Fuerte River Histories and Ambivalent Mayo Modernity in Mexico, 1926-1970

By

James V. Mestaz
B.A. University of California, Los Angeles, 1998
M.A. University of Miami, 2009

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Dissertation Committee:
Christopher Boyer, Chair and Advisor
Joaquín Chávez
Jeffrey Banister, University of Arizona
John Monaghan, Department of Anthropology
Javier Villa-Flores
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Summary

This dissertation shows how some Mayo indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley in northwest Mexico accepted irrigation infrastructure into their practices as a way to extend their symbolic connection to the Fuerte River from 1926 to 1970. For generations the Mayo performed religious rituals to pay homage to the Fuerte River for providing irrigation water. Non-Mayo developmentalist strategies limited access to the river system that represented the unifying source of Mayo culture. The uses of dams, pumps, sugarcane cooperatives, and canals allowed some Mayos to both increase crop productivity and protect lands necessary for performing riverine religious traditions that were vital to their cultural autonomy. Such uses of hydraulic technologies reflected an indigenous worldview and knowledge systems that allowed Mayos to engage the modern world while they protected traditions.

Mayos used all technologies at their disposal from the mid-1920s through 1960s to defend their way of life, villages, and to survive. In the arid Fuerte Valley, access to irrigation water became increasingly synonymous with power throughout the twentieth century. The opening of political spaces in the postrevolutionary period allowed some Mayos to leverage tangible benefits such as irrigation and land concessions. The inability of other indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley to gain such advantages showed that some villagers were more prepared than others to adapt to changes in the political and physical landscape. The diversity of Mayo approaches to hydraulic technology resulted in numerous river histories reflecting the distinct obstacles, aspirations, and strategies of indigenous villages of the Fuerte Valley. It was in fact these divergent tactics in dealing with changes to the Fuerte River that allowed some Mayos to help shape local hydraulic development while their culture adapted in order to survive.
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### Introduction
In 1957 God appeared as a small man with a long white beard to an indigenous Mayo man named Antonio Bacasegua in the town of La Florida in the Fuerte River Valley of northwest Mexico. God told Bacasegua to organize religious fiestas to help revive Catholic faith that had dwindled in recent years. These fiestas consisted of dancers, musicians, and prayers, which integrated Mayo practices with a folk Catholicism. Word of Bacasegua’s encounter spread among indigenous people in the Fuerte, Mayo, and Yaqui Valleys of northwestern Mexico, resulting in a revival of these religious fiestas.\(^1\) As word spread, the story morphed, but centered on how God would respond to issues of water inequity. In the Mayo Valley indigenous people believed He was going to provide rain to flood dams and supply the poor with sufficient water, or destroy canals so there would be no charge for His water. In the Fuerte Valley the old man appeared to other Mayos while standing on a river dam, and an indigenous non-believer drowned while bathing in an irrigation ditch. Indigenous people of both valleys related to Bacasegua’s vision within the context of the availability of hydraulic technology. While the story of the appearance of God eventually subsided, it regenerated indigenous rituals that continue to unify Mayo today.\(^2\)

How are we to understand this indigenous movement, which occurred at a time of rapid changes in human intervention in the use of the key rivers supplying water to the region? This dissertation frames economic development, environmental concerns, and indigenous mobilization within the context of one of today’s most pivotal issues: access to water. I investigate the historical relationship of the Mayo people, an indigenous group in northwestern Mexico, with one of the largest bodies of water in the region, the Fuerte River. Between the

\(^1\) Erasmus, *Man Takes Control*, 288.
\(^2\) Ibid, 288.
years 1926 and 1970, the Mayos limited their political and economic marginalization by maintaining a deep and evolving connection to the Fuerte River. They adapted new technologies by using their own approach to irrigation systems, dams, ejidos, and sugar mills for practical purposes. Such uses also helped indigenous villagers protect cultural practices such as religious ceremonies, allowing them to understand themselves as different from *mestizos* (mixed race people).

Mayos participated in or subverted river projects, shaping political processes introduced by a developmentalist state, foreign investors, and the local mestizo population. The indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley thus gained a number of allies and adversaries in the process. In some instances they joined mestizo peasants to help alter river development by struggling against corporate and state capitalist control of the river, yet at other times they participated in new relationships with these powerful entities to varying degrees. Interrelated conflicts surfaced as both indigenous and mestizo people used political leverage to increase agricultural productivity and to protect and/or expand their access to cultivable land. New opportunities for employment or access to water created inequities within Mayo villages that resulted in social, economic, and ecological stress.

Mayo reactions to the structural remaking of the Fuerte River in the mid-1920s through 1970 led them to become, within particular contexts that varied over time and space, a combination of victims of development, reluctant collaborators, and enthusiastic supporters. Focusing on Mayo practices allows me to account for multiple overlapping river histories. Indigenous people’s approach to their uses of new technologies such as canals, pumps, and sugarcane cooperatives were based on their own experiences to the world around them. The practices that they brought to the struggle over the Fuerte River allowed them to employ new
uses of hydraulic technology for their own advantage. This in turn led to new ways of understanding who and what belonged to indigenous practice.

I use an environmental history approach to analyze the river and changing ecology of the Fuerte Valley, and ethnohistory to examine indigenous practices. Such an inter-disciplinary method allows me to ask what it meant for the Mayos and their communities, in contrast to the intent of the Mexican state, when outsiders changed the technologies used to access the river. This type of analysis also leads to further questions about the changing symbolic relationship between indigenous people and the Fuerte River. In what ways did the indigenous world view and approach to the river shape their relationships with the state? Why did some Mayos adopt aspects of technology (pumps, canals, cooperatives) but others did not? What affect did adaptation of new strategies have on ceremonial practices? How did the introduction of irrigation technology alter indigenous social organization and sense of community? How did their evolving practices using the river, rainwater, animals, and raw materials allow them to retain cultural autonomy in the face of a dominant techno-scientific approach toward nature? To answer these questions, I have relied on both archival materials that record the official state sanctioned attempts to control water sources as well as oral history of the Mayo to understand extra-official approaches.

Specifically, this dissertation examines the tactics of resistance, adaptation, and collaboration of Mayo people in the face of changing access to the Fuerte River from 1926 to 1970. Indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley confronted changes in a political and hydrological landscape that they could not control. A close investigation reveals that some indigenous villages integrated newly available technologies (pumps, canals, sugarcane cooperatives, ejidos, purified water systems) into their practices. Such uses of modern technology helped them protect
traditions such as religious ceremonies, and sometimes kept their communities intact. Understanding the changing link between water technology and Mayo tradition will help scholars of cultural resilience reconsider the importance of river access to both cultural and physical survival.

The concept “hybridization” helps me to explain the process of change and continuity within Mayo communities of the Fuerte Valley in the mid-twentieth century. Mexican-Argentinian anthropologist Néstor García Canclini used the term “hybrid” to describe Latin American cultures. He showed how the mixing of cultural expressions blurs borders between traditional and modern, or high, popular, and mass culture. All cultures in this sense are hybrid. It is becoming more difficult to distinguish cultures from one another as they constantly appropriate practices and traditions from each other. Indigenous cultures in particular have historically integrated outside practices into their traditions, affording them the opportunity of being “modern” in some contexts and “traditional” in others.

The process of hybridization has pivotal consequences for indigenous cultures encountering modernity. García Canclini used the example of museums to show the Mexican state’s tendency to valorize ancient indigenous cultures, while glossing over how modernity influenced their contemporaries. He argued that museums portray current indigenous cultures, “without the objects of industrial production and mass consumption that we often see in the communities today. We cannot know therefore the hybrid forms that the traditional ethnic assumes in mixing with capitalist socioeconomic and cultural development.” Identifying hybrid forms certain indigenous cultures adopted in their mixing with development facilitates an understanding of modernity’s effect on these same people. My analysis of how the integration of

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3 García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures*
hydraulic technology by some Mayo villages helped protect cultural practices also helps explain indigenous peoples’ role in modernity that official state expressions of contemporary society like museums, and humanity in general, sometimes overlook.

García Canclini’s ideas on culture and tradition also help me to explain the effect of modernity on the Mayo people of the Fuerte Valley. In Hybrid Cultures García Canclini originally expressed a concern for the disappearance of indigenous tradition, but then reversed his sentiments when conversing with a Zapotec artist who moved seamlessly between three cultural systems. A few years later he helped clarify the importance of this verbal exchange by adding that, “Instead of the death of traditional cultural forms, we now discover that tradition is in transition, and articulated to modern processes. Reconversion prolongs their existence.”

Mayos were constantly integrating hydraulic technologies into their practices and then dropping them when they were no longer available, or did not serve the needs of their village. Long standing traditions, such as religious ceremonies, also shifted based on changes to the physical and political landscape. Mayos encountering modernity prolonged their culture through reconversion of traditions, especially those concerning water, in the mid-twentieth century.

The methods by which Mayos integrated new technologies into their practices from the mid-1920s through 1970 are a good example of hybridity. Some outsiders treated new technologies including canals, pumps, and cooperatives as tools to make the land more economically productive. The indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley embraced new technologies that became available to them as a subsistence strategy that helped to reproduce their society, while also taking into account long standing traditions of reciprocal use of the natural landscape and the Fuerte River specifically. In these terms such acceptance of new

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5 García Canclini, Hybrid Cultures, 172.
technology reflected peasant subsistence, what Cynthia Radding described as, “the complement of resources necessary to ensure both material existence and the social and ceremonial needs of community life.”\(^7\) Mayo integration of new technology therefore assisted in crop production and other practical needs, as well as the protection of indigenous cultural practices such as religious ceremonies conducted on the banks of, and within the Fuerte River itself.

The use of new technologies hybridized Mayo culture so that indigenous villagers had the ability to maneuver between modernity and tradition depending on particular contexts and in some cases blurred the boundaries between the two. The indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley often made traditional uses of modern technologies such as canals. In one such case indigenous villagers from Los Goros helped mestizos construct a canal and petitioned the state to help defend their use of it, even referring to the structure as their patrimony.\(^8\) These villagers considered the canal not just their property, but also an integral component to the preservation of their crops, material wealth, community, and religious ceremonies. Some Mayo individuals and villages thus found ways to adapt new technologies without denouncing their identity because such practices in fact helped protect their cultural autonomy.

Understanding García Canclini’s influence on other scholars writing about the hybridization of Latin American indigenous cultures allows me to interrogate the use of such contingent labels as “tradition” and show its connection to “practice.” Based largely on Garcia Canclini’s work on hybrid cultures, anthropologist Christopher Chiappari argued that, "Traditions are invented or created...There is a political aspect to designating a practice as a tradition and if deciding if a person or group belongs to or possesses a tradition...Traditions can

\(^7\) Radding, *Wandering Peoples*, 17.
\(^8\) October 24, 1942, AHA, Aprovechamientos Superficiales, Caja 1929, Expediente 29006. Chapter two analyzes this particular instance, which is part of a number of different examples of the evolving connection between Mayos and their integration of new technologies.
develop over centuries, but also over years or months.” This suggests that traditions are not
timeless but rather exist in time. Traditions are therefore contingent on changing social aspects
that reflect indigenous people’s struggle for cultural and physical survival.

I build on García Canclini’s notion of hybridization and Chiappari’s ideas on tradition by
showing how practices, in this case the use of such technologies as pumps, canals, and sugarcane
cooperatives, had the social cost of fracturing some indigenous villages. Mayo communities were
never unanimous in their acceptance of practices as they were transformed into traditions. The
political aspect of delegating a practice as a tradition and the internal dissension it caused, was
often tied to existing communal alliances and factions, and the understanding of the way
potential goods, resources, and opportunities would be distributed as a result of the acceptance of
a practice into tradition.

Some Mayo villages like Los Goros fought to defend the use of hydraulic technologies
into their practices because it helped to protect long standing cultural traditions. Some traditions,
such as the performance of religious ceremonies, were passed down to successive generations,
changing slightly over time based on alterations to the political and physical landscape of the
Fuerte Valley. When some of the new hydrological practices such as the use of canals became
restricted, indigenous people adjusted accordingly. Some Mayos adapted by relying more
heavily on old traditions like rain request ceremonies, or took up new practices such as the use of
purified water systems.

Mayos of the Fuerte Valley exhibited multiple expressions of cultural hybridity in
response to the changing political and physical landscape in the twentieth century. The growing

9 Christopher Chiappari, “Hybrid Religions” Critical Studies, 234. Scholars have used García Canclini’s concepts of
hybridization in a number of contexts, such as discussions of race and identity in Tace Hedrick’s Mestizo
Modernism, or art’s vital role in social change in Shifra M. Goldman’s Dimensions of the Americas. Chiappari’s
analysis fits best within my analysis of indigenous peoples’ reaction to modernity because it interrogates the
contingent concepts of “tradition”, “practice”, and “culture.”
heterogeneity of religious ceremonies performed on the Fuerte River for instance became reflections of some indigenous villages being more restricted from river use than others. Mayo cultural survival of the mid-twentieth century can be most attributed to their ability to integrate new practices that allowed them to collaborate with modernization initiatives while simultaneously protecting, adjusting, and channeling their indigenous cultural practices. Based on fieldwork in the late 1950s, anthropologist Charles Erasmus predicted that Mayo culture would eventually disappear due to new economic opportunities and increased interaction with mestizos. Some indigenous elders today point to a decline in their culture starting in the late 1950s as some indigenous villages lost access to the Fuerte River.

Existing accounts explaining Mayo cultural deterioration neglect to mention the importance of indigenous peoples’ uses of hydraulic technology that made them more prepared to adapt to change. The indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley were never uniformly invested in a particular hydrological venture, facilitating the integration and then relinquishment of water technologies within their practices as they became available and then unavailable. Some Mayos counteracted radical changes to the natural and political landscape that had the potential to break up their communities and endanger their culture, by using pumps and canals to gain a voice in local development decisions. The eventual restriction of access to irrigation infrastructure posed new obstacles, but Mayos endured by taking on new practices, or relied more heavily on existing traditions. The ability to constantly adopt new water technologies and political strategies to protect and sometimes adapt traditions, and the fact that some indigenous villages never relied on such technologies at all, allowed for Mayo cultural and physical survival from 1926 to 1970.

**Mayo Social Structure and Community**

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10 Erasmus, *Man Takes Control*. See also O’Connor *Descendants of Totoliguqui*.
11 Chapter six will discuss this assertion among some Mayo elders about the link between river access and a loss to culture.
The Mayo social structure of the twentieth century adapted to massive changes in the political, social, and physical landscape within the Fuerte Valley. I will summarize these changes within the context of these indigenous peoples’ actions between the years 1926 to 1970. Their social structure was not a static, pristine order that had stayed perfectly intact since before conquest. A flexible social structure helped keep indigenous communities of the Fuerte Valley resilient, particularly in the mid-twentieth century. According to anthropologists Martin Robards and Lilian Alessa, community resilience refers to the adaptive capacity to evolve alongside social and environmental changes.\textsuperscript{12} Particularly between the years 1926 to 1970, the ability of some Mayos to adopt hydraulic technology into their practices expressed the malleability of their social structure and allowed community resilience.

The “Mayo community” in this context is defined as the group of indigenous people bound together through experiences and beliefs, and the practices (religious, social, economic) that support this belief system.\textsuperscript{13} Indigenous villages of the Fuerte Valley remained resilient by combining existing traditions with new technology and information. Environmental scholar Derek Armitage suggested that, “Community adaptive capacity to deal with change relies not only on existing cultural adaptations but also on the ability to put together knowledge from different sources to make a new synthesis, co-producing knowledge.”\textsuperscript{14} The willingness of some Mayos to use hydraulic technologies in the mid-twentieth century resulted in a multitude of experiences and knowledge that they deployed to deal with changes around them.

The indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley historically navigated the challenges of each successive era by using the tools at their disposal, which in turn reorganized their communities.

\textsuperscript{12} Robards M. and Alessa L., “Timescapes of Community Resilience and Vulnerability in the Circumpolar North”, \textit{Arctic}, 415-427.

\textsuperscript{13} In this sense, cultural understandings also influenced certain Mayo practices.

\textsuperscript{14} Armitage, D., “Co-management and the co-production of knowledge: Learning to adapt in Canada's Arctic”, \textit{Global Environmental Change}, 1003.
From initial contact with the Spanish in 1533, to the mission system, massive land dispossession in the nineteenth century, and the ejido system in the postrevolutionary era, Mayo communities adapted and survived. In twentieth century Fuerte Valley, the environmental and social changes indigenous people encountered as a result of the first sustained access to land tenure and water sources sanctioned by the Mexican state, and then scarcity in both, tested the strength of communal bonds. It also allowed the Mayo to restructure their villages spatially and determine membership based on actions, all of which altered their communities but kept them intact in some form or another.

Shared experiences facilitated the creation of Mayo culture, but the distinctive practices of each village, and other historical factors helped distinguish it from indigenous neighbors of northwestern Mexico. Alejandro Figueroa explained that for the Mayo,

> There did not exist as in the case of the Yaquis, recognition of communal property that exceeds the boundaries of a community with its small villages. This factor consolidated the trend towards territorial and political dispersion between Mayos that apparently was already present since the time of the Spanish Conquest.\(^{15}\)

Prior to contact with Spaniards, the Fuerte Valley was inhabited by separate indigenous groups that eventually distilled into Mayo culture. The groups were not unified but did share a common language and similar cultural practices.\(^{16}\) Moments of stress and crisis since colonization united these indigenous groups and facilitated a long process of Mayo ethnogenesis that resulted in a more homogenous culture.\(^{17}\)

Indigenous people of northwestern Mexico responded to change in a multitude of ways, but some groups developed political structures to unify their villages. In contrast to Yaquis, who created a formal and centralized political assembly, Mayo villages of the Fuerte Valley remained

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\(^{15}\) Figueroa and López, *Encuentros con la Historia, Sinaloa*, 52.


\(^{17}\) I discuss this process of Mayo ethnogenesis in chapter one
independent of one-another and approached challenges and opportunities in a variety of manners. None of the indigenous groups of northwestern Mexico took completely uniform actions, but the Mayo of the Fuerte Valley adopted a multiplicity of practices that reflected the autonomy and singularity of villages more than their indigenous neighbors. The political and territorial dispersion of the Mayo, in combination with slightly different cultural expressions, distinguished it from such nearby indigenous groups as the Yaqui, Seri, and Guarijio.18

Mayos have established their culture largely through their interaction with the local ecology of the Fuerte Valley over several centuries. The word Mayo derives from the Cáhita word mayombo. According to indigenous oral tradition, Mayo (or the word mayombo) means “the people of the riverbanks.”19 This categorization helps to verify the centrality of the Fuerte River in the birth, growth, and maintenance of their culture. Other indigenous groups of northwestern Mexico historically depended on river systems, but the Mayo ability to integrate new hydraulic technologies into their practices in order to extend their symbolic connection to the Fuerte River in the early to mid-twentieth century also set them apart from their neighbors.

Mayo religious practices and other symbols of identity constituted a reflection of their culture as they maintained their reciprocal approach toward the river and natural landscape. Each indigenous village practiced religious ceremonies with slightly different variations, yet their similarities based on shared experience, allowed for some uniformity within the Mayo community. In reference to persistent cultures, the dean of Yoreme studies, Edward Spicer,

18 Figueroa and López, 52. While Figueroa and López point out that the political and territorial dispersion separated Mayos from their indigenous neighbors, I take it a step further by pointing out that practices and culture also distinguish the Mayo from Yaquis, Seris, and the other indigenous groups of northwestern Mexico.
19 López Carrera, Atlas Yoreme del Municipio de Ahome, 12.
suggested that, “the meanings [of identity symbols] amount to a self-definition and an image of themselves as they have performed in the course of their history.”

Identity symbols were a key element to the survival of both the indigenous social structure and community among massive changes within the Fuerte Valley. For instance, religious rituals performed on the Fuerte River, such as the San Juan ceremony, played a key role in maintaining indigenous identity. Access to the river became more restricted in the mid-twentieth century. Each indigenous village therefore adopted new strategies, including the use of hydraulic technologies, to gather the water needed to perform riverine religious ceremonies. The result was slight variations in these rituals within each village, whose surviving similarities allowed Mayos to still recognize religious ceremonies as identity symbols and unite them behind a common culture.

A Cobanaro (traditional governor) oversaw the Mayo political and cultural structure during the twentieth century. The Cobanaro acted as the figurehead of each village and was responsible for managing political affairs between villages and government institutions, dispensed justice, and had final authority in all church matters. They were accountable for the development and monitoring of religious activities, ensuring that proper observance of ceremonies and fiestas was followed. In the early-to-mid twentieth century the Cobanaro was always male, and sometimes elected for a life term. Currently the Cobanaro serves a limited term, and is usually male. Occasionally some women fill this role such as Juanita Buitemea who

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20 Spicer, “Persistent Cultural Systems”, *American Association for the Advancement of Science*, 798.
21 In the late 1930s and 1940s, Mayo villages also elected an executive committee of agrarian leaders placed in charge of petitioning the appropriate government agencies for ejidal land rights. These villages then elected ejidal committees to administrate the political affairs of their newly formed ejido.
23 Ibid, 84.
was Cobanara of Mochicahui until 2007. The alteration of gender roles and term limits shows how indigenous communities integrated outside approaches to fit within their social structure.

