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The *Yoreme* Creation of *Itom Ania* in Northwestern Mexico: Histories of Cultural Landscapes

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We gathered in the patio of a village elder in the small community of Los Nachuquis ("place of the *huachapori* thorns"). Under the shade of mesquite and *piocha* trees we discussed the vital link between strengthening the *Yoremnokki* language among contemporary *Yoreme* communities and the defense of *lutu'uria*, their rightful claim to the forested spaces of the monte, *huya ania*, and the resources it provides. Several of the men and women present recalled their ancestors' legacy in the stories they had told about their struggles to defend their land, affirming that *territory—itom ania* or "our world"—signifies not only the land but also the culture and wisdom of the people.[1]

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[1] Piocha, in the regional vernacular of Sonora, Mexico, is the *Melia azedarach* tree known in temperate climates as the white cedar. Possibly introduced from Asia in the past, it has acclimated to subtropical environments in the Americas. The word *piocha* is derived from

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Language plays a fundamental role in our interpretation of the rich archival sources that allow us to comprehend the deeply rooted knowledge base that Indigenous peoples developed from the material and spiritual worlds through which they moved in seasonal patterns of migration and dwelling. Language is also an essential part of the living histories we construct in collaboration with the Indigenous peoples that maintain their traditions in a radically transformed ecological region through their ritual cycles and collective memories that derive their meaning from the natural world. Indigenous perceptions of their environment were rooted in the landscapes they had created in the course of pursuing subsistence strategies for centuries before European contact. The arid environments of the coastal plains and highland valleys bordering the Sonora and Chihuahua Deserts required access to a diverse range of resources and ecological spaces. Indigenous peoples adapted the traditions they had developed over centuries to secure a livelihood to the demands and the opportunities of the colonial economy. Following the initial violent encounters with early Spanish *entradas*, Native villages coalesced into mission towns, whose internal economies combined Indigenous cropping and irrigation methods with European cultigens and livestock. Their settlement patterns were altered even further as they intersected with the colonial enterprises of mining, livestock raising, and commercial agriculture that developed in northwestern New Spain (Deeds, 2000).

Indians were not explicitly "environmentalists" in their worldview. Nevertheless, their territorial defense arose from longstanding holistic practices of land use that included arable land for cultivation, coastal estuaries for fishing, and the forests and grasslands for foraging. The

Nahuatl *piochtli*, meaning "full of grace or magnificent" (RAE Diccionario https://dle.rae.es/piocha). Mesquite (*Prosopis velutina*) is Native to northwestern Mexico.

Los Nachuquis, like Punta de la Laguna, Bachoco el Alto, Buaysiacobe, and other small communities in the middle portion of the Mayo river basin, are linked together by the Traditional Government of the Pueblo of Cohuirimpo, *Batwe Cowiktipo*, a historic *Yoreme* town and one of the eight Jesuit missions founded in the early seventeenth century. *Lutu'uria yo'owe*, the ancient or greater truth (Lerma Rodríguez, 2011, p. 214).

term *monte* occurs throughout the documentary record and in common speech to refer to uncultivated spaces in forests, grasslands, and wetlands near rivers or coastal estuaries. The meanings that Native peoples ascribed to places and the intensity of conflicts that erupted over basic resources stemmed from practices that linked labor to water and land, including floodplain cultivation and the renewable vitality of the *monte*.

This chapter offers new readings of land titles for the colonial provinces of Ostimuri and Sinaloa, focusing on the Mayo river valley. The analysis of changes in land tenure and use that are documented in these archival sources foregrounds ecological conditions and cultural meanings through the dual lenses of environmental history and ethnohistorical perspectives. It privileges Indigenous knowledge of landforms, biological species, and the cultural values that the communities of this region ascribed to the physical features and the territorial extension of the spaces they inhabited and defended. Its objectives seek to highlight the parallel production of oral and written sources and, thus, to suggest points of intersection in the languages and modes of communication that are inferred from both colonial documents and ethnographic registers. Finally, its purpose is to contribute an historical analysis that is useful for the *Yoreme* communities in their present-day defense of their territory and its resources.

The research that supports this chapter is rooted in archived land titles and judicial cases involving Indigenous pueblos and Hispanic settlers during the Spanish colonial administration of northwestern Mexico. These archival materials are supplemented with botanical information and place names collected by the author using hand-written notes during conversations with elders in the Pueblo of Cohuirimpo in 2017–2018 and 2021, as shown in Tables 5.1 and 5.2. In turn, the author has given transcriptions of the archival documents to the community in both printed and digital formats in an effort to collaborate with their vital interests for demonstrating their persistence as corporate communities in the region over centuries and their cultural practices for dwelling in the land. The research methodology is basically historical: to analyze a corpus of selected land titles that was compiled

Table 5.1 Placenames and names of plants derived from Yoremnokki

Name	Meaning
Bacabachi	Local variant of maize or carrizo seeds [*Arundo donax*]
Bachoco	Brackish water, associated with coastal marshes
Bachomo	A plant with medicinal properties that grows in the wetlands
Bachomotahüeca	Place where the bachomo plant stands
Caamoa	Pueblo: where maize or carrizo did not sprout
Capetamaya	Place where the fishing hook is thrown
Cohuirimpo	Pueblo: where the river turns back on itself, forming a tight meander
Conicari	Nest or home of the crow, associated with the gift of maize
Echomocha	Place where the *echos*, a fruit of the Pachycereus cactus is piled high
Etchojoa	Pueblo: the house of *echos*
Hona	[Óna] Salt
Huatabampo	Pueblo: a willow that stands in water
Jito	Distinctive species of trees in the monte: *Forchhammeria watsonii*
Júpare	Place of mesquite trees
Masiaca	[Masiacahui] Centipede hill
Móhua	Carrizo reed, basic material for building houses and fences
Mo'olco	Wild grass
Molcovaso	Grass that has turned yellow or brown, after the summer rains
Navojoa	Pueblo: house of tunas, the fruit of the nopal cactus
Tepagüi	Fattened deer
Tesia	Pueblo: the place of the *teso* tree, *Acacia occidentalis*
Yócuribampo	Rainwater

Sources Crumrine (1977), Camacho Ibarra (2017), Conversation with Elders of Cohuirimpo (2017)

from different repositories in order to create a narrative that is sensitive to change over time and informed by relevant insights from the archaeological and ethnographic literature.

