice. Although religious institutions

imposed restrictions on formalized Indigenous labor, Native navigators had been serving in various maritime roles within the region for centuries and maintained a consistent presence. Jesuit missionaries advocated for the ongoing isolation of Native populations from settler communities, asserting that Indigenous neophytes were not to be integrated until they actively demonstrated the ability to resist the allure of secular life. The demands of practicality and necessity, coupled with the inability of non-natives to effectively navigate the internal waterscapes of the region, necessitated the emergence of informal Indigenous leadership as a crucial factor in regional development.

The formal incorporation of Native peoples into maritime and landed economies in Baja California occurred slowly, directly linked to the rate of secularization of mission communities or *cameras*. As missions represented the primary administrative structure in the Mexican Pacific, their grip on regional power diminished gradually, even with the influx of military personnel and increased settler migration to Baja California's growing port communities. Secularization in the Mexican Pacific began in 1813 when the liberal Spanish parliament passed laws to convert missions into parishes and distribute mission property to Native converts, aiming to integrate Indigenous peoples into colonial society.

Native incorporation into Crown-subsidized maritime work offered distance from agricultural labor obligations and physical separation from mission labor communities. Within mission systems, "neophyte" Indigenous laborers were not

legally considered full laborers, nor were they socially or racially equal to *criollos* and *mestizos*. Native workers living within the bounds of mission communities did not receive direct compensation for their mandatory labor. Instead, mission fathers viewed Native labor as integral to their spiritual path towards achieving complete Christianization and becoming loyal subjects of the Crown. The attainment of full citizenship within the *castas*, which represented New Spain's socio-economic hierarchy, was rarely bestowed, especially in the vulnerable northwestern borderlands. Consequently, a *de facto* permanent neophyte status became the prevailing norm in the borderlands of the Mexican Pacific. When Native laborers were thrust into military maritime service to meet immediate labor shortages, military leadership did not account for limitations in Native economic capital. Nascent port communities like Loreto in the last decades of the eighteenth century, significant restructuring occurred as Bourbon administrators sought to make unprofitable holdings like Baja California financially viable rapidly. Concurrently, Indigenous mariners, now removed from mission guardianship and protections, exposed themselves to institutional abuse and mistreatment. This complex interplay of secularization, incorporation into maritime economies, and Indigenous peoples' challenges in the Mexican Pacific highlighted the intricacies of Native labor, identity, and citizenship during this transformative period.

During the late eighteenth century, a notable transformation in administrative control took place under the leadership of José de Gálvez, the Visitor General.

Gálvez's primary focus was on the Mexican Pacific borderlands, which had been previously neglected by the colonial administration. When Gálvez took office, he launched a far-reaching land reform initiative, profoundly altering the landscape of property ownership in the region. Before his tenure, the Baja California peninsula comprised mainly of mission and church lands, with minimal involvement of private ownership.⁵¹ The cornerstone of these changes was the land reform act issued on August 18, 1768, effectively transformed the region's social and economic structure.⁵² It became the most influential administrative document in the region until Mexico's 1824 General Colonization law and the official secularization acts were implemented in 1833 and 1834.

⁵¹ Luis Navarro García, *Don Jose de Gálvez y La Comandancia General de las Provincias Internas del Norte de Nueva Espania* (Sevilla: Ramundo Lulio, 1961), 168-173.

⁵² "Don Joseph de Gálvez a Carlos Francisco de Croix, Marques de Cruillas, Instrucciones sobre California," 12 agosto 1768, reprinted in Ulises Urbano Lassépas, *Historia de la colonización de Baja California y decreto del 10 de marzo de 1857* (Mexicali, B.C.: Gobierno del Estado de Baja California Sur et al, 1859, 2014), 321-325. For years, Gálvez and Croix exchanged scores of letters on the state of New Spain's northern frontier. From 1765 to 1769, they discussed Native communities in open rebellion, how to entice settlers, and changes to land ownership along the frontier. The Huntington Library contains an extensive collection of Jose Gálvez's Papers.. For more information on communications about early land reform discussions, see "Correspondence and Manuscripts, 1768, May 3-1768, Dec. 17," Box 7, GA 582, GA 454, GA 501, GA 549, GA 410, GA 548, GA 500, GA 581, GA 409, GA 580, GA 547, GA 452, GA 408, GA 579, GA 498, GA 451, GA 546, GA 578, GA 450, GA 545, GA 577, José de Gálvez Papers, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

Gálvez's directive granted him the authority to redistribute land allotments but did so with the caveat that these divisions must occur without prejudice against Native Indians and reformed soldiers. The possibility of state-endorsed private property ownership allowed Indigenous peoples to opt into a system previously defined by labor conscription, reflecting a notion of plural sovereignty. His reforms aimed to appeal primarily to those Indigenous people residing at the peripheries of the Californias, both north and south.⁵³ Before Gálvez's administrative tenure, the mission leadership largely controlled the lands, imposing strict restrictions on the Indigenous people's ability to own property outside the confines of the mission communities under direct ecclesiastical oversight. Gálvez's reformative policies marked a distinct shift from this traditional governance structure, effectively dismantling these administrative barriers and enabling Native populations to hold individual and familial land ownership. Article 2 of the new policy stipulated that land divisions, particularly within proximity to missions, must be allocated without prejudice towards Indigenous peoples.⁵⁴ Gálvez's 1768 land reforms proved significant, allowing Indigenous populations and *mestizo* soldiers to benefit from land redistribution.

⁵³ Article 5 guaranteed access to communal water use to maintain livestock. Article 6 gave new landowners a three-year reprieve from paying "tithes."

⁵⁴ Lassépas, *Historia de la colonización de Baja California y decreto del 10 de marzo de 1857*, 322.

As part of a campaign to undercut Indigenous mobility by folding independent Native laborers into a wage-earning system outside of mission supervision, Gálvez's introduction of Native private landownership presented Indigenous communities with new avenues to navigate plural sovereignty arrangements in southern coastal Baja. Gálvez's reforms expanded land ownership possibilities beyond the Indigenous peoples, extending them to Spanish and *mestizo* soldiers.⁵⁵ This inclusivity was underscored in Article 2 of his decree: "... *y que estos repartimientos de tierras se han de hacer sin perjuicio de los indios naturales, en soldados reformados, y en otros españoles de buenas costumbres /* and that these divisions of land must be made without prejudice to Native Indians, reformed soldiers, and other Spaniards of good customs."⁵⁶ Within the context of the Mexican Pacific, the demographics of the military volunteers or soldiers stationed in the Californias during this time consisted of socio-economically disadvantaged, illiterate, and lacking formal combat training. A significant portion of them were *mestizos*. This suggests that the descriptor of "useful settlers" may have motivated these soldiers and military volunteers, particularly those with limited socio-economic prospects, to become more active

⁵⁵ Barrie Earl Malcolm, "The Soldiers of Spain's California Army, 1769-1821" (1993). Dissertations and Theses. Paper 4690, Portland State University, 8. <https://doi.org/10.15760/etd.6574> [Last Accessed June 9, 2023]. Malcolm claims that most Spanish-surnamed soldiers were *mestizo* subjects who could not secure profitable military postings in other regions.

⁵⁶ Lassépas, *Historia de la colonización de Baja California y decreto del 10 de marzo de 1857*, 322.

participants in the colonial project, either through marrying into the Indigenous community or proving their usefulness as settlers.

Gálvez's reforms also laid the groundwork for an integrated societal model. The document included coded language signifying a "good character" and "hard-working" populace, pointing to the kind of settlers Gálvez desired in the region. Gálvez's reforms, characterized by the use of moralistic language, established the framework for classifying subjects as either "good" or "bad." This classification system set a precedent for categorizing citizens as "profitable" or "rebellious" in the post-Independence era. Article 3 of the legislation stipulated the perpetual granting of lands to male offspring by the authorities. Notably, property inheritance for daughters was contingent upon fulfilling specific conditions, namely their marriage to "useful settlers" as a prerequisite for retaining their rights to the inherited property.⁵⁷ Such language was racially charged and belied the persistence of anti-Indigenous racism.

Gálvez's land reforms were not without their own sets of constraints. He carefully structured his policy to restrict land ownership, specifically limiting its utilization to grazing and crop cultivation for livestock feed. Through subtle engineering, Gálvez directed the agricultural and economic development of the region to conform to his vision. By prioritizing livestock farming and discouraging potentially disruptive land uses, he ensured that the focus remained on his intended

⁵⁷ Lassépas, *Historia de la colonización de Baja California y decreto del 10 de marzo de 1857*, 322.

path of growth and stability rather than other potentially disruptive land uses. Article 5 of the legislation, addressed the issue of communal water use for livestock maintenance, further complicated the situation. This stipulation significantly strained the region's water resources, particularly in the southern region of Baja, which was the primary focus of Gálvez's legislation at that time.⁵⁸ The tension over water resources potentially exacerbated existing frictions between Indigenous peoples, *mestizo* soldiers, and Spanish settlers, as they were all forced to compete over the same limited water supply, essential for both human consumption and livestock maintenance.

Moreover, Article 6 introduced a three-year exemption from paying tithes.⁵⁹ While on the surface, this is a beneficial provision, and it may have further entrenched the colonial presence by incentivizing Indigenous peoples and *mestizos* to participate in the colonial economy and societal structure. Gálvez's land reform can be seen as an intricate strategy to blur the lines of racial and social hierarchies, motivate specific populations to adapt to the Spanish colonial model, and ultimately reinforce the Spanish colonial project.

The Native populations did not passively accept these changes; instead, they engaged in various forms of resistance, whether through subverting the water usage

⁵⁸ Lassépas, *Historia de la colonización de Baja California y decreto del 10 de marzo de 1857*, 323.

⁵⁹ Lassépas, *Historia de la colonización de Baja California y decreto del 10 de marzo de 1857*, 323.

restrictions, covertly opposing the land ownership stipulations, or challenging the attempts to co-opt them into the Spanish colonial system. Such instances of resistance offer an intriguing counterpoint to Gálvez's land reforms, and they highlighted the active role that Indigenous people played in shaping their destinies within the evolving colonial landscape.

Gálvez's language was racially coded, and despite the seeming inclusivity, the reforms remained riddled with anti-Indigenous racism. Land allotments primarily favored mestizo soldiers, underscoring persistent disparities in land distribution and perpetuating racial inequities. Gálvez's tenure and land reforms revealed the complex interplay of administrative policy, societal integration, and racial dynamics in late eighteenth-century Baja California.⁶⁰ The depth and breadth of the impact of these policies continue to resonate, providing a fascinating lens through which to examine the evolution of colonial administration and societal transformations in the Mexican Pacific borderlands.

Gálvez's 1768 land reforms dictated the course of land policy in Baja, California, for over fifty years until the passing of post-independence land reforms in the early nineteenth century. The 1824 Colonization Law played a pivotal role in

⁶⁰ John L. Kessell, *Friars, Soldiers, and Reformers: Hispanic Arizona and the Sonoran Mission Frontier, 1767-1856* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1976: 2021 Open Access Edition), "Chapter 6: The Promise and Default of the Provincia Internas, 1776-81" and "Chapter 7: The Challenge of a Reforming Bishop, 1781-95," Open Access [Last Accessed 16 June 2023].

shaping the early development of independent Mexico and its Pacific borderlands. Passed soon after Mexico's independence from Spain, this 1824 law encouraged the settlement and economic development of the country's vast, underpopulated northern territories. The law's fundamental objective was to boost Mexico's population through immigration, primarily targeting European and North American settlers and establishing a buffer against encroaching foreign influences, particularly from the United States. The law bestowed sizable land allocations upon Mexican citizens and immigrants, contingent upon the grantees' conversion to Catholicism and their pledge of allegiance to the Mexican government. The law allowed the individual states within Mexico to oversee the land grants, reflecting the newly adopted federalist system of government. The decentralization of authority enabled territories like Baja California to tailor settlement and development policies to their specific needs.

The 1824 Colonization Law, officially known as the General Law of Colonization (No. 72), profoundly impacted land and colonization dynamics in Baja California during the 1830s. This law offered security for the persons and property of foreigners desiring to settle in Mexican territory on the condition that they abide by the country's laws. It specifically addressed the occupation of national lands not owned by individuals, corporations, or towns, allowing these lands to be occupied by settlers. The law imposed restrictions on the occupation of lands within twenty leagues of foreign boundaries and ten leagues of the coast, requiring prior approval from the Supreme Executive Power. Notably, the new government did not impose

levies on first-time foreign settlers coming to settle in the nation for four years from the law's publication. The distribution of lands favored Mexican citizens, with preference based on individual merit, services rendered to the country, and residence in the respective region. Military personnel entitled to lands as per the offer made on March 27, 1821, were to be compensated upon presentation of the necessary documents provided by the Supreme Executive Power. Furthermore, the law restricted land ownership and mandated that individuals were not permitted to hold more than one square league of 5000 yards of irrigated lands, four leagues of non-irrigated arable land, and six leagues of pasture land as their personal property. During this era, these provisions and regulations shaped the patterns of land distribution and colonization in Baja California, significantly impacting the region's social, economic, and political landscape.

The 1824 Colonization Law had a complex and often detrimental impact on Indigenous communities in Baja California, during the 1830s. While the law aimed to attract foreign settlers and promote colonization, its provisions often disregarded the rights and interests of Indigenous peoples. One of the critical issues was the occupation of lands deemed national property and available for settlement. The law failed to recognize Indigenous communities' ancestral lands and territories, treating them as vacant and available for colonization. As a result, Indigenous communities faced displacement and the loss of their traditional lands, which held deep cultural, spiritual, and economic significance.

Additionally, Article 9 of the law gave preference to Mexican citizens in the distribution of lands, creating a disadvantage for Indigenous peoples who were often marginalized and excluded from the benefits of land allocation.⁶¹ The criteria for land distribution, such as individual merit, services rendered to the country, and residence in specific regions, often disadvantaged Indigenous communities due to historical marginalization and systemic discrimination. Furthermore, the limitations imposed on land ownership, as stated in Article 12, had a disproportionate impact on Indigenous communities.⁶² These limitations constrained the land holdings of individuals and effectively limited the capacity of Indigenous communities to sustain their traditional subsistence practices, agricultural systems, and communal land management.

The 1824 Colonization Law, aimed at luring overseas colonists while privileging Mexican citizens, initiated a chain reaction of colonization that profoundly marginalized and dispossessed Indigenous tribes in Baja California. Indigenous inhabitants found their rights, voices, and cultural legacy frequently overlooked in pursuing colonial interests. The repercussions of this law on Baja California's Indigenous societies were far-reaching, going beyond territorial

⁶¹ "Translation of the General Law of Colonization, No. 72," August 18, 1824, reprinted in H.P.H Gammel, *The Laws of Texas, 1822-1897*, 12 vols., (Austin: Gammel Book Co., 1898), 1: 97-98. <http://texinfo.library.unt.edu/lawsoftexas> [Last Accessed June 9, 2023].

⁶² "Translation of the General Law of Colonization, No. 72," August 18, 1824, reprinted in H.P.H Gammel, *The Laws of Texas, 1822-1897*, 12 vols., (Austin: Gammel Book Co., 1898), 1: 97-98. <http://texinfo.library.unt.edu/lawsoftexas> [Last Accessed June 9, 2023].

displacement and exclusion from land grants. Indeed, the law's stipulations often disrupted traditional Indigenous leadership structures, eroding their cultural traditions and self-determination. As incoming settlers erected their settlements, Indigenous populations witnessed a steady encroachment upon their territories and resources, sparking territorial disputes and gradually undermining their ability to maintain their everyday lifestyle.

Additionally, the arrival of foreign colonists instigated cultural assimilation pressures that jeopardized Indigenous identity and cultural preservation. Indigenous societies grappled with preserving their language, traditions, and religious rites as they came into contact with colonists who frequently sought to impose their cultural standards and values. The social interplay and power disparities resulting from colonization reinforced the sidelining and cultural erasure of Indigenous tribes in Baja California.

The 1824 Colonization Law also brought about economic repercussions for Indigenous tribes.⁶³ Traditional modes of sustenance, including hunting, fishing, and foraging—crucial to Indigenous livelihoods—were increasingly constricted as colonists seized and capitalized on the region's resources. Indigenous inhabitants were often denied access to their ancestral lands and resources, an issue that had

⁶³ “Translation of the General Law of Colonization, No. 72,” August 18, 1824, reprinted in H.P.H Gammel, *The Laws of Texas, 1822-1897*, 12 vols., (Austin: Gammel Book Co., 1898), 1: 97-98. <http://texinfo.library.unt.edu/lawsoftexas> [Last Accessed June 9, 2023].

significant implications for their financial stability and food security. Furthermore, the law unintentionally paved the way for mission systems' expansion, which deeply affected Indigenous societies. Missions, first established in Baja California, during the Spanish colonial era, sought to convert and assimilate Indigenous inhabitants into European cultural and religious norms. The arrival of overseas settlers bolstered by the law further consolidated the influence of the mission systems, thereby continuing a trend of cultural domination and the obliteration of Indigenous heritage.

The 1824 Colonization Law profoundly impacted Baja California, primarily influencing its demographic composition and economic growth. With its low population density and underdeveloped economy, the law encouraged Mexican and foreign settlement in Baja California with the objective of economic progress.⁶⁴ The law's provision for individual land ownership lured settlers and increased agricultural and maritime activity. The resultant influx of settlers also introduced new cultural

⁶⁴ Article 1 of the law opened Mexican lands to foreign settlement, on the condition that new settlers followed Mexican laws. Article 2 protected Mexican public and communal lands, known as ejidos, from foreign settlement. Article 4 ensured the preservation of borderlands spaces and guaranteed public access to coasts, ports, and shorelines, although special permissions could be granted by state administrators. Article 6 exempted first-time foreign settlers from paying any admission fees for a period of four years. Article 9 established that Mexican citizens would be given preference in the distribution of lands, with merit and services rendered to the country as criteria. Article 10 outlined compensation for military personnel entitled to land, based on documents provided to the Supreme Executive Power. Lastly, Article 12 specified land possession limits, allowing individuals to own no more than one square league of irrigated land, four leagues of non-irrigated arable land, and six leagues of pastureland.

dynamics and tensions between Indigenous communities and foreign, primarily American, settlers. The 1824 Colonization Law was instrumental in driving demographic shifts and economic development at the expense of Baja's Indigenous populations. The racial rhetoric behind "good" and "useful settlers" intensified as Indigenous peoples who continued to live semi-nomadic lives were cast as "*indios bárbaros*" (barbarous Indians) or seen as uninvested in Mexico's commitment to industrial progress.

The period of secularization spanning six transformative decades from the 1790s to the 1840s in the Mexican Pacific borderlands marked a crucial era of change. This era witnessed efforts aiming to disrupt and reshape Indigenous water power as the region grappled with evolving sociopolitical constructs. This transformative shift began with the expulsion of the Jesuit order from New Spain's Pacific borderlands in 1768. Soon after, secular Bourbon Reformers such as José de Gálvez embarked on an ambitious mission to invigorate regional economic markets by establishing racially integrated settlement communities.

Amid the transforming landscape, the Jesuit religious order's influence dwindled, marking a significant shift. Gálvez and his contemporaries encountered a perplexing predicament as they audited the Jesuit mission communities in Baja California. In their endeavors, they confronted complex questions regarding sovereignty, power

dynamics, and the future of Indigenous incorporation into settler society. These questions ballooned into more significant issues as they came across unexpected realities linked to race, ethnicity, water, land, and labor. Late imperial administrators and auditors came to realize that the societal structures implemented within the Spanish missions and later within the Mexican *villas* did not exert the expected dominance over Indigenous cultures. Instead, they were deeply immersed in Indigenous worlds, especially within the maritime milieu of the Mexican Pacific. The region's unique circumstances necessitated innovative approaches that tested traditional beliefs and policies. Gálvez and other secular administrators of the 1770s and 1780s found themselves at odds with the ecclesiastical fathers as they debated Indigenous peoples' classification and labor roles. They also pondered the feasibility of establishing a large-scale agricultural economy in Baja California. Although Gálvez managed to implement significant land reforms, these reforms failed to entice Indigenous landowners and inadvertently paved the way for *mestizo* handers. The weakening control over regional power and the influx of military personnel and settlers into Baja California's blossoming port communities provided avenues for Indigenous integration into Crown-subsidized maritime work. This allowed the Indigenous people autonomy and mobility, creating an alternative to mandatory agricultural labor. By the 1790s, administrators like Miguel Costansó recognized that developing an agrarian future was increasingly unrealistic due to the region's lack of reliable interior water resources. They gradually shifted their attention to Alta

California, considering Baja California and its Indigenous inhabitants a readily exploitable labor pool. Costansó and others initiated the practice of Indigenous maritime conscription, an indirect approach to harnessing Indigenous water power for navigation. Between 1800 and 1824, the gaze of the state shifted northwards to the Rio Colorado region in northern Baja.

After independence, Mexico's 1824 Colonization law and official secularization policies enabled the large-scale redistribution of mission lands. Open colonization, designed to accommodate Californian and American landowners, resulted in new regional dynamics and racially defined relationships with land and water. Regrettably, this occurred at a substantial cost to Baja's Indigenous peoples, who bore the brunt of these changes as their lands and rights were severely compromised.

This chapter highlighted the intricate dynamics of power negotiations during the secularization period in the Mexican Pacific borderlands. It underscored the pivotal roles of figures like Gálvez and Costansó, the resilience of Indigenous agency, and the long-lasting impacts of administrative decisions on the region's socio-economic and political tapestry that took on a different warp and woof in Sonora. Constitutional Lieutenant Governor Juan Bustamante took charge of executing a distinct approach in Sonora, setting his sights on the region's elusive riparian regions. Bustamante envisioned the utilization of these internal waterways for ambitious large-scale irrigation projects. Like in Baja, Indigenous communities' persistent mobility

and isolation presented a challenge, as it impeded the development of a substantial Indigenous workforce. Where Baja administrators abandoned agricultural development for maritime futures, Sonoran officials like Bustamante dedicated themselves entirely to large-scale agricultural development. Secular administrators, who had more control of internal waterways, launched sweeping land that targeted and leveraged Native access to water to compel agricultural settlements. Native hesitancy to commit to entirely sedentary lives and their continued isolation compelled state officials to doubt Native dedication to national progress and identity. These conflicts between secular administrators and Native communities occurring against the backdrop of secularization played a foundational role in shaping the burgeoning *mestizo* nationalism that emerged by the mid-nineteenth century in Sonora.

CHAPTER FOUR

Constructing *Indios Bárbaros* and Deconstructing Native Autonomy in Sonora

“If the appointees were also *hijos de la país*, ...we would not be suffering from our lackluster results of Indigenous-led revolutions and *indígenas malos*,” vented Ignacio Bustamante in an 1832 report from Sonora.¹ As the appointed Constitutional Lieutenant Governor of Sonora during the early 1830s, Bustamante was entrusted by the reorganizing Mexican Republic with the responsibility of integrating Sonora’s elusive riparian interior into the nation. Bustamante soon discovered that the situation in Sonora was more chaotic and precarious than he had initially understood from overly optimistic mission reports. The future for state builders like Bustamante and the nation-state project in Sonora was uncertain due to the inconsistent and unpredictable results of incorporating Indigenous converts into late colonial and subsequent republican societies and economies. Although the secularization process in missions across Sonora, newly formed Sinaloa, California, and Baja California began under the Spanish Crown in 1813 and accelerated in 1824, three years after Mexico gained independence from Spain (1821), the aim of integrating Indigenous

¹ Consejo de Gobierno de 4 Junio 1832, Archivo General del Gobierno del Estado de Sonora, Tomo 55, Expediente 2, Documento Numero 34797.

converts into late colonial and later republican societies and economies led to uneven and unstable consequences that troubled Bustamante.

By 1832, Bustamante's growing concern over "*indigenas malos*" or bad Indians became evident. Whether intentional, Bustamante started to emphasize and reshape the racial and ethnic distinctions between "*hijos del país*" (a term used for *mestizos* in the republican context) and "*indigenas malos*." Bustamante, in a correspondence directed to Sonora's Provincial Governing Council, drew attention to the disconcerting precedent set by Juan de la Banderas, an Indigenous Yaqui leader, who spearheaded and sustained an Indigenous revolt in the Rio Yaqui region in 1827. The delicate peace between Native communities and the emerging state in the Rio Yaqui Valley persisted solely due to a political cease-fire negotiated between the Mexican Republic and Banderas. Bustamante was anxious about the precedent created by the agreement that endorsed Banderas as a Captain General of various Yaqui towns. He contended that allowing Sonora's Indigenous towns to nominate and elect their own regional leaders would almost certainly pave the way for the resurgence of the "*los mal indigenas*" who had previously dispersed when Banderas transitioned from a military general to a political captain.²

² Consejo de Gobierno de 4 Junio 1832, Archivo General del Gobierno del Estado de Sonora, Tomo 55, Expediente 2, Documento Numero 34797.

To prevent the appointment of Indigenous individuals whose allegiance to the Mexican Republic could be doubted, Bustamante suggested provincial authorities select “*hijos de una paternal intención*,” or “*mestizos* with national intention,” for leadership positions.³ The emerging national discourse spread as many bureaucratic leaders and military families from New Spain’s central provinces settled in the Mexican Pacific borderlands. There, it conflicted with a complex web of interconnected, layered sovereignties that had preserved a balance between Indigenous and mestizo communities. The regional context prompted the first waves of administrators, soldiers, and non-Native settler families to take a pragmatic approach to Indigenous integration, providing incentives like land, labor, water, and protection for Native subjects. As the mission system collapsed in the 1820s, new power contenders emerged in the 1830s, such as *hacenderos* (hacienda owners and managers), bureaucrats, foreign investors, and state-sponsored Indigenous leaders, threatening the delicate balance of plural sovereignties. Simultaneously, as shifting legal and labor policies aimed to erode Native autonomy, established through generations of expertise in waterway management and control, settler frustrations with growing border violence involving “*los indios enemigos*” (enemy Indians) resulted in demands for open war and state-sponsored pacification efforts against

³ Consejo de Gobierno de 4 Junio 1832, Archivo General del Gobierno del Estado de Sonora, Tomo 55, Expediente 2, Documento Numero 34797.

Native populations beyond state oversight by the early 1830s. Crucially, the emergence of settler-led, state-sponsored vigilante campaigns targeting perceived “*enemigos de la patria*” (enemies of the nation) portrayed indigeneity and Native lifestyles as barriers to a fully realized *mestizo* nationalism. Bustamante’s focus on limiting the influence of “*indígenas malos*” (bad Indigenous people) mirrored regional state officials’ commitment to building a *mestizo* nation that included only “the Indians we trust,” as opposed to earlier attempts to harness Indigenous water expertise for themselves or negotiate relative Native autonomy for regional peace.⁴

This chapter asserts that early Mexican authorities strategically used racial categorization to facilitate the assimilation of Indigenous peoples into a settler colonial society. This approach ultimately laid the foundation for the emergence of *mestizo* nationalism in the 1860s. The state employed various measures to exert control over Indigenous labor and resources while actively promoting anti-Indigenous rhetoric, effectively marginalizing and dispossessing Native communities. These actions foreshadowed the exclusion of Indigenous peoples from the construction of Mexican national identity. The distinction between “*hijos del país*” (children of the country) and “*los mal indígenas*” (the bad Indigenous) shed light on conflicts related to regional land and water rights. It illustrated how late imperial officials and early

⁴ Consejo de Gobierno de 4 Junio 1832, Archivo General del Gobierno del Estado de Sonora, Tomo 55, Expediente 2, Documento Numero 34797.

post-Independence military leaders tackled the so-called “Indian Problem” by imposing strict racial categories that later became integral to 1860s *mestizo* nationalism.

During the initial years of the Mexican Republic, Native communities maintained a modified form of control over water resources, despite reform policies that restricted their access to land and water. Concurrently, a discourse of racialization emerged, differentiating between Native and *mestizo* populations. The distinction made by Bustamante between “*los hijos del país*” and “*indígenas malos*” suggested that the official state discourse positioned “bad” indigeneity in contrast to “good” modern *mestizo* identity, emphasizing the limited role of Indigenous communities within Mexican nationalism. After 1837, Mexican *mestizo* nationalism increasingly shaped the racial identities and employment prospects of Indigenous peoples. State bureaucracies assumed a more significant role in regulating mobile and industrial labor, consequently impeding Indigenous water sovereignty and restricting their movements. The influx of settlers, coupled with a decline in Native populations, further eroded Indigenous water sovereignty and severely limited labor opportunities for Indigenous borderlanders. Anti-Indigenous campaigns expanded the discourse surrounding mixed-race populations, fueling public debates about the position of Native communities within *mestizo* nationalism and justified the dispossession of

Indigenous peoples by the 1870s. This vision of the Mexican republic echoed Bustamante's earlier promotion forty years prior.

Bustamante established regional governments to bring national order to the region by appointing official community leaders to liaison between newly christened citizens, Indigenous and *mestizo*, and the nascent Mexican republican government officials.⁵ The appointment of state-endorsed community leaders afforded officials, like Bustamante, a means of establishing a state presence outside of mission priests to reinforce to Native communities a separation from mission religious and labor expectations. Secular administrators like Bustamante believed that recognized leadership positions for Native and *mestizo* individuals could further incentivize Native investment in Spanish political economies. Bustamante's purpose was simple—make Pimería Alta and Sonora habitable for settlers from Mexico's interior. State officials, including Bustamante, recognized the urgent need to address peaceful indigenous assimilation.⁶ Paradoxically, Bustamante also believed that *indios*

⁵ Robert C. Stevens, "The Apache Menace in Sonora, 1831-1849," *Arizona and the West* 6, no. 3 (Autumn 1864). Julio Albi, *La Defensa de las Indias* (Madrid: Instituto de Cooperación Iberoamericana, 1987), 78-82, 97-98.

⁶ Cynthia Radding, *Bountiful Deserts: Sustaining Indigenous Worlds in Northern New Spain* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2022), 53-71, 162-171. María del Carmen Bojórquez Jusaino, "De Pític a Hermosillo: La Pcpación del espacio a través

violentos could not be changed, let alone trusted with the region's future. The promise of recognized Indigenous leadership also implied relative, continued Native autonomy would persist into the Mexican period, particularly in the Pimería Baja region where few non-Native families refused to settle because of limited labor opportunities or outright violence.⁷ Pimería Alta held a more immediate promise for Mexican colonizing forces as, first, a gateway to Alta California's Pacific markets and defense, and, second, a potential Native labor pool for regional infrastructure construction and viable *mestizo* consumer bases for local markets. But, during the late 1820s and early 1830s, the combination of anti-clerical sentiments, a growing *mestizo* settler population, and Native population decline in Pimería Alta led to smaller Native communities or Native abandonment of integrated mission community settlements altogether threatened post-independence plans for colonization and assimilation.

Bustamante was particularly concerned about the growing marginalization of isolated Indigenous *pueblos* such as the Yuma, Tohono O'odham, Pima, Yaqui, Seri, and Opata, notably those located in river and mountain areas where amphibious use

de la privatización de la tierra, 1744-1852," in *De los márgenes al centro: Sonora en la independencia y la revolución: cambios y continuidades*, edited by Ignacio Almada Bay and José Marcos Medina Bustos (Hermosillo: El Colegio de Sonora, El Colegio de Bachilleres del estado de Sonora, 2011), 125-140.

⁷ David J. Weber, *Bárbaros: Spaniards and their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), Kindle Edition, Location 1717-1852.

of land and waterscapes ensured continued practice of semi-nomadic lifeways even amidst legislative changes to land use and water access meant to compel rapid Indigenous assimilation. The persistence of cultural and political autonomy within these communities not only caused discomfort for central bureaucrats like Bustamante, but it also instilled a tangible anxiety of looming Native-led rebellions in perpetually weakened frontier states as secular officials intensified Native assimilation efforts through increased military pressure on *indios de paz* (peaceful Indians), economic pressure through wage economies and new taxation measures, and land and water mobility restrictions. While early nineteenth century political and military leaders like Bustamante, dedicated themselves to constructing a defensive frontier against European and American incursions on Spanish and later Mexican sovereignty, the colonial vestiges and persistence of plural sovereignty powered arrangements in the Mexican Pacific demanded a categorical restructuring of Native and non-Native relationships through the intentional dismantling of Indigenous water sovereignty as non-Native officials leveraged race, land, and water access in the region.

Contested coastal and riparian corridors emerged as focal points for territorial disputes and conflicting national identities during the early nineteenth century. A combination of regional legislation, private land ownership, anti-Indigenous campaigns, and Native revolts exposed deep divisions between Native and *mestizo*

communities. Mexico's instability following multiple administrative transitions in the first decade of the republic (1821-1831) weakened its racial project at the national periphery, as various Indigenous groups pursued their own ambitions in the Pacific borderlands region by maintaining access to crucial waterways.⁸ Some Indigenous and *mestizo* communities leveraged their control over waterways to evade oversight and labor conscription, while other Indigenous individuals used mandatory maritime service to attain wealth and social mobility.

Though conversations about the place of Native peoples within social, racial, and economic hierarchies began during the Bourbon Reforms beginning in the early 1700s, Spain's northernmost frontier territories like Pimería Alta and Baja California did not experience the thrust of imperial reform until the final decades of the eighteenth century.⁹ Secular imperial Bourbon reformers like José de Gálvez, the

⁸ Cynthia Radding, *Landscapes of Power and Identity: Comparative Histories in the Sonoran Desert and the Forest of Amazonia from Colony to Republic* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 260-268. Cynthia Radding, *Bountiful Deserts: Sustaining Indigenous Worlds in Northern New Spain* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2022), 53-71, 162-171. Natale Zappia, *Traders and Raiders: The Indigenous World of the Colorado River Basin, 1540-1859* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 92-98.

