UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

# Cocopah Identity Survival: “We Are The River People”

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

in

Latin American Studies

by

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The Thesis of Viridiana Talamante Dominguez is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2014

Dedication

*Esta tesis esta dedicada con todo mi corazon a mis padres Lupita y Carlos Dominguez.*
*Gracias por todo su apoyo y amor.*

Epigraph

A Nation is not conquered until the hearts of the women are on the ground.

Cheyenne saying

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Cocopah Identity Survival: "We Are The River People"

by

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Professor Gloria Chacon, Chair

This thesis analyses the colonization of the Cocopah people to show that their traditions have survived the effects of colonization. I focus on issues of sovereignty and complicate the question of the nation-state. Also, this thesis analyses the effects of colonization on gender among Native American women. I use personal interviews with Cocopah women to discuss how women's oral history allows for preservation of Cocopah

cultural identity. I set out to investigate the following questions; Have the Cocopah people maintained their cultural identity despite colonization? Has sovereignty allowed for the preservation of cultural identity? How has gender been affected by colonization? The review of the literature looks at colonization, patriarchy, and sovereignty and the underlying theories that may explain the experiences of Cocopah women. The review of the literature address ethnicity theory. In this thesis I investigate the following questions: Have the Cocopah maintained their cultural identity despite colonization? Has sovereignty allowed for the preservation of Cocopah cultural identity? How has gender been affected by colonization? This thesis will show how Cocopah cultural identity is present and how it is sustained.

## Introduction

The Cocopah Indian Tribe is located on the U.S.-Mexico border. Once able to freely cross between Mexico and the United States, their movement was restricted by the United States government and the tribe was splintered into two groups. This thesis investigates the role of colonization on the lives of Native Women who are members of the Cocopah Indian Tribe located in Somerton, Arizona. This study will focus on understanding their experiences as Native American women living along the U.S.-Mexico border in an area that is highly militarized, and an area with a high activity of drug smuggling and human trafficking. The personal interviews conducted with Cocopah female tribal members will allow for an understanding of their lived experiences as women who have fought against federal government efforts to first exterminate the Native American during the Jackson extermination era, and then to assimilate the Native American by forcing their children to attend Indian boarding schools. I will also explore how Cocopah women have experienced change based on colonization and how this has affected issues of sovereignty and gender. This work will focus on the personal interviews conducted with a group of Cocopah Elders and tribal members a total of six women. This group of women decided to remain anonymous, except for Paula Coolick and Chairwoman Sherry Cordova. Also, I only identify the Cocopah female Elders out of respect to their traditions and customs because Cocopah Elders are highly revered in Cocopah society and I do not want to over look that. Significant to this thesis are

interviews conducted with Cocopah Tribal Council Chairwoman Ms. Sherry Cordova and Vice-Chair Mr. Dale Philips. This thesis focuses on social inequalities specifically gender and class analysis and how these inequalities are part of the colonial project as well as how the Cocopah tribe is decolonizing their community.

## Methodology and Reflection

My thesis focuses on Cocopah women who currently reside on one of the three Cocopah reservations in or around Somerton, Arizona. I use the term Native or Native American because they were the initial inhabits of the Colorado River Delta and surrounding area around Somerton, Arizona. I only use the term "Indian" particularly when I look at literature that addresses Native American or Natives in this manner. I use the term Native American, because all members of the Cocopah Indian Tribe are Untied States citizens, being born in the Untied States is a requirement in order to seek enrollment in the tribe. I also use the term "tribe" and "nation" to describe the Cocopah people because that is how they self-identify.

The methods used for this project were guided by ethnography including two personal interviews, one conducted during a brunch in Yuma, Arizona and the other two conducted at the Cocopah tribal headquarters on the West Reservation in Somerton, Arizona. The interviews with all Cocopah members used in this thesis were scheduled by appointment only. Jill McCormick, M.A. the Cocopah Cultural Resource Manger was instrumental in me securing these interviews with Cocopah Tribal Elders and members and with Chairwoman Cordova. I had tried for months since September 2013 to obtain an interview and was unsuccessful, mainly because the Cocopah women were not interested in speaking with me, and Chairwoman Cordova's extremely busy schedule. It was not until March 2014 that I was granted interviews and had to travel during Spring Break to Arizona and conduct these interviews, I was told that our meeting times could change at

any moment, and that there maybe the possibility of a cancellation. As I would periodically check in with Jill McCormick to see if anyone had changed their mind and would finally speak to me, I would often receive the apologetic denial of interviews. One reason I observed when finally speaking to the Cocopah Elders and tribal members was a reluctance to speak to me, first they wanted to hear why was I there? What was I going to do with the interview? Where was I from? Who was I? I shared with them who I was, and my connection to Yuma and Somerton, Arizona.

I revealed to them that I was a descendent of the Pascua Yaqui Indian Tribe that resides around the Tucson, Arizona area. I told them that I was only one-fourth Native and that I was not an enrolled member, I had grown up on the U.S.-Mexico border in Somerton, Arizona raised in Mexican traditions and customs, but I felt that if I they would share their lived experiences with me it would help me in understanding my community of Somerton and my Great-Grandmother Margaret who had been a registered Pascua Yaqui tribal member. Aside from interviews I utilize participant observation when meeting with Cocopah female Elders and members, I observed how their ties to their community were strong and how much they care for one another. I observed a true bond and genuine affection and respect between the women. I can conclude that is respect and bond is what also keeps Cocopah cultural traditions alive despite the effects of colonization and violence. All though most of the Cocopah women interviewed are bilingual or trilingual I conducted my interviews in English.

I decided to focus on the oral histories of Cocopah women because it was a way of recording their personal and historical memories, and because “[o]ral history is an unparralled tool for reaching below the surface and uncovering hidden stories and points

of view" (Armitage, Hart, and Weathermon 13 ). Scholars have argued that, "[w]omen's oral history is a feminist encounter, even if the interviewee is not herself a feminist. It is the creation of a new type of material on women; it is the validation of women's experiences; it is the communication among women of different generations; it is the discovery of our own roots and the development of a continuity that has been denied us in traditional historical accounts" with this in mind I felt that my work would best reflect my research interest into the oral histories of Native American women by conducting interviews (Armitage, Hart, and Weathermon 13) .

This intervention into Cocopah women's lives and history is also a journey of healing and connecting to my ancestors. I want healing from the violence that colonization has brought to my ancestors and to the women of the borderlands, especially Cocopah women because it is Native Women who are most often overlooked and forgotten, but it is these same women who are the strength of the community and the light of the home. I want to understand the history of the Southwest, because my ancestors have resided there since the 1800s. Moreover, the history of the Cocopah has often been overlooked and ignored, told by outsiders who observed them as objects to be studied. As I spoke to a group of Cocopah elders I saw small similarities in our life stories such as forced migration, having under pressure and as a survival method to learn English and being separated from one's parents because of socioeconomic reasons, but also something positive having a close bond with one's grandparents, as these women shared with me their grandparents hold a significant place in their lives, as have my maternal grandparents. Yet there are no words to describe the violence that the colonization of the Colorado River brought to their lives. With a heavy heart I recount and share the stories

of these indomitable Cocopah women, who have taught me the meaning of courage, love, and community. I humbly share their words of strength and survival.

## Chapter 1: History of the Cocopah & Cucapá people

*What does it mean, the border? It's sad. It's frustrating because we have all of these things that we cannot — there's so many things that we cannot share with our family there. There's so many, not just material things, but there's just so many things that we are not able to share with them because someone came along and drew that line in the sand.* -Cocopah Tribal Council Chairwoman Sherry Cordova

A line drawn in the sand by those unfamiliar with the history of this unique space that had been inhabited by various Yuman-speaking tribes lead to the physical splintering of the Cocopah/Cucapá people, a transnational tribe divided by the U.S.-Mexico border. This split resulted in the two groups being recognized by different names and acquiring citizenship in different nation states. The Cocopah gained citizen rights in the United States on June 2, 1924 when Congress granted citizenship to all Native Americans born in the U.S., but even after the Indian Citizenship Act, some Native Americans were not allowed to vote. In Arizona, Native Americans were granted the right to vote by the Arizona Supreme Court on July 15, 1948 when it unanimously overruled the decision of the Superior Court of Maricopa County which had ruled against Native Americans in a lawsuit filled by Frank Harrison, a Yavapai from the Fort McDowell Reservation and Harry Austin, Yavapai tribal chairman.

On the other hand, the majority of the Cucapá in Mexico reside in the village of El Mayor in Baja California, which is on the very end of the Colorado River, it is the home of the largest population of Cucapá people in Mexico, other Cucapá also reside in Sonora. In Mexico the political impact of the Mexican Revolution and its (1910-20) national polices and class-based organizing in Mexico encouraged indigenous people to identify as peasants (Jackson and Warren 549-73). In Mexico nationalist ideologies of *mestizaje* (racial and cultural mixing) emphasized cultural and biological mixing as opposed to ethnic difference and further discouraged politicized indigenous identification (Alonso 459-590). The state focused on forging a "mestizo nation" and granting land rights to Mexico's indigenous communities, the state also encouraged the abandonment of indigenous markers such as language and traditional clothing (Knight 71-113). Mexico's native population was encouraged to assimilate itself into the "mestizo nation" and leave behind their tradition and customs.

The Cocopah are a Native American tribe located in Southwestern Arizona near the Colorado River delta. They refer to themselves as a "tribe" because they constitute one of the seven descendant Tribes from the greater Yuman language-speaking people unlike other Native American groups who refer to themselves as nations. The Cocopah Indian tribe has a reservation systems that are structured through a constitutional political system that is imposed by the federal government, which is referred to as a tribal government. The purpose of this chapter is to contribute to the historical knowledge on the Cocopah. I have examined their cultural history through a framework of ethnicity theory in the context of Cocopah identity to explore how these historical processes

operate at a local level among the Cocopah and how it has affected ethnic identity and cultural survival. I review what has been written on the Cocopah and their quotidian activities and included oral interviews from current tribal members on the reservation near Somerton, Arizona to discuss the work that has been written about them. It is important to demonstrate their on-going traditions are still persistent despite colonization because as Andrea Smith suggests "native peoples are a permanent 'present absence' in the U.S. Colonial imagination, an 'absence' that reinforce at every turn the conviction that Natives peoples are indeed vanishing and that the conquest of native land is justified" their ongoing traditions are testament that despite their colonization and "absence" and government restrictions on membership such as proving one's blood quantum in order to be recognized as Native American (72).

I conducted this review to observe the effects of colonization on the Cocopah people. Since the majority of published ethnographic work has mainly profiled male informants, this chapter will demonstrate that this academic tendency and approach is flawed and leaves out a critical perspective. Cocopah males have been deemed by previous academics to be more important and significant to their research projects. This chapter relates not just the history of the Cocopah but also seeks to intervene into the scholarship produced by academics that have overlooked and silenced Cocopah women.

I conducted interviews with Cocopah women tribal members during a weeklong visit to my hometown; Somerton, Arizona. I met with one group of tribal elders who decided to remain anonymous. They did have questions as to who I was, where was I from, and what I was going to use the interview for? I humbly explained that I grew up in Somerton, Arizona and my family has been in the Somerton area since the early 1800s. I

also spoke about my Mother and the fact that she is also Native American, but that I had grown up within Mexican culture and traditions and knew very little of my Mother's Pascua Yaqui ancestors and I wanted to know more about Native women especially those in my hometown. Surprisingly, something extraordinary occurred that late morning on March 23, 2014 during brunch at IHOP in Yuma, Arizona. I rarely speak of this to others but I shared with them that my Grandfather Guadalupe Talamante was born in Gadsden, Arizona in 1925 he was adopted and taken across the border to San Luis Rio Colorado, Sonora Mexico. Then suddenly a female Tribal Elder spoke-up and shared with me that the same thing has happed to her parent, her father was born in Arizona and raised in Mexico. I immediately felt a personal connection; I had never in my life met a stranger with the same experience. After I shared with them these personal stories I felt that the resistance I had initially felt from them was melting away, also I finally felt at ease my nervousness began to fade. These interview were not easily granted, I had waited approximately six months before I was able to confirm an interview. A several times the Cocopah Cultural Resources Manager, Jill McCormick e-mailed me writing that no one was willing to speak with me, yet she continued to offer her help and support in order for me to accomplish my field work. Finally, a few weeks before Spring Break 2014 I had an interview appointment confirmed with both tribal Chairwoman Sherry Cordova and female Cocopah Tribal Elders and members. I was extremely nervous when I first started speaking during both interviews even though growing up I had several Cocopah friends I knew I was going to speak to Tribal Elders and the Tribal Chairwoman, I knew that Cocopah culture values respect to their Elders and I wanted to show that I understood and respected their Elders and their cultural traditions. I was able to record both interviews on

my IPhone and I had the interview with Cocopah Tribal Chairwoman professionally transcribed. The interview with Tribal Elders and Members were not transcribed because of lack of funding, since there were several conversations occurring at once because of the group setting the transcription fee for this recording was high.

**Ethnicity Theory**

This section will provide a theoretical framework of analysis to demonstrate how the Cocopah people have maintained their ethnic identity and structure. Edward Spicer a pioneer of ethnic studies in the Southwest provides the concept of “persistent cultural systems” and “identity configuration” to analyze the persistence of Cocopah cultural identity (Spicer 795-800). Through the use of this theoretical framework of analysis to illustrate how the Cocopah Indian tribe have maintained their cultural identity among contrasting environments and have survived attempts of integration into two modern nation-states, the United States and Mexico. Spicer’s “identity configuration” accounts for a recognized set of symbols representative of a group’s identity system, and is based on the sense of a “common” identity. These symbols are associated with a people’s unique historical experience  (Spicer 795-800). Spicer identifies four sets of symbols that are common to all enduring peoples. They include 1) a group’s ethnic terminology, 2) geographical and locations and ties to the land, 3) sacred law, 4) devotion to certain songs and dances that may be sacred or secular. Spicer proposes “in a persistent cultural system the meanings of the symbols consist of beliefs about historical events in the experience of the people through generations (Spicer 795-800). This belief that the experience is shared with and through ancestors is basic in such systems.” I have applied this theory to the

Cocopah people to show that they are an enduring people whose ethnic identity has survived colonization, yet they have been affected by it.

A group's ethnic terminology, means that an enduring people have a set of terms by which they think about themselves in relation to other peoples among whom they live. This process of boundary maintenance is essential to the existence of people who have lived and continue to live in contact with many different peoples. (Spicer 349),
The Cocopah have historically retained their ethnic identity. Though they have been faced with colonization, interethnic or racial affiliations and marriages they remain with a clear and distinct ethnic identity. The earliest written accounts for the Cocopah are found in the ethnographic data of Spanish explorers starting in 1540. The Cocopah Indian Tribe continues to be recognized as a tribe among other native groups and by the U.S. government. The Cocopah continue to refer to themselves as Cocopah. As can be seen from my 2014 oral interviews with current Cocopah tribeswomen, they described themselves as Cocopah women, and made distinctions between the "white man world" and their own. They distinguish themselves from neighboring Native peoples such as the Pai Pai of Baja California Mexico and Diegueno of Southern California. A second identity symbol consists of geographical locations and ties to land. Spicer suggest that place names become important symbols regardless of whether the actual place due to larger legacy of existence continues to be included in the territory in which a people lives (Spicer 351). For the Cocopah this would include significant spiritual mountains near El Mayor in Baja California Mexico. Cocopahs share a common place of origin among themselves and with the Cucapá of Mexico. The Cocopah people share a sense of belonging to a specific territory and they remain within their territorial boundary as

indicated by the four mountains located in each of the cardinal directions that make the boundaries of Cocopah territory. Their place of origin is among the mountains of El Mayor in Baja California, Mexico and it is also part of the Cocopah's belief that their deceased relatives go back to their place of origin. The third type of symbol in Spicer's identity configuration is sacred laws. A sacred law still being followed in contemporary times is during menstruation, in which a woman must following several cleansing rituals. The Cocopah tribal female members I spoke to described this ritual in which during menstruation a Cocopah woman may not touch herself, they explained methods for fixing their hair, one informant cleverly stated that she wore gloves. Many still practice this; they even mentioned that younger generations are also practicing this sacred law. My informants also spoke of food taboos during birth and cleansing rituals after menstruation and childbirth. These sacred laws are gendered with women following certain set of rules for reproduction, childbirth, and personal appearance. During the Cocopah funeral process sacred laws are also gendered.

Cocopah Tribal Council Chairwoman Sherry Cordova elaborated more on this:

> we have funerals, it's the women that must go get the clothing, and it's the women that stay up all night and the clothing. They have to make sure there's food to feed people. Whereas the men, on the other side — on the other hand — their job may be to cut the wood, to bring it for the cremation, and then they just — that's pretty much it. They're there as a supportive role to me, to the women, because the women are — they have to — they cannot leave the bundles of clothes there. They have to be there all night with the clothes. They have to make sure that the families bathe, fast, and do all these things (personal interview. 24 March 2014).

The fourth kind of symbol is a devotion to certain songs and dances that are characteristic and unique to that group. These songs are sacred and secular, but often the so-called secular songs and dances have a deeper and more universal significance than

those that are part of religious worship (Spicer 354). The Cocopah men perform the Bird Songs, unique to all Yuman speaking people and also to other Native Peoples of Southern California. Men still maintain the role as singers and women dance this reinforces patriarchy and gender roles. Both men and women have rules and a structured format that they must follow in order to preserve their identity.

As Chairwoman Sherry Cordova describes the traditional role of Cocopah women, “like in most native tribes, I don’t think Cocopah is any different in that the men are revered and the women have — always the expectation has been that they are there to support the men. History has painted that picture”. The effects of colonization are illustrated in the Cocopah tribe yet they continue to maintain their ethnic identity despite the change in gender roles they have experienced. The Cocopah people also perform secular song and dance that has been passed down through generations orally and Cocopah elders are the ones who hold this knowledge and pass it down to younger generations. The Cocopah elders hold a very special and revered place in Cocopah society and social life and Cocopah elders are important in order to maintain Cocopah identity and the tropes of tradition, history, and member roles and responsibilities in the tribe. As the Cocopah elders contribute to the maintenance of Cocopah identity it is equally important to discuss how the Cocopah tribes as a group continue to identify and maintain their ethic Cocopah identity.

Moreover, Spicer suggests that the group identification is based on a set of

> …beliefs and sentiments, learned like other cultural elements, that are associated with a particular symbols, such as artifacts, words, behaviors and ritual acts. A relationship between human individuals and selected cultural elements-the symbols- is the essential feature of a

> collective identity system: individuals believe in and feel the importance of what the symbols stand for (197).

I use this criteria for group identification as my framework in which I will analyze cultural identity among the Cocopah to gain a better understanding of Cocopah group identification as it has persisted as a cultural and ethnic identity despite colonization. The Cocopah are people who have been able to maintain continuity through their experiences and their conception of themselves in a wide variety of sociocultural environments (Spicer 349). They have been able to maintain their cultural identity, which makes them a people with a "persistent identity system" on the basis of their demonstrated capacity to survive contrasting sociocultural environments, such as the modern-welfare state of the United States and Mexico. I provide a brief overview of Cocopah cultural identity before and during the colonization of the Colorado River Delta and provide insight if and how Cocopah women's identity, voices, and understanding of their history has shifted with the contrasting environments they have managed to survive. I have used this theory to understand this larger history of ethnic retention and survival.