Religion has always been a key element to Mayo social structure, identity, and culture. Jesuits introduced Catholicism in the Fuerte Valley in the sixteenth century, as it was practiced through the veneration of saints, which amalgamated with indigenous traditions, festivals, and beliefs. Jesús Ochoa asserted that religious activity is in fact the backbone of Mayo ethnic identity and that,

Mayos believe that religion is not only a system of practices, rituals, and magic that aim to transform the real into the imaginary, but that these actions and rites are objectively real and effective. Mayo religion is characterized by a series of structural and super-structural elements, which ultimately come to distinguish, that religion, society, culture, and ethnicity are different aspects of the same reality.

Religion was in practice a major constitutive element of Mayo identity, as the two cannot be separated within their cosmology. This inter-connectedness extended to ideas about the land, water and agriculture, which play a key part in indigenous social structure, community, and identity.

Mayo religious ceremonies combine both ancient indigenous and Roman Catholic practices. U.S. anthropologist Ralph Beals explained that, “Not only are the admittedly non-Christian phases of supernatural practice and belief largely of aboriginal origin, but many features of the dances, paraphernalia, and organization associated with Christian ritual, are likewise aboriginal.” During the mission period the Mayo integrated a multitude of Roman

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25 Figueroa and López, Encuentros con la Historia, Choix, Tomo 1, 146.
26 Ochoa Zazueta, Los Mayos, Alma y Arraigo, 80.
27 Beals, The Contemporary Culture of the Cähita Indians, 206.
Catholic practices and beliefs into their own rituals, yet a large number of elements within their pre-Hispanic belief system also survived into the mid-twentieth century and even today.

Mayo cosmology is centered on the veneration of mother-nature or what they call *Juyya Annia*. This belief in the inter-connectedness of all living organisms is represented in religious ceremonies. Mexican Anthropologist Gabriel Uriarte clarified that,

*Juyya Annia* is the name assigned to the belief in nature, in the mountains, which invokes both fear and gratitude. *Juyya Annia*, words meaning nature and world, must be understood as the ‘world of nature.’ They are constantly used in indigenous conversation, [in discussing] both matters of everyday life and their deepest religious cosmology. Today Catholicism and *Juyya Annia* are the perfect pairing of conjugation in the scheme of faith of the Mayo Indians.²⁸

The role of nature is expressed in religious ceremonies through characters played by dancers and performers, such as deer dancers who mimic this animal’s movements. It is important to understand this interconnectedness as key to Mayo cosmology. In the indigenous world, the entirety of nature, flowers, deer, birds, are all singing in unison.²⁹ Every living thing is respected within this cosmology, and some entities like deer are particularly revered and recognized in indigenous ceremonies.

Mayo approaches to nature are also reflected in every day practices as all living things are considered a vital element to a functioning ecosystem. Gabriel Uriarte explained that indigenous people used their wisdom to, “become one with their surroundings, respecting other forms of life, considering that the individual is only part of a cycle, where everyone has their place, and where everything depends on each other for survival.”³⁰ The belief in the utility of all living organisms is one of the reasons indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley often communicate with nature. For instance, when most of the Mayo cut wood they explain their actions to the tree

³⁰ Uriarte, 12.
and ask its permission. They take just enough wood that is needed and make sure that the tree can survive.

Mayos generally believe that their reciprocal connection to the natural landscape separate them from *Yoris* (non-Mayos) whom they view as exploiters of natural resources.\(^{31}\) This is reflected in one of their origin myths that related how God created gold for Yoris, and work tools for indigenous people.\(^{32}\) This story likely derived from early interaction with Spaniards who thirsted for gold, and valued it above all other objects. Its meaning survived, as it is the general consensus among the indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley that Yoris exploited the land and natural resources to get rich, while they used the same instruments to support the cycle of life. This extended to their idea about the Fuerte River which was there to support life and was given to the Mayo as guardians.

The Mayo worked farmland with specific intentions. According to their cosmology their ties to the soil were part of an ancient trust, and their approach to the land was expressed by the importance they placed on agriculture. In the 1940s, Beals clarified that,

> The central core of Mayo life is concerned with the fields. Even for those that do not have their own land and hence must work for others, life evolves about the succession of planting and harvesting. There are periods of ceremonial activity, seasons of lesser animation due to climatic extremes, and secondary occupations, such as wood cutting and small household industries; but agriculture furnishes the thread of continuity and the basic pattern of Cáhita life.\(^{33}\)

Crops, mostly corn, beans, and squash, provided sustenance for indigenous subsistence farmers of the Fuerte Valley for hundreds of years. After a large number of indigenous farmers were dispossessed of their lands they continued to harvest crops for others, not just to earn wages, but

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\(^{31}\) Mayos refer to each other as Yoremes meaning “the people” or “brother/sister” and Yori means “not the people”. In practice “Yori” became the word used for mostly white outsiders.

\(^{32}\) Figueroa and López, *Encuentros con la Historia, Sinaloa*, 146

\(^{33}\) Beals, 207.
also to fulfill what they understood as their vital role within local ecosystems. Their social structure and community depended on all elements of their life to stay in tune with one-another. Mayo uses of new technology allowed them to satisfy their obligation to work the soil and give back to the earth what it had given to them.

**Mayos in the Fuerte Valley in the Early Twentieth Century**

The Mayos of the Fuerte Valley are settled primarily around the Fuerte River (or Zuaque as the river is known to them) in northern Sinaloa. They refer to themselves as Yoremes or sometimes as Mayos-Yoremes. The Fuerte Valley is their ancestral land and they view all non-Mayos as outsiders, or Yoris. Mayos are joined in a broader Yoreme cultural-linguistic group by Yaquis of Sonora, as well as other Mayos living along Sonora’s Mayo River.\(^34\) Yaquis and Mayos recognize each other as Yoremes, or brothers/sisters. All three groups share a common language and culture with slight regional variations. The current population of Sinaloan Mayos stands at around 15,000, a number that has remained roughly the same since the early 1900s.\(^35\)

The potential productivity of the Fuerte Valley terrain (with the Mexican government’s favorable terms) is the main reason that American and Mexican entrepreneurs such as Benjamin Johnston and Albert Owen annexed Mayo ancestral properties in the late nineteenth century.\(^36\) The historical trajectory of indigenous land dispossession in the Fuerte Valley at this time was similar to that described by geographer Jeffrey Banister in the nearby Mayo Valley, as it constituted, “the earliest sustained effort to de-territorialize the valley, and separate the thick

\(^{34}\) These categories and membership criteria within each of these communities have always been contested.

\(^{35}\) Census data and scholars have historically had different opinions on what constituted a “Mayo” or “indigenous” person throughout the 20\(^{th}\) century. The best estimates for current indigenous people in the Fuerte Valley range from 10,000 to 20,000.

\(^{36}\) The land in the Fuerte Valley is optimal for large-scale agricultural production due to its nutrient rich soil, but such crop raising was only possible with the help of irrigation water.
history between a people (Yorem) and a place.”37 The arid conditions of both valleys necessitated the dependence on irrigation ditches and diversion dams. In the Mayo Valley, the growing use of hydraulic technology in the twentieth century empowered Yoris and made it easier for them to further dispossess indigenous people. The latter responded by subverting these irrigation systems.38 The more complicated relationship between Mayos and irrigation technology in the Fuerte Valley will provide the basis for analysis in this dissertation.

Outside investors began installing irrigation ditches and diversion dams in the Fuerte Valley in the late nineteenth century. Until that time, the region had remained relatively isolated from large scale industry and lagged behind other areas of Mexico in technological development. Mexican entrepreneur Zacarias Ochoa built the Fuerte Valley’s first irrigation ditch in 1880, using it to divert water from the Fuerte River and irrigate his sugarcane crops. The early use of irrigation would pale in comparison to the massive works undertaken by powerful American and Mexican entrepreneurs in the early twentieth century.39

The seeds of major river development in the Fuerte Valley were planted by Americans Albert K. Owen and Benjamin F. Johnston. Johnston formed an empire known as United Sugar Companies that dominated the Fuerte Valley both politically and economically in the early twentieth century. The creation of a canal system took on particular importance with sugarcane, a crop which requires inordinate amounts of water. Johnston played an important role in the irrigation network’s expansion by funding the construction of lateral ditches and diversion dams

37 In his dissertation Rio Revuelto, Jeff Banister makes this assertion about Mayos in the Mayo Valley, but the same is true for Mayos in the Fuerte Valley, and in fact the same could be said for many indigenous people and their lands throughout Mexico during this time.  
38 Ibid. 
39 Gill, 8.
in the early twentieth century. To accomplish this work Johnston and other entrepreneurs hired Mayos, many of whom had been personally affected by their employer’s takeover of land.

Canals and pumps began to draw water from the Fuerte River in the early twentieth century, reducing its hydraulic flow. The river therefore no longer flooded Mayo lands on a predictable schedule, which the Mayo had depended on for centuries for irrigation. The erratic flooding of the Fuerte River made conventional planting methods risky, limiting their use of the river. Dispossession of indigenous farmers’ lands at the hands of entrepreneurs like Johnston also forced thousands of them to seek employment with companies like United Sugar.

Mayos found more difficulty surviving on subsistence agriculture, had less access to the river, and depended on outsiders for jobs. Joining Felipe Bachomo’s rebellion (1911-1916) to win back land and respect seemed to be one of the only options for Mayos in the early twentieth century. Because some indigenous people recovered their land, this uprising symbolically and in practicality helped ensure the survival of Mayo society. Within the increasingly larger population, however, the armed rebellion did not change the dominant social structure of the Fuerte Valley that placed indigenous people at the bottom.

Landowners like Johnston continued to dominate the economy of the Fuerte Valley after Bachomo’s death, yet the use of canals and pumps became a new option of resistance and accommodation for Mayos in the more politically accessible postrevolutionary period. Some indigenous people probably even learned from Johnston and other local hydraulic entrepreneurs about the advantages of using modern technology to access water from the Fuerte River for agricultural purposes. The near monopoly on water that Johnston and his United Sugar

40 Quintero, Historia Integral de la Región del Río Fuerte, 579-610.
41 Ochoa, Bachomo.
Companies built proved to be a formidable challenge to Mayos, or anyone for that matter who wanted to use the valuable waters of the Fuerte River to grow crops.\[^{42}\]

The Mexican government armed itself with the necessary legislation to enact sweeping reforms after the military phase of the Revolution. A lack of political will, the strength of regional power-holders, and the resistance of landowners postponed such changes until the mid-1930s. Mexico initially implemented modest agrarian reform, yet much of the radical legislation set forth in the 1917 Constitution was held back by the moderate reformist Constitutionalist Presidents Venustiano Carranza (1917-1920), Álvaro Obregón (1920-1924), and Plutarco Elías Calles (1924-1928). This slow reform, or inability to fully implement the liberating principles outlined in the Constitution, were reflected in the initial limited impact the Revolution had on the political and social power structures within the Fuerte Valley.

Mayo villages responded to Fuerte River construction projects in different ways. Some continued to depend on rainwater to grow crops, however the unreliable precipitation of the Fuerte Valley made this an inefficient system since it could not be combined with floodplain agriculture. Others accepted the notion that new technologies such as water pumps, canals, aqueducts, and dams could be used efficiently to grow crops. It was in fact the multitude of approaches to irrigation infrastructure that allowed some indigenous farmers to gain some political mobility in the mid-twentieth century, yet also prevented others from growing too reliant on these technologies.

Some indigenous farmers wanted access to pumps and canals for subsistence agricultural use, diverging from the ways corporations used them for mass production and profit. Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution stated that the property of all land and water within national territory

\[^{42}\text{Archival documents, especially those from the Historical Water Archiva (AHA) will show the difficulties that potential irrigation water users faced in attempting to gain access to the Fuerte River.}\]
was originally owned by the nation, which had the right to transfer this ownership to private parties, dictated by "public interest." Corporations, communities, and individuals in the Fuerte Valley therefore petitioned the Ministry of Development and Agriculture for water concessions.

A major factor in the social, cultural, spatial, and political transformation of the Fuerte Valley was the growth of the *ejido* system in the late 1930s, which was an essential component to land reform. The switch to an ejido system facilitated Mayo willingness to adapt their practices as their contact with the Fuerte River changed. Article 27 of the 1917 Mexican Constitution granted communities the right to apply for an ejido, a plot of communal land where *ejidatarios* enjoyed usufruct rights to raise crops. Most Mayo communities in the Fuerte Valley did not apply for ejidal lands until the 1930s, when local allies such as teachers often helped them submit land grant forms. At that point indigenous peoples’ interim water rights were tenuous, as most had not yet applied for a water *dotación* (grant).

The formation of ejidos in the Fuerte Valley in the late 1930s complicated the meaning of the term “Mayo community.” Indigenous villages in the Fuerte Valley were granted ejidos sometimes located on their ancestral lands, yet often bordered by ejidos made up of mestizos. Some “mixed” ejidos consisted of both indigenous and Yori members. Indigenous ethnic identity and communal acceptance became based on uses of the river, Mayo language fluency, and participation in religious ceremonies. Riverine religious rituals had the potential to unite indigenous people even if the ejido system sometimes produced new communities in which whole Mayo villages integrated Yori outsiders.

The establishment of ejidos also altered indigenous peoples’ approaches to natural resources. Mexican anthropologist Jesús Ochoa, an expert on the Mayo, argued that, “the communal system for accessing natural resources in the region, used for two or three centuries

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43 Article 27, Constitution of Mexico 1917.
was modified by the ejido system.”

Granting previously unused land to Yori ejidatarios led to the clearing of forests and natural vegetation to create farmland, and reduced the amount of trees and other natural resources indigenous people used in religious rituals. Ejidos also opened up internal hierarchical systems in which some Yori ejidatarios profited through exploiting natural resources, interfering with indigenous relationships with their ecosystems.

Over the three decades prior to Bacosegua’s revival movement of the late 1950s, the Mexican state and elites initiated major river engineering projects that altered Mayo strategies of accessing the Fuerte River. Indigenous people had developed a symbolically reciprocal relationship to the Fuerte River over several generations, paying homage to the river for its gifts by performing religious rituals on the riverbank and acting as river protectors. From the mid-1920s to early 1950s some Mayos found new uses of the river through integrating pumps and canals into their practices to increase crop production in the same way as mestizos. Such uses of hydraulic equipment to access water also allowed some indigenous people to protect religious ceremonies conducted on the Fuerte River and keep their communities intact.

In the Fuerte Valley, control of irrigation water became synonymous with power in the twentieth century. By the mid-1950s the state’s developmentalist project took access to canals and pumps out of the hands of most Mayos, as large land owners nearly monopolized the use of river water. The elimination of access to canals and pumps made it more difficult for indigenous farmers reliant on these irrigation structures to harvest crops, causing great stress in their communities, and at times even threatened the religious backbone of their identity. Still, today the Mayo remain as a vibrant and resilient people. How can we explain this? Irrigation construction initially had negative effects on Mayo communities, but, as will be shown in the following chapters, would one day help shape their tactics of resistance in the twentieth century.

Ochoa, Los Mayos, Alma y Arraigo, 72.
Historiography

My work intersects with several fields of historical inquiry, including ethnographies, histories of rivers, modernity, and environments. Environmental history examines the changing relationship between humans and nature over time. Some environmental histories of Latin America focus particularly on water and its importance to human populations. Christopher Boyer and Cynthia Radding pointed out that some of these water histories use hydrography and social history to explore such themes as water use in ejidos, water conservation, water use effects on the environment, the construction of irrigation infrastructure and the green revolution, and the creation of river basin commissions to push state developmentalism. My dissertation is in dialogue with these works as it connects to each of these themes through the experiences of indigenous people adapting to changes in the Fuerte Valley from 1926 to 1970.

The decades of the 1920s through 1960s are particularly critical for scholars because they straddle two vital time periods of Mexican environmental history. Environmental historian Christopher Boyer argued that, from the start of the Mexican Revolution until the mid-1940s, the Mexican-state went through an era of decentralization, in a time of diminished state power, despoiling the resources under their control. In contrast, the mid-1940s through the 1980s consisted of a period of centralization, historically associated with state policies that promoted and regulated resource use. Boyer also pointed out that the periodization that includes


46 Boyer, A Land Between Waters, 13. The Lázaro Cárdenas administration (1934-1940) was the exception to this rule as according to Boyer, Mexico witnessed a period of both centralization and decentralization.
examination of the national period of decentralization and centralization, has the, “capacity to focus our attention on the complicated link between the nation’s shifting political ecology and people’s use of nature.”\textsuperscript{47}

In the 1980s and 1990s Luis Aboites wrote two of the classic texts in the history of Mexican water use in twentieth century. \textit{La irrigación revolucionaria} compared and contrasted the Plutarco Elías Calles (1924-1928) and Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) presidential regimes according to their approaches to water resources and agriculture. \textit{El agua de la nación} related how the federal government came to manage water resources, and the resistance of local actors to their subsequent loss of water rights.\textsuperscript{48} These works of political history allowed scholars to understand the consequences of state-led hydraulic development of twentieth century Mexico, setting a foundation for studies that delve deeper into how the state’s control of water affected local actors and vice-versa.

Several works have built off of Aboites’ political analysis, but two doctoral dissertations of the past decade in particular further his approach by examining the centrality of irrigation water use in the development of northwestern Mexico in the twentieth century. Mikael Wolfe’s dissertation \textit{Water and Revolution} focused on the technological development of the Nazas River in the Laguna region as a means to examine agrarian reform in the postrevolutionary era. He argued that political actors placed in charge of hydraulic development altered local ecosystems through the use of wells and pumps. However, as intermediaries between humans and nature, these hydrocrats also gained a new perspective of the natural landscape.\textsuperscript{49} My dissertation shows that the indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley found their own means of mediating the symbolic relationship between humans and nature in the mid-twentieth century. For instance, through their

\begin{footnotes}
\item[47] Ibid, 6.
\item[48] Aboites, \textit{La irrigación revolucionaria, El agua de la nación}
\item[49] Wolfe, \textit{Water and Revolution}.
\end{footnotes}
adaptation of canals and pumps, some Mayos fulfilled their symbolic role as guardians of nature and, in particular, the Fuerte River, maintaining ethnic unity and political mobilization that was influential in local development decisions.

Jeffrey Banister provided another thorough analysis of northwestern Mexican river development in the twentieth century. His dissertation *Rio Revuelto* focused on the Mayo River and the historical conflicts over river access among competing entities of the Mayo Valley. Paramount to these struggles was everyday contention and cooperation with the Mexican state that moved increasingly closer toward centralization, and seemingly inevitable capitalist-state hegemony. My dissertation complements Banister’s work by focusing on similar water conflicts in the Fuerte Valley. Banister took an exhaustive approach to analyzing the effects of hydraulic development on all stakeholders, and demonstrated how the effects were particularly instrumental for effective treatment of changing Mayo river practices. 50 By focusing on indigenous riverine mobilization in the Fuerte Valley, my ethnohistorical approach to water history will examine what these changes meant not only for Mayo identity but also how their participation shaped the process of modernization.

Ethnohistory emerged out of interdisciplinary roots. While still maintaining a plurality of approaches, themes, and methods, it is generally accepted that ethnohistory, “explains historical events and the processes of cultural change that have transformed individual cultures.” 51 Recently, scholars have turned to ethnohistorical approaches to explain issues more central to understanding modernity in the twentieth century. For example, Claudio Lomnitz suggested that indigenous people in the Huasteca region of Mexico incorporated outside practices and

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50 Jeffrey Banister, *Rio Revuelto*.
reasoning, such as national history or mestizo logic into their own cultural terms.\textsuperscript{52} Akhil Gupta proposed that indigenous farmers in India were enthusiastic users of new irrigation technologies, yet their actions were also dependent on indigenous knowledge and practices.\textsuperscript{53} Both Gupta and Lomnitz supported the notion that indigenous people participated in their nations’ modernization campaigns by accepting outside influences into their respective belief systems.

The ethnohistory of northwest Mexican indigenous people, in which this dissertation is situated, is vast.\textsuperscript{54} Within these northwest Mexico ethnohistories, the subfield of Cahuíta or Yoreme studies has advanced a great deal since the early twentieth century. Ralph Beals’ ethnographies from field work conducted in the 1930s set a good foundation for future studies on Mayos and Yaquis.\textsuperscript{55} Charles Erasmus’ work, based on research in Sonora and Sinaloa in the 1940s and 1950s, took a leap forward as he was able to discuss the Yaqui and Mayo place in Mexican society by analyzing how changing social, political, economic, and physical landscapes affected their cultural practices.\textsuperscript{56}

Anthropologist Edward Spicer is best known for his ethnographic and historical research on the Yaquis. Spicer argued that in the face of encroachment by outside groups, Yaquis turned inward and embraced traditional beliefs and practices, strengthening the bonds among each

\textsuperscript{52} Lomntiz-Adler, \textit{Exits from the Labyrinth}
\textsuperscript{53} Gupta, \textit{Postcolonial Developments: Agriculture in the Making of Modern India.}
\textsuperscript{55} Beals, \textit{The Aboriginal Culture of the Cahuíta Indians and Contemporary Culture of the Cahuíta Indians.}
\textsuperscript{56} Erasmus, \textit{Contemporary Change in Traditional Societies V.3 and Man Takes Control}
other. He provided context for this “interactionist” model by documenting changes in Yaqui culture over his fifty years of research from the 1930s to 1980s.\textsuperscript{57}

In the late 1980s Anthropologist Mary O’Connor analyzed the effects that state sponsored techno-scientific changes (what she terms “development”) had on Mayo culture from the early to mid-twentieth century. The agricultural development project of the postrevolutionary state created an indigenous cultural continuum in the Mayo Valley. Mayos began labeling those engaging in traditional indigenous practices as “\textit{Muy Yoreme}”, and categorized those abandoning or eschewing indigenous practices as “\textit{De Razón}” or “\textit{Más Mestizo}.”\textsuperscript{58} Individual and communal reactions to the process of modernization therefore became directly tied to notions of ethnicity and belonging within indigenous villages.