Table 5.2 Selected Títulos Primordiales in Ostimuri and Sinaloa

Archive	Lands Registered	Year	District	Solicitant	Adjacent Properties
AGN IV 5907, 77	Yoricarichi Los Camotes	1715	Ostimuri	D Mateo Gil Samaniego	Pueblo de Macoyagüi, de la misión de Conicari
AGES TP LV,800	Cerro Colorado y Taimuco	1765	Álamos	D Juan José Amarillas	Pueblo de Macoyagüi, de la misión de Conicari
AGES TP XXVIII, 387	Husibampo	1788	Ostimuri	D Manl Ign Vlenzuela	Pueblos de Tesia, Navojoa, And Camoa
AGES TP XXVI,359	Real Viejo de Guadalupe, Mezcales, La Cabeza, Tres Marías, Osobampo	1793	Álamos	D Bartolomé Salido	Rl de S Joseph de Gpe, Rl de Santa Bárbara, D Juan de Sayas (difunto), Pueblo de Camoa
AGES TP XXIV,331	Lo de Ramírez	1790–1794	Álamos	D. Bartolomé Salido de Exsodar	Pueblos de Tesia, Camoa, Osobampo, de los herederos de D. Juan de Zayas, Usibampo de D Manl Ign Valenzuela
AGES TP XXIII,305	Jupsibampo Bachaca El Retiro Soledad	1793–1807	Álamos	D. Manl Ign de Valenzuela	D Bartolomé Salido D Patricio Gómez de Cossío Manl Cayetano Espinoza Pueblos de Camoa, Tesia, Navojoa, Cohuirimpo

(continued)

Table 5.2 (continued)

Archive	Lands Registered	Year	District	Solicitant	Adjacent Properties
AGES TP XIX,244	Echomocha	1796	Álamos	D Marcos de Valenzuela	D José Manl de Campos D Blas Antonio Muñoz Naturales de Echojoa Indio Julián Ontiberos Indio Pablo Ant Escalante
AGES TP V,58	Bacajaquito	1796–1797	Álamos	José María Lucenilla	Pueblo de Macoyagüi, Manuel Anguis, Lucas Ruiloba
AGN Tierras 1421, 9	Los Pilares	1800–1820	Ostimuri	D Francisco García	D José Ramón de Soto, vecino de Río Chico, Rancho de la Dispensa del propio García
AGN Tierras 1422, 2	Capetamaya Tierras agregadas	1806–1819	Álamos	D Juan Tomás González	Pueblos de Navojoa, Cohuirimpo, Chinobampo de D. Manuel de Espinoza, Soledad de D Manuel de Jesús de Valenzuela
AGES TP VI,69	Bacusa	1791–1820	Baroyeca Ostimuri	D Gabriel Felix	Naturales de Tepahüi Indios vecinos de Quiriego D Fr Javier de Valenzuela B Joaquín Elías González de Zayas

The Spatial and Cultural Creation of *Itom Ania*

Northwestern Mexico constituted a series of overlapping borderlands radiating northward from the tropical environments of the Gran Nayar, Chametla, and Culiacán to the arid lands of the Sonoran Desert (Hers, 2013, pp. 273–312; Sauer, 1935).[2] What the Spaniards first called *petatlán* (land of reed houses) became defined by four major river valleys—the Sinaloa, Zuaque (Fuerte), Mayo, and Yaqui—that flowed through slopes and canyons to water the coastal plains leading from the sierra to the Gulf of California. Petatlán reflected the production of culturally crafted spaces through mixed practices of food procurement and dwelling in the land. Native peoples created these landscapes through their labor, knowledge, and ceremonial cycles across different ecological zones extending eastward from the Gulf of California through coastal beaches and brackish wetlands, networks of streams and floodplains, and the *monte* of thorn forest, cacti, and hardwood trees (Crumrine, 1977: 11–14; Camacho Ibarra, 2017: 18–19; Gentry, 1942: 27–41; Gentry, 1995; Ingold, 2000) (Fig. 1).

Indigenous peoples in this region defended these territories as "our world" (*itom ania*) through their relationship to nature. These mosaics of distinctive geographical features were further inscribed with meaning by the spiritual power that emanates from nature (Camacho Ibarra, 2017: 312; Crumrine, 1977: 98; Shorter, 2009). In addition to the life-giving monte—the source for hunting, gathering medicinal plants, fruits, seeds, and building materials—*itom ania* embraced *kawi* (the sierras) with hills and ranges whose names evoke stands of vegetation, boulders, and oral traditions of *rancherías* (small, seasonal settlements); *wasam*, cultivable farmland in the river valleys; *pueplum,* the villages that mark their domestic spaces, the *ramadas* (arbors) for their rituals and centers of governance; *batwe,* the streams and arroyos that flow into the main river channels; and *bawe*, the maritime estuaries and open waters of the Gulf of California (Lerma Rodríguez, 2011: 53–72).

[2] Sauer and Brand (1998) referred to the pre-Hispanic northwestern frontier of Mesoamerica as Aztatlán, extending from Acaponeta to Culiacán.