**Before Colonization**

Anthropologist Anita Alvarez Williams has devoted much of her work to the study of Native Americans along the U.S.-Mexico border; she describes the Cocopah people as "river people" who have lived on the Colorado River Delta, an environment similar to the Nile River of Egypt for hundreds, perhaps thousands of years (1). Unlike any other written accounts of the Cocopah people Anita Alvarez Williams allows for the Cocopah's history to permeate in her work. Others who have written on the history of the

Cocopah have described them more as an object on displays overlooking their human condition as Cocopah people. The history of the Cocopah people is related to the Hokan-derived Yuman linguistic family. Most of the members of the Yuman language-speaking group presently live in Southwestern Arizona and in Northwestern Mexico in the state of Sonora near the Colorado River along the U.S.-Mexico border. The Cocopah are part of the Yuman (Hokan) speaking people and first appeared in the Colorado Valley around A.D. 1000 (Roger 196). During the 17th and 18th centuries, the Colorado River Delta was occupied by the Yuma (Quechan), Halchidhoma, Kahwan, Halykwamai and the Cocopah (Kelly 10). The Cocopah cannot with certainty be placed on the Colorado delta before A.D. 1450 (ibid). The Cocopah have endured the many structural and social changes that have occurred around the Colorado River Delta. They have survived the colonization by Euro-American settlers of the Delta, and have maintained their centuries old traditions and customs in spite of these events and confrontations. Their survival as Cocopah people can be explained with Spicer's concept of "identity configuration" as it recognizes sets of symbols that are representative of a groups identity system and is based on the sense of a "common identity" this common identity depends on an awareness and common understanding of the kinds of symbols involved and that these symbols are associated with a people's unique historical experience, the Cocopah's because they have been able to adapt to a different environment (Spicer 348). Examining the history of the Cocopah is essential to understanding the origins of Yuma County and the surrounding region because this history is significant in providing a connection to their historical past. The Southwest is a unique space, it is surround by miles of international border, and it is the living theory of transnationalism and embodies the effects of colonization.

**Colorado Delta Ethnography**

The majority of the ethnography has been completed by male anthropologists and explorers and has primarily focused on men; this type of androcentric scholarship overlooks women and their experiences. This is significant because it illustrates the effects of colonization and the prejudice that male anthropologists and explorers brought with them to the Colorado River. They observed and wrote about the Cocopah in an attempt to provide the "truth" and decenter Cocopah identity, as Stuart Hall suggests, western rational thought is seen to be the form of universal knowledge yet it is only true because of its historical links to power, as can been seen with the Western Scholarship produced about the Cocopah (12). The earliest ethnography that exist for the Cocopah were produced by Spanish explores and later by American explorers seeking to colonize the Colorado River with the first European settlement in 1852 with the establishment of Fort Yuma (Kelly 9). The Cocopah like other Yuman-speaking people have occupied the lower Colorado River delta since before 1540 when Fernando de Alarcon recorded the first written account of the river valley. Sent by Viceroy of New Spain, Mendoza to explore the country, Alarcon was the first European to visit the Colorado River Country in 1540. During his exploration of the area he travelled the river from August to September 1540. Through this experience he took note of a heavily populated river valley and observed five or six thousand men, women were not mentioned and possibly overlooked.

The Colorado River is a significant space of contestation because its waters are mainly diverted for agricultural use, and this has destroyed the Cocopah tribe's traditional custom of fishing. Alarcón also mentions the presence of Shamans conducting cures

possibly to highlight their so-called primitivism. William H. Kelly an anthropologist form the University of Arizona conducted research among the Cocopah between 1940 and 1950. He spent five months in the Yuma Valley near Somerton, Arizona in the spring of 1947. He used nine principal informants, 7 of them were men. I use his work not only to describe a history of the Cocopah and Cucapá people but also to illustrate how Cocopah/Cucapá women were not in the majority of informants being interviewed for purposes of collecting oral histories from the tribe. Kelly's ethnography and the written observations of the Spanish and American explores illustrates what Devon Abbott Mihesuah, a native scholar who writes about Native American women, suggests is the need for research that focuses and uses Native women as sources of information:

> There is much to do to give voice to Indian Women. Many books and articles about women desperately need new interpretations. Their social, religious, political, and economic roles have been the focus of numerous articles, but few authors uses …Indian women themselves as sources of information. Without understanding the complexity of Indian females, we cannot hope to comprehend the whole of tribal existence (49).

For the Cocopah life on the River did not change much between 1540 and 1850 (Kelly 4). Since Alarcón's exploration of the Colorado River Delta, there had been other explorers that recorded their observations of aboriginal life, Juan de Oñate in 1605 his journey was form the Hopi villages to the Colorado River Delta observing and recording life on the Colorado River Delta. Onate reports the Cocopah on the mouth of the Gila River, and records their name according to their "native pronunciation (kwapa')" he also observed other tribes along the river (Kelly 5). Father Eusebio Kino visited the Colorado River Delta almost 100 years after Onate, during 1701 and 1702. Between 1771 and 1776, Father Francisco Garces collected the most complete data on the Cocopah prior to

any modern ethnographic investigation; he recorded the presence of three tribes located south of the Yuma, one being the Cocopah (Kelly 6).

In the late summer of 1826, Lieutenant Hardy became the first-English speaking explorer to the Colorado River country but made his observations only from his boat. He describes a dense population on the river of nearly "5,000 to 6,000 Indians assembled along the banks near his boat. (7). During the winter of 1850-51, the U.S. War Department sent Lieutenant George Derby to explore the Gulf of California and inspect the area to determine if riverboats could be use to carry supplies to the newly established Fort Yuma. This was the first European settlement on the Colorado River since the destruction of the missions near Yuma in 1871 (8).

**Community and Alliance**

Historically, the Cocopah have been people of the river living in close proximity to it and their existence is intertwined with the Colorado River Delta. The Cocopah are part of the Yuma-speaking people that have lived along the Colorado River for at least the past 1,000 years but there is not exact date (qtd in Kelly 54). According to Kelly, historical evidence from the eighteenth century indicates that the Cocopah were part of an alliance, which included the Maricopa, Pima Halichidoma, Walapai, Hacasupai form the lower Colorado River Delta, the Cahuilla of Southern California and the Paipai, Tipai and Kiliwa in Baja California. This allied group opposed the Yuman-speaking Quechan, who also resides along the U.S.-Mexico border. During the 19$^{th}$ century, Cocopah associated with Baja California tribes because of intermarriage such as the Paipai who lived in the delta and in the mountains, and the Diegueno and Kilwa who lived in or near Cocopah

camps, they coexisted without any hostility. Contact with the mountain Natives took place in the in order to maintain alliances and ensure the groups own survival based on their need for water, and it was primarily the Wi Ahwir and Kwarkwarsh groups who regularly made trips into the mountains to gather food products since they were able to cooperate peacefully.

The Hwaynak clan and Mat Skrui clan were two communities and one was almost entirely Cocopah, and the Mat Skrui were know as the "real Cocopah" and looked down on other Cocopah who had moved into the mountains (Kelly 13). This illustrated the creation of a distinction in identity among the various bands and the importance of the River Delta in forming their identity and the significance of geography, as it was essential to their identification as "people of the river" despite the divisions and physical movement, the Delta continued to link them together and uphold their ethnic identity. The Mat Skrui and Hwanyak were the two bands that moved north and settled in the Somerton, Arizona area. The Cocopah's that inhabited the area around the Colorado River between 1890 and 1900 were divided based on kinship among four independent bands and had no central political leadership the four bands are: Wi Ahwir; Kwakwarsh; Mat Skrui; and the Hwanyak (Kelly 13). Historically, these four bands lived in a rancheria type settlement; this consisted of households grouped in clusters, kinsmen and friends around farming and gathering areas. Kelly states that these house clusters consisted of 10 or 12 houses (109). In fact, Spicer argues that "one important characteristic which marked most rancheria peoples was a strong sense of tribal identity" and he describes them as "Yuman-speaking people of the Colorado River Valley had a strong tribal sense" (373). These four bands occupied various spots around the delta, the

Wi Ahwir lived along the sand hills and the delta for a distance of 15 to 20 miles North of El Mayor, Baja California Mexico, the Kwakwarsh occupied the area below El Mayor, and the Mat Skuri occupied the center of the delta and the eastern edge of the Hwanyak. Finally, the Hwanyak lived 20 miles below San Luis Rio Colorado, Sonora Mexico. Even though these four bands lived apart from one another they identified as a group, illustrating their unity by continuing to see themselves as "river people" and living the Cocopah way. Most of the Hwanyak around Somerton, are described as "constantly shifting back and forth across the U.S.-Mexico border, this type of migration for the Cocopah was typical, it was a way of life for them they were nomadic people who moved with the seasons, until their movement was restricted by the United States Immigration Service in the 1930s (Kelly 13).

Between 1900-10, the majority of the Wi Ahwir Cocopah moved near Mexicali, Baja California; the Mat Skrui spread along the Baja California border while some families moved near Somerton, Arizona, while others settled south of San Luis Rio Colorado, Sonora (Kelly 13). This constant shifting was due in part to Cocopah families looking for work among a wage-labor economy since they could no longer live a nomadic lifestyle that provided them with food and shelter that took hold of the surrounding area of the Colorado River Delta. Steamboats were used from 1852 to 1877 when the Southern Pacific Railroad reached Yuma. Along the Colorado River where Cocopah men found work as guides for the steamboats, the river still remained part of their lives and continuing to aid in their survival. Steamboat travel and work for the Cocopah ended with the introduction of the railroad system into Southwestern Arizona forcing men to find work among local farms. For the Cocopah the end of steamboat travel

meant "that the bottom fell out of the cash economy to which a generation of them had become accustomed" (Williams 38). Undoubtedly, the loss of income, floods and droughts that had decreased their natural food supply were push factors that led the Cocopah to leave the lower Colorado River Delta after steamboat transportation came to an end, forcing some Cocopah to move north towards the Somerton, Arizona area and other towards the Mexicali, Baja California area. Women did not participate in the navigation of steamboats; this could be because of gender norms since women's work was mostly done around the home.

All these structural changes the Cocopah experienced impacted their livelihood but they still remained connected to the Colorado River. In 1917, some of the Cocopah who had permanently settled near Somerton after migrating from the lower Colorado River due to the end of the use of steamboats finally received recognition as United States Native American and were given two reservations after much work was done by them and their clan leader Frank Tehana, they were federally recognized. President Woodrow Wilson signed executive order no. 2711 and the Cocopah received two small reservations a total of 446 acres in 1917. Presently their reservation consists of East Reservation, West Reservation and the North Reservation.

The reservation brought changes to Cocopah daily life, natural food resources for Cocopah families came from the small plots of land they farmed on and they grew native crops of corn, bean and squash since their traditional farming methods depended on the Colorado River Delta. The ancestral Cocopah did not view food as a symbol of wealth or prestige and was generous with it. This generosity still remains among the Cocopah

people, as Cocopah Tribal Chairwoman Sherry Cordova recalls growing up and going with her grandparents to distribute food:

> We would get what we needed and then we would haul everything into the car, and then we would come out here to the reservation and take it to people because that was their thing. They said, "You get what you need for your family, you take care of what you need for your family, but the rest you go share with other people. You don't keep it to yourself." And that's the same philosophy that I tell everybody… (personal interview. 24 March 2014)

The Cocopah displayed good will towards others and this attitude may have been a key to the tribal alliances they had established. Other Cocopah women interviewed for this research project who decided to remain anonymous also recall distributing and sharing food with Cocopah tribal members. Food was a symbol of goodwill and still used in Cocopah celebrations. Before living on the reservation the Cocopah followed the planting season, which started in July the men and older boys usually when they were over 12 years old would hunt and fish in the morning and hunt in the afternoon. The women and older girls usually around the age of 12, spent the morning gathering mesquite beans, bird eggs, and quelite greens. This way of life indicates how the labor among the Cocopah was divided based on gender while this division of labor reinforced gender norms, it also worked to preserve knowledge, and contributed to how the women passed on their knowledge of the household to their daughters. Division of household labor is still gendered as women maintain the household responsibilities while balancing work in and outside the reservation as mentioned by Chairwoman Cordova.

Living on the reservation also brought changes to the Cocopah household. Typically during the late 19$^{th}$ century, the Cocopah lived in the "old style" Cocopah

house, an earth covered structure with round corners, a flat roof, and excavate floor (Kelly 47). In a Cocopah house, pottery and baskets were typically used for cooking and storage since life in the desert meant extreme temperatures during the summer months. Housing for the Cocopah changed once they had permanently settled around Somerton, Arizona and were federally recognized they would now be able to receive support and benefits from the U.S. government.

In the late 1970s when Cocopah enrollment was "open" for those willing to enroll. One of the benefits of this increase in enrollment for the Cocopah people meant that they had qualified for homes provided by the U.S department of Housing and Urban Development or more commonly known on the reservations as HUD housing. The impact of this modernization experienced by the Cocopah was that these houses replaced the traditional Cocopah houses and provided indoor plumbing and electricity, which offered them the choice of cooking indoors unlike their traditional outdoor cooking style. The construction of these houses also meant they would be confined to a particular space on the reservation, it also moved them away from their traditional family living because many of them did not have their nuclear family or close relatives living with them or next to them, a drastic change to their *rancheria* style living. Cocopah families have traditionally lived close to their kin and this change in their living situation disrupts their traditional customs of living in close proximity to family, now their homes are assigned to them keeping them from living next to relatives this is something that they are working to resolve as mentioned by Cocopah Tribal member Lynetta Thomas. However, the Cocopah continue to maintain their cultural identity as people of the river despite this

drastic change in their living arrangements they continue to identify ethnically as Cocopah.

The Colonization of the Cocopah also brought other structural changes. Cocopah ancestors were divided into four bands, the Cocopah are no longer divided among these bands since they have all settled on one of the three reservations and in the place of the band leader is the Cocopah tribal Council. The tribal council was formed in the 1960s with five-member Tribal Council, members aiming their work at improve the living conditions, preserving cultural heritage, traditions, and history of the Cocopah people. The Cocopah Tribal Council Chair took on the responsibility of the bandleader, and as the bandleader they must also be able "maintain order, to settle disputes, to urge cooperation in group activities…" (Kelly 80). Their current Tribal Council Chairwoman is Sherry Cordova; she is the third female Chairwoman in tribal council history.

**Cocopah Mythology**

Cocopah mythology is orally passed down generation-to-generation and the creation story shows how they came to be on the Delta and how they would understand their existence. According to Kelly, his informant under the pseudonym "Sam Spa," recalled the Cocopah creation story as a guiding philosophy to the Cocopah. Kelly notes that Spa's narrative was full of animation and recounted with energetic vigor that showed enthusiasm in sharing his peoples story (Kelly 150). The Cocopah believe that the Gods, Sipa and Komat, created all. Their existence began underwater and came to the surface when Komat smoked a cigarette and gained extra strength and pushed his twin Sipa out. When they came to the surface Komat became the older twin and was blinded on his way up from underneath the water, and again one can observe the importance of water to the

Cocopah people, since it is deeply rooted in their mythology. Once on the surface, Sipa and Komat created the heavens and the sky, and all kinds of men; Mexican, Chinese and American, etc. and they also created the Cocopah and gave them the name of their lineage.

Moral values are one element of a "persistent cultural system" as introduced by Edward Spicer. These values represent a "moral sphere" where persistent people such as the Cocopah maintain a conception of the moral world. Spicer suggests that there is a part of the "general moral world that becomes specialized for guiding them in realities of opposition". Sipa and Komat establish moral values for the Cocopah community. The Cocopah creation story illustrates this. Sipa made the bow and arrow, when he was finished he shot it in the air and on its way back from the sky it hit Komat. Once he was hit Komat inquired on why Sipa had shot the arrow, and then continued to explain how they should only shoot the arrow when killing animals (Kelly 116). This story emphasizes a male-centric creation story, the importance of water and tradition and history, also it emphasizes the need for an alliance between the Cocopah and the importance of avoiding the displacement of people. The belief that they were responsibly using these sophisticated tools and they would not hurt other men. Several Cocopah mythology stories center around Coyote.  In one of the stories, Coyote dies after his sister Snake retaliates against his constant bullying; Sipa intervened on Snake's request. Sipa instructed Snake to bite Coyote if he threw her around again. Coyote dies from the Snake's bite and is cremated. Sipa is also the victim of witchcraft after Coyote's sisters, two frog girls ate Sipa's excrement, and Sipa became ill, died and was cremated on a pyre.  Sipa comes back from the dead at the Roadrunner and Badger pleaded with him to

return. He became convinced and returns after “being close to heaven” to reteach the people how to live (Kelly 118). This moral teaching like much of the Cocopah past is veiled in mythology that is populated with villains and heroes in the form of human-like birds, insects and animals (Williams 74).

Cultural identity is maintained through Cocopah mythology, it is passed down orally from generation to generation, in doing this the Cocopah maintain and preserve their creation story. Socrates saw power in maintaining oral tradition, in live conversations, and dismissed written text because it would claim completion and finality; it is useful only as an aide to memory as written by Plato in the Phaedrus. It is important to not only focus on the written word or academic scholarship but also on oral interviews in order to illustrate how the Cocopah are able to preserve their cultural traditions through the continuation of this tradition of verbalizing their mythology. Unlike the reports of the numerous explorers that traveled the Colorado River Delta, and reported only counting them, and observations of what they ate and how they lived. The observation recorded dehumanized the Cocopah and, they were like objects to be studied. It is important to examine their creation story to understand this community, and understand how they recognized their creation and the rest of mankind, and it serves as an explanation of why the have a strong connection to the Colorado River Delta.

**People Divided by the United States-Mexico Border**

The Cocopah people soon became divided because of the arbitrary establishment of the U.S.-Mexico border. Those who remained in the U.S. identified themselves as Cocopah, and those who resided in Mexico took the name Cucapá, and both groups have remained in permanent homes on both side of the U.S.-Mexico border. During late 1930s,

the free movement of the Cocopah across the border ended when the United States Immigration Service began to restrict their free movement across their ancestral homelands (Kelly 83). The U.S. (INS) "acting in response to county board of supervisors who found Indians a welfare burden during the depression" divided Cocopah into two groups; the Cocopah and Cucapá (Kelly 13).

The Cocopah like their ancestors still experience the continual physical division between them and their kinsmen in Mexico by the U.S. government. With the establishment of the United States-Mexico border the Cocopah and Cucapá people are permanently physically divided in 1938. Prior to this both groups migrated between Arizona and Mexico, and it was typical for families to travel frequently. Like the O'odham, the Cocopah people were first split by the Gadsden Purchase of 1853, and this split left a small band of Cocopah under the jurisdiction of the U.S. (Hays 37 Luna-Firebaugh 159-181).