In northern Sinaloa, the attitude and sensibility of the ways Mayos accepted new technologies to access the Fuerte River helped shape what space on the cultural continuum their communities recognized individuals. Mayos took the risk of being shunned by their villages and labeled Yori if their approach to the Fuerte River and natural landscape diverged from the rest of the community. Villages communally determined an individual’s location on the cultural continuum, but so did Mayo self-representation. An individual engaging in practices not fitting with their community may have continued to consider themselves Yoreme, and the matter could be up for debate. Language was therefore an important way for Mayos to maintain their social order amidst a rapidly changing social, political, cultural, and natural environment.\textsuperscript{59}

Mexican historians and anthropologists of the past two decades have made great strides in the field of Yoreme studies, particularly in their in-depth analysis of religious rituals and their

\textsuperscript{57} Spicer, \textit{People of Pascua; Pascua; and The Yaquis.}

\textsuperscript{58} O’Connor, \textit{Descendants of Totoliguqui}, 44-51.

\textsuperscript{59} Bordieu, \textit{Outline of a Theory of Practice}, 21 “official language, providing representation of social relations (in concepts, for example), sanctions and imposes what it states, contributing toward the maintenance of the symbolic order from which it draws authority.”
significance. Such scholars as Jesús Ochoa, Alejandro Figueroa, and Alma López established how the performance of religious ceremonies has become the most significant practice binding Mayo communities and determining indigenous identity. Such studies also stress that although Mayos maintain a general cultural uniformity, each village has its own variation of similar religious ceremonies, reflecting heterogeneous historical experiences. While each of these works in Yoreme studies built upon one another to reflect changes in both the field of ethnohistory as well as in indigenous culture, none of them explain how Mayos navigated hydraulic based development and subsequent changes in river access. My work advances previous Yoreme ethnohistories by focusing on and establishing the centrality of water in the cultural and physical survival of the indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley in the twentieth century.

Shaylih Muehlmann recently published one of the few ethnohistorical books dealing with rivers in northwest Mexico in the twentieth century. This work, *Where the River Ends* focused on the struggles of the Cucapá people of the Mexican Colorado Delta in the past two decades as they confront the diversion of water from the Colorado River. Muehlmann’s book is vital to understanding modifications that some of the indigenous people of the northwest have made in response to recent challenges of modernity. My work explores similar topics, such as identity, cultural survival, and changes to the environment, and also asks what happens to an indigenous people as physical changes (through human intervention) to the river system affects their identity and world view.

This study also fits within the long tradition of historical and anthropological discussions of modernity’s impact on indigenous peoples. I complicate the idea of “modernity” by also

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61 Muehlmann, *Where the River Ends*. 27
questioning the abstract analysis of “tradition” and “community,” arguing that each of these three unstable social categories needs to be explained contingently and historically. Ray Pierotti utilized the term “traditional ecological knowledge” to describe indigenous people’s changing views of nature, suggesting that the reason for indigenous tradition’s longevity can be attributed to, “their ability to incorporate new observations and information that has kept them fresh and relevant.” Pierotti also pointed out that, “indigenous people invariably contend that the attitude and philosophy involved, rather than the technology, are what make a practice traditional.”

This work will examine the philosophies that allowed the Mayo to both adapt while also maintaining tradition in conversation with the larger society in Sinaloa.

My work adds to Mexican historiography by straddling two important eras in Mexican history in which some indigenous people strategically navigated the changing political landscape. I utilize a regional history to uncover the ways by which Mayos took advantage of new opportunities they encountered in the postrevolutionary period of the 1920s and 1930s, particularly under the Lazaro Cardenas administration (1934-40), to gain access to land and water rights. I then focus on the under-studied period in Mexican historiography of the 1940s through 1970 as Mayos reacted to new challenges imposed by a developmentalist state.

During the period between 1926 and 1970, Mayos encountered radical transformations in the world around them, including a more centralized state, increased corporate involvement in hydraulic development decisions, and major alterations to the river. In the face of these changes, the indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley struggled to preserve a sense of cultural autonomy, deploying multiple and sometimes divergent strategies. Like indigenous peoples from other regions of Mexico and throughout the world, Mayo relied on prior experience and knowledge to

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63 Ibid.
inform their responses to “modernization.” In what ways did the Mayos adapt the use of canals and pumps as an opportunity to extend their connection to the Fuerte River and continue to act as guardians of the river? In what ways did they shape the local political and economic conditions?

Methodology and Approaches

I completed the research for this dissertation by gathering documents at eleven archives in Mexico City and Sinaloa, while residing in Mexico for thirteen months. The archives I consulted each housed archival documents that contributed to my dissertation in different ways.64 Indigenous community petitions requesting water, government development documents, and corporate records provide invaluable insight into Mayo hydraulic mobilization strategies. Yet I read these records against the grain, understanding the possible subjectivity inherent in the individuals producing such documents, and recognizing competing objectives.

One of my first research tasks was to determine which villages I would define as a “Mayo community.” Some villages such as Los Goros identified themselves as indigenas (indigenous) in petitions, and some documents show that other villages like La Palma were identified by land reform officials as indigenous as well. Locating “Mayo Villages” was particularly challenging since a majority of peasant petition writers in this time period did not acknowledged themselves as indigenous. I was able to find the names of some indigenous villages in anthropological studies that mention Mayo communities of the Fuerte Valley.65 Some local professors such as

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64 The Mexican General National Archive (AGN) offered limited information specifically on Mayo hydraulic mobilization efforts, but did have documents on the SICAE. The Historical Water Archive (AHA) housed extensive petitions from Mayo villages and individuals requesting irrigation resources and concessions. Property records at the General Agrarian Archives (AGA) deal largely with Mexico’s land reform as villages applied for dotación, and as ejidos lost and gained members as well as territory over time.

65 Ochoa’s Los Mayos, Alma y Arraigo is an example of one of these anthropological studies.
Loreto Coronado at the Autonomous Indigenous University (UAIM) also provided the names of Mayo villages.

Oral histories were a vital component to my investigation. I conducted more than fifty oral interviews with Mayo elders, local historians, and river development experts in the Fuerte Valley. I have changed the names of Mayo interlocutors in order to protect their identities. These oral histories have allowed me to contextualize, confirm, and interrogate information found in archival documents, as well as to locate lost accounts that do not appear in the official record.

Oral historians stress the importance of triangulating oral histories against other records to check for accuracy before integrating them into any historical inquiry. Oral historian Donald Ritchie pointed out that in conducting oral interviews, researchers scrutinize intensely, and that they conduct and apply a higher degree of professional skepticism to them. I rigorously examined each of the oral histories I used, verifying their accuracy through other interviews, and when possible, through archival documents. I also paid close attention to the the way interviewees expressed themselves, as they provided vital information that teaches us about indigenous peoples’ experiences in this era of massive change in the Fuerte Valley.

I conducted most of the oral interviews with indigenous elders on trips to Fuerte Valley villages guided by Professor Loreto Coronado from the Autonomous Indigenous University of Mexico (UAIM) located in Mochicahui. Loreto identified communities where I could find indigenous elders to interview. On some occasions I requested that we visit specific locations identified as Mayo villages in archival documents. This system proved less than perfect. On one occasion we visited the ejido of Zozorique, El Fuerte which was one of several villages the state’s Indigenous Improvement Brigades came to help in the 1960s. Upon arrival we asked if there were any indigenous people in the village to interview, and we were told that there were no

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Mayos in that village anymore. It is unclear if indigenous people simply died out over the years, or if perhaps the current inhabitants were descendants of Mayos who for some reason ceased from following their traditions and stopped seeing themselves as indigenous.67

The day before setting out on trips to Mayo communities, I consulted my archival records on these particular villages to find specific documented historical occurrences to discuss with the interview subjects. I also asked open-ended questions to each elder, such as inquiries regarding the changing relationship between Mayos and the Fuerte River. The multitude of responses helped me construct a diverse narrative that encompasses numerous Fuerte River histories.

I benefitted from the fact that these indigenous elder interview subjects spoke Spanish as well as Mayo. Yet since Spanish was the second language for the majority of the elders, their thick accents made it difficult for me to understand some of them. I overcame this obstacle by learning how some elders pronounced certain words in Spanish, and by using key Mayo words such as Juyya Annia (mother-nature) when possible.

I had two advantages working in my favor while conducting these interviews. The first was that UAIM is a highly regarded institution within these Mayo communities, as usually at least a few students from every village graduate from the university every year. Professor Coronado introduced himself to the elders, explaining his position at UAIM, and the purpose of my interviews. This endorsement from UAIM gave me instant credibility. Although I was an outsider, the fact that I was working with the UAIM gave the impression that the university considered my project important. Also, the Mezta are a well-known realtor family in the Fuerte

67 It is also possible that there were indigenous people in this village who simply did not want to discuss things with an outsider. While the presence of Professor Coronado from UAIM often opened doors to villagers familiar with his university, Loreto was not particularly familiar with Zozorique.
Valley. When I was introduced as James Mestaz, many of the elders apparently believed I was related to this locally known family. I immediately had their attention.\textsuperscript{68}

Locating archival records allowed me to set this history in its proper context, but it is in fact indigenous people’s voices that I rely on to tell their own story. Oral historian Alessandro Portelli argued that oral histories are best used by interpreting the historical imagination of people.\textsuperscript{69} Mayo elder testimonies revealed a wide range of historical imagination. Information found in archival documents gave me the knowledge necessary to decipher these interviews and produce a historical narrative based on how Mayos forged their identity through river practices in the face of modernity. The combination of archival records and oral interviews also allowed me to provide a snapshot into how Mayo relationships with nature, river practices, and views on water changed in the mid-twentieth century.

Organization of the Dissertation and Chapter Summaries

This dissertation takes a thematic approach, although it also organized somewhat chronologically. The process of change in state-led hydraulic development over time forced the Mayos to correspondingly adopt new strategies of resistance and adaptation. The centralization and decentralization of river development allowed me to identify and analyze particular eras in which Mayos were equally affected by and influenced local hydraulic decisions.

Chapter one of the dissertation examines the long process of Mayo ethnogenesis from the pre-Hispanic era to the Felipe Bachomo rebellion in the early 20th century. Was Bachomo’s rebellion from 1913 to 1916 the culmination of ethnogenesis that united the indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley, or the beginning of modernity? Did the indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley

\textsuperscript{68} I considered the possibility that at some point this family had swindled Mayos, that villagers resented them, or were afraid of their influence. Conversations with Loreto and other local historians assured me that this was likely not the case. Either way, I immediately saw a look of familiarity on the face of interview subjects when I was introduced which made me less of an outsider.

\textsuperscript{69} Portelli, \textit{The Death of Luigi Trastulli}
always constitute a homogenous cultural group? For how long did the harsh physical environment prevent outsider encroachment? To what extent did Spanish contact, the Mission System, and land dispossession pull indigenous people together? Did Bachomo’s uprising help protect indigenous identity and cultural autonomy, did its ultimate failure influence Mayo mobilization strategies in subsequent decades?

In Chapter two I examine Mayo water use tactics of the mid-1920s through early 1940s to maintain access to the Fuerte River. How did efforts to gain water access reveal social positions that ultimately divided some communities? How much did the switch to an ejido system and ensuing hydraulic alliances unite or divide particular indigenous ejidos attempting to use canals and pumps? Did Mayo use of irrigation infrastructure help or hinder indigenous villages attempting to protect their farming practices and communities?

Chapters three and four analyze the effect of some indigenous ejidatarios becoming members of the SICAЕ sugarcane cooperative in the late 1930s to mid-1950s. In chapter three I analyze how joining the SICAЕ cooperative permitted some Mayo known as collectivists, to gain control of irrigated lands, in contrast to the majority of independent indigenous people, called individualists, who became isolated and politically marginalized. How did the SICAЕ’s more subtle approach to acquiring irrigated properties from 1938 to 1946 help it gain almost total control of the Fuerte River? What success did independent Mayo communities find in accessing irrigation water and why was that significant?

Chapter four investigates the importance of the SICAЕ’s increased efforts to acquire irrigated lands from the mid-1940s to the mid-1950s. Were SICAЕ strategies of irrigated land seizure the main cause of further polarization within affiliated ejidos? How did ethnicity play a role in establishing which ejidatarios became affiliated with the SICAЕ? How was membership
determined within both mixed and indigenous ejidos, and how much did this further complicate
the idea of “Mayo community”? What were some of the socio-cultural affects within Mayo
villages of development initiated by the SICAE? What powerful allies did both collectivists and
individualists depend on during their struggle for irrigated land? In what ways did participation
and resistance to the cooperative’s domination of the Fuerte River’s irrigation water affect the
Mayos’ ability to influence local water development strategies?

The mid-1940s through mid-1950s was a turning point in the political and economic
dynamics of the Fuerte Valley as large landowners constructed private canals and began slowly
taking power out of the hands of the SICAE. Chapter five explores how Mayos navigated these
changes and to what extent their rejection of some canals and struggle to use others benefitted
their communities. New canals constrained indigenous peoples’ autonomy and often led to land
dispossession, so why did they serve as the primary labor pool in their construction? How did the
Mexican developmentalist state’s ability to deny irrigation water to some indigenous villages and
cede additional power to property owners change Mayo approaches to land, community, and
religious rituals in the early 1940s to mid-1950s?

I begin the sixth and last chapter by analyzing the social costs of the construction of the
Miguel Hidalgo Dam in the 1950s. Officials from the Fuerte River Commission (CRF) took
great pains in planning and executing the construction of the Hidalgo Dam, but how much did
they consider the material and cultural costs to the indigenous ejidatarios displaced in the
process? To what extent did the CRF’s treatment of these displaced Mayo ejidatarios reflect the
state’s general approach to indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley in the mid-1950s through
1960s? During the earlier decentralized period the creation of political spaces had helped Mayos
adapt to massive changes since the 1920s, yet new obstacles in the mid-1950s could not be
addressed by using the same tactics. How much material damage to indigenous enterprises did the growth in technology and new restrictions on irrigation access cause, and did it change Mayo cultural practices? How did the contamination of the Fuerte River, declining access to raw materials used in religious ceremonies, the proliferation of purified water, and lack of ceremonial access to the Fuerte River affect Mayo culture after the mid-1950s?
Chapter 1

From Colonization to Bachomo: Mayo Ethnogenesis and Strategies of Resistance Until the Early Twentieth Century

Cáhita People, sad, melancholy,
Your time has come,
My people will no longer be so,
It will be like the time of my grandparents…
-Gonzalo M. Armiento Calderón ¹

In 1913, Felipe Bachomo led thousands of Mayos in an uprising against powerful land owners to regain usurped ancestral lands. After hundreds of years of mistreatment and land dispossession, the indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley, began a three-year insurgency in which their collective frustration and despair were unleashed. The overwhelming support Mayo villages showed for the rebellion had deep roots which not only stretched back centuries, but were inseparably intertwined with the history of the Fuerte Valley. Moreover, the actions of the indigenous community subsequent to the abortive insurrection shed light on their relations with the state, their physical environment, and each other from 1926 to 1970, the time period in which this dissertation focuses on.

I begin this chapter with a description of the physical geography of the Fuerte Valley. By outlining the history of the first indigenous inhabitants of the Fuerte Valley before conquest, I next explain how they were affected by Spanish colonization, and finally how and why they rose up against Spanish authorities in the colonial period, and then Mexican authorities into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I also focus largely on the events, such as Bachomo’s

¹ Excerpt from the Poem “Mi Pueblo” in Figueroa and López. Encuentros con la Historia, Choix, Tomo 1.
rebellion, that facilitated the creation of a united indigenous culture highlighted by self-representation as Yoremes by the early twentieth century.

I explore how over the course of several hundred years, Mayos of the Fuerte Valley gained a unified identity in the face of dynamics which in other cases led to ethnocide, or the loss of a distinct and ethnically-defined way of life. Rather than merely a centrifugal effect--pulling them apart, and folding them into mestizo society--their experience was more often a centripetal effect--people were forced together and found common cause--in the colonial period and into the twentieth century. Mayos of the Fuerte Valley started as heterogeneous indigenous groups whose experiences and practices slowly became more uniform. Circumstances such as the Spanish Conquest, land dispossession, and migration of other Mayos from Sonora, allowed these indigenous people to embrace their commonalities in order to forge a more cohesive group.

Shared experiences led to common practices among the indigenous people in the Fuerte Valley. Ethnogenesis, the process by which new ethnic identities emerge, helped to define a Yoreme culture in the early twentieth century, which continued to take shape.\(^2\) Spaniards initially classified indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley as Cáhita due to their common language and geographic proximity, yet they were by no means a unified ethnic group. As was true with other indigenous groups in the Americas, ethnogenesis in northern Sinaloa was responsible for, “the consolidation of once distinct Indigenous groups—often reeling from the aftermath of colonial encroachment—into larger multiracial and pan-Indian communities.”\(^3\) In the Fuerte Valley this process of ethnogenesis was gradual through the colonial and post-Independence eras as indigenous people in this region began to unite behind common practices. During Bachomo’s rebellion, or perhaps even before this time, indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley started to

\(^2\) This definition of ethnogenesis is taken from Cipolla, *Becoming Brothertown*.
\(^3\) Cipolla explains this as a common process among Native American groups, and particularly among the Brothertown Natives of the East Coast.
define themselves as Yoremes, constituting a major step in the formation of their identity. The two main factors responsible for the creation of this Yoreme identity and self-definition was their shared language and religious practices.

Mayo unity in the Fuerte Valley became an important factor during Bachomo’s rebellion, whose aim was to gain back indigenous people’s usurped lands. The retention of land was vital to the continuation of indigenous religious ceremonies which in turn was the basis of Mayo culture. As the struggle for land was intimately linked to indigenous cultural practices, Bachomo’s insurgency, similar to previous rebellions, was also a struggle for identity. Fredrik Barth described ethnic identity as, “a social phenomena that is fluid, and contingent on social interaction.” Interaction, through the shared experience of oppression, bound Mayos together from the Colonial period to the twentieth century. Interaction and communication between indigenous villages, as a consequence of increased threats to their land and cultural autonomy in the early twentieth century, led to further unity and communal action. Bachomo’s rebellion thus became a pivotal moment in Mayo ethnogenesis, as indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley began to see themselves as part of a broader community.

Bachomo was eventually defeated and killed in 1916. It is important to understand this revolt as part of a cycle, a step in the formation of the strategies of resistance that Mayos eventually employed in the mid-twentieth century. Analyzing each cycle of resistance, initiated during the Spanish Conquest, and leading up to the early twentieth century allows me to properly dissect the strategies that Mayos undertook from 1926 to 1970. Mayo use of and reaction to changing water infrastructure, in that time period, is part of a centuries-long pattern of resistance to outside forces that is intimately tied to the formation of a Yoreme identity. Longstanding cultural continuities preserved as a result of mobilizations, (anti-colonial mobilizations, against

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4 Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. 
the emerging Mexican state, and capitalist encroachment) vividly informed the ways in which Mayos resisted and adapted to twentieth-century transformation in the physical geography of the Fuerte Valley.

**Physical Geography of the Fuerte Valley**

Before analyzing the changes in the political and economic landscape of the Fuerte Valley from pre-Conquest to the twentieth century, a description must first be given of the region’s topographic, ecological, and climatic characteristics, as the latter circumstances exerted a large degree of influence over the former. Environmental and social factors combined in a unique manner in the Fuerte Valley. The historical links between the physical landscape and society resonate with many examples in Mexican historiography. One famous example comes from Veracruz. In *A Pueblo Divided*, Emilio Kourí showed that in the Tecolutla River Basin of northeastern Veracruz, the temperature, rainfall patterns, and physical landscape shaped human culture, settlement patterns, and trade.\(^5\) The diversity of the Fuerte Valley’s climate, geography, subsoil, vegetation, rainfall, river flow, and wildlife helps to explain the vastly different experiences, and relationships among the people that came to inhabit this region.

During the formation of the Basin and Range Provinces of Sonora and Sinaloa, that began between ten and twelve million years ago, Baja California started to split from the mainland. The Pacific Plate pulled away from the North American Plate. Once disconnected, Baja California slid northwest along strike slip faults. This rifting and rupturing formed the Proto-Gulf depression. The Yaqui River, Mayo River, and Fuerte River deltas resulted from this new gap. The orogeny of the basin and range created new hydrological units which drained and helped create the Gulf of California, which was formed around six million years ago.\(^6\)

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The Fuerte Valley is located in northwestern Mexico, with a surface area of 54,128 square kilometers, and consists of five Sinaloan municipios (municipalities): Ahome, El Fuerte, Choix, Sinaloa, and Guasave. The three municipalities located along the Fuerte River— Ahome, El Fuerte, and Choix have a combined surface area of 12,768 square kilometers. The largest of the municipios, Ahome with 4,399 km², is followed by Choix 4,359 km², and El Fuerte 3,395 km². The Fuerte Valley is bordered by the Mayo Valley to the north in Sonora, by the Sinaloa River to the south, the Gulf of California and Sea of Cortez to the west, and the basins of the Yaqui, Conchos, and Nazas in the Sierra Madre Occidental mountain range. It is located between 106°30’ and 109°00’ northwest longitude, and between 25°10’ and 26°45’ latitude north of the meridian of Greenwich. Its setting north of the Tropic of Cancer means that it has some overlap with the fringe of the great African desert. However, its location between the Gulf of Mexico and the Sierra Madre Occidental gives it characteristics that allow rainfall, although irregular and minimal, which is accompanied by heavy runoff from the top of the sierras.7

The Fuerte Valley as a whole was not a paradise by any means when Spaniards colonized it in the sixteenth century, or when rich industrialists moved in to exploit its resources in the late nineteenth century. Mexican historian Mario Gill suggested that, “the basin of the old Zuaque, with his fiery deserts, aggressive flora and venomous wildlife, could not be considered precisely a hospitable place.”8 The economic development and subsequent changes to the Fuerte Valley’s ecosystem starting in the late nineteenth century eventually turned it into one of the most productive agricultural regions of Mexico.