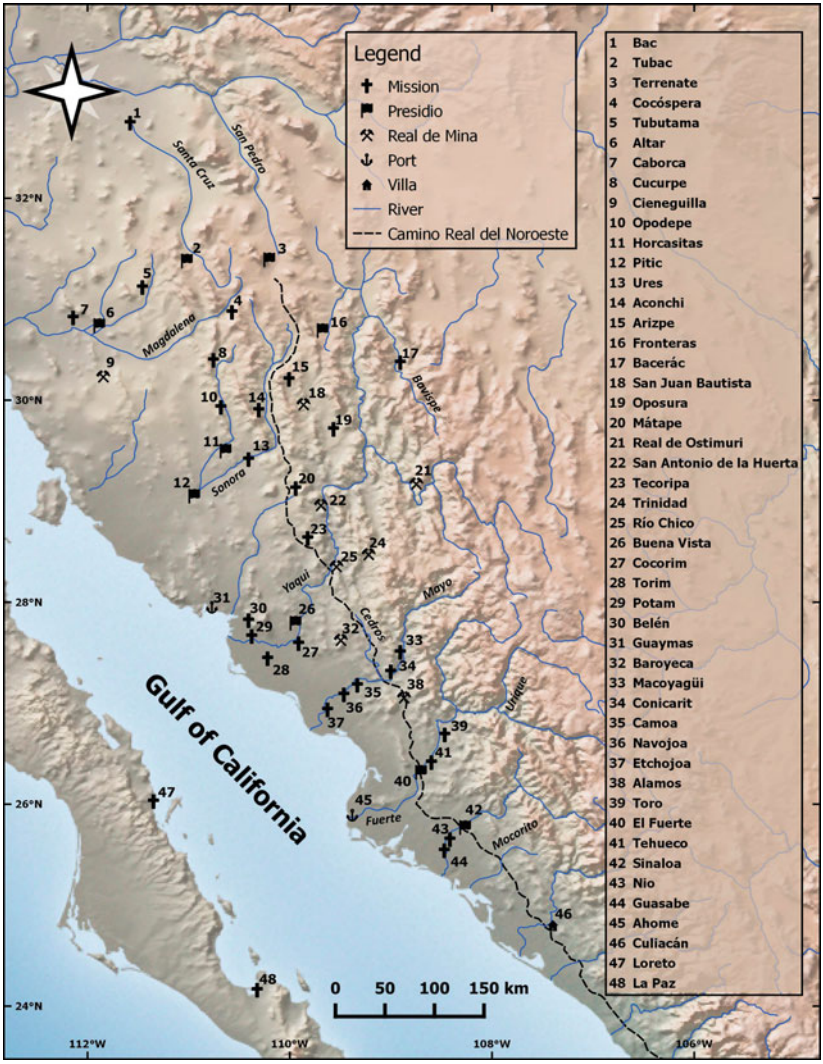

Fig. 5.1 Northwestern New Spain: Provinces of Sinaloa, Ostimuri, and Sonora. Map designed by Javier Etchegaray, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Reprinted with permission from the University of Arizona Press

The peoples of these four river basins adapted Mesoamerican cultigens to these semi-arid but watered valleys, developing local varieties of maize, cucurbits, beans, chilis, amaranthus, cotton, and tobacco as well as root crops like camotes (*Ipomoea batatis*). Beyond the floodplains, along the arroyo beds, and in small clearings throughout the monte, the *Yoremem* and neighboring peoples planted shifting milpas with periods of fallow.[3] Their combined practices of planting, harvesting, and gathering redistributed different species of herbaceous plants, succulents, and cacti; furthermore, all the Indigenous communities of the highlands and river valleys both cultivated and gathered numerous varieties of edible and fibrous plants (Bañuelos, 2013: 403–407; Harriss Clare, 2012: 27, 72–73). The rivers and coastal mangroves and estuaries provided an abundance of fish, clams, freshwater shrimp, mollusks, and amphibians as well as salt. Indigenous peoples lived in these spaces and moved seasonally through different biomes to create a mixed livelihood of farming, foraging, and trade.

Indigenous landscapes were not timeless or unchanging, however, and their practices for planting, hunting, and foraging produced evolving and shifting borderlands. Indigenous skills for survival learned over centuries through experimentation created knowledge that was passed across the generations through quotidian practices, oral traditions, and rituals of dance and song (Shorter, 2009; Yetman & Van Devender, 2002). Recent archaeological findings suggest that the Fuerte river valley was occupied continuously for at least 2000 years BP, and the cultural roots of the historical communities of this region ran deep through changing environments from the Mocorito valley in the south to the Yaqui basin in the north. Analyses of ceramic, lithic, and shell remains for different sites in the Sinaloa, Fuerte, and Mayo drainages support hypotheses of continuous settlement in Petatlán with datable material for over a millennium prior to European contact. Adapting to ecological transformations in these fluvial borderlands, ethnic boundaries shifted within networks of chiefly alliances and rivalries

[3] The Mayos, Yaquis, Guarijíos, and Rarámuris constitute living peoples with enduring cultures to the present day. The Tepagüis, Macoyagüis, and Conicaris no longer exist as separate ethnic groups; however, they maintained their languages well into the nineteenth century, and they identify as *Yoreme* or mayo to the present day.

among different bands of rancherías and villages (Carpenter, 2014: 37–52).

The peoples of the floodplains and highland ranges throughout the four major river basins of Petatlán exhibited discernible patterns of livelihood and political organization that differed from the urban settlements of Culiacán and Acaponeta to the south, the terraced villages of the eastern Sonoran highlands, and the hunter-gatherers of the Sonoran Desert. Archaeological surveys and excavations carried out in present-day central and southern Sonora point to shared cultural traditions in the piedmont leading eastward to the Sierra Madre Occidental with cultivation, terracing, and methods for manufacturing ceramic and lithic artifacts even as they suggest regional variations in their time span and settlement sizes (Doolittle, 1988; Pailes, 1972, 1994). A complex of villages known as Huatabampo developed on the coastal marshes of the Mayo and Fuerte river valleys through agriculture and long-distance trade networks from c. 200 BCE to 1450 CE (Álvarez Palma, 1990). On the northern boundary of Petatlán in the mid-Yaqui drainage and its tributaries, archaeological surveys of the Ónavas Valley found evidence of trade with Huatabampo, in the lower Mayo valley, and the Casas Grandes complex centered in Paquimé, in northwestern Chihuahua (Gallaga Murrieta, 2006: 105–252).