The Cocopah developed an unofficial agreement with the INS, that would allow for freedom of passage of Mexican Cocopah into the United States (Luna-Firebaugh 167). The Cocopah people were impacted by the heightened border crossing controls implemented by the U.S. government earlier than any other tribe because their land is adjacent to primary river crossing and because of U.S. control of the Colorado River. Today, the Cocopah reside near Somerton, Arizona occupying three reservations and the Cucapá reside in El Mayor, Baja California, and in Pozos de Arivzu, Sonora.

In 1985, the Cocopah Tribe gained an additional 4200 acres to include the North Reservation; this was due to the Cocopah Land Acquisition Bill signed by President Ronald Reagan. Presently the Cocopah's North, West, and East Reservations comprise

over 6500 acres of land.  However, this land is leased as agricultural land to non-Indian farmers in order to create revenue for the tribe. In addition to acquiring revenue for the tribe the Cocopah people have also created a seal. The Cocopah Indian Tribe seal symbolically represent the sovereign Cocopah Tribe that embodies their beliefs, customs and culture.

**The U.S.-Mexico Border**

The Cocopah and Cucapá were faced with a newly established border after the end of the U.S.-Mexico war during which Mexico ceded half of its territory to the United States. The Untied States acquired California and Arizona among other states when the treaty was ratified in Queretaro, Mexico on May 30, 1848. Many Cocopah and Cucapá found themselves being confined to only one side of the international border, this split up families and forced them to distinguish themselves between those on the U.S. territory and those in Mexican territory.

The Cocopah/ Cucapá were denied their citizenship rights granted to them by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Article VII extended citizenship to all Mexican citizens…that remained on ceded territories (Tate 20). This was not enforced since many Cucapá and Cocopah that were born in Mexico and were living in Arizona were deported to Mexico.  One of my informants a Cocopah elder described how her Aunt was taken by the Border Patrol and deported. It has also been reported that many Cocopah that were born in the U.S. were mistaken for Mexican citizens and were also deported. Though the Cocopah were forced to split into two groups by the U.S. government their cultural and ethnic identity has survived. The Cocopah in the United States continue to remain in contact with the Cucapá in Mexico.

**Cucapá in Mexico**

To further illustrate government infringement upon the Cucapá, between 1935 and 1950, Mexicans and the Mexican government gained control of land that was formally owned by Americans when this land began to be developed under the system of the *ejido*, which was cooperatives farms owned by the Mexican government the Cucapá found it difficult to obtain wage labor. They had previously been employed by American companies doing construction work and farm labor. According to Kelly, in 1936 many Cocopah families living in Baja California formed part of an *ejido* that was intended to be Cucapá only. The Cucapá did not benefit from the *ejido* system because of the lack of support from the Mexican government, this lack of support allowed for non- Cucapá families to join the *ejido*. These families later left the *ejido* and settled in Sonora, Mexico. The Mexican government had failed them and would continue to do so in contemporary times with the disruption of their traditional fishing customs.

During the 21st century they would infringe on their traditional custom of fishing and develop a protected zone along the Hardy River in Baja California where the Cucapá fish in order to sell it themselves to the local fish markets. They were being denied the right to fish because they were not behaving and acting like traditional Indians as defined by the Mexican government. In order to deny the Cucapá claims to an indigenous identity, local official were questioning their indigeneity, arguing that in fact the Cucapá were behaving "modern" because they fished on boats and nets unlike their ancestors. Kelly states that the Cucapá prior to the 1940s were in ownership of few acres of land along the canal between San Luis Rio Colorado, Sonora, Mexico and La Grulla a community located a few miles from San Luis Rio Colorado, Mexico. In 1947, more than

a dozen families lived on a underdeveloped tract south of La Grulla, this land was set aside for them when a new irrigation system was put in place in 1940 (Kelly 14). After the 1940s, the Cucapá had begun to leave the *ejido* to pursue jobs in wood chopping, cotton picking, and raising cattle (Kelly 13). The Cocopah in Arizona have examined prospects for the dual enrollment of their Mexican counterparts. The benefits of dual enrollment would be expanded access to health care, education and other tribal benefits, something the Cucapá struggle with in Mexico (Hayes 1996:43).

**Colonization and Displacement of the Cucapá**

Colonization of the Cucapá's ancestral lands in the Mexicali Valley began in 1874 with the creation of the Colonia Lerdo by foreign investors, named in honor of Mexican president Sebastian Lerdo de Tejada. The Mat Skuri was living on the land used to establish the Colonia Lerdo. The Colonia Lerdo became a failed colonization project when the waters of the Colorado River would rise and destroyed everything in its path (Bonilla-Vazquez 87). Foreign investors in the new settlement decided to pull their capital from the project and head North. One of the investors, Guillermo Andrade a Mexican investor living in San Francisco, CA entered into a partnership with an American banker, Thomas Blythe, in order to continue the development and make a profit from the Colonia Lerdo. Blythe was murdered and Andrade was forced to sell the land to another American, G.C. Hunt, who later formed the California-Mexico Land and Cattle Company. In 1904 Hunt expelled the occupants of the Colonia Lerdo, among these families were the Cucapá. The Cucapá were faced with changes to their environment introduced by outsiders with no consideration of their traditional way of life, or their connection to the Colorado River. The Cucapá then became part of the Mexican

Revolution of 1910 when they participated in the army of Enrique Flores Magón as his troops entered Mexicali on January 11, 1911 although not much is written about their involvement. This decision to participate could have been due to the history and continual infringement by the Mexican government.

Finally, after the turmoil of the revolution and the attempts to develop the Mexicali Valley, the Cucapá finally found a permanent home in El Mayor. El Mayor was founded in 1937, on land that was given to the Cucapá by President Lázaro Cardenas when he introduced article 27, which redistributed land to peasants and indigenous communities that were illegally stripped of them (Bonilla-Vazquez 109). In 1973 the Cucapá saw an addition of more of their ancestral land be recognized as Cucapá territory, the Laguna Salada and the Sierra Cucapá became part of El Mayor. The Cucapá of El Mayor had an opportunity to fish and maintain their traditions, cultures, and sustenance provided by the Colorado River. Unfortunately, La Laguna Salada dried-up but in 1978 the Mexicali Valley flooded and the Laguna Salada once again was able to provide the Cucapá with fishing up until 1989 when it dried up. The Cucapá would continue to encounter barriers to their traditional custom of fishing on the Colorado River. In 1993, a federal biosphere was created on the Colorado River Delta to protect its "struggling ecosystem" and this has led to the Cucapá fishing cooperative being denied access to their ancestral fishing grounds.

The Cucapá want the right to fish corvina (Mexican saltwater sea bass) on the Colorado and have an on going conflict with the Mexican government that denies them this right based on a constitutional clause advocating 'indigenous rights' since they claim that the Cucapá are not "adequately performing their indigeneity" because their fishing

techniques were "unsustainable and unindigenous" and therefore would not be allowed (Muehlmann 468-469). Mexican officials argue that if the Cucapá "fished with spears or bows and arrows, it would be a different story" the Cucapá fish on small boats using nets (Muehlmann 472). Although, the National Commission of Human Rights recommends that the government support the claims of the Cucapá, the Commission cites Article 2 of the Mexican constitution, which states that Mexico is a "pluriculutral" nation and should support the Cucapá (Muehlmann 473). Additionally, the Commission cites the International Labor Organization Convention 169, states that it is the "obligation of governments to recognize, protect, and respect the values and practices of indigenous people…in particular, their spiritual and cultural relation to the land", Muehlmann adds that Mexico ratified in 1990 but the fishing conflict continues and the attack on their traditional fishing practices remains (473).

As recently as May 2013, news reports on the fishing conflict have reported that the Mexican government ban on the corvina has affected the 80 Cucapá families that form part of the Cucapá fishing cooperative, since they do not have access to more than 2,300 tons of fish a year (*La Jornada* 40). According to Hilda Hurtado Valenzuela, president of the Cucapá fishing cooperative many Cucapá youth have left for the United States because of the ban on fishing because they are without a job (*La Jornada* 40). This conflict continues to remain unresolved, and the Cucapá people are frustrated, as Hurtado Valenzuela argues that her people are loosing their culture and their native tongue because they are not allowed to defend themselves. The Cocopah of Arizona do not fish on the Colorado, this according to Mr. Dale Phillips, tribal council member when interviewed during September 2013. He continued to state that they no longer fish

because the water of the Colorado has been diverted for agricultural needs. The Cucapá struggle to maintain their cultural and ethnic identity to continue their traditional fishing customs on the Colorado River continues. I was unable to secure an interview with the Cucapá of El Mayor.

**Colonization of the Colorado River the End of Aboriginal Life for the Cocopah**

The establishment of Fort Yuma in 1850 by the U.S. army brought a visual manifestation of outsiders coming in to the Colorado River and bringing with them their imposing European architecture, patriarchy and colonialism. Kelly cites the establishment of Fort Yuma, as the end for aboriginal life for the Indians of the Colorado and Gila Rivers because it put an end to tribal warfare and it brought the Cocopah "for the first time into face-to-face relations with Europeans" (9). Fort Yuma was constructed on the same site where the mission of Fray Francisco Garces' *La Puerta de la Purisima Concepcion* stood before the Yuma Indians killed the occupants. The construction of Fort Yuma on the site of the mission was a message to the Yuman-speaking people; the presence of the U.S. government was there to stay.

Undoubtedly, male observations of the Cocopah have been read as the only historical record of the Yuma area before colonization. Major Heintzelman, who was at the command of Fort Yuma in 1852 after it was abandoned because of conflict with the Yuma Indians (Kelly 9). Major Heintzelman became familiar only through his observation with the Cocopah and identified three separate groups under the leadership of Chi-pi-ti, Colorado, and Jose (Kelly 9). During this time he claims the Cocopah had an alliance with the Southern Diegueno and other Indians from Baja California as they united against the "Yum and Cuchano" (Kelly 9). Also, recorded in his personal diaries

are moments when he was visited by friendly Yuma Indians whom he decided to interview and how he benevolently fed starving Indians when the Yumans' crops failed in the summer of 1851 (Thompson 243). Major Heintzelman's benevolent act of saving the Natives from starving is an attempt to gloss over the fact that the establishment of Fort Yuma was destructive to Native people. The establishment of the Fort also imposed a permanent reminder that outsiders were among the many tribes of the Colorado River Delta. The Cocopah and neighboring tribes now had to coexist with military presence and continue to adhere to their traditional customs and way of life.

The colonization of the Delta and the introduction of the military and steamboats infringed on their space and brought a money-based economy. Also, the American army was brought into the Yuma area to allow for safe passage of immigrants traveling to California, and Cocopah men began working for the steamboat companions by gathering wood, and guiding boats on the river many Cocopah men also worked on the steamboats because of their vast knowledge of the Colorado River. In 1877, the Southern Pacific railroad made its way into Yuma, and steamboat operation was abandoned. For the period of 1850-1877 the Cocopah were employed by steamboat companies to cut firewood for the boats traveling between the mouth of the river and Yuma. Steamboats transported cargo and many miners head to California in search of gold and they also disrupted traditional Cocopah life by being an entry point to wage labor for Cocopah men.

**Present Day Economy**

Presently the Cocopah Indian Tribe maintains a strong presence in Yuma County. Two of the Colorado River tribes that were in the area before colonization, the Quechan and the Cocopah are the most active in Yuma, Arizona. Both tribes operate casinos and

report a drastic change from their traditional activities as hunter-gathers that offer the community year-round casinos and other leisure activities, and offer a large firework display for the Fourth of July holiday, which is not one that their ancestors celebrated but that as U.S. citizens they have adopted. This holiday represents one of the celebrations that they generously celebrate with the surrounding community. These resorts are frequented by locals and employ a large population of Yuma County. The Quechan operates their casinos in both California and Arizona, while the Cocopah operate solely in Arizona.

The Cocopah West Reservation houses the tribe's administrative offices and a museum that is open to the community. This is a significant measure undertaken by the Cocopah in order to preserve their history, identity and cultural traditions and ultimately to tell their own experiences. The museum displays many artifacts and photography of quotidian activities of the Cocopah. In the spirit of community-building, admission to the Cocopah museum is free of charge. The Cocopah recognize the importance and significance in telling their own story and sharing it with the surrounding communities. Their administrative offices are symbolic of them taking back their independence and maintaining their sovereignty, free to some extent from government interference and their ability to administer the tribe and their affairs the Cocopah way. They also recognize the importance of the communities' access to spaces of learning and this is illustrated in their decision to provide free admission to the Cocopah Museum. Last Fall I visited the museum during a trip to the West Reservation and was captivated by the telling of the Cocopah history through artifacts and photographs honoring their ancestral traditional way of life.

# Chapter 2 Sovereignty

Sovereignty... [i]t is our lifeline . . . we have to constantly remind every government entity that we work with that we are a sovereign nation.

-Cocopah Tribal Council Chairwoman Sherry Cordova

Lakota scholar Vine Deloria, Jr. views sovereignty as a theological term originating within early East Asian and European discourses. He writes, "Sovereignty is an ancient idea, once used to describe the power and arbitrary nature of the deity by peoples in the Near East. Although originally a theological term it was appropriated by European political thinkers in the centuries following the Reformation to characterize the person of the King as head of state"(Deloria 22). In other words, a King has absolute power because God chose him to rule. His power was used to make war and govern the domestic affairs. Sovereignty is a concept that Native American tribes and nations have had and use to negotiate with the federal government since the onslaught of colonization throughout ancestral lands. Scott Lyons (Ojibwe) also suggests that sovereignty "originated in feudal Europe, and denoted the concept of a single 'diven ruler'(Lyons 447-468). Additionally, legal scholar Charles Wilkinson suggests that sixteenth-century philosopher Jean Bodin coined the term sovereignty, and explains that it "was equal parts theology (the sovereign-the crown-derives power directly from God) and metaphysics (sovereignty is both supreme and absolute, it cannot be dived up" (54). He also points out that the definition of sovereignty has evolved but that at the foundation

of every definition is power, a “locatable and recognizable power” (Wilkinson ). While the historical roots of sovereignty are found in feudal Europe, it undoubtedly made its way across the Atlantic Ocean. The notion runs through the founding principals of the Untied States minus the concept of a supreme, absolute divine ruler; instead, in its place, lies what Jack Forbes (Chickahominy) describes as sovereignty, which accordingly, “has come to be regarded as the equivalent of an autonomous state” and “freedom from external control” (Forbes 11-23). Another important dimension to sovereignty refers to a state’s “relative independence from and among other states” where sovereignty can also be seen as “something systemic and relation” (Lyons 447-468). Embedded in sovereignty is the ability for self-governance of a people or a state and it must also be recognized as well as acknowledged, but most importantly, respected by nations and people. It has been argued that because of the European origins of sovereignty it is an inappropriate term and concept for Native peoples. Taiaiake Alfred, a Mohawk scholar, urges scholars to “transcend the mentality that supports the colonization of indigenous nations, beginning with the rejection of the term and notion of indigenous sovereignty” (Alfred 466).

The definition of sovereignty as it evolved and the United States has adapted its own meaning and the way that it is used and understood. A significant moment for both the United States and Native Americans in determining how the concept of sovereignty would be used begins with the “Marshall Trilogy” – *Johnson v. McIntosh* (1823), Cherokee Nation v. Georgia (1831), and Worcester v. Georgia (1832) is the trilogy of court cases that provided the first substantive definition of sovereignty for American Indians by the U.S. judiciary and subsequently served to establish precedence for the trust relationship between the U.S. federal government and American Indian tribes (Barker 6).

U.S. Chief Justice John Marshall used the “doctrine of discovery” to argue that “American Indians were not the full sovereigns of the lands that they possessed” rather they were just users of the land they roamed and wandered for purposes only of shelter and sustenance. The right of property belonged to the nation who discovered the land; American Indians were granted certain rights associated to their status as the “original inhabitants” of the land (8). American Indians were denied landownership to their ancestral lands based on the doctrine of discovery as presented by Justice Marshall. Discovery was demonstrated by land appropriation for agriculture. The doctrine of discovery is critiqued by Robert William in his illuminating text, *The American Indian in Western Legal Thought; he* suggests that law has served the European colonizers as a tool for genocide while also showing how a deep rooted European belief of cultural and racial superiority “underlie all discussions of the interaction between whites and indigenous people on the issue of sovereignty. This was further supported by the “Lockean hunter-gatherer/agriculturist dichotomy, in which hunter/gather societies “might have property in what they found or captured…but not in the land over which they traveled in its pursuit” (Pocock 27).

Marshall continued to argue that no civilized person who had appropriated the lands for agriculture would give up lands to the American Indians, who only wandered over the land to gather only what they needed. Marshall delivered his opinion in *Johnson v. McIntosh*, a dispute over land ownership previously in possession of the Piankeshaw tribe in Illinois were he argued that Native Americans by the law of nature had not acquired “fixed property capable of being transferred.” He maintained that indigenous people did not possess the kind of title to the lands that they need in order to negotiate by

treaty (Barker 9). The nation-state such as the U.S. has used sovereignty to “abrogate the means and abilities of Indian tribes to maintain their jurisdiction and territorial rights” and to construct it self as sovereign in order to claim jurisdictional authority and territorial rights over indigenous peoples (Barker 13).

In fact sovereignty is for Native nations an inherent and ancient as David Wilkins (Lumbee) and K. Tsianina Lomawaima (Creek/Cherokee) have argued, “Tribes existed before the United States of America, so theirs is a more mature sovereignty, predating the Constitution; in that sense, tribal sovereignty exists ‘outside’ the Constitutions” therefore to only see a Tribal nation as sovereign because of its recognition by the nation-state is incorrect (Wilkins and Lomawaima 78). Indigenous scholars argue that sovereignty springs from the unique identity and culture of peoples and is therefore inherent and inalienable right of peoples to the qualities customarily associated with nations”( Barker qtd in Indian Sovereignty pamphlet).

For indigenous people such as the Cocopah who have been federally recognized since 1919 the colonization of the Colorado Delta, and their ancestral lands in present day Southwestern Arizona and Northwestern Mexico led to them being seen as an object to observe not as people whose ancestors had been there for thousands of years. In fact, the concept of sovereignty has served colonists in denying indigenous territorial rights while at the same time justifying the right of conquest by claims of national superiority (Barker 5). The Cocopah Indian Tribe is recognized by the United States as “constituting a nation that possessed right to sovereignty” this could be “accomplished by treaty, by constitution, by legislative action, and by court ruling”, for the Cocopah this was done with the creation of their constitution and the establishment of a five-member tribal

council in the 1960s. Vine Deloria in *The Nations within: The past and the Future of American Indian Sovereignty* argues that "self-government" for Native people is not wrong but inadequate:

> Self-government is not an Indian Idea. It originates in the minds of non-Indians who have reduced the traditional ways to dust, or believed they have, and now wish to give, as a gift, limited measure of local control and responsibility. Self-government is an exceedingly useful concept within which negotiations can take place. Since it will never supplant the intangible, spiritual, and emotional aspirations of American Indians, it cannot be regarded and the final solution to Indian problems (Deloria 15).