⁹ David J. Weber, *Bárbaros: Spaniards and their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), Kindle Edition, Location 1606. See Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of the North Mexican States*, Vol. 1, 1531-1800 (San Francisco: A.I. Bancroft & Company, 1884), 670-686, for more about the early reforms and collaboration with the Church to initiate reforms. See Salvador Bernabéu Albert, "La frontera californica: de las expediciones cortesianas a la

visitor general of the Americas serving from 1776 to 1787, ushered in several decades of church, economic, and military reforms across New Spain, particularly in unsettled frontier regions like the Mexican Pacific.¹⁰ Reformers like Gálvez sought to limit the power of Church fathers in mission communities by undercutting ecclesiastical social, political, and economic control held over Native parishioners in vulnerable frontier communities.¹¹ Initially, secularization policies were rooted in the economic need to

presencia convulsiva de Gálvez (1534-1767), *Estudios (Nuevos y Viejos) sobre la Frontera, Anexos Revista de Indias* 4 (1991): 85-118.

¹⁰ For more on Gálvez's appointment and reform agenda, see Luis Navarro García, *Don José de Gálvez y la Comandancia General de la Provincias Internals del Norted de España* (Sevilla: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos de Sevilla, 1964). See Matthew Babcock, *Apache Adaptation to Hispanic Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016) for more on Bourbon policies targeting Spanish-Native relationships on New Spain's northern frontiers. Babcock argues that while Spanish Indian policy was multifaceted given local contexts and relationships, three key Spanish policy decision set the course agenda for a military-led interactions from the late-eighteenth century onward. The three policies Babcock emphasized was the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767, the Marques de Rubi's inspection of the presidial frontier line from 1766-1768, and King Carlos III's regulations of 1772 that emphasized waging offensive wars—in economic policies and physical warfare—against unincorporated Indigenous peoples in the pursuit of peace (74).

¹¹ Herbert Ingram Priestly, *José de Gálvez: Visitor-General of New Spain (1765-1771)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1916), 46-58. Donald E. Chipman, *Spanish Texas, 1519–1821* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992). Luis Navarro García, *Don José de Gálvez y la Comandancia General de las Provincias Internas del Norte de Nueva España* (Sevilla: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos de Sevilla, 1964). Mark Santiago, *The Red Captain: The Life of Hugo O'Conor, Commandant Inspector of the Interior Provinces of New Spain* (Arizona Historical Society, 1994). Mark Santiago, "Virtue, Character, and Service: The Spanish Officer Corps in Sonora, 1779," *The Journal of Arizona History* 44, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 45-72. Alfred Barnaby Thomas, *Teodoro de Criox and the Northern Frontier of New Spain, 1776-1783* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1941). Gálvez's

turn Indigenous parishioners into active taxpayers as an alternative revenue source for the Spanish Crown as church edicts exempt Native neophytes from paying taxes and instead demanded that the Crown fund missionary-led spiritual education.¹² By the 1790s, secular administrators sought added tax revenue and Spanish civil access to mission protected access to land, water, and Native labor. Secular officials viewed missions as the largest hurdle in regional economic development.¹³ Beginning in 1790, imperial visions of Pimería Alta shifted from replicating large scale mining communities, as experienced in Sinaloan missions towards maritime development along the Gulf of California coasts in Guaymas and agrarian land.¹⁴ Imperial agents viewed secularization in territories like Sonora as a way to impart sedentary

contemporaries and subordinates were Commandant General Teodoro Croix (Nueva Vizcaya), Comandante Rafael Martínez, Lieutenant Ygnacio José de Urrea (Sonora) communicated with each other about their respective “Indian Problem” and problematizing counterstrategies and solutions.

¹² Herbert Ingram Priestly, *José de Gálvez: Visitor-General of New Spain (1765-1771)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1916), 56.

¹³ David J. Weber, *Bárbaros: Spaniards and their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), Kindle Edition, Location 1606.

¹⁴ Miguel Tinker Salas, *In the Shadow of the Eagles: Sonora and the Transformation of the Border during the Porfiriato* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 18-20. For more on northern New Spain settlement patterns, see José Refugio De la Torre Curiel, *Twilight of the Mission Frontier: Shifting Interethnic Alliances and Social Organization in Sonora, 1768-1855* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), xvi-xvii, 117-122; Evelyn Hu-DeHart, *Missionaries, Miners, and Indians: Spanish Contact with the Yaqui Nation of Northwestern New Spain, 1533-1820* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1981).

agricultural cultural anchors in both Native and non-Native communities, and secure safe passage to Alta California hoping to establish local agricultural markets, foster regional trade, and international ports.¹⁵

Between 1800 and 1820, secular administrators placed heavy emphasis on establishing agricultural systems in frontier territories and transforming Indigenous communities into both agricultural producers and mercantile consumers and local political leadership for the sake of easier civil administration where non-Native leaders were scarce. The battle waged over Independence, for a time, stayed off this new vision as regional leaders turned their attention towards regional support of pro-monarchy forces. Following Mexican independence in 1821, the weight of racial and ethnic discourse once again intensified with renewed state colonization efforts epitomized by the 1824 General Colonization Law that sought to draw non-Native settlers into northwest frontier regions. As the General Colonization Law introduced still more potential actors into frontier spaces, it also codified ongoing secularization efforts across the Pacific regions as a necessary step in legitimizing Mexico's emerging constitutional monarchy. For in the eyes of the new Mexican government,

¹⁵ Maria del Valle Borrero Silva and Jesús Denia Velarde Cadena, “*La Nueva Organización Militar en la Nueva España: La fuerzas Presidiales en Sonora a Fines del Siglo XVII*,” in *De los márgenes al centro: Sonora en la independencia y la revolución: cambios y continuidades*, edited by Ignacio Almada Bay and José Marcos Medina Bustos (Hermosillo: El Colegio de Sonora, El Colegio de Bachilleres del estado de Sonora, 2011), 47-60.

secularization would not only guarantee the dissolution of church lands and their redistribution to Native communities, but it also meant that *mestizos*, Mexican settlers, and the Mexican state could also reabsorb excess lands. Though Sonoran and Baja California territories saw little colonists from the United States, the influx of non-Mexican settlers into *Tejas*, Coahuila, New Mexico, and Alta California loomed large in Mexican administrators' minds. The threatening specter of effective foreigners in Mexican territories also heightened bureaucratic calls for immediate and complete Native assimilation. Yet, as Native assimilation through land incentives, political benefits, and water restrictions occurred slowly, both government officials and regional *vecinos* began to group Indigenous peoples as either "good" or "bad" depending on perceived contributions or buffers to economic and political progress.

The mid-nineteenth century from the 1821 to 1850 proved to be a period of state and governmental transitions within the Mexican Pacific borderlands as the weakened Mexican State shifted from a colonial holding to a constitutional monarchy in 1824 with republican views on a diffuse central government and strong local oversight of border provinces like Sonora, Alta California, and Baja California. Though nationalist rhetoric and ideas of equal Mexican citizenship under the Article 12 of the Plan de Iguala attempted to wipe colonial hierarchies of race and Native/non-Native difference from official documents, far-flung regions like the Mexican Pacific could not dismiss race and indigeneity as a necessary marker of

difference as the vestiges of plural sovereignty and Indigenous water power persisted in day-to-day negotiations on the *frontera*. Regional officials were much more concerned with simultaneously jumpstarting rural labor markets while also addressing large pockets of labor scarcity in low density populated regions. The Colonization Law of 1824 and the promise of private property and years of tax exemptions sought to lure non-Native settlers into border regions. While territories were open to foreign colonization in the 1820s, the settlement of the region did not begin until the 1830s when mission lands were increasingly abandoned by ecclesiastical fathers and settlers.¹⁶

Repeated attacks by the selectively stateless Apache and Comanche raiders along the Mexico's northern border provinces further exacerbated mounting tensions in the regions for *vecinos*, *mestizos*, and *indios de paz* that continued to shape local relationships to governments, land, water, and indigeneity. The Mexican government, in 1833, mandated the secularization of missions throughout Mexico, placing particular emphasis on border regions where the missions still held considerable sway.¹⁷ Importantly, demographic shifts in Mexico's center pressured borderlands officials to heighten colonization and settlement efforts at the same moment tensions

¹⁶ Marco Antonio Samaniego López, *Breve historia de Baja California* (Mexicali: Universidad Autonoma De Baja California, 2006), 54.

¹⁷ Samaniego López, *Breve historia de Baja California*, 53-62.

between *indios enemigos* and *vecinos* hit a tipping point as Mexico's population increased from 6.2 million to 7.9 million between 1820 and 1854.¹⁸ While Mexican federal Indigenous policies by 1830 had identified and targeted mission protected Indigenous land rights and use as a barrier to national advancement, Native peoples still compromised over half of Mexico's population as late as 1850. Yet as municipal governments led by "trusted" *hijos del pais* steadily usurped Indigenous leaders within Native community governments in Mexico's interior, the continued weak presence and leverage of the central government in areas of the Mexican Pacific still afforded relative maneuverability to sidestep or minimize state interference in community life as well as hinder continued state efforts to erode community land holdings well into the late 1840s. Though the war between the United States and Mexico (1846-1848) did not significantly impact the Mexican Pacific region

¹⁸ See Robert McCaa, "The peopling of Mexico from origins to revolution," in *A Population History of North America* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000) edited by Michael R. Haines, Richard H. Steckel, and Richard H. (Richard Hall) Steckel. 2000); Colin MacLachlan and William Beezley, *Mexico's Critical Century, 1810-1910* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010); Ruth R. Olivera and Liliane Crete, *Life in Mexico under Santa Anna, 1822-1855* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), Marcela Terrazas y Basante, "Efectos del nuevo lindero: Indios, Mexicanos, norteamericanos ante la frontera establecida al terminology de la guerra entre Mexico y Estados Unidos," *Norteamerica 11*, num. 1 (enero-junio 2016): 75-96, for a general overview of Mexican population increases and demographic shifts in the nineteenth century. See also Peter Stern and Robert Jackson, "Vagabundaje and Settlement Patterns in Colonial Northern Sonora," *The Americas 44*, No. 4 (April 1988): 461-481.

throughout its duration except for the capture of Guaymas, the resultant secession of land and peoples in the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, did have a profound and lasting impact on the region and the racialization of its peoples whether Native or *mestizo*. Despite the eventual dramatic regional shifts that would occur with introducing the United States into regional debates over the meanings of *mestizaje* within in a U.S.-Mexico border context, the Mexican liberal definition of *mestizo* nationalism still clung to the vestiges of colonial hierarchies repackaged into 1860s uses of *mestizaje* and *indigenismo* state policies that targeted indigeneity as the antithesis to national progress.

The slow process of secularization from the 1790s to the 1840s exposed the perpetually weakened state of centralizing government forces to exercise meaningful control or pressure on *frontera* communities despite waves of legislation that sought to restructure local Indigenous relationships to land and water. Still, secularization as a totaling economic project failed to usher in a dramatic restructuring of nascent mixed Native and settler communities and significantly change Indigenous relationships to land and water. Regionally, secularization did succeed in introducing the Spanish, and later Mexican military and secular administrators, as important regional quasi-political, quasi-economic, and quasi-social authorities in the Mexican Pacific that allowed these men to not only shape rigid racial and ethnic hierarchies but also dictate the boundary between *indios enemigos* and *hijos del pais*. It rested with

this ability for men like Bustamante to construct “*indios malos*” as a common enemy and essential scapegoat for the slow settlement and industrialization of difficult borderlands spaces.

For in the Mexican Pacific borderlands, secularization meant that military and political administrators set the terms of citizenship for the region, at least in theory. From state official’s perspectives, Indigenous subjecthood, and later Mexican citizenship, would be defined by Native and *mestizo* participation in local economic markets rather than their adaptation to racialized Christian lifeways. Whether they were tethered to *rancherías* or actively fighting or evading non-Native settlement, the mission systems still represented the most visible symbol of the state in the Mexican Pacific borderlands to Native communities. As Sonoran missions underwent a gradual decline, the process of secularization, unfolding slowly but steadily, gave rise to the development of varied economic relationships and the establishment of distinct racial categories for Indigenous populations in the early nineteenth century.

Administrators in Pimería Alta and the Californias tried different approaches to entice semi-nomadic Indigenous communities to opt into permanent, integrated Native and non-Native settler communities as they did in Sonora through promises of land ownership, guaranteed access to water, and protection from military and Native

violence.¹⁹ Or, as was attempted in Baja California, maritime conscription afforded Native communities an alternative to agricultural work and an avenue to participate in local markets by entering maritime wage economies. Both scenarios saw regional administrators recognizing the crucial role of Indigenous integration, rather than exclusion, in advancing their overarching visions of Mexico rooted in nationalism. Despite their simple rhetoric, secular officials still had to grapple with the social, cultural, and racial realities of the region where the combination of Indigenous water sovereignty, negotiated plural sovereignty, and strict segregationist ecclesiastical policies made it difficult to sustain Native and non-Native interactions let alone the promotion of intimate mixed unions. State calls to foster several concentrated

¹⁹ In this chapter, I am going to use the terms Pimería Alta, Pimería Bajo, and Sonora in reference to coastal and internal lands in modern-day Sonora. Pimería Alta comprises modern-day northern Sonora and southern Arizona that comprises the Native ancestral lands of Rio Colorado Indigenous tribes like the Cocopah, the Tohono-Oodham, the Maricopa, the Yuma, and the Upper Pima territories, from which the region draws its name and bounds the region. The Pimería Bajo region comprises central and lower Sonora that is bounded by the Indigenous homelands of the Seri, Opata, Lower Pima, Yaqui, and Mayo peoples. Geographically, Pimería Bajo is marked by the Rio Sonora, Rio Yaqui, and Rio Mayo river valleys, internal riparian corridors, and the Sierra Madres Occidental mountain ranges. Collectively, I will refer to region as Sonora particularly in reference to state policies and mandates. In 1823, the Province of Sonora and Sinaloa was split into two administrative states. The Republican Sonora comprised Pimería Alta and Bajo, regional terms that were a legacy of Jesuit, Dominican, and Franciscan mission administrations but were used locally until the mid-nineteenth century. In the wake of the US war with Mexico and the resultant Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo (1848) and La Venta de La Mesilla (1854), or the Gadsden Purchase, the boundaries of the Sonoran state were redefined politically, but the Rio Colorado delta and its peoples remained culturally bounded.

generations of distinctly mestizo citizens, exposed an important racial and ethnic caveat to the burgeoning Mexican identity in the region that viewed indigeneity as not only undesirable, but that Indigenous lifeways were in direct opposition to good “*hijos del pais.*”

Critically, the military, bureaucratic, and legal actions taken by state administrators in the Mexican Pacific borderlands illustrated a different understanding of New Spain and Mexico’s ongoing “Indian Problem,” or the ongoing question of where Indigenous peoples would fit into a *mestizo* future. Unlike the approach taken towards the Indian Problem in interior Mexico, which focused on compensating for perceived Indigenous inferiority based on phenotypical racial distinctions, Mexican Pacific state operatives regarded their own Indian Problem as necessitating the containment of Indigenous power and mobility. Because in spaces like Baja California and Sonora, steady access to land and water resources allowed Indigenous people to maintain their semi-nomadic lifeways even after non-Native contact. Indigenous amphibious use of landscapes and waterscapes unsettled Spanish legal understandings of colonial and, later, national sovereignty and power.

This critical distinction re-contextualizes initial economic and political calls for a unifying concept of *mestizaje* and *mestizo* nationalism in the Mexican Pacific borderlands as a targeted attempt to curb Indigenous water power by erasing Native linkages to Indigenous cultural practices that stressed seasonal mobility and

environmental subsistence. While initial calls for *mestizaje* attempted to erode Indigenous social and cultural customs through incentive-based practices like the awarding of property or a pathway to accumulating legal tenure. Over the course of several decades the underlying rhetoric behind calls for *mestizaje* underscored more familiar settler colonial intentions to dispossess Native communities and curb threats to state power most visible in the creation of categorical distinctions between “*hijos del pais*” and “*indios malos*.” The tensions experienced during this secularization period not only proved foundational to subsequent mid-to-late nineteenth century articulations of *mestizo* nationalism in the 1860s and 1870s, but it also provided a blueprint for later *indigenismo* racial policies that sought to erase indigeneity altogether through cultural assimilation in the 1910s and 1920s.

Over a period of approximately six decades, beginning in the 1770s and continuing until the late 1840s, Sonora underwent a gradual process of secularization.²⁰ Despite the significance of missions and the church as social

²⁰ For more on the secularization of missions in northwest New Spain, see David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); David J. Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846: The American Southwest Under Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982); David J. Weber, *Bárbaros: Spaniards and Their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), Martha Menchaca, *Recovering History, Constructing Race: The Indian, Black, and White Roots of Mexican Americans* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001). For more on the secularization of mission systems in Sonora, see John L. Kessell, *Friars, Soldiers, and Reformers: Arizona and the Sonoran Mission Frontier 1767-1856* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press,

institutions in the Mexican Pacific borderlands, most Native communities continued to engage in hunting, gathering, and fishing activities primarily outside of their *rancherías*, which were satellite Indian villages situated outside of mission structures.²¹ Religious orders attempted to create sedentary societies from semi-nomadic and semi-sedentary Native communities through the practice of *congregación*, which involved resettling Native peoples into Christian settlements. On the whole, mission fathers' efforts in Sonora were largely unsuccessful.²² Sonora's political and military leaders saw mission fathers as obstacles to accessing much-needed, unregulated, and unprotected Native labor. The crumbling remnants of

1976); Cynthia Radding, *Wandering Peoples: Colonialism, Ethnic Spaces, and Ecological Frontiers in Northwestern Mexico, 1700-1850* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); For more on the secularization of mission systems in Baja California, see Lee M. Panich, *Narratives of Persistence: Indigenous Negotiations of Colonialism in Alta and Baja California* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2020); Robert H. Jackson, *Indian Population Decline: The Missions of Northwestern New Spain, 1687-1840* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994). For more on the secularization of mission systems in Alta California, see Albert Hurtado, *Indian Survival on the California Frontier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); Lisbeth Haas, *Conquest and Historical Identities in California, 1769-1936* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Lisbeth Haas, *Saints and Citizens: Indigenous Histories of Colonial Missions and Mexican California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); Steven W. Hackel, *Children of Coyote, Missionaries of Saint Francis: Indian-Spanish Relations in Colonial California, 1769-1850* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

²¹ Robert H. Jackson, *Indian Population Decline: The Missions of Northwestern New Spain, 1687-1840* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), 34.

²² Robert H. Jackson, *Indian Population Decline: The Missions of Northwestern New Spain, 1687-1840* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), 13.

mission systems strewn across the Sonoran Desert stood testament to the significant problem Indigenous autonomy posed to military and state officials in ways that increased their resolve to assimilate and subdue Indigenous populations. Under secular oversight, citizenship status in early nineteenth century Pimería Alta increasingly hinged on economic independence and active participation in local market economies, with greater significance placed on these factors than on the racial and religious markers highlighted by the mission fathers. During Mexican Independence from 1800 to 1821, two decades of tensions between ecclesiastical and military administrators highlighted competing visions and definitions of Indigenous assimilation and eventual citizenship.

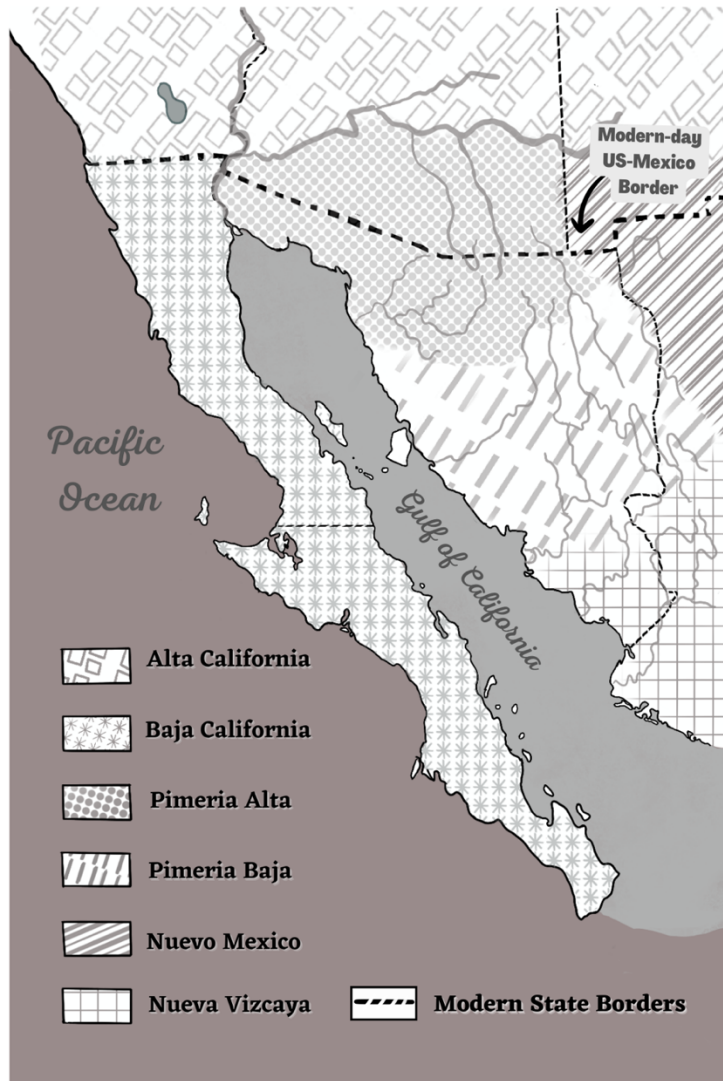


Figure 4: Spanish Colonial and Mexican Republic Administrative Map of the Mexican Pacific Borderlands. Drawn by the author.

The Pimería Alta and Sonoran frontier project and dissolution of the mission system illustrated the important role land tenure, legal codes, internal waterways, and communal water use played in the region's transition from the late imperial to the early-national period that hinged on economic engagement rather than socially defined citizenship. But there were appreciable differences between the two regions. Indigenous communities in central and southern Sonora or Pimería Baja, the Seri, Pima, Opata, and the Tohono O'odham had semi-sedentary lifestyles and relied on flash flood agriculture, living in designated seasonal pueblos in the central and southern Sonora region.²³ Pimería Alta, as a colonial administrative entity, encompassed the northern region of Sonora and the southern area of Arizona. The presence of the Rio Colorado complex riparian system allowed mission fathers to establish more resilient communities near reliable sources of freshwater, catalyzing substantial transformations in Indigenous lifestyles during the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.²⁴ The steady influx of settler populations congregated towards expanding mining centers in Sonora's interior, necessitated an agricultural-

²³ Cynthia Radding, *Wandering Peoples*, 48-49, 297-298. Edward F. Castetter and Willis H. Bell, *Pima and Papago Indian Agriculture* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1942), 4-10, 13-14, 18-23, 122-130.

²⁴ Natale Zappia, "The Interior World: Trading and Raiding in Native California, 1700-1863," Dissertation, University of California, 2008.

centric local economy that relied heavily on Indigenous labor.²⁵ As the possibility of productive commercial agriculture became more likely, tensions between settlers and Native peoples escalated. They competed for access to land and water, while also struggling against escalating Apache and Comanche raids. Immediately after the Jesuits were ousted from New Spain in 1768, the Spanish Crown and the Franciscan order began to change Indigenous peoples' relationships to land and water.²⁶

As administrative oversight shifted, the priorities of the colonial authorities demonstrated a different course for Native incorporation and regional settlement that bound the concepts of land, indigeneity, labor, and subjecthood together. José de Gálvez, the Royal Visitor, sent to evaluate the state of colonial holdings in Pimería Alta, including church, Native, communal, and royal lands, issued a decree in 1768 and mandated that mission lands be divided among Sonoran *vecinos*. Gálvez envisioned a Sonora characterized by established agrarian communities, where the designation of *vecino* encompassed both Native and non-Native residents united by a shared objective of fostering productive regional settlements. For secular

²⁵ Robert H. Jackson, *Indian Population Decline: The Missions of Northwestern New Spain, 1687-1840* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), 31. Karl Jacoby, *Shadow at Dawn: An Apache Massacre and the Violence of History* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2008), 13-34. Cynthia Radding, *Wandering Peoples*, 237-245.

²⁶ Michael C. Meyer, *Water in the Hispanic Southwest: A Social and Legal History, 1550-1850* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1984), 36-45.

administrators like Gálvez, the ecclesiastical practice of rigid, segregated Native and non-Native settlements hindered the late-imperial push to settle the Mexican Pacific borderlands region quickly for the purposes of strategic maritime defense against rival European incursions. Secular military leaders used church land redistribution to undercut Church power and simultaneously push against the racial and economic limitations placed on Native parishioners. If the future of the region rested on a racially integrated *mestizo* future, then secularization policies needed to literally remove the physical barriers between natives and non-natives by rigid mission norms. To these ends, early secular land policies leveraged individual and communal holdings to incentivize Native and non-Native settlements.

Within each settler site, land needed to be set aside to create a *pueblo* or township. Then, four leagues of communal lands needed to be established, usually containing important water sites. Third priority was given to pastoral lands, an extension of communal holdings, with mission communities allotted at least twenty acres of land next to community lands. Importantly, besides mission land, each Native head of family was to be given four acres of land to work and till for both mission and familial use. Recipients of land allotments needed to attempt an agriculture or animal husbandry every year or after two years of inactivity, land ownership would revert to the Crown and could be leased in perpetuity to interested

private Spanish citizens or “unobjectionable half-castes.”²⁷ Land allotments meant starting regional trade and establishing a consistent tax base and tax rolls to, in the eyes of settler society, Indigenous communities into market economies. As Native populations declined in mission and settler communities in the 1780s because of a combination of regional epidemics and the mission policy of *reducción* that moved and consolidated Native populations into single villages, Indigenous communities’ claims to land and water waned significantly.

As Spanish administrators sought to redefine land and water in frontier regions like Sonora, the initial impulse for secular officials was to erode the ecclesiastical custom of Native and non-Native social and physical segregation. Late imperial officials advocated strongly for mixed race intimate unions as a means of expediting Indigenous cultural assimilation for the subsequent generation of *mestizo*, that is Spanish and Indigenous children. Secular administrators believed these transformations would happen over a single generation, the low number of intimate mixed unions between Spanish men and Indigenous women, which was the preferred pairing for Spanish civic engineers, over multiple generations failed to entice a significant surge in racially mixed pairings. Waning Spanish and burgeoning

²⁷ *Friar Bringas Reports to the King: Methods of Indoctrination on the Frontier of New Spain, 1796-1797*, translated and edited by Daniel S. Matson and Bernard L. Fontana (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2017), 45.

republican states' approaches to Indigenous peoples in the early nineteenth century revealed that Native identities and markers of difference in the Mexican Pacific borderlands were based on local contexts, geographically relative, and not anchored in preconceived notions of racial difference. As Indigenous water power continued to stall imagined *mestizo* futures for the Mexican Pacific region throughout the secularization period, Mexican officials and *vecinos* began to racially re-categorize Native communities on a spectrum from “*indios malos*” (bad Indians) to “*ciudadanos*” (citizens). Advocates for burgeoning *mestizo* nationalism regarded indigeneity, with its commitment to ancestral Indigenous traditions, as more than a liability; they deemed it a cultural connection requiring absolute elimination instead of simple tolerance.

While Native sources for the 1790s to the 1820s are limited, a closer look at birth, baptism, marriage, and death rosters can provide a glimpse at the extent of racial and ethnic transformations in borderlands communities like Pimería Alta as isolated mission communities began to secularize over a sixty-year period. For example, baptismal records for Mission La Purísima Concepción de Caborca, in north central Sonora, revealed that between 1768 and 1796, mission fathers baptized 111 Tohono O’odham, 24 Pimas, 17 Seris, 2 Apaches, and 117 *nijora*, or war captives

from the Rio Colorado region.²⁸ The ethnic overview of collective baptisms to account for nearly three decades of Franciscan presence in Pimería Alta highlighted the limited power of mission estates, and in the eyes of the Crown, the financial loss inherent in financing frontier communities. The ethnic distribution of the baptisms also reveals that even as late as 1796, in established missions like Caborca, missionaries were still grappling to restrict Indigenous migrations in an out of mission communities as Tohono O’odham, Apaches, and *nijora* from the Rio Colorado regions, all primarily nomadic populations still comprised a majority of new converts. Moreover, the presence of such a high number of Rio Colorado *nijora* also highlights the mission practice of *congregación*, or Native relocation, as a way to help fill declining mission populations and a colonization tool that removed Indigenous peoples from their home environments to foster dependency on mission life. The connection between place and power for semi-nomadic Native peoples was not lost on late-imperial fathers even as they devoted themselves to creating sedentary communities.

²⁸ Altar, Sonora—Parish Archive—Province of Sonora: *Pueblos of Caborca, Pitiquito, Ildelfonso de Cienquilia, Alamitos and Figueroa, Part 1, 1771-1859*, Mexico and U.S. Border Microfilm Collection, Reel Number MF 0552.1, Case 424, Dr. 2, Arizona Historical Society, Tucson, AZ. Also see Robert H. Jackson, *Indian Population Decline: The Missions of Northwestern New Spain, 1687-1840* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), 28. Consult Table 1.3 for a comparative mission breakdown.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the heightened use of *congregacion* not only indicated a shift in rhetoric among mission and settler communities but also reflected the establishment of a dichotomy between “good” and “bad” Indigenous converts. This categorization positioned semi-sedentary and semi-nomadic Native populations on a sliding scale that determined their level of deserving full integration into Spanish society. The shuffling of undesirable Native populations like the Tohono O’odham in an out of northern Sonoran missions contrasted noticeably with the recruitment of Pima’s semi-sedentary communities to populate struggling missions. Mission settlements like Caborca, in decades prior, only documented the baptism of a handful of Pima converts. By 1802, Pima settlement in the missions had increased to 181 in addition to 10 Yaquis, 8 Opata, and 5 Seri with 71 *gente de razon*, or settlers.²⁹ While on the other hand, Caborca parish polls reported 0 Apache and only 32 neophytes from the Rio Colorado region that indicated a sizable shift of nomadic Native populations to other missions, usually in Baja California, and a dedication to repopulating Sonoran missions with Native peoples deemed to offer the most agricultural potential.³⁰ The combined total of ethnically Pima baptism recorded in

²⁹ Altar, *Sonora—Parish Archive—Province of Sonora: Pueblos of Caborca, Pitiquito, Idefonso de Cienquilia, Alamitos and Figueroa, Part 1, 1771-1859*, Mexico and U.S. Border Microfilm Collection, Reel Number MF 0552.1, Case 424, Dr. 2, Arizona Historical Society, Tucson, AZ.

³⁰ Altar, *Sonora—Parish Archive—Province of Sonora: Pueblos of Caborca, Pitiquito, Idefonso de Cienquilia, Alamitos and Figueroa, Part 1, 1771-1859*,

Caborca was 24 in between 1768 and 1796, by 1838, that total had grown to 1,121 according to parish archives.³¹ Another factor that could account for the significant rise in the Pima population in Sonoran mission sites like Caborca are interracial and interethnic marriages as populations shifted and settlers integrated into mission and mining communities.

As secular leaders advocated for increased mixed intimate partnerships in the Pacific borderlands, the centuries of Native and non-Native segregation could not be reversed with any semblance of expediency. Any increase in intermarriage and mixed unions compelled mission fathers to take on new and changing roles in their missions. The first was to decide whether Native and non-Native mixed unions were legitimate. Secondly, how would *mestizo* children be ethnically or racially categorized. For

Mexico and U.S. Border Microfilm Collection, Reel Number MF 0552.1, Case 424, Dr. 2, Arizona Historical Society, Tucson, AZ. For an overview of Sonoran and Baja California population statistics for specific missions, see Robert H. Jackson, *Indian Population Decline: The Missions of Northwestern New Spain, 1687-1840* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), 30. See Table 1.5. For baptism, marriage, and death records for Baja Californian missions, see Pablo L. Martínez, *Guía Familiar de Baja California, 1700-1900: Vital Statistics of Lower California* (Mexico D.F.: Editorial Baja California, 1965).

³¹ *Altar, Sonora—Parish Archive—Province of Sonora: Pueblos of Caborca, Pitiquito, Ildelfonso de Cienquilia, Alamos and Figueroa, Part 1, 1771-1859*, Mexico and U.S. Border Microfilm Collection, Reel Number MF 0552.1, Case 424, Dr. 2, Arizona Historical Society, Tucson, AZ. See Robert H. Jackson, *Indian Population Decline: The Missions of Northwestern New Spain, 1687-1840* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), 29. Consult Table 1.4. for a comparative mission breakdown.

example, in Mission Caborca between 1769 to 1779 when the mission Native population were more ethnically diverse, marriages within Indigenous ethnic groups remained relatively steady that might have illustrated either limited interest in mixed unions or limited opportunity, as interethnic Pima marriages totaled fifty-four, while Pima and other Native unions totaled eight. Of note, in this decade, no marriages between Native peoples and *gente de razon* were recorded and sixteen unions occurred without ethnic, racial, or class markers.³² The unspecified status of marriages could illustrate how mission fathers either choose not to engage in racial classification, or more than likely, that only mixed unions between *gente de razon*, a common term for settlers, and Native parishioners were of note.