The Fuerte Valley contains three sub-regions, represented in the form of parallel strips running in a southeast to northeast direction to the coast. The contrasts between these sub-

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7 Secretaria de Agricultura y Recursos Hidraulicos. Memoria de la Comision Del Rio Fuerte, 11-13
8 Gill, La Conquista del Valle del Fuerte, 5.
regions best represent the diversity of the Fuerte Valley’s ecosystems and topography. The eastern sub-region includes not only the Municipality of Choix, but also a large amount of land in the state of Chihuahua. Though covering two-thirds of the surface area of the Fuerte Valley, it is the least important in terms of economic development. It has a sparse population, and the limited grassy regions make livestock raising a challenging enterprise.

The extreme terrain and climate of the eastern sub-region create economic challenges. The terrain is very rugged and rocky, with minimal areas for planting crops. There is also a lot of erosion caused by intense rain, the steep terrain, and human interaction. The climate is usually dry and warm, with uneven rainfall in both winter and summer, and droughts are common. The annual average temperature is 24°C, with the hottest recorded temperatures of 45°C in 1935, 1967, and 1978, and the lowest recorded temperature of 1°C in 1971. This sub-region’s economic limitations are also confined due to the prominence of the Sierra Madre Occidental, whose heights reach 3,100 meters above sea level, and sits in a general direction from southeast to northwest. The eastern sub-region contains part of the parallel to the mountain watershed. Sedimentary and igneous rocks came together to form its land mass, which due to tectonic activity were lifted, folded and broke, resulting in a steep topography that channels storm runoff to the northwest, toward the town of Huites. This is where the headwaters of the Fuerte River are formed.9

The intermediate sub-region, where El Fuerte, and parts of Sinaloa and Choix Municipalities are located, is best described as a land of transition between the mountains and plains. It consists of high hills, which were formed through the spilling of tertiary pyroclastic materials. These hills make seasonal agriculture difficult. The climate here is dry, with limited rainfall, which arrives in both the summer and winter, and droughts are not uncommon

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9 Secretaria de Agricultura y Recursos Hidraulicos, 31
throughout the year. Poor farmers, who cannot afford irrigation systems, struggle in their attempts to harvest crops, such as peanuts, beans, and corn due to the inconsistent rainfall. The generally humid conditions caused by the rain makes it somewhat easier to maintain pastures used for livestock-raising, which remained a steady economic resource through the twentieth century. The average annual temperature is 25.1°C.10

The Ahone and Guasave Municipalities are located in the western sub-region, or lower area of both the Fuerte and Sinaloa rivers. This sub-region consists of mostly coastal plain formed by accumulations of unconsolidated detrital material.11 Pieces of volcanic debris in the form of rocks, clays, silts, and sands were brought here by the Fuerte River from the Sierra Madre. These particles previously buried the mountains and hills of the now level plain, resulting in soils that are rich in clays. This fine textured dirt is very fertile, and only needs water to help it produce efficiently.12 The small mountains in this area today (the largest of which is Las Escaleras at 620 meters), were formed out of igneous metamorphic rocks. The abundant flat areas and general conditions have made this sub-region the most economically successful, especially in the agricultural sector. Here the climate is dry, with very low rainfall that arrives in the summer (mostly June and July), and droughts occur year-round. Irrigation is the only way to ensure productive harvests. The climate is roughly the same as the other two sub-regions, with an average annual temperature of 25°C.13

In all three sub-regions, winds generally come from the west at an annual frequency of 12% and are mostly mild, with a median velocity of 12 km/hr and a maximum of 25 km/hr. Cyclones are somewhat frequent, and usually occur between July and October. When cyclones

10 Ibid, 34
11 Ibid, 34.
12 Yetman and Van Devender,13- 14.
13 Secretaria de Agricultura y Recursos Hidraulicos, 31
form on the west coast of Sinaloa, bringing moderate rainfall, they boost local agricultural production. However, when they are formed in the eastern sub-region and move west toward the coast, because of their geographic position, can sometimes cause great damage, usually as a result of the very strong winds they bring. In these cases they could either destroy crops directly, or they could provoke massive rainfall in the middle to upper basin, resulting in occasional violent flooding in the Fuerte River.\textsuperscript{14}

There are generally two rainy seasons within the Fuerte Valley. The first of these produces regular, expected rain flow, occurring from June through September, ensuring a harvest. These harvests, based on this rain cycle are generated mostly in the Sinaloa, Fuerte, and Choix municipalities, where they usually receive between 500 and 700 millimeters of annual rainfall. Yet in the municipalities on the coast, Ahome and Guasave, there is much less annual rainfall, usually between 250 and 300 millimeters annually. Most farmers in these areas depend on irrigation water to grow crops.\textsuperscript{15} This lack of rain in Ahome and reliance on dams, pumps, canals, and aqueducts created an uneven distribution of resources, based on geographic location, in the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{16}

The second rainy season in the Fuerte Valley is between December and February, and occurs in very irregular patterns. At times, this rain, combined with sometimes cold temperatures in the Sierras produce snow. More often, this uneven rain in the Sierras creates floods in the Sinaloa and Fuerte Rivers.\textsuperscript{17} These rare and irregular winter rains are much more common in the

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, 32
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, 31-32
\textsuperscript{16} I dedicate several chapters of this dissertation to analyzing how a discrepancy of resources led to certain degrees of Mayos using irrigation infrastructure for their own purposes in both the Ahome and El Fuerte municipalities from 1926 to 1970.
\textsuperscript{17} Secretaria de Agricultura y Recursos Hidraulicos, 32-33
eastern Fuerte Valley. Some rains in the El Fuerte municipality are sometimes caused by jet-stream flows.\textsuperscript{18}

The flooding of the Fuerte and Sinaloa rivers, as well as the diverse altitudes and topography create a variety of soil grades in the Fuerte Valley. Along the margins of the rivers, the soil is light, similar to sand. Further into the center of the valley the soil becomes heavier, reaching points to where it consists of 50%-70% clay soil. The color of the soil varies depending on its texture, starting from clear gray in light soil, and going up to dark gray, and even black soil.\textsuperscript{19}

The majority of soils in the Fuerte Valley have a Ph level (measurement of acidity or alkalinity) ranging between 6.5 and 7.5 under normal conditions. These Ph levels are a good indicator of the most fertile lands for growing crops. Ideal soil Ph for vegetables and sugar cane, the main crops grown in the Fuerte Valley in the early to mid-twentieth century, range from 5 to 7.5.\textsuperscript{20} When soils are affected by salt content, their Ph levels can be at 8.5 and higher, which usually makes growing any crops difficult. Sugarcane can be harvested in soil with Ph levels up to 8.5. This flexibility enabled the massive growth of sugar cane production throughout the Fuerte Valley in the early twentieth century, which in turn affected social and political dynamics for decades.

The natural vegetation cover in the Fuerte Valley is very diverse, with differences resulting from environmental conditions that include wind, rain, temperature, and location. Most of the vegetation dominating the Fuerte Valley have characteristics of desert zones, both in the colluvial slopes of the hills, and in the flat regions, where areas covered by trees reaches heights up to six meters. Ninety percent of the vegetation is stripped of their leaves during the dry

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, 33.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, 34.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid, 34.
season, and ten percent consists of unchanging varieties of cactus.\textsuperscript{21} There is a rich assortment of trees indigenous to the area. Mulberry, ebony, mesquite, and amapa (\textit{Tabebuia Rosea}) trees produce sturdy woods that have been utilized for construction by colonists since the late-nineteenth century. Liverpool, cottonwood, brazilwood, naked indian, and soapberry are some of the other trees common to the western and intermediate sub-regions.\textsuperscript{22}

Indigenous people of this region have a long history of finding practical uses of their natural vegetation, such as natural remedies, food, and shelter. Mayos continue to utilize approximately one-fifth of the local vegetation in one way or another. The western and intermediate sub-regions consist mostly of tropical deciduous forests (such as in El Fuerte), and some thornscrub (in Ahome).\textsuperscript{23} In the upper basin where the weather is mild, and frequently cool, other species such as pine, oak, and cedar grow. This wood is cut by sawmills.\textsuperscript{24}

In the plains and intermediate regions the most common animals include coyotes, deer, skunks, opossum, bobcats, rabbits, wild boar, iguanas, small lizards (lámpagos), scorpions, and tarantulas. There are also a large variety of birds including hawks, buzzards, eagles, owls, ducks, geese, pigeons, quail, and doves. Alligators inhabited the Fuerte River up to the 1940s, but have since vanished. In the mountains there are also pumas, rattlesnakes, and mountain lions.\textsuperscript{25} Twentieth century development, irrigation infrastructure, and the clearance of natural vegetation pushed many of the animal species (such as deer) further into the sierras.\textsuperscript{26}

The Fuerte River is 180 miles long, flowing at an annual rate of nearly five million cubic meters, and providing water for the majority of the Fuerte Valley. The annual flow of the Fuerte

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\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, 34.  
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid, 34  
\textsuperscript{23} Yetman and Van Devender, 8.  
\textsuperscript{24} Secretaria de Agricultura y Recursos Hidraulicos, 34.  
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid, 35-36, and Beals, \textit{The Aboriginal Culture of the Cáhita Indians}, 9.  
\textsuperscript{26} In chapter six I talk more in depth about these animal relocations and their effect on Mayo communities.
River is over three million acre feet, which is sufficient to irrigate one million acres of land, or roughly 4,000 square kilometers.\textsuperscript{27} In fact, the Fuerte Valley is responsible for providing almost one-third of irrigation water for all of the state of Sinaloa. Through the combination of federal and private investment in hydrological technology, the Fuerte Valley contained almost ten percent of all land in the nation’s irrigation districts by the 1960s, making it the fourth-largest irrigated agricultural zone in Mexico.\textsuperscript{28} Thanks to the Fuerte River, in a little more than a century, the Fuerte Valley has grown from an arid desert region with a sparse population, to one of the most important agricultural hubs in Mexico.

The Fuerte River is formed through the convergence of many different waterways. The river starts in the Minas district of Chihuahua, where the Urique and Verde Rivers meet. From Chihuahua it runs downhill at a slope of six meters per kilometer, until it empties into the Gulf of California near the Port of Topolobampo. During its course, it shows signs of a mature river, maintaining a balance between erosion and sedimentation. As is normal with rivers near the Pacific Ocean, its slope has decreased over the years due to sedimentation. As the river reaches its plateau, consisting of unconsolidated material, it takes on characteristics of a juvenile river, moving and establishing changes and meandering through the last part of the river course. During the more substantial floods, the Fuerte River has changed its course several times. In some circumstances, such as in 1908 and 1940, the river changed course due to human actions.\textsuperscript{29}

Human actions changed not only the course of the Fuerte River, but also the physical environment of the Fuerte Valley. The irrigation technology that turned this area into a productive cultural hub was not used extensively by entrepreneurs until the twentieth century. This meant that the Fuerte Valley remained economically unattractive to first Spanish, and then

\textsuperscript{27} Olmstead, \textit{Report on the properties of the United Sugar Companies}, 13
\textsuperscript{28} Barkin, \textit{Regional Economic Development}.
\textsuperscript{29} Secretaria de Agricultura y Recursos Hidraulicos, 35.
Mexican colonizers. The minimal alterations to this region’s physical environment afforded Mayos access to the Fuerte River, and the local flora and fauna, all of which figured prominently in the continued development of their culture.

The Fuerte Valley’s rugged terrain delayed massive changes to local ecosystems until the twentieth century. Mayo reactions to these changes, and even collaboration in bringing about alterations to the local ecology, will highlight the major shifts in indigenous practices that I analyze throughout this dissertation. But first I must establish who these indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley were, and how their culture was developed over hundreds of years.

Everyday Life of Early Indigenous People of the Fuerte Valley

The earliest existence of humans found by archaeologists close to this region was in the southern Sonoran town today known as Huatabampo in 180 C.E., which is located just north of the Fuerte Valley.\(^{30}\) A slightly different periodization is offered by Elisa Villalpando, who places the timetable of these first inhabitants between 140 B.C.E. and 900 C.E. Villalpando, as well as other scholars, refer to the early inhabitants of both the Fuerte and Mayo Valleys as Huatabampos.\(^{31}\)

Academics have various opinions on what these early indigenous populations should be labeled. The consensus among scholars is that the Fuerte Valley was originally inhabited by the Zuaques, Ahomes, Sinaloas, Tehuecos, Ecoronis, and Guasaves. Such groups did not exactly constitute a homogenous culture, but they did share some commonalities such as language and religious practices.\(^{32}\) These people from the Sinaloan municipalities of Ahome, Fuerte, Choix,

\(^{31}\) Villalpando, *Los grupos agrícolas de Sonora*, and Yetman and Van Devender, 30
\(^{32}\) Although there are disagreements of how they classify the original inhabitants of the Fuerte Valley, scholars including Villalpando, Quintero, Gill, and Grande agree that at some point these people were referred to as Cähita.
Sinaloa, and Guasave are members of what linguists and anthropologists have identified as a larger cultural-linguistic group known as Cáhita, who share similar practices and speak dialects of a common broader language group. This cultural-linguistic group extends from the Yaqui River in central Sonora to the Mocorito River in north-central Sinaloa.

These same indigenous groups today insist that they are not Cáhita, but rather Yoreme, which can be roughly translated into meaning brother/sister, human, or those who respect tradition.\(^{33}\) This latter definition is a more recent construct reflecting the perceived threat of losing Yoreme identity, as non-indigenous people moved into the Fuerte Valley. This particular definition did play a significant role in the establishment of Yoreme self-representation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Spaniards’ classification of Yoremes as Cáhitas probably came from confusion upon first contact with these people. Early Spanish narrators claimed that in this region, the majority of the Indians spoke a language called Cáhita. Spanish interrogations were often met with the word “Cáhita”, which in the indigenous language, depending on the context can mean either “no” or “there are none”.\(^{34}\)

Cáhita groups left no written records so their quotidian life remains somewhat obscure. Archaeological findings do cast some light onto general practices. There are also some extensively detailed first-hand accounts of Cáhita culture from Jesuit missionaries upon first contact, although some of these versions are culturally and religiously biased.\(^{35}\) Scholars classify these Cáhita groups as hardened, warlike, and nomadic. Yet there are some groups who led a sedentary existence and established permanent villages close to rivers. Most were semi-nomadic,

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\(^{33}\) Figueroa and López, *Encuentros con la Historia*, Choix, 140  
\(^{34}\) Grande, *Sinaloa en la Historia*, 177.  
\(^{35}\) For example, see Pérez de Ribas, *Cronicos de Los Triunfos de Nuestra Santa Fe.*
moving locations at certain times of the year and eventually returning to their established homes.  

There were few large architectural structures in the Fuerte Valley. Cähita houses were built around a mat base, mostly by braiding sticks and lining them with mud. Thick tree trunks, dense shrubs, and cacti were also used for huts and fences to keep out dangerous animals, and were also used as firewood. Outdoor *ramadas* (shelters), usually constructed of *álamos* (cottonwood) trees were used for cooking, and as shade for resting. Some ramadas were also considered sacred, and assembled specifically for religious ceremonies, in much the same manner as today.

The indigenous groups of Sinaloa made efficient use of their resources. They ate fish, turtles, and other seafood, using fish bones for needles, hooks, and eating utensils, and turtle shells for chairs, cradles, containers, jewelry, and percussion instruments. They utilized wood as instruments, tools, and as material for children toys. Stones were used as mallets, knives, axes, grinding stones, scrapers, arrow heads, and figurines. By 700 C.E. the population was organized enough to allow a trade network from Sonora in the north, Chihuahua in the east, and stretching south to at least southern Sinaloa, if not further.

Cähitas were avid sports players. The most popular sport, which is sometimes played by Mayos today was *ulama*. This appears to be a cross between soccer and the ancient Aztec sport *ullamaliztli*, in which players use their hips to strike and maneuver a large rubber ball. Yet there

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36 Grande.
37 Gill, 6
38 Grande, 124.
39 Yetman and Van Devender, 30.
40 Grande, 123-124.
41 Yetman and Van Devender, 30.
is no evidence that the losers (or winners) of ulama were sacrificed, as it has been rumored that this was the fate of some of the players of ullamaliztli.

Sex, drinking, and religion were important elements to Cáhita life. Unwed non-virgins and incest were looked down upon. Homosexual relations, especially among men were not that uncommon, yet men exhibiting “feminine” behavior were usually barred from using weapons. Cáhitas made alcoholic beverages such as mezcal, and others from fermenting cactus fruits (like pitahayas and tunas), as well as mesquite seeds and honey. Most ceremonies and parties were accompanied with these alcoholic drinks, and most participants would drink to the point of inebriation. There were some regional variations in religion, yet all Cáhitas worshipped the sun and the moon, and divinities had the character of guardian spirits. They believed that these spirits often appeared in the form of animals and the most feared was the coyote.42

Cáhitas of northern Sinaloa spent most of their time, hunting, fishing, and gathering. They ate snakes, lizards, insects, turtles, and iguanas. They also hunted and consumed deer, pumas, bears, rabbits, wild boars, coyotes, turtles, and mountain lions, using all of these animals’ hides and bones for clothes and tools. These indigenous groups domesticated animals such as dogs, turkeys, iguanas, ducks, and even some types of snakes. They sometimes raised snakes to eat, but also kept Boa snakes in their houses as pets to capture rats and mice.43 Cáhitas collected honeycombs for honey, as well as a prodigious amount of wild fruits and vegetables for their consumption including; fruits of cactus (pitahayas and tunas), guamuchiles (peas), talayote (spearleaf fruit), ciruelitas (baby plums), and many more.44

The Fuerte River annually overflowed and deposited alluvium and water in its floodplain, and farmers planted crops in this wet earth after the floodwaters subsided. At the point of

42 Nakayama, Sinaloa: Un Bosquejo de Su Historia, 30-32.
43 Yetman and Van Devender, 30, and Beals, 13.
44 Others include cinas, aguamas, bebelamas, uvalamas, sayas. Quintero, 45.
conquest, this flooding occurred for roughly seventy-five miles along the river bank, and stretched out as far as seven miles on each side, leaving approximately 1,600 square miles of fertile land for a few months annually.\textsuperscript{45} The transportation or redirection of river water was not of major importance to Cáhitas prior to the arrival of Spaniards. They were able to harvest based on the annual overflow of the river, as well as the use of rain water. The Fuerte River had a steady flow of water and never dried out completely. They built rafts and canoes and used them when the water was high enough. This extended their trade networks as well as their community relations with other groups.\textsuperscript{46}

Early indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley also depended on the annual rain cycles to harvest their crops, generally expecting the rain in June and July. Cáhitas subsisted on these limited agricultural methods of utilizing floods and rains, harvesting corn, beans, chiles, cacao, and cotton for clothes. Their diet, which depended on harvesting, hunting, and gathering, was therefore not very distinct from other regions of Mexico.\textsuperscript{47}

The corn cultivated in Sinaloa, like the rest of Mexico, was very resilient, as indigenous people grew it in either dry regions with seasonal rainfall, near water, in humid areas, on mountains, hills, or valleys. A large variety of corn was cultivated in Sinaloa, with different colors of yellow, white, blue, red, or pink, depending on the climate or its subsoil. Corn was also an efficient crop, as it produced fruit within three to four months. They also subsisted on beans, squash, and chiles.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{45} Perez de Ribas, \textit{Cronicos de Los Triunfos de Nuestra Santa Fe}, and Beals, 11.
\textsuperscript{46} Grande 181
\textsuperscript{47} Grande, 125.
\textsuperscript{48} Grande, 126-7)
None of these Căhita groups followed a central political power but made communal decisions based on a tribal assembly. Military leaders sometimes took charge and organized particular settlements, especially in times of war. There were no leaders who held total power over families or individuals. Every village and family had a figure head (always male) with nominal authority who was distinguished by dress and privileges. These leaders were not hereditary, and were elected based on such things as battlefield distinction, number of children they fathered, and other abilities such as oratory skills.

Shamans, or “sorcerers” as Spaniards negatively referred to them, also held a great deal of power. They were the ultimate guardians of their people’s traditions. The believed their community must survive to pass on their culture, so they valued warfare as an integral element to life. They made sure their communities were ready for battle, boosting their collective warlike spirit, and preparing them to face their enemy. These Shamans also allegedly had the power of shape-shifting, or turning into animals such as coyotes, jaguars, or owls. Shamans may have also been known as jiteveris, who had the power to prophesize by having visions of the future, or by reading patterns in the stars, sun, and moon. Since they were also highly regarded and respected healers and exorcists, these positions were held by elders that had gained experience and wisdom.