As Taiaiake Alfred states sovereignty must be discussed within an intellectual framework of internal colonization (Alfred 33-50). He describes internal colonization as being the historical process and political reality defined in the structures and techniques of government that consolidate the domination of indigenous peoples by a foreign yet sovereign settler state. Native Americans recognize sovereignty as a "two-way street" as one Native American author described during a presentation at the University of California, San Diego, adding that geography complicates it more. His words mirror the personal interview conducted with Chairwoman Cordova where she describes the way sovereignty is understood among the Cocopah:

> Sovereignty means that we have the ability to govern ourselves, that we have the ability to make decisions for the wellbeing of our people. But it also means we are responsible. Because we claim it, we are also responsible for the consequences, and so I don't like to use that word very lightly or very often because it is a special — it's a special, unique — again, it's a unique special right that the Cocopah people have, and if we abuse it, overuse it, like anything else, it becomes meaningless. And it's constant in the legislature and the state and the nation that everybody's always trying to tear it down, or they have their own definition. (personal interview, 24 March 2014)

Chairwoman Cordova describes the Cocopah's relationship with the state and the nation she acknowledges that they must defend their right to be sovereign and as Native Scholar Amanda J. Cobb suggest, the significance of the word sovereignty can not be underestimated… and that consequently it is a contested term that carries with it multiple meanings and multiple implications for Native Nations, and just as Chairwoman Cordova and Cobb suggest it is in danger of losing it meaning (Cobb 115-132).

Additionally, Taiaiake Alfred complicates the idea of sovereignty. In his work, he critiques Russel Barsh and James Henderson— authors of *The Road: Indian Tribes and Political Liberty* because they concentrate on the United States and the creation of a historical narrative that completely ignored basic principals of natural law and philosophical foundations of American notions of liberty and equality. More problematically, they trace the evolution of tribal sovereignty in U.S. law and show how it has changed through judicial decisions has misrepresented the true potential of liberal principles including the United States Constitution (Alfred 33-50).

While conducting research for this thesis I had the privilege of interviewing Cocopah Tribal Council Chairwomen Sherry Cordova. She is the third woman in tribal council history to be elected Chair. She shared with me her views on sovereignty and what it means for Native Nations in the 21st century and how the Cocopah tribe navigates issues of sovereignty:

> Sovereignty is — oh, my gosh. It is our lifeline. It is our lifeline in that we have to constantly remind every government entity that we work with that we are a sovereign nation, because everyone uses the word but I don't know that a lot of them really, truly know what it means. On the other hand, you don't want to use that word and overuse it so that it scares people away that you want to have help something that we live by and, again, you got to see the whole package. It's not just having it but it's not

> abusing it, it's not overusing it. It's Cocopah. And there are some, like Quechan [Quechan reservations are in California and Arizona]. I think they're a 280 state [public law 280 extended state criminal and civil jurisdiction to reservations…], and they're 280, so they don't have the unique system that we have with our sovereignty. They can — they have everything on our own here, and that took forever to build that up, but it's our sovereign right and we must protect that at any cost. But, again, not abuse it and be responsible. You got to be responsible. And we tell people, because we're sovereign, we have to maintain our own roads, we have to maintain our own reservation. We don't have anybody coming in and giving us monies to do these things. So when they try and lump us in with other groups, other special interest groups — oh, yes, Cocopahs and Wildlife Federation. I don't think so. You're a group. We're not. We're a sovereign nation. We are our own nation. You deal with us like another — any other government entity. We are a government entity. It's just a constant battle every day to educate people. (personal interview, 24 March 2014)

The "constant battle" described by Chairwoman Cordova is caused by the "inconsistency and indeterminacy" a hallmark of the tribal and federal relationship (Wilkins and Lomawaima 78). Chair Woman Cordova recalls a time before the Cocopah were able to gain greater access to self-determination, "that was a time where the Bureau of Indian Affairs did everything for us. We didn't even think for ourselves. They'd come down with documents and say, "Okay, sign right here. Here's your budget." Since then the relationship between the Cocopah and the Bureau of Indian Affairs has changed. Chairwoman Cordova describes these changes, "You got law enforcement issues, you got Bureau of Indian Affairs issues, you got Indian health issues. You got all these people. You got EPA (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency) people coming at you. You got everybody coming at you for every little thing that you want to do, and it takes a lot of time." These issues have come with the Cocopah taking charge of their own affairs and dealing with outside agencies a responsibility that comes with their right to self-determination and tribal sovereignty.

Nonetheless, because of this inconsistency native nations must constantly endeavor to exercise their sovereignty (Cobb 115-132). The federal government has sought to limit the exercise of sovereign tribal powers through a "rhetorical process of definition and redefinitions" (Cobb 115-132). This process has been termed "rhetorical imperialism" and it is "the ability of dominate powers to assert control of others by setting the terms of debate. The terms are often definitional, that is they identify the parties by describing them in certain ways" (Lyons 447-468). Lyons has offered examples of this process: From "sovereign" to "ward," from "nation" to "tribe," and from "treaty" to "agreement", the erosion of Indian national sovereignty can be credited in part to a rhetorically imperialist use of writing by white powers, and from that point on, much of the discourse on tribal sovereignty has nit-picked albeit powerfully, around terms and definitions (Lyons 447-468). The definition of sovereignty has evolved and has been used by the government to erode Native sovereignty.

**Native Traditions and Customs as Cultural Identity**

Native Scholars argue "tribal sovereignty carries a cultural component" and that both the government and Native nations highlight this component in various ways (Cobb 115-132). For many Native nations concepts of government and culture are inseparable, as Chairwoman Cordova describes it, "Sovereignty means that we have the ability to govern ourselves, that we have the ability to make decisions for the wellbeing of our people" and the well being of the Cocopah people is an ability to freely maintain their traditions and customs, one of the main traditions still practiced among the Cocopah is the funeral rituals and cremation they perform for deceased Cocopah tribal members. Unlike the Cucapá in Mexico, who are no longer allowed to cremate deceased tribal

members, the Cocopah still practice the traditional cremation services for their deceased tribal members. As the Cocopah engage in this ancient ritual, problems arise stemming from the federal government's decision to place the Cocopah on three separate reservations, Chairwoman Cordova spoke of a recent incident that had immediate family members at odds of a deceased tribal member who were living on different Cocopah reservations this was causing a tension when it came to decide were the body would be taken, causing a disruption. The Cocopah exercise their sovereignty in preserving their funeral rituals. As Andrea Cobb argues, sovereignty is in effect cultural continuance, and this is demonstrated with the Cocopah and their preservation and continual engagement with their funeral rituals (Cobb 115-132).

Cobb recognizes that for native nations, "concepts of government and culture are hinseparable" and this can be seen with the Cocopah (115-132). Similarly Vine Deloria and Clifford Lytle suggest self-government or government dose not and cannot adequately express or "assuage the needs of a spiritual tradition that remains very strong within most tribes and that needs to express itself in ways familiar to the people", sovereignty allows for cultural continuation, without it Native communities would suffer a loss of traditional rituals and customs (Deloria and Clifford 89) On the other hand, it is important to recognize that sovereignty can be used as a means to maintain tribal cultural integrity, but tribal cultural integrity can also be "viewed not as a natural part of an inherent sovereign but instead as a criterion, a quality that Native nations must prove for their sovereign status to be recognized" by the United States, it is a way for the colonizer to define and control the colonized (Cobb 115-132). To define and control the colonized the government uses cultural continuity, Kiwell and Velie stated,

> Cultural continuity is a requirement for a federal recognition for tribes… if American Indians cannot demonstrate their cultural distinctiveness within American society, Congress can simply terminate its government-to-government relationships with tribes and deny their sovereignty, as happened during the termination era of the 1950s (62).

The termination era that dominated Congress during the 1950s and most of the 1960s is described by Charles F Wilkinson and Eric R. Biggs as "the most extreme extension of assimilation" by the U.S. government and the intent was to have Native Americans be under state control without any federal support (140). Termination during this era simply can be defined as the "cessations of federal-tribal relationship, whether that relationship was established through the treaty or otherwise" this occurred in an effort to assimilate Native Americans and terminate the reservations (La Farge 41-46). It is the extraordinary perseverance of Native communities in maintaining their traditions and customs among the hardships they faced within the context of Indian policy in the Untied States.

**Complicating the Nation-State**

Native scholars argue that the United States limits the exercise of tribal sovereignty in ways that "privileges it own dominance" within government-to-government relations among the United States and Native American tribes. Historically, the U.S. has introduced various attempts and methods at assimilating Native Americans, through various treaties such as the Indian Trade and Intercourse Acts, passed from 1790 to 1834, which was a promotion toward "civilization and education among the Indians, in the hope that they might be absorbed into the general stream of American society"

(Prucha 78). In hopes of absorbing Native Americans into the "general stream of American society" the nation-state represents "political geographies imagined, lived and even institutionalize under modernity by American Indians" and the nation-state can also be seen not only as a "obligatory" but also a "liberatory" category which complicates it use and understanding (Biolsi 239-259).

Native scholars argue that it is more "obligatory" than liberating and undermines Native Sovereignty. An example of this complex concept is the dual citizenship that Native Americans have. The United States declared that all Natives be granted citizenship in 1924. One might consider a "liberatory" category the right of dual citizenship that Native Americans were granted in 1924. Seneca tribal members and Syracuse University Law Professor Robert Porter, see the granting of citizenship to Native American as a project to assimilate Indians and eradicate tribes. He also sees dual citizenship as having political ties to two nations will make one political allegiance to either or both questionable and that rights and privileges of U.S. citizenship will undermine Native American political systems (Porter 107-183). The inherent complexity in the concept of citizenship emerges because the Cocopah people have managed their dual citizenship as a positive concept with some negative aspects. Chairwoman Cordova spoke on the issue of citizenship both acknowledging its advantages and disadvantages for the Cocopah people, "One of the criteria of our constitution is that you must be a citizen of the United States. You must be. If you were not a citizen of this country, you would not be enrolled with this tribe. And so that's why we enjoy the privilege at the border." Cocopah tribal members are able to freely cross the U.S.-Mexico border to visit many of their relatives that resided in Mexico since the tribe was splintered during the

establishment of the border. Chairwoman Cordova acknowledges that there are certain advantages that come with U.S. citizenship such as national recognition of the Cocopah Indian Tribe, “Nationally, everybody accepts our memberships because that’s one of the criteria that we have in our constitution that says you must be a citizen of this country. And it’s worked for us” because it allows for self-determination and representation of Native peoples.

Chairwoman Cordova’s comments illustrates how the Cocopah Tribal government has strategically been able to navigate across the border and Nationally because of their ability to be recognized as American citizens, undoubtedly the U.S. attempts to eradicate the Native American, but have been met with resistance and Native people are using their citizenship that was imposed on them to gain national recognition and membership and continue with their cultural traditions that require them to visit Mexico.

Dual citizenship also comes with it regulations by the government in determining who is recognized as Native American, blood quantum is used by Native American tribes when determining if one is eligible to gain tribal membership and also to be recognized by the U.S. federal government as Native American. Blood Quantum represents a way of establishing recognition as a Native American in the U.S. but it also is used as a way to not recognize a Native American who does not meet the requirements of blood quantum. This issue signals a precarious situation for Native Americans in contemporary times with intermarriage, Native American governments are strategically passing ordinances to allow for more tribal enrollees specifically children born of intermarriage.

**What makes one Cocopah?**

To be Cocopah is not only proving one's one-fourth blood quantum but to also participate in Cocopah traditions and customs. The process of enrollment in a Native American tribe has it historical roots in the nineteenth century. During this period the US government dispossessed native peoples from their land and treaties were established with specific rights and privileges. An example of this is what Native Scholar Bonita Lawrence (Mi'kmaw) argues was the *Dawes Act* of 1887, which broke up most of the reservations into individual allotments in an effort to force Native people to "adapt to concepts of private property" and the remaining 'left over' land after allotment on each reservation was 'freed up' for white settlement (Lawrence 3-31). In order to maintain who was to receive what the U.S. government complied and began list of names of tribal members who were entitled to these rights and privileges (Thornton 33-42). Mirroring the U.S. government, Native Americans tribes also established blood quantum requirements in order to gain tribal membership. Individuals enrolled in federally recognized tribes also receive a Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood from the Bureau of Indian Affairs specifying a certain degree of Indian blood more commonly known as blood quantum (Thornton 33-42). The government policy of Blood Quantum was used by the Federal government to gain acquisition to tribal lands by dividing 'fullbloods' from 'mixed-bloods' and "setting standards regulating if and at what point mixed-bloods should be externalized from their nations" (Lawrence 3-31).

In 1934 the Federal government pass the Indian Reorganization Act under which most tribes are organized, which means that they typically have a written constitution that contains a membership provision. The Cocopah Indian Tribe's government is formed around a constitution drafted by them that indicates

membership eligibility requirements (Thornton 33-42). Blood quantum varies from tribe to tribe but "most tribes accept the federal standard of twenty-five percent blood quantum" (Wilson 10). In fact, Creek/Cherokee Metis scholar Ward Churchill has labeled blood quantum "arithmetical genocide or statistical extermination" and the Cocopah have recognized this and passed an ordinance to increase tribal membership (Churchill 5).

The Cocopah Constitution states that in order acquire tribal membership one must have one-fourth Cocopah blood and be a U.S. citizen. The Cocopah Tribal government recognizes that intermarriage among tribal members will affect future enrollment and they addressed this by issuing an ordinance, Chairwoman Cordova explains the current situation the Cocopah people are faced with in contemporary times:

> Our constitution states in one of the articles that if you are one-quarter, at least one-quarter blood degree, then you are eligible to be enrolled. But we recognized and realized real quick back then that a lot of our tribal membership are marrying out of the tribe. They're having children out of the tribe. And so — take in my case, for instance. My blood degree is half, so my child was one-quarter, so he was eligible. Now, had he had a child, then that child would not be eligible for enrollment even though — again, when you say what does it mean to be Cocopah. Now, my grandchild would not have been eligible even though I've raised this child in a Cocopah way, even thought that child lives here and participates, because that child is off that much that he's not able to partake of any of the benefits that we have as a membership. So we passed an ordinance because we couldn't — to amend the constitution takes a secretarial election and all that. So we passed an ordinance, and in this ordinance, it says that, if the parent is an enrolled member of at least one-quarter blood degree and there's certain criteria you meet which is taking part in cultural events, speaking your language, visiting the reservation x-amount of times throughout the year, then you would be eligible to be adopted into the tribe as a tribal member" (personal interview. 24 March 2014.)

The Cocopah have strategically found a way to continue their cultural identity as Cocopah people while also extending tribal membership to those who are of Cocopah blood but do not meet the government's blood quantum requirements. Russell Thorton suggest tribes on reservations are able to maintain "exclusive" membership by setting higher blood quanta, especially since the location of some reservations has generally isolated the tribe from non-Indians and intermarriage versus a tribe that does not have a reservation and has "inclusive" membership. The Cocopah do not fit neatly in these two categories of membership. Their reservation is in close proximity to Yuma, Arizona, and they are not isolated from non-natives and it makes intermarriage common. Plus, historically intermarriage among other Yuman-speaking people was common before colonization (Thornton 33-42). Thus, setting lower blood quanta for membership makes sense as their population has intermarried with non-Natives.

The Cocopah Tribal Council also recognizes that the key to Cocopah cultural survival is to continue teaching all Cocopah regardless of blood quantum about Cocopah traditions and customs and living the "Cocopah way". The Cocopah have established a way to keep traditions and customs alive among their members even when facing challenges of blood quantum and urbanization. Chairwoman Cordova gives us an example on how the Tribal Ordinance to adopt tribal members who have less than one-fourth blood quantum works:

> My uncle takes his grandkids and they — he makes sure they know everything about the tradition. He takes them to funerals. He makes sure they partake. And he has them go help the other elders. I mean, he shows them. And then they're there. They do all these things. But they were not eligible because their blood degree wasn't enough. So now they are members. So we keep that tradition going along. (personal interview. 24 March 2014)

This type of participation initiated by the Cocopah Tribal Council will also allow for the Cocopah people to challenge what Russell Thornton calls the 'new' Native American, one who may or may not have tribal attachment or tribal identities, as the 'old' Native Americans those who are strongly attached to their tribes will decrease and a population of 'new' Native Americans will increase with urbanization and intermarriage (Thornton 33-42). The Cocopah also believe their ancestral teachings of community and taking pride in Cocopah identity contribute to their survival as a colonize people despite government regulations on Native identity, Chairwoman Cordova address this historical issue when asked during a personal interview what makes one Cocopah in contemporary times, what does it mean to claim a Cocopah identity despite issues of blood quantum requirements and the effects of urbanization:

> It's just that pride. Someone that doesn't have pride and they were born blood but yet they don't, like you say, identify. They don't take that pride and be a part of our community, be a part of our functions. You know, to lend that helping hand, to go without being asked to do something. That [not engaging and being active in the Cocopah community]— to me, that's not Cocopah. If you're Cocopah, you're proud to be a Cocopah… [i]t's just part of you. So the fact that they're not living here, they're still Cocopah because they live the way that we're supposed to be living, and that is helping and sharing and doing all of those great things…
> (personal interview. 24 March 2014).

As native scholar Bonita Lawrence (Mi'kmaw) suggest in an attempt to move away from colonizing frameworks and to revive identities and ways of living that preceded colonization then it is essential for Native people to understand how colonial governments have regulated Native identity and the Cocopah Indian tribe understands this and it is demonstrated in their efforts to revive Cocopah cultural identity and

maintain their sovereignty (Lawrence 3-31). Chairwoman Cordova spoke of the necessity to recognize how the past has affected Cocopah tribal identity:

> …if you can't recognize what happened back then, then you got to understand that you are today what you are because of those things, good and bad, and then you're here today, and, yes, we're here today [Cocopah Indian Tribe]…(personal interview. 24 March 2014).

The Cocopah have had to navigate through "legislation based on colonialist assumptions about race, Nativeness, and civilization, which are deeply rooted in European modernity" and they understand that authentic native identity is constructed by the federal government in order to regulate who is native and who is not, it is a "systems of classification and regulation of native identity" that has been established through colonization (Lawrence 3-31).

The Cocopah continue to reclaim their pre-colonial identities, traditions and customs and decolonize their lives by continuing to increase tribal membership and defining tribal identity through the preservation of their traditions and customs. As their membership is open to those members who have less than the federal requirement of one-fourth blood quanta they believe that what makes one Cocopah is living Cocopah traditions and customs.