The rapid push for immediate secularization by military administrators in the 1780s and 1790s meant increased development of *doctrinas*, half-mission and half-settler communities, regardless of the Indigenous cultural and social assimilation project as townships were compelled to integrate non-Native and Native

³² Altar, Sonora—Parish Archive—Province of Sonora: Pueblos of Caborca, Pitiquito, Ildfonso de Cienquilia, Alamitos and Figueroa, Part 1, 1771-1859, Mexico and U.S. Border Microfilm Collection, Reel Number MF 0552.1, Case 424, Dr. 2, Arizona Historical Society, Tucson, AZ. See Robert H. Jackson, *Indian Population Decline: The Missions of Northwestern New Spain, 1687-1840* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), 32-33. Consult Table 1.6. for a comparative mission breakdown for other Sonoran mission.

populations.³³ Because of the quick integration of settlers, mission fathers might have felt that intra Indigenous marriages within the parish did not warrant special attention or documentation as much as mixed *gente de razon* and Native marriages did. For in 1790 to 1800, 34 interethnic Pima marriages were recorded, while 11 Pima and other Indigenous marriages and 8 unspecified marriages were noted in parish records. Only one marriage between a *gente de razon* and an Indigenous person was recorded for the decade.³⁴ Parish census records in 1802 claimed to house 353 Pima neophytes and 105 settlers, whose demographic ratios seem to push against the small scale and almost closed opportunities for mixed Native and non-Native unions, these statistics suggest.³⁵

³³ “Defuciones, 1786-1805, 1815-1844,” 1796, MEX C2-20A, Vol. 4, Roll 18, image 63, El Registro Parroquia de San Miguel de Horcasitas, Sonora, Archquidiocesis de Hermosillo, Archivo General de la Nacion y Academia Mexicana de Geneologia y Heraldica, [digital repository] Ancestry.com, illustrates terms like “*mestizo y vecinos*.”

³⁴ *Altar, Sonora—Parish Archive—Province of Sonora: Pueblos of Caborca, Pitiquito, Ildfonso de Cienquilia, Alamitos and Figueroa, Part 1, 1771-1859*, Mexico and U.S. Border Microfilm Collection, Reel Number MF 0552.1, Case 424, Dr. 2, Arizona Historical Society, Tucson, AZ. Robert H. Jackson, *Indian Population Decline: The Missions of Northwestern New Spain, 1687-1840* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), 32-33. Consult Table 1.6. for a comparative mission breakdown.

³⁵ *Altar, Sonora—Parish Archive—Province of Sonora: Pueblos of Caborca, Pitiquito, Ildfonso de Cienquilia, Alamitos and Figueroa, Part 1, 1771-1859*, Mexico and U.S. Border Microfilm Collection, Reel Number MF 0552.1, Case 424, Dr. 2, Arizona Historical Society, Tucson, AZ.

A closer look at parish death records for Mission San Miguel de Horcasitas, located about 160 miles south of Mission Caborca may potentially provide a window onto how mission fathers in Pimería Alta categorized *mestizo* children born from mixed neophyte and *gente de razon* pairings throughout the secularization process in ways showed how racial and ethnic distinctions mattered less than legal status and positionality within the greater settler communities. When it came to record keeping, mission priests may have considered children born from unions between settlers and Indigenous individuals as *indios*, rather than strictly adhering to the expected *casta* categorization. The use of mixed union categorizations like *mestizo* were incorporated slowly overtime. For Indigenous communities, the gradual but steady changes in racial categorization of *mestizo* children throughout secularization at Mission San Miguel de Horcasitas showed the growing divide between *hijos del país* or *vecinos* and *indios malos* or *enemigos indios* developed in the region by between 1788 and 1844. The widening divide was indicative of changing relationships between neighbor, or *vecino*, demarcations to labor identifications.

TABLE 1:
CHANGING RACIAL TERMS IN SAN MIGUEL HORCASITAS, 1788-1844

YEAR	TERMS USED
1788	<i>"indios opatas solteros"</i>
1796	<i>"mestizos y vecinos"</i>
1796	<i>"mestizos de esta filigresia"</i>
1814	<i>"mestiza y vecina"</i>
1815	<i>"indios" y "mestizo, hijo legitimo"</i>
1816	<i>"indio Hiaqui (Yaqui)"</i>
1816	<i>"españoles y mis filigres"</i>
1816	<i>"indios transeunte" y "muerta violenta"</i>
1816	<i>"hijo" y "hijo legitimo"</i>
1818	<i>"Espanola y mi feligres"</i>
1820	<i>"mestizo y feligres"</i>
1820	<i>"mestiza, vecino"</i>
1821	<i>"Sonora y haciendas"</i>
1821	<i>"española solterra y vecina"</i>
1822	<i>"villas españoles"</i>
1823	<i>"indios yaqui y vecinos del labor"</i>
1824	<i>"indios opata y vecinos"</i>
1824	<i>"españoles ciudadanos y vecinos"</i>
1827	<i>"de hacienda codorachi"</i>
1829	<i>"cuidadana"</i>
1829	<i>"vecinos"</i>
1832	<i>"yaquis y vecina"</i>
1837	<i>"india coyote"</i>
1837	<i>"vecina del Ranchito"</i>
1844	<i>"matado de los Apaches"</i>

SOURCE: "Defuciones, 1786-1805, 1815-1844," MEX C2-20A, Vol. 4, Roll 18, image 12, image 63, image 64, image 89, image 101, image 106, image 108, image 138, image 150, image 151, image 157, image 162, image 163, image 175, image 181, image 188, image 189, image 238, image 269, image 271, image 318, image 360, image 362, image 434, El Registro Parroquia de San Miguel de Horcasitas, Sonora, Archquidiocesis de Hermosillo, Archivo General de la Nacion y Academia Mexicana de Geneologia y Heraldica, [digital repository] Ancestry.com.

Table 1: Changing Racial Terms in San Miguel Horcasitas, 1788-1844.
Table created by the author.

Father Juan de Aviles administered the last sacraments to Rosalia, a Yaqui Indian maid in the service of the widow Doña Gregoria Leon, in 1788. While Rosalia's individual descriptor was reduced simply to "*mujer de Josef*," her social identity was tied to her work as a servant to a settler household and her ethnic identifier for her and her husband, both Yaquis.³⁶ The following final sacrament entry for Marcelo Batora was "*indio soltero*" with no ethnic descriptors and no social tether to a greater community. Of greater significance in Batora's entry was his lack of connection to the mission community, surpassing the importance of his racial or ethnic categorization. The final sacrament entry for Don Antonio Correa, an *españole* whose documentation includes his hometown of Malaga in Spain, and that he is survived by his wife Maria Moreno also emphasized the importance of community anchors and positionality within the township as well as social and racial status.³⁷ Similarly, the final sacrament entry for Antonio Josef a Native child who passed away as a "*niño*" and listed as the son of Pablo and Ana Maria, Yaqui servants in the household of Don Fernando Ninigo Ruiz stressed the labor relationships between the

³⁶ "Defuciones, 1786-1805, 1815-1844," 1788, MEX C2-20A, Vol. 4, Roll 18, image 12, El Registro Parroquia de San Miguel de Horcasitas, Sonora, Arquidiocesis de Hermosillo, Archivo General de la Nacion y Academia Mexicana de Geneologia y Heraldica, [digital repository] Ancestry.com.

³⁷ "Defuciones, 1786-1805, 1815-1844," 1788, MEX C2-20A, Vol. 4, Roll 18, image 12, El Registro Parroquia de San Miguel de Horcasitas, Sonora, Arquidiocesis de Hermosillo, Archivo General de la Nacion y Academia Mexicana de Geneologia y Heraldica, [digital repository] Ancestry.com.

deceased and their community even if they were likely too young to participate in said relationships. The lack of documented surnames for Yaqui residents like Rosalia, Josef, Antonio Josef, Pablo, and Ana Maria also evidenced the relationship between race and assimilation status where mission fathers understood Native peoples as tethered but not yet full members of their mission communities. The 1788 final rites entry for Maria Egesiaca, a *mulatta*, a person of Spanish and African ancestry, daughter to her parents Juan Bautista Sierra and Maria Dolores Sanchez, servants in the Manuel Lopez Gallego household, highlighted the slow but steady integration of settler societies and the presence of racial diversity in the region outside of Native and non-Native.³⁸ Additionally, the use of surnames for Egesiaca's parents was also noteworthy as it showed that the closer one's link to *español* heritage, the more stressed the community linkages.

By 1796, the community positionalities in Mission San Miguel de Horcasitas shifted as death records emphasized whether the deceased were *hijos naturales* or *hijas legítimas* followed by their race and ethnicity. While *indios* and *españoles* remain critical categories, death records show a shift in Indigenous ethnic distinctions, as Tohono O'odham parishioners yielded to Pima and Yaqui

³⁸ "Defunciones, 1786-1805, 1815-1844," 1788, MEX C2-20A, Vol. 4, Roll 18, image 12, El Registro Parroquia de San Miguel de Horcasitas, Sonora, Arquidiócesis de Hermosillo, Archivo General de la Nación y Academia Mexicana de Genealogía y Heraldica, [digital repository] Ancestry.com.

parishioners. Most critically, the Native relationships with labor and Spanish community members fell away as mission administrators added the community categories of *vecinos*, or neighbors, and *feligreses*, or parishioners.³⁹ The use of *vecinos* varied. On one hand, *vecinos* seemed to signify a social classification that was often used in connection with *españoles* that reads as more of a racial category in contrast to the *indio* designation. Unlike in years prior, when an *español* was documented, parish administrators usually included the deceased's birth town in Spain, like in the case of Don Antonio Correa documented in 1788. Eight years later, in 1796, no hometowns were listed in conjunction with *españoles*. By 1800, the term *españoles* meant white and non-Native rather than its older use of someone born in Spain. Rather, the use of *españoles*, in the Sonoran context, was closer akin to *criollo*, the *casta* term for a second-generation Spanish person born in the Americas. Instead, the term *vecino* was also used in conjunction with “*de esta villa*,” or “of this town,” that seemed to highlight the continued evolution from isolated *rancheria* to more integrated *doctrina*, or half-mission and half-settler communities, while also maintaining the social divide between Native and non-Native. Both in its social and

³⁹ “Defunciones, 1786-1805, 1815-1844,” 1796, MEX C2-20A, Vol. 4, Roll 18, image 64, El Registro Parroquia de San Miguel de Horcasitas, Sonora, Arquidiócesis de Hermosillo, Archivo General de la Nación y Academia Mexicana de Genealogía y Heraldica, [digital repository] Ancestry.com, highlighted “*mestizos de este filigresa*.”

racial connotations, the term *vecinos* persisted as a hybrid category that transcended strict classification in these parish entries.

Father Carlos Mendez, the resident priest at San Miguel de Horcasitas, documented the passing of Leonardo de Contero, “the *hijo legitimo* of Juan Mendez and Josefa Sambrano, *españoles y vecinos de esta villa*.”⁴⁰ Another entry of Maria Petra, “*hija legitima* de Josef Mesquita and Maria Gonzalez, *mestizos de esta feligreses* (of this parish)” introduced the use the more frequent use of *mestizo* as a racial category outside of the *españoles and indios* binary as well as introducing the community position of *feligreses*, or parishioners, that further highlighted Native and settler increasing hybrid communities.⁴¹ By the 1810s in Mission San Miguel de Horcasitas’s parish records cited with even greater frequency a combination of *mestizo* and *vecino* designations.⁴²

⁴⁰ “Defuciones, 1786-1805, 1815-1844,” 1796, MEX C2-20A, Vol. 4, Roll 18, image 64, El Registro Parroquia de San Miguel de Horcasitas, Sonora, Archquidiocesis de Hermosillo, Archivo General de la Nacion y Academia Mexicana de Geneologia y Heraldica, [digital repository] Ancestry.com.

⁴¹ “Defuciones, 1786-1805, 1815-1844,” 1796, MEX C2-20A, Vol. 4, Roll 18, image 64, El Registro Parroquia de San Miguel de Horcasitas, Sonora, Archquidiocesis de Hermosillo, Archivo General de la Nacion y Academia Mexicana de Geneologia y Heraldica, [digital repository] Ancestry.com.

⁴² “Defuciones, 1786-1805, 1815-1844,” 1815, MEX C2-20A, Vol. 4, Roll 18, image 101, El Registro Parroquia de San Miguel de Horcasitas, Sonora, Archquidiocesis de Hermosillo, Archivo General de la Nacion y Academia Mexicana de Geneologia y Heraldica, [digital repository] Ancestry.com, included many “*indio*” distinctions alongside “*mestizo y hijo legitimo*” that illustrated slow but steady changes over time.

For Juana Mendoza, who passed away in 1814 and was survived by her husband Andres Arvires, their classification as *mestizos* and *vecinos* exemplified the gradual but continuous process of racial amalgamation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations within mixed *doctrina* communities.⁴³ As *mestizo* were recognized by mission fathers, who operated as an effective stand-in for state oversight, as *vecinos* in Sonoran communities, the racial divide between *mestizos* and Indigenous parishioners seemed to have narrowed significantly in the same moment that a new binary between Native communities began to emerge.⁴⁴

Two decades of aggressive military and political tactics compelled Native communities to navigate the fragmentation of the imperial order in exceedingly localized ways as previous plural sovereignty non-aggression arrangements between mission communities and Indigenous settlements frayed beyond repair. Border communities in areas like Pimería Alta were sporadically attacked and experienced patterns of settler retreat and military reconquest from 1800s to the 1830s as Apache

⁴³ “Defuciones, 1786-1805, 1815-1844,” 1814, MEX C2-20A, Vol. 4, Roll 18, image 89, El Registro Parroquia de San Miguel de Horcasitas, Sonora, Archquidiocesis de Hermosillo, Archivo General de la Nacion y Academia Mexicana de Geneologia y Heraldica, [digital repository] Ancestry.com.

⁴⁴ “Defuciones, 1786-1805, 1815-1844,” 1814, MEX C2-20A, Vol. 4, Roll 18, image 89, El Registro Parroquia de San Miguel de Horcasitas, Sonora, Archquidiocesis de Hermosillo, Archivo General de la Nacion y Academia Mexicana de Geneologia y Heraldica, [digital repository] Ancestry.com, highlights the continued incorporation of slow but steady mixed unions as terms like “*mestiza* y *vecina*” become more commonplace in parish records.

raiders targeted frontier communities in Pimería Alta, Opata rebellions sparked in Pimería Bajo, and PaiPai revolts unfolded in Baja California.⁴⁵

By 1816, the newly emerging pattern juxtaposed Indigenous parishioners with “violent” Native peoples. Throughout Sonoran death records, mission fathers were more concerned with documenting if the last sacraments were given and the individual’s relationship to the community, rather than detailing the specific cause of death. With one exception, this practice largely persisted, except in cases of parishioner deaths caused by “*muerte violenta*” resulting from conflicts with Comanche and Apache groups.

The resident father of Mission San Miguel Horcasitas, in 1818, lamented the death of Juan Ignacio whom the priest called “*indio y mi feligrese,*” or “Indian and my parishioner,” as the priest explicitly attributed Juan Ignacio’s death to Comanche violence.⁴⁶ The pattern of singularly noting violent parishioner deaths at the hands of Comanche and Apache hands continued into the 1830s. Although death records from archival rosters do not definitively provide insights into social relationships, a close

⁴⁵ Martha Menchaca, *Recovering History, Constructing Race: The Indian, Black, and White Roots of Mexican Americans* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 191. Cynthia Radding, *Wandering Peoples*, 293.

⁴⁶ “Defuciones, 1786-1805, 1815-1844,” 1816, MEX C2-20A, Vol. 4, Roll 18, image 108, El Registro Parroquia de San Miguel de Horcasitas, Sonora, Arquidiócesis de Hermosillo, Archivo General de la Nación y Academia Mexicana de Geneología y Heraldica, [digital repository] Ancestry.com.

examination of phrases such as “*hijas legítimas*,” “*indio y mi feligrese*,” and “*de esta villa*” juxtaposed with “*muerte violenta por Comanche*” demonstrated not only the widespread acceptance of “Indians of our town” as valued members of the community, but also highlighted the emerging divide between “*mestizos y hijos legítimos*,” or “*mestizos* and legitimate sons” and the stigmatized “violent Indians.” The subtle yet significant shifts in racial identities continued as terms like “violent Indians” evolved into “*indígenas malos*.” Importantly, the process of secularization in Sonora had created mixed racial and multi-ethnic spaces that allowed for the gradual adoption of new ethnic considerations. While social status continued to be predicated by one’s proximity to or detachment from indigeneity, the emergence of terms such as *vecinos* (neighbors) and *feligreses* (parishioners) indicated the critical role community presence and involvement played in determining one’s position within borderlands communities. Despite the political and legislative maneuvering of new land laws, for the most *indios*, *mestizos*, *vecinos*, and *feligreses* living in former mission settlements respected and acknowledged each other’s individual and community claims to land through generations of use, local customs, and common knowledge.

By 1824, increased military presence in the Mexican Pacific region prompted the abandonment of long-negotiated non-aggression agreements between Native communities like the Opata in Pimería Bajo against Sonoran ranchers and *vecinos*.

Moreover, Opata communities who had been incorporated into mission communities withdrew from *doctrina* communities, refused to pay tithes or taxes, and ignored repeated summons from Church officials.⁴⁷

Agricultural-leaning regions like Sonora, racial markers and community legitimacy equated legal protections for land and water use of communal lands. Mission-affiliated Native families were assigned a predetermined number of *varas*, or plots, to cultivate. Continued mission oversight put economic limitations on how Native people were compensated for their agricultural production, *doctrina* community status did exempt individual Indigenous families from paying taxes. Ultimately, mission labor restrictions went against their overall assimilation project in Sonora by limiting Indigenous participation in local market economies by not allowing individual families to accumulate economic capital. Instead, mission communities either sold their surplus products to settlers, or, more often than not, Sonoran missions sent food stuff aid to their struggling sister missions in Baja California. Still, the steady incorporation of *mestizo* also made space for children of mixed unions in *doctrina* communities in ways that legitimized their claims to land and labor in the post-independence period. Whereas before in the Mexican Pacific borderlands, most mission priests would often consider any child of a Native mother

⁴⁷ Radding, *Wandering Peoples*, 292-294.

racially Indigenous in order to inflate underpopulated mission statistics to rationalize higher budgets from the Crown, secularization compelled mission fathers acknowledge and foster the agricultural labor potential of new generations of *mestizos*. Although, the caveat of *hijos naturales* or *hijas legítimas* used alongside *mestizo* designations can also signify a lingering fear non-Native settlers grappled with about were true *mestizo* allegiances laid as Mexican independence sparked a series of Yaqui, Opata, and Pima rebellions across the Mexican Pacific borderlands as well as continued pressure from Apache and Comanche raiding offensives.

At the same moment, *mestizos* were assimilating into secularizing Sonoran communities in wake of Mexican independence in the 1820s, increased armed confrontations between non-Native settlers and Apache, Comanche, Pima, Seri, Yaqui, and Opata communities began to occur with greater frequency. From 1800 to the 1830s, new administrative governments ushered in a series of economic, legal, and land tenure reforms that created new relationships between Native individuals and the burgeoning Mexican nation-state. Late-imperial administrators' answer to their northwestern borderlands' "Indian Problem" emphasized assimilation into settler society through secularization and introduction to, and eventual incorporation into, fully sedentary agricultural lifeways. Notably, due to minimal military support in the Mexican Pacific borderlands, late-imperial missionaries emphasized a defensive frontier. Under plural sovereignty interactions, the unofficial practice for minimally

staffed missions was to either partner with semi-nomadic Native communities and normalize seasonal residencies, or, unbeknown to the Crown, acquiesce to Indigenous sovereignty. As late as the 1780s, it was common practice for priests to avoid certain regions recognized as antagonistic Indigenous territories like desert Apacheria and Comancheria regions, riparian Yaqui and Mayo zones, or mountainous Seri and Opata ranges. Official policies towards Native communities in open rebellion grew more aggressive as military officials replaced ecclesiastical leadership as Bourbon administrators focused on defending New Spain's northwestern borders against British, Russian, and French incursions.

Under effective military oversight, the speedy incorporation of Indigenous communities into local economies prompted state-defined conceptions of idealized Native labor in direct opposition to Indigenous peoples in open rebellion as the nineteenth century progressed, especially in Sonora. The Spanish Crown appointed Bernardo de Gálvez, a frontier soldier, as the new viceroy of New Spain in 1785, entrusting him with the responsibility of overseeing political, economic, and military affairs. Gálvez's primary objective revolved around the settlement and protection of the northwestern borderlands, which commenced with the establishment of three military comandancia regions—Sonora, Sinaloa, and California—in 1786, aimed at addressing the safety concerns of settler society. Naval stations in Baja California shifted their focus to military defense against competing European powers, whereas

in Sonora, military and political officials committed themselves to revitalizing local and regional economies. Gálvez believed that established, lucrative settler communities could also tempt Apache raiders to opt to engage in trade and foster economic relationships rather than continued open hostility. Gálvez's proposed "peace policy" sought to quicken Indigenous assimilation through economic dependency that often clashed with the slower religious secularization project. Controversially, Gálvez often encouraged his soldiers to encourage Apache dependence on distinct Spanish goods like guns, *mezcal*, and brandy as a way to foster, and eventually, subjugate Native communities into settler hierarchies that clashed with mission fathers.⁴⁸ Although Gálvez's policies were implemented unevenly, the combined strategy of peace and war fueled Spanish hopes to pressure some Apache bands to sue for peace and capitulate to settler assimilation.⁴⁹ Gálvez also believed that increased Apache dependence on Spanish guns combined with selective Spanish trading relationships with certain groups would prompt intra Apachería fighting between rival bands and long-term inter-Indigenous enemies like

⁴⁸ *Friar Bringas Reports to the King: Methods of Indoctrination on the Frontier of New Spain, 1796-1797*, translated and edited by Daniel S. Matson and Bernard L. Fontana (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2017), 10. Bernardo de Gálvez, *Instructions for Governing the Internal Provinces of New Spain, 1786*, translated by Donald Worchester (Berkeley: Quivera Society, 1967), 30-51.

⁴⁹ Matthew Babcock, *Apache Adaptation to Hispanic Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 106.

the Comanche.⁵⁰ The second possibility Gálvez envisioned was that the combination of steady trading and constant pressure from the Spanish military would prompt battle-weary communities to opt into Spanish vassalage and mixed mission communities. But, in the decades between the 1780s to the 1820s, many Native communities opted to settle in fixed agricultural communities to for protection from constant Spanish and Indigenous violence, access to growing local market economies, and an opportunity to make Spanish, and eventually Mexican, systems work in their favor.

Under Spanish property laws, land titles and grants stressed private property rights, but they did not always guarantee uncontested water rights.⁵¹ Iberian water laws distinguished between public and private use of water as well as regulated water used for human consumption, domestic needs, agricultural uses, and mining practices. The ultimate Spanish legal code, *Las Siete Partidas*, compiled in the thirteenth century, established the legal precedents for the various uses of water in Spain, including the public use of beaches and seashores and the limitations on diverting water for irrigation.⁵² Under Iberian law, Partido III, Titulo XXVIII, Ley VI proved

⁵⁰ Matthew Babcock, *Apache Adaptation to Hispanic Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 107.

⁵¹ Radding, *Wandering Peoples*, 177.

⁵² *Las Siete partidas*, Partido III, Titulo XXVIII, Ley III. The first six laws of Titulo XXVIII detailed the use of land and water in Spain, but the concepts were transferred and adhered to in New Spain and in Sonora. Ley 1 establishes Royal authority in the

one the most important directives that codified public and private use of rivers, streams, and other internal waterways. Ley VI stated that “The rivers, and the ports, and the public roads pertain and all the homes communally, in such a way that those who are from another land can also use them as well as those who dwell and live in that land where they are.”⁵³ While not explicitly stated, Ley VI implied that the flows of rivers could not be used in such a way that a single user could not easily alter the current of internal waterways if it puts public use in jeopardy, at least not without explicit permission. According to Iberian legal practices, the only protected rights to irrigation or diverting internal waterways is if an individual owned the proven origin

distribution of lands and establishes Royal lands. Ley II establishes the divide between public and private lands. Ley III establishes the public use of seashores and rainwater and guarantees unregulated fishing rights, “The things that belong communally to all the creatures that live in this world are these: the air, and the waters of the rain, and the sea and its shores; Any living creature can use each one of these things according to what it wishes: and therefore every man can take advantage of the sea, and of its shores fishing, and navigating, and doing all the things that he understands that are for his own benefit.” Ley IV expands on fishing rights by using semi-permanent nets. Ley V maintains that natural resources found on or near shores like gold and pearls can be claimed by anyone who finds them. Ley VI proved one the most important laws that set the boundaries for public and private use of rivers, streams, and other internal waterways. Ley VI stated that “The rivers, and the ports, and the public roads pertain and all the homes communally, in such a way that those who are from another land can also use them as well as those who dwell and live in that land where they are.” While not explicitly stated, Ley VI established that the flows of rivers could not be used in such a way that a single user could not permanently alter the flow of internal waterways if it puts public use in jeopardy.

⁵³ *Las Siete partidas*, Partido III, Titulo XXVIII, Ley VI.

of said spring or river.⁵⁴ The year 1642 witnessed the Spanish sovereign's reinforcement of legal protections for Native lands, public lands, and royal lands in territories such as Sonora, as part of the governance of New Spain. Intricate borderlands regions like the Mexican Pacific exhibited deviations from the established precedents of the motherland, leading to variations in compliance with these regulations.⁵⁵

For example, on March 3, 1791, in Texas, Spanish soldier and *vecino* Bartolomé Rosales petitioned local authorities for the right "*hacer una pesca*," or the right to fish, for himself and his family in the Rio Medina even though Iberian law held that anyone could fish for survival.⁵⁶ Responding to the petition, Governor Manuel Munoz did not cite legal precedents, but instead instructed "let the *ayuntamiento* respond as it sees fit" that shows how localized water access could be regulated.⁵⁷ It was not uncommon for *vecinos* to have to make special petitions for

⁵⁴ Radding, *Wandering Peoples*, 117. Meyers, *Water in the Hispanic Southwest*, 117-120.

⁵⁵ Mariano Galvan Rivera, *Ordenanzas de tierras y aguas, o sea, Formulario geométrico-judicial para la designación, establecimiento, mensura, amojonamiento y deslinde de las poblaciones y todas suertes de tierras, sitios, caballerías y criaderos de ganado mayores y menores, y mercedes de agua* (Mexico, 1851), 160-61.

⁵⁶ Bartolomé Rosales, *Petición to the Ayuntamiento de Bexar*, 6 March 1791, E.3/6/1791, Box 2558, Roll 21, Bexar Archives, Briscoe Center for American History, Austin, Texas.

⁵⁷ Bartolomé Rosales, *Petición to the Ayuntamiento de Bexar*, 6 March 1791, E.3/6/1791, Box 2558, Roll 21, Bexar Archives, Briscoe Center for American History, Austin, Texas.

fishing and water navigation in more established presidios, but in bureaucratically weak *doctrinas* and *presidios* in Sonora and Baja California, access was more militarily enforced rather than legally negotiated as they would become in the Mexican Republic.⁵⁸

The Plan de Pitic, issued in 1789 to commemorate the establishment of present-day Hermosillo, underscored the importance and impact of water provisions in Sonora within the broader context of New Spain. Consisting of twenty-four administrative edicts, the Plan de Pitic set the standard for water use, ranging from irrigation to fishing, in both existing and future settlements in New Spain. It also addressed Indigenous rights within mixed Native and non-Native communities. Article II of the provision not only established the town's boundaries but also ensured that the Seri inhabitants, through their residency, were granted individual protections similar to other residents. This article solidified Native access to communal land, public works, and water within the Pitic township, as well as facilitated the political and administrative incorporation of Native and mestizo leaders into the settlement bureaucracy. Indigenous towns were to elect their own Alcaldes and Regidores, appointments that were responsible for overseeing economic growth through agricultural development achieved via local irrigation networks.

⁵⁸ Meyers, *Water in the Hispanic Southwest*, 119.

Articles in the Plan de Pitic touched on various aspects related to land and water distribution, use, and management.⁵⁹ Identified as crucial figures in borderlands, captains were responsible for assigning land and water allotments. Both settlers and Native communities were given legally protected access to common lands for various purposes, such as pasturing, fishing, hunting, and agriculture. The distribution of lands were inherently uneven and depended on the discretion of appointed commissioners. Land organization aimed to maximize irrigation for major crops and seasonal harvesting. Personal lots were assigned to optimize irrigation for the common good, and all residents were required to contribute to the construction of irrigation infrastructure equally, without exception.

The Plan de Pitic emphasized the importance of individual families and landowners to generate agricultural profits and maintain residency on the land. It allowed for lots to be reclaimed and reassigned based on factors such as diligence, negligence, or nonapplication. Commissioners were to keep records of land allotments and titles, which were considered final once issued. Families were required to swear oaths of inheritance, maintain arms and horses for defense, and live on their land with their families for at least four years without leasing or mortgaging it. Within two years, residents needed to produce profitable crops under penalty of losing their

⁵⁹ *Plan de Pitic, 1789, Tierras, Volumen 2773, Expediente 22, Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico D.F.*

lands. These stipulations tied Native peoples to agricultural lands in a way that promised relative autonomy and protection but also meant assimilation and an erosion of semi-nomadic Native lifeways.

Irrigation and access to it were essential in Pític (Hermosillo). A primary irrigation line and six divisions transferred water to different allotments within the community. Residency within the township guaranteed access to irrigation, and water distribution was regulated to prevent unfair usage. Water was assigned annually by the city in proportion to the promised harvest, implying that Native families needed to produce steady annual harvests to secure water allotments.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Article 3 established that Captains are going to be important figures in the borderlands and would be in charge of assigning allotments of land and water use. Article 6 establishes that both settlers and Native communities will have legally protected access to common lands including pastures, mountains, water, fishing, hunting, vegetation, and pastoral lands for Indigenous residents and Native towns adjacent to settlements. Ley X, título 17, libro 4, of the *Recopilacion de Leyes de los Reynos de las Indias* codified that Indian lands are protected against private cattle use. Ley XI established that new lands must also be irrigated according to this law as well. Article 7 holds that Indians and settlers will have guaranteed access to royal communal lands. Ley XI, Título 12, Libro 2, of the *Recopilacion de Leyes de los Reynos de las Indias* stipulated that when given land allotments “residents” must make begin growing crops within the first three months of settlement to seal their ownership claim, “*Que se tome possession de las tierras repartidas dentro de tres meses y hagan plantios, pena de perderlas.*” Article 9 of the Plan de Pític confessed that the distribution of lands will be inherently uneven and will be at the discretion of the appointed commissioner. Article 13 established that Land will be organized to maximize irrigation of major crops and seasonal harvesting. Article 14 held that personal lots will be assigned to maximize irrigation for the common good and that all residents were required to help build the irrigation infrastructure. This was important because you see the state secular attempt to initially flatten racial categories

at the same moment administrators are highlighting difference. However, in cases of labor, whether Native or non-Native for the purpose of irrigation infrastructure they were to contribute “equally without exception” / “*participen de ellas con igualdad, sin excepcion de Poblador, ni Vecino...*” Article 15: Essentially it is up to individual families and land owners to turn an agricultural profit and, most importantly, they need to maintain residency on the land to turn a profit. Lots can be reclaimed and reassigned as a prize to those that work the land faithfully in juxtaposition to those that practice “negligence” or “nonapplication” or those that leave without cultivating their assigned lots. These reassignments also affect inheritance potential. Article 16: Commissioners will try to keep land and allotments together. Article 17: Commissioners must keep records of land allotments and titles. Article 18: Land title are forever final. The families have to swear “oaths of inheritance.” Under the Oath of inheritance, settlers must maintain arms and horses to defend the country against the enemies that harass them and take up arms against these enemies whenever and wherever they are commanded. “*a defender el Pais de los Ynsultos de los enemigos que les hostilizaren, y salir contra ellos siempre que se les mandare.*” Importantly, in the Sonoran frontier, the only enemy the military was concerned with were the Native communities in armed rebellion and *indios de paz* that chose to reside outside of mission communities. Article 18 also states that in order to guarantee a perfect title and full ownership of allotments, families have to build their houses and live with their families for at least four years and they cannot lease or mortgage their land during this time. Residents were also prohibited from selling or leasing their land to the Church. Within two years, they needed to produce profitable crops under penalty of losing their lands. This was an important stipulation because this tied Native peoples to agricultural lands in a much more significant way than the mission system did because it promised relative autonomy and protection. But it also meant assimilation and an erosion of semi-nomadic Native lifeways. Article 19 established that Irrigation and access to irrigation is key. In Pitic (Hermosillo) there would be one main irrigation line and 6 divisions that will transfer water to different allotments within the community. The emphasis was on “profitable lands”, “The development of the population” and the “distribution of waters” Importantly, residency within the township will ensure access to irrigation and someone does not have the power to take the water from a different person or in a greater quantity than is required for the cultivation of their assigned land. Article 20 codified that water would be assigned in proportion to the promised harvest and assigned annually by the city. Meaning that Native families needed to produce steady, annual harvests to secure water allotments.

When greeted with the realities of diffuse plural sovereignty at work in the Mexican Pacific, military administrators like Gálvez sought to unsettle Native and non-Native arrangements as well as intertribal pacts. Militarily, Gálvez also employed divisive martial tactics that emphasized Native difference between *indios de paz*, or peaceful Indians, and *indios violentos*, or violent Indians, that influenced the development of land tenure systems and, by extension, water use and navigation. As evidenced by San Miguel Horcasita's parish records, borderlands terminologies and descriptors and the relationships they exposed revealed much about social and community positionalities. Spanish guerilla tactics targeted frontier Native communities that had under previously negotiated plural sovereignty agreements been left in isolation, that showed increased regional coordination uncommon in the late-colonial period. For example, while Apacheria functioned much like an Indigenous federation composed of different regional bands, some groups like *Apaches de paz* opted for diplomatic relationships with Spanish settlers even as they refused to opt into mission systems. But, under Gálvez's offensive approach to *indios enemigos* meant increased Spanish raiding of *Apache de paz* towns as potential collaborators with raiding bands. Gálvez believed that the added pressure on unallied communities would pressure those communities to opt into mission communities or join Spanish campaigns against *indios enemigos*. Questions of settlement proved to be less about access to land in Sonora, and more about guaranteed access to water as Spanish

agricultural and mining communities strained local environments with massive water consumption. While Spanish settlers followed the Iberian tradition of communal land, they still commandeered year-round fresh water springs as they came to them as they refused to adapt to the realities of desert life in geographies like Sonora. But as settlers would come to learn, availability of water did not always mean accessibility nor did it mean usability. As colonization efforts in Sonora gained momentum in the 1780s, regional administrators focused not only on the obtainability and accessibility of water but also on its suitability for human and animal consumption, as well as its viability for irrigation purposes. Water allotments, assigned annually by administrators, served as a tool of administrative influence, allowing for the rewarding or penalizing of unproductive landowners and exerting power over semi-nomadic Native families.