Căhitas used herbs and animals for medicinal purposes. Basic knowledge of using distinct herbs for healing and curing were known by most indigenous people, but most of the time it was practiced by shamans, also known as curanderos (healers). It is possible that Fuerte

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49 Basauri, La Poblacion Indígena de Mexico, 31.
50 Nakayama, 32
51 Quintero, 41.
52 Grande, 124
53 Ibid, 124
Valley people gained their herbal-medicinal knowledge from Yaquis whom were known as the regional experts in this field.\textsuperscript{54}

\textbf{Cultural Diversity of Pre-Conquest Fuerte Valley}

Similar to the situation in other regions of pre-Hispanic Mexico, Cáhita people had a history of warfare and animosity towards each other and other indigenous people. There were no particular groups that held political or military control of this region, such as the Mexicas who dominated central Mexico. Today we know these people of northern Sinaloa as Mayos, or as they refer to themselves, Yoremes. The largest of these groups were the Sinaloas (the current name of the state Sinaloa was borrowed from them) who resided between the Mocorito and Zuaque rivers, in today’s municipality of Sinaloa.\textsuperscript{55} It is important to stress the cultural multiplicity of the pre-Hispanic Fuerte Valley in order to relate the circumstances by which these indigenous groups slowly began to identify as Yoremes.

The definitive presence of Nahua (Aztec) culture in the pre-Conquest Fuerte Valley underlies this region’s cultural diversity. This is indicated by Aztec influenced artifacts found by archaeologists, such as petroglyphs and pottery, and language similarities. But how did Nahua culture reach the Cáhitas, when the Valley of Mexico is over a thousand miles from the Fuerte Valley? It is possible that Yoremes migrated down to the valley of Mexico where they became culturally influenced before returning north. Another possibility is that Sinaloa was one of the northernmost trading posts of the Aztecs, whose exchange network stretched over a broad range of Mexico. Or perhaps this culture was passed on during the post-conquest era, as Tlaxcaltecs and other Nahuaas went with Spaniards as conquerors/colonizers throughout Mexico.

\textsuperscript{54} Secretaria de Agricultura y Recursos Hidraulicos, 42.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid, 41.
At the time of Spanish conquest, the area which is now the state of Sinaloa was occupied by groups with different linguistic influences. I stated earlier that the indigenous groups residing in northern Sinaloa did share the common language which has since been classified as Cáhita. The Cáhita language, as well as the Ópata and Rarámuri languages of northwest Mexico, derive from the Nahuatl language, making them part of the same family, the Uto-Aztecan. Manuel Orozco y Berra argued that the similarities in the Nahuatl and Cáhita language must have derived from the mythical pilgrimage of Aztecs from Sinaloa, or Aztlán. Some scholars, using circumstantial archaeological evidence, proposed this same theory on the origins of the mythical Aztlán homeland originating in Sinaloa. Similarities between the Nahuatl and Cáhita languages are undeniable.

The geographic etymology of the Fuerte Valley derives mostly from the Cáhita language, but there are some trace elements of Nahuatl and even Purépecha (indigenous people of Michoacán) in some of these names. For instance, Ahome is constructed from the Nahuatl words Atl (water) and ome (two), which together means “two waters”, or “between two waters”. Apparently this word describing the Ahome people meant those living between the two waters of the Fuerte (Zuaque) River and the Gulf of California. The town of Huepaco’s name originated from the Nahuatl word Huei (large) and Paacu which means flat, in both Nahuatl and Cáhita. As of yet, there is no clear explanation as to how the Nahuatl language reached northern Sinaloa.

56 Gill, 5.
57 Secretaria de Agricultura y Recursos Hidraulicos, 41
58 This is one of many theories of where the Aztlán homeland originated. Aztlán is the mythical homeland where the native people who migrated to the Valley of Mexico, and became known as Aztecs, originated from. Orozco y Berra, Geografía de Las Lenguas y Carta Etnográfica de México, Nakayama, 37.
59 Quintero, 51.
60 Quintero, 51.
How Cáhitas Became Mayos, or Yoremes

Scholars disagree on key points in the history of the indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley, such as how long they have inhabited the area, and what factors led to academics and political officials categorizing them as Mayos. Similarities between Yaquis and Mayos adds to the mythology, and even theory that many of these Fuerte Valley Cáhita groups (that were later classified as Mayos) originally lived among the Yaquis, and later came to inhabit northern Sinaloa. As the legend goes,

A long time ago the Mayo and the Yaqui were one single people and lived together. There was a kabanaro, a “governor” in each village, and one great kabanaro who led everybody. When other Indian groups began to invade the territory of the Yoreme [Yaqui Valley], they gathered together to decide what to do. The great kabanaro told several families that they had to go to seek a new territory to populate it and defend themselves from their enemies. Then he gave them an order: Go far to live by the banks of the first two rivers you find. Those who went to populate the new territories arrived at the banks of the rivers Mayo and Fuerte, and that is why their descendants call them Mayo.\footnote{Gutiérrez and Gutiérrez, *El noroeste de México*.}

This legend does not specify who these enemies were, or what year this great Yoreme migration occurred. The fact that the kabanaro (or cobanaro) sent Yoremes to inhabit the banks of rivers, exhibits the link between Yoreme culture and rivers that has always existed, and continued to play a significant role in the lives of Mayos in the Fuerte Valley in to the mid-twentieth century.

Other aspects of cultural similarity go beyond this indigenous geographic origin story, such as the fact that Yaquis and Mayos today refer to each other as Yoremes. They continue to speak the Cáhita language, although with regional variations on particular words and pronunciations. They also share in common many cultural practices, such as religious ceremonies that incorporate the deer dance. Some would say that Mayos are sometimes mocking Yaquis in the way they perform this dance. This mocking is due largely in part to a good-hearted
rivalry based on geographic location, and does not detract from the intimate ties felt between Yoreme groups. The similarities between Yoremes support this mythology and anthropological theory that Mayos originated in Sonora and migrated south to settle in the Mayo and Fuerte Valleys.

Scholars have varying opinions on how Mayos of the Fuerte Valley came to share so many cultural traits with Yaquis and Mayos of Sonora. Mexican historian Mario Gill suggested that a union of philological affinities among the indigenous groups of this region indicates that at one point, these indigenous people constituted a more cohesive racial group that was destroyed prior to the arrival of Spaniards. Gill produced no archaeological evidence to support this theory.

A more contemporary outlook by Yetman and Van Devender suggested that it is impossible to know if Mayos today all descended from indigenous people of the Rio Mayo region. But they do argue that by 1000 C.E. the Huatabampo culture was disrupted, probably by warfare, but also by floods and hurricanes. These apparent catastrophes wrought havoc on these communities, forcing realignment. Perhaps this is when Mayos began to arrive in masses to the Fuerte Valley. It is difficult to determine just how many Mayos of Sinaloa came from the north or when this happened.

Most logically, Mayos of the Fuerte Valley are a mix between Yoremes that at some point came from the north, and descendants of the heterogeneous cultures (Ahomes, Zuaques) that inhabited this region prior to the Spanish Conquest. Mayos of the Fuerte Valley today take great pride in pointing out that they are descendants of the original inhabitants of this area.

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63 Gill, 6.
64 Yetman and Van Devender, 30
Former school teacher, Mayo elder, and local expert on ancient indigenous cultures, Juan Valenzuela of Camajoa explained that,

The Mayo people in this area range from Navojoa (southern Sonora) to the Sinaloa River. They were originally different groups of native people. Ahomes came to base their settlements from Ahome to San Miguel Zapotitlán. From San Miguel de Zapotitlán to Charay were the people known as Zuaque. From Charay to El Fuerte the Tehuecos settled. Zoes later settled from El Fuerte all the way up to Choix. From Choix to the Sinaloa River, that’s where the Sinaloas settled. South of Ahome around the Sinaloa River, which is now Guasave, were the Guasaves. And along the Sinaloa River, in the current municipality of Sinaloa were the Sinaloas. Those are all the indigenous peoples now known as Mayos. All the Mayo people in this immediate area settled on the banks of the Fuerte River. 65

Cáhitas of Sinaloa not mentioned in this quote also included the Huites who resided in the Choix municipality, Baimenas who were just north of the Sinaloas up the Sinaloa River, Ocoronis located in the Guasave municipality along the Ocoroni tributary of the Sinaloa River, and Bamoas (originally called Nebomes) who were located near Guasaves in the Guasave municipality. These Huites, Baimenas, Ocoronis, and Bamoas are considered Yoremes, yet scholars disagree as to whether or not they should be classified as Mayos. Mr. Valenzuela also neglected to reveal the importance of the steady stream of Yoremes migrating from the Mayo Valley to the Fuerte Valley.

Other scholars also seem to overlook the important migration patterns of Yoremes from the Mayo Valley. Thomas Robertson suggested that,

There seems to be no historic reason why people living on the Rio Fuerte in villages such as Baca, Baimena, Los Copomos, Choix, San Miguel should be considered descendants of Mayos rather than of the Ahomes, Choix, Huites, or Zuaques who inhabited the lower river at the time of contact. 66

66 Robertson, Southwestern Utopia, and Yetman and Van Devender, 17.
Robertson’s theory only revealed one part of a complicated story. He overlooked migration from the Mayo Valley and absorption into indigenous communities.

One explanation as to how Fuerte Valley indigenous people became known as Mayos is that Jesuits, partial to the relatively peaceful groups living in the Mayo Valley, chose to refer to northern Sinaloa indigenous people as Mayos. This raises the question as to why Spaniards would have classified Fuerte Valley Yoremes as peaceful. Other than the Ahomes who Spaniards noted as pacifists, and Tehuecos, who aligned militarily with Spaniards, most indigenous groups of the Fuerte Valley fought relentlessly for decades to dislodge Spaniards from northern Sinaloa.

There is another possibility, in the fact that Spaniards rounded up indigenous people and placed them in “reduction towns” near missions, which could have produced a homogenous culture and language among indigenous people along the Fuerte River. Any one of these explanations could be viable, but neither seems to completely explain why Mayos along the Fuerte and Mayo Rivers, as well as Yaquis, share many cultural traits today. Van Devender and Yetman also pointed out that, “the descendants of these same indigenous people along the Fuerte River are the Mayos who live along the Fuerte River today.” Maybe these indigenous people at some point prior to the Spanish Conquest did in fact migrate south to the Fuerte Valley. Perhaps Mayos in the Fuerte Valley are simply the remnants of all indigenous groups in the region, many of whose cultures (as they knew them at the time) were wiped out. The most likely scenario is that there were several moments of southwardly migration as people were absorbed by the indigenous groups of the Fuerte Valley.

Complicating matters even further were the labels that Spaniards assigned to particular Yoreme groups in the Fuerte Valley. For instance, a 1785 report detailed the ethnic makeup of

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67 Yetman and Van Devender, 17.
68 Yetman and Van Devender, 17.
69 Yetman and Van Devender, 36.
Fuerte Valley missions. San Miguel was said to have been made up of Mayos, Bacoreguis, and Sinaloas. Baca and Mochicahui consisted of Mayos. Tehueco and Bamoa were both comprised of a mix of Sinaloas and Mayos. Based on this evidence, it appears Spaniards were using the term Mayo to refer to many indigenous people in the Fuerte Valley in the late Colonial period. There is no explanation as to why this particular term was used, or where these “Mayos” came from originally. It was not uncommon for Spaniards to lump indigenous groups into one, as in this case they stopped using the terms Tehueco, Zuaque, and Ahome.

A possible explanation as to why Spaniards changed the terms used to describe indigenous groups in the Fuerte Valley, was because these indigenous people consolidated the terms of self-representation themselves. Mexican anthropologist Juan José Rodríguez Villarreal explained that by 1740, indigenous nations such as Zuaques, Nios, Zoes, Huites, and, Nebomes had ceased from referring to themselves as such, and began to identify with the names of the missions or visiting towns they inhabited, such as Tehueco, Ahome, Ocoroni, Sivirijoa, and Mochicahui. These changes in self-representation were an important element to the cultural homogenization process in the Fuerte Valley.

Yoremes in the Fuerte Valley changed their terms of self-representation, and it appears that Spaniards also referred to these indigenous groups in new ways. Rodríguez Villarreal clarified that by 1785, “the vast majority of inhabitants of villages near El Fuerte no longer belonged to nations of that river, but were now Mayos.” This explains the classifications used by the 1785 report on missions that reduced the number of terms to refer to the indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley. The absence of indigenous written records and inability of scholars

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70 Rodríguez Villereal, *Los Indios Sinaloenses Durante la Colonia*, 238.
71 Rodríguez Villarreal, 241.
72 Ibid, 236.
to mention how villagers referred to themselves in this time period makes it difficult to
determine if these groups called each other Mayos or Yoremes at this time.

In order to better understand the process of Mayo ethnogenesis in the Fuerte Valley
during the colonial era, there are two indigenous groups, the Maya of Yucatán, Mexico, and
Brothertown Indigenous people of Eastern U.S., who encountered similar experiences. In *Maya
Ethnogenesis*, Matthew Restall argued that through the colonial period and up until the late
twentieth century, indigenous people of Yucatán, “struggled for centuries against their own
ethnogenesis.” Through the colonial era, despite Spaniards’ insistence on categorizing Yucatec
indigenous people as “Mayans”, they did not self-identify as such. Rather, self-representation
was based on their respective *Cah* (geographic entity/village) and *Chibal* (patronym group).
Despite Yucatec Mayans’ insistence on remaining disparate indigenous groups, the fact that
Spaniards assigned them this ethnic identity based on perceived characteristics and regionalism,
this became an important step in their eventual self-representation as Mayans.

Self-representation as well as ethnic categorization assigned by outsiders were both vital
factors to indigenous ethnogenesis. In *Becoming Brothertown*, Craig Cipolla, following the
theories of Fredrick Barth argued that, “identities are rooted both in the ways we classify our
social world and in the ways our social world classify us.” This proved as important for
Yucatec indigenous people categorized as Mayans, as it did for some Algonquin groups of the
United States who began to refer to themselves as Brothertown people. Cipolla explained that
these formerly disparate Algonquin groups of the east coast left their homes, and consolidated
into a larger indigenous community they began to call Brothertown. After several decades of
living among each other, first in New York, and then Wisconsin, “their communal name, or

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[74] Ibid, 73-79.
ethnonym Brothertown supplanted ethnonyms used previously, Narranganetts, Eastern Pequots, Mashantucket Pequots, Mohengans, Montauketts, Niantiks, or Tunxis.”

Similar to Yucatec indigenous people being defined by Spaniards as Mayans, indigenous groups of the Fuerte Valley were initially lumped into the category Cáhita, based on geographic proximity, and linguistic and cultural similarities. Unlike Mayans who resisted ethnogenesis, the shared experiences Cáhitas endured allowed them to begin to define themselves as one people. Like Brothertown people, indigenous groups of the Fuerte Valley eventually chose their preferred ethnonym. At first they defined by the names of the missions or visiting towns they inhabited, and eventually they elected to be called Yoremes. This constituted a pivotal step in the process of Mayo ethnogenesis.

We can be sure that at least some indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley referred to themselves as Yoremes during the Bachomo rebellion of the early twentieth century. Self-representation plays an essential role to identity, and collective identity often leads to communal action. It is no coincidence that this moment of Yoreme self-representation was the same time in which Fuerte Valley villagers united to defend their land and shared cultural practices.

As important as self-representation is tied to ethnogenesis, classification by outsiders is equally important. Spaniards’ classification of these indigenous groups as Cáhitas also played a major role in bringing these people together. Regardless of how Cáhitas became Mayos, or Yoremes, the Spanish conquest was at least partially responsible for uniting these once disparate groups. In their attempts at dominate the inhabitants of the Fuerte Valley, Spaniards classified these indigenous people as one homogenous group. Spaniards eventually recognized divisions among these groups, yet decided to treat each of them as savages. In doing so, Spaniards created

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76 Ibid, 54.
77 Proof is provided through a 1913 letter from a Mayo Governor to another Mayo leader in which he used the term “Yoreme”, oral sources confirm this usage in that time period.
the conditions which allowed these distinct groups to find common ground and eventually recognize each other as brothers/sisters (Yoremes). The decimation of indigenous people and changes to their way of life led to military alliances, common religious ceremonies and practices, and finally unification. Consolidating them into missions also facilitated this process of ethnogenesis. Indigenous groups of the Fuerte Valley had existed for thousands of years, yet the Spanish Conquest of Northern Sinaloa helped create the group known today as Mayos. Ironically it was indigenous unification that made the Conquest of the Fuerte Valley such a difficult task.

The Spanish Conquest of the Fuerte Valley

The first Spaniards arrived in the Fuerte Valley in July 1533, led by Captain Diego de Guzmán. Being the rainy season, the Fuerte River was running too swiftly for them to cross. After waiting in the Fuerte Valley a few months they crossed the river and proceeded north. In the Mayo and Yaqui Valleys of Sonora, they fought off Cáhita armies and eventually fled back south. Captain Guzmán organized another expedition in 1535 into Ocoroni, in the eastern Fuerte Valley along the Sinaloa River, which is now in the municipality of Sinaloa.

While in this area, the expedition encountered Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and three other Spanish conquistadors (one of them, known as Esteban, was an African slave) who had been roaming what is now northern Mexico and the southwestern United States since 1528. They were originally part of the 1527 Narváez Expedition that had shipwrecked in Florida and then Texas. These four survivors were enslaved by several indigenous groups for many years, and explored over thousands of miles. Cabeza de Vaca and his men returned to Mexico City and eventually Spain shortly after their “rescue”.

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Cabeza de Vaca and these three other Spaniards did not arrive to northern Sinaloa alone. They brought with them a group of Nebomes (today known as Lower Pimas) from the upper Yaqui Valley. Having faced incursions from both Opatas and Yaquis, these Nebomes joined Cabeza de Vaca in search of better lands, or perhaps a cure for the terrible typhus plague that was decimating their villages.\(^7\) The Nebomes eventually ended up settling the village of Bamoa on the Sinaloa River. By 1615, approximately 400 Nebomes had settled in Northern Sinaloa, and they were assigned communal lands and bushels of corn.\(^8\) These migration patterns are indicative of movement into the Fuerte Valley, before, during, and after the Colonial era, which helped create a fascinating mixture of similar indigenous cultures that eventually defined themselves as Yoremes.

Diego de Guzman’s expedition into Ocoroni also started a campaign of terror against indigenous people in this area, as Spanish soldiers massacred thousands of men, women, and children. This led to the Spanish crown organizing a peace mission into the area. The peace expedition led by Friar Marcos de Niza, set out for northern Sinaloa from Culiacan on March 7, 1539. This expedition did not find a great deal of material wealth in indigenous settlements, like the town of Baca (as it is known today) along the Fuerte River that they explored. Apparently Niza was convinced that this area was worth exploring in greater detail.\(^9\) At this point there is a discrepancy as to why Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza became interested in organizing another expedition into northern Sinaloa.

According to Mexican scholar Miguel Vélez, Marcos de Niza returned to Mexico City on September 2 of the same year, and told an exaggerated story to Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza.

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\(^7\) Yetman, David A.
\(^8\) Diego de Guzman was quoted saying this in Alegre, Francisco Javier. *Historia de la Compañía de Jesús de Nueva España*, and López, 75.
The Viceroy was led to believe that the cities they found were of greater significance than even Tenochtitlán and all of the Aztec Empire.\textsuperscript{81} Mario Gill, on the other hand suggested that Cabeza de Vaca’s stories had a great influence on the Viceroy. Apparently Cabeza de Vaca told the Viceroy there were, “at least seven cities in this region that had houses of at least four stories, whose facades were covered with turquoise and other precious stones.”\textsuperscript{82} It is possible that both historians are correct, and that the Viceroy was influenced by each of these stories, to the point that he organized another expedition.

Viceroy Mendoza set up a new expedition to locate these seven cities of riches, or what has often been referred to as Cibola. The expedition was led by Francisco Vasquez de Coronado, captain general to the king of Nueva Galicia, and it included a force of 250 mounted cavalry, and well over one-thousand indigenous auxiliary troops.\textsuperscript{83} Filiberto Quintero, an expert on the history of the Fuerte Valley, suggested that these conquistadores probably crossed over the Fuerte River at the village Sivajahui, just downstream from Sivirijoa.\textsuperscript{84} The leader of this force, Coronado was known for his harsh cruelty to indigenous people that he had exhibited on previous expeditions. His actions were no different this time, as his forces moved swiftly along the river, killing indigenous people that chose to fight and even some that were peaceful. The conquistadores did however fail to find anything of particular monetary value, such as gold or silver, in these Mayo settlements, which led Viceroy Mendoza to regard the expedition as a failure.