Petatlán was connected through these trade routes to Aztatlán and the urban centers on the western and northern borderlands of Mesoamerica. Even after the ceremonial and trading hubs of Huatabampo, Paquimé, Chalchihuites (in Durango) and the Hohokam settlements in the Gila and Santa Cruz river valleys of Arizona began to disperse a century before European contact—due to climate change, internal dissention, and external invasions—clusters of agricultural villages throughout the alluvial valleys and piedmont continued to thrive, producing food surpluses, tools, and prestige insignia like pearls, shells, obsidian, and cloth, that supplied the regional trade networks Spaniards would encounter in the sixteenth century (Berrojalbiz, 2012; Webster et al., 2008). Well-storied sixteenth-century expeditions led by Nuño Beltrán de Guzmán, Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, Marcos de Niza, Francisco Vázquez de Coronado, and Francisco de Ibarra passed through portions of Sinaloa and Ostimuri, following multi-lingual

Indigenous guides who traveled from one province to another along trails that linked together coastal routes, highland ravines, and mountain passes (Obregón, 1584/1988; Pailes, 1997: 147–157; Sauer, 1932).

Colonial Borderlands in Petatlán

Spanish colonialism came to the *Yoreme* borderlands in the early seventeenth century through Jesuit missions and the mining industry. The Society of Jesus founded a network of mission districts from its base in the Colegio de San Felipe y Santiago in the Villa of Sinaloa, extending through the river valleys of Sinaloa, Ostimuri, and Sonora. In mid-century, the frontiers of mission evangelization advancing northward from the Villa de Sinaloa met the mining frontier proceeding westward from Parral in Nueva Vizcaya. Mining began in Ostimuri with silver strikes in the 1660s deep in the sierra between the Yaqui and Mayo drainages (West, 1993: 44–55). From the late seventeenth to the early eighteenth century, new mines opened in the Reales de los Alamos, Río Chico, Tacupeto, Piedras Verdes, and Baroyeca. Alamos and La Aduana became the principal commercial and administrative centers for Indigenous pueblos and Spanish settlements in the Mayo river basin (Cramaussel, 2012; West, 1993: Fig. 18, "The Alamos mining district, southern Sonora").

The parallel development of missions and *reales de minas* created conflicts involving labor and resources. The mines and surrounding settlements became markets for mission produce and livestock, but at the same time missions became labor repositories for the mines through the supply of rotational workers recruited for specific places and time periods, known as *repartimiento* (BNFR AF Caja 32, 650.1, 1698. Fojas 1–44v.) The Real de los Alamos drew heavily from the Mayo pueblos even as Yaquis, Mayos, and other Indigenous groups from Sonora and Ostimuri crossed the Sierra Madre to work in Parral (Cramaussel, 2014). Parallel to the labor drafts ordered through repartimiento, Indians traveled on their own to the mines, incorporating paid labor into their patterns of seasonal migration. Over

time colonists and mission pueblos competed ever more rigorously for Indigenous workers and the productive resources of croplands, pasturage, woodlands, and sources of water in streams and springs.

Colonial boundaries were negotiated over more than three centuries through different practices of defining space and allocating resources in a mixed thorn forest and riparian environment, extending from the basin-and-range topography of the Sierra Madre Occidental to the deltas, wetlands, and estuaries of the Gulf coast. The Jesuit missions were intended to bring scattered Indigenous settlements into permanent villages, but, in practice, they became an interface between the rancherías that supported the Indians' seasonal movements through different biomes and the ceremonial and political centers of the missions. As the Spanish population grew with the expansion of mining and livestock ranching, the institutional status of the missions under colonial law protected Indigenous agricultural lands and portions of the monte, where Native shepherds and cowhands tended mission herds. Yet, mission lands were not necessarily contiguous or clearly defined; rather separate parcels of croplands, dependent on rainfall or the seasonal flow of intermittent streams, and grasslands mixed with thorn forest, were occupied at different times by both Indigenous and Spanish cultivators, pastoralists and foragers. Called *parajes*, which translates simply to "place," these irregularly shaped stretches of monte were named—often with Indigenous toponyms—thus revealing locally recognized histories of occupation and use.

Customary land tenure and usufruct in these northern borderlands of New Spain became more formal under the pressures of population growth and an increase in the size of livestock herds. Over the course of the eighteenth-century colonial authorities in Nueva Vizcaya, Sinaloa and Sonora pressured Spanish *vecinos* (Hispanic resident heads of households) to regularize their occupation of portions of the monte, known as *realengos* (public lands nominally owned by the Crown), through *composición*, a legal process involving the payment of royal fees to carry out the measurement, public auction, and issuance of title that turned open parajes into discreetly bounded pieces of private property

(López Castillo, 2010, 2014; Radding, 1997: 171–206, 2005, 2022: 152–191).[4] Private landholdings evolved from use rights negotiated through verbal agreements to demarcated and titled properties. The legal process for enclosing portions of the monte contrasted with informal arrangements for sharing pasturage and water or transferring use rights through purchase and inheritance.[5] Formal land ownership with measured boundaries and property markers ran counter to Indigenous practices of land use and access based on seasonal occupation of the monte and the resources of water, forests, and wildlife sheltered within it. Table 5.2 lists a selection of archival sources for the legal enclosure of private landholdings in the Provinces of Ostimuri and Sinaloa.