Taxation further reinforced the presence and control of the state. Indigenous responses to imposed taxation can provide a clearer picture of regional power relationships in the late-colonial and early Mexican republican period. *Españoles* in frontier communities like Sonora played critical roles as *corregidores* (royally appointed officials), Native commissioners, and *alcalde mayores*, serving as authoritative figures overseeing Indigenous communities. These individuals held positions of power and responsibility, acting as wardens entrusted with maintaining order and enforcing Spanish governance. Additionally, they were directly accountable

to the superintendents of real haciendas, who served as intermediaries between the local officials and the highest levels of colonial authority, reporting directly to the King and the Council of the Indies and maintained local tax rolls and ledgers. As locally based officers operating under plural sovereignty arrangements, they emphasized mutually beneficial partnerships and peaceful solutions rather than provoking antagonistic relationships with Native communities. As secularization progresses in the 1780s and into the 1810s, the Crown introduced the administrative category of intendants, or provincial governors, who operated almost entirely independent of viceregal oversight, exercised complete control over provincial finances, and took on general executive and judicial duties.⁶¹ The late-colonial system comprised four major departments, or *ramos*: *la causa de hacienda* (revenue and finance), *la causa de justicia* (the justice department and lower courts), *la causa de guerra* (war department), and *la causa de policia* (general police and infrastructure),

⁶¹ Donald E. Smith, *The Viceroy of New Spain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1918), 116. Felipe Castro Gutierrez, “*De paternalismo autoritario al autoritarismo burocratico: Los exitos y fracasos de Jose de Gálvez, 1764-1767*,” in *Mexico in the Age of Democratic Revolutions, 1750-1850*, edited by Jaime E. Rodriguez (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2023), 21-33. Robert H. Jackson, “Northwestern New Spain: The Pimería Alta and the Californias,” in *New Views of Borderlands History*, edited by Robert H. Jackson (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998): 73-106.

and *intendente*'s took on roles from each department in the Mexican Pacific borderlands in ways that jeopardized local power arrangements.⁶²

While the landscapes of Sonora ranged from riparian to mountainous to desert, the presence of relatively stable, albeit often seasonal, water sources in the forms of rivers and internal waterways meant that local administrators and soldiers strove to build more consistent Indigenous communities that promised a more stable Native labor force as rancheria communities became more sedentary at the end of the eighteenth century. Military-lead secularization accelerated the privatization of community property in the transition from imperial to early-Republic.

The escalating military presence, the centralization of regional administration, and settler discontent with the slow progress of Indigenous assimilation into Spanish society fueled demands for an all-out war or pacification of tribes deemed barbarous, such as the Apache. Theoretically, the 1825 *Constitution of the Estado e Occidente* (Sinaloa and Sonora) defined citizenship. According to Section 3, Article 13, all those born in the state's territory were considered citizens, regardless of whether they were *Indios* or *Hispanos*. Citizenship was granted to individuals over the age of eighteen if married, and over twenty-one if unmarried. Section 3, Article 21 stated that Sonorans were equal before the law. Section 4, Article 28, No. 6, allowed for the rights of

⁶² Donald E. Smith, *The Viceroy of New Spain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1918), 119.

Indian citizens to be revoked for “having the custom of going about shamefully nude.” Although the constitution echoed the language of the Plan de Iguala (1821), it still used terms such as “barbarous” and “less barbarous.”

Importantly, by viewing Indigenous peoples as full citizens, the constitution implied that they could be taxed, which triggered multiple revolts from Mayo and Yaqui communities resisting government oversight. For Indigenous peoples, Mexican citizenship held little meaning and failed to instill a sense of national identity. Instead, they continued to cultivate local village sovereignty. For Indigenous communities like the Yaqui, the value of citizenship lay in the language of institutions and governing principles that they adapted and modified to suit their specific needs. The state’s imposition of Hispanic governing principles significantly reduced Indigenous claims to communal lands.

This early period introduced tensions between communal and private ownership and the juxtaposition of “barbarous Indians” and “less barbarous Indians” based on each group’s conformity to municipal government models and those in open rebellion. Within the context of the upper Mexican Pacific borderlands, the “barbarous” label targeted Apache communities along riparian regions like the Rio Colorado, the Rio Yaqui, and the Rio Mayo. It also highlighted the tensions between the new state government and local community governments and how they were to operate within this new national framework. This tension was evident in Sonora as

español and *mestizo*-led militias attempted recruitment of *indios de paz* to combat Apache raids in the northern borderlands. These tensions grew especially taut in the 1830s as wealthy *hacenderos* and *rancheros* who had accumulated mining wealth in Mexico's interior turned their attention to the "open" properties of the Sonoran frontier. Sonoran legislation prohibited the abuse of common lands for private ends. Wealth private landowners often allowed their cattle to abuse and drain the water resources of communal land before they officially purchased property in regions like San Miguel Horcasitas. Though in clear violation of Sonoran water-use laws, the weakened centralized government could not enforce water regulations of common lands, nor did, in many cases did state appointed officials see a need to enforce water law. For in the eyes of state administrators, the promise of agricultural surplus outweighed the effort relegation and justice would warrant for poor individual landowners. One notable case involved Manuel Gómez del Campillo, an *español* who sought to acquire extensive parcels of private property in the San Miguel River valley, situated near San Miguel Horcasitas. Campillo filed to purchase three *sitos* in the San Miguel area in 1807 but would not be awarded the two of his proposed *sitos* property until 1813. While Campillo's petition was in review, he moved into the region and bred over 2,000 head of cattle on San Miguel Horcasita *ejido*, or common pasture lands. Furthermore, Campillo appropriated vast portions of the communal agricultural flood lands along the San Miguel River to cultivate private commercial

crops, in addition to utilizing communal lands for his own cattle. For years from 1807 to 1813, local residents petitioned their local governments to force Campillo to remove his cattle from communal lands as the sheer volume of cattle stressed the Arroyo de Taray water table from which Horcasita's *ejido* drew water. Campillo's roaming cattle also frequently destroyed the individual crops of smaller family farms who were utilizing the ejidos for individual subsistence. Campillo actively participated in a successful bidding process and obtained ownership of two private properties, namely La Palma and Taray, situated in the San Miguel River Valley in 1813. After years of exploiting communal lands to expand his cattle herd, Campillo proceeded to remove his livestock from the ejido. Subsequently, in 1816, Campillo entered into non-compete land agreements with affluent ranchers, strategically undermining or capitalizing on communal land holdings in irrigated areas such as San Miguel Horcasitas, at the expense of marginalized Indigenous and *mestizo* families who depended on these lands for their livelihoods.⁶³ The Campillo example revealed various shifts that occurred in communities like San Miguel Horcasitas, bringing forth additional contestations for power as wealthy *hacenderos* entered and colonized the regions for private commercial ends that centered around water.

⁶³ Radding, *Wandering Peoples*, 234-236.

Campillo's case also stressed the continued weakened regional government power in frontier territories like Sonora and Pimería Alta. New legislation granted local administrators, commissioners, and mayors broad state powers from partitioning land and relegating water use to enforce property laws. Local officials, driven by the goals of achieving agricultural surpluses and fostering lucrative commercial trade, faced challenges in safeguarding the rights of indigent Indigenous and *mestizo* property owners or sharecroppers against the interests of wealthy *hacenderos* from Mexico's interior. Moreover, as smaller *indio* and *mestizo* communities witnessed large landowners from Mexico's interior combined with the inaction or inability of local officials to protect access to land and water, Indigenous and *mestizo* communities who maintained ties to kith and kin in more Native controlled villages like the Yuma, Yaqui, and O'odham in Pimería Baja or the Opata and Seri in Pimería Bajo, migrated to Native controlled pueblos that officials like Bustamante feared so much by the 1830s. Opata townships, in the lower valley regions of Sonora, officially recognized by the Mexican state, protected their municipal borders against intrusive administrative oversight. Just Indian commissioners protected community *ejidos* by denying private landowning petitions wealthy landowners hoping to create private land monopolies. Settler awareness of accumulating Indigenous power in isolated communities outside of direct administrative control paired with the growing open aggression military officials, local *vecino* commissioners, and exploitative

hacenderos levied against Indigenous *filigreses* underscored the growing racial and ethnic divide in the Mexican Pacific borderlands by the late 1830s.

The mounting uncertainty of where *mestizo* would align themselves if open war erupted between natives and non-natives at the height of Apache and Comanche violence in the 1830s and 1840s, can also account for why Ignacio Bustamante, writing in 1832, warned the new republican government, about the danger any cultural ties to indigeneity posed to *mestizo* nationalism. Beginning in the early 1830s, various non-Indigenous *vecinos* began to organize state-sponsored but volunteer manned anti-Indigenous militant vigilante groups meant to police and protect local townships against “*indios malos*,” who threatened settler peace and property.

The vigilante anti-Indigenous militia, *El Partido de Moctezuma* based in Arizpe in the 1830s, revealed much about the state of racialization in frontier regions like Sonora. The evocation of the name *Partido de Moctezuma* by the anti-Indigenous vigilante group might have exemplified a growing trend of romanticizing Indigenous peoples and their Native lifeways, especially in relation to significant pre-Hispanic civilizations like the Aztecs.⁶⁴ Simultaneously, the group also advocated for the

⁶⁴ For more on the anti-Indigenous campaigns in Sonora, see *Indigenas–Apache* (1834) Caja 1, Tomo 2, Expediente 16, Documentos 841-859, Archivo General del Gobierno del Estado de Sonora, Hermosillo, Sonora. *Indigenas* (1834), Tomo 2, Expedientes 18, Documentos 1019-1033, Ejecutivo, Archivo General del Estado del

extermination of Native communities in the borderlands, that revealed a changing social relationship between indigeneity and *mestizo* nationalism.⁶⁵ Emperor Moctezuma II was the ruler of central Mesoamerica at the time explorer Hernán Cortéz entered Mexico's interior in the early 1500s, and Moctezuma's relationship with Cortéz is cited as one of the most famous conquest narratives that emphasized a

Sonora, Hermosillo, Sonora. Indigenas (1834), Tomo 2, Expedientes 21-25, Documentos 1055-1136, Ejecutivo, Archivo General del Estado del Sonora, Hermosillo, Sonora. Indigenas (1832-1837), Tomo 93, Expedientes 10, Documentos 35081-35090, Ejecutivo, Archivo General del Estado del Sonora, Hermosillo, Sonora. Indigenas (1834), Tomo 47, Expedientes 21, Documentos 31036-31038, Ejecutivo, Archivo General del Estado del Sonora, Hermosillo, Sonora. Indigenas (1833-1834), Tomo 38, Expedientes 5, Documentos 26963-27063, Ejecutivo, Archivo General del Estado del Sonora, Hermosillo, Sonora. Indigenas (1827), Tomo 38, Expedientes 2, Documentos 26847-26927, Ejecutivo, Archivo General del Estado del Sonora, Hermosillo, Sonora. Indigenas (1835), Tomo 52, Expedientes 31, Documentos 30800-30806, Ejecutivo, Archivo General del Estado del Sonora, Hermosillo, Sonora. From 1820 to 1840, anti-Indigenous campaigns sprouted up across Sonora. These were organically assembled groups of *hacenderos*, *mestizo* landowners, Mexican *vecinos* who formed militia groups to keep the “*indios bárbaros*” at bay. Most militia companies were attached to towns they claimed to protect. The most notable and prolific of these groups seemed to be El Partido de Moctezuma, which operated in central Sonora around Hermosillo and had auxiliary chapters in Ures and Mazatan. The height of their operation appeared to be from 1827 to 1837. There are hundreds of documents located in the Archive General del Estado del Sonora documenting their activities and communications with local administrators that included rosters of active participants and financial donors to the war against the Apache, although they also waged war against the Opata and the Seri.

⁶⁵ Ramon Orozco, *Letter to the Ayuntamiento de Guadalupe*, 6 November 1833, Document 027018, Aspecto Politico, Archivo General del Estado del Sonora, Hermosillo, Sonora.

racially hybrid future for Mexico.⁶⁶ Indigenous communities were absorbed into Mexico's growing cities and labor systems in sprawling urban cities like Mexico City in the 1830s, *criollo* and *mestizo ciudadanos* began to romanticize Indigenous pasts even as contemporary state policies in frontier regions like Sonora and Baja California sought to displace and erase Indigenous peoples living in those areas.⁶⁷ The juxtaposition between "*hijos del patria*" and "*indio malos*" began to gain traction in the national imaginary in the center as they played out in real ways in borderlands communities like Sonora with vigilante groups like the *Partido de Moctezuma*, who evoked that "good" and "bad" Indian binary in their very name.⁶⁸ To volunteering militia members and patrons of the cause, their goal was singular, to combat "*el enemigo Apache*" by any means necessary. Group rolls listed the members and contributors as "*cuidados*" with Spanish names and surnames devoid of any racial or ethnic markers associated with individual names. Contemporary parish and death records suggest that the majority of the volunteers were most likely *mestizos* and

⁶⁶ Arthur J.O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble, trans., Fray Bartolome Sahagún, *Florentine Codex, Book 12, : The Conquest of Mexico* (Santa Fe: School of American Research and University of Utah, 1975), 43-46.

⁶⁷ Marilyn Grace Miller, *Rise and Fall of the Cosmic Race: The Cult of Mestizaje in Latin America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004).

⁶⁸ *Carta al Juez de Paz de Ures*, 6 October 1833, Document 027042, Aspecto Politico, Archivo General del Estado del Sonora, Hermosillo, Sonora.

criollos rather than *españoles*.⁶⁹ The evocation of the Moctezuma imagery, who in the 1830s was developing as a Mexican cultural symbol of “good” indigeneity, at the time of this militia group’s formation seems too relevant to be marked as purely coincidental as the group targeted “*enemigos Apache*” for irradiation.⁷⁰

These vigilante groups sprouted up all over Sonora, but held the most power in the Pimería Alta region where higher ratios of *españoles* and military units resided such as the Ayuntamiento of Guadalupe, the nearest settler community to the port of Guaymas, or Ures, a river valley community near Hermosillo. Though many scholars attribute the rise of anti-Indigenous vigilante campaigns in Mexico’s northern borderlands from the early 1860s to the late 1880s, Sonoran town council records document their existence as early as 1833.⁷¹ Local *vecino* Ramón Orozco penned a letter in 1833 to his town officials in Guadalupe. Orozco stated in his letter that he

⁶⁹ *Lista de contribucion voluntaria que hicieron los ciudadanos del mineria de San Antonio de la Huerta para ayuda de la Compañia contra el rebelde Apache*, 1833, Document 027025, Aspecto Politico, Archivo General del Estado del Sonora, Hermosillo, Sonora.

⁷⁰ *Letter to El Estado de Sonora from El Partido de Moctezuma*, 26 November 1833, Document 027019, Aspecto Politico, Archivo General del Estado del Sonora, Hermosillo, Sonora.

⁷¹ For more on Apache and Comanche violence and anti-Indigenous vigilante campaigns in the Arizona-Sonora borderlands, see Karl Jacoby, *Shadows at Dawn: An Apache Massacre and the Violence of History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009); Ned Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); Pekka Hamalainen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

intended to form a group of like-minded *vecinos* to “*atacar en su propios terrenos al bárbaro Apache,*” to highlight their “*patriotismo*” as the targeting of Indigenous peoples intensified in the region.⁷² San Antonio de la Huerta and other town councils in Pimería Alta witnessed an influx of militant *vecinos* who energetically organized and contributed financial resources and supplies to support the “*Compañías contra el rebelde Apache*” (Campaigns against the Apache rebels).⁷³ Donations to fund militia efforts also came from growing mining communities like San Antonio de Huerta in Pimería Baja, located south of Hermosillo in the Rio Yaqui valley who began to buy into state narratives of Indigenous threats to regional economic development. Other anti-Indigenous groups in areas like Ures operating in the 1830s had their volunteer lists and funds managed by their local justice of the peace that illustrated how state and private citizens worked in tandem to create and execute the “*bárbaro Apache*” and by extension stateless Indigenous communities as threats to national development.⁷⁴

⁷² Ramon Orozco, *Letter to the Ayuntamiento de Guadalupe*, 6 November 1833, Document 027018, Aspecto Político, Archivo General del Estado del Sonora, Hermosillo, Sonora.

⁷³ *Lista de contribucion volunteria que hicieron los ciudadanos del mineria de San Antonio de la Huerta para ayuda de la Compañía contra el rebelde Apache*, 1833, Document 027025, Aspecto Político, Archivo General del Estado del Sonora, Hermosillo, Sonora.

⁷⁴ *Carta al Juez de Paz de Ures*, 6 October 1833, Document 027042, Aspecto Político, Archivo General del Estado del Sonora, Hermosillo, Sonora.

El Partido de Moctezuma provided a compelling illustration of the racialization process in frontier areas such as Sonora. The group's invocation of Emperor Moctezuma II, an emblem of Indigenous prestige, occurred paradoxically alongside contemporary state policies that sought to displace and exterminate the very Indigenous populations the symbol represented. This paradox, a concurrent romanticization of the Indigenous past and a systematic erasure of their present, is reflected starkly in the dichotomy between "*hijos del patria*" and "*indio malos*." This contrast played an increasing role in shaping the national narrative, highlighting the complexities of racialization in early Mexican society.

During its formative years, Mexican authorities strategically employed racial categorization to assimilate Indigenous populations into a settler colonial society. This strategic move laid the groundwork for the eventual emergence of *mestizo* nationalism in the 1860s. The early national state's authoritative hold over Indigenous labor and resources, amplified by the spread of anti-Indigenous rhetoric, led to the marginalization and dispossession of Indigenous communities, particularly in regions like Sonora. The distinction made by Gálvez between "*hijos del país*" (children of the nation) and "*los mal indígenas*" (the bad Indigenous) was a tactical implementation of racial categories by officials, serving as a tool in disputes over land and water rights

and determining who would emerge victorious and consequently receive these resources. As the years advanced, the assimilation of Indigenous people emerged as a potential compromise for national incorporation. The envisaged new *mestizo*—a fully realized Mexican citizen embodying the nation’s cultural identity—symbolized the forthcoming phase of the Indigenous question in the Mexican Pacific borderlands.

CHAPTER FIVE

Indigenismo and Nationalism at the Water's Edge

Francisco Pimentel, a well-respected Mexican intellectual in the mid-1800s, made significant contributions in various fields, including literary criticism and Indigenous linguistics. His role as a historian, particularly focusing on Indigenous history, had a major impact on Mexico's state policies, as the country was modernizing. Pimentel's influential work, which shaped the understanding and approach towards *mestizaje* (racial and cultural blending), perceptions of indigeneity, and the need for industrial worker training, also laid the foundation for comprehending the intricate relationships between Indigenous cultures and Mexico's evolving national identity in the process of modernization. Pimentel published his seminal work, *Memoria sobre las causas que han originado la situacion actual de la raza indigena de Mexico y medios de remediarla* (*Reflection on the Factors that have Contributed to the Current Condition of the Indigenous Population of Mexico and Proposals to Improve It*) in 1864. The title of the book itself suggested Pimentel's viewpoint: he perceived Mexico's Indigenous peoples as the most significant obstacle to the country's future industrialization and modernization. Pimentel contended that the enduring isolation of Indigenous communities and their

commitment to “ancient [agricultural] customs” led to economic stagnation.¹ Pimentel proposed that integrating Indigenous peoples into industrial work demanded a reimagining of the relationship between land and labor. He firmly believed that this transformation actively propelled economic growth and modernization within Mexico. Pimentel actively aimed to assimilate Native communities into the larger Mexican society, forging a new *mestizo* who actively contributed to the economy and was fully integrated as a Mexican citizen, wholeheartedly embracing the nation’s cultural identity.

By 1910, the Mexican Revolution’s perspective had supplanted Pimentel’s vision. This new viewpoint saw the national project of *mestizaje* as a process emphasizing the erasure of borderlands Indigenous peoples and posited a type of whiteness as the pinnacle of *mestizo* hybridity. The transformation in the understanding of *mestizaje* and indigeneity that occurred from the late 1850s to 1910 set the stage for the racial framework of Mexico during the revolutionary era. This shift also laid the foundation for the evolving dynamics of land and labor that emerged as crucial factors during the impending revolutionary period. Pimentel’s views on land and labor resonated with Mexican state officials’ preoccupation with the potential impact of race and indigeneity on Mexico’s industrial future, signifying

¹ Francisco Pimentel, *Memoria sobre las causas que han originado la situación actual de la raza indígena de México y medios de remediarla* (Mexico: Imprenta de Andrade y Escalante, 1864), 197.

a notable shift in Mexican society. Borderland Indigenous isolation and commitments to communal landholdings, or *ejidos*, frustrated Mexican state officials who, in 1856, responded with radical liberal reforms that legislated the dissolution of the Catholic Church as a legal entity, introducing civil marriages, and land redistribution. These reforms, collectively known as La Reforma, aimed to modernize Mexico and align it more closely with the industrialized world. Within this context, Pimentel's vision appears to be in sync with the spirit of La Reforma's liberal agenda, as both emphasized the need for modernization and incorporating Indigenous peoples into the broader Mexican society. But implementing these reforms often led to the dispossession of Indigenous lands, which contradicted Pimentel's vision of a harmonious integration.

As Indigenous and *mestizo*'s relationships to land, water, and labor shifted in the Mexican Pacific borderlands because of La Reforma, by 1876, new president Porfirio Díaz aimed to modernize Mexico with increased nationalistic fervor. Although Díaz's policies emphasized *mestizaje* (racial and cultural mixing) and *indigenismo* (the promotion of Indigenous culture), his administration's primary goal was to transform Mexico into an industrial, global competitor that he resolved to accomplish with or without Mexico's Indigenous peoples. Díaz's approach, prioritizing foreign development over nationalism post-1883 — particularly in labor and racial dynamics — marked a notable shift from Pimentel's vision. This change

significantly influenced Mexico and the United States' paths towards modernization and their policies towards Indigenous communities, favoring marginalization (erasure) over Pimentel's ideal of harmonious integration.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Pimentel championed a visionary perspective that catalyzed a profound transformation in Mexico's socio-economic and cultural landscape. The Mexican intellectual envisioned a future where Indigenous communities harmoniously merged into the broader Mexican society, nurturing a *mestizo* identity that propelled economic prosperity and embodied the essence of the nation's culture. No longer was the question of Indigenous national incorporation limited to the country's frontier regions. Pimentel passionately advocated the idea that the assimilation of Indigenous people must encompass the entire nation. Although Pimentel was uncertain about the industrial potential of Indigenous people, he rejected the classic colonial ideal that Native people were incapable of societal integration. Pimentel's ambivalence was clear. While he observed that, "... the Indian is... cold in his passions and slow in his work," also observed that Indigenous people had the ability to learn the habits of industry.² So

² Francisco Pimentel, *Memoria sobre las causas que han originado la situación actual de la raza indígena de México y medios de remediarla* (Mexico: Imprenta de Andrade y Escalante, 1864), 213.

much emphasis on race in terms of racial divisions that in the face of national project, it matters less than prompting a collective economic future.

Pimentel's ambivalence stemmed from the Indigenous people's everyday use of land and their reliance on small, non-commercial ejidos systems. The Mexican intellectual recognized that the persistent isolation of Indigenous communities and their dependence on communal land and water for individual family subsistence posed a significant challenge to Mexican commerce. Pimentel implored state-makers and *hacendados* to realize that Indigenous people pose considerable challenges to modernization. "To what end do we think so much about better things when there are no people? We want railways, but the majority of our population insist on walking on foot; we want the telegraph, and the Indigenous person sees it as a way to communicate with the dead...we want to expand our trade when there are no consumers / *A que fin pensamos tanto en mejorar la cosas cuando no hay personas? Queremos caminos de fiero, y la mayor parte de nuestra poblacion no sabe andar mas que a pie; queremos telegrafo, y el indo ve su aparato como cosa de nigromancia...queremos extender nuestro comercio y no hay consumidores,*" contended Pimentel.³

³ Francisco Pimentel, *Memoria sobre las causas que han originado la situacion actual de la raza indigena de Mexico y medios de remediarla* (Mexico: Imprenta de Andrade y Escalante, 1864), 219.

For Pimentel, this persistent independence threatened the ongoing national industrial projects. He envisioned a future where the country's economic fate was secure, not just regionally or nationally, but on a global scale. This vision required quickly educating the rural, Indigenous agricultural workers on new technologies. Achieving harmonious integration required a collective effort, with natives and *mestizos* actively participating as educated workers, while wealthy Mexican *hacenderos*—landowners—fulfilled their role as upper-class innovators, guiding the path towards prosperity. His vision of a modern, industrial Mexico rested on Indigenous incorporation not just as a working class, but also as a viable consumer base that evolved alongside the Mexican economy. Pimentel had no doubts that Mexico, as a nation, and the education of *mestizo* citizens from Indigenous peoples actively propelled progress. He remained keenly aware of those who questioned Mexico's industrial future.⁴

Pimentel viewed the persistent self-reliance of Indigenous communities as a threat to the ongoing national industrial endeavors. While Pimentel envisaged

⁴ Francisco Pimentel, *Memoria sobre las causas que han originado la situacion actual de la raza indigena de Mexico y medios de remediarla* (Mexico: Imprenta de Andrade y Escalante, 1864), 219. Translation: "To what end do we think so much about better things when there are no people? We want railways but the majority of our population insist on walks on foot; we want the telegraph, and the Indigenous person sees it as a thing of necromancy...we want to expand our trade but there are no consumers...Mexico will progress, but in the meantime its most passionate admirers must have little hope of its advancement and even of its existence as a nation."

Mexico's economic future as being regionally, nationally, and globally integrated, he also realized that this depended on the transformation of Indigenous people into workers who were educated in new agricultural technologies.⁵ Pimentel emphasized that achieving such a vision of harmonious integration required a collective endeavor, with natives and mestizos functioning as educated laborers, while affluent Mexican hacenderos (landowners) assumed the role of upper-class innovators, leading the path toward industrialization and modernization.

The North American plow represented a significant opportunity for commercial agricultural innovation. Its ability to transform vast stretches of uncultivated land into productive cash crop fields held great promise. Nineteenth century civic engineers installed basic irrigation systems in various towns across the borderlands, but it was not until introducing the plow that steady harvests became possible. The ejido system, which involves communal land ownership, made it impossible to cultivate large tracts of land, and thus hindered progress. The ejido system of communal land ownership presented a significant obstacle as it prevented the cultivation of large tracts of land, thereby stalling progress. Pimentel lamented such stagnation, analogizing the Indigenous ejido system to collective ownership of property, a condition the Mexican intellectual deplored. "Communism," wrote Pimentel, "turns a people into a flock of

⁵ Francisco Pimentel, *Memoria sobre las causas que han originado la situacion actual de la raza indigena de Mexico y medios de remediarla* (Mexico: Imprenta de Andrade y Escalante, 1864), 201.

sheep which violates our natural inclinations.”⁶ Pimentel recognized the vast Indigenous population within the Mexican borders, comprising over a quarter of the country’s populace, that warranted neither neglect nor abandonment. Rather, it was necessary for Indigenous communities to integrate and contribute towards Mexico’s industrial advancement.

This vision for Mexico arose when the country’s total population hovered just above 8.6 million people in 1864, with a considerable majority being Indigenous or of mixed heritage—*castas*. The demographic breakdown of the Mexican population in the 1860s totaled 23 percent “of Spanish descent,” 30 percent Indigenous, 47 percent *castas*, with less than 1 percent identified as foreign born and less than 1 percent listed as black.⁷ Pimentel’s viewpoint obscured the line between *mestizos*, those with both Native and Spanish ancestry, and whites. It remained ambiguous whether he categorized *mestizos* as part of the “Spanish descent” demographic or included them within the *castas*. It is possible that Pimentel perceived *mestizos* either as Mexicans who appeared white or as a blend of Native and Spanish blood. Based on Pimentel’s other writings, it seems likely he saw white-presenting *mestizos* as belonging to the

⁶ Francisco Pimentel, *Memoria sobre las causas que han originado la situacion actual de la raza indigena de Mexico y medios de remediarla* (Mexico: Imprenta de Andrade y Escalante, 1864), 76-77.

⁷ Francisco Pimentel, *Memoria sobre las causas que han originado la situacion actual de la raza indigena de Mexico y medios de remediarla* (Mexico: Imprenta de Andrade y Escalante, 1864), 196.

castas, and as part of a broader socioeconomic class. His interchangeable use of the terms “*blancos*” and “*hacendados*,” those in the borderlands regions often racially classified as both *criollo* and *mestizo*, suggested a fusion and obscuring of racial and economic categories, with *mestizos* seen as descendants of Spaniards with some degree of Indigenous heritage but predominantly appearing white. “The white is the owner; Indians are the workers. The white is rich, the Indian is poor...Descendants of Spaniards have at their fingertips modern knowledge...which Indians are unaware of...There are two different people living in the same land, and what is worse, to a certain extent they are enemies,” Pimentel wrote.⁸

For Pimentel, *mestizos* were likely viewed as essentially white-appearing Mexicans with some Indigenous lineage. Regardless of a *mestizo*’s proximity to whiteness, Pimentel perceived the Indigenous peoples’ apathy towards the central government as a significant threat. He believed that their lack of interest in national affairs revealed a genuine weakness for the Mexican state, declaring, “[E]verything shows that the Indian is selfish...and [they only rise above] their general apathy when personal interests compel them.”⁹ Interestingly, the very “selfishness” Pimentel

⁸ Francisco Pimentel, *Memoria sobre las causas que han originado la situacion actual de la raza indigena de Mexico y medios de remediarla* (Mexico: Imprenta de Andrade y Escalante, 1864), 217-218.

⁹ Francisco Pimentel, *Memoria sobre las causas que han originado la situacion actual de la raza indigena de Mexico y medios de remediarla* (Mexico: Imprenta de Andrade y Escalante, 1864), 214.

criticized—the Indigenous focus on their community, their property, and their work—later became desirable traits for nation-building as envisioned by other liberal state-makers.

Beyond the socio-economic concerns, Pimentel was also deeply apprehensive of the potential for escalating racial tensions within a country that was committed to maintaining the hierarchical *castas* system. He firmly believed that unless the state explicitly intervened to enforce Indigenous citizenship, the country's lax racial project had the potential to exacerbate the strife between Native communities and the lighter-skinned *mestizos*. As Pimentel explicitly documented the continued, deep animosity between natives and non-natives populations, "*Todavía los blancos desprecian á los indios.*"¹⁰ Despite Mexico's state laws that established complete and equal citizenship for natives, Pimentel was acutely aware of the colonial vestiges of racial stratification embedded in everyday social practice. He candidly acknowledged that no substantial reform to Indigenous status had yet been made. Pimentel harbored hope that racial animosity would naturally dissipate with time and generations of mixed *mestizo* unions and industrial education. Despite constitutional guarantees of Native equity, Pimentel conceded, "*Segun nuestro código no hay esclavos en México, y los indios so iguales á los blancos. Apréciese esta manifestacion en sus justo valor,*

¹⁰ Francisco Pimentel, *Memoria sobre las causas que han originado la situacion actual de la raza indigena de Mexico y medios de remediarla* (Mexico: Imprenta de ndrade y Escalante, 1864), 203. Translation: "Still the whites hate the Indians"

porque si bien las costumbres todavía son hostels á los indios, sin embargo, entiéndase que no ha habido, de hecho, una reforma / According to our [legal] code, there are no slaves in Mexico and the Indians are equal to the whites. [We must] appreciate this manifestation at face value, because ...our [social] customs are still hostile towards the Indians, [and] there has not been a reform.”¹¹ Even so, Pimentel believed that generations of industrial education would eventually “make [the practice of Indigenous equality] a reality.”¹²

The presumption of Native self-interest at the expense of national duty, a common belief touted by Mexican leaders like Pimentel, contributed to increased racial tensions across the nation. The delay in Indigenous incorporation presented a dual threat to the Mexican state. The public perceived Native peoples as jeopardizing Mexican spaces where state control often yielded to Native independence. Embracing his ideal of harmonious integration, Pimentel believed that facilitating Native communities’ equal access to profit and capital expedited their interests in industrial education. He also held the belief that the educational system had the potential to

¹¹ Francisco Pimentel, *Memoria sobre las causas que han originado la situación actual de la raza indígena de Mexico y medios de remediarla* (Mexico: Imprenta de Andrade y Escalante, 1864), 194. Translation: “According to our [legal] code, there are no slaves in Mexico and the Indians are equal to the whites...although our [social] customs are still hostile towards the Indians, there has not been a reform,... Let time do the rest, [and] it will make [the practice] a reality.”

¹² Francisco Pimentel, *Memoria sobre las causas que han originado la situación actual de la raza indígena de Mexico y medios de remediarla* (Mexico: Imprenta de Andrade y Escalante, 1864), 194.

transform uneducated Indigenous peoples rapidly into true peers if *mestizos* afforded the national project more time. Pimentel stressed, “*Pero, sobre todo, las personas que vivimos en Mexico vemos diariamente que cuantos indios se separan de su raza, frecuentan los colegios y se educan como los blancos, manifiestan ... [una] buena comprension...*”¹³ Recognized equal citizenship needed to be a necessary component of Mexican *mestizo* nationalism. He argued that if the state did not intervene or commit to enforcing equal citizenship, and by extension equal economic opportunity, for all its peoples, the racial categorization of land and labor continued to replicate older colonial racial divisions.