Sovereignty has provided the Cocopah with the right to negotiate with the Federal government and the right to self-determination. It has been an avenue for them to redefine on their own terms what makes one Cocopah, in which being Cocopah is not only about blood quanta but also about living the Cocopah way. Sovereignty although historically incompatible with Native ancestral teachings of community has also been a concept used by Natives to preserve their traditions and customs. The establishment of

the U.S. as a nation-state and the colonization of the Colorado River delta splintered the Cocopah Indian tribe and with it introduced and imposed the concept of sovereignty, the Cocopah have been able to adapt and make sovereignty a tool to preserve their traditions and customs but not without the trauma and pain of becoming a divided people, Chairwoman Cordova describes their unique situation of the Cocopah as a family divided between the U.S. and Mexico:

> But that line that was drawn there, it divided basically divided a home. It divided our house because we all basically lived under that same roof with the same teachings and the same values, and that line just was drawn in between so, all of a sudden, we had two sets of rules, two sets of plans, two sets of lifestyles. The language became even different because of the dialectic of living in Mexico as opposed to those of us here. We will — again, I have no doubt that we're going to be here for hopefully decades and decades and decades to come, but that has divided our house, divided our house in two, and it's caused us to have two separate — it's like having two separate families under one roof. (personal interview. 24 March 2014).

# Chapter 3: Gender

Native Scholar John Mohawk wrote that Europeans such as the British military noted that women were often present at peace negotiations between the military and Native American tribes, this was of course considered a men's affair (A5). As the days of negotiations between the British and Native Americans have long passed. Native American women have become more involved in the decision making of their Tribes. Lee Maracle, a Native American activist and writer became aware of "sexism and misogyny within Native culture, which she saw as themselves a legacy of colonialism, racism, and patriarchy" this has led to many Native women becoming less involved in their communities (qtd in Moane 57).

As Diane-Michele Prindeville suggest research on women of color has added important knowledge to the literature on American women and politics and "American Indian women have a rich history of political involvement in their communities" but this is not to suggest that all Native American tribes see the participation of Native women as necessary (101). According to the Bureau of Indian Affairs of 2007 there are 571 federally recognized Native American tribes in the United States (BIA website). Despite many of these tribes having female tribal members in leadership positions some Native American tribes still exclude women from leadership positions; the majority of 20 Pueblo nations prohibit women from participating in tribal politics (Prindeville101-112).

In the Southwest where the Cocopah are located, it is argued that it was Spanish conquest of the area that gradually contributed to the corruption of Native cultural traditions, social practices and religious beliefs systems of the peoples of the Southwest (qtd in Prindiville 102). Along with the conquest of the Southwest "native social structures that generally valued knowledge, skill, and maturity-qualifications obtainable by both sexes-were replaced by a rigid colonial hierarchy bases on race, ethnicity, ancestry, religion, sex, occupation, and ownership of land" and in pre-colonial Cocopah society men and women's activities defined their gender roles, men hunted and gathered food, while women stayed at home cooking and attending to the home, yet their gender roles were not hierarchical, this changed with colonization (Prindeville 101-112).

In many indigenous societies women made decisions that affect the survival and the well being of their communities. Women and men played different yet complementary roles; and they both exercised their power over aspect of tribal life for which each was uniquely responsible. In some Native American tribes women were in control of the community resources for example food. In the Tohono O'odham and Yaqui communities women oversaw the preservation of their culture (qtd in Prindeville 101-112). Also the Cocopah female Elders and tribal members interviewed for this thesis all recalled learning about their culture through their grandmothers. Cocopah tribal member Paula Coolick describes listening to her Grandmother's storytelling as a child, she describes that each story would last a few nights. The majority of the Cocopah women describe having close relationships with their grandmothers and being taught how to live the Cocopah way by them.

Cocopah women soon were faced with changes imposed on them by the colonizers (ibid). Some of the changes the Cocopah experienced were induced by the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) of 1934 passed by Congress, Native American tribes were induced to organize with a written constitution contrary to their traditional roles of government, as the Cocopah established their constitution in 1964. The Cocopah Indian tribe is one of the smallest tribes in Arizona (Alvarez de Williams 97). Despite being on of the smallest tribes, their endeavors are significant; for example they have used their constitution as a vessel to decolonize Cocopah society.

As the Cocopah continue on their journey of decolonization and reclaiming their ancestral society they have used their sovereignty and have established the right of women in leadership position in the tribe. A very significant example is their current tribal council leader, Chairwoman Sherry Cordova, whose personal interview has contributed significantly to this research. She is the third woman in Cocopah tribal council history to hold this position. Female tribal leaders have continually challenged federal, state, and tribal authorities to reform policy for the benefit of their communities (Prindeville 101-112). The Cocopah Indian tribe will hold their upcoming tribal council elections July 2014, elections occur every two years. The Cocopah's mission statement is "A tradition of Honor. A Future of Progress" and this is demonstrated by honoring their ancestors female-male complementarity by allowing both sexes to hold leadership positions at the same time moving towards a "future of progress" by allowing a space for women in the Cocopah Indian tribe to participate in tribal politics.

The Cocopah Indian tribe also illustrate what Native Scholar Linda Hogan describes as resistance among Native women, she argues that despite the attempts to eradicate Native people and cultures, Indian woman are showing their strength by taking positions as activist/warriors, tribal leaders, community leaders, religious leaders, healers, lawyers, physicians and educators  (Hogan 1-4). They have women in leadership position as department heads in their Tribal government. Also, female Cocopah Elders participate in language preservation programs.

**Gender and Colonization**

Colonialism is the systematic domination of one territory by another and it maintains itself through a patriarchal context, it also relies on military force, and various levels of political, economic, and cultural control (Moane 33). Colonialism as a process is structured by sexual violence and Native Nations cannot decolonize themselves until they address gender violence (Smith and Ross 1-7). The colonization of the Cocopah people brought changes to their society, the gender roles held by Cocopah men and women changed to reflect those of the colonizers. Native Scholar Sarah Deer argues that prior to colonization, Native communities had effective means for ensuring violence against Native women rarely occurred and if it did Native communities would address it themselves (qtd in Smith and Ross 1-7). Gender began to be used interchangeably with sex, and the colonization of Native Americans illustrates this (Lerner 238). In place of their complementary gender roles a new rigid definition was in place, colonization brought with it the ideology that gender "is the cultural definition of behavior defined as appropriate to the sexes in a given society at a given time. Gender is a set of cultural roles" this can still be seen in Cocopah society (Lerner 238).

Some of the Cocopah female tribal members I spoke to recalled having different responsibilities and behavior expectations placed on them in comparison to their brothers. Also, they were expected to be caregivers to their siblings because they were the oldest of the children. They did not see these gender roles as being oppressive they see it as their contribution to their household as a way of upholding the Cocopah tradition of community and family. Chairwoman Cordova acknowledges how gender roles have affected the Cocopah community, and she also reveals how within Cocopah society women contribute to the continuation of Cocopah tradition and customs that are normally seen as male dominated;

> …like in most native tribes, I don't think Cocopah is any different in that the men are revered and the women have — always the expectation has been that they are there to support the men. History has painted that picture. From my perspective, it's the other way around because when we have funerals, it's the women that must go get the clothing, it's the women that stay up all night and [inaudible] the clothing. They have to make sure there's food to feed people. Whereas the men, on the other side — on the other hand — their job may be to cut the wood, to bring it for the cremation, and then they just — that's pretty much it. They're there as a supportive role to me, to the women, because the women are — they have to — they cannot leave the bundles of clothes there. They have to be there all night with the clothes. They have to make sure that the families bathe, fast, and do all these things. That's not up to the men. So, traditionally, it's always been thought that the woman supports the man.

Chairwoman Cordova discusses how Cocopah woman are represented in history as being in supportive role to men, yet they are the ones who contribute and participate in the Cocopah funeral rituals while providing support and comfort to the grieving family. Cocopah women continued with the ancestral tradition of community, as they unselfishly offer their time and labor to their Cocopah community. Cocopah women also demonstrate how the colonial project intent on destroying Native American culture has

been ineffective because they continue to actively participate in the Cocopah funeral rituals. She also describes how her own position as Tribal Council Chairwoman has been questioned because of her gender, and how women are seen as weak if they show any emotion;

> As a woman in politics, one of the things that I find very difficult is emotions. If you cry, they take it as a sign of weakness". So I put them all away, and now I'm the big B word because, "Don't you even care? You act like you don't (personal interview. 24 March 2014)

Cocopah women fight back against gender roles and they have been able to preserve Cocopah traditions and customs despite colonization. Nonetheless, they have been affect by hierarchical systems; Jean Baker Miller argues that a dynamic exists between inferiority-superiority in hierarchical systems. Miller states that once a group is defined as inferior, the dominant group sees them as incapable of performing roles that are highly valued by the dominant group (6). Making the Native populations into the inferior group was necessary for the colonization of Native Americans. One way this occurred was through Indian boarding schools, I spoke to a Cocopah female Elder and she describes her time at the Phoenix Indian School, as a moment when Native American female students were taught domestic work as a way to assimilate them into American society.

The Phoenix Indian School graduated its last senior class on May 24, 1990 (Parker 1). It was founded in 1891 and welcomed by the people of Phoenix only because the Indian school would provide "exploitable source of labor for the developing citrus and cotton industries" which would be provided for free by the Native American students who attended the Phoenix Indian School (Parker 2). These boarding schools were used as

an attempt to destroy Native cultural and impose gender roles on Native female children, the boarding school systems were established to assimilate native children into mainstream American society;

> The erosion of the roles and position of women began with missionization and education. Indian girls were forced to go to school and learn to homemakers or homemaidens for non-Indian families. Others who dared to return to reservations found themselves alienated until they either had to relearn traditional skills for survival and /or return to the non-Indian world to find work. This loss of values among Indian peoples accelerated as more and more tribes were forced into a paternalistic wardship position with the federal government. The fabric of many tribal cultures, however, survived because in many instances women of the tribe used whatever means were available to protect their children and men. Unfortunately, they were no match against the powerful arm of the federal government, an institution that was bent on 'civilizing' the Indians. Tribes may have been able to save some of their elements of their language or their cultural traditions, but these efforts did not stem the tide of other changes, which have resulted in poverty… (185).

The Cocopah Elder I interviewed decided to remain anonymous and she did not allow the recording of most of our interview, she was very reluctant to share with me her lived experiences, but she decided to share with me that she was able to return to the reservation after she graduated from the Phoenix Indian school, she married and had children she describes raising them in the traditional Cocopah way. She was born and raised on the West Cocopah reservation. She recalled being eight years old and walking by the canal on the reservation, she lived with her maternal grandparents and their household was without electricity or water, her grandfather built their home. She describes life on the reservation as a struggle for food and clothes. She spoke of being sent to the Phoenix Indian School around the age of 12 or 13 she said that at that moment that reason for attending the school was to make her responsible.

She attended the Phoenix Indian school at the same time as her Sister, but she recalled they were made to stay in separate buildings and were hardly together and only visited their parents on the reservation in Somerton, Arizona a few times a year, only during holidays (the distance between Somerton and Phoenix is 193 miles), when she shared this with me my heart sank and I felt a sadness at the cruelty she had experienced.

She was not allowed to speak Cocopah and describes being whipped if she did, instead she was forced to speak English this is an example of what Lee Maracle describes as colonizers wanting to erase the Native, not easily, but with shame and brutality" her Cocopah identity was to be erased and forgotten (8). During the moment we spoke she did not let the traumatic experience of her time at the Indian school interrupt our conversation, she was open to sharing her experience with me, and I was shocked at what I heard. It was one thing to read about the Phoenix Indian school, but to have met a former student was incomparable. I realized words cannot describe her experience, and to some extent I felt her pain, I too had been separated from my parents at the age of 12, but was fortunate in that my younger sister and I stayed with my maternal grandmother, nonetheless I remember the pain caused by separation. I asked her if she shared her experiences at the Indian School with her parents and she replied no, because she would not write to her parents and did not explain why.

When describing Cocopah hardships on the reservation such as lack of food or clothing she said "it might have been light things to other people, but it was hard for us", Linda Hogan argues that Indian women are aware of the difficult position of being female and minority and that Native women have the lowest wages in the country (Hogan 1-4). Gender roles were intended to assimilate Native Americans into society, but their

influence is weak among the Cocopah, the Cocopah Elder I interviewed with, did landscaping for sometime; she described it, as doing the same job as a man. This moment in her life that she is describing can be understood as her willing and knowingly crossing the boundary between what defines a man's job and a woman's. The attempts to push her into a gendered occupation such as domestic worker in which all female students at the Phoenix Indian school were trained to do. She was conditioned at the Indian school to do domestic work but she clearly rejected this idea, and worked in a occupation that is dominated by men.

Winnona LaDuke describes colonialism as a process that occurs on the individual level, when one finds themselves as prey within their own society;

> We, collectively, find that we are often in the role of prey, to a predator society, whether for sexual discrimination, exploitation, sterilization, absence of control over our bodies, or being the subjects of repressive laws and legislation in which we have no voice. This occurs on an individual level but equally, and more significantly on a societal level. It is also critical to point out at this time, that most matrilineal societies, societies in which governance and decision making are largely control by women have been obliterated from the face of the earth by colonialism, and subsequent industrialism (42).

LaDuke sees Native communities, as sites were colonialism seeks to destruct either by the elimination of Native people or by turning native land into industrial cites. Native lands have been cites of mining in the Southwest, but also throughout the United States industrialism has caused the pollution of these lands. Native Scholars link the destruction of Native lands to the destruction of Native bodies. Native American women's reproduction has been controlled as a "subordinating strategy-by dominant groups against minority groups…" (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 62-75). Native Women's bodies have been seen as polluted, and the colonial body must purify itself, it does this by

eliminating the Native (Smith 70-85) . Native Americans living in California in the 1860s were described as wearing "filthy rags, with their persons unwashed, hair uncombed and swarming with vermin" (Rawls 195). Andrea Smith argues that the connection between the colonization of native bodies particularly those of Native women is not metaphorical, and many feminist theorist have in fact argued for a connection between patriarchy's disregard for nature and Native women (70-85). Their bodies were seen as polluted and unclean in Ann Stoler's analysis of racism in which native populations pollute and threate U.S. security is seen in the comments of one Doctor in his attempts to rationalize the mass sterilization of Native women in the 1970s: "People pollute, too many people crowded too close together cause many of our social and economic problems" (qtd in (Smith 70-85). The idea of protecting social and economic welfare was the same rational used during the Great Depression in which many Cocopah were deported back to Mexico. Stoler continues to argue that in the process of racialized colonization:

> [T]he more 'degenerates' and 'abnormals' [in this case Native people] are eliminated, the lives of those who speak will be stronger, more vigorous and improved. The enemies are not political adversaries, but those identified as external and internal threats to the population. Racism is the condition that makes it acceptable to put [certain people] to death in a society of normalization" (Stoler 12).

This racism made it acceptable for society to decide who is normal and who deserves to live within the relationship between the United States and Native Americans because the U.S. is engaged in a "permanent social war against Native bodies particularly women's bodies that threaten U.S. legitimacy", the U.S. historically sought to find ways to eliminate and eventually changed its course and planned on assimilating is Native populations (Stoler 12).

Additionally, Maracle describes the colonization of Native people as not only constructing them as polluted bodies that were dirty and need to be eliminated but as;

> destruction and expropriation of knowledge, particularly language, medicine (science) and culture is a prerequisite for the unabated persecution of pockets of resistance. The aims of the colonizer are to break up communities and families, and to destroy the sense of nationhood and the spirit of cooperation among the colonized. A sense of powerlessness is the legacy handed down to the colonized people. Loss of power-negation of choices as well as legal and cultural victimization-is the hoped for result. It can never be wholly achieved. At every juncture in the history of colonization, we have resisted domination. Each new prohibition was met with defiance, overt and covert (93-94).

The resistance and defiance she writes about was present in the oral histories and lived experiences of the members of The Cocopah Indian tribe who granted me an interview. They have used their sovereignty to protect Cocopah cultural identity and continuance of the Cocopah Indian tribe against the menacing rules of the BIA in regulating Native American identity through blood quantum requirements. Marcle describes the affects of colonization as causing violence and disrupting Native communities,

> The anger inside has accumulated generation by generation, and because it was left to decay, it has become hatred. By its very nature, racism only permits the victimized race to engage that hatred among its own. Lateral violence among Native people is about our anticolonial rage working itself out in an expression of hate for one another (Maracle 11).

Chairwoman Cordova acknowledges that it is in fact a generational issue among young and old that gets perpetuated if her community does not seek out professional care to address the traumas of colonization;

> In the old days, just like I'm sure in a lot of places there was a lot of domestic abuse. There was all these things that nobody really wanted to talk about, was taboo, and people endured that, and they endured that, and, again, like I said, you are from where you came, and a lot of our children,

> because that's where they came from and no one ever spoke of it. But now there's much more. They can talk about it. There's people they can talk about it to. There are people we can send them to. So I feel like they have a little bit. That is better for them that they can share that because that's helping them and their kids. That same old circle. They do better at home, they do better in school. It goes on and on and on. But for the longest time, that wasn't available. They were afraid. Because of a [the Cocopah Indian Tribe] small community, you don't want to tell you — you don't want to tell it to somebody because everybody's going to hear it. But then they got that ability to go off the reservation, to go elsewhere. Same thing with the drug abuse problems, the alcohol problems. Nobody wanted to talk about it. Everybody just lived it. But now there's programs available, and now they're available out of state. You can go somewhere else and get help, and they're willing to do that. But before, that wasn't there, so everybody just lived with it. They kept it in and it just poured on to the next generation, and we just kept on going (personal interview. 24 March 2014)

Chairwoman Cordova describes how the Cocopah community is working with these issues that have affected her community because of colonization, which also brought poverty to the Cocopah and led to other serious issues such as substance abuse and domestic violence. Andrea Smith and Luana Ross describe colonization and violence as "a quiet violence" because the evidence is not merely in the most obvious forms of the history of massacres against Natives but in the "continuing institutionalized forms of racism, discrimination, and housing that manifest themselves on a daily basis in the lives of Native peoples (2).

**Patriarchy**

Patriarchy is the "manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general. It implies that men hold power in all the important intuitions of society" (Lerner 213). Walby refers to patriarchy as a "system of social structures and

practices" where "every individual man is in a dominant position and every women is in a subordinate one (20).

Gerda Lerner, describes patriarchy as the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general. It implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society and those women are deprived of access to such power. It does not imply that women are either totally powerless or totally deprived of rights, influence, and resources (239).

Native Scholar Andrea Smith argues that patriarchy rests on binary gender systems, and it is not a coincidence that colonizers targeted indigenous peoples who did not fit within this binary model (312). Particularly, the violence was felt by Native women as gender violence is a primary tool of colonialism and white supremacy (ibid). Historically, violence can come in many forms, for Native women the experience translated into sexual violence such as mutilation and rape and it was experienced with their time at Indian Schools that sought to destroy native culture and assimilate the native, as it separated children from their families.

Ramona Ford suggests that patriarchy was as ideological assault on Native Americans and she identifies the majors ideas of influence that affected Native Americans: 1) Patrilineal, father-dominated families with women dependent on husbands for maintenance, 2) private property held in the name of the male head of household, 3) and education system that reinforced limited gender roles, such as women working in the home and men being the breadwinners (57). Chairwoman Cordova shares how the

Cocopah Indian tribe has adapted and navigated through the gender roles, not necessarily fitting into to the gender roles that were imposed on them by colonization;

> you'll see predominantly they're women that are working and supporting the families, and yet they still go home and take care of the families when they get home because that's expected of them, and, if you want to — like me. I go home, I cook, I do whatever because that's what I like to do, not because I have to do it, and I think that today is important that we do things because we want to do it, not because we have to or because we're stereotyped. I don't go there. I get pretty passionate about those things sometimes, and people have told me (personal interview. 24 March 2014).