Defending the *Monte*

In the middle portion of the Mayo river drainage, where the floodplains widened to support extensive croplands, the pueblos of Camoa, Tesia, Navojoa, and Cohuirimpo straddled both the northern and southern banks of the river. The Indigenous officers of Navojoa became the principal litigants in a case that represented the entire village in their demand to maintain the riparian wetlands and scrub forest that surrounded their croplands as open monte not to be measured or adjudicated to private owners. Together with the officers of Tesia, they claimed these realengos by right of possession and "because the king, in

[4] *Realengos* referred to lands that were nominally under the jurisdiction of the monarch and not alienated to a private owner. See the interesting discussion of *realengos* and *real* in BNFR AF Caja 32, 650.1, 1698, f. 44. Vecinos were Hispanic subjects, identified as residents of a given city or town, with potential landholding rights and the duties to contribute to local defense. The provinces of Sinaloa, Ostimuri, and Sonora were under the administration of the Kingdom of Nueva Vizcaya under 1734, when the governorship of Sonora–Sinaloa was established; with the Intendancy system of 1786, the western provinces from Chiametla to Sonora came under the authority of the Intendancy of Arizpe.

[5] Hundreds of files created through the process of approving land titles through composición, often called *títulos primordiales*, are preserved in the Archivo General del Estado de Sonora, Títulos Primordiales (AGES TP), in the Archivo Histórico General del Estado de Sinaloa, Ramo de Tierras, in the Archivo Histórico de Jalisco, and in the Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), Ramos de Tierras and Indiferente Virreinal.

his mercy, had given them the lands that were left unmeasured" between the boundaries of neighboring villages and private landholdings.[6] The contentious arguments recorded in the field and entered into the court proceedings in the Audiencia of Guadalajara hinged on the meanings of *possession*; their dissonance arose from distinct ways of securing a livelihood and dwelling in the land. In the following paragraphs, the positions upheld by the *Yoreme* village officers are analyzed in detail, because they illustrate in profound ways both the material qualities of the land and its resources and the values that Indigenous peoples ascribed to the landscapes that they and their ancestors had created.

Don Manuel Ignacio Valenzuela, a vecino of the Villa of Sinaloa, filed a claim (*denuncia*) to uncultivated lands between his ranch of Husibampo and the pueblo of Navojoa before the magistrate in charge of land sales and composiciones in the Audiencia of Guadalajara, Don Guillermo Martínez de Aguirre y Viana. In June 1787, Judge Martínez de Aguirre commissioned Juan María de Figueroa, a vecino of Álamos in the Province of Sinaloa to survey the lands surrounding Husibampo, ordering Figueroa to measure or estimate (*regular*) the distances between Navojoa and Husibampo and show their locations in a map; determine how much land the Indians of Navojoa cultivated and how much they occupied beyond their croplands; report the number of Indigenous families living in Navojoa; measure the entire area over which Valenzuela had filed his claim and determine its "intrinsic worth." Figueroa fulfilled this demanding commission only partially: he did not actually measure any of the lands in question, rather he merely estimated their circumference and extension, nor did he get an accurate count of the population of Navojoa. If he drew a map, it is not included in the archive. Despite these omissions, his report revealed key aspects of the human ecology of the Mayo river basin and surrounding monte in the late eighteenth century; furthermore, the language he used to summarize verbal exchanges in the field articulated some of the conflicting notions of territoriality expressed by Indigenous

[6] AGES TP XXVIII, 387, 28 February 1788, f. 70. "… [e]l Gobernador de [Tesia] y sus vocales … dijeron que respecto a que el Rey les ha hecho limosna del realengo sobrante, no consienten en la mensura de él".

communities, Hispanic landowners, and officials charged with determining property boundaries, awarding land titles, and collecting the corresponding royal fees.

In late February 1788, Juan María de Figueroa assumed his commission and sent a citation to the claimant Manuel Ignacio Valenzuela, who named a representative to defend his interests for the land survey in Husibampo and the surrounding monte. Likewise, Figueroa summoned the Indigenous officers of Navojoa, naming those who responded to witness the survey and defend their pueblo's lands and boundaries: Governor Nicolás Cubil and council members Ignazio Raqui, José Manuel, Vidal Melchior Usacamea, Juan Ygnazio Arze, Ramón Baqui, Fernando Baquivi, José Matías Machiri, Ygnazio Anuamea, José Qroba [Quiroga?], Oní Agustín y Nomamea. Figueroa read to the assembled *Yoreme* officers out loud the order he had received from the Audiencia Judge Martínez y Aguirre, to which they responded that they heard and understood it. Governor Cubil signed this portion of Figueroa's *auto*, as the official record of the proceedings in representation of all the village officers, together with Figueroa and one Hispanic witness, Simón de Santelizer. Nicolás Cubil, literate and bilingual in Spanish and *Yoremnokki*, was named Captain General of the Mayo River in the following decade. He appeared in numerous cases of land measurement and titling as an interpreter and adviser to his own and other *Yoreme* pueblos.[7]

The following day Governor Cubil and his fellow council members walked with Figueroa along the perimeter of all the croplands cultivated by the villagers of Navojoa, accompanied by witnesses Miguel María de Figueroa and Simón Santelizer, the former charged with counting cord lengths and estimating the distances they traversed. In effect, they led him downstream toward the west, following the river bank until they reached the limits that the Mayos of Navojoa recognized between their pueblo and the lands of Cohuirimpo. All along this transect Figueroa observed cultivated land, some of it dependent on seasonal rainfall and other parts watered by the highland streams that replenished the floodplain. Figueroa estimated its length in 125 cords of fifty varas each;

[7] AGES TP XXVIII, 387, 26 February 1788, f. 66–67.