There were other Spanish expeditions into the Fuerte Valley, such as that led by Francisco Ibarra in the 1560s. He founded the town of El Fuerte de Montesclaros (El Fuerte) in 1563, which later became the most important city in northern Sinaloa for the next few hundred

\textsuperscript{81} Vélez, 13.
\textsuperscript{82} Gill, 9.
\textsuperscript{83} Vélez, 14.
\textsuperscript{84} Quintero, 85.
years. Ibarra was assisted in his many expeditions through northwest Mexico by an indigenous woman interpreter named Luisa. Ibarra found Luisa in Ocoroni after his interpreter died, and hearing rumors of a woman who spoke several indigenous languages, as well as Spanish. Because she helped the Spanish conquer indigenous territories, she has often been referred to as the “Sinaloan Malinche” or Doña Marina, the famous and controversial indigenous interpreter who served Hernán Cortés in his campaign against the Aztecs.85

The Spanish struggled to settle in the Fuerte Valley at first. They set up an encomienda system, which allowed Spaniards who were granted a trusteeship, the right to extract labor from a group of indigenous people. In exchange Spaniards were supposed to instruct them in Christianity and Spanish. The town of San Juan Carapoa was founded by Spaniards in 1564 along the left margin of the Fuerte River. Many difficulties, including the inability to enforce labor demands from Cáhitas, and indigenous rebellions near this town soon led to it being abandoned.86 Spaniards tried to settle the town of San Felipe y Santiago along the banks of the Sinaloa River 1583 but were again attacked by indigenous groups.87

Spaniards did not have an easy time conquering the indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley partially due to the military skill of Cáhitas. Spanish solidiers noted that Cáhitas were astute warriors with very fierce military tactics. Indigenous warrior weapons consisted of arrows and bows of wood, sometimes dipping their arrowheads in poison. They also used heavy wooden clubs and spears tipped with sharp obsidian, as well as shields made from crocodile skin.88 These descriptions of Cáhitas as fierce warriors may have been due to the military prowess of the Yaquis of Sonora.

85 Gamez, 37-39.
86 Gamez, *El Valle del Fuerte*, 29
87 Gamez, 30
88 Nakayama 31.
The fighting skill of indigenous warriors along the Fuerte River, and their capability of rallying a large number of soldiers must not be underestimated. Historian Roberto Acosta described how,

The principal nations were the Huites, who lived up river where it emerges from the Sierras. That tribe consisted of more than a thousand families or more, well-armed with bows and arrows. Six leagues below dwelt the Tehueco nation, fearless and warlike, who could easily mount a force of one thousand five hundred warriors. Ten leagues downstream from them were the Zuaques who occupied several towns and could mount a force of more than two thousand warlike and brave fighters, and finally four leagues down, occupying the course of the river until it reached the sea, dwelt the gentle Ahomes, who comprised about a thousand families.  

These indigenous groups were constantly at war with each other, yet the incursion of Spanish forces into the area resulted in fierce resistance, and at times even led to some of these groups joining forces to repel the conquistadores. These alliances proved to be the start of cohesion of Fuerte Valley indigenous peoples into a more homogenous group that shared similar practices. As circumstances, and their terms of subjugation changed, Cáhitas continued to re-define themselves and shape their culture.

Spaniards Turn to Religion for Help

After decades of failing to militarily pacify Cáhitas, Spaniards employed new strategies, aimed at winning the minds and souls of these indigenous people. In 1591, the first Jesuit priests arrived to San Felipe y Santiago and constructed a mission. Father Gonzalo de Tapia learned how to speak the Cáhita dialect and toured the margins of the Sinaloa and Fuerte Rivers in his initial attempts to convert indigenous people to Christianity.

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89 Acosta, *Apuntes Historicos Sonorenses*, 41, and Yetman and Van Devender, 35.
90 This is apparent for example in the fact that Zuaques, Guasave, and other tribes joined forces against Spaniards, and even against Tehuecos who sided with the Spaniards.
Jesuits had a particularly difficult time because Cáhitas could not pick up the general concepts and practices of Christianity. Aztecs, for instance were easier to convert to Christianity because priests learned how to substitute the pantheon of Aztec Gods for Christian Saints. Cáhita religion had a different structure, in that their rudimentary religious concepts had not yet reached the stage of anthropomorphic representation of divinity. Jesuit Priest Andrés Pérez de Ribas asserted that, “I can say that although for some of them there are signs of formal idolatry, but with others they don’t know of any God, or deity, although false. [They do not] acknowledge the lord having dominion over the earth. And they do not worship anything.” These insights must be taken with a grain of salt as this Spanish priest did not completely understand indigenous cosmology.

To what extent Pérez exaggerated, or was uninformed has been analyzed by other scholars. Filiberto Quintero suggested that Cáhitas did in fact view the sun and the moon as divinities, making offerings to them regularly. He also cited proof of their concept of divinity, as described through a ceremony recorded by other Jesuits, “Cáhitas danced in a circle, using representations of plants and animals to represent nature, and in the center they placed a masculine and feminine divinity.” The important matter here is that there were major differences in the ways Cáhitas and Spaniards viewed and enacted their religions, adding to the difficulty the Jesuits initially faced in attempting to convert these indigenous people.

Jesuit missionaries eventually found the Cáhita religion to be a major obstacle, and set out to limit its hold on indigenous people. This “sorcery” as they referred to it, was practiced by nearly all of the Cáhitas, and “sorcerers” (or more accurately shamans) wielded a substantial amount of power over indigenous communities. In 1595 Father Tapia delivered many sermons to

91 Gill, 11
92 Pérez de Ribas, and Gill, 11.
93 Quintero, 42-43.
Cáhitas in their own language, and rebuked Nakabeba, one of the most famous and trusted shamans in the Fuerte Valley. These spiritual attacks led to Nakabeba leading an uprising of Zuaques, Guasaves, and other tribes against Tehuecos, who had sided with the Spaniards. After burning Tehueco villages, they killed Father Tapia. Spanish authorities finally put down this rebellion, and executed Nakabeba for his crimes.\textsuperscript{94}

These events are vital to understanding the difficulties Spanish authorities faced in subjugating the Cáhitas in the late sixteenth century. They also reveal the lengths Spanish forces were willing to go in their attempts to quell uprisings. One strategy used in this case was to turn neighboring indigenous communities against one another. Cortés’ suppression of the Aztecs was facilitated by his ability to gain alliances with their long-time indigenous enemies (such as Tlaxcalans). This same strategy was used to turn Tehuecos against Zuaques, yet it also led to Tehueco villages being burned in retaliation. Spaniards convinced Tehuecos to fight against other indigenous groups, yet it is significant that military alliances among indigenous groups were forming. Zuaques and Guasaves in this case, and Zuaques and Ocoronis earlier, were coming together on a regular basis, in order to repel Spanish colonization. This suggests that Cáhitas were starting to recognize their strength in numbers and they shared a common enemy.

The Zuaques, known by Spaniards to be the most rebellious of the Cáhita tribes, rose up one last time in the early seventeenth century, in the town of Mochicahui along the Fuerte River. Captain Diego Martinez de Hurdaide was in charge of stopping Cáhita rebellions in Sinaloa. For this, Hurdaide was very successful, as he was personally credited with pacifying and reducing nearly twenty different indigenous nations throughout northwest Mexico. In Mochicahui, one of the Cáhita strongholds at the time, Captain Hurdaide used particularly fierce tactics. He attacked

\textsuperscript{94} Gamez, 33-35.
an unprepared Zuaque army, and took their leaders, women, and children hostage. He then cut off the head of the military leader Taxicora. These acts essentially ended the major early colonial-era Cáhita rebellions in the Fuerte Valley.

Yaqui tribes continued their fierce insurrections from Sonora, and despite Spaniards recruiting the Mayos of the Mayo Valley to fight on their side, Yaquis defeated Hurdaide’s forces on two occasions in 1609. Yaquis submitted to Hurdaide voluntarily in 1610. Hurdaide used his original defeats as an excuse to construct a huge defense fort in Montesclaros (El Fuerte) that same year. The quelling of the Yaqui, and for that matter all Cáhita rebellions, and the construction of the massive defense fort, ensured that there was now generally peace within the entire region of what is now Sinaloa and Sonora.

Repressive Colonial Era Systems and Cáhita Conversion to Christianity

With peace and stability a large number of Spaniards moved into the Fuerte Valley. Spanish towns sprung up more frequently, mostly along the Fuerte River, as Jesuits established churches and parochial schools. Around this same time in the early seventeenth century, Spanish Jesuits constructed more towns along the Fuerte River. Two of these, Arcángel San Miguel 1608 (now San Miguel de Zapotitlán) and San Antonio 1605 (La Florida) soon became the only two Mayo ceremonial centers in the Ahome municipality, and still remain major indigenous ceremonial centers today.

The addition of centralized ceremonial centers meant that Cáhitas continued to perform smaller rituals in their individual towns. For major ceremonies, they now converged on a central

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95 Yetman and Van Devender, 35.
96 Gamez, 37
97 Yetman and Van Devender, 38
98 López Carrera, Atlas Yoreme del Municipio de Ahome, 16.
location and performed their rituals alongside other villagers. Congregations in Jesuit-based towns helped indigenous people maintain their religious traditions by mixing in elements of Christianity. Such religious practices were just Christian enough for Jesuits to allow them. These ceremonial centers, through their union of previously disparate indigenous groups, also facilitated the growth of a more homogenous culture in the Fuerte Valley. The consolidation of Cáhita ceremonial centers also suggests that military and religious suppression, as well as the diminishing populations of indigenous people pushed them to begin identifying as a common people. Several other factors that Cáhitas of the Fuerte Valley faced during colonization also led them to “becoming” Yoremes.

The Fuerte Valley offered Spaniards limited resources to accumulate wealth. There were few precious metals like gold or silver to be mined. The dense vegetation and desert-like conditions made large scale farming a difficult enterprise to undertake. These conditions, and possibly the immense geographic distance from New Spain’s capital (now Mexico City), allowed the Fuerte Valley to maintain a relatively sparse population throughout the colonial era.

The one valuable resource that Spaniards found in the Fuerte Valley was a potential indigenous workforce. The repartimiento system officially replaced encomienda in New Spain, as the Spanish crown had deemed the latter potentially dangerous, as it could provoke separatist movements. Under the repartimiento de labor, indigenous people were required to perform a certain amount of monthly days of labor for Spaniards. Viceroy Luis Velasco ordered that repartimiento be awarded to Spaniards in the Fuerte Valley to boost livestock, mining, and agriculture industries, with the provision that those required to perform labor be remunerated for their services. At the same time, he recommended that Spaniards working in the mining and
livestock industries increase their small number of African slaves in the region.⁹⁹ These appear to be strategies to ensure the pacification of the indigenous populations of the Fuerte Valley, an obvious precaution after the indigenous uprisings in the first years of contact.

Viceroy Velasco attempted to reduce the exploitation of Fuerte Valley Cáhitas, yet it was difficult to regulate repressive Spaniard practices. The encomienda system had officially ended, but Spaniards found ways to ensure its survival in some forms. The use of indigenous people as an exploited workforce in different forms, continued through the twentieth century, figuring fundamentally into the trajectory of the local history. The large number of abuses that continued in the colonial era notwithstanding, there were few indigenous revolts by the seventeenth century. Most rebellious indigenous groups by then were pacified, exterminated, or enslaved.¹⁰⁰ 

Epidemics also eroded the bases for Cáhita resistance and contributed to their almost-total subjugation by the seventeenth century. Outbreaks of fatal diseases in Sinaloa in 1593, 1602, and again from 1606 to 1607 decimated Cáhita populations.¹⁰¹ News of these horrible epidemics spread throughout indigenous populations, and as much as ninety percent of the indigenous population of New Spain was reduced in the first one-hundred years of Spanish occupation. Yetman and Van Devender argue that it was indigenous submission to Christianity, along with the mission system that brought indigenous people into crowded populations of others with diseases, which ultimately facilitated the spread of measles, smallpox, malaria, and many more epidemics that greatly reduced Cáhita populations.¹⁰² The conversion of many indigenous people, along with the reducción of their communities into new, tightly-packed villages, helps to

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⁹⁹ Gamez, 38
¹⁰⁰ Gill, 11.
¹⁰¹ Reff, and Yetman and Van Devender, 40
¹⁰² Yetman and Van Devender, 40
explain the relative absence of Cáhita rebellions within the Fuerte Valley for the rest of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries.

Living in these reduction towns on mission property facilitated both the spread of deadly diseases, as well as the process of indigenous ethnogenesis. For some indigenous people they found themselves living in the same lands they inhabited prior to the Spaniards’ arrival. Others found new homes alongside villagers from cultures that may have differed slightly from their own. Their shared language and experiences living among Jesuits helped them develop uniform religious practices that were the key to a new indigenous identity. Each village went through this process of cultural homogenization as performance of their religious practices helped them to develop ties to their natural surroundings. Indigenous people understood the necessity of retaining lands to protect their culture.

Jesuit control changed the way of life of Cahitas in the Fuerte Valley. Many spiritual leaders passed through northern Sinaloa to assist conversion, including Father Eusebio Kino, famous for his defense of the indigenous groups of northwest Mexico against mistreatment at the hands of Spanish miners and haciendas (large estate owners). The occasional reform-oriented priest notwithstanding, Cahitas were still subject to an oppressive Spanish system of subjugation in which they were relegated to the bottom. At times these indigenous people worked with no pay, were not given time to harvest their own crops, and endured several other abuses.103 Aside from corporal punishments which included whippings, there were harsh restrictions placed on their actions. They could not eat meat on Fridays, and had to supply labor to the repartimiento. Hunting and gathering was restricted, monogamy was enforced, and extramarital sexual relations (including no same sex relations) were prohibited.104

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103 Secretaria de Agricultura y Recursos Hidraulicos, 48.
104 Yetman and Van Devender, 42.
Cahitas also had to endure denunciations of all rituals that seemed foreign to Jesuit priests. Ancient indigenous ceremonies survived due to an ability to accept Christian practices and fuse them with their own beliefs. Mexican anthropologist and expert on Mayos Gabriel Uriarte explained that,

Religious holidays and its main votive element, dance, are the events dedicated to the beliefs that govern most of the traditional Indian life. The Saints, custodians of their faith, are the result of the evangelization of the Jesuit order in these lands, who based their religious scheme in Catholicism of Rome. But due to the circumstances presented in their implementation, the indigenous peoples created their own form of worship.\textsuperscript{105}

Indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley had a very complicated religion that was still under development in the early years of the colonial era. This process invariably relied on a system of negotiation, struggle, and compromise on behalf of both Jesuits and Mayos.

Most aspects of indigenous life were regulated by Jesuit authorities, which often ran counter to Cáhita practices prior to these Christians’ arrival. The Jesuits appeared in New Spain in the early 1570s, and adapted their policies from the lessons learned by the Franciscans and the other first wave of religious orders. Jesuits lived in close contact with Cáhitas yet struggled to understand them and their culture. Even into the mid-eighteenth century, Jesuits in northern Sinaloa wrote about the, “peculiarities of the Indigenous people that inhabited the province.”\textsuperscript{106}

There was never total suppression of the Cáhitas of Sonora and Sinaloa during the colonial era. The indigenous fighting spirit was also never completely dominated, as mistreated Cáhitas occasionally got their revenge by killing particularly abusive Spaniards.\textsuperscript{107}

Mayos witnessed an influx of Spanish settlers into the Fuerte Valley in the colonial era. In the 1680s, Spanish surveyors discovered silver just north in Alamos, Sonora, and gold and

\textsuperscript{105} Uriarte, 8.
\textsuperscript{106} Baltazar, Informe Sobre Sinaloa y Sonora.
\textsuperscript{107} Secretaria de Agricultura y Recursos Hidraulicos, 48.
other minerals soon after in the Sierra Madre in Chihuahua. The opening of mines was not as prevalent in the heart of the Fuerte Valley where indigenous people resided, but it still led to a growth in the Spanish population. Some Cáhitas found work in these mines but were often pushed aside by newly arriving miners and colonists who took their lands by force. Jesuits pleaded with the Crown to control these new settlers, but the viceregal administration tended to side with the incoming Spaniards, and not with indigenous people.\textsuperscript{108} In the face of repression, Cáhitas maintained certain practices, and adopted new ones, shifting and maintaining their indigenous culture. Yet I argue that the amount of abuse humans can endure is often proportionate to their perceived options of retaliation.

\textbf{The Pan-Cáhita Movement of the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} Centuries}

Years of mistreatment by Jesuits, Spanish officials and settlers came to a head in 1740 when a Yaqui leader named El Muni led a Cáhita uprising. Yaquis and Mayos, of what is now Sonora and Sinaloa, joined the rebellion. Apaches, Seris, and Pimas carried out separate rebellions in Sonora. The Muni Rebellion became the most intense in the Mayo and Fuerte Valleys and thousands of Spanish soldiers were sent in to quell the uprising. El Muni was eventually killed, and the rebellion suppressed; however the Crown could not claim total victory.\textsuperscript{109} The Pan-Cáhita alliance showed that the historic hostility between indigenous people could be overcome in order to fight against Spanish oppression and the presence of systems promoting inequality.

The Crown’s reaction to these uprisings was to suppress Cáhita populations to the extent that most Mayos moved out of the Mayo Valley, and some migrated south to the Fuerte Valley.

\textsuperscript{108} Yetman and Van Devender, 43-44
\textsuperscript{109} Yetman and Van Devender, 44-45.
Yetman and Van Devender argued that this migration started, “a process of amalgamation that today blurs the distinction between Mayos and the indigenous people of the Fuerte.”

This mixing represented one step in very complicated historical developments that, over time, shaped a disparate group of Cáhitas into a more homogenous Yoreme identity in the Fuerte Valley.

The Jesuits were expelled from Mexico in 1767. In Northwest Mexico, Franciscan friars replaced the Society, who impressed the Indians with their practices of humility. Having accumulated vast amounts of property, Jesuit lands were auctioned off. With limited access to monetary resources, indigenous people in the Fuerte Valley were unable to purchase additional lands and struggled to hold onto their existing plots.

With Jesuits out of the fold the Spanish Crown initiated a series of reforms aimed at tearing down the systems of land tenure that they felt led to economic stagnation. According to Rodríguez Villarreal, the first of these reforms consisted of, “derailing missionary life, as it was initially felt that it contributed to the occupation and development of the region but, on the contrary, with its political and economic autonomy had favored depopulation, to prevent the entry of Spaniards, mestizos, and other races.”

These reforms were therefore aimed at populating underdeveloped lands in hopes of generating economic activity.

The most significant of these reforms was the allocation of both private and communal lands. In June 1769 the inspector general of New Spain, José de Gálvez, introduced a decree to repartition farmland. Indigenous communities received communal land grants that were most likely previously owned by individual missions. The Crown also distributed individual plots of barren lands, some of which indigenous communities abandoned earlier.

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110 Yetman and Van Devender, 45-46
111 Gill, 11.
112 Rodríguez Villarreal, 232.
113 Ibid, 232.
plots were assigned to indigenous people, Spaniards, and mestizos. Yori (non-indigenous people as Cáhitas referred to them) settlers received few restrictions on accumulating new property, while Cáhitas were limited to five and a half hectares per family.\textsuperscript{114}

It is difficult to determine how many indigenous communities received individual or communal land grants in the late Colonial period.\textsuperscript{115} Perhaps some communities never registered their land with Crown officials, making their property rights particularly vulnerable to outside encroachment. The extent to which Cáhitas faced land dispossession at the hands of Spanish settlers in the Fuerte Valley in the eighteenth century, was not as drastic as that which occurred in the Mayo Valley, where massive amounts of indigenous lands ended up in the hands of non-Mayos.\textsuperscript{116} This may have to do with the fact that Spanish authorities and settlers recognized the economic potential and value of the Mayo Valley well before that of the Fuerte Valley.

There were very few battles in Sinaloa during the War of Independence (1810-1821). Some Cáhitas fought valiantly on the side of the Independence movement, earning distinction in battle. The majority of indigenous people in the Fuerte Valley continued to live in miserable conditions of servitude after independence. Historian Rafael Valdez Aguilar argued that, “Independence did not improve the situation for any of the indigenous people in the country, the governments, conservative or liberal, equally tried to snatch their land, and nullify their autonomy.”\textsuperscript{117} In Sinaloa, independence increased the amount of mestizos moving into the area, leading to further attempts to seize the lands of indigenous communities.\textsuperscript{118} Cáhitas held their

\textsuperscript{114} Figueroa A., 80 and Yetman and Van Devender, 46.
\textsuperscript{115} The scarcity of indigenous people’s land titles became evident in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries, as Mayo villages and political allies found difficulties in locating their titulos primordiales in order to protect themselves from dispossession.
\textsuperscript{116} Yetman and Van Devender, 46.
\textsuperscript{117} Valdez, “Tradiciones versus Modernidad: La Lucha de los Yaquis” Clio.
\textsuperscript{118} Secretaria de Agricultura y Recursos Hidraulicos, 40.
ground, and although many of their lands were taken, indigenous people were able to retain some of their lands in the Fuerte Valley.

The increasing number of attempts to dispossess indigenous people of their lands in northwestern Mexico was one of the factors leading to another Pan-Cáhita rebellion in 1825. A new Yaqui leader named Juan Ignacio Jusacamea (otherwise known as Juan Banderas) united Yaquis, Mayos, Seris, and Ópatas of Sonora, and Mayos of Sinaloa, in a campaign to expel mestizos from indigenous lands. The nascent Mexican government remained disorganized and disjointed, a result of the political rift between Federalists and Centralists. Banderas’ campaign lasted nearly eight years. These indigenous forces were eventually subdued in 1833, and Banderas was executed.119

The rebellion in 1825 laid bare the frustration indigenous people in the Fuerte Valley expressed with the new government. It also revealed that the Pan-Cáhita alliance between indigenous people in Sonora and Sinaloa survived, even after independence. At this point in history, especially in the realm of land dispossession, conditions among indigenous populations grew even worse during the forty years after Mexico’s independence. The Pan-Cáhita military alliance united Yoremes of Sinaloa and Sonora, and helped them to recognize the similarities that still existed between their cultures, as they continued to view each other’s struggles as the same. What’s more, the internal military alliance between indigenous people in the Fuerte Valley (Tehuecos, Zuaques, Ahomes) that endured, was an important element to these groups’ transition into identifying as a united Yoreme people.