Pimentel’s views on Indigenous land use reflected the broader Mexican discussions of the 1860s, primarily centered on President Benito Juárez’s advocated land reform policies. These reforms, known collectively as La Reforma, were a series of liberal laws passed by Juárez that prioritized modernization and economic growth. Key to these reforms were the *El Estado Orgánico del Territorio* (1856) and *La Ley de Desamortización de Fincas Rústicas y Urbanas Propiedad de Corporaciones*

¹³ Francisco Pimentel, *Memoria sobre las causas que han originado la situación actual de la raza indígena de Mexico y medios de remediarla* (Mexico: Imprenta de Andrade y Escalante, 1864), 213-214. Translation: “But, above all, the people who live in Mexico witness daily many Indians who separate from their race to attend schools and educate themselves like the whites, and they develop...[a] good understanding...”

Civiles y Eclesiasticas (1856), often referred to as the Lerdo Law.¹⁴ Collectively, Juárez's reforms sought to base Mexican citizenship on land ownership and labor, emphasizing that property, work, and industry were crucial indicators of Mexican citizenship. Pimentel's philosophy on land and labor corresponded with Juárez's reforms as the Mexican intellectual exalted property, and broadly associated it as a nexus of national citizenship rights and the "exercise of industry." Pimentel recognized that without deliberate intervention by the state, land, labor, and water resources continued to adhere to colonial logics rather than a racially mixed, *mestizo* national future.

For nationalism to be effective, Mexicans needed to unify as a single people and nation to counteract foreign economic intrusions. Nationally invested workers along the northern borders not only functioned as a physical buffer between Mexico and the United States, but they were also crucial in protecting the state's economic interests. The success of Mexico's industrial project intensified the nation's concerns about the growing economic influence of the United States and other foreign investors. State officials worried about foreign actors taking advantage of Mexico's

¹⁴ See *El Estatuto Orgánico del Territorio de Mayo 12 de 1856* in *Legislacion Mexicana, Colecion Completa de las Disposiciones Legislativas desde la Independencia*, Tomo VIII, edited by Manuel Dublan y Jose Maria Lozano (Mexico: Imprenta del Comercio de Dublan y Chavez, 1877), 169-181. See *La Ley de Desamortización de Fincas Rústicas y Urbanas Propiedad de Corporaciones Civiles y Eclesiasticas*.

vulnerable sovereignty in the northern borderlands. To address this challenge, it was necessary to confront deep-rooted social biases, structural inequalities, and historical injustices. Pimentel believed that the Mexican government needed to strive to dismantle the structural barriers keeping Indigenous communities marginalized or in active resistance to state imposition. He recognized the difficulties involved in this transformation and understood that achieving harmonious integration required long-term commitment, likely marked by slow progress and setbacks. He steadfastly believed that the benefits of such an approach far outweighed the costs, benefiting both Indigenous peoples and the broader Mexican society.

By 1876, the relationships between Indigenous and *mestizo* peoples and their connections to land, water, and labor resources underwent a shift in the Mexican Pacific borderlands due to an alternate interpretation and application of La Reforma. President Porfirio Díaz's perspective on land and labor marked a significant departure from Pimentel's vision of harmonious integration. Díaz was driven by an intense sense of nationalism and aimed to modernize Mexico. His policies highlighted *mestizaje* (racial and cultural blending) and *indigenismo* (the promotion of Indigenous culture), but the primary ambition of his administration was to transform Mexico into a global industrial contender, with or without the participation of Mexico's Indigenous peoples. Starting from 1883, Díaz's approach prioritized foreign development over nationalism, particularly in labor and racial matters. This

redirection significantly altered the course of both Mexico and the United States towards modernization, and influenced their policies regarding Indigenous communities, favoring marginalization over Pimentel's ideal of harmonious integration.

Pimentel's concept of Indigenous inclusion failed to acquire traction. The path to peaceful integration was an expensive and gradual one, which the new president, Porfirio Díaz, was unwilling to embark on. Despite this, the shared vision among Pimentel, Juárez, and Díaz was a republican future of industrialization. Díaz, also a republican, leveraged Juárez's legislative mechanisms to further his goal of integrating the Indigenous population. As a fellow republican, Díaz catalyzed Juárez's legislative tools to promote Indigenous assimilation—an assimilation that implied erasure, a viewpoint that stood in stark contrast to those of his republican counterparts, Pimentel and Juárez. Díaz understood that by rubbing away Mexico's Indigenous population, he was nullifying their potential contributions to the country's economic future. To usher in modernization in Mexico, Díaz sought wealthy foreign investors from the United States and western Europe to replace those who he called "*indios bárbaros*." While Juárez and Pimentel advocated for a Mexican-driven agricultural workforce, Díaz favored the use of foreign investors and immigrant workers, ironically building on Juárez's La Reforma laws. Díaz's modernization agenda amplified Juárez's efforts to restrict Indigenous land ownership and fervently

advocating for the swift industrialization of underdeveloped borderlands regions. Though the core objective of Juárez's liberal reforms had been to convert the Indigenous and *mestizo* populations of Mexico into a potent working class, a vision where Mexico emerged as a commercial agricultural center and a worthy regional competitor to the United States, Díaz's agenda welcomed the United States as an economic partner instead.

Díaz abandoned the idea of a Mexico-centric republicanism, favoring instead a transactional relationship with the exacting foreign investors from America and Europe. This shift brought significant challenges for Mexican landowners and workers. Interestingly, Díaz's modernization plan employed and reshaped Juárez's principles of individualism and the common good in a manner that seemed like a natural and benign progression of Mexican liberalism. Tucked within Díaz's aggressive industrialization plan was his pledge to balance the interests of Mexico and foreign entities equally. Under the cover of *mestizo* nationalism, Díaz used Juárez's legislative tools to augment civil rights protections and removed statutory barriers for foreign corporations. This pursuit to shape Mexico's future revealed an inherent contradiction. On one hand, Díaz made efforts to acknowledge and elevate the country's rich Indigenous heritage, recognizing its essential contribution to the formulation of Mexican identity. Concurrently, his regime crafted Indigenous people as barriers to national development and modernization. As the nation moved towards

an industrialized future, Díaz's *indigenismo*—the categorical erosion of indigeneity as a legal consideration apart from basic citizens—sought not to harmoniously incorporate Indigenous peoples into the new order, but to erase their distinctiveness, relegating them to a celebrated past rather than an active present. Díaz employed agrarian reforms and the categorization of property as the most expedient way to erode Indigenous ties to land and, by extension, pressure Native laborers into *mestizo* wage-earning employment.

Díaz juxtaposed landless peasants, racially coded as Indigenous, as antithesis to Mexican modernization efforts. Navigating the complexities of social agrarian practice and effective administrative racialization, Díaz's government introduced policies like educational, land, political, and economic reforms that sought to modernize and assimilate ethnic Indigenous peoples into the Mexican body politic. Díaz's *indigenismo* policies served as a bureaucratic approach to hasten Indigenous assimilation and erode social practices of Native difference. Where Juárez considered *indigenismo* an eventual after effect of economic integration, Díaz understood *indigenismo* as a necessary, intentional racial project to foster Mexican nationalism through forced assimilation. This tension played out in the northern borderlands, where increased designations of *terrenos baldios* (unproductive lands) allowed for the continued dispossession of Indigenous communities as property owners and the state

pressure to become employed wage earners in industrial workshops or *hacienda campos* (fields).

The specter of colonial racial stratification persisted into the late nineteenth century. Although Mexico's constitution abolished race as a distinct legal category for Indigenous people and again during Juárez's 1856 reform law, in their daily life and in local interactions, Indigenous peoples still operated as if they were a distinct racial category not in law but in social practice. Even Pimentel and Juárez's "harmonious integration" model considered Indigenous peoples as a community apart from everyday Mexicans, even as the reformers sought to break free from "the vicious circle" colonial categories.¹⁵ Díaz recognized that legal categorization of property provided the best means to erode Indigenous difference in custom. Rather than creating a new structure, Díaz used Juárez's ambiguous definitions of common use terms like "private property," "productive lands," and "vagrancy" to target Native border communities and undercut the economic positioning of Mexican landowners in underdeveloped bordered spaces. Shifting meanings between categories of property and productive labor capture not only the shifting direction of *mestizo* nationalism but

¹⁵ Francisco Pimentel, *Memoria sobre las causas que han originado la situación actual de la raza indígena de México y medios de remediarla* (Mexico: Imprenta de Andrade y Escalante, 1864), 237.

also expected the transformation of Díaz's *indigenismo* policy towards a full-blown *mestizaje* racialization project by the early twentieth century.

Under Díaz's regime, the protections of Mexican citizenship, the meaning of property, and an individual's right to labor changed from 1884 to 1910 in highly racialized ways. Although there was a disconnect between the intention of the law and daily social customs, Díaz's interpretations of Juárez's liberal reform agenda and his subsequent actions clarify Díaz's racial rhetoric. Juárez took great legislative pains to ensure that every natural-born Mexican citizen had the right to pursue "liberty, security, property, and equality," regardless of race.¹⁶ La Reforma laws vehemently prohibited the foreign acquisition of former church lands, echoing Pimentel's stance on the importance of a distinctive Mexican middle-and upperclass leading the nation's economy. Juárez laid the groundwork for proletarianization in Mexico's subsistence farming population and the rise of an agrarian middle class. Critically, La Reforma legislation marked property, labor, and industry as critical components of Mexican citizenship. For leaders like Pimentel and Juárez, property was more than inviolable; it was expansively defined to encompass goods, rights, or involvement in "the exercise of industry."¹⁷ By intention, La Reforma's broad

¹⁶ See *El Estatuto Orgánico del Territorio de 1856*, Section 5, Article 30 and Article 31, for more on protected civil rights, slavery, and naturalization.

¹⁷ See *El Estatuto Orgánico del Territorio de 1856*, Section 5, Articles 62 and 63, for more on the legal definitions of property.

interpretation gave state officials greater authority, tipping the balance of power away from locally elected Native captains sponsored in the post-independence period towards regional administrative officials appointed by the State under Juárez's reorganization. To pave the way for an agrarian middle class, La Reforma laws additionally imposed significant limitations on foreign-born residents and implemented stringent criteria for naturalization. These criteria included marriage to Mexican citizens, continuous residency, and the prohibition of foreign acquisition of former church lands.¹⁸ Pimentel and Juárez's preoccupation with the viability and success of Mexico's industrial project also reflected his underlying anxiety regarding the increasing power of the United States and other foreign investors as they exerted ever increasing control over Mexican economic markets even as they comprised less than one percent of the total population by 1864.¹⁹ Díaz's 1883 *Ley sobre terrenos*

¹⁸ See *El Estatuto Orgánico del Territorio de 1856*, Section 3, Articles 10-13, for the legal definitions of Mexican citizenship concerning marriage and foreign residency. Juárez's liberal reforms placed residency limitations on non-citizens. Foreign individuals either had to marry into a Mexican family or prove continuous residency for a year. Hopeful foreign landowners needed to file for official documentation to Mexican consular or immigration agents but proven residency was no longer a requirement for land ownership.

¹⁹ Francisco Pimentel, *Memoria sobre las causas que han originado la situación actual de la raza indígena de Mexico y medios de remediarla* (Mexico: Imprenta de Andrade y Escalante, 1864), 196. Pimentel cites population tallies for 1864. *Extranjeros*, or foreigners, totaled 25,500, or 0.29% of Mexico's total population of 8,629,982.

baldíos epitomized a fundamental shift, a striking illustration of the extent to which Díaz exposed Mexico to the United States.

The categorization of property became an important tool for the Díaz regime to exercise economic and social power in the Mexican Pacific borderlands. Díaz's 1883 law introduced the language of the "Executive" as the final determinant of which lands were open to colonization. Juárez's reform legislation had listed "gobernadores" and "jefes políticos" as the facilitators of "el Estado" in local districts and introduces regional territorial councils for better administration reinforcing feudal relationships²⁰ Díaz's emphasis on the executive powers and state actors illustrated a growing centralism in Mexican government that also underscored relationships between borderlands spaces and the central government.²¹ By granting the Executive the power to "*determinara cuales deben colonizarse desde luego, publicando el plano de ellos y los precios a que hubieren de venderse* / The executive will determine which [lands] should be colonized immediately, publishing the plan, and the prices at which they are to be sold."²² While Juárez's Lerdo Law had not imposed individual

²⁰ See *El Estatuto Orgánico del Territorio de 1856*, Section 9, Article 121, for more on territorial government structure.

²¹ *Ley sobre terrenos baldíos, mandado deslindar, medir, fraccionar y valuar los terrenos baldíos o de propiedad nacional para obtener los necesarios para el establecimiento de colonos, 15 December 1883*, Article 30 placed the colonization project under the strict oversight of the Executive under the auspices of public good.

²² *Ley sobre terrenos baldíos, mandado deslindar, medir, fraccionar y valuar los terrenos baldíos o de propiedad nacional para obtener los necesarios para el establecimiento de colonos, 15 December 1883*, Article 4.

limits, the concept of “productive property” effectively placed a cap on the amount of land an individual was able to guarantee a profitable yield on. Conversely, Díaz’s law set a limit of private landholdings to 2,500 hectares per individual, extending a ten-year purchasing window.²³ Juárez’s previous policies proposed a three-month purchasing window for hopeful *hacenderos*. Díaz’s land reform significantly diverged from his predecessors, as it actively welcomed foreign involvement in colonization and industrial efforts and simplified the process for foreign entities, individuals and corporations alike, to buy vacant lands.²⁴ Díaz, continuing in Juárez’s footsteps, broadened the definitions of vacant and uncultivated lands.

Díaz’s agrarian reforms removed Mexican property protections, incentivized foreign investors, and increased land subsidies for foreign buyers, particularly from

²³ *Ley sobre terrenos baldíos, mandado deslindar, medir, fraccionar y valorar los terrenos baldíos o de propiedad nacional para obtener los necesarios para el establecimiento de colonos, 15 December 1883, Article 3, subsection 1.*

²⁴ *Ley sobre terrenos baldíos, mandado deslindar, medir, fraccionar y valorar los terrenos baldíos o de propiedad nacional para obtener los necesarios para el establecimiento de colonos, 15 December 1883, Article 7* granted colonists ten years of guaranteed exemptions from things like military services or offered premiums for “trabajo notables” or for the incentives for “la intruducción de una nuevo cultivo o industria”. Importantly, the Mexican state provided colonists with a ten-year exemption from paying import and export duties on goods and services. Article 12 allowed foreign residents to maintain their original citizenship and settlers did not have to seek Mexican citizenship. Article 15 codified into law that the purchase of *terrenos baldios* were open to not only Mexican citizens and foreign individuals equally. Article 18 stated opened up the purchase of *terrenos baldios* to foreign corporations in addition to foreign individuals.

the United States. Díaz also created a special corporate designation that allowed foreign investors and their companies to purchase beyond the individual acre limitations. Between 1860 and 1910, U.S. investors purchased over 200 million acres of land, mostly classified as *terrenos baldios*, in the Mexican Pacific borderlands.²⁵ Baja California alone witnessed a significant acquisition of land in 1887, as the International Mexican Company, a U.S.-based investment firm, bought nearly half of the Baja California peninsula, totaling 186 million acres.²⁶ This addition was critically significant as it countered Pimentel's and Juárez's vision of a Mexican-led industrial revolution. For colonization and industrialization, Díaz, in his management of *terrenos baldios*, made Indigenous and *mestizo* laborers an optional resource.²⁷ Not only did Díaz's reforms undercut Mexican guarantees of property, but the demographic shifts occurring as Mexico slowly modernized created also increased racial tensions in contentious borderlands spaces and multi-racial spaces developed quickly in the Mexican Pacific region.

²⁵ Verónica Castillo-Muñoz, *The Other California: Land, Identity, and Politics on the Mexican Borderlands* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 10.

²⁶ "Lower California for Sale," International Mexican Company, Lower California, Mexico, July 1887, Don Meadows Papers, 1824-1994, MS-R001, Special Collections and Archives, The UC Irvine Libraries, Irvine, California.

²⁷ *Terrenos baldíos o de propiedad nacional para obtener los necesarios para el establecimiento de colonos, 15 December 1883*, Article 19 granted foreign corporations the right to bring in their own settlers and workforces.

Juárez's administration solidified the citizens' right to sell their labor and accumulate capital, which, even in the post-independence period, remained contingent on a region's secularization project. Mexican citizenship became anchored in labor, capital, and property. La Reforma legislation also clarified that the government reserved the right to constrict or expand the meaning of citizenship in pursuit of industry, agriculture, and the public good.²⁸ The introductions of sweeping terms like "industry" and the "public good" continued to centralize power under Juárez's administration. Critically, Juárez's *Estatuto Orgánico del Territorio de 1856* introduced "vagrancy" as state loophole to circumvent legal protections for an individual's right to their own labor and land.²⁹ Under the law, the State reserved the power to deem an individual a *vago* (vagrant), *vicioso* (vicious), or *sin oficio* (without trade) and suspend their citizenship. During their probation, *vagos* and *viciosos* not only lost critical legal protections but also, at the State's discretion, were obliged to work towards their reinstatement at select industrial workshops or agricultural labor fields "*por el tiempo necesario á su correccion*" (for the time necessary for their

²⁸ See *El Estatuto Orgánico del Territorio de 1856*, Section 5, Article 65, for more on the criteria for the confiscation of property for "public utility." See *El Estatuto Orgánico del Territorio de 1856*, Section 9, Article 117, Subsection 15 and 18, for more on government promotion of agriculture, industry, and the "prosperity of the State."

²⁹ See *El Estatuto Orgánico del Territorio de 1856*, Section 9, Article 117, Subsection 30, for more on "vagrancy" laws.

correction).³⁰ This work was considered voluntary, yet necessary for reinstatement of full citizenship protections.

The growing relationship between the Mexican government and U.S. venture capitalists played out most visibly in northern Baja California. Across regions like the Rio Colorado Basin, U.S. nationals actively fostered various industries along the international boundary line, encroaching on established Indigenous communities and continuously disrupting Native lifeways, especially in maritime spaces. The post-independence period and La Reforma started a changing legislative and social landscape in the Mexican Pacific as Mexico's modernization efforts tapped into greater global Pacific markets, with their goal being an enduring trade route to China. After 1848, steamboat and ferry industries grew considerably after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and then boomed after *La Venta de La Mesilla*, or more commonly known as the Gadsden Purchase (1854) took effect as land restrictions eased. Lieutenant Cave Johnson Coutts, a U.S. military officer wrote in 1849 of the increased maritime activity in port cities like San Diego, "The emigrants are pouring in from all directions...Our gorgeous little harbor is now seen riding four, five, or six of the oceans pride daily and not infrequently two steamboats. The place promises to

³⁰ *El Estatuto Orgánico del Territorio de 1856*, Section 9, Article 117, Subsection 30.

be of much importance.”³¹ Though hired as a US army boundary commission surveyor, Coutts remained in San Diego and eventually married Ysidora Bandini, the daughter of Juan Bandini, one of the region’s wealthiest ranchers.³² Coutts’ entry into the Mexican Pacific and his eventual marriage into a *californio* family marked a changing Mexican Pacific landscape. For decades, following the reconfiguration of the international border between the United States and Mexico, both the United States and Mexico sought to establish transnational trade and movement across borders through both steamboat networks and railroads. The scarce settlement of the Mexican North coupled with increased Native rebellion across the borderlands between 1850s

³¹ Thomas L. Scharf, ed., “Pages from the Diary of Cave Johnson Coutts,” *The Journal of San Diego History* 22, no. 2 (Spring 1976), Entry for San Diego, 12 August 1849. Accessed 23 May 2023, <https://sandieghistory.org/journal/1976/april/coutts/>. See also Cave Johnson Coutts, *Hepah California!: The Journal of Cave Johnson Coutts from Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico to Los Angeles, California, During the Years 1848-1849*, edited by Henry F. Dobyns (Tucson: Arizona Pioneers’ Historical Society, 1961).

³² Thomas L. Scharf, ed., “Pages from the Diary of Cave Johnson Coutts,” *The Journal of San Diego History* 22, no. 2 (Spring 1976), Entry for San Diego, 12 August 1849. Accessed 23 May 2023, <https://sandieghistory.org/journal/1976/april/coutts/>. Juan Bandini was originally from Peru and was sent to Mexico as a diplomat in 1833. He decided to resign his post and acquired the Hajar colonization company in 1834. He was later charged with smuggling by local Mexican officials and moved back and forth between the border for several years until he was granted the Tecate Ranch in 1837. Upon his death, Bandini left his considerable property across the Mexican Pacific borderlands to his son-in-law Coutts who would become one of the wealthiest men in Southern California and Northern Baja California. See William Ellsworth Smyth, *History of San Diego, 1542-1908* (San Diego: History Co., 1907) for more information on Juan Bandini.

and the 1870s slowed railroad development and the establishment of a safe landed route across borders. Instead of industrial, landed development, Mexican and U.S. turned their attention to the development of ports and maritime spaces that were easier to defend. The steamboat, like the plow, held incredible promise for the Mexican North for both commercial and national interests.

Within local settings, steamboat allowed some transborder Indigenous communities like the Tohono O'odham and the Cocopah to continue to circumvent both the United States and Mexican authorities and compulsions to enter agrarian and mining wage economies as they continued to move semi-nomadically and amphibiously across the region. Many semi-nomadic communities engaged in seasonal work in the timber trade, selling wood along the coastlines to steamboat crews as they traversed the Mexican Pacific region.³³ Cocopah and Yuman laborers also circumvented agrarian work by working as crew members and navigators for steamboat lines, who relied on Indigenous water knowledge to navigate the Rio Colorado region.³⁴ The completion of the Southern Pacific Railroad in 1879 marked the effective end of the Mexican Pacific steamboat era, that further displaced regional agrarian mestizos who travelled north into the United States in search of employment.

³³ Castillo-Muñoz, *The Other California*, 17-18.

³⁴ Castillo-Muñoz, *The Other California*, 17-18. See also Thaddeus Harlan Stanton, "Itinerary of a Journey to and through Arizona in the Winter of 1871-72," Rare Page Manuscripts, Huntington Library.

The collapse of the steamboat economy also compelled semi-nomadic Indigenous peoples, like the Cocopah, and *mestizos*, to enter emerging agrarian labor colonies. Though Díaz's land reforms simplified foreign acquisitions of property to expedite the colonization of the Mexican Pacific, a combination of brutal environmental conditions associated with desert life that made raising cattle and guaranteeing steady harvest difficult coupled with lingering Native raiding failed to attract a steady influx of *mestizos*. Thomas H. Blythe, an American venture capitalist and prominent land developer, based in southern California, petitioned the Mexican government to start a two-hundred-family agricultural colony in the Mexicali Valley in 1884. The Mexican government, excited by the prospect of non-Native families settling the region as a base workforce, readily granted Blythe's request. The colony and settlement stipulations aligned with Díaz's *terrenos baldios* legislation of vacant lands offered at reduced prices for the promise of family settlement in border spaces.³⁵ By 1886, only fifty-three *mestizo* families had settled and work in Blythe's Mexicali colony. Blythe was unable to provide competitive wages in the copper mines of southern Arizona or

³⁵ *Ley sobre terrenos baldíos, mandado deslindar, medir, fraccionar y valorar los terrenos baldíos o de propiedad nacional para obtener los necesarios para el establecimiento de colonos, 15 December 1883*, Article 24 mandated that in addition to industrial production, foreign corporations needed to take part in settler initiatives with premiums given for establishing families in corporate colonies. Special premiums were given to the establishment of Mexican families in colonial holdings. Article 26 held that foreign colonization companies were to always be considered Mexican. "*Las compañías extranjeras de colonización se considerarán como mexicanas...*"

the unskilled work opportunities in Los Angeles and central California, as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 came into effect in the United States.³⁶

Díaz's agrarian and industrial policy undermined and undervalued Indigenous labor as his policies strove to populate the region with non-Indigenous residents. Díaz believed that the financial incentives, like multi-year tax breaks, offered to the *norteamericano* elite provided financial and settlement reassurances to potential European immigrants and Mexican migrants alike.³⁷ Regional agribusiness and mining companies in the Mexican Pacific borderlands initially relied on local Native and *mestizo* labor in the 1880s and 1890s as the abolition of the *ejidos* propelled subsistence farmers into modern wage systems. But, when Mexican labor shortages occurred as foreign privatization of land occurred, foreign industrial managers recruited laborers from Mexico's interior and from China and Japan as the Baja peninsula's population remained relatively low into the late-1890s. The official census of 1895 for the Baja California territory recorded only 7,268 total inhabitants in the northern district, with 4,165 men and 3,103 women.³⁸ The persistent shortage

³⁶ Castillo-Múñoz, *The Other California*, 18.

³⁷ *Ley sobre terrenos baldíos, mandado deslindar, medir, fraccionar y valuar los terrenos baldíos o de propiedad nacional para obtener los necesarios para el establecimiento de colonos, 15 December 1883*, Article 21 made it possible for the Mexican government to use *terrenos baldíos* as a lucrative enticement to lure foreign inventions into Mexican landownership and investment.

³⁸ *Censo General de la República Mexicana, 1895*. Baja California Sur.

of settler families and agrarian and industrial workers compelled the Mexican government to look elsewhere for a steady stream of laborers.

The Porfirian administration, guided by the *científicos*, advisers to Porfirio Díaz, pursued European immigrants primarily because of their belief in their suitability for modernization and industrial growth. They doubted the ability of the Mexican peasantry and Chinese immigrants to integrate into and contribute to such a society. They held a romanticized view of Europeans, particularly those practicing Roman Catholicism, while Indigenous populations were unfairly deemed detrimental to Mexico's progress. Factors beyond racial concerns influenced Chinese immigration. Failed colonization and immigration endeavors during the mid-nineteenth century meant Mexico was disconnected from the trans-Pacific migration networks. The reluctance of various racial and national groups, including Arabs, Egyptians, African Americans, former Confederate soldiers, Chinese, and Europeans, to inhabit Mexico's remote areas, muted even the fiercest advocates of Mexican liberalism.

The dearth of immigrants who adhered to the Porfirian ideal forced a shift in Mexico's immigration policy. Driven by necessity, some *científicos* began accepting manual laborers more indiscriminately. Historian Moisés González Navarro documents that, by the late 1870s, the *científicos* prioritized labor productivity over race or aesthetic considerations, emphasizing economic criteria. Amidst this evolving

context, Matías Romero, a Mexican diplomat in the United States under Juárez and a Mexican senator of Chiapas under Díaz, successfully persuaded a reluctant Mexican Congress to embrace Chinese immigration, although these attempts saw little success.³⁹ With the absence of robust migration networks that had directed numerous Chinese laborers into the Pacific Americas, Mexico's colonization and immigration strategies were doomed. Mexican officials, in 1874, embarked on integrating Mexico into the trans-Pacific migration networks, despite reservations about Chinese laborers. As per a contract with the Mexican government, the New York-based Pacific Mail Steamship Company (PMSC) established routes from Panama to San Francisco via Acapulco.⁴⁰

A more concerted effort to attract Chinese immigrants did not occur until 1884, when PMSC steamers started regular trips from Acapulco to Hong Kong via Honolulu and Yokohama. The Mexican government funded PMSC \$17,000 per voyage to transport up to a thousand Chinese laborers into Mexico and to facilitate

³⁹ Grace Peña Delgado, *Making the Chinese Mexican: Global Migration, Localism, and Exclusion in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 13.

⁴⁰ "Articles of Contract Between the Pacific Mail Steamship Company and the Mexican Republic," in correspondence of October 10, 1895, in United States Department of State, dispatches from United States Consuls in Acapulco, Mexico, 1823–1906, National Archives Microfilm Publications, Microcopy 143, reel 7 (Washington, DC: National Archives and Record Service, 1949), RG 59; from here on referred to as USCAMEX.

trade in various commodities. The PMSC also received an additional payment per Chinese worker, while a higher amount was provided for each European worker.⁴¹

This Chinese immigration plan never came to fruition. PMSC suffered financial setbacks, and British officials thwarted attempts to transport Chinese laborers to Mexico, fearing potential exploitation and inhumane conditions in the absence of legal protection. British officials insisted on a formal treaty between Mexico and China to safeguard Chinese laborers' welfare. The British put forth a proposal to guarantee the protection of Chinese laborers in Mexico. Mexican officials responded by suggesting that China appoint representatives to safeguard its nationals in Mexico, but China insisted on British oversight. Eventually, Mexico agreed to a certain level of British intervention but declined complete protection of the Chinese by the British. This led to treaty negotiations beginning in July 1885, although they were fraught with communication issues and misunderstandings.⁴²

The negotiations faced numerous hurdles, including a change of Chinese representative because of illness, miscommunications, and delays. Despite these

⁴¹ Letter from Spenser St. John, British Envoy to Mexico, to Foreign Minister Lord Granville, March 19, 1884, Great Britain, Public Record Office, Foreign Office, Consular Dispatches from Mexico, 1822–1902, series 50/volume 445/folio 33, reel 178, Britain, Foreign Office, Bancroft Library; from here on referred to as BFO-BL.

⁴² Letter from Spenser St. John to Foreign Minister Lord Granville, March 19, 1884, 50/445/33, reel 178, BFO-BL. Lionel Carden, British Envoy to Mexico, to Ignacio Mariscal, Minister of Foreign Relations in Mexico, May 1, 1885, Romero, *Correspondencia, 1881–1886*, vol. 4, p. 629.

challenges, the steady influx of Chinese migrants into Mexico continued because of the promise of citizenship and land ownership. The Porfirian regime viewed Chinese immigration as a triumph. Díaz attracted foreign investors and immigrants with promises of financial gains and opportunities, respectively. This strategy starkly differed from U.S. immigration policies that prohibited Chinese laborers following the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. A year after Romero's death, in 1899, China and Mexico formalized their relationship by signing the Treaty of Friendship, Commerce, and Navigation in Washington, D.C. The treaty promoted Chinese immigration to Mexico and granted civil rights and privileges to immigrants, despite the treaty's intentions.⁴³

The facilitation of Chinese and other Asian laborers into northern Baja California and the mountainous and desert realities of the region meant that, time and again, agrarian-based colonization efforts continued to fail. Initial colonization and settlement projects launched by the Díaz administration fizzled as newly immigrated Chinese laborers in Baja California and Sonora made their way north even after the passing of U.S. Chinese Exclusion Laws. Newly created trans-Pacific migration networks provided illicit gateways to the United States via Baja California

⁴³ John V. A. MacMurray, *Treaties and Agreements with and Concerning China, 1894–1919* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1921), p. 214; Manuel de Azpiroz and Wu Ting-fang represented Mexico and China, respectively. The treaty was ratified in Washington, DC, on July 9, 1900.

and Sonora that placed the Mexican Pacific region at the forefront of regional and national debates over Mexico's *mestizaje* policies. By 1895, territorial census records document only 71 Chinese peoples, mostly male laborers, living in Baja California while 310 lived in the Sonora.⁴⁴

Despite the multiple grievances levied against planters and recruiters and the dismissive attitude of the Díaz regime, the idea of Chinese immigration into Mexico was considered a workable project. Chinese laborers aligned with Porfirian development objectives, which aimed to link individuals to markets and formerly distant locations, supported by foreign capital. Should the Díaz administration have gauged success by the participation of Chinese workers in constructing railroads or farming crops before returning home, the events that unfolded in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands around the start of the twentieth century called into question the regime's liberal immigration policies. Chinese migrants had made their way to Mexico, particularly to the northern states, by the time diplomatic relations between China and Mexico were officially established in 1899 with a formal treaty.

By 1900, Sonora had the largest Chinese population in Mexico, with over 850 settlers. Contrary to the expectations and desires of Mexican officials, many Chinese arrived not to work but to establish businesses, cross into the United States,

⁴⁴ Ministerio de Fomento, *Dirección General de Estadística: Censo General de la República Mexicana, 1899* (Mexico: Oficina de la Secretaría de Fomento), 6.

or both. While the U.S. southern border was theoretically closed to Chinese immigration, in practice, Chinese individuals found themselves in various positions, ranging from Mexican citizens, nationals, sojourners, and merchant-laborers, uniquely positioned to cross into the United States with relative ease. The array of statuses accumulated by Chinese border crossers was not the most significant outcome of their experience, although the range of options assisted them in navigating immigration bureaucracies and countering the notion that they were merely coolies. What had a more profound impact were the trans-Pacific Chinese migration networks that intersected with an existing borderlands society, long characterized as a place of fluid movement and political autonomy.

The continuous movements of Native peoples in Sonora, together with the border crossings of Chinese migrants beginning in the late-nineteenth century, destabilized national projects at the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. This fluidity was also impacted by the trans-Pacific migration networks, making the concept of the Chinese diaspora more complex due to the variety of factors influencing its structure and evolution in the borderlands. Chinese diasporic communities, both in Mexico and the United States, encapsulated the experiences of individuals and families who migrated from their Native lands to settle in new areas where their identities were both confirmed and redefined. Thus, the existing fluidity of the borderlands, when combined with trans-Pacific migration networks, enabled cross-national movements

through Arizona and Sonora. The Chinese immigrants brought their culture with them but were also transformed by the culture they encountered in the borderlands, becoming Mexican Chinese or *fronterizos*.

These overlapping movements and connections, which kept borders open and identities fluid, also complicated the vision for Chinese immigration into Mexico, held by Matías Romero. Even though the political machinery and orientation of the Mexican nation changed markedly after 1854, against the backdrop of its colonial past, the need for Chinese labor remained constant throughout the following four decades of social upheaval and ongoing internal and external movements.