this linear distance computed to 6250 varas, roughly equivalent to 5700 meters or 5.7 km. At this point he and the Navojoa officers crossed the river and turned to the north, passing through watered cropland for a distance that Figueroa estimated in fifty cuerdas (2.28 km). Turning eastward on the northern bank of the river, Figueroa, the Mayos, and the two witnesses walked upstream along the river's edge a distance of 250 cuerdas (11.4 km) to reach the limits between the pueblos of Navojoa and Tesia. At this juncture they crossed the river turning south, walking for another fifty cuerdas, then turned westward for an equal transect of 125 cuerdas. In this manner, their survey traced an uneven rectangle along the full width of the floodplain running parallel to the river and surrounding the pueblo. Figueroa estimated the circumference of the entire area in six leagues (approximately 24 square kilometers). He noted, further, all along these cultivated lands short term, seasonal plantings in the washes, where the humidity of the soil would allow crops to germinate and mature.[8] Thus, Nicolás Cubil and the officers of Navojoa guided Judge Surveyor Juan María de Figueroa to confirm their pueblo's possession of the wasam, the lands that were replenished each year by the floodplains in the Mayo river basin and renewed seasonally for planting and harvesting.

The dialogue took a sharper tone when Figueroa turned to the thorn forest that the people of Navojoa enjoyed by right of possession, but without cultivating it as cropland. Figueroa made the striking statement that north of the pueblo, these lands were "limitless," extending as far as thirty leagues to the southern margin of the Yaqui river. Looking south of the pueblo, Nicolás Cubil asked Judge Figueroa to establish the boundaries of Navojoa's lands at the same time that he measured the portion of the realengo that lay adjacent to Valenzuela's holdings in Usibampo. Figueroa verbally assented and issued an auto, stipulating that he would give Governor Cubil a copy of this agreement in writing,

[8] AGES TP XXVIII, 387, 26 February 1788, f. 68. The distances were computed into modern measurements on the basis of the conversion of one vara to .912 meters, from the online *Diccionario de la Lengua Española*, https://dle.rae.es/?id=bMH7x5e. The following lines express Figueroa's description of the wasam. "De aquí tomamos el viento poniente por la orilla de tierras de la misma qualidad a cerrar nuestro paseo a este mismo pueblo de donde salimos, regulando por 125 cuerdas: cuya circunferencia es la de 6 leguas: y he visto en las tierras que labraban, sembrados los bajíos que el temporal de verano les permite humedad para ello."

following legal procedure. On February 28, the commission convened for the land survey and set out to walk through the monte leading southward from the pueblo. When they arrived at the boundary marker for the puesto of San Joseph del Retiro, Governor Cubil declared that he did not consent to the measurement of these lands in favor of Valenzuela, because—he declared—they belonged to Navojoa, and the villagers had no other grazing land for their livestock. Pedro Joseph Solano, who represented Valenzuela, insisted that the survey proceed as ordered by Judge Martínez de Aguirre in Guadalajara. Figueroa then "crossed the line" between the lands recognized as belonging to the pueblo of Tesia and those of San Joseph del Retiro. Standing there, he turned to the governor and council members of Tesia, who responded in unison with Governor Cubil that they did not consent to the measurement of these lands, because the king had awarded them to their pueblo. Despite their recorded protest, they deferred to Figueroa's authority on the strength of the order issued by the Audiencia Judge, telling him to act as he thought best.[9]

Overriding the objections of the Indigenous officers of both Tesia and Navojoa, Figueroa proceeded in early March to carry out the survey from the puesto of Husibampo, where he had summoned the officers of the pueblo of Camoa (north of Tesia). When he announced to them the order he had received from the Audiencia, the Camoa officers responded that "they had nothing to say" and acceded to the measurement of the realengo bordering their pueblo. Accompanied by Solano and the witnesses, Figueroa estimated the area that corresponded to Valenzuela's claim as four sitios, but he dispensed with their measurement in order not to increase the costs that would accrue to him for securing title to the land. Two local vecinos, Miguel María de Figueroa and Andrés Armenta, estimated the value of the land at five reales per *caballeria* (43 hectares). The four sitios awarded to Valenzuela corresponded to 162.5 caballerías; when valued at five reales each, the cost of converting them into titled property would have totaled 812.5 reales or 101 pesos and four reales, a sum on which Valenzuela would

[9] AGES TP XXVIII, 387, 28 February 1788, f. 69–70.

have paid an additional amount in taxes and fees to the royal treasury had he completed the process of securing title to the land.[10]

Immediately following the land survey Governor Nicolás Cubil and the councilmen of Navojoa and Tesia registered their protest over the measurement of the realengo that extended between their pueblos and Husibampo before the Justicia Mayor of the Real de los Álamos, Don Juan Manuel de Zavala, who forwarded their signed statements to the Protector de Indios in the Audiencia of Guadalajara. As they had done in person before Don Juan María de Figueroa, the Indigenous officers defended their right of prior possession according to the primacy awarded to them as Indigenous pueblos (*pueblos de indios*) by the Sovereign, the longevity of their occupation of these lands—as it was commonly known in the region—and their need for these realengos in which to pasture their livestock. Magistrate Zavala halted the process of issuing the land title to Valenzuela, ordering that until the Juez Privativo de Tierras in the Audiencia ruled on the case, the *Yoreme* villagers should continue to exercise their use rights to this portion of the monte according to their custom.[11]

In his role as the commissioned surveyor don Juan María de Figueroa had requested the census corresponding to the Pueblo of Navojoa in order to comply with the orders he had received from Judge Martínez de Aguirre in Guadalajara. Figueroa counted one hundred families in the mission census but doubted its veracity because—he said—he could

[10] AGES TP XXVIII, 387, 3–7 March 1788, f. 72–73. Miguel María de Figueroa had served as one of the witnesses throughout the land survey, while Andrés Armenta, who had not appeared previously, was illiterate and could not sign his name. *Caballería*, a common measurement for grasslands or thorn forest, computed as 1104 × 552 varas, or 43 hectares. A *sitio* for bovine cattle, computed at 5000 × 5000 varas, constituted 1747 hectares. Radding, 1997: Table 6.1, p. 177, based on AGN AHH *Temporalidades* legajo 1165.