Chairwoman Cordova describes how gender roles ascribed to Cocopah women are not something they see as unchanging, as she mentioned in our interview she decides for herself, if she will do thing because it has been her choice to do so, not because of gender roles. According to Lewis Hanke it was Aristotle, who first wrote that all women-as well as all children, slaves/servants, and animals-were to be the property of male heads of patriarchal households (Guerrero 58-69). Chairwoman Cordova acknowledges that not all women are free from patriarchal households, "Now, is there still the male domination? In some people's minds, but you're never going to change that. People are just wired that way. There are some people that just — you know, a woman's place is in the home, and my job is to do this" (personal interview. 24 March 2014) Karen Warren argues that the colonization of Native women strengthens patriarchy within white society" (qtd in Smith 76).

**Native Feminism**

Native Scholar Linda Hogan views feminisms as a complicated issue for Native women because what affects the women, also affects the entire community, and that as Native women tribal members have allegiances to the members of tribes that rarely exist

for the non-Indian American women. Most importantly she argues that political economic injustices are practiced against entire tribes and are not limited to just women (Hogan 1-4). Hogan is laying out her argument as to why she sees feminism as incompatible with addressing Native women's issues among Native Americans communities, she does not see women as inspirable from their tribes and sees injustices as affecting both genders equally. She also adds that other Native scholars such as Shirley Hill Witt and Annie Dodge urge Native women to become more active in politics and states, because the discrimination that Native American women face are a by-product of federal intervention into tribal affairs, not discrimination that has grown from within Native American communities (Hogan 1-4).

Additionally, Andrea Smith writes Feminism according to Annette Jaimes Guerrero and Teresa Halseys's 1990 article "American Indian Women: At the Center of Indigenous Resistance in North America" argue Native women do not considered themselves feminist if they do then they are assimilated, Jaimes Guerreo argues "feminism is an imperial project that assumes the 'givenness of U.S. colonial stranglehold on Indigenous nations (qtd in Smith 93-123). Smith views Jaimes Guerrero and Halsey argument to "support sovereignty Native women activist reject feminist politics" they view Native Feminist as accepting "indigenous nations are now a legitimate sub-parts of the U.S. geopolitical corpus rather than separate Nations" the authors are describing Native Feminist as traitors who have given in to the U.S. demands that they see themselves as a part of the U.S. nation-state. Their critique of Native Feminism overlooks issues of gender and sovereignty and they cannot be separated. In their view

Native Feminist are sellouts, who do not support tribal sovereignty and put gender issues above tribal issues.

After interviewing Chairwoman Cordova I see Guerrero and Halsey's critique of Native feminism as incorrect Chairwoman Cordova did not identity herself as a native feminist nor did I ask her during our interview if she was, but her comments or lack thereof of placing tribal issues above gender issues was not mentioned in our interview. I have concluded that her comments reflect her recognition that issues of gender and tribal sovereignty may not be separate because women act as more than a supportive role to men in Cocopah society, women are the heads of families, the breadwinners, and the ones who pass on Cocopah traditions and customs, with out their sovereign right to do so this could all change. I would like to speak to Chairwoman Cordova again if offered the opportunity, to ask as a follow-up question if she believes in Native feminism. Guerrero Jamiens and Hasley also quote one of the founders of Women of All Red Nations (WARN), Loreli DeCora Means:

> We are American Indian women, in that order. We are oppressed, first and foremost, as American Indians, as peoples colonized by the Untied States of American, not as women. As Indians, we can never forget that. Our survival, the survival of everyone of us – man, woman, and child – as Indians depends on it. Decolonization is the agenda, the whole agenda, and until it is accomplished, it is the only agenda that counts form American Indians… (qtd in Smith 93-123).

Jaimes Guerrero and Haley along with De Cora see no room for women's issues in the process of decolonization. Women's issues are not of importance, they view issues of sovereignty and decolonization as taking precedent over issues that Native American women encounter because of their gender, this deliberate omission of women's issue altogether contradicts with the historical facts that show how women's bodies have been

used in the colonial project and how their lives continue to be affected by it, their reproduction rights and the racialization of native women's bodies continues to affect them today.

Also, many Native women activists argue feminism is far from being a "white concept" and that it is actually "and indigenous concept white women borrowed from Native women as one Native women suggest, "…feminism, that's for white women. Oh, feminists, they're not Indian. They're counterrevolutionary. They're all man-haters. No, first of all that presumes that Native women weren't active in shaping our identity before white women came along. And that abusive male behavior is somehow traditional, and it's absolutely not" (qtd in Smith 93-123). To deny Native women the ability to identify, as a feminist is to see all women issues that affect them within their tribes and nations as something that is rooted within their community, not as a legacy of colonization.

Not all Native Women Scholars agree with Hogan, Hill Witt, or Dodge. Renya Ramirez, enrolled member of the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska and descendent of the White Earth Ojibwe argues that rather than assuming Native feminist consciousness is a white construct or that it automatically creates internal conflict, it should be seen as "advancing a critical and essential goal for indigenous scholars and communities to confront sexism Native's scholars prioritizing race and tribal nation over gender is a mistake because sexism and racism oppress Native American women at the same time (Ramirez 303-307). Native American communities should not prioritize race and tribal nation over gender because my interviews have illustrated what an essential role Native woman have in preserving cultural identity, as they are the one to pass down traditions

and customs orally. In Cocopah society it is the women that raise children in the Cocopah way, they are the ones teaching how to be part of Cocopah community.

## Conclusion

Writing this thesis, I came to the conclusion that not enough is written or known about Cocopah women in my community of Yuma County. I learned about Native Americans as a child living on the U.S.-Mexico borderlands by having Cocopah classmates in elementary school and high school, but we knew little of each other's traditions and customs. After interviewing several Cocopah female Elders and members, I never imagined how similar we are. However, I believe this thesis has allowed me to see for myself the importance of women's oral histories and how it significantly adds to the preservation of cultural identity among the Cocopah. Cocopah women are passing on traditions and customs orally and their presence is essential in keeping Cocopah cultural identity alive.

To help improve the lives of Cocopah women I believe issues of gender should have the same significance as issues of sovereignty. I believe having a history of Cocopah female tribal council chairwomen is significant in making issues of gender visible. Also, it reflects the Cocopah mission statement *A Tradition of Honor. A future of Progress*, because in allowing for women's participation in leadership positions they honor their ancestors beliefs of complementarity among men and women and it is also a step to a *future of progress*, because presently there are several Native American tribes that do not allow for the participation of women in leadership positions.

As I look forward to the expansion of my work I am considering conducting more interviews with other Native American women from different tribes that also reside along the U.S.-Mexico border near or around Yuma, Arizona. I would also like to return to the

Cocopah Indian reservation to speak with the female Elders and the women I interviewed as a follow-up to our interviews to see how they felt after our initial introduction and to get their response to the analysis this thesis has done. I would also like to present this thesis to the Cocopah community and Cocopah Tribal Council. In effort to bring awareness to a concern that many Cocopah women shared with me, their worry that technology among the youth as disrupting the learning of Cocopah traditions and customs, and this distraction would have negative effects on the Cocopah community. This thesis has served to provide a current understanding of Cocopah women and the importance of oral histories, as way of passing down traditions and customs to younger generations and persevering Cocopah cultural identity. It also illustrates the importance of addressing gender issues such as violence against Native women.

Through their voices and conversations, Cocopah women openly expressed their views and opinions about Cocopah cultural identity and life as a Cocopah woman. They expressed how being Cocopah and living the Cocopah way is important to them and allows them to connect with their ancestors. They also expressed the importance of passing on Cocopah teaching to the younger generations, especially teaching them to be part of their community. These women allowed me into their lives by sharing their lived experiences, their words were meaningful and showed their knowledge and wisdom. The experiences they shared with me will forever remain with me; it showed me how courageous these women are. Their courage, wisdom and strength and love of their community is very strong, I believe will always remain present as long as Cocopah women are present.

## Appendix A

This interview was conducted on March 24, 2014 at the Cocopah Indian Tribe Headquarters in Somerton, Arizona.

**INTERVIEW WITH COCOPAH TRIBAL COUNCIL CHAIRWOMAN SHERRY CORDOVA**

INTERVIEWER: Chairwoman, could you share with me about your experience living on the US-Mexico border?

CHAIRWOMAN: Well, I think, first of all, I guess my perspective is a little bit unique because I am not full-blooded Cocopah. I have some Hispanic in me. So I spent time on the other side of the border. Anyway, so if you're looking at it from a personal perspective, I think it's really unique that I am able to communicate with the Mexico population as well as my own people. I grew up with my grandfather, who spoke only Spanish and Cocopah. My grandmother spoke only Cocopah. Therefore, in order for me to survive, I had to learn Cocopah. But being raised in the Somerton area, everyone spoke Spanish, all my friends, so I was able to learn. Like everyone else, I took Spanish in school, but that don't do nothing for you. You go to Mexico. I also lived in Mexico for a few years, so that even gave me more education about life on that side. I traveled down to where the Cocopahs live in Mexico and I have seen how they live, what their lifestyle is,

and it is so — even though we all say we share the same traditions, just their way of life, there's just so much difference, and we're only separated by a line that somebody drew in the sand, the way I look at it, way back when. That's it. As a child, I remember going down to the border, and it was nothing more than a fence, a little fence. There was a market out there, and I remember what the inspection station looked like. And to be honest with you, I have not been to Mexico, San Luis, Mexico, probably for 10 years simply because I just — it's inconvenient. Almost everything that you had to go to Mexico to buy before, you can buy over here, and I think it's a vice versa. My friends that go over there tell me, "Hey, they have Circle K, they have..." I go, "Really? I did not know that." But living out here, it gives you that unique perspective, and being able to speak the language is really good because it keeps you in constant communication with both sides. As a child, I was very upset that I didn't get to go out and play with the kids because my grandmother needed me to help her because I had to do the translation for her. I mean, it was — I was very upset as a child, but I sure am glad now that she made me do these things because now I am very thankful that I do know my language that many of us don't have, and so, for me, it's real rewarding. I know there's a lot of, they say dangers, and a lot of controversy along the border, but for me, from my perspective, I live right down here, I like — you know, Mexico's right here. I can walk down to the levee. I very much enjoy our culture here and Mexican culture. It's great.

INTERVIEWER: I think I see your grandmother was a very significant presence in your life.

CHAIRWOMAN: Oh, no doubt about it. No doubt about it. My family — again, because my grandfather was part Hispanic, he did not — how can I say? He was not 100 percent the Cocopah way. He came to us — or he taught us about being a part — and I think this is where I get this being a part of the community. You are not of one place. You are of two places, and you have to always make sure that you maintain those two. You've got two homes. Don't ever look at — you're not one person. You're in two places. My grandmother, on the other hand, was a very disciplinarian person, very — loved going to church, made sure we all went to church. And she taught everything Cocopah. My grandfather, he was a singer, he made gourds, he did gourds, he did all of the traditional things, but he always had that little bit in him, the work ethic. He would get up four o'clock in the morning and go to work every day, and my grandmother would get up with him. And she got up, you guys get up. I tell the story that I hated it when I was a kid coming home because we lived off of Avenue F and 20th Street, way out there, and the school bus could only go down one way and turn around and come back because there no bridge to go across. The bus would not go across. And that time, there were many, many — we had a lot of fields, crops and everything out there. And every day that I went home, I will have my fingers crossed that I will not see my grandma in that cotton field because I knew if she was in that cotton field, we didn't even have to ask. We had to go home and change our clothes, and go pick cotton. So every time we would go [cross talking]...

CHAIRWOMAN: Don't be out there, don't be out there, and then she'd stand up in the fields and we're like [sigh]. But today, in this day and age, I think that our people, the

Cocopahs, have so many health issues. Everybody talks about the obesity and the diabetes, and all the illnesses we have. Well, A, that was back [inaudible] with someone else. But, B, oh, my goodness, we are so spoiled by everything around us, and children do not understand the meaning of going out and exercising. As I said, my grandparents, they were like, “You come in the house to eat, you come in the house to do your homework, and you come in the house to go to sleep. Other than that, you’re outside, you’re chopping wood or you’re playing in the fields, or you’re doing whatever you’re doing, but you’re outside. You do not come and sit in the house all day.” Nobody does that anymore, and it’s very clear in the way children are being brought up now, and I don’t know how to change it. Technology has come in and taken over everything. I’ve talked to so many people saying, “Oh, you guys got some fields out there. You should have your kids go out there.” “Are you kidding? We’re lucky we can get them to go on a bike and go down the road.” But we were fortunate that — I mean, now I say fortunate, but then I fought tooth and nail because I did not like going out there, being outside all day. I did not like going out. We had a garden and we had chickens and everything, so we had to always make sure we gathered the eggs, and we had to make sure that — we did not have running water so buckets of water from the canal to go and irrigate my grandfather’s fields. And the other part of that was that we would get what we needed and then we would haul everything into the car, and then we would come out here to the reservation and take it to people because that was their thing. They said, “You get what you need for your family, you take care of what you need for your family, but the rest you go share with other people. You don’t keep it to yourself.” And that’s the same philosophy that I tell everybody here, at our community, with Somerton, with all of the different entities.

Hey, when we get it — we get what we need here, and we need to have the community around us. They helped us when we had nothing, and so when the day comes that we can help them, we want to do that back because I really — I mean, that's how I was brought up is you take care of your family first, make sure your family is taken care of, but once that's done, then you go help those that can't take care of their families. And that's what we did. We just put everything in the car and then we just go house to house and drop off corn or whatever we had — tomatoes, onions — because he had a nice little garden. So that's kind of how I was raised. And, again, I look at it as a plus that I had two different cultures that I was brought up in, and I was really proud of both. As a kid, again, I wasn't very happy about it because all the Hispanics would be the you-know-what out of me, and all the natives would beat the you-know-what out of me, so I had many skinned knees. I still have scars on my knees. Many torn dresses. But at some point, it worked out and we all understood who we were, and here I am today, and I'm very happy about that.

INTERVIEWER: It's quite a unique experience now, the gate in between these two culture, but I see that your grandparents, they instilled this philosophy of the spirit of community and which you still carry out today. So this society has become very individualistic, and it's really beautiful to see that you have that philosophy.

CHAIRWOMAN: Well, I had a short saying that I think everybody has is that you are what you are today because of where you were, and if you know where you were or what you were, then that makes you who you are today and then you can see in front of you where you want to be. But if you can't recognize the good and the bad of your past, if

you can't recognize what happened back then, then you got to understand that you are today what you are because of those things, good and bad, and then you're here today, and, yes, we're here today, but I always think back to my grandparents. If it wasn't for the sacrifices they made for me, I wouldn't be here today, and I want to be that person that somebody down the road is going to say, hey, we're here because those people thought about us and prepared for us, just like our forefathers prepared us and prepared the path for us, and that's how I see things. I want to — I'd like to be that person that, hey, we're here because they thought and they planned for us. That's what I envision for our people here.

INTERVIEWER: You want to leave this legacy for future generations.

CHAIRWOMAN: Yes. Not even — not just a legacy so much but the opportunity. We had a community meeting the other day and I thought it was really nice because, again, in this day and age, everything is money-driven, technology-driven, and, "What's in it for me? What's in it for me?" "How come we don't get this much money?" "How come you haven't done this?" There was a young lady that really caught my attention. Young lady, and she stood up and she said, "You know, it's great we get money and it's great you throw money at us, but I don't want money, I want opportunity. I want opportunity. I want opportunity for my daughter. I have been given an opportunity and I blew it, and I'm fixing that now. I'm trying to fix this so that — I got to bring myself out of this hole and get myself because I want to go back to school. I want to make something of myself. But I recognize that I made a mistake and I've got to repair that

before I can move on." And I was blown away because I haven't heard that in so long because everybody — it's always somebody else's fault. It's always somebody else to blame for something that didn't happen, so that was very refreshing for me to hear that. From a young lady, mind you. And it would be very easy for her to stand up like everyone else and say, "How come you didn't do this? How come they didn't give me this [inaudible]." She didn't say that. She says, "I blew it and I got to fix it myself, but I want opportunity for my daughter. I don't want her to go through life with her hand out expecting someone else to do that." And I guess along with that, for me, is that my grandmother told me very clearly, "You take care of yourself. You. Don't expect anyone else to take care of you because what you think of yourself is what other people think of you, and if you have low self-esteem about yourself and you don't think that much of yourself that you feel like somebody else should be responsible for you? Then that's how they're going to look at you, too. That's what you don't want. You take care of yourself. You take care. You get married, whatever you do, whatever you need to do, but always remember you're responsible for you. No one else is responsible." And I carry that to this day, as well. I carry that to this day. And some people may say I'm a little hard, but I know what I went through and I appreciate everything that I have. Everything that I have I appreciate because I worked for that. When something is given to you, it doesn't mean as much. Just a little quick story. When I was growing up, I wanted — and you guys are probably too young to appreciate it, but back in the '60s, I guess it was, there was these moccasin-type boots that went all the way up to the knee with fringe on it, and I seen them downtown Yuma and I said, "Oh," I wanted them so bad. And I told my grandma, "Oh, I got to have those. I got to have them." She said, "Well, then, you're just going to

have to find some work somewhere because we buy you shoes for school, we buy you shoes for when you're home. Anything — that's on you." And I was still — I was barely like a freshman in high school, and I wanted them so bad, and so I — we lived in the middle of nowhere so I went walking around and I finally found this one guy and he did onions, he did green onions, topped them for the seeds, and they said, "Yeah, this is what we do. You can come if you want." And I'm like, "How much do you pay?" and they told me, so I went, and I stunk. We didn't have running water. We'd have to go about half a mile down the road for — there was a bracero camp where they had showers, and we would have to walk down there to shower. But, oh, I scrubbed and I scrubbed. I smelled like those onions because they're like this high and you're going through them and cutting them. But when I got my shoes, let me tell you what. The shoes that my grandma bought for me, I just threw them under the bed. The shoes that I bought, I put a box — we had dirt floors. I put a box there and I put the shoes on top. I brushed them every day, and I set them there. I'd look at them and I would take such good care of them. My other shoes, I'd just look under the bed, dust them off, put them on, go to school. And that to me was like — because I earned that, I had to work for that, and so I made sure that nothing happened to them. What was given to me, eh. Because you know what? When it's done, they're going to come and give me another pair. I know that. So that's kind of, in my mind, that's when I learned, yeah, when you have to work for it, you don't discard it as easily as if somebody gave it to you. You work and you earn it, man, and then you're proud of it. That's why I tell so many kids here, I go, "You know, I know you don't think it now but you're going to be proud of it one day. You're going to be proud

that you had to put in your blood, sweat and tears because it's going to mean something. Hopefully it will, but it's kind of a broken record.

INTERVIEWER: Chairwoman, so you talked about the use of the community, but what is it like? What was it like for you to raise children on the border?