Entrepreneurs, labor recruiters, corporations, and state-builders in Mexico, the border region, and China sought to attract Chinese migrants to Mexico's most remote areas. The expected Chinese labor force, which Romero and his cohorts envisioned working under severe conditions for scant wages, distanced from the more cosmopolitan Mexican citizens, eventually materialized differently as robust Chinese *fronterizo* communities. For the Chinese, their world was shaped by social relationships among neighbors, friends, and kin, thereby portraying the U.S.-Mexico borderlands as a historically constructed and disputed intersection of immigration, settlement, and fluidity.

The need for Chinese laborers to make real Díaz's industrial vision a reality resulted in lax immigration laws and tax codes for entering Chinese immigrants,

mostly men, who capitalized on Díaz's lax residency and naturalization policies by marrying Mexican women. Many Chinese merchants successfully entered mixed union marriages with Mexican women and gained naturalized Mexican citizenship. Not only did Mexican citizenship allow Chinese Mexicans to cross borders relatively unhindered, but it also gave Chinese Mexicans standing to purchase land and pursue industry. Chinese merchants proved formidable business competitors to *mestizo* proprietors, particularly in border communities like northern Sonora, which had developed into an important trans-Pacific and transborder nexus point for labor migration and capital.

Beginning in the 1900s and exploding in the 1920s in the post-Revolutionary period, vehement anti-Chinese campaigns erupted in northern Sonora. Described as a "yellow plague," Sonoran city councils (*juntas*), levied highly racialized claims against Chinese Mexicans, merchants in particular, and accused them of undercutting Mexican merchants, selling inferior items at lower prices, and tapping into exclusive Chinese trans-Pacific networks not available to *mestizo* merchants.⁴⁵ Sonoran business and commercial councils publicly appeals to a Sonoran sense of *mestizo* nationalism that solidified its own social cohesion against Chinese peoples through violent Sinophobia. Sonoran business councils tapped into a Mexican

⁴⁵ Letter from Ignacio Burgos to José María Arana, September 7, 1917, JMAP.

common disdain for Chinese as the Revolutionary ideals of a cogent *mestizo* nationalism took hold in Sonora, as the Chinese, who benefited from Díaz's reform policies, were deemed enemies of the *mestizo* state. Besides economic and political grievances, anti-Chinese leaders also strongly objected to the marriage of Chinese men and Mexican women and voted to prohibit mixed Chinese and Mexican unions. Law after law in an embattled Sonora, many Chinese migrants believed that U.S. Southwest borderlands communities like Tucson might hold the promise of social acceptance in the wake of the Mexican North growing animosity.

An uncommon familial connection was forged between Lee Goon, a new Chinese immigrant, and Guillermo Valencia, a wealthy Mexican landowner from Tucson in 1908. This relationship, an unusual alliance built on economically beneficial arrangements and neighborhood bonds, crossed racial and cultural boundaries. Mary (nee Lee) Malaby, a descendant of both Goon and Valencia, and a Tucson resident of both Chinese and Mexican heritage, shared the origin of their acquaintance. Goon and Valencia, despite being an improbable pair, shared a story that mirrored other Chinese immigrants residing and operating in the Arizona-Mexico borderlands. Their friendship emerged from shared business in a local grocery store in south Tucson, where Valencia owned and Goon worked. As Goon rose from a mere clerk to eventually taking ownership of Valencia's store, their bond remained strong. Local politics imposed considerable challenges on their lives, as anti-

miscegenation laws prevailed and traditional cultural expectations of family formation confronted them.

Goon, while managing the grocery store, had a family back in China. Following his success in Tucson, he invited his teenage son, Lee Hop, to move from China to assist with the family store. A twist in the tale happened when Hop, despite being married to a woman in China, fell in love with Maria Trujillo, Guillermo Valencia's granddaughter. "And that's where the family came together," recounted Malaby, the eldest child of Hop and Trujillo.⁴⁶ The narrative of their relationship provides an intriguing glimpse into the trans-Pacific world, with the Arizona-Mexico borderlands at its core. Chinese immigrants like Goon and Hop found societal belonging in these borderlands, establishing personal bonds with Mexicans, their numerical and political majority. Their relationships, while economic at their core, were profoundly social and often worked against the backdrop of harsh exclusion laws. During an era marked by Chinese exclusion laws, the everyday interactions among the borderlands people, or *fronterizos*, played a crucial role in mitigating the deeply rooted Sinophobia associated with Chinese communities in the American West and wider Latin America. Despite state-level anti-miscegenation laws and solidifying racial lines, these communities cultivated networks of human connection and fostered a new understanding of borderlands family life. The story of Goon,

⁴⁶ Mary Malaby, interviewed by Priscilla M. Martínez, March 12, 2018.

Valencia, and their descendants illustrates how kinship networks reinforced a sense of social belonging and emphasized the personal and practical relationships between people of Chinese and Mexican origin in the Arizona borderlands. The narratives offer valuable insights into the interconnected social and cultural networks that bound communities across the North American Pacific coast and the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, often overlooked in written records. These oral histories provide a richer context for understanding the experiences of Chinese, Chinese American, and Chinese Mexican communities amid Chinese Exclusion and escalating Sinophobia in border states like Arizona and Sonora.

From these narratives, we learn that the social fabric of the Arizona-Mexico borderlands was woven from the quality and content of relationships among neighbors, friends, and family, often breaking racial barriers. The story of Goon and Valencia's alliance, for instance, reveals the U.S.-Mexico borderlands as historically constructed and contested intersections. During an interview given to the Tucson's Chinese Cultural Center's oral history project in April 2018, Malaby's recounting of her lineage underlined the dynamics and resilience of these intercultural connections. From an outsider's perspective, their lives may seem marked by hardship and tension because of the exclusion laws and prevalent Sinophobia. They continued to build and rely on their relationships, drawing strength from their communal bonds and contributing to a vibrant, interconnected borderlands society. Without generational

ties in southern Arizona to depend on, Chinese immigrants such as Goon and Hop often formed alliances mainly with Mexicans, who made up the numerical and political majority. They devised alternative mechanisms to establish a sense of social belonging and residential permanence, enabling them to navigate through the exclusionary socio-political landscape.

These stories underscored the most human of all inclinations—to form, maintain, and depend on relationships—shaped borderlands communities, giving them a fluid and transnational identity during times of harsh exclusion laws. For historians studying the Arizona-Sonoran region, the predominant narrative of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries revolved around sovereignty—delineated borders and established governing institutions. Oral stories of migration and border crossings like these provide a deeper context that reveals the experiences of Chinese, Chinese American, and Chinese Mexican individuals during the era of Chinese Exclusion and rising Sinophobia in border states like Arizona and Sonora. Their narratives shed light on the remarkable resilience and adaptability of these communities, embodying a spirit that persisted despite the adversities. These stories not only provide us with a glimpse into the complex web of their familial and social ties, but also remind us of the power of human connection in navigating through challenging socio-political landscapes.

The Mexican Pacific borderlands witnessed the active removal of Indigenous communities and the deliberate erasure of ethnic markers, which empowered Mexican and U.S. state officials to broker transnational water treaties, increase border policing, and construct regional irrigation projects. During Spanish colonialism, colonial indigeneity advocated for the progressive acculturation of Indigenous peoples.⁴⁷ Colonial officials compared the “origin of the American Indian” to Europeans, Africans, and Asians, framing cultural evolution with Indians on one end and Europeans on the other, with religion and Christianity at the core.⁴⁸ Progress was anchored in religion and measured through social advancement.⁴⁹ In the nineteenth century, Pimentel built on these concepts, recognizing that progress could vary within the nation. He believed this gradient should also apply to key post-independence institutions—property, family, and government.⁵⁰

While Pimentel and Juárez, through land reforms focused on incorporating Indigenous and *mestizo* populations, revealed a *mestizo* nationalism aimed at erasing indigeneity, Díaz's policies and prioritization of foreign investors unveiled a *mestizo*

⁴⁷ Manuel M. Marzal, *Historia de la Anthropologia Indigenista: México y Perú* (Peru: Pontificia Universidad Catolica del Peru Fondo Editorial, 1981), 20.

⁴⁸ Marzal, *Historia de la Anthropologia Indigenista*, 20.

⁴⁹ Lewis Henry Morgan, *Ancient Society: Or, Researches in the Lines of Human Progress, from Savagery, through Barbarism to Civilization (1877)* (Project Gutenberg, 2014): <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/45950> , pp. 48.

⁵⁰ Marzal, *Historia de la Anthropologia Indigenista*, 20.

nationalism that sought to erase indigeneity altogether. Díaz's acceptance and embrace of foreign capital and colonization efforts opened the Mexican Pacific borderlands to new relationships with land and intersecting dynamics of race and labor. Foreign investors and corporations imported settlers, taking advantage of Mexico's immigration policies to ensure a steady labor supply. The inclusion of Chinese immigrants in discussions of *mestizaje* revealed racial hierarchies in the Mexican Pacific borderlands, that contradicted the national promotion of racial hybridity. Later in Díaz's regime, his views on *indigenismo* shifted from socially removing *de facto* racial categories to a more insidious *mestizaje* racial project. In the late Porfirio era, *mestizaje* represented the aspiration of complete racial hybridity, approaching whiteness. Early twentieth-century *mestizaje* adopted European ideals of race rooted in scientific racism and eugenics theories. Díaz envisioned Mexico ultimately achieving near whiteness through racial hybridity. Ironically, the same racialization and rhetoric used against Chinese and Indigenous Mexicans crossed into the United States, where ethnic Mexicans were perceived as potential violent deviants or confined to an Indigenous working class limited to unskilled manual labor.

The debate surrounding *mestizaje*, or racial mixing, became more complex with the arrival of Chinese immigrants, that exposed racial hierarchies in the Mexican Pacific borderlands and contradicted the national endorsement of racial blending. In Díaz's later reign, his perspective on *indigenismo* shifted from socially removing *de*

facto racial categories to a subtler *mestizaje* racial strategy. This strategy encompassed a racial ideal and the practice of continuous racial mixing. Díaz envisioned Mexico's racial blend eventually leading to near whiteness, influenced by early twentieth century *mestizaje* ideals derived from European notions of race, scientific racism, and eugenics theories. Ironically, the racialization and derogatory rhetoric employed by Mexican officials against Chinese immigrants and Indigenous Mexicans resonated in the United States, where ethnic Mexicans were often seen as potential violent offenders or confined to an Indigenous working class limited to unskilled manual labor.

The intertwined histories of Indigenous communities, *mestizaje*, and racial dynamics in the Mexican Pacific borderlands underscore the intricate interplay of power, race, and identity. The active removal of Indigenous communities and the deliberate erasure of ethnic markers granted state officials the authority to broker transnational water treaties, increase border policing, and construct regional irrigation projects. These historical processes have had enduring implications, shaping not only the Mexican Pacific borderlands but also influencing the treatment and perception of ethnic Mexicans in the United States. Understanding this history is crucial for comprehending the ongoing challenges and complexities surrounding race, ethnicity, and power in the region.

CHAPTER SIX

Arbitrary Borders: Chinese Tucson

In their era, U.S. and Mexican national leaders might have perceived the camaraderie between Lee Goon and Jesus Valencia as unconventional. In the early 1900s, immigration laws caused a widening gap between Chinese migrants and already settled residents. These laws sparked Sinophobia in the American Northwest, California, Peru, Canada, and Mexico.¹ However, circumstances in Tucson, Arizona, deviated significantly from this pattern. Tucson had tensions between migrants and established residents but did not evolve into the anti-Chinese movements seen elsewhere. Initially, practical considerations and mutual necessity brought Valencia and Goon together. Valencia employed Goon, a migrant from China and former San Francisco resident, to manage his grocery store in Tucson. “And that’s how they met,” Mary Malaby, a Tucson resident of Chinese and Mexican heritage and the

¹ For examples of violent Sinophobia, see Beth Lew Williams, *The Chinese Must Go: Violence, Exclusion, and the Making of the Alien in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019); Grace Peña Delgado, *Making the Chinese Mexican: Global Migration, Exclusion, and Localism at the U.S.–Mexico Borderlands* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012); Andrew Gyory, *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Acts* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Benjamín Narvárez, “Becoming Sino-Peruvian: Post-Indenture Chinese in Nineteenth-Century Peru,” *Asian Journal of Latin American Studies* 29 (2016): 1–27; Kornel Chang, *Pacific Connections: The Making of the U.S.—Canadian Borderland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); and Sue Fawn Chung, *In Pursuit of Gold: Chinese American Miners and Merchants in the American West* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2014).

granddaughter of Lee Goon and great-granddaughter of Jesus Valencia, recalled during an oral history interview conducted by the Tucson Chinese Cultural Center (TCCC).² As the two men worked together, their bond strengthened and the Lee and Valencia families grew closer.

As Valencia neared retirement, he passed on his market to Goon. Goon, in turn, summoned his adolescent son from China to assist with the store operations. Lee and María Trujillo, Valencia's granddaughter, met at Goon's market and began a relationship. "And that is where the family came together," reflected Malaby, who is the eldest child of Hop and Trujillo.³ Despite the long-standing intimate relationship between Lee and Trujillo, their bond ultimately crumbled under the societal pressures of an unofficial union and the heavy burden of familial obligation and personal honor.

The story of the Lee-Valencia family, while fascinating, is not entirely unique or confined to local circumstances. Instead, it reflected a wider Mexican Pacific borderlands history, with Tucson at its heart. Migration networks brought Chinese individuals, like Lee Goon and Lee Hop, to the Arizona-Mexico border. Here, their commercial endeavors fostered both friendships and familial ties with established Mexican Tucsonans. Internally, personal bonds interwove Chinese migrants into Mexican communities, constructing a unique social fabric that diverged from the standard practices seen in Chinese diasporas elsewhere. Typically, these diasporas,

² Mary Malaby, interviewed by Priscilla M. Martínez, March 12, 2018.

³ Mary Malaby, interviewed by Priscilla M. Martínez, March 12, 2018.

even while dispersed, would orient towards China to maintain a collective identity. In Tucson, Chinese migrants like Lee Goon formed strong ties with Mexicans like Jesus Valencia to build a life in Southern Arizona.

Lee Hop's migration suggests that transnational connections remained intact. While cross-national connections played a role, the emotional family bonds and social dynamics that built Lee Goon's family in Tucson over generations proved more complex. During the initial three decades of the twentieth century, the unforeseen connections between Tucson locals and Lee Goon's family, as well as other Chinese migrants, were a critical factor in their integration into the city.⁴

The daily interactions that take place between family, friends, and different ethnic groups, such as the Lee and Valencia families, are frequently undervalued in the predominant historical narrative of Southern Arizona and the broader U.S.-Mexico border region. Yet, these narratives and the histories they highlight are pivotal in understanding how people from different backgrounds came together, built

⁴ For an example see, Madeline Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration between the United States and South China, 1882–1943* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); and Laurence J.C. Ma and Carolyn Cartier, *The Chinese Diaspora: Space, Place, Mobility, and Identity* (New York: Roman and Littlefield Publishers, 2002). There are several scholarly works on the Chinese in Tucson, including three seminal articles in the Autumn 1980 *Journal of Arizona History* (hereinafter *JAZH*). See specifically the work of Michael Fong, "Sojourners and Settlers: The Chinese Experience in Arizona," *JAZH* 21 (Autumn 1980): 227–56. Other notable scholarship includes Florence C. Lister and Robert H. Lister, *The Chinese of Early Tucson: Historic Archaeology from the Tucson Urban Renewal Project* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989); and Li Yang, "Lee Wee Kwon: Chinese Grocer in Tucson, 1917–1965," *JAZH* 52 (Spring 2010): 33–50.

communities under extraordinary circumstances, and remained resilient in the face of stringent immigration laws and racialized regimes. Throughout the nineteenth century, Mexico demonstrated the relative flexibility of *mestizaje*, a concept of state-sponsored racial hybridity, deeply rooted in local relationships marked by colonial remnants. During the Porfirian era, Mexico enthusiastically accepted the concept of scientific racism, especially regarding *mestizaje*, promoting the progressive whitening of the population as a vital part of Mexico's national identity. However, in the Mexican Pacific borderlands, the understanding of race and ethnicity was not static. It varied depending on the context and situation, strongly influenced by social relationships. In communities like Tucson, this proved particularly noticeable, as the institutional identities suggested by *mestizaje* failed to gain a foothold.

Examining everyday interactions helps us understand the bonds within tight-knit communities and challenges traditional labels such as alien and citizen or Mexican and American. In the early twentieth century, *mestizaje* in Mexico functioned as a rigid, institutional concept designed to eradicate Indigenous identity and exclude Chinese populations from Mexico's idealized racial identity. However, the daily interactions between Chinese and Mexican communities in Tucson demonstrated the inability of *mestizaje*'s strict framework to traverse the U.S.-Mexico border. The experiences of Chinese Mexicans in Tucson presented a distinctive type of cultural amalgamation and neutrality towards racial categorization and ethnic boundaries. Dual categories have a tendency to uphold the divisions created in legal

statutes and confirm existing assumptions, which contribute to the “border spectacle” defined by anthropologist Nicholas De Genova.⁵ The border spectacles have the potential to conceal both past and future transnational histories.

Unlike elsewhere, the world of Chinese migrants in Tucson was determined by the combination of transpacific networks and local arrangements. Mexicans experienced social fluidity in the region because of a diverse range of collective practices that deepened their social interactions. These relational structures had profound implications for Chinese Tucsonans. Despite their substantial contributions to local economies in northern Sonora, Chinese immigrants encountered xenophobia and discrimination, even as they strove to marry and integrate into Mexican society. In contrast, Mexican Tucsonans accepted Chinese cultural differences and regarded Chinese entrepreneurs not as rivals, as in Sonora, but as economic allies. By and large, Tucson’s Mexican community disregarded negative racial stereotypes about Chinese people and welcomed Chinese-Mexican partnerships in both business and romance.

Relationships in daily life provided a sense of civic belonging that was not based on traditional citizenship attributes, but on building families, running local business, and asserting local political rights, despite not having American citizenship by naturalization. By the mid-1920s, when exclusionary nationalism permeated the

⁵ Nicholas De Genova, “Spectacles of Migrant ‘Illegality’: The Scene of Exclusion, the Obscene of Inclusion,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36 (2013): 1180–98.

region, these ties of mutual trust and neighborhood bonds weakened. Nativism resulted in the racialization of Chinese, Mexican, and Chinese Mexicans as permanent outsiders or alien-citizens after the mid-1930s.

Oral histories offer valuable insight into the past of Chinese and Mexican Tucsonans. Incorporating oral history in this chapter enriches our understanding because life stories and family histories remind us of the inherent subjectivity of history. This methodological approach captures the subtle nuances of personal decisions, granting us a more human and intimate perspective on the past. Historians continue to rely on oral histories as an essential tool in their pursuit of a fuller, more nuanced, and empathetic understanding of history—an understanding often absent from official records and archives. Following scholar Wendy Brown’s interpretation of Michel Foucault’s concept of genealogy, I regard and use oral histories as a method to portray the past as a “field of eruptions forces, emergences, and partial formations.”⁶ As a lens to view the less conspicuous past, oral histories resist easy categorization and counter the silences and biases of conventional archives, thus generating new ways of understanding history that do not merely reinforce narratives of historical rupture or continuity with the past. Drawing from historian Michel-Rolph

⁶ Wendy Brown, *Politics Out of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 117.

Trouillot's observations about the "silences and mentions" that relegate the Haitian Revolution to the sidelines of French history, these principles can be extended to Chinese bonds with Mexicans.⁷ Traditional borderlands histories have largely silenced the close neighborhood and emotional connections with Mexicans, connections that actively defied laws and practices that sought to label them as harmful aliens.

In amplifying the voices of interethnic families and societies, oral histories can help scholars reconsider the legal and racial binaries that often dominate historical perceptions of the greater U.S.–Mexico borderlands region, and Tucson in particular. As historian Daniel James stated, "Oral sources can also take us beyond the limits of existing empirical data...[and] opens up a social and cultural universe beyond the realm of official statistics."⁸ At their most fundamental level, oral histories comprise recorded interviews between an interviewer and a narrator around a specific topic or a life history. Yet, through the process of long-form life histories conducted by a skilled interviewer and an engaged narrator, scholars can use oral history methods to glimpse the social structures and processes of the peoples and communities they study. Few other historical methods can provide quotidian insights into the roles of husbands and wives, familial relationships, and sexual intimacies

⁷ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press 1995), 26.

⁸ Daniel James, *Doña María's Story: Life, History, Memory, and Political Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 122.

both within and outside of committed partnerships. Likewise, memories of childhood told to interviewers can reveal sometimes seamless cultural blending or formative encounters with discrimination.

Collected between 2017 and 2019 with members of Tucson's Chinese Cultural Center, the "Tucson Speaks! Finding Place, Finding Home" oral history project revealed personal histories of deeply rooted, interethnic relationships between Mexican, Chinese, and Indigenous peoples brokered over generations. Adding to the limited, but rich, archives of Asian-descent peoples living in Arizona, these eight long-form, recorded interviews make visible the vibrant, interconnected social and cultural networks that bound communities in borderlands spaces like Tucson, often absent from archival records. Unedited, raw interviews provide insight into individual and community understandings of racial hierarchies, a narrator's personal identities and value systems, their roles as part of multiple family units, their place within their local community, their sense of belonging, and their relationship to the state at large and their understanding of citizenship. During these sessions, interviewees not only forge their own understandings of historical memory, but they also disclosed portraits of family formations within the broader context of transpacific-borderlands spaces and nationalism that other sources cannot. Once recorded, historians analyze, deconstruct, and recast these oral texts within their historical context, as I have done with the Lee-Valencia story.

While memories can be imprecise, the true strength of the method is less about the chronology of events and more about their meanings. As historian Alessandro Portelli argued, “what is really important is that memory is not a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings... these changes [in memory] reveal the narrators’ effort to make sense of the past and give a form to their lives.”⁹ An oral history is not a complete, perfect source; in fact, it is quite the opposite. Because of the fragmented nature of memory, oral history sources feel incomplete by nature and leave a lingering feeling of countless stories left untold or even unremembered. Without these oral histories, rich stories like Mary Malaby’s about the social relationships that begot her family provide borderlands scholars with a history they would have missed otherwise. As Portelli argued, “historical work excluding oral sources (where available) is incomplete by definition.”¹⁰ Under the guidance of a skilled interviewer, long-form oral histories can transform Malaby’s recollections into a fuller mapping of local relations and power structures. Animated by oral history praxis, a historian can take Malaby’s narrative and reconstruct the intricate webbing of daily choices *fronterizos* (borderlanders) made to counter, circumvent, or navigate a multitude of state policies. Interviews with narrators like Malaby point toward the many local accommodations negotiated in borderlands spaces like Tucson. From tales of business partnerships and friendships transcending

⁹ Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 52.

¹⁰ Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories*, 55.

discriminatory property laws to memories of family resilience and strength in the wake of long-standing anti-miscegenation laws, stories like Malaby's become simultaneously transnational and local as *fronterizos* navigated multiple identities.

Several scholars of Arizona history have successfully used oral histories in fruitful ways. For instance, Mary Logan Rothschild and Patricia Preciado Martin used oral records to catch the commonplace stories, whether of Arizona women or of predominantly ethnic Mexican ranching and mining communities from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries in southern Arizona.¹¹ Barbara Kingsolver used oral histories to illustrate the kinetic lives of miner's wives and female labor organizers in Arizona in the 1980s.¹² Culling oral accounts to sketch Mexican community struggles, Gloria Holguín Cuádriz unveiled narratives of ethnic Mexican resilience as multigenerational families navigated Southwest Cotton Company life in the camps of Litchfield Park in the Salt River Valley from 1916 to 1986.¹³ Historian Lydia Otero blended oral history and archival research to capture how Arizona's nonwhite communities navigated post-World War II urban renewal projects that

¹¹ See Mary Logan Rothschild, *Doing What the Day Brought: An Oral History of Arizona Women* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992). See Patricia Preciado Martin, *Songs My Mother Sang to Me: An Oral History of Mexican American Women* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992).

¹² See Barbara Kingsolver, *Holding the Line: Women in the Great Arizona Mine Strike of 1983* (Ithaca, N.Y.: ILR Press, 1996).

¹³ See Gloria Holguín Cuádriz, "Artist's Statement: Unearthing and Recovering Memories in a Company Town: Litchfield Park, Arizona," *Chicana/Latina Studies 11* (Fall 2011): 9–17.

sought to erase multiethnic neighborhoods like *La Calle* in south Tucson.¹⁴ Through extensive oral history work, Otero recorded the stories of Mexican, Mexican American, and Chinese communities in Tucson while historical institutions like the Tucson Heritage Foundation and the Arizona Historical Society continued to highlight an Anglo-centric, pioneer narrative of Arizona's settlement. With urban renewal projects that cast Tucson's ethnic neighborhoods like *La Placita* as blighted areas, Otero's work highlighted how, if not for oral sources, institutional memory had the power to erase the Mexican community's foundational contribution to the town's development altogether.

The Arizona Memory Project database, managed by Arizona State Library, features several oral history projects including the "Capturing Arizona's Stories" project that makes searchable oral history interviews donated by communities across the state.¹⁵ Collections like the "Perspectives of the Past: Pima County Oral History Project and Archive Tucson" featured publicly accessible interviews with Tucson-area residents that trace stories of change and resilience in the mid- to late twentieth century.¹⁶ While these accounts are rich and complex, few collections house

¹⁴ See Lydia Otero, *La Calle: Spatial Conflicts and Urban Renewal in a Southwestern City* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010).

¹⁵ For more information, consult the Arizona Memory Project website, especially "Capturing Arizona's Stories," <https://azmemory.azlibrary.gov/digital/collection/asacapture> (last accessed August 13, 2020).

¹⁶ For more Tucson-specific oral history projects, see "Perspective of the Past: Pima County Oral History Project," available online at <https://azmemory.azlibrary.gov/digital/collection/pimacent> (last accessed August 13,

interviews conducted with people of Asian descent living in the Arizona-Mexico borderlands.

Chinese communities comprised a significant part of daily life within this region. The most notable collections that foreground Chinese voices in Arizona include Sara Bush's *Arizona's Gold Mountain: Oral Histories of Chinese Americans in Phoenix* and the Desert Jade Woman's Club recordings. Bush's *Arizona's Gold Mountain* is a collection of the written summaries of nine interviews conducted with Chinese Americans living in the greater Phoenix area.¹⁷ The Desert Jade Woman's Club collection comprises a selection of sound clips with former members of the Woman's Club, taken from longer interviews.¹⁸ According to the Oral History Association, the professional organization for oral historians, the method underscores four key tenets: oral histories should be extensive, collaborative, unaltered, and accessible to scholars and communities for future use.¹⁹ While rich and informative, Bush's *Arizona's Gold Mountain* and the Desert Jade recordings are not accessible to scholars as unedited, long-form oral recordings, thus limiting their usefulness for future scholarship.

2020). For Archive Tucson, see [https:// www.archivetucson.com/](https://www.archivetucson.com/) (last accessed August 13, 2020).]

¹⁷ See Sara Bush, *Arizona's Gold Mountain: Oral Histories of Chinese Americans in Phoenix* (Tempe, Ariz.: Sara M. Bush, 2000).

¹⁸ For the Desert Jade Woman's Club, see <https://azmemory.azlibrary.gov/digital/collection/djwc> (last accessed August 13, 2020).

¹⁹ For a summary of oral history's core principles, see the Oral History Association's website, <https://www.oralhistory.org/oha-core-principles/> (last accessed August 13, 2020).

Marked by a lengthy and cooperative process, oral histories underscored the dynamic relationship between an informed interviewer and an engaged narrator. Crucially, oral histories function as audio products that should not only contribute to the primary interviewer's personal project, but they also need to endure beyond their initial purpose as open, unedited sources for future generations of scholars. With this understanding, the most versatile windows into Chinese life in border communities like Tucson remain the Esther Tang and Thomas Tang transcripts housed at the Arizona Historical Society in Tucson and Tempe, respectively.²⁰ Both files contain over an hour of raw interview data. The Tang life histories provide invaluable glimpses into everyday life in the borderlands. Conscious of this archival gap, the oral history project "Tucson Speaks! Finding Place, Finding Home" records the voices of a southwestern Chinese community, whose roots reach as far back as the mid-nineteenth century.²¹

²⁰ See Esther Tang, interviewed by Pam Stevenson, March 20, 2001, Arizona History Makers Oral History: In Our Own Words: Reflections and Recollections, PP-OHI, Box 22, Folder 15a, Arizona Historical Society (hereinafter AHS), Tempe; Thomas and Lucy Tang, interviewed by K. Trimble, April 20, 1978, AV 0412-07, AHS, Tucson.

²¹ "Tucson Speaks! Finding Place, Finding Home" oral history project is maintained by the Tucson Chinese Cultural Center's History Program, see <http://www.tucsonchinese.org/chinese-history-tucson/> (last accessed August 13, 2020). As of May 2020, Tucson Speaks! contains eight long-form, unedited oral history interviews with nine different narrators. These interviews will be available on the project website set to launch Winter 2023, see www.tucsonspeaks.org. Currently, the project is open-ended, with further interviews planned in 2024.

Discussions with Chinese Tucsonans and Chinese Mexicans like Raymond Lim, another “Tucson Speaks!” narrator, revealed complex marriage and intimate partnership arrangements between his grandparents, Lee Kwong and Lai Ngan. With their lives spanning China, California, Sonora, and Arizona, Lee Kwong and Lai Ngan worked to stabilize both family and fortune amid growing Sinophobia in the late nineteenth century. Stories like Mary Malaby’s show how anti-miscegenation laws shaped not only her parents’ lives but also her own relationship with her eventual husband George Malaby, an ethnic Mexican. Childhood memories of the frequency of non-traditional, multiethnic families, and neighborhoods reflect the historical presence and current persistence of ethnic fluidity in the Arizona-Mexico borderlands. Through community-based oral history projects like “Tucson Speaks!,” children and grandchildren like Mary Malaby and Raymond Lim have shared stories of their ancestors like Lee Goon, Jesus Valencia, Lee Kwong, and Lai Ngan that reach back across multiple geographies.

When he stepped off the passenger steamship at the port of San Francisco, Lee Kwong entered a country on the precipice of civil war. Called to serve in his newly adopted country, Lee enlisted in the U.S. Navy in May 1862.²² Three months later in July of that same year, desperate for Union soldiers, the U.S. Congress passed an act that stated that any foreign-born male living in the United States not yet

²² Carol A. Shively, ed., *Asian and Pacific Islanders and the Civil War* (Washington, D.C.: The National Park Service, 2015), 175; Yang, “In Search of a Homeland,” 343.

naturalized at age twenty-one could enlist and earn full citizenship if they could prove at least one year's residency.²³ Lee served for three years on a Mississippi River gunboat and mail vessel as a cabin boy, one of the few jobs open to non-white soldiers.²⁴ He was shot five times in service to his country.²⁵ In discussing his grandfather Lee, Raymond Lim noted, "Because he was in the Civil War, later on he was granted a citizen. They gave him citizenship in the United States."²⁶ In 1874 in St. Louis, Missouri, Lee Kwong filed for and received his naturalization papers, which gave him the ability to cross national borders as a citizen in an era of increasing Sinophobia. Lee crossed state and international borders throughout his life. By the turn of the twentieth century, he resided in San Francisco, but anti-Chinese sentiment led to local laws that barred Lee from voting regardless of his naturalized status.²⁷

For Chinese migrants like Lee and his family, movement and mobility became a way of life until they settled in southern Arizona. In the late nineteenth century, the porousness of the U.S.–Mexico border allowed Chinese men like Kwong Lee, now naturalized through military service, to move unhindered across national borders. But with Chinese exclusion laws (1882), his legal status yielded to racial markers of difference. Raymond Lim recounts how his grandfather negotiated

²³ Act of July 17, 1862, Ch. 200, §21, 12 Stat. 594, 597.

²⁴ "Old Chinaman Union Soldier," *Riverside (Calif.) Daily Press*, July 23, 1909.

²⁵ "Chinese Civil War Veteran to Vote," *San Francisco Call*, July 23, 1909.

²⁶ Raymond Lim, interviewed by Priscilla Martínez, August 28, 2017.

²⁷ "Chinaman to Vote in Next Election," *San Diego Union*, July 24, 1909.

citizenship in the face of Chinese Exclusion: “And so he was a citizen. And then because of the Chinese Exclusion Act—They [the federal government] revoked his citizenship. So they took it away from him.”²⁸

To escape the mounting Sinophobia in California, Kwong took his oldest son Percy and moved to La Colorada, Sonora, to run and operate a gold mine in the early 1890s, leaving behind his wife and two children in San Francisco. Raymond Lim recounts his grandfather’s decision to move to Sonora, “After he went to Mexico and he worked and he learned how to make cigars... then, I guess he got the urge to go hunt for gold so he had a little gold mine down there, and then that’s when he took... the oldest kid down to Mexico.”²⁹ Migration networks accommodated men originating from south China, but they also obliged women and children who lived along the Pacific Coast of the United States. When Kwong’s wife, Lai Ngan, left San Francisco for Sonora under extreme duress, for example, she accessed the migration network for Mexico. Ngan boarded a steamer for Guaymas, Sonora, with her daughters, Carmen and Aurelia, to track down Kwong, and their son, Percy, after two years of separation.

Leaving home was not an easy decision for Ngan, but childhood experiences might have prepared her for transnational travel. Ngan was born and raised in San Francisco. After her father retired from the Chinese opera in 1883 and returned to

²⁸ Raymond Lim, interviewed by Priscilla M. Martínez, August 28, 2017.

²⁹ “Aged Chinese Serve 3 Years in Civil War: Order Cancelling Naturalization Certificate Signed,” *San Francisco Call*, August 19, 1909.