[11] AGES TP XXVIII, 387, 5 March 1788, f. 75–78. En el Rl de los Álamos a 5.III.1788. Ante mi, D. Juan Manuel de Zavala, Justicia Mayor y Capitán a Guerra de este mencionado real y su jurisdicción, pareció presente el Gobernador del Pueblo de Navojoa D. Nicolás Cubil por sí y a nombre de los demás naturales, haciéndome manifestación … en oposición de las medidas que ha practicado a pedimento de D Manuel Ygnacio Valenzuela, en lo que dicen ser realengo, y reclaman pertenecer dichas tierras a los dos pueblos de Navojoa y Tesia, de esta comprension … mediante a la primacía que les concede el Soberano, y a la inmensidad de años que tienen de posesión y reconocimiento por sí y sus antecesores y en el interim se resuelve lo conveniente por el referido S. Juez Privativo, proseguirán los Indios Naturales de los citados pueblos en el proprio método que han gozado, sin innovación alguna.

find no more than ten "poorly built" houses within the village perimeter. This statement does not ring true, however, when compared with the figures in the census carried out four years prior, in 1784, by the first Bishop of Sonora, and because of what we know about Indigenous patterns of settlement and livelihood. The Bishop's census showed 140 families and 350 persons in Navojoa, 95 families with 300 persons in Tesia, and 35 families with 90 persons in Camoa. The families of the fourth pueblo, Cohuirimpo, were dispersed in the monte, while the population of all four villages was mixed among Yoremem, Spaniards, and castas (mestizos). Figueroa opined that the pueblos' scant population undermined their alleged need for the land they so staunchly defended, an argument that Valenzuela's attorney repeated vociferously before the Audiencia. Determined to promote the privatization of the realengos, Figueroa willfully denied the enduring pattern of rancherías in which clusters of families distributed themselves along the length of the floodplain to cultivate their milpas and procure a wide variety of plants and wildlife in the marshes and upland monte. Their jacales of reed mats and puddled adobe provided shelter and served them in their seasonal movements through different ecotones of thornscrub, wetlands, and highland deciduous forest (Dimmitt, 2000: 3–18; López Castillo, 2008: 60).[12]

Maneuvering between deference and defiance the governors and village officers of Tesia and Navojoa expressed the conflicting practices of land use that defined the open quality of the realengos (Deeds, 2003). Leaders like Nicolás Cubil navigated the judicial and administrative institutions of local governance and the Audiencia of Guadalajara to persevere in their assertion of usufruct rights and access to both the cultivated floodplain and the resources of the monte. Their ancient traditions of dwelling between the wasam and the monte clashed, however, with notions of titled ownership of measured pieces of land and its commodification in set fiscal and monetary terms. Indigenous pueblos were caught between the customary rights they defended and the commercialization of the land and its resources, a

[12] AGES TP XXVIII, 387, 5 March 1788, f. 72; BNFR AF 34/759 Obispo Antonio de los Reyes, Informe, 1784.

process in which they participated by breeding their own livestock herds and trading their produce and labor in the colonial market. Governor Cubil and his fellow officers forestalled the division and enclosure of the monte surrounding Navojoa and Usibampo with the simple words: "we do not consent." The corpus of documents generated by the process of land titling shows the momentum of issuing land titles through *composición* and the gradual dispossession of Indigenous communal lands in favor of the commercialization of landed properties. To read them only in this way, however, would deny the perseverance of individuals and communities among the Yoremem and neighboring peoples who intervened in the contentious histories of enclosing the open territory of the monte.

North of Camoa in the mountainous territory of the headwaters of the Mayo and Cedros rivers, the Pueblo of Tepagüi defended its longstanding possession of Bacusa, a stretch of land with sufficient water for agriculture some two leagues north of their village.[13] Faced with the threat of its measurement and conversion into private property in favor of Don Gabriel Felix, a vecino from the mining real of Baroyeca, the governor and village council of Tepagüi mobilized to demonstrate to local authorities their effective use of Bacusa. In the spring of 1791, Governor Pedro Misquy and his fellow officers walked the land with the Subdelegado of the Province of Ostimuri, Don Cristoval Gimenes Moyano, taking care to point out the milpas they had cleared for planting and the irrigation canals—*acequis*—they had dug to water their crops. Located northwest of the main channel of the Cedros river, the Tepahuis harnessed the downward flow of arroyos that fed into both the Cedros and Mayo rivers to irrigate small fields immediately adjacent to their pueblo and in separate puestos like Bacusa. Furthermore, the Tepahuis maintained reciprocal relations with several vecinos from the highland ranching settlement of Quiriego, upstream on the Cedros river, who used portions of Bacusa but acknowledged that it belonged to Tepagüi. It was not clear whether the

[13] AGES TP Tomo VI, 69, 1791–1820, ff. 431–469. Don Gabriel Felix y el Pueblo de Tepagüi por el sitio de Bacusa.

vecinos paid rent or offered a different kind of material Exchange (AGES TP Tomo VI, 69, 1791–1820, f. 435–436).