CHAIRWOMAN: Again, I find it a unique situation. Personally, I lived in Las Vegas for a couple of years, and we moved away from there because — I'm glad we moved away now that I see what it's become. But it was very difficult to raise a child in that environment, and then to come back out here, I loved it. I loved it because you felt — back then, you felt free to let your children run outside, go down to the river, play in the river. It was great. It was my childhood being brought back to the children now to see them doing those things. Then came the issues with the drugs and all of this, and then, all of a sudden, we start getting pushed back, pushed back. But all in all, I think it gives our children a better understanding of what life is all about. I think that raising children out here is 10 times better, even though crime is now coming out to this area. I see that. But I think that we have the opportunity to have a better handle on it. I just read the LA Times. I read it every night. I think the first nine stories was, you know, 8-year-old killed, drive-by shooting. Eight-year-old. Bicyclist hit, run over. Somebody was stabbed. I'm like, oh, my God. That's just one day. So I think that being out here and being able, as hard as it is, to teach our kids, to show them where we came from, and we still have some of our elders here that they can talk to them. They see them. We have functions that they can participate in. They are curious about the language. If we were somewhere else, we

wouldn't have that opportunity, and I think being out here, again, gives us that unique perspective. We take them down to Mexico. They see the people on the other side. They realize at a young age, hey, it's not just us. We have members on the other side. So, again, I look at it as a plus. I mean, maybe I'm biased but I just love where I live. [Cross talking] I love where I live and I wouldn't live anywhere else.

INTERVIEWER: It is a special space.

CHAIRWOMAN: It is. It is. And the people. In all my travels, I dread every time I tell everybody, once I see that Mississippi River as I'm flying back east, the people are so different there. It's just not the same. I just — and then, when I head up this way and go up to Oregon and go this way, I mean, they're okay, but it's not here. I mean, I missed it so much, just the food, just the people. You know, "How are you doing today?" Nobody else does that other places, and I think that's important, not only for us but the kids, to understand. Don't be so afraid. Don't be afraid to help somebody when they need it. People can beat the you-know-what out of each other, and nobody helps. Here, something happens, somebody jumps up right away and goes and tries to help, and that good, but I just — this is a unique place, and I think we have a unique situation. I love it. I love the people here, I love the Mexican border here, I love the California border there. It's just a great place to live.

INTERVIEWER: I agree.

CHAIRWOMAN: I'd be a tourist talking, I guess, because I love it here.

INTERVIEWER: It is a great place. Chairwoman, how are the differences between gender expectations negotiated would you say?

CHAIRWOMAN: Clarify that a little bit.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I mean, the differences between men and women. How are they negotiated. Maybe if there's maybe some gender inequality, if there's some — the women feel maybe less empowered. Or like that young woman was saying, she wanted more opportunities. Is it something that's specifically related to gender?

CHAIRWOMAN: Well, I think predominantly, like in most native tribes, I don't think Cocopah is any different in that the men are revered and the women have — always the expectation has been that they are there to support the men. History has painted that picture. From my perspective, it's the other way around because when we have funerals, it's the women that must go get the clothing, it's the women that stay up all night and [inaudible] the clothing. They have to make sure there's food to feed people. Whereas the men, on the other side — on the other hand — their job may be to cut the wood, to bring it for the cremation, and then they just — that's pretty much it. They're there as a supportive role to me, to the women, because the women are — they have to — they cannot leave the bundles of clothes there. They have to be there all night with the clothes. They have to make sure that the families bathe, fast, and do all these things. That's not up

to the men. So, traditionally, it’s always been thought that the woman supports the man. Again, my personal opinion is that, since I’ve been here, I have always respected my elders, not so much because they were male. I respected my elders, and every time an election came up back when and if the individual came to me and said, “This election, I’m going to run for this seat. What do you want to do?” If they asked me that, out of respect for them as an elder, I will tell them, “If you want to run for the chair, I will respect that and I will run for the vice. I will not run against you if that’s what you want to do.” Not because they’re male but because I respect. And I’ve said that to this day, to my current council people. I tell them, “If I do something, I do it out of respect for the title and I do it out of respect as an elder.” That’s it. I may not agree with you as an individual, but I will respect your position. So predominantly in the past, as I said, I was raised that way. My grandfather, his job, he was very clear was to provide for the family. Very clear. I don’t know if you’ve noticed when you walked around this building when you came in, I’d say 80 percent of the employees are women. The men don’t work. They don’t. They’ll bring them and drop them off, go back home. And I see that and it’s — to me, it’s sad that they all wait for the woman to bring the paycheck home. But that’s how it’s been, and I tease people about it, says go look around and see who is the one holding this tribe up. Look around. Look in all of these offices. Hispanic, native, white, no matter. Go look in all of these offices and you’ll see predominantly they’re women that are working and supporting the families, and yet they still go home and take care of the families when they get home because that’s expected of them, and, if you want to — like me. I go home, I cook, I do whatever because that’s what I like to do, not because I have to do it, and I think that today is important that we do things because we want to do it, not

because we have to or because we're stereotyped. I don't go there. I get pretty passionate about those things sometimes, and people have told me. As a woman in politics, one of the things that I find very difficult is emotions. If you cry, they take it as a sign of weakness. I did it one time because I lost someone that was really dear to me, and that's the first — I hadn't even got back from the function yet and it was already back here. I mean, I'll remember this for a long time. As I walked up, one of the gentleman stood there with a handkerchief and was standing at the door waiting for me, and I was upset because I had just lost a friend. I just looked and I just shook my head, and I came back here and I talked to one of the other elders and they go, "Well, that's because it's a sign of weakness because you're showing your emotions. You're wearing your emotion." I said, "Okay." So I put them all away, and now I'm the big B word because, "Don't you even care? You act like you don't." I go, "Well, what do you want me to do?" I sit here. In fact, this morning we had a death, and so I spent this morning with the family members, two different factions, because the family of the deceased, the birth family, they live on the west. The wife lives on the east. So right away my thing was, "Oh, no. Is the wife going to keep him on the east? Is the wife going to say, 'Okay, family, he can be over there with the rest of your family?'" I knew that was going to be an issue and I thought, "Oh, good lord." This weekend I kept thinking about it because he passed away over the weekend. Sure enough, it came to be, so now I got to deal with that. But they tell me that. They're going, "Well, you act like you don't even care." I go, "No, it's not that I don't care. It's just that I have to go through all of these things and we got to get these things done. I'll be there with you. I'll be there to support you." But that one incident shut me off a little bit so I've really learned to control my emotions. It isn't — I was kind of

upset about that because that's just human nature, but to have someone act that way, and they were my elder, I was really put back by it and I haven't forgotten that, so I do what I got to do. That is one of the hardest things is putting your personal feelings aside and having to deal with what's out there.

INTERVIEWER: Very difficult. I have another question for you. How would you define identity, Cocopah identity? What makes you — what makes one Cocopah?

CHAIRWOMAN: What makes one Cocopah.

INTERVIEWER: Or identity in general.

CHAIRWOMAN: Pride. If you're proud of being Cocopah, it comes out in ten thousand different ways. You don't have to go around saying you're Cocopah because it's going to just show. It's just that pride. Someone that doesn't have pride and they were born blood but yet they don't, like you say, identify. They don't take that pride and be a part of our community, be a part of our functions. You know, to lend that helping hand, to go without being asked to do something. That — to me, that's not Cocopah. You don't — I don't feel like you should be paid to be Cocopah, and some people expect that. That's just how it is in this day. I'm sorry but that's just how it is. So what is our identity? If we're proud of who we are, irregardless of what the situation is, that's Cocopah a hundred percent. That's the only way I can say, as simple and pure as that. Pride.

INTERVIEWER: So you would say you could be Cocopah without necessarily having to live on one of the reservations?

CHAIRWOMAN: Sure. We have numerous people. I find it — I think it's disrespectful to — okay. These homes that are out here now, for instance. I moved into the home that I like in now. It was built in 1980. My grandparents moved into their home down here on the west in 1976. In 1973 were the first homes that were built here on the east, and there were only so many homes. So there wasn't opportunity for anyone to live out here, even if they wanted to. Okay? They may have wanted to be out here but there was nothing for them. There was no infrastructure, there was no water. Now, I — as I said, I grew up without any of that, but I was used to it. I mean, that's — again, my grandparents, you know, "You want to drink water, you go get it." So it's like — but as homes began to be built and people started moving back — unfortunately, these homes have stipulations. When we first — when these homes were first built, it was an opportunity to own these homes. Then all of a sudden, the eligibility really changed and the federal government says, "You got to meet this, this, this and this in order to get this home." A lot of people didn't make it. Then it became a rental unit, and all we had were rental, and a lot of people didn't want to come out here and live in a rental unit. They wanted their own home, they wanted their own space. So what was their alternative to live elsewhere? But yet they continue to come, they continue to serve, they continue to sit on boards, they continue to come and mentor the children. They would come and give somebody a ride when they didn't have a ride to town or church, or whatever the case may be. So the fact that they're not living here, they're still Cocopah because they live

the way that we're supposed to be living, and that is helping and sharing and doing all of those great things, I think. But, again, we have people that live here who won't even give it up or get up. They just lay around and wait for something to happen for them, and that I can't support. I can't support that. But that's all I can tell you about being Cocopah is, if you're Cocopah, you're proud to be a Cocopah and you don't — there's no words to say it. It just happens. It's just part of you.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you. Do you see women being less empowered than men? Has it changed from when you were growing up, or is it still the same? Has it become — has there been more shift of the balance of power, or...

CHAIRWOMAN: It's changed. It's changed. It was a lot different back then. Like you said, I'm the third. The other two ladies, I respect them so much. I was so honored. Believe me, I was honored when I was sworn in one year, and [inaudible] Clara Brown, at first she came and she hugged me. She said she was proud of me, and that meant everything to me because that was a time where the Bureau of Indian Affairs did everything for us. We didn't even think for ourselves. They'd come down with documents and say, "Okay, sign right here. Here's your budget." So it was an easier time. Today, every little thing has to be microscoped because you're going to get called on it. Like in today — I don't know — today's newspaper, an issue with the property that we own in Somerton.

INTERVIEWER: The annexation

CHAIRWOMAN: Yeah. But, you know, the thing of it was, we were sitting here minding our own business. We bought this golf course, we're merrily running along, minding our own business, and then one day the city administrator and everybody comes in with these plans and says, "Look, you have this property. If you develop it, it's going to cost so much money. If you go this way..." And so we're sitting here like — "Oh, and then we want to build you some roads and we want to put in water, and we want..." and I'm like, "Hm." And so we're looking at them. Oh, okay. Time went on and we never really moved on that idea, and then they kept bothering us. "Are you guys going to sign it? Are you ready? Are you guys going to sign?" So it came up again, and here comes the administrator, and the mayor, and they're like, "We want to support you." Oh, okay. "What's it going to cost us?" "Oh, it's not going to cost you anything. We're going to do this. We're going to do..." And then last week, here comes the city administrator of Somerton. Emergency. He has to meet with me. And I'm like, "Why?" So he comes in and then he begins to tell me, "Oh, there's residents there. They're not happy with this annexation. They're not happy with your development, and they're agin it." And I'm like, "Whoa, whoa. Wait a minute. You came to us. We were minding our own business here. We weren't — we did not initiate this. We did not go out there and purport to do anything. You came to us. Now we're the bad guys? And so then I see the publicity in the paper, and unfortunately now Anna's gone when we need her here, our PR person. But, so, there's just so many more decisions, hard decisions to be made, and I tell people it's not like it was in the '70s and '80s that you can just raise you hand and be on council because there's so many controversial issues out there that you have to be able to deal

with. You got law enforcement issues, you got Bureau of Indian Affairs issues, you got Indian health issues. You got all these people. You got EPA people coming at you. You got everybody coming at you for every little thing that you want to do, and it takes a lot of time. It takes a lot of travel. It takes common sense, I think. Not so much you don't have to have all the degrees, but common sense.

INTERVIEWER: Absolutely.

CHAIRWOMAN: What works. Again, where did we come from, how did we get here, what is it we want to accomplish now, what do we see happening 20, 30 years from now, what do we want to see based on what we have now, and based on where we — how long did it take us to get here from here? What did we go through from here to here? What's going to happen from here to here. Those are all the things. Now, is there still the male domination? In some people's minds, but you're never going to change that. People are just wired that way. There are some people that just — you know, a woman's place is in the home, and my job is to do this. Well, then, do your job. Sometimes I just, "Yeah, then do your job. I wouldn't be here if you did your job." But it has changed but not at the pace that I think that it should change, and I'm hoping that, down the road, it'll get better. It's good, but it can be better. Just like everything else, it can be better.

INTERVIEWER: Can you offer your definition of sovereignty, what sovereignty is and what it means for native nations in the 21st century, and how does the Cocopah tribe navigate the issues of sovereignty.

CHAIRWOMAN: Sovereignty is — oh, my gosh. It is our lifeline. It is our lifeline in that we have to constantly remind every government entity that we work with that we are a sovereign nation, because everyone uses the word but I don't know that a lot of them really, truly know what it means. On the other hand, you don't want to use that word and overuse it so that it scares people away that you want to have help you and be a part. Sovereignty means that we have the ability to govern ourselves, that we have the ability to make decisions for the wellbeing of our people. But it also means we are responsible. Because we claim it, we are also responsible for the consequences, and so I don't like to use that word very lightly or very often because it is a special — it's a special, unique — again, it's a unique special right that the Cocopah people have, and if we abuse it, overuse it, like anything else, it becomes meaningless. And it's constant in the legislature and the state and the nation that everybody's always trying to tear it down, or they have their own definition, and every time there's rulings that come out here and there, it's something that we live by and, again, you got to see the whole package. It's not just having it but it's not abusing it, it's not overusing it. It's Cocopah. And there are some, like Quechan. I think they're a 280 state, and they're 280, so they don't have the unique system that we have with our sovereignty. They can — they have sovereignty but not to the degree that we do. We have our own court system. We have everything on our own here, and that took forever to build that up, but it's our sovereign right and we must protect that at any cost. But, again, not abuse it and be responsible. You got to be responsible. And we tell people, because we're sovereign, we have to maintain our own roads, we have to maintain our own reservation. We don't have anybody coming in and

giving us monies to do these things. So when they try and lump us in with other groups, other special interest groups — oh, yes, Cocopahs and Wildlife Federation. I don't think so. You're a group. We're not. We're a sovereign nation. We are our own nation. You deal with us like another — any other government entity. We are a government entity. It's just a constant battle every day to educate people. We do it here, as I said. I just met with the mayor, which is, for me, was kind of nice because the other mayor of Yuma wasn't that great. I'm sorry. But the new mayor took the time to come down and sit down and meet with me because I just — and I appreciated that. And he came and he says, "I know you guys are your own, I know this and this and this, but I want you to know we're there for you." And I'm like, "Great. We got a good start here. And that's why I say — again, back to my grandfather's teaching, you're not by yourself. You're a part of this community. In other words, again, back to that old take care of what you need here but make sure you're still helping those out there that are in need, and I see that same philosophy with the towns and the cities around here. But sovereignty is our very existence. And, again, now abusing it and not overusing it, because we can lose meaning in there somewhere, and you don't want to do that. Got to keep it intact.

INTERVIEWER: I have a few more questions if you have some more time.

CHAIRWOMAN: Mm-hmm.

INTERVIEWER: Do you see women in contemporary times having more mobility from, say, when enrollment increased in the late '70s, I think, when it was opened. '71?

CHAIRWOMAN: Mm-hmm, '71.

INTERVIEWER: By [Mr. Barkley?]. How would you say — has it increased since that moment where there was a large tribal enrollment, the way women have mobility, their mobility?

CHAIRWOMAN: What do you mean, mobility?

INTERVIEWER: I mean, are they able to — do they mostly leave the reservation for — engaging in [wage labor?]. Are they mostly employed within the reservation? Do they have access to resources for women, educational resources? Because I know that the tribe was able to take more control after the government altered the self-determination act and they were able to...

CHAIRWOMAN: Yeah, I would say that, yes. Yes, there is more mobility. They have been able — or we have been able to do much more. I personally, again, think that — I was never a big fan but I know that's the way of life. I felt like we were cattle, that we all got stamped with a number, and then all of a sudden our existence began. I was never a fan of that. But once we got that number, I just feel like — I said, gee, I feel like a cow. You stick that thing and you got your enrollment number, and all of a sudden you're somebody now, and all of a sudden now you can get grants or you can do all of these things. But, yes, I think that it's good for them. They have the ability. Different programs, health programs, education programs. In the old days, just like I'm sure in a lot of places there was a lot of domestic abuse. There was all these things that nobody really wanted to

talk about, was taboo, and people endured that, and they endured that, and, again, like I said, you are from where you came, and a lot of our children, because that's where they came from and no one ever spoke of it. But now there's much more. They can talk about it. There's people they can talk about it to. There are people we can send them to. So I feel like they have a little bit. That is better for them that they can share that because that's helping them and their kids. That same old circle. They do better at home, they do better in school. It goes on and on and on. But for the longest time, that wasn't available. They were afraid. There was no way for them to get up to a clinic to get checked medically when they were pregnant, but now we have all these programs that allow them to go have their medical treatment, to get their medication, and to share with people. Because a small community, you don't want to tell you — you don't want to tell it to somebody because everybody's going to hear it. But then they got that ability to go off the reservation, to go elsewhere. Same thing with the drug abuse problems, the alcohol problems. Nobody wanted to talk about it. Everybody just lived it. But now there's programs available, and now they're available out of state. You can go somewhere else and get help, and they're willing to do that. But before, that wasn't there, so everybody just lived with it. They kept it in and it just poured on to the next generation, and we just kept on going. But ever since in, like you said, the early '70s, it's better. Much better, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Great. So how is national affiliation determined?

CHAIRWOMAN: What do you mean, national affiliation?

INTERVIEWER: I've read in some documents that a child born of a Cocopah parent having one-fourth Cocopah blood presenting proper documentation would be granted membership. You can have dual membership in other tribes. Is that still the same process?

CHAIRWOMAN: It's still the same process, but have since — I believe about 10 years ago, the tribe adopted an ordinance because our constitution — our constitution states in one of the articles that if you are one-quarter, at least one-quarter blood degree, then you are eligible to be enrolled. But we recognized and realized real quick back then that a lot of our tribal membership are marrying out of the tribe. They're having children out of the tribe. And so — take in my case, for instance. My blood degree is half, so my child was one-quarter, so he was eligible. Now, had he had a child, then that child would not be eligible for enrollment even though — again, when you say what does it mean to be Cocopah. Now, my grandchild would not have been eligible even though I've raised this child in a Cocopah way, even thought that child lives here and participates, because that child is off that much that he's not able to partake of any of the benefits that we have as a membership. So we passed an ordinance because we couldn't — to amend the constitution takes a secretarial election and all that. So we passed an ordinance, and in this ordinance, it says that, if the parent is an enrolled member of at least one-quarter blood degree and there's certain criteria you meet which is taking part in cultural events, speaking your language, visiting the reservation x-amount of times throughout the year, then you would be eligible to be adopted into the tribe as a tribal member. And so we do

that, and we have had numerous — a great number of children. You know my Uncle Colin. You know him, right?