Mexican Independence, and the subsequent problems it brought indigenous people of northwest Mexico led to more Cáhita uprisings as a strategy for regaining stolen lands. This brings into question why land played such a pivotal role in the lives of these indigenous groups.

119 Yetman and Van Devender, 48.
Globally, indigenous people’s ties to land have existed for centuries, and today are gaining more international legal recognition. Recently, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights stated that, “the land indigenous people traditionally use and occupy, are critical to their physical, cultural, and spiritual vitality…Indigenous People’s territorial rights are unique, and encompass a tradition and a cultural identification of indigenous peoples with their land.”\(^\text{120}\)

Specifically among indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley, land held communities together in many ways. For instance, Cáhita people’s ability to harvest their own crops annually kept communities intact and assisted in the maintenance of their social structure.\(^\text{121}\)

Land was also pivotal in the continuity of religious ceremony, which was the backbone of Cáhita identity and cultural integrity. López Carrera argued that, “Mayos-Yoremes struggled to maintain sacred sites, as the ritual in them was very important to maintain their identity.”\(^\text{122}\) The maintenance of these sacred sites was vital to indigenous identity, making armed defense of territory that much more significant.

Some indigenous people developed ties to their natural surroundings over hundreds of years, and continued along the same trajectory even after the mission system came into effect. For those who were uprooted, or migrated into this area, they developed new relationships with the land alongside their new brothers/sisters. In subsequent chapters, I also show how Mayo land and water rights, and access to raw materials located on these lands, were directly tied into the continuity of religious practices, and ultimately their culture. These struggles for land, as they always have been, were largely a defense of indigenous culture.

\(^{120}\) Interamerican Commission on Human Rights, “Indigenous and Tribal People’s Rights Over Their Ancestral Lands and Natural Resources”. December, 30, 2009.

\(^{121}\) I will delve more into the links between crop harvesting and the maintenance of indigenous social structures in chapter two.

\(^{122}\) López, 66.
These armed campaigns continued in 1859 when indigenous people from the Fuerte Valley rose up again in order to seek restitution of their lands. They timed these insurrections in unison with Mayos and Yaquis of Sonora, who were struggling for the same thing. These Cáhitas of Sinaloa used such expressions as “brothers of race” to describe their counterparts of Sonora. According to historian Javier Fuentes Posadas, such expressions were common among these rebel Indians during their fight against land dispossession.\textsuperscript{123} These expressions of brotherhood go far in exhibiting the growing solidarity between Cáhitas in Sinaloa and Sonora in their shared struggle to regain their lands.

Land defense from the colonial era through the early twentieth century undoubtedly played a significant role in the formation of Yoreme identity. Most literature describing Cáhita struggles refer to this land as “ancestral” or “traditional”.\textsuperscript{124} If we view ancestral land as that which was inhabited by ancestors over hundreds of years, and utilized by indigenous people long enough to tie long-standing cultural practices to the land itself, then not all indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley could necessarily claim their land was ancestral. If we define ancestral land as those communities that secured títulos primordiales, then it is significant that not all Mayo communities possessed these communal land grants. I pointed out earlier that those indigenous communities that did procure communal land titles probably received the mission land they had settled on. For some, this was the ancient land of their ancestors. For others who were absorbed by existing indigenous communities this land became vital to the existence of their identities.

Multitudes of Mayos migrated from the Mayo Valley and settled in Northern Sinaloa. I described how this migration pattern played a key role in the development of a more homogenous Yoreme culture in the Fuerte Valley. Descendants of the indigenous groups who

\textsuperscript{123} In \textit{Resistencia y Rebelión}, Fuentes Posadas claimed that during his research at the Historic Government Archive of the state of Sonora, he encountered several documents in which such expressions were used

\textsuperscript{124} Ochoa Zazueta and Yetman and Van Devender are examples of authors who use such terms
originally inhabited the Fuerte Valley (Ahomes, Techuecos, Zuaques) were packed into larger settlements and began to define by their particular towns (Mochicahui, Tehueco). They accepted these Sonoran Mayo migrants into their communities.

The interaction between newly arrived Mayos and those already established in the Fuerte Valley facilitated the formation of ethnic identity and shaped the manner by which indigenous people defended their land. A prime example of the social relations between Mayo migrants and indigenous people who previously established residency in the Fuerte Valley was best described by Yoreme elder Alejandro Inzunza of Los Goros. Inzunza related that, “originally our ancestors were from San Pedro, Sonora, and four of them arrived here (Los Goros) in 1826. They knew the people [here] were Yoremes like them. They inter-married with the people here and called it their home.”

San Pedro, Sonora is located in the Etchojoa municipality of the Mayo Valley, and is still predominately Mayo. Mr. Inzunza did not describe the reasons for his ancestor’s migration but the fact that they were aware that Los Goros’ inhabitants were Yoremes exhibits the long-standing communication and ties between indigenous people of Sinaloa and Sonora.

This interaction between Alejandro Inzunza’s ancestors, and the inhabitants of Los Goros in the early nineteenth century exemplifies one of the intricate steps in the ethnogenesis of indigenous people in the Fuerte Valley, and the way in which they defended their land. Conflicts between newly arrived Mayos and inhabitants of communities of the Fuerte Valley were invariably a consequence of the former’s migration. Shared practices made the relocation of indigenous people from Sonora to Sinaloa much easier, as their common language and religious practices were the two most important factors that led to the creation of a united Yoreme culture in the Fuerte Valley. The influx of Yoris into the Fuerte Valley made the arrival of Yoremes from the Mayo Valley, who shared common cultural traits, a welcome addition. From the stories

I have heard regarding Mayo migration to the Fuerte Valley, Mr. Inzunza’s ancestors’ experiences of acceptance into their new communities were common.

The inter-marriage between newly arrived Mayos and indigenous residents solidified the formers’ place within the community of Los Goros. After their absorption into this community, these new residents became participants in the performance of religious rituals. Land was invariably connected to the preservation of religious practices, and defense of indigenous properties in the Fuerte Valley became their concern as well. Not all Mayos of the Fuerte Valley could technically claim their new homeland as ancestral, yet there is every reason to believe they would have defended it as such.

In 1865 French forces invaded Mexico, landing (among other places) in Sonora. They eventually convinced Mayos of Sonora to join their side, in exchange for returning all Mayo lands that had been taken from them.126 There is no evidence of the French making these same promises of land to the indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley, but perhaps they heard rumors that a French victory would result in the return of lands. Mexican historian Ernesto Gámez pointed out that, “Imperialist victories in Sonora had an impact, and coupled with propaganda from their sympathizers, culminated in the general uprising of Yoremes, as those of the Fuerte River colluded with indigenous people of the Ocoroni River.”127 This pan-Yoreme alliance in the Fuerte Valley against Mexican forces was militarily strong, and at one point General Martínez had to send for reinforcements from the south in order to put down this rebellion.128 Commander Manuel Pérez recorded how he had to fight off attacks from indigenous people in Guasave, Nio

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126 Yetman and Van Devender, 49.
127 Gamez, 68.
128 Quintero, 49.
and Bamoa. Mexican Liberal forces responded to aggression by attacking villages such as Cahuinahua.¹²⁹

Yoreme combined forces of the Fuerte Valley soon proved that their objective was not just the defeat of the Liberal Mexican army, but more importantly, the removal of all Yoris from their lands. Indigenous forces began attacking mestizo towns with such ferocity that Yoris organized defense forces in such towns as Mavari, La Bacona, and Higuera de Zaragoza. It is unclear if indigenous people of Sonora and Sinaloa conspired against the Liberal Mexican forces. Mayos took advantage of this opportunity in an attempt to free themselves from the oppression they had faced after hundreds of years of colonial rule, and now independence.

After witnessing the military actions of Fuerte Valley Mayos, Mexican Liberal forces ascertained that these indigenous people were not necessarily aligned with French forces. This realization led to the signing of a decree in Alamos on March 15, 1866 that returned all lands illegally stripped from Mayos. In attempts to prevent other uprisings, Mexican liberals guaranteed that there would be no future dispossession of indigenous lands. The decree also pardoned all rebels that returned to work. The fact that the decree also promised indigenous people fair pay for their work indicates that several Mayos were engaged in wage labor at that time.¹³⁰ The creation of this agreement suggests that Liberal Mexican forces engaged in dialogue with indigenous people in order to understand the motivation behind their uprising. The 1866 decree, combined with the eventual defeat of French forces, led to indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley putting down their weapons.

To what extent the Liberals kept their promises is difficult to gauge, but future Mayo uprisings suggest that little was done to return indigenous lands, or ensure fair pay for those

¹²⁹ Gamez, 68.
¹³⁰ Gamez, 68-69.
working other people’s lands. The important point here is that indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley collectively rose up in arms against their government that refused to aid them in protecting their lands against encroachment of outsiders. The Pan-Yoreme alliance was another example of evidence that perhaps indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley began to recognize themselves as one people. These indigenous groups were unable to expel mestizos from the Fuerte Valley, yet Mayos never lost sight of their goals of regaining their lost lands and protecting their culture.

A prime example of the growth of indigenous insurgencies in order to fight against land dispossession can best be viewed by the continuity of this pan-Cáhita military alliance in the 1870s and 1880s. The 1866 Alamos pact did not provide Mayos with rights to land and fair pay they struggled for in the 1860s so they found it necessary to rebel once again. The Pan-Cáhita alliance grew to a crescendo during the Cajeme uprisings of Sonora and northern Sinaloa. Known by historians as one of the great Yaqui leaders, Cajeme (José María Leyva) united Yoremes of Sonora and Sinaloa. By 1875 Cajeme had organized Yoremes into a virtual independent nation. He opened a port, charged duties and tolls on ships and passengers, established a treasury and army, and dispatched lieutenants to supervise the governing of all Yoremes.¹³¹

After winning several key battles Cajeme offered to stop fighting if mestizos would leave Yoreme lands, but was denied each time. After a major victory over thousands of Mexican troops in Southern Sonora near Navojoa in 1882, mestizo residents either fled or armed themselves and stayed put.¹³² Yetman and Van Devender suggested that Yoremes grew too confident in thinking they had won, after seeing thousands of mestizos flee. Sonoran and

¹³¹ Troncoso, Las Guerras con las Tribus Yaqui y Mayo, 63, and Yetman and Van Devender, 50.
¹³² Troncoso, 75, and Yetman and Van Devender, 51.
Sinaloan Yoremes seemingly lost interest in fighting at that point, and were not ready for the retaliation of Mexican forces in Navojoa in 1884, where the Pan-Mayo army was defeated. Yaquis did not provide significant help in this battle which may have added to Mayo disillusionment with the rebellion. This led to a split within Yoreme communities of those wanting to continue the struggle and those seeking peace. Cajeme was eventually defeated in 1887 and the rebellion all but ended.\textsuperscript{133}

Cajeme’s defeat essentially terminated this Pan-Cáhita military alliance which started during the Conquest in northwest Mexico, and continued throughout colonization and into the post-Independence Period. After several attempts at organizing all Cáhitas of Sonora and Sinaloa, perhaps Yoremes realized that there was no possible way they could sustain their struggle against Mexican forces, and no way that the expulsion of all mestizos from Cáhita lands would remain permanent. This area was too massive, and economically important to investors and Mexican officials to abandon altogether. Yoremes never lost sight of their ultimate objective of getting their lands back, which remained tied to the survival of identity. In order to retrieve their lands, they would need to change the focus of their struggle to their immediate geographical regions.

\textit{Dispossession of Mayo lands in the late Nineteenth Century}

The dispossession of Mayo lands in the Fuerte Valley moved at a steady rate through the late nineteenth century. In attempts to acquire indigenous lands, there were specific instructions found in the El Fuerte circulars of 1856, 1861 and 1878, and guaranteed by the Decree of 1879, which gave officials the legal capacity to expedite several individual land titles that were at the time located on indigenous lands.\textsuperscript{134} The pace of dispossession quickened during the long period

\textsuperscript{133} Yetman and Van Devender, 51. 
\textsuperscript{134} Gill, 63.
of rule by President Porfirio Díaz, known as the Porfiriato (1876-1910). As in other parts of Mexico, Díaz’s policies helped integrate systems of *latifundia* (large estates with peasant labor) and servitude into the Fuerte Valley, a process facilitated by the confiscation of indigenous lands.

Mayo communities scrambled to find their títulos primordiales in order to prove their legitimate rights to the land, as granted by the Spanish government. Despite the effort to follow this legal path, local officials often proceeded with dispossessing indigenous communal lands and selling them to outside individuals.\(^{135}\) Some indigenous communities applied for new land titles at the end of the nineteenth century. Fuentes Posadas pointed out that in 1882, Mayo leaders from Mochicahui and San Miguel petitioned the Sinaloa state government for new land titles, as the titles granted by the Spanish government had been lost.\(^{136}\) The inability to produce títulos primordiales made it easier for local officials to turn down new requests, and put indigenous communities at risk of losing chunks of their land, or their entire communal plots. Some indigenous communities, such as Baimena had legitimate land titles, but most did not.\(^{137}\) Scarcity of títulos primordiales facilitated land dispossession in the nineteenth century.

New agreements reached between powerful Fuerte Valley businessmen and the federal government also increased the rate of land dispossession in the early twentieth century. Filiberto Quintero related that in 1901, hacendado Don Luis Martínez de Castro signed a contract with the ministry of development that allowed him to determine which lands were barren within the state’s territory. As their lands were classified as barren (*baldíos*) the agreement gave the legal justification to strip indigenous people of their land, and be re-appropriated to private

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135 Fuentes Posadas, 96
136 Ibid, 134.
137 Gill, 47.
individuals. The scarcity of land titles again became evident in the early twentieth century, as indigenous communities and mestizo political allies continued their efforts to locate such titles in order to avoid dispossession. For instance, mestizo political organizer José María Robles Luque worked diligently to locate these títulos primordiales, but his unsuccessful attempts led him to conclude that these titles could only be found in Spain. Most indigenous communities could not produce land titles, as baldíos largely ended up in the hands of foreign investors (many of which were Americans) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Mario Gill suggested there was a difference between the land dispossessions of Cánhitas of the northwest and other indigenous people of Mexico. He tied this back to Cánhitas’ slow adoption of Christianity, and their ability to retain their culture. Gill argued that,

Although Yoremes were dispossessed of lands, they never lost their conscience. They were fully aware of their situation, but were never resigned to it, such is evident through the numerous amounts of armed protest they engaged in… Indians of other regions reluctantly accepted this dispossession in exchange for rewards when they reached heaven. Gill went on to argue that Cánhitas were more reluctant to accept Christianity than other indigenous groups. He cited the example pointed out by Father Pérez de Ribas, that Cánhitas had a different concept of the divinity. The argument that Cánhitas, after hundreds of years, did not accept Christianity to the extent of other indigenous people was problematic, and symptomatic of Gill’s limited range of knowledge in Mexican history. An important factor to consider is the large amount of Christian rituals and beliefs that were appropriated by Mayos, and combined to fit within their own rituals and religion. Gill’s assertion that other indigenous people of Mexico reluctantly accepted their

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138 Quintero, 518-519, and Gill, 62.
139 Gill, 15-16.
140 Gill, 16
dispossession with very little resistance was another controversial statement, especially if we analyze other nineteenth century indigenous uprisings in Mexico such as the Caste Wars in Yucatán.\footnote{In Yucatan’s Maya Peasantry and the Origins of the Caste War, Terry Rugeley explained that the causes of the Caste War included the loss of Maya communal lands (land alienation), but also other factors which included increased taxes, poor living conditions, and the differences between Catholicism and Maya religious beliefs.}

What can be extracted from Gill’s arguments is the fact that he did not underestimate the degree to which Cáhitas did not accept the dispossession of their lands without a fight. The Pan-Cahita alliance had ended in the nineteenth century, but Mayos again rose up in the twentieth century. These armed struggles of the twentieth century occurred separately and often simultaneously, as indigenous people now focused on taking back their lands in their immediate geographic region.

Felipe Bachomo’s Rebellion and Mayo Ethnogenesis

Cáhita groups demonstrated different reactions to the ultimate failure of the Cajeme rebellion, which helped shape each of their strategies of struggle in the twentieth century. Yaquis continued their uprising against the Mexican state and federal government during the Porfiriato. Yaquis enjoyed key victories but were soundly defeated. Afraid of future rebellions, President Díaz ordered the systematic repression of Yaquis. He broke up whole communities, forcing men, women, and children to work under slave like conditions in henequen plantations in Yucatán, sugar and tobacco plantations in Oaxaca, and mines in Baja California. Most Yaquis used the confusion of the Mexican Revolution to free themselves from servitude and return to their homeland in Sonora. Back home, Yaquis again rose up. This led to a split between those continuing to fight an independent war for the return of their ancestral lands, and indigenous people joining such leaders as President Porfirio Díaz. Yaquis also aligned with Sonoran

\footnote{In Yucatan’s Maya Peasantry and the Origins of the Caste War, Terry Rugeley explained that the causes of the Caste War included the loss of Maya communal lands (land alienation), but also other factors which included increased taxes, poor living conditions, and the differences between Catholicism and Maya religious beliefs.}
governor José María Maytorena, and General Álvaro Obregón, both of whom promised the return of ancestral lands in exchange for joining their armies.

Sonoran Mayos took a different approach than Yaquis. After the Cajeme defeat, these Mayos essentially returned to work on haciendas, mines, and other forms of servitude. Thousands of Mayos moved north to the Yaqui Valley where there were more jobs. During the forceful removal of Yaquis, many Mayos were also displaced and sold into virtual slavery as Mexican authorities didn’t bother to sort out who was Yaqui and who was Mayo. Mayos in Sonora predominately joined popular revolutionary movements that did not exclusively fight for their particular interests. However, by aligning themselves with such powerful leaders as Álvaro Obregón, Mayo soldiers expected rewards of return of their ancestral lands and a certain amount of autonomy.

Mayos of the Fuerte Valley also remained relatively peaceful at the end of the nineteenth century, yet the Mexican Revolution gave them the opportunity to launch another armed rebellion. Their main objective was to regain their stolen lands. The earliest twentieth century revolutionary organizing of indigenous people in the Fuerte Valley started in 1908 by José María Robles Luque, a mestizo born in the Fuerte Valley, and married to a Mayo woman.

In the town of Camayeca, Robles began to organize Mayos in such indigenous villages as Jahuara, and towns like San Miguel, and Mochicahui, convincing them that Maderismo would give them the chance to reclaim their lands. Perhaps he even read excerpts from Madero’s book *The Presidential Succession of 1910*, in which Madero pointed out the injustice perpetrated by Díaz toward their brothers to the north, and their rights to land, “the Yaquis from time immemorial by right of origin are in quiet and pacific possession of those lands because no one
ever disputed their ownership.” One of the Mayos who became inspired at these meetings was Felipe Bachomo. It is difficult to know if Robles or even Bachomo could have predicted that the latter would soon initiate the biggest Mayo rebellion in the Fuerte Valley since the uprisings against the Spanish Conquest.

Mayo strategies of resistance can be viewed in terms of cycles, and Bachomo’s armed uprising can therefore represent one of these cycles. This insurrection is significant in the fact that nearly all indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley participated, and probably because of this immense collaboration, enjoyed more success than most other uprisings. Yet the forms of resistance that Mayos undertook after Bachomo would not have come to fruition without the foundation that building respect for indigenous tradition, and the fear of future uprisings were based on. Several indigenous cultural practices such as religious ceremonies remained intact, and even grew more uniform among Mayos after Bachomo. This goes to show that Bachomo’s uprising was not focused solely on regaining lost indigenous lands, but was also concerned with the survival of Mayo identity and the religious ceremonies tied to it.

The social interaction among once disparate indigenous groups of the Fuerte Valley eventually led to a more homogenous Yoreme culture. The two main factors that define indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley as Yoremes are a common language and shared cultural/religious practices. According to Mexican anthropologist Gabriel Uriarte, for Yoremes of Sinaloa, “after the indigenous language, traditional festivals are the main factor of cohesion between ethnic identity conglomerates, as it strengthens racial ties and gives presence to the indigenous cultures.” Cáhitas of northern Sinaloa, who shared a common language before the

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143 Uriarte, 11.
Spanish conquest, over time formed a more unified ethnic identity through speaking this mutual language, and performing common religious rituals.

Oral sources confirm that indigenous religious ceremonies and language are the most important cultural identifiers among Mayos. While conducting oral interviews with elders in the Fuerte Valley, I posed a question to each participant, “what is the most important factor that makes someone a Yoreme?” The answer I received in every instance was that comprehension of the indigenous language made a person Yoreme. Another question that I posed was, “what actions, other than speaking in the indigenous language, helped Yoremes decide who belonged to the indigenous community in the early to mid-twentieth century?” The most common response I received for this question was that the participation of individuals in indigenous religious rituals separated Yoremes from Yoris. These shared indigenous practices in northern Sinaloa set the stage for the creation of a shared Yoreme ethnic identity, one which was more fully embraced during and after Bachomo’s rebellion.