When Subdelegado Gimenes Moyano forwarded the file to Intendant-Governor Enrique de Grimarest, he dismissed the Tepahuis' strenuous arguments, referring disparagingly to the acequia they had dug as nothing more than a shallow ditch. In August 1791, he commissioned Gimenes Moyano to survey Bacusa in favor of Felix's bid to gain title to the puesto. Having summoned the neighboring landholders Don Francisco Xavier de Valenzuela, the priest Don Joaquín Elías González de Zayas—both members of prominent families in the mining center of Álamos—and the Pueblo of Tepagüi, Gimenes Moyano began the measurements in late October. Using a twisted ixtle rope of fifty varas' length, Gimenes Moyano established the center of the property in a corral built on the top of a low mesa. The work began by counting 48 cordeles to the north, ending in the boundary marker for Quiriego, where the subdelegado placed another marker for this northern limit of Bacusa at the foot of a *teso* tree (*Acacia occidentalis*; Martin et al. eds., 1998: 110). Returning to the center, the survey team walked in the other three cardinal directions to establish the boundaries of the puesto. Gimenes Moyano extended the perimeters of the surveyed land toward the east and south, by directing an additional set of measurements that reached the northern limits of Tepagüi, where Governor Misquy and his fellow officers placed the boundary marker that separated their village lands from this portion of Bacusa that—until that momento—had been part of their communal patrimony. Gimenes Moyano's elongated survey rendered this measured portion of Bacusa in 2.5 sitios "and three cordeles more," surrounded on its southern and eastern limits by the village lands of Tepagüi and to the north and west by the properties of González de Zayas and Valenzuela. The subdelegado valued Bacusa at 69 pesos, considering that it was forested and intersected by arroyos that provided alluvial lands for planting maize and natural water holes for livestock (*abrevaderos*). Don Gabriel Felix paid the fees to obtain title to Bacusa two decades later, in 1820, on the eve of Independence.

The testimonies recorded in the survey of Bacusa in support of the Tepahuis as well as their detractors offer pointed observations regarding

different systems of cultivation and water management in the foothills surrounding the Mayo river. Witnesses called to defend or refute the Tepahuis' claim to Bacusa described canals that conducted water to cleared fields, and separate plantings *de humedad* and *de verano*—that is, crops dependent on groundwater at the margins of arroyos or on summer rains without irrigation. Even those witnesses who argued against the Tepahuis' effective use of Bacusa, emphasizing the small scale of their visible cropland, named a series of puestos—Choymoco, Techueca, Supabampo, Saposero, Los Chinos, and Suybampo—across the stream beds of tropical deciduous forest to which the Tepahuis had access for hunting, gathering, and cultivos de humedad. Don Juan María Figueroa and Don Victorino Gil, vecinos who purported to have long-term knowledge of the región, calculated the number of *fanegas* of wheat or corn that could be planted in Tepagüi village lands communally or by individual families. Despite their intention to undermine Indigenous claims to this puesto and promote its enclosure as a titled property, Figueroa and Gil revealed the cyclical or seasonal nature of land use in the monte with different kinds of vegetation, soils, and sources of water.

Language and Histories of Cultural Landscapes

For the Indigenous peoples of today, land titles and the documents they generate provide a wealth of information about the natural environment and the landscapes their ancestors created, adding to their own stores of knowledge and opening pathways to future possibilities for restoring their ecological patrimony. The histories of land enclosures through the process of composición to grant land titles upon payment of a fee do more than merely document a bureaucratic legal procedure under colonial rule; rather they illustrate the persistence of Indigenous communities in the face of contested power relations and the disputed control over vital resources. The testimonies included in these files provide the names of Indigenous officers, who represented the institutional presence of community governance in the northwestern

borderlands of New Spain. The principles they defended in specific instances of disputed claims to portions of the monte were centered in the material resources of vegetation, water, and cultivable land. Moreover, they expressed the very identity of community linked to these commonly held spaces in the wider cultural meaning of territory. Their words are echoed by the *Yoreme* citizens of Cohuirimpo gathered in Los Nachuquis, who articulated the significance of *itom ania* in their affirmation: *we claim our natural right, because we are part of the territory* (Radding, "Jornada de trabajo en torno al Pueblo de Cohuirimpo," field notes, 23 October 2021).

Orality and the written word are integral to the narratives that are woven into the colonial land titles analyzed for this chapter. Verbal confrontations and negotiations among the historical actors—the vecinos and *Yoreme* peoples who appear in the recorded proceedings—can be inferred from the written documents, even in the formal language of the scribes' annotations. The Indigenous officers who were called to witness land measurements and defend the boundaries of cropland and monte surrounding their villages deliberated among themselves in yoremnokki and then directed their words to the colonial authorities either directly or through interpreters. Regionally based Spaniards and Indians shared a common lexicon for geographical markers relating to place names and species of plants and animals, even when they disagreed on the meanings of possession, usufruct, and ownership of the vital resources of forested land and water. Governor Nicolás Cubil and the council officers of Navojoa, Tesia, and Camoa contested the measurement of Husibampo in the middle Mayo river drainage during the land survey in the field and before the magistrates of the Province of Sinaloa and the Audiencia of Guadalajara. With the words "we do not consent," they alleged their legal right to the territory as pueblos de indios and subjects of the king, asserting their need for this portion of the monte as grazing land. In a similar confrontation, Governor Misquy and the council officers of Tepagüi defended their corporate possession and usufruct of Bacusa against the encroachments of private landowners in the forested monte and watered cropland that surrounded their pueblo. They called witnesses to attest to the ways that Tepahuis had turned Bacusa into a

cultivated landscape through their labor to dig acequias, gather the forest, and clear brush for planting milpas.

The full meaning of the conflicts narrated in this chapter emerges from a careful reading of the internal evidence generated by the títulos primordiales, interpreted in the context of the ecological settings for these territories and the ethnohistorical patterns of both cultural continuity and historical change. In this way, histories of cultural landscapes can be woven from the verbal descriptions and numerical measurements of portions of the monte. The language that gives them meaning is deeply rooted in the spatial environments of Petatlán, connecting the colonial past with the present in the living histories of *Yoreme* communities.

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AGES Archivo General del Estado de Sonora.
TP Títulos Primordiales.
AGN Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico.
AHH Archivo Histórico de Hacienda.
BNFR Biblioteca Nacional, Mexico, Fondo Reservado.
AF Archivo Franciscano.

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