Hong Kong, and until her marriage to Kwong, Ngan's maternal aunts cared for her. Before her father's retirement, she had accompanied her father to Chinese theaters in Hong Kong and had become familiar with, and perhaps confident about, the challenges of crossing the Pacific Ocean bound for China. These earlier travel experiences came in handy for Ngan as a married adult. When she married Kwong, she was fifteen years old, and he was thirty-five. For a while, the bond of shared family experiences kept the marriage whole, but in the face of hardship and a twenty-year age difference, Kwong left San Francisco with Percy for the fabled mines of Sonora, abandoning his wife and two daughters. Although she withstood the separation for a while, Ngan was undeterred by her unfamiliarity with the Spanish language and her lack of knowledge of the specific whereabouts of her husband and son in Sonora.³⁰

According to Raymond Lim, "My grandmother knew he was down there so she took off and went to look for him... she spoke a little bit of English, but I don't know how much. Didn't speak any Spanish... the only word that she knew was *agua* (water)."³² The three intrepid travelers found Kwong and Percy in La Colorada, a small mining town south of Hermosillo. The couple reunited and over the next ten years, Ngan worked in a Chinese-owned shoe factory, conceived four more children with Kwong, and witnessed the futility of her husband's mining scheme. In 1903, not wanting her children to become Mexican citizens, Ngan moved her family to

³⁰ Raymond Lim, interviewed by Priscilla M. Martínez, August 28, 2017.

Nogales, Arizona, where she tended a small store. There, in the store, her husband sold Chinese lottery tickets.³¹

Once they were in Nogales, local webs of support absorbed Ngan and her family into a small but supportive Chinese community. There, she and Kwong were never without jobs or without the help of neighbors. When Ngan and her family crossed back into the United States, several hundred Chinese had already traversed the line between Arizona and Sonora, although a few had stopped for interminable stretches of time in Arizona border towns. Despite federal exclusionary laws, the family was able to live transnational lives and join communities in California, Sonora, and Arizona.

After living in Sonora for some years, Kwong returned to San Francisco in 1907. In 1908, Kwong attempted to vote in a local city election. However, local officials barred him from voting because he was Chinese, a naturalized citizen of the United States in the height of exclusionary laws, and because he had been living in Mexico. Later in 1909, U.S. district Judge John J. de Haven signed an order cancelling the naturalization Kwong had held since 1874. After Lee Kwong's death in 1913 in San Francisco, Ngan remarried, left San Francisco, and joined her daughters and son in Tucson, Arizona, in 1918.³¹

³¹ "Information Relating to the Family of Lee Kwong and Lai Ngan from Interview with Marían Lim," February 27, 1979; and two other documents authored by Marían Lim, the fifth daughter of Lai Ngan and Lee Kwong, Folder 38, MS 1242, AHS.

Ngan's exit from Sonora coincided with the emergence of anti-Chinese campaigns across the northern region of Sonora and along the Mexican Pacific borderlands. Throughout the revolutionary era and the subsequent civil war, tension between Mexican and Chinese Mexican communities steadily increased. The localized fallout from intra-Chinese political conflicts, or "tong" wars, in conjunction with *mestizo* resentment towards the perceived affluence of Chinese Mexican merchants amid widespread Mexican poverty, fueled an escalating anti-Chinese discourse.³² This deeply entrenched Sinophobia gradually wove its way into Mexico's national identity through narratives of *mestizaje*.³³ Unlike in the United States, the Porfirian government permitted Chinese immigrants to become naturalized Mexican citizens, which enabled them to marry Mexican women without restriction. Mexican women played a crucial role in supporting Chinese men, who were the primary migrants flooding into Mexico in search of employment following the implementation of the U.S.'s Chinese Exclusion Act. Chinese men reciprocated by providing Mexican women and their families with wealth and economic stability during a period of civil unrest. Due to their relatively small numbers, Sonoran Mexican Chinese could not form ethnic enclaves like their counterparts in the United States, instead, they integrated into Mexican society. Chinese men, through both

³² Delgado, *Making the Chinese Mexican*, 159-165.

³³ Delgado, *Making the Chinese Mexican*, 165.

marriage and labor, actively assimilated into everyday Sonoran life.³⁴ As colleagues, Sonoran Chinese Mexican and Mexican *vecinos* formed crucial economic working-class ties.

Chinese businesses also became significant hubs for commercial and cultural exchange. During the revolutionary years, Mexican neighbors and authorities defended Chinese businesses against vandalism, robbery, and looting.³⁵ Chinese business owners also established strong ties with Sonora's Indigenous populations who preferred to conduct business with Chinese merchants. Yaqui natives, particularly women, frequently patronized businesses owned by Chinese merchants in Guaymas, such as the Fu Pau Hermanos shop run by two Chinese brothers, Augustin and Pablo. Local Guaymas historian Juan Ramirez Cisneros revealed in an interview with Sonoran historian Julia María Schiavone Camacho that "[Yaqui women] preferred that business for the simple reason that its owners... two gentlemanly Chinese who were impeccably dressed in suits, attended [to the Yaquis] personally, speaking to them in their own language, which [Augustine and Pablo] commanded as perfectly as they did Spanish."³⁶ Chinese entrepreneurs in Sonora capitalized on their

³⁴ Julia María Schiavone Camacho, *Chinese Mexicans: Transpacific Migration and the Search for a Homeland, 1900-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 26-28.

³⁵ Schiavone Camacho, *Chinese Mexicans*, 28.

³⁶ Schiavone Camacho, *Chinese Mexicans*, 30. Juan Ramírez Cisneros as quoted by Camacho.

business savvy and cultural and linguistic skills to build local bonds with their neighbors.

By the 1920s, the image of a respected, affluent Chinese merchant had become commonplace, even amidst local business conflicts between Chinese and Mexican business owners. Marriages between Chinese men and Mexican women became the most visible manifestation of Mexico's evolving perspectives on the Chinese community at large. Between the 1880s and 1920s in Sonora, Mexican communities viewed mixed marriages between Chinese men and Mexican women from two distinct angles. On one hand, Mexican families and Chinese suitors saw these marriages as mutually beneficial, seeking economic stability (for Mexicans) and social integration (for Chinese). Marriages to Mexican women anchored Chinese men in Sonoran society and enabled the children from their mixed unions to access land as agricultural workers and growers. It was not uncommon for Mexican families to arrange marriages to Chinese men in pursuit of mutually advantageous partnerships with the potential for a love match. On the other hand, some families vehemently prohibited any romantic or sexual relationships between their daughters and Chinese men. Despite patriarchal pleas to preserve Mexican women's honor and filial piety, Chinese men and Mexican women often engaged in secret relationships that, when discovered, ignited racial animosity in local communities.³⁷

³⁷ Schiavon Camacho, *Chinese Mexicans*, 31-34.

Militant anti-Chinese activists like José María Arana, active from 1916 until his death in 1921, exploited the perceived violation of patriarchal authority and feminine innocence, recasting them as metaphors for Chinese deceit and their detrimental influence on Mexico's national character. In a public speech in 1916, Arana vilified the Chinese with stark imagery, saying they "had tentacles of an octopus, the immunity of Mithidates, the talons of a bird of prey, and the venom of a serpent."³⁸ Arana later established and published *Pro Patria* (Pro-Fatherland), a periodical dedicated to his anti-Chinese crusade. Its publication tagline read "Either them or us."³⁹ Arana's influence profoundly shaped anti-Chinese propaganda that leveraged revolutionary rhetoric and imagery to highlight the alleged moral deficiencies and vices of the Chinese community, calling on Mexican patriotism to combat this perceived "Chinese plague."⁴⁰ Arana argued that the traditional Mexican traits of warm hospitality, laid-back attitudes, and apathy had facilitated Chinese immigrants' entry into Mexico and subsequent prosperity, potentially threatening the nation's economic and cultural sovereignty. He adamantly contended that an insurmountable cultural divide existed between Mexicans and Chinese, pointing to marked differences in racial background, societal customs, and economic practices.⁴¹

³⁸ Speech of José María Arana at Cananea, April 29, 2016, tomo 3083, paquete 1, expediente 2, Archivo General del Estado de Sonora, Hermosillo, Sonora.

³⁹ *Pro-Patria*'s log line appeared on the first page of every issue.

⁴⁰ "Document Regarding Report by Cesario G. Soriano," April 4, 1918, JMAP.

⁴¹ José María Arana, *Pro Patria*, August 1, 1917, 1.

In response to the growing tension, the Chinese community in Sonora took defensive actions, highlighting their diligent work ethic, integrity, and significant contributions to the Mexican socio-economic structure. However, rising incidents of violence and economic constraints pressured Chinese and Chinese Mexican families to consider relocation, primarily towards U.S. border towns such as Tucson. Despite anti-Chinese sentiment in the United States, those Chinese and Chinese Mexican immigrants who successfully entered the country often leveraged pre-existing robust transnational networks. Individuals like Ngan found a cultural and social refuge in diverse, multi-ethnic communities such as Tucson, despite the prevailing climate of prejudice.

Despite its multiethnic composition, discriminatory legislation permeated borderlands towns like Tucson, most visibly in matters of property and marriage. For Chinese migrants like Lee Goon and Lee Hop, the deeply rooted ties with *tucsonenses* ultimately anchored their communities and families. Soon after his arrival in Tucson in 1908, Lee Goon blended into southern Arizona's multiethnic landscape. Settling in Barrio Ochoa, Lee Goon found community and put down roots in the town's southside, eventually opening a small grocery store.⁴² Mary Malaby remembered how her grandfather Lee Goon, a Chinese national, formed his close and intimate friendship with Jesus Valencia, a prominent rancher and grocery store

⁴² "Lee Hop: East Meet West," *Arizona Daily Star* (Tucson), June 9, 1974; "Chinese Grocers Part of Our History," *Arizona Daily Star*, August 21, 2001.

owner: “I guess [my grandfather] had a little money and he wanted to start a store, but he ran into Valencia . . . and [my grandfather] worked at the Valencia store . . . while Valencia . . . worked at the ranch.”⁴³ For years, Lee Goon ran and operated the California Grocery in south Tucson while Jesus Valencia operated the California Meat Market. This symbiotic relationship between a Chinese merchant and a Mexican property owner represented a fundamental building block of community life in borderlands communities like Tucson. By 1913, Lee Goon was managing two grocery stores, including one under his own name two streets over from California Grocery. While Lee Goon established himself as a merchant in Tucson, he frequently traveled from Arizona to China to visit his wife and children still living there.

Malaby’s own father, Lee Hop, was the first of Lee Goon’s children to journey from China to Tucson. Arriving in Tucson in 1926 while in his late teens, Lee Hop attended school in the *barrio* and quickly adapted to life in Arizona by learning to speak English, Spanish, and Tohono O’odham.⁴⁴ After three years, Lee Hop ended his formal education and transitioned to owning and managing his grocery store, Lee Hop Grocery at 1600 S. 6th Street in downtown Tucson, which earned him an exemption from the Chinese exclusion laws that targeted unskilled laborers.⁴⁵ But by the time Lee Hop readied himself for the life of a merchant in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Arizona legislature had passed the Alien Land Law of

⁴³ Mary Malaby, interviewed by Priscilla M. Martínez, March 12, 2018.

⁴⁴ “Lee Hop: East Meet West,” *Arizona Daily Star*, June 9, 1974.

⁴⁵ Mary Malaby, interviewed by Priscilla M. Martínez, March 12, 2018.

1921, which “prohibited aliens ineligible for citizenship from purchasing Arizona realty.” Under the 1921 law, Arizona state legislators, like those in other states, specifically targeted Asian migrants as a class of people explicitly barred from citizenship under exclusion laws.³⁹ Although the Alien Land Law prohibited “any alien ineligible for citizenship,” including Afghans and British Indians, the provision had its greatest impact on ethnic Japanese farmers whose family-based strategies for agricultural production competed with Anglo growers.⁴⁰ Thus, by preventing landownership or leasing for Japanese farmers among others, the Alien Land Law paved the way for Anglo-controlled agricultural regions in the Salt River Valley.⁴⁶ In Tucson, Chinese merchants like Lee Goon and Lee Hop still thrived despite the imposition of the Alien Land Law. In fact, Chinese merchant listings in the Tucson city directory grew annually.⁴⁷ Sometimes, Chinese store owners leased land or storefronts from Mexican and Anglo Tucsonans to circumvent state restrictions that

⁴⁶ Jack August, “The Anti-Japanese Crusade in Arizona’s Salt River Valley, 1934–1935,” *Arizona and the West* 21 (Summer 1979): 114–15. At the passing of the bill, the *Tucson Citizen* nicknamed the legislation the “anti-Jap land bill. “Anti-Japanese Land Bill Is Passed by Upper House, As Bar to Owning Lands in Arizona,” *Tucson Citizen*, February 1, 1921. For the text of the Arizona Alien Land Law see Charles F. Curry, “Alien Land Laws and Alien Rights,” House of Representatives, 67th Cong. 1st Sess., Doc. No. 89, pp. 36–37.

⁴⁷ See Tucson city directories, available online in “U.S. City Directories, 1821–1989,” indexed database and digital images, at www.ancestry.com (accessed August 5, 2020), for years 1921 (pp. 275–76), 1923 (pp. 447–48), 1924 (pp. 326–27), 1926 (pp. 349–51), 1928 (pp. 462–63), 1930 (pp. 366–67).

accounted for the persistence of long-standing relationships like Lee and Valencia and an economically stable Chinese Tucson community.

The coupling of Chinese men—whether with Chinese or Mexican women—continued to be the most challenging experience of daily life. Extended separation, the norm for both merchants and laborers living in the United States, not only created a tremendous strain on Chinese marriages but also forced the Chinese to reconstruct their families in response to immigration and anti-miscegenation laws. There were exceptional situations, but these circumstances were favorable and unusual. Most Chinese men faced formidable barriers in bringing their Chinese wives into the United States. Newly arrived Chinese women faced the challenge of a mandated court appearance to prove marriage to a “lawfully domiciled Chinese merchant.” Chinese women made up 12.6 percent of the U.S. Chinese population in 1920 but constituted less than 10 percent of Tucson’s Chinese population.⁴³ In Tucson, married Chinese men faced legal barriers in their attempts to facilitate the legal entry of their Chinese wives, and single Chinese men often struggled in their efforts to marry Mexican women in Arizona. Residential proximity with Mexicans, considered “white” by Arizona law, complicated day-to-day relations between residents in El Barrio. In 1901, Arizona lawmakers passed a second and harsher anti-miscegenation law that prohibited “all marriages of persons of Caucasian blood, or their descendants, with negroes [*sic*], Mongolians or Indians, and their descendants.”⁴⁴ According to territorial law, it declared all such marriages “null and void,” and those

solemnizing mixed marriages were subject to fines of up to \$300 dollars and imprisonment up to six months.⁴⁸ Faced with legal prohibition, marriages between Chinese men and Mexican women remained rare in the first two decades of the twentieth century.⁴⁹ Ten years later, the territorial census listed three women—two Mexican and one French—living with Chinese men. Between the three families, there were eleven children of mixed-race parentage.⁵⁰ Although there was an increase in the number of Chinese children, the two Mexicans listed in the 1900 census were the same women listed in the 1910 census.

Despite their reputation as excellent providers, most Chinese men in Tucson remained unmarried. For laborers—who made up the vast majority of Chinese in Tucson—the prospect of marriage was less likely than for merchants. Combined with a skewed gender ratio, harsh anti-miscegenation laws forced most Chinese men in Tucson to live a bachelor’s life. Rather than pursue social integration through marriage ties with Anglos, the Chinese continued to assert themselves in Tucson society through daily interactions with Mexican residents. Lily Olivares married Frank Valenzuela in 1923. Olivares and Valenzuela lived with his parents in Tucson

⁴⁸ *Revised Statutes of Arizona*, sec. 11, p. 3097. By stipulating marriage laws in this way, legislators placed a person of mixed heritage in an untenable situation. If the individual descended from a Chinese father and Mexican mother, by an extension of the law he or she was prevented from marrying a white person or other Mexican, or another person of mixed heritage. In effect, this person could not legally marry any Arizonan.

⁴⁹ Lister and Lister, *Chinese of Early Tucson*, 5.

⁵⁰ 1910 U.S. Census.

until Valenzuela abandoned her even though she was pregnant with their daughter Stella, and had another child by Valenzuela, Sylvia.⁵¹ When Olivares later married her second husband, Raymond Liu, her two daughters born to Valenzuela kept their biological father's surname. Raymond Liu raised Sylvia and Stella Valenzuela from the time they were infants, despite his wife's past relationship. "That's the only papa they know," proclaimed Lily Liu about her children's relationship with Raymond Liu.⁵²

Besides legal barriers, life in the transpacific borderlands for Chinese migrants and their Mexican spouses also meant defying social customs and coping with cultural ruptures that followed. Shortly after Lee Hop opened his own grocery store in Barrio Ochoa in the early 1930s, he started a courtship with María Antonia Trujillo, a young Mexican Tucsonan. Born in 1916, María was the youngest daughter of Guillermo Trujillo, a Mexican national and railroad worker, and Juana Valencia, a homemaker and daughter of Lee Goon's longtime friend Jesus Valencia.⁵³ In 1933, Lee Hop and Mary Trujillo entered a committed partnership and started a family together despite anti-miscegenation laws prohibiting their union.⁵⁴ For nearly a decade, Lee and Trujillo built a life together in south Tucson and raised their nine

⁵¹ Lily Olivares Valenzuela Liu, oral history interview, July 5, 1984, Southern Pacific Railroad Project, AV-0001-15, 6, 8, 15, 19, 21, AHS.

⁵² Valenzuela Liu, oral history interview, 15, 26.

⁵³ U.S. Census, Juana Trujillo, Tucson, Pima County, Arizona, roll m-t0627-00111, p. 6A, enumeration district 10-31.

⁵⁴ "Lee Hop: East Met West," *Arizona Daily Star*, June 9, 1974.

children. “We all lived in the back of the store,” recalled Malaby, Lee and Trujillo’s oldest child.⁵⁵ However, census data and city directories for years following 1933 list María Antonia Trujillo as a single woman living with her mother, Juana (née Valencia) Trujillo and a few children as the years progressed. Mary Malaby’s own birth certificate, dated 1934, lists María Antonia Trujillo as a sole parent with the father’s information left blank.⁵⁶ In the eyes of the state, Trujillo appeared to be a single Mexican mother living with her parents, while city directories presented Lee Hop as a single Chinese merchant living alone in Tucson. Malaby’s childhood memories show how Lee and Trujillo eluded state scrutiny of their unsanctioned union. Separate addresses provided an effective paper shield for the interracial couple and their children who lived behind their family store like many grocery owners at the time.

Life for the Lee-Trujillo family grew even more complicated after 1937 when Lee Hop’s father, Lee Goon, retired as a merchant in Tucson and returned to China to live out the rest of his days. Upon returning to China and under Chinese cultural customs, Lee Goon secured a Chinese bride for his son Lee Hop despite the ever-growing family his son had built in Tucson. For Lee Hop, María Trujillo, and their young children, this action presented a major complication for their family. While the

⁵⁵ “Chinese Grocer Part of Our Community,” *Arizona Daily Star*, August 21, 2001; Mary Malaby, interviewed by Priscilla M. Martínez, March 12, 2018.

⁵⁶ Birth Certificate for Mary Trujillo, August 15, 1934, State File No. 504, Arizona State Board of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics, Tucson, Pima County, Arizona.

family stayed together for several more years, the pressures of an unsanctioned union coupled with Lee Hop's familial duties in China caused an irreparable fissure in the Lee-Trujillo household. For a time, Lee balanced his duty to his wife and eventual child in China with the needs of his wife and children in Tucson. But the strain of a legally unsanctioned marriage combined with an awareness of her partner's dual life in China weighed heavily on Trujillo. According to Mary Malaby, the cultural tension caused a breaking point in her family: "Well, my mother left us afterwards, because my father couldn't marry her because he was married in China." Left with nine young children, Lee Hop brought his wife over from China hoping she would help care for his Arizona family. Upon arrival in Tucson, Lee's Chinese wife appeared resentful of her new home, her new role as a grocer's wife, and her new blended Chinese Mexican family. "The kids were still young, so he brought his wife and son from China...and then, she didn't like the kids either! So my father said, 'Get the hell out of here too!' And then he sent her somewhere else too . . . [And] he stayed with all the kids," recounted Mary Malaby.

After about a year of living as a newly formed family, Lee decided to send his Chinese wife and son back to China.⁵⁷ The cultural rupture caused by the Chinese custom of multiple families and legal restrictions forced Lee Hop to struggle to find a stable footing for himself and his blended family. But Lee Hop and his family

⁵⁷ Mary Malaby, interviewed by Priscilla M. Martínez, March 12, 2018.

ultimately found support in the form of Juana Valencia Trujillo and her family. Despite her daughter's decision to separate from Lee Hop, Juana Valencia Trujillo considered Lee Hop and his children her family. For a time, Mary Malaby and her sister Stella lived with Juana Trujillo in Tucson's Second Ward on 22nd Street. "She was an angel, but very strict with us," Malaby said about her grandmother. Likewise, the rest of Lee Hop's children lived under the guardianship of their Valencia-Trujillo *tias* (aunts), who all lived within walking distance from Juana Trujillo's home. "The family was always very close because we always had the parties at [my grandmother's] house," Malaby declared with a chuckle. Later, when Mary Malaby and her sister Stella married, they both assumed guardianship of their younger siblings.

Importantly, the reinforcement of the Lee-Trujillo familial ties underscored how ethnic Mexican neighbors anchored immigrant communities at the same moment Chinese migrants contributed to Mexican economic lives in transpacific borderlands spaces like Tucson. As Mary Malaby stated, "Because [my father] had a lot of money, [if] the [Valencia-Trujillo] family, you know, needed something, my father would help. He was really good about it because he loved my grandmother a lot. I think he loved my grandmother more than any other son... so the families were all together."⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Mary Malaby, interviewed by Priscilla M. Martínez, March 12, 2018.

The complexities of daily life often shaped the identities of second-generation Chinese Americans and existed outside the parameters of Arizona law. Children of mixed heritage like Mary Malaby and her siblings grew up caught between two identities. On the one hand, the state of Arizona read them as racially Chinese, or nonwhite, while they navigated day-to-day life in their local community as culturally Mexican. The significance of this split in identity featured more prominently in the lives of Mary Malaby and her sister Stella when it came time for them to marry their non-Chinese partners. Although they were not exempt from racial tension or discrimination in Tucson, many Chinese were able to marry Mexican and Anglo partners despite Arizona laws by securing marriage licenses in states like New Mexico or across international lines into Mexico. Mary Malaby shared how she and her sister Stella sidestepped Arizona's anti-miscegenation laws to marry their non-Chinese partners: "Both of us got married in Mexico. And we could [live] married after that, you know. But, I said, 'Maybe it's not legal because it's Mexico?' So, we got married again in New Mexico. We got married twice! George and I got married twice!"⁵⁹ In fact, Mary and her husband George, a Mexican American, married three times. Two years prior to Arizona court's overturning of the state's anti-miscegenation law in 1962 and seven years before the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that state anti-miscegenation laws were unconstitutional in *Loving v. Virginia* (1967), the

⁵⁹ Mary Malaby, interviewed by Priscilla M. Martínez, March 12, 2018.

Malabys remarried in Tucson on January 1, 1960.⁶⁰ The Malabys' decision to remarry in Tucson came weeks after Pima County Judge Herbert F. Krucker declared Arizona's anti-miscegenation law unconstitutional in December 1959. On December 28, the Pima County court clerk issued the first interracial marriage license between Japanese American Henry Oyama and Anglo American Mary Anne Jordan.⁶¹ The Malabys received their own Arizona marriage license a few days later.⁵⁹ Malaby's story highlighted the myriad ways borderlanders negotiated legal restrictions and reveals how impositions of the state sometimes mattered little in shaping individual choices or their personal happiness.⁶²

The ethnicity of second-generation Chinese in Tucson did not remain calcified in a fixed set of customs and practices received from the first generation; rather, a blended ethnic identity emerged that was Mexican, American, and Chinese. During the early 1920s, this identity extended to embrace many aspects of Mexican culture. According to anthropologists Florence and Robert Lister, most "American born

⁶⁰ *Journal of the Senate, Twenty-fifth Legislature of the State of Arizona, Second Regular Session, 1962* (Phoenix, 1962), 199, 335; *Journal of the House . . . Twenty-fifth Legislature, Second Regular Session*, (Phoenix, 1962), 467; *Acts, Memorials and Resolutions of the Second Regular Session of the Twenty-fifth Legislature of the State of Arizona, 1962* (Phoenix, 1962), 22.

⁶¹ Roger D. Hardaway, "Unlawful Love: A History of Arizona's Miscegenation Law," *Journal of Arizona History* 27 (Winter 1986): 386.

⁶² For more on the discreet arrangements of borderlanders and westerners see Anne F. Hyde, "Mixed-Race Families and Strategies of Acculturation in the U.S. West after 1848," in *On the Borders of Love and Power: Families and Kinship in the Intercultural American Southwest*, ed. David Wallace Adams and Crista DeLuzio (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

Chinese moved into the Hispanic barrio where most [first-generation Chinese] had also moved.”⁶³ As Tucson’s Mexican population shifted to the southern part of the Old Pueblo, the Chinese merchants and their families followed.⁶⁴ Grocery stores served as important spaces of refuge and relationship-building for multiethnic communities. Tucsonan Patsy Lee, a former high school teacher, recalled that economic pressures and Anglo prejudice forced many of Tucson’s Chinese families, including her parents, into Mexican neighborhoods like El Barrio: “another thing was prejudice where we couldn’t go to the white neighborhoods, so we opened a grocery store in the Barrio.”⁶⁵

Although first-generation Chinese in Tucson forged an economic niche for themselves as small-scale merchants or service workers, and although the number of Chinese-owned businesses increased during the 1920s, the wealth generated by this small community was not sizable.⁶⁶ Mary Malaby remembered how her father Lee Hop combined his limited schooling with an informal credit system to broker multiethnic community relationships: “He went to Ochoa School . . . I think he went

⁶³ Lister and Lister, *Chinese of Early Tucson*, 12–13. They also pointed out that “with penetration of a Hispanicized territory came gradual acquisition of Spanish, merchandising skills necessary to cultivate a consumer base there, and occasional intermarriage with Hispanic women” (12).

⁶⁴ *Tucson Citizen*, February 18, 1925, and February 22, 1935, Eleventh Annual Rodeo Edition, Chinese Section; *Arizona Daily Star*, February 20, 1937, and March 24, 1991.

⁶⁵ Tucson Chinese Cultural Center, “TCCC History Program,” March 25, 2014, available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gZTwEhHCU18&t=474s> (last accessed August 15, 2020).

⁶⁶ Delgado, *Making the Chinese Mexican*, 135.

for three [years] and that's all . . . but he knew Papagos and *mexicanos* . . . he got the language really well. Everybody knew him and he knew their names because they had a card."⁶⁵ For grocery store and business owners like Lee Hop, the credit system between Chinese merchants and Mexican and Indigenous families made visible the intimate relationships established within neighborhoods and barrios.

The experiences of Don Wah were representative of the early Chinese merchants in neighborhoods in the Old Pueblo.⁶⁷ Before his arrival in Tucson in May 1899, Don Wah worked as a cook for the Southern Pacific Railroad, but he moved from that occupation to business ownership. Wah established a bakery and then a grocery store in the Mexican and Chinese section of Tucson, between Convent Avenue and Main Street. For Wah, civic participation extended beyond mere appearance. As his daughter, Esther Don Tang—Wah's third daughter and a second-generation Chinese Tucsonan born in 1917—recalled, Wah was fond of reminding his family, "The community is the extension of your home."⁶⁷ Wah's activities contrasted with the far more segregated experiences of Chinese in cities such as San Francisco and Los Angeles.⁶⁸ Chinese enterprises like Wah's tended to be modest in

⁶⁷ Don Wah was born with the name Dong Wah. According to his daughter, Esther Don Tang, her father changed his name because the new name was easier for Americans to pronounce and remember. See "In the Matter of the Identity of Dong Wah," p. 5, Folder 1, Box 12, MSS 94, Esther Don Tang Collection (hereinafter EDTC), Arizona Historical Foundation, Hayden Library, Arizona State University (hereinafter ASU), Tempe, Arizona. ⁶⁷ Esther Don Tang, undated speech, "Good Morning Friends," p. 2, Folder 1, Box 12, EDTC, ASU.

⁶⁸ See Judy Yung, *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Peggy Pascoe, *Relations*

size. Wah's grocery store was small, and a walled curtain often separated the Wah family's living space from its working space. "The store itself . . . was perhaps twelve feet by twelve feet and immediately at the back of the store there was a cloth curtain and as you went in, there was a bedroom," Tang recalled. "We didn't have many rooms and there were about three of us, I remember, in one bed, and my oldest sister, Rose, she had some sort of boxes with a plank board and a mattress on top of that."⁶⁹ The Don family, whose second business was a grocery store at the corner of Convent Avenue and Jackson Street, depended on their children, the eldest sons and daughters, not only to help with basic chores but also to facilitate customer interactions with fluency in English. Esther Don Tang recalled her family's early years in Tucson as a time when "everybody . . . worked hard." Describing her childhood years, Tang remembered her days in the little barrio grocery. "We were a big family—nine girls and one boy—and we all had to help. . . . It didn't matter how young you were. When we started school, we also stocked the shelves, we dusted

of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874–1939 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Benson Tong, *Unsubmissive Women: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000); Natalia Molina, *Fit to be Citizens: Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879–1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); and Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

⁶⁹ Abraham Chanin with Mildren Chanin, "Esther Tang: A Chinese Success Story," in *This Land, These Voices: A Different View of Arizona History in the Words of Those Who Lived It* (Flagstaff: Northland Press, 1977), 206.

them and when we got a little older, we would make change.”⁷⁰ They also depended on the trustworthiness of their customers. With such practices and relationships, Chinese grocers flourished. Tang recalled customers buying their groceries: her mother would mark the amounts they owed in the *cartera* (payment notebook) and return the *cartera* to the customer. As Tang recalls, on payday everyone would return to the store to settle their accounts. “That was really trust!” she reminisced fondly.⁷¹

Many proprietors expanded their businesses by hiring nonfamily labor and purchasing trucks with an icebox in the cab to ensure fresh and cooled produce. As in the rest of Tucson, the economies of Chinese and Mexicans entwined. This entanglement would take on poignancy as the fortunes of one group rose and the other fell. The Don family transported groceries to, among many other places, Marana, where Mexican migrant workers labored in cotton fields. Mexican migrant families survived somewhere between a bare subsistence and abject poverty, and Chinese grocers and merchants absorbed unpaid debts left by these families. Growing up, Patsy Lee remembered how her parents, and other Chinese grocers, extended credit to Mexican community members and how this system facilitated everyday life in Tucson: “The biggest thing was that we gave them credit . . . my friends would come in and sign—my friend, José, he could barely write . . . he was only six years old, but he’d walk home with about ten dollars’ worth of groceries just by signing his

⁷⁰ Esther Tang, Tucson Oral History Project (hereinafter ETTOHP), p. 9, AV-0505–16; Tang, undated speech, p. 2, EDTC, ASU.

⁷¹ ETTOHP, 10; Tang, undated speech, p. 3, EDTC, ASU.

name . . . it went just like that.”⁷² Regardless, Chinese and Mexican families both large and small faced economic hardships from their position in the labor market—as migrant farmers, small-scale merchants, or consumers.

Knowing that the migrant farmers had little money, Wah continued to truck groceries into Marana, never complaining about unpaid debts. Other Chinese grocers and merchants in Tucson also continued to serve Mexican migrant farmers in the nearby agricultural areas, and other working-class *hispanos* who lived in the neighborhood. With its diverse population of business proprietors, farmworkers, sales clerks, and vendors, El Barrio expanded south and west of downtown even as commercial and cultural activities between Chinese and Mexican residents continued to thrive on and near South Meyer Street.⁷³ Next to Mexican merchants offering staple items, Chinese vendors also sold rice, beans, tea, and silks. El Cortez Market at the center of El Barrio was the home of a Chinese-Mexican deli.⁷⁴ Mexican food became a means of forming bonds both within and outside the Chinese community.

⁷² Tucson Chinese Cultural Center, “TCCC History Program,” March 25, 2014, available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gZTwEhHCU18&t=474s>.

⁷³ Speech of Harry Gin, “Remembrances from Tucson’s Chinese Community,” Don Wah Biographical File, p. 13, AHS. On the resettlement of Mexicans in the South Meyer District, see Thomas E. Sheridan, *Los Tucsonenses: The Mexican Community in Tucson, 1854–1941* (Tucson, 1986), 186; Lister and Lister, *Chinese of Early Tucson*, 16.

⁷⁴ “Biographical Sketch of Don Chun Wo,” Don Chun Wo Biographical File, p. 5, AHS.

As with many communities in the borderlands, cultural crossover and established traditions became the norm for many families. Raymond Lim and his daughter Dana remember the family tradition of tamale making. Their mother and grandmother started this family tradition. Marion Lee, the daughter of Kwong Lee and Lai Ngan, organized the women in her family to get together for a *tamelada*, or tamale-making day. “She was an excellent cook. We used to have green corn tamales. Oh, boy, that was really good!” Lim recalled, smiling. Shared culinary traditions mirrored the relative normalcy of multiethnic families and histories in border communities like Tucson. The local Tucson staple of Chinese chorizo represented much more than a curious food fusion. “We didn’t know how to keep up with it. . . . We sold tons of [Chinese] chorizo. . . . It was just a big production,” reflected Ray Quen about his days as a butcher and grocer in Tucson in the early 1900s. The borderlands staple symbolized the dynamic, multiethnic community of Tucson and the results of cultivated neighborhood relationships between Mexicans and Chinese along the border. For community members like Lim and Quen, recollections of making Chinese chorizo, green- corn tamales, or owning grocery stores represented more than just a regional fare or economic necessity; these memories highlighted the centrality of Tucson as an important hub of Chinese families and larger community engagement.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Raymond Lim, interviewed by Priscilla M. Martínez, August 28, 2017.