Bachomo’s rebellion proved to be a watershed moment in terms of Mayo ethnogenesis. But popular insurgencies did not always unite indigenous groups of Mexico in the modern era. Matthew Restall argued that for indigenous Yucatecos, the most significant Post-Independence uprising in their region, the Caste War that started in 1848, was unable to foster Mayan ethnogenesis, as divisions still remained among these indigenous people. Indigenous groups of the Yucatán resisted ethnogenesis up until the late twentieth century. The exact opposite happened in the Fuerte Valley, as Bachomo’s uprising promoted a sense of community among indigenous people, built on their opposition to the injustices perpetrated by Yoris. The

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144 Based on Oral Interviews Conducted in Sinaloa in 2014. I focus on these two responses in subsequent chapters, as both have particular importance in later years. Less Mayos speak the native language today, and more non-Mayos participate in indigenous religious rituals.

145 Restall, 80.
complicated process of Mayo ethnogenesis had slowly taken shape over centuries within the Fuerte Valley. By referring to themselves as Yoremes, the indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley also acted as a more homogenous indigenous group. In doing so they took a significant step in this process of ethnogenesis and became a more cohesive and strong military force.

Felipe Bachomo was born in 1883 in Buy’ya kus’si (El Parnaso), a small Mayo village located between Jahuara and La Palma. Unable to read or write, Bachomo gained employment on a local hacienda. Like other indigenous people of the early twentieth century, and most Mexican peasants, Bachomo was paid meager wages to work on other people’s lands leading up to the Mexican Revolution.

The Mexican Revolution allowed Mayos to leave their subordination and slave-like conditions on haciendas, and other back-breaking professions. Jesús Ángel Ochoa Zazueta pointed out that, early twentieth century Mayos were, “despised, marginalized, ignored, mediated with outrages of all kinds. Submissive society clearly knew the place in which indigenous people belonged.”

Madero’s main objective was to ensure democracy by overthrowing Díaz, who had been in power for thirty-four years, and had designs on taking office for another term. Madero had no intention of ensuring massive land reform by returning usurped indigenous lands. Perhaps Madero was purposely ambiguous about his ultimate objectives in order to gain a larger following. Thanks to meetings organized by Robles, Mayos at the very least believed that Madero’s cause, and the removal of Díaz would facilitate the return of their lands.

Along with thousands of other indigenous people in the Fuerte Valley, Bachomo joined the ranks of the Revolutionary Army of General Rodolfo Ibarra y Vega in San Blas in 1911. Bachomo exhibited leadership skills and was named First Captain of a predominately-indigenous regiment armed primarily with bows and arrows. Sometimes referred to as the “other army”, this

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146 Ochoa Zazueta, _Bachomo_, 211.
Yoreme force proved vital in securing a victory for Madero’s forces in Sinaloa.\textsuperscript{147} With victory in hand and Porfirio Díaz out of office, indigenous people soon realized that Mexico’s gradual reformist President Madero, would not make it a priority to return their lands. The only option available to Fuerte Valley Mayos to seriously challenge their subordinate place in society and claim back their lands was to rise up again.

The assassination of President Madero and overthrow of government by Victoriano Huerta in 1913 provided another opportunity for Mayos to rebel. Huerta’s actions brought together rebel factions calling themselves Constitutionalists. They united to oust Huerta, whom they viewed as a dictator similar to Díaz, evident through his actions that subverted democracy. Indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley again took up arms, but this time they formed a more loose alliance with the rebel forces.

Mayo forces fought against Huerta, yet their objectives now were to (among other things) reclaim ownership of their lands. Therefore their fight was more directly against the \textit{caciques} (local political bosses) and \textit{hacendados} (owners of estates and plantations) of the Fuerte Valley. A little more than forty years after this rebellion, Mario Gill argued that this war against mestizos, “was not just extermination for being white, but Yoremes’ claims to human rights and respect for their ancestral heritage.”\textsuperscript{148} This fight revolved around land, but because the continuity of cultural practices necessitated the retention of lands, this was also a struggle for the survival of Mayo identity and culture itself.

This argument that tied Bachomo’s fight to recover lands, to the retention of indigenous culture, continues to maintain credibility among scholars today. In \textit{Bachomo: los días del gato}, Ochoa Zazueta constructed a meticulous profile of the Mayo general. This detailed account

\textsuperscript{147} Ochoa Zazueta, 114.  
\textsuperscript{148} Gill, 102.
revealed the historic events leading up to Bachomo’s rebellion. It also provided crucial insight into his family tree, details on particular battles, a through description of his trial, and hundreds of photographs of local historical figures. Ochoa Zazueta also pointed out that Bachomo had clear goals to, “recover indigenous lands, ensure the freedom of all native people, and make use of their autonomy that can only be explained through uses and customs.”  

The stakes were high for Mayos of the Fuerte Valley, whose past rebellions never significantly changed their social and economic standing. The aims of this rebellion were to win back indigenous lands, but also to restore the honor that went along with performing indigenous rituals and other practices that helped form their culture, and were at risk of disappearing.

A major step in the formation of indigenous identity came as a result of Yoreme self-representation. Proof that indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley came to refer to themselves as Yoremes is provided through a letter written in 1913. In this letter, Mochicahui Governor, Pedro Baymori, who was indigenous, wrote to another Yoreme leader. In this letter (riddled with grammar and spelling errors in Spanish), Baymori asked this other leader for the following,

It would be much appreciated if you could arrange for most of the lloremes that are over there to come here closer, and those who enlist to all have bows. And make more bows and arrows for those without them, because here we are unable to do it. Also tell them to gather together here in Mochicahui.

This letter exhibits the overwhelming indigenous support for Bachomo’s rebellion, even among those with well-established careers within the local government. Baymori’s pleas for weapons also showed that Mayos created an efficient communications network.

The most important element to this letter was that Baymori referred to other indigenous people as Yoremes. Unlike other correspondence written by indigenous people in the early

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149 Ochoa Zazueta, 284.
150 Letter from Baymori to an unidentified Yoreme leader in 1913, Quintero, 685.
twentieth century, that usually refer to themselves as *indio* or *indigena*, the use of the word “Iloreme” is significant. One of the meanings of the word “Yoreme” is those that respect tradition, defining themselves as such meant that they were dedicated to the defense of their identity. Referring to indigenous people of other villages as Yoremes signified their recognition of the common cause that they fought for in this rebellion. This represented a momentous step in Mayo ethnogenesis. Identities, as I mentioned earlier, depend not only on classification by the outside world, but also in self-representation. By choosing to self-represent as Yoremes, indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley recognized themselves as a common people, and took collective action to defend their land and identity.

Bachomo’s rebellion became a rallying call for all Mayos, a moment to understand that their shared practices made them a more homogenous group, and only by uniting could they keep their land and their cultural practices intact. According to Mayo elder Carlos Salcedo of Camajoa, “When Yoremes came together to fight for Bachomo, they were defending their religion and culture, not just their land. The people from many different villages saw themselves as one people. This is the time when some indigenous people here began to call themselves Mayos Yoremes.”

This quote comes from a sixty-year old instructor of the Mayo language who was not alive during the rebellion, and got this information from second-hand oral accounts. It is difficult to gauge the reliability of his contention that indigenous people started to define themselves as Mayo-Yoreme. But at the very least, thanks to Baymori’s letter, we know that indigenous people started to self-define as Yoremes either before or during Bachomo’s rebellion. Yoreme culture, like indigenous religion, continued to be an intricate process that had taken shape over centuries of struggle. Ritual became tied to identity and culture as indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley became increasingly unified, as many of them now identified as Yoremes.

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Bachomo, having distinguished himself as a proven leader during the Madero campaign, was named general and primary leader of the new indigenous military movement. What set apart this new rebellion from previous ones was the sheer amount of Mayos who rose up with Bachomo. Most scholars that have written about Bachomo claim that he had around 6,000 soldiers at his disposal who were always ready to fight. \textsuperscript{152} Mayos from such mixed towns as Mochicahui, San Miguel, and La Florida, and Mayo villages like Tehueco, Pochotal, Camajoa, La Palma, Camayeca, and various others united as a military force. \textsuperscript{153}

Other rebellions the indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley joined since the eighteenth century were led by Yaquis like Cajeme, or mestizos such as Madero. Perhaps this movement gained such an immense following because it was headed by a local Mayo leader, with specific objectives that would benefit all indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley. This alliance of indigenous people from numerous villages across the Fuerte Valley again showed that Mayos had become more of a united people, allied behind a common cause.

Some mestizos also joined Bachomo’s army. One of these mestizos, Jesús Ruiz was second in command. This raises an interesting point as to whether it was ethnicity, or practices that decided if someone belonged to the Mayo community. \textsuperscript{154} Another mestizo leader under Bachomo, Armando Borboa had criminal tendencies, which may account for why his particular regiment so viciously burned, raped, and sacked mestizos at an alarming rate in the Fuerte Valley. \textsuperscript{155} As the leader of this army, Bachomo became liable for Borboa’s actions later on.

\textsuperscript{152} Mario Gill and Filiberto Quintero are among the many scholars that give this estimate, Ochoa Zazueta gives a more conservative estimate of 3,500 Mayo soldiers.
\textsuperscript{153} Ochoa Zazueta, 225.
\textsuperscript{154} I will analyze this question in much more detail in later chapters.
\textsuperscript{155} Gill, 122
Apparently Bachomo did not reprimand his men for such discretions to the extent that other revolutionary generals like Emiliano Zapata had with his officers.\textsuperscript{156} Bachomo brought together a large number of soldiers to battle, partially because nearly everyone in the indigenous community fought for him; blind, old, young, ceremonial dancers, officials, almost every man saw time in the battlefield. Older women became specialists in making bows and arrows, and children foraged for food. The majority of Mayos in the community followed the armies to the battlefield and helped in some way, except for some younger women who stayed behind in the village and cared for immobile elders.\textsuperscript{157}

At first these Mayo armies fought with bows and arrows, but after winning several battles, began acquiring and using guns they recovered from their enemies. Another way Bachomo got guns was through his secret (although now very popular) pact with U.S. capitalist Benjamin Francis Johnston. Johnston provided rebels with the weapons necessary to carry out their revolt, and in return they did not raid his sugar cane producing haciendas. Near the end of Bachomo’s campaign, his forces were armed with seven millimeter Mausers, and Winchester and Remington 30-30 rifles.\textsuperscript{158}

Modern technology served an important function for rebellion and survival, but so did ancient technology and knowledge. For instance, Bachomo’s forces relied on ancient petroglyphs to tell them where they could find water. Jorge Robles, a Mayo elder from San Miguel related that, “in Camayeca, there is a hill where the river runs underground, so water never dried. Bachomo knew water was there because he could read the petroglyphs, so they camped there.

\textsuperscript{156} Zapata’s punishment of his subordinates is well documented by such authors as Samuel Brunk in \textit{Emiliano Zapata: Revolution & Betrayal in Mexico}.  
\textsuperscript{157} Ochoa Zazueta, 284.  
\textsuperscript{158} Ochoa Zazueta, 293
The hill also let them see if the enemy was coming. Water was completely vital to the survival of soldiers and their horses, as was tactical advantage of knowledge of the terrain, and their ability to gain advantageous positions vis-à-vis their enemy. Bachomo thus relied on the ancient knowledge of his ancestors in order to gain a tactical advantage. It is almost certain that Bachomo also used his familiarity of the local topography to his benefit, depending on the fact that in many areas heavy vegetation reduced visibility to only a few dozen yards. This heavy vegetation also prevented large cavalries from pursuing his men.

Bachomo’s forces raided haciendas and towns across the Fuerte Valley. One of the most documented raids was on the large town of Los Mochis in April 1913. First-hand accounts mostly recall the terror felt by town residents as Mayo forces sacked haciendas, businesses, and homes of the wealthy. As in any war, atrocities were committed, but apparently most of these were perpetrated and ordered by Bachomo’s subordinates such as Armando Borboa. The impact of mestizos witnessing the destructive force of a few thousand indigenous soldiers must have been essential to their realization that this army could potentially change the social and economic dynamics of the entire Fuerte Valley. This made the defeat of Bachomo a crucial necessity to the powerful individuals in this region.

As rich hacendados were at risk of losing their lands and livelihoods, they made the demise of this uprising a top priority. They pulled their resources and launched a major counteroffensive. Victoriano Huerta’s forces were stretched thin throughout Mexico so they had very little influence in the Fuerte Valley. This phase of the rebellion in the Fuerte Valley became a struggle between Mayos and hacendados over land rights. These hacendados and caciques

160 Beals, 1945, 50.
161 Quintero, 714.
162 Ochoa Zazueta, 326.
organized para-military forces called “village guerillas.” They were placed in charge of
defending properties as well as hunting down and killing Bachomo’s men.\textsuperscript{163}

As the insurgency claimed lives on both sides, Bachomo attempted to minimize civilian
casualties, yet hacendados did not follow these rules of conduct, as they often terrorized Mayo
villages. As Alejandro Inzunza recalls the fate of some Yoreme men,

They were hung, they were killed. There was a patio in San Miguel, where
Indians hung for seven or eight straight days, And who were they? They were not
Yoreme soldiers. These acts violated their basic rights. There was also a
hacendado, a cacique in San Vicente de Ahome, he did the same as his friends in
San Miguel. There every night would be hung men, in a corner, in a circle, with
their arms out, stocked like hung fish.\textsuperscript{164}

These atrocities committed against Mayos during the rebellion exhibited the extremes to which
hacendados were willing to go in order to stop the uprising, and the disregard they showed for
the lives of indigenous inhabitants. It also showed that Bachomo’s forces must have understood
what was ultimately at stake here. By continuing with their campaign, despite lynchings of their
indigenous brothers, Mayo soldiers must have ascertained that their struggle for justice
outweighed the unfortunate repercussions. The perpetual and overwhelming support of the Mayo
community also suggests that the majority of indigenous people were willing to endure potential
violence in exchange for the opportunities this struggle provided.

Victoriano Huerta was defeated by the summer of 1914, which led to new divisions
between the revolutionary forces, and the final stage of the armed phase of the Mexican
Revolution. Villa and Zapata sought more radical reform and were referred to as
Conventionalists, as they continued to fight against the moderates Carranza and Obregon, and

\textsuperscript{163} Ochoa Zazueta, 238.
\textsuperscript{164} Alejandro Inzunza, Interview by James Mestaz, Los Goros, Municip. Ahome, Sinaloa, Mexico, February, 14, 2014.
their forces known as Constitutionalists. At first Bachomo stayed neutral as he always had done. His rebellion continued to focus on particular objectives of land and cultural rights.

Eventually Villista General Orestes Pereira visited Sinaloa, and for reasons that are not clear, Bachomo committed to an alliance with Villa. Exuding a paternalistic tone, Mario Gill argued that this decision revealed Bachomo’s, “political ignorance and lack of tactical and strategic military knowledge.” It is true that Villa’s forces were essentially surrounded and greatly outnumbered by Obregon’s army (many of which were Mayo soldiers from the Mayo Valley) in Sonora, and by Carranza’s Constitutionalists in Sinaloa. Yet Gill did not know exactly what Bachomo’s motives may have been, and his description of the indigenous general as “ignorant” revealed a tinge of racism that was still prevalent at the time he wrote these words in the 1950s.

More recent accounts highlighted some of the tactical errors committed by Bachomo. Probably the biggest mistake the general made was to leave the Fuerte Valley and fight elsewhere. Ochoa Zazueta pointed out that, “knowing the entire stretch of river valleys from Bacorehui, Barobampo to Tehueco, [Bachomo] could elude the constitutionalists…his strength lay in an impregnable territory and a hidden army in indigenous geographical environments.” His decision to fight outside of familiar territory left the Mayo army exposed to enemy artillery, and negated his tactical advantages. It also led to some Mayos questioning why he would cease his fight to retrieve lands of the Fuerte Valley.

Bachomo admitted his error later and disbanded most of his army, as he did not want his soldiers to die for a cause that was not theirs. After fighting a few battles in Sinaloa with a reduced force, and suffering defeats in Sonora, Bachomo eventually surrendered in February

165 Gill, 124.
166 Ochoa Zazueta, 366.
167 Gill, 124.
1915. Constitutionalist Colonel Guadalupe Cruz had offered guarantees and pardons for those surrendering. This ended Bachomo’s rebellion, but not his impact on Mayos, or the history of the Fuerte Valley.

Bachomo was executed in Los Mochis on October 24, 1916, after being found guilty of murder, theft, and many other crimes. The largest outcry among politicians and the court was against the murder of an American named José Tays, which showed the immense value placed on foreign investment. Unsurprisingly, no hacendados were implicated in the murders of innocent indigenous people they had lynched, which inversely showed the minimal value placed on Mayo lives. Indigenous villagers came from all over the valley to pay their respects to the fallen general, each depositing a stone on top of his grave.

Bachomo’s family asked for the right to exhume his body in order to perform the necessary funeral rights. Local authorities were afraid that such a ceremony would provoke an uprising and denied this request. After six years of asking for the right to exhume Bachomo’s remains, Mayo leaders were finally given permission in 1922. His body was taken to El Publico, located on the side of the Tastes Canal. A ramada was constructed in order to enact a traditional funeral, in which Pascola dancers performed, and women arrived with the specific purpose of crying. After the funeral, his remains were laid to rest in a secret grave, the location of which is still a mystery, tightly guarded by Bachomo’s family.¹⁶⁸

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¹⁶⁸ Ochoa Zazueta, 564-573.
found it necessary to change their names and even move to other villages.\textsuperscript{169} Flor Escalante, a Mayo elder from Jahuara recalled that,

> We were related to Felipe Bachomo, and our last name was also Bachomo. But we changed our name to Escalante when I was a little girl. Everyone was afraid. The hacendados were looking for the family of Bachomo. We lived in Jahuara, and my uncle made my mom bring me to (the town of) Constancia. The lagoon there was filled with men looking for our family, they wanted to kill my dad but we escaped.\textsuperscript{170}

The extremes that hacendados went to in order to prevent future rebellions, and relative impunity they enjoyed, shows the difficulty Mayos encountered in fomenting future uprisings. This left them to seek new forms of resistance, as they changed their tactics in the next few decades.\textsuperscript{171}

Bachomo’s death forced Mayos to seek other strategies of resistance, but it was largely these insurrections that gave them the strength to endure. Mario Gill explained that after Bachomo’s death, “Mayos did not end their struggle, and they believe he is in heaven fighting for them..Bachomo was converted to a native Christ. He can bring rain in drought and protect them from floods.”\textsuperscript{172} Mayos had created a very intricate religion that fused Christian beliefs and practices. The fact that they believed Bachomo controlled natural phenomenon like rain, that would affect their physical environment, exhibits the truly unique nature of their religion and belief system. This idea that tied Bachomo to nature remains consistent with Mayo connections to their natural environment. The indigenous word \textit{Juyya Annia} describes Mayo belief in “the world of nature”, and positions them directly within this world. This role that Yoremes played

\textsuperscript{169} Ochoa Zazueta, 21.
\textsuperscript{170} Flor Escalante, Interview by James Mestaz, Jahuara, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, July 13, 2014.
\textsuperscript{171} I analyze this shift in Mayo resistance strategies (including use of irrigation infrastructure) in greater detail in the next chapter.
\textsuperscript{172} Gill, 128.
within their ecosystem was vital to the continuity of their culture in the Fuerte Valley in the twentieth century.¹⁷³

Many indigenous people today still believe in this notion that Bachomo advocates on behalf of them. Professor Loreto Coronado, an expert on Fuerte Valley Mayo communities, pointed out that, “indigenous people still believe Bachomo can change things on earth, some even think he will return to help them reclaim their lands.”¹⁷⁴ The idea of Bachomo returning to earth supports the notion that Mayos do in fact still view him as an indigenous Christ. As some Catholics believe Jesus will return to this earth, Mayos believe Bachomo will also return.

In the stories told by their ancestors which keep alive the memory of Bachomo as a liberator, Mayos today remember him as a champion of the downtrodden indigenous people of the region. Mayo elder Flavio Guerrero of Jahuara explained that,

He was a hero and defender, he fought for us after they took our lands, there was nobody else like him. Bachomo revealed the injustices, and in his time Yoremes began to wake up and take action. After he died, there was still inequality, but indigenous people knew about it now and did things about it.¹⁷⁵

Bachomo gave hope to thousands of Mayos even after his death. Motivated by Bachomo’s actions, Mayos found alternatives to armed rebellion in order to affect change.

One way to understand Mayo practices after Bachomo is to analyze to what extent his original objectives were met. Ochoa Zazueta pointed out that Bachomo won back ancestral lands that had been taken from them, yet there were no decrees to properly document this transfer of

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¹⁷³ In Por la Tierra y por los Santos, Figueroa described the concept Juyya Annia in greater detail. I focus on this connection between Mayos and their natural environment in subsequent chapters.
ownership back to indigenous people. Under Bachomo indigenous people recovered de facto possession of their land and ethnic sovereignty, and held onto it until the Cárdenas reforms.\textsuperscript{176}

The extensive research provided in Ochoa Zazueta’s six-hundred page biography notwithstanding, there was no mention as to the amount of Mayo lands recovered by Bachomo, or how much of this land was retained in the years following his death. Agrarian documents of the 1920s and 1930s show that a great deal of Mayo villages remained intact, and were situated next to private mestizo landholdings. This suggests that indigenous people either recovered some of their lands, were able to fend off mestizo land grabs of the early twentieth century, or a combination of both. Either way, in hindsight it can be said that Bachomo at the very least minimized the dispossession of ancestral lands until indigenous people were able to legalize their holdings through agrarian reform laws of the early twentieth century.

Another important factor here is how Bachomo’s insurrection may have allowed