CHAIRWOMAN: Well, his grandkids — a prime example. My uncle takes his grandkids and they — he makes sure they know everything about the tradition. He takes them to funerals. He makes sure they partake. And he has them go help the other elders. I mean, he shows them. And then they're there. They do all these things. But they were not eligible because their blood degree wasn't enough. So now they are members. So we keep that tradition going along. The other thing that we enjoy is that one of the criteria of our constitution is that you must be a citizen of the United States. You must be. And so that's why we enjoy the privilege at the border and everything because we say in there, we are saying you have to be. If you were not a citizen of this country, you would not be enrolled with this tribe. And they have accepted that, and that's great, and that helps us because a lot of our people, they don't drive and that helps them. The children — you know, when they go — a lot of them go over there for medical reasons and whatever. So we enjoy that. Nationally, everybody accepts our memberships because that's one of the criteria that we have in our constitution that says you must be a citizen of this country. And it's worked for us.

INTERVIEWER: Just one final question. I don't want to take up any more of your time. What does it mean for the Cocopah to have been divided by this arbitrary line because your people, the Yuman-speaking peoples have been here. These are your ancestral lands, and settler colonialism and the colonization of the borderlands that began. I see you as a persistent cultural system. You have these elements, language, rituals,

song, and dance. Your people have survived the modern welfare states, like Mexico and the United States, the colonization of the Yuma area, the Colorado River has been commodified, and your people have endured all this. You've survived as a people, as a tribe. What would you say about this — about this division because every — Mexico was laying claim to this land. The US eventually took it over. The Yuman-speaking people have been here for many, many hundreds, thousands of years.

CHAIRWOMAN: I have — I sat on — I spoke on a panel up in our — at one of our water conferences, and I'll send you that article. I think it explains really clear, talking about the Cocopahs, when we got here, and it talks about our existence. It talks about the dry land, the [inaudible], all the way down here. What does it mean, the border? It's sad. It's frustrating because we have all of these things that we cannot — there's so many things that we cannot share with our family there. There's so many, not just material things, but there's just so many things that we are not able to share with them because someone came along and drew that line in the sand. And it is literally drawing it in the sand because everybody's taken our water. And I tell people that when I go to meetings and they're asking about water, and I sit quietly and I say, "I got nothing to say because I don't got any water." I mean, you can literally walk across into Algodones. And you ask what the scene is like out there, well, when you don't have to swim the Colorado and you can walk across it, what do you think it is out there? So this little history that I gave, and like I said, when I find it, I'll get it to somebody and you can see it, it tells the whole story. It talks about us back when and being a part of the Yumans and going up the river. But it's that perseverance that we have that we refuse to let this go. But I think — what

does it mean to us with our families down there? It's frustrating and it's just sad that we can't share. We cannot share what we have with them. They in turn can't share a lot of things with us that they have down there. And why? Because somebody came and drew a line in the sand? They suffer. I mean, we suffer here with our illness and our diabetes and all of these things, but, my God, they have it ten times worse over there because they're not recognized over there as they are over here. It's sad when they come and they talk to us, but there's only so much we can do because a lot of our money is from federal money and we're not allowed to use that money to help people on the international side of the border. That was not drawn by us. So what do — the perseverance that we have will keep us going. I know that. I have no doubt about that. But that line that was drawn there, it divided — it basically divided a home. It divided our house because we all basically lived under that same roof with the same teachings and the same values, and that line just was drawn in between so, all of a sudden, we had two sets of rules, two sets of plans, two sets of lifestyles. The language became even different because of the dialectic of living in Mexico as opposed to those of us here. We will — again, I have no doubt that we're going to be here for hopefully decades and decades and decades to come, but that has divided our house, divided our house in two, and it's caused us to have two separate — it's like having two separate families under one roof. And you know how well that works, just in general. You know how well that works. And this is kind of what it is to us now.

INTERVIEWER: It's quite incredible how you have persevered. Your Cocopah tribe has overcome a lot. It's survived.

CHAIRWOMAN: Well, I'm sure you've seen that Look magazine article back in 1970, the poorest tribe in the nation.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, I saw that one. I read about that, mm-hmm. It brought a lot of attention.

CHAIRWOMAN: Yeah. Like I said, where I lived at out there, we had — where I was raised was we had one house where my grandmother lived, we had one house where my grandmother's brother lived. I mean, this were just little mud huts. These are not big houses. These were mud huts. And then we had a house where my uncles lived, and they all lived in one house because they were the men so they had their own house. And then we had one house where we stored everything, and then we had one house where my aunt lived, and then there was our house, and so we all — it was just like our own little colony there, and that's how — and my grandfather, at that time, looked for the Barkley Company out there. Then he went to go work the — I don't know if you remember but there was vineyards up on the mesa, lots of vineyards up there, and he worked in the grapes up there, and he would bring the grapes home for us, and so I'm not a big fan of grapes anymore. They did everything they had to do in order to keep going. Whatever had to be done, we would do it. Like I said, my grandmother would pick cotton. I would get with my grandmother on the Greyhound bus and we would — because there was that bus from San Luis to Yuma. We would get on that bus and we would see how much money we had, and we would go up to Phoenix and she would sell her beadwork. And, again, that's why I had to learn the language because I was translating for her. I had to

make change for the customers. She would sit on the ground in front of the Woolworth store in Phoenix, in front of the bus depot, and sell her beadwork, and I was with her, helping her. So we went all the way doing that. We had to do whatever we had to survive, and that's how our older people are. They can tell you these stories because they lived it. They've been a part of it. They know what it meant, and they can tell you it. I say it with passion because I was fortunate enough that my grandmother took me with her everywhere she went, so I was able to meet elders back then. I knew elders that are all gone now because I was with her when she went to all of these places, and I'm so glad now that I did. My grandfather would make gourds and he'd sit behind the house, and all the guys would come over and they would sit there and just talk gourds, but my grandmother wouldn't let me listen to the conversation. "Go take them coffee, get back inside. It's none of your business." You know? And so I didn't get to hear anything. We just did what we had to get to where we are today. That's why I say back to the importance of knowing where you came from. You did what you had to do, and it took us that long. I'm sure my grandparents suffered a lot more than what we did, but they brought us and they taught us and they taught us, and so today we're here and we enjoy certain things because of what they did for us. So with what we have today, let's use that. I say, "Okay, what are we going to do? We know how long it took from here and here, and what we went through. What are we going to do between here and here? What is the plan for here and here, and what we want for them." I took me — it was a mile from the bus stop, from where our bus stopped for high school. And, again, like I said, we got one pair of shoes, and temperatures were crazy back then, and there was gravel roads, and you could feel those rocks through your shoes and you're just like tiptoeing all the way,

and there'd be one date tree and we'd all run under that date tree and we'd all stand there and get the shade. Okay. And run the rest of the way home. But now the buses come out here. They stop on every block. They pick up the kids. And that's why I get mad at some of the people. I'm like, "Guy, you guys, it's just right there, and yet you got to have us transport your child? Get up and get your kid to the bus depot." I mean, the bus stop there is just right there. So we did what we had to do to get to the present day, and now it's time to plan what's going to happen so that this continues in a positive way. My thing is, we may be status quo for a while, but we don't ever want to go back. We're thankful for what we have. It taught us a lot. We appreciate what we have, but we don't ever want to go back to that place. We learned from that, and you learn and you move on, and then, from here, we hope to — somewhere along the line, we're going to learn from what we did there and take this and go that way a bit further. And it is that really — I think that's one of the most difficult things, female or male, is taking that technology, present-day, as I call it, white man's world, and marry it to our tradition and the Yuman aspect of why we're here. I feel I'm elected to take care of my people, but I recognize that, in order to take care of my people, I have to act a certain way, I have to do certain things in order to bring that back, and so it's hard when you got your tribal membership looking at you saying you're a sellout, or you're never here. I do what I do because you had enough faith in me to put me here and let me do what I need to do, and, believe me, you will have your chance. If you don't want me here, I'm gone. I don't have a problem with that. I'm gone. But I do have a stake in this because I'm a tribal member. And I'm getting there. I'm 60. I was 27 when I started here. I started at 27. And that's just with my political career. I started working with the tribe in 1971, so right out of high school. I got out of high school

in May, and I started working in June with the tribe. So this is my life. When I tell people, I say, “This is not a cliché. This is my life. I got nothing else.” I worked with Chicanos for a while in Somerton. I needed work so I worked there, but my heart wasn’t there. It was not there. I worked in various places but my heart wasn’t there. When I lived in Las Vegas, I worked for the power company, Nevada power company. When my uncle passed away and they called me and I told them that I had to come home, my grandmother needed me, they told me no, because that is not an immediate family member. I said, “Well, then I guess you have to fire me because I got to go home.” That’s number one for me. My family is number one for me. So I came home. I came for the funeral. I was all tough when I came home, but then, when I was going back, I’m like, “Oh, how about the job.” As I went back, I’m like, “Wow, what am I going to do?” So I go back and I went through a panel of three different groups of people. You know, “Shame on you, shame on you, shame on you.” “Do I got a job or not?” “We’re going to keep you, but we’re going to write you up.” Well, I had my job. Less than a year later, my grandmother wasn’t well, so I says, “I got to be home,” so I quit my job and we moved back home. Came out here to the reservation, and I’ve been ever since. I’m glad I did because priority. Things happen, priority is take care of your family. Luckily, there’s enough of us. We’ll take care of the white man’s work, as we say. You stay and take care of this stuff. That’s just something that we all have to continue doing. I’m very — people tell me that I’m kind of — I guess I want to say. I’m very passionate about — and that’s why I tell people I’m not upset about things but sometimes I just get to a point where, people, please understand that it’s not about us, and if we start thinking it’s only about us, then you’re disrespecting all of those that gave for us to be here. It’s not about us.

Comfortable, we're happy. Let's focus on what's going on in the future. I want to be able, 10, 20 years from now, as I'm sitting on my porch. I want to be able to come over here, talk to people, see that the building is different. Maybe bigger, maybe better. I don't know. But that's only going to happen if we take care of not only the white man's side of it, but our land. Our land. We talked about the border and everything. We talked about that at some of the meetings, and I explained why we do what we do. It's important to us. We are river people. That's us. We are river people, and we're being held away from there, and that is very difficult to tell and 80-, 90-year-old that you cannot go down there and roam and look at the arrow weed stuff. It's hard to tell them that they can't do that. So we go to Washington, we go to all the — to fight all these battles, but it's because we want to make sure that this is still there for them. That's the part that's hard, to put these two things together, to make it understandable that we have to do these things in order for us to continue doing these things. So that's one of the bigger challenges I think that we have is just trying to mesh the two things together and making sure that we have a balance of business but there's a human side to this. Employee-wise, people sit here and complain. "Oh, we're supposed to be picked up at ten o'clock in the morning and they didn't show up," and then, 30 days later, they'll come in and say, "My daughter applied for that job." Hello. Your daughter misses three days a week, she comes in later every day. Now, do you want to be picked up at ten o'clock and get to your appointment, or do you want us to give your daughter a job. There's, again, that balance. Are we an employment agency or are we a service agency? Got to mesh it somehow. So those are the hard things. I call it white man's word. That's easy for me. It's easy because I don't have that connection with those people. I'm there to do business. I'm here to do business

and let's do what we got to do, and I'm going home. Now, the culture aspect of it and the people here, that's a whole different ball game. I got feelings and I know most everybody out here, and it's real difficult to have to say no or to have to — it's difficult, so I'd rather deal with that other stuff because that's easy. I can walk away from that in a heartbeat. But it's just putting those two things together. Just to close it up, I guess, as being a woman in tribal leadership, I deal with both sides. I deal, if you will, at the border. I got people that they just don't want to deal with a woman. I've got other people that could care less as long as the job gets done. So I think it's a pretty good mesh right now. I'd say within the last 10 years it's gotten a lot better. Previous to that, oh, my God, it's just innuendos, just the abuse the staff in here take, just people being ignorant. But I'd say, yeah, within the last 10 years, it's gotten way better, and I think it'll get better.

INTERVIEWER: What would you say is a factor that contributed to this progress that we see now in contemporary times [inaudible] this chairwoman.

CHAIRWOMAN: The fact that people are more educated in the simple things. Like I said, the simple things that people were hurting. People were brought up a certain way and, right or wrong, they were brought up and they were hurting, they were ashamed, they were embarrassed, but all of that was bottled up inside, and that's the only way they knew how to act. And they bring that, and they bring that to their kids, and their kids act the same exact way, and they bring that mentality in here. I think now it's so much different because, as I said, there is an avenue for them now that wasn't there before. There's an avenue for them to take. Whether they take it or not, that's another story. But I

do see the difference here. I do see. Finance. They are all females. Everybody, they — they're confident. They walk around with confidence. Before, it was walking kind of on eggshells. You're not sure when you're supposed to speak or not. Well, I speak, but I was brought up different. Like I said, I was taught you stick up for yourself, you take care of yourself because nobody's going to do it like you. I got divorced a few years back because my husband decided that one day he was one of those guys that just wasn't going to go to work. I'd go home at five o'clock and he's just waking up, yawning, getting ready to get dressed to go back into town. So one day I just said, "You know, you must have a place to stay. I think that's where you need to go," because if I have to get up in the morning and go to work all day long, I want to come home and relax. I don't want to walk into a house smelling of stale booze. My thing is, I don't care if you got to dig a hole, fill it up, dig it over there, I don't care. Do something. Do something. Make yourself useful. That's it. Make yourself useful. Now, in my old age, I'm not as useful as I used to be because now I like to watch TV all day. But things have changed. Things have changed here. I am very, very fortunate that I have been raised by people that have taught me to be secure in myself, know that I'm not perfect and that I make mistakes and I'm willing to make those mistakes and move on, and I think a lot of people here understand and recognize that. And I've always told them that. If I'm wrong, I'll say I'm wrong, and I've been wrong many, many times, and I'm sure I'll be wrong again, but I think now people have accepted. Remember [inaudible] was our chief of police at one time. Unheard of at one point, a woman chief of police. Lots of things have happened and changed. I hear it sometimes, stereotyping. "Well, I think she'd be better as a secretary," when she's applying for a surveillance officer, and I'm just like looking, going, "And

that's based on what? What is it based on?" "Well..." "No, what is it based on? I just read you the history, I just read you their education, I read you their references. What is it that you're basing it on?" "Well, I just think she'd be happier." "Oh, now you know how to think like a woman."

INTERVIEWER: That's a problem.

CHAIRWOMAN: But that's good. Like I said, I respect so much Miss San Diego, Miss Brown, that they opened those doors. Again, Miss Brown lived behind me so I was fortunate to see her. That was cool. I would look out my back window and I would see her back there doing her garden, and every now that then I'd walk over and we'd just talk. You talk about being nervous. You know me. I was — this is the Miss — she was the woman. Oh, my God.

INTERVIEWER: The initial enrollee.

CHAIRWOMAN: When she says that she was proud of me, that was, to me, made me feel like everything else didn't matter that day. I was just — that was it. That was my high. That was it. My family, they never say that they're proud. We're Indians. We don't share our emotions on our sleeves and things. You can try and try. My uncle, I try to please him every day of the week, and you're never going to get, 'Hey, you did good." "By tomorrow, can you do this?'' Okay, okay. That's good. We're getting better. I'm very proud of everything that's been accomplished here. This is my — those were what?

Nine elections that I had to go through, every two years, where there's gut-wrenching every two years, but I'm proud of those because that says to me that my people, as small as we may be, have faith in me, and that means a lot to me, so I put that there right next to my oath and I look at my oath every day, and I sit here and I say, okay, I took an oath to do these things, and that's just my motivation to keep going every day. Here I have thank you notes from kids and everything that send me thank you things. There's a lot of kicks in the rear end, but then I get those little things, thanks for their little gift cards or something, so I look at them and I'm like, okay, there are some people out there that appreciate things so it's worth it, and you go another day.

INTERVIEWER: The history of the Cocopah people is quite impressive the way they've survived so many barriers, adversity, and how they're so resilient, and they've maintained their culture.

CHAIRWOMAN: I want to share with you. Like I said, I want to get that to you because, as I researched that one night and I was going through and I'm doing all of these things and I'm looking at it and I'm reading and I'm thinking, wow, we are a strong people. We came from nothing. We were given diseases with no hope of survival. Our water was taken from us so that we can no longer have those crops. We were pushed into certain areas and only by decrees did we get our own land back. And that's why I tell everybody now, we're right up against the river. There's nowhere for us to go. There's a river there. There's a boundary over there. Cocopahs are — we're already in a corner. There's nowhere else for us to go. So those of you that sit with your timber and your

mines, come see Cocopah and you're going to really see what it is. I am not kidding you. And somebody told me, "Next time you go, just take a thing of sand with you and say, 'Here's our river right here. Here's our water.'" To all of you that don't know where we are, come down and see where we are. Come down and see what we go through. Come down and see what we're about before you pass a bill or you make judgment on what is in our best interest. That's where I really lose my temper. You sit up here and you flip through pages. Come down there. Come look and see what we've accomplished and where we have problems. Come see it before you start passing all this legislation and all these bills and everything that you're doing in our best interest. Again, that's white man's world so I just get really upset about those things.

INTERVIEWER: I am really, truly, immensely grateful for you to have taken time from your busy schedule, Chairwoman.

CHAIRWOMAN: Thank you.

INTERVIEWER: I really appreciate you sharing your lived experience, your memories of your ancestors, and I can see that they raised you in a very dignified way, that you've stayed true to your convictions, and that you really try to implement this philosophy of the spirit of community in everything that you do.

CHAIRWOMAN: That's why I say we are not an island. We cannot exist as an island. We are a part of a greater group. I don't see Cocopah as Cocopah. I see Cocopah

as a community of Somerton, Yuma, San Luis. We are Welton. This is who we are. We can't keep saying, "Oh, this is our land." Well, this is our land because somebody put us here. If somebody didn't come and draw that line, we wouldn't be saying that. I consider myself a part of Somerton. I'm Cocopah but I consider myself a part of Somerton. I consider Yuma Cocopah. First I'm Cocopah but it's only because I got put here. I didn't ask to be put here. I didn't ask to live not even where I'm at. I didn't ask for that. We had no choice. The number that I bear when I have to go through inspection, this is the number the federal government gave me. I was here first. That's why I always get mad and I always have a heart attack with the guys at the border inspection. Yeah, border patrol, "Are you citizens?" Sometimes I'm with one of my native friends and they're like, "More than you'll ever know." "Shush. We're going to be sitting here all day. Just shush." We're going through to get to Phoenix. I'm like, "Quiet. Quiet. We're going to be here all day." But, yeah, it irritates me. You have nerve to ask me? We were here first. You put us where we are. And then the state says, "You can't enjoy this luxury or that." Hello. You guys put us here. Now you want to go dictate more? Well, I better stop there because [inaudible].

INTERVIEWER: I thank you so much. I'm so immensely grateful for you taking your time.

CHAIRWOMAN: No problem. Thank you.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you so much. Thank you very much for sharing with me

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