In the early twentieth century, ethnic Chinese family across the United States either found refuge an anonymity in the Chinatowns of large urban cities like San Francisco, or, like Ana Don's family, they lived transient lives moving from small community to community along a Chinese kith and kinship network. Ana Don described the extensive route her own family took before finally setting down roots in Tucson. "From 1928 to 1940, we had lived in... eighteen different cities," recalled Anna Don, whose family worked as a traveling Eastern medicine apothecary. "So if business was slow, like, we were in San Francisco, Sacramento, Fresno, Bakersfield, Anaheim, Bedford," Don recounted.⁷⁶ "I was born in Yakima, Washington... then we went to Pueblo, Colorado, back to California, Petaluma, Napa, Sonora, Vallejo, then back to Washington... Salt Lake City, Idaho Falls, Twin Falls, Santa Cruz" remembered Don about the extensive migratory movement of her family before establishing their lives in Tucson.⁷⁷ "That's a lot of traveling!" exclaimed Don.⁷⁸ Ana Don's family eventually settled in Tucson because her family was able to establish a Chinese grocery and general goods store. Families like Anna Don's were soon absorbed into Mexican culture as Chinese and Chinese Mexican families lived and navigated daily life alongside Mexican and Indigenous neighbors. Borderland communities like Tucson afforded Chinese families like Don's a means to escape the rising Sinophobia in areas like California and northern Mexican states like Sonora in

⁷⁶ Ana Don Belton, interviewed by Priscilla M. Martínez, March 9, 2018.

⁷⁷ Ana Don Belton, interviewed by Priscilla M. Martínez, March 9, 2018.

⁷⁸ Ana Don Belton, interviewed by Priscilla M. Martínez, March 9, 2018.

the early-twentieth century. Once settled in Tucson, the Chinese formed cross-cultural connections within the local neighborhoods their family businesses served.

Chinese grocery stores, typically situated within Mexican neighborhoods, played a pivotal role as hubs for cultural and social interactions. It was common to find multiple Chinese grocery stores nestled within Mexican and other multi-ethnic communities. Proprietors of these stores embraced Mexican food varieties and provided a welcoming space for Black and Indigenous neighbors residing in Tucson. The role of Chinese grocery outlets extended beyond commerce, becoming vital centers for cultural dialogue and interaction between Chinese families and their surrounding communities. These stores often served a dual purpose as both family-run businesses and residences. Families typically lived behind their stores or in a proximate home. The family's patriarch would manage the store, frequently taking on the role of the in-house butcher. Conversely, the matriarch would often manage the store and serve as a clerk, handling the financial books and ledgers. Women of Chinese and Chinese Mexican descent were usually the primary point of contact for Mexican patrons.

Mastery of the Spanish language proved instrumental in sustaining economic and cultural connections with the local clientele and neighbors. A striking linguistic diversity grew apparent among Chinese families, with many speaking three to five languages, including various Chinese dialects, Spanish, English, and occasionally Indigenous languages. Chinese and Chinese Mexican women proved especially

proficient at multilingual communication, as they were often tasked with managing and running the family stores. Recalling the significance of Spanish in the daily life of Chinese residents in Tucson, Ana Don shared, “All the Chinese grocery stores in the old days were located in Mexican neighborhoods, most everybody spoke Spanish.”⁷⁹ She added, “Even the women who came from China, working in the stores with their husbands, learned Spanish before they learned English.”⁸⁰ Children also contributed significantly to the family business, with roles ranging from clerks to stockers. Sons usually undertook manual labor, restocking shelves, and even working as local harvesters if their family’s store maintained contracts with local Chinese and Mexican farmers. Daughters, like Mary (nee Low) Wong, frequently acted as trilingual interpreters and stock managers, either assisting their mothers or stepping into their roles as clerks and accountants. Wong shared memories of handling inventory orders and monitored credit accounts, further contributing to the seamless functioning of these multi-faceted establishments as early as eight years old.

In the 1860s, when the United States declared Arizona a territory, a surge of Anglo settlers seized the opportunity and staked claim on former presidio spaces such as Tucson. *Tucsonenses*, otherwise known as Mexican Tucsonans, gradually migrated southward from the presidio, creating new communities in the outskirts of Tucson. However, it took until the 1920s for Anglo Americans to constitute the racial majority

⁷⁹ Ana Don Belton, interviewed by Priscilla M. Martínez, October 23, 2017.

⁸⁰ Ana Don Belton, interviewed by Priscilla M. Martínez, October 23, 2017.

in Tucson. With their economic prowess, Anglo city administrators designed the city landscape to encircle Mexican enclaves, while Anglo engineers established commercial districts distinct from Mexican barrios.

Historian Lydia Otero meticulously detailed the “barrioization” process within Tucson’s Mexican communities, casting it as a deliberate destruction of culture rather than the often-romanticized concept of cultural concentration featured in wider Southwestern U.S. histories. From the 1860s to the 1970s, deliberate city planning, and subsequent urban renewal projects aimed to disrupt and displace large portions of Mexican neighborhoods in South Tucson.⁸¹ Yet, Mexican barrios demonstrated a resilience that not only asserted Mexican authority and presence in Tucson but also provided a haven for Chinese families.⁸²

Numerous Mexican neighborhoods, including Barrio Anita, Barrio Libre, Barrio Ochoa, Barrio Hollywood, and Barrio Viejo, were predominantly located south of the Southern Pacific Railroad (SPRR) line, which sliced diagonally across Tucson’s broader downtown area.⁸³ Excluding Barrio Adelanto and Barrio San

⁸¹ For more on the development of and transformation of Mexican Tucson, see Lydia R. Oteros, *La Calle: Spatial Conflicts and Urban Renewal in a Southwest City* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010).

⁸² Delgado, *Making the Chinese Mexican*, 135-156.

⁸³ Within the last decade, several oral history projects and performance arts projects have been launched that have centered Tucson’s various barrios. For more information and oral history interviews, please see Borderlands Theater’s “Barrio Stories” Project, <http://www.borderlandstheater.org/> (Last accessed 20 June 2023). See also the Barrio Anita Neighborhood Association’s “Walking Through Barrio Anita’s History” Oral History Project, <https://parentseyes.arizona.edu/node/950> (Last accessed 20 June 2023).

Antonio, around sixteen unique Mexican *barrios* flourished south of the SPRR tracks. Neighborhoods such as Barrio Libre, situated south of E. 14th Street and west of S. 5th Avenue, functioned as effective refuges from police surveillance.⁸⁴ These geographical landmarks marked the boundary between South Tucson and the central commercial district of downtown Tucson. Barrio Anita stood as one of several Mexican barrios where Chinese families established their residences, cultivating their social and cultural roots in the process.

Individuals of Chinese Mexican heritage, such as Mary (nee Low) Wong, found their identity deeply rooted in Mexican barrios, or neighborhoods. “I was born there...It’s called Barrio Anita,” Wong nostalgically recalled.⁸⁵ Her father, Sew Kee Low, originally from the Canton region of China, migrated to Tucson in 1915 to aid his father, Lin Kee Low, with his Low Hoy Co. Market.⁸⁶ Sew Kee’s wife, Lee Shee, who had stayed behind in Canton following their wedding in 1912, joined her

⁸⁴ Kathleen Allen, “Borderlands project is all about Barrio Anita’s history, culture, people,” *Arizona Daily Star*, April 17, 2018, https://tucson.com/entertainment/borderlands-project-is-all-about-barrío-anita-s-history-culture/article_097dfe74-1737-5be5-a791-19f49f4f49cb.html (Last accessed 20 June 2023). See also the Barrio Anita Neighborhood Association’s *Un Camino al Río: Recuerdos del Río Santa Cruz y Barrio Anita / A Path to the River: Memories of the Santa Cruz River and Barrio Anita*, <https://parentseyes.arizona.edu/node/951> (Last accessed 20 June 2023).

⁸⁵ Mary Wong, interviewed by Priscilla Martínez, November 20, 2017.

⁸⁶ See Tucson city directories, available online in “U.S. City Directories, 1821–1989,” indexed database and digital images, at www.ancestry.com (accessed 3 June 2023), for years 1920 (pp. 167, 263) and 1921 (pp. 166).

husband in Tucson in 1919.⁸⁷ Together, they worked for Lin Kee Low until 1927 when they launched their own enterprise, the Sew Kee Market, nestled in the heart of Barrio Anita at 928 Anita Street.⁸⁸

Barrio Anita, established as a subdivision of McKinley Park in 1902, had its main avenue initially named Annie Avenue. Situated on the fringes of Tucson's central business district, Barrio Anita witnessed an influx of ethnic Mexican families who built traditional Sonoran-style adobe houses. In time, the neighborhood's main

⁸⁷ Petition for Naturalization for Lee Shee Low to the U.S. District Court of District of Arizona at Tucson, Arizona, No. 3993, July 1932. When Lee Shee arrived in Tucson, she adopted the name "Marie" and used it in everyday life as she navigated the store. This name change was visible in Tucson city directories, available online in "U.S. City Directories, 1821–1989," indexed database and digital images, at www.ancestry.com (accessed 3 June 2023), for 1929 (pp. 440). By the 1940 census, Marie would go by the name Lee Kasing Low, and would be listed as the head of the family and a saleslady, after the passing of her husband Sew Kee in 1937. See Department of Commerce Bureau of the Census, Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940, Population Schedule, City of Tucson, Ward 6, Sheet 14 A, Enumerated 26 April 1940 by William C. Whiffer. Lee Shee "Marie's" name would change again to Sew Kee Low, taking on the name of her deceased husband, and was listed as Store Proprietor and Grocery Store owner in 1950. See *U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1950 Census of Population and Housing, Tucson, Pima County, Arizona*, Sheet No. 11, 5 April 1950, enumerated by Abraham R. Lorona. Lee Shee / Marie / Sew Kee Low would switch through her different names across different city, state, and federal documents throughout her life. Her constants were her family grocery store and home at 928 Anita Street. She would be buried alongside her husband, Sew Kee Low, upon her passing on April 2, 1981, as Lee Shee Low. (Author visited their grave at Evergreen Memorial Park, Tucson, Arizona, Plot Block 42).

⁸⁸ See Tucson city directories, available online in "U.S. City Directories, 1821–1989," indexed database and digital images, at www.ancestry.com (accessed 3 June 2023), for years 1926 (pp. 3), 928 Anita Street is listed as a vacant lot. There are no available city directories for 1927 and 1928. The next available directory is 1929, and Sew Kee Grocery is listed at 928 Anita Street (pp. 52).

avenue informally took on the name “Anita” Avenue, and officially adopted this name in 1907.⁸⁹ As the years passed, the subdivision became universally recognized as Barrio Anita, a predominantly ethnic Mexican and closely bonded community in central Tucson.⁹⁰ Mirroring the welcoming ethos found in other Mexican neighborhoods around Tucson, residents of Barrio Anita embraced Chinese and Chinese Mexican families as both business owners and fellow *vecinos*, or neighbors, including families like the Lows. “We learned to speak Spanish before we could speak English,” Wong noted, reflecting on her childhood in Barrio Anita.⁹¹ “We knew everybody. I remember the Ruiz family from across the street taught us how to cook Mexican food... They taught us how to make tamales,” Wong fondly recalled.⁹² “We were almost like family. We frequently visited each other’s homes. I always remember them as a family,” Wong reflected on the close friendships and bonds formed between Chinese and Mexican families in early twentieth-century Tucson.⁹³

⁸⁹ Kathleen Allen, “Borderlands project is all about Barrio Anita’s history, culture, people,” Arizona Daily Star, April 17, 2018, https://tucson.com/entertainment/borderlands-project-is-all-about-barrio-anita-s-history-culture/article_097dfe74-1737-5be5-a791-19f49f4f49cb.html (Last accessed 20 June 2023).

⁹⁰ For more information on Barrio Anita’s population breakdown, see Barrio Anita Neighborhood Association’s *Visions of Barrio Anita: Looking through the Eyes of Different Generations*, <https://parentseyes.arizona.edu/node/952> (Last accessed 20 June 2023). For more community oral histories of Barrio Anita, see Davis Bilingual Magnet School’s “*Huellas del Pasado...Footprints from the Past*” Oral History Project, <https://parentseyes.arizona.edu/huellas> (Last accessed 20 June 2023).

⁹¹ Mary Wong, interviewed by Priscilla M. Martínez, November 20, 2017.

⁹² Mary Wong, interviewed by Priscilla M. Martínez, November 20, 2017.

⁹³ Mary Wong, interviewed by Priscilla M. Martínez, November 20, 2017.

“Anita Street was only a mile long, and it was always amusing that there were five [Chinese] grocery stores... And I knew all of them. I knew everyone that owned [them]... because we were like family,” shared Wong.⁹⁴ Chinese families not only discovered a sanctuary in Tucson’s Mexican neighborhoods but also established deep cultural ties within these communities, thereby anchoring their identities and sense of belonging.

Tucson’s neighborhoods evidenced a complex dynamic of racial hybridity. Collected family oral histories pivots our attention to the unique fusion seen within the Chinese Mexican communities like Barrio Anita. Oral sources necessitate a nuanced comprehension of the socio-cultural structure that defined these vibrant communities, encompassing diverse bonds of friendship, neighborhood solidarity, and the sacred institution of marriage. Each of these elements contributed to the rich tapestry of community life that has been meticulously woven over the late-nineteenth and into the early twentieth centuries.

The bonds binding these communities were not simply a result of geographical proximity or shared cultural heritage. They were manifestations of richly intricate narratives of shared experiences, resilience, and common histories that have been slowly, yet steadfastly, formed over time. Such bonds were not merely

⁹⁴ Mary Wong, interviewed by Priscilla M. Martínez, November 20, 2017.

fortuitous connections, but rather the products of shared experiences, mutual exchanges, and a profound sense of respect nurtured over the years. This sense of mutual belonging transcended the boundaries of individual households, permeated shared community spaces, and ultimately shaped collective identity.

The role of the institution of marriage within this socio-cultural landscape cannot be understated. It served as a significant catalyst in the long-term formation and evolution of racial and cultural identities within these communities. Matrimonial unions between Chinese and Mexican denizens were not merely a legal or religious compact between two individuals, but symbolized the amalgamation of two disparate cultures, traditions, and races. Over time, these intermarriages substantially contributed to the intricate tapestry of racial hybridity within Tucson's Chinese-Mexican communities that countered Mexico's more rigid *mestizaje* racial project occurring south of the border. Subsequent generations of Chinese Tucsonans, a fusion of these diverse cultures, inevitably shaped the community dynamics and perceptions of racial identities across the Mexican Pacific borderlands in intriguing ways.

Moreover, an investigation of southern Arizona's encounters with *mestizaje*, Tucson's *barrio* neighborhoods, and Chinese Mexican community formations would be incomplete without a thorough understanding of the fundamental concept of belonging. Inherent to these communities rested a Chinese and Mexican identity that extended beyond being a mere cohabitation of a geographic locality. Instead, Chinese Tucson presented a more holistic, nuanced approach to *mestizaje* where individuals

and families were woven into the shared fabric of common narratives, collective histories, and shared aspirations. This sense of collective identity contributed to the enrichment of community life, influenced individual and collective identities, and provided an encompassing sense of home, safety, and kinship that transcended racial and cultural boundaries. Within Tucson's Chinese Mexican neighborhoods, this sense of belonging is deftly intertwined with everyday life, resulting in spaces of multiculturalism, with community dynamics and racialization finding an intrinsic and harmonious balance until the mid-1930s.

EPILOGUE

This research has offered an in-depth exploration of Indigenous waterway sovereignty in Mexico spanning from 1750 to 1934. “By Land and By Sea” has challenged conventional narratives by highlighting the key role that Indigenous communities played in using waterways and maritime spaces to counteract external forces, including Europeans, Mexicans, and Americans. My study has shown how these communities successfully challenged efforts to control them, underscoring the potent political symbolism of waterways. Indigenous water sovereignty has emerged as a formidable bastion against external impositions, underscoring power differentials within the borderlands and revealing the mutable and adaptive character of racial categorizations in late-colonial and early national periods, particularly in the Sonora and Baja California-US borderlands. This historical perspective holds significant relevance to current conflicts over water and land in the Mexican Pacific borderlands.

Just as it was the case a hundred years prior, the borderlands are at the center of Mexico’s most recent neoliberal project that began in 1994, with the North American Free Trade Agreement, or NAFTA. These neoliberal shifts triggered a series of territorial land reforms that had a disproportionately adverse impact on the essential resources that sustain Indigenous communities, especially along the US-Mexico and Mexico-Guatemala borderlands. Under the guise of sustainable development and environmental stewardship—a concept referred to as “Green”

neoliberalism—the Mexican government extended its regulatory authority over ocean management, fisheries, and agricultural sectors.¹ This expanded control relied heavily on the privatization and restriction of resource access, emphasizing the prominent role of water in Mexico’s most recent neoliberal project.

Green neoliberalism, while promising in its rhetoric, has proven to inflict considerable harm on both human communities and natural resources. It pursues environmental conservation by treating it as an aspect of capital accumulation, leading to the emergence of diverse resource management strategies. Advocates of Green neoliberalism suggest that viewing nature as a tradable asset will yield better environmental protection. They further contend that the Green economy serves a dual function: improving the wellbeing of poor communities while promoting environmentally sustainable economic growth. Even though Green neoliberalism does not overtly involve racial elements, it implicitly positions the state as the guardian of resources. By doing so, it targets Indigenous communities—the primary recipients of new regulations—by questioning their abilities to manage their traditional fishing and water rights effectively, thereby portraying them as unfit stewards of natural resources.

In the unfolding battle for control at the Mexican Pacific borderlands, the struggle takes place on numerous fronts that reflect the region’s larger history of

¹ Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez, “‘The sea is our bread’: Interrupting green neoliberalism in Mexico,” *Marine Policy* 80 (2017): 29.

contested water sovereignty. Local communities, intimately tied to the land and water resources that provide for their sustenance, are driven to safeguard their ancestral ties and ensure their means of survival. Conversely, foreign actors, propelled by economic gains or political aspirations, actively seek openings and leverage within these shifting environments. Meanwhile, government agencies ostensibly responsible for regulating access, ownership, and usage persist in prioritizing private companies over the needs and rights of their Indigenous communities. Changes in water and land use have not only led to Indigenous dispossession of customary fishing rights that threaten Native livelihoods but have also prompted Native resistance practices to undermine government policy implementation. Continued Native use of land and water rights around Mexico's littoral spaces has been recategorized as irregular fishing—unreported fishing performed for livelihood but not reported because of bureaucracy—and illegal fishing—when groups conspire to break the law and violate protected sites.²

As the struggle for control over the Mexican Pacific borderlands continues, numerous fronts reflect the region's larger history of contested water sovereignty. Local communities, deeply connected to the land and water that sustain them, are compelled to preserve their ancestral connections and survival means. In contrast, foreign entities, motivated by economic profit or political goals, actively explore

² Environmental Defense Fund of Mexico et al. "Illegal and Irregular Fishing in Mexico: A Barrier to Competitiveness." [Last accessed 5 July 2023]: <https://www.edf.org/sites/default/files/content/illegalfishing.pdf>

opportunities and gain influence in these evolving environments. Paradoxically, government bodies charged with overseeing access, ownership, and usage often favor private enterprises over the requirements and rights of their Indigenous communities. Changes in water and land usage have not only dispossessed Indigenous communities of traditional fishing rights, threatening their livelihoods, but have also sparked resistance efforts against government policies. Ongoing Indigenous use of land and water rights in Mexico's coastal areas has been recategorized as irregular and illegal fishing.³

The criminalization of Indigenous water use furthers national and international narratives of Native resistance to global progress. These government interventions in land and water uncannily echo major nineteenth century land and water reforms initiated in Mexico under Benito Juárez and Porfirio Díaz that placed Indigenous land and water use at the heart of their legislative agendas. This reclassification further promotes national and international narratives of Indigenous resistance to global progress. These governmental intrusions eerily recall the significant land and water reforms initiated in Mexico during the nineteenth century under Benito Juárez and Porfirio Díaz, which centered on Indigenous land and water usage.

³ Environmental Defense Fund of Mexico et al. "Illegal and Irregular Fishing in Mexico: A Barrier to Competitiveness." [Last accessed 5 July 2023]: <https://www.edf.org/sites/default/files/content/illegalfishing.pdf>

In the United States Southwest, beyond the Mexican border, the region is grappling with the worst drought period in 1,200 years.⁴ This extreme drought and excessive water consumption have drastically depleted the Colorado River, a critical water source in the North American West. Over 40 million people in Mexico and seven U.S. states currently rely on the Colorado River for drinking water, electricity, and agriculture.⁵ For the first time in U.S. history, the federal government declared a water shortage in the region in 2021. As state and federal bodies struggle with water allocation along the Colorado River, Indigenous communities like the Cocopah, Mojavi, Yaqui, and Tohono O’odham continue to struggle with secure water access. For the Tohono O’odham, the land and water are more than resources; they form an integral part of their cultural heritage, identity, and spiritual practices. The tribe’s ancestral lands span across what is now Arizona and Sonora, Mexico, with the sacred Baboquivari mountain range serving as a spiritual focal point. Water, scarce in these arid regions, is revered as a life-giving entity, vital for the survival of both people and the ecosystem. Indigenous communities, such as the Tohono O’odham, who have

⁴ Megan O’Toole and Jillian Kestler-D’Amours, “Crisis on the Colorado: The Indigenous Fight for Water Rights,” Al Jazeera (2023), [Last accessed 5 July 2023]: <https://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/2023/colorado-river-climate-Indigenous-communities/>

⁵ Megan O’Toole and Jillian Kestler-D’Amours, “Crisis on the Colorado: The Indigenous Fight for Water Rights,” Al Jazeera (2023), [Last accessed 5 July 2023]: <https://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/2023/colorado-river-climate-Indigenous-communities/d>

inhabited the region since time immemorial, still reside on federally recognized reservation lands within the Colorado River’s riparian network.

The river remains vital to their community culture, traditions, and lifestyles. Water politics in the region have always been contentious since Spanish imperial administrators attempted to restructure land policies to favor irrigated agricultural settler communities. Throughout the nineteenth century, states in both Mexico and the United States employed racially charged land policies to target Indigenous water use, considered counterproductive to national progress and development. Beneath the shifting rhetoric—from “*indios de paz*” and “*indios malos*” under Spanish imperialism, to “*hijos del pais*” and “*indios bárbaros*” under the Mexican Republic, to “federally-recognized Indigenous peoples” and ethnic Mexicans—lies a long history of racial categorization through land and water politics.

The land and water hold a profound significance for the Tohono O’odham people, shaping their lives and traditions. Native creation accounts from across the Mexican Pacific borderlands hold three central truths—water can give life or take it away, waterways are critical to Indigenous lifeways, and Native communities are tasked by the Creator to protect, manage, and defend their waterscapes. Traditional knowledge passed down through generations informs the tribe’s understanding of water management. The Tohono O’odham have developed intricate systems of

farming that are adapted to the desert environment, using techniques that respect the natural water cycle and promote conservation. Although sustainable and efficient, these practices have been threatened by larger socio-economic forces.

The cholla, a stout, silvery cactus, sustains life, while the mid-summer rains bring anticipation of thunderstorms, signaled by the saguaros' fruitful offerings. Even the shores of the Gulf of California, stretching into the distance, provide the essential salt of life. The People learn that every living being—humans, animals, plants, and natural phenomena—possesses a spirit and follows its own unique path, known as *him'dag*.⁶ To the O'odham, their homeland remains both sacred and indispensable, intricately woven into their daily existence and community fabric. The seasonal pilgrimages to the northern beaches of the Gulf of California establish a profound connection between the Desert People and the cyclical patterns of life shared by the land and their ancestors. the colonization of the Colorado River Basin and the ancestral lands of the Tohono O'odham and other Indigenous peoples, including the Cocopah, Yaqui, Pima, and Maricopa, has been a long and arduous journey filled with contingencies. Since the initial encounters with Spanish colonizers to the Mexican Republic and the United States, the Tohono O'odham and other Indigenous communities have confronted various colonization forces. These forces have taken the form of military outposts, mining sites, continental railroad lines, cross-border

⁶ Guojun Lee, "Desert People," *Indigenous Religious Traditions*, accessed 16 November 2019: <https://sites.coloradocollege.edu/indigenoustraditions/sacred-lands/desert-people/>

irrigation projects, massive dams, transnational highway systems, international observatories, chemical waste sites, and the establishment of a demilitarized zone. These developments continue to desecrate their most sacred places and hinder access to their ancestral homelands, posing ongoing challenges for the Tohono O’odham and other affected communities.

Borderland dwellers, known as *fronterizos*, paid little attention to the imposition of an international border until the early decades of the twentieth century. It was during the long nineteenth century that Native people began experiencing a rapid loss of their communal lands on both sides of the border, primarily due to massive transnational irrigation projects. Nonetheless, the movement of Indigenous individuals across borders for family visits, hunting, fishing, farming community lands, raising cattle, visiting sacred sites, and participating in religious ceremonies and rites of passage remained relatively unrestricted until the 1980s. It was during this period that U.S. and Mexican border controls tightened. Border communities, like Tucson, situated in southern Arizona at the heart of Indian Country and the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, Indigenous, Mexican, ethnic Mexican, and Chinese inhabitants actively collaborated to navigate the escalating social and economic pressures that accompanied the centralization efforts of the state in the 1920s and 1930s.

Transborder communities, such as the O’odham and the Cocopah, effortlessly crossed borders to traverse the ancestral paths of their homeland, despite the increased presence of border enforcement. Ethnic Mexicans, whether Indigenous or

not, freely settled and moved between the Tucson-Nogales region in search of a home and livelihood. Chinese migrants skillfully evaded escalating Sinophobic violence in northern Sonora and exploited loopholes in the U.S. Chinese Exclusion Act to establish themselves in border communities like Tucson. While the historical development of the Colorado River Basin and the broader Mexican Pacific Borderlands is a complex narrative involving various actors and dynamics, a compelling constant emerges. These interethnic communities actively resisted state control, shaping their own notions of belonging that profoundly influenced the trajectory of U.S. and Mexican nationalism in the early twentieth century.

The foundation of this history lies in the late Spanish imperial reforms from 1768 to the 1910s, when the Mexican, and later U.S., government began reassessing its relationship with Indigenous peoples within its borders. These legal trajectories laid the groundwork for the transformative decade of 1924 to 1934, which witnessed a significant shift in Native-non-Native relations, the initiation of transnational regional infrastructure development, and the rise of Sinophobia along the Mexican Pacific borderlands. The juxtaposition of Indigenous struggles for tribal sovereignty with the struggles of ethnic Mexicans and Chinese for a sense of belonging compels scholars to reconsider the nature of legal and territorial borders, with water serving as a central element in discussions of racial formation and migration.

The tensions between Indigenous water sovereignty and settler colonial forces in the Mexican Pacific borderlands revealed the critical role nineteenth-century

meanings of Indigeneity and Native political autonomy played in undergirding twentieth-century Mexican racial identities. When Fred Miller, the Cocopah tribal chief plead his case for additional land before the U.S. Senate’s Select Committee on Indian Affairs in 1984, he sketched out a simplified history of his community’s relationship with American state makers.⁷ Miller opened his statement by stating, “We have always lived along the Colorado River, but we have been ignored by the Federal Government.”⁸ While Miller’s phrasing of “being ignored” by the federal government suggested a relationship where the U.S. government set the terms of contact and negotiation between the two entities, it obscured the long history of Indigenous water power in the Mexican Pacific that effectively dictated the limits of Spanish colonial, Mexican Republic, and United States control in the region for over a century. The Cocopah as “People of the River,” whose ancestral lands laid at the heart of the Rio Colorado Delta, played a critical role in the region as power brokers and gate keepers to important riparian networks throughout the long nineteenth century. Miller continued, “Our reservation was created in 1917, but our people did not even know it. Only a handful of the Cocopah were allowed to enroll.”⁹

⁷ Fred Miller, “Statement of Fred Miller, Sr. Chairman of the Cocopah Tribe,” Select Comm. on Indian Affairs, United States Senate, S. 2823, S. 2824, S.2862, at 25 (1984), 24.

⁸ Fred Miller, “Statement of Fred Miller, Sr. Chairman of the Cocopah Tribe,” Select Comm. on Indian Affairs, United States Senate, S. 2823, S. 2824, S.2862, at 25 (1984), 24.

⁹ Fred Miller, “Statement of Fred Miller, Sr. Chairman of the Cocopah Tribe,” Select Comm. on Indian Affairs, United States Senate, S. 2823, S. 2824, S.2862, at 25 (1984), 24.

The history of relocation and recognition remains long and fraught. Throughout the nineteenth century, the U.S. government passed sweeping legislations to make itself the sole determiner of rightful property, at least in theory. Miller claimed before the subcommittee that “[The Cocopah] were just overlooked in those days.”¹⁰ Although, in fact, generations of continued and defensible Native water power in regions like the Mexican Pacific borderlands continued to dictate the terms of both U.S. and Mexican colonial ambitions in the region. Legislatively, the Indian Removal Act of 1830 granted the U.S. federal government the authority to relocate Native peoples and the Indian Appropriations Act in 1851 created the modern reservation system. The passing of the Dawes Act of 1887 transitioned reservations from communal lands to individual family allotments for the purposes of agricultural development. Yet the continued semi-nomadic movements and the vital role Cocopah peoples played in regional maritime economies as navigators, fishers, and farmers kept U.S. boundary commissioners at bay, at least for a time. “We lived on the ditch banks, on the local farms we helped to build...We have always looked to the Colorado River for our survival,” recounted Miller.¹¹

¹⁰ Fred Miller, “Statement of Fred Miller, Sr. Chairman of the Cocopah Tribe,” Select Comm. on Indian Affairs, United States Senate, S. 2823, S. 2824, S.2862, at 25 (1984), 24.

¹¹ Fred Miller, “Statement of Fred Miller, Sr. Chairman of the Cocopah Tribe,” Select Comm. on Indian Affairs, United States Senate, S. 2823, S. 2824, S.2862, at 25 (1984), 24. Fred Miller, “Prepared Statement of Fred Miller, Sr. Chairman of the Cocopah Tribe,” Select Comm. on Indian Affairs, United States Senate, S. 2823, S. 2824, S.2862, at 25 (1984), 25.

It would not be until President Woodrow Wilson's 1917 Executive Order No. 2711, commonly referred to as the Cocopah Lands Act, that the federal government intervened in Cocopah life. "During this time, the Cocopah were largely ignored but the U.S. Government. Most of our people barely understood there was a reservation set aside for the Cocopah," shared Miller.¹² The government's intent was not to usher a new era of collaboration with Native peoples in the Colorado River delta, but instead to remove Cocopah communities from the region to make way for large-scale irrigation projects that created the modern-day Imperial and Mexicali Valleys and the damming of the Colorado River. "We lived mostly in huts along irrigation ditch banks and in other areas unsuitable for agricultural development. While the Government was dividing up the land for new settlers, we knew nothing...just our own ways," shared Miller.¹³

The reason Miller gave for this isolation that was delivered in an offhand, matter of fact manner, in truth, sparked this project. Miller stated, "The Cocopah were not enrolled and were said to be Mexican and not eligible for BIA services."¹⁴ Buried within this sole sentence rests centuries of colonial encounters, plural sovereignty

¹² Fred Miller, "Prepared Statement of Fred Miller, Sr. Chairman of the Cocopah Tribe," Select Comm. on Indian Affairs, United States Senate, S. 2823, S. 2824, S.2862, at 25 (1984), 25.

¹³ Fred Miller, "Prepared Statement of Fred Miller, Sr. Chairman of the Cocopah Tribe," Select Comm. on Indian Affairs, United States Senate, S. 2823, S. 2824, S.2862, at 25 (1984), 25.

¹⁴ Fred Miller, "Statement of Fred Miller, Sr. Chairman of the Cocopah Tribe," Select Comm. on Indian Affairs, United States Senate, S. 2823, S. 2824, S.2862, at 25 (1984), 24.

arrangements, borderlands negotiations, and Indigenous water power in the Mexican Pacific region. The Cocopah's ancestral homeland was central to the region's—marked by the Rio Colorado Basin, the Gulf of California, and the Pacific Ocean—Native lifeways, Spanish colonial imaginations, Mexican industrial development, and the United States' economic aspirations. Embedded within Miller's phrase of "were said to be Mexican" obfuscates the fraught history of the racial classification faced by Cucapá—the other half of the Cocopah peoples living within the bounds of the Mexican North—and ethnic Mexicans living in the U.S. Southwest. Miller's use of "not eligible" also evoked the slow, but intentional targeting of indigeneity and Indigenous lifeways as unfit for incorporation into Mexican and U.S. national projects. The ways in which Indigenous water power emerged at the Mexican Pacific borderlands in response to imperial and national ambitions had defined the limits of colonization in the region, at least for a time. As a result, Mexican, and later American, racialization projects levied land and water policies to undercut Native power through selective configurations of Indigenous-Mexican *mestizaje*. Still, the nature of water and its modalities from navigation to fishing to irrigation proved that formations of race and racial categories in late-colonial and early national Mexican Pacific borderlands were equally as fluid.

By viewing the maritime movement and waterscape knowledge exercised by Native coastal peoples, this dissertation not only showed how Indigenous communities posed a powerful counter to settler colonial ambitions, but is also offers

a distinct portrayal of Indigenous power and identity within the eventual US-Mexico borderlands.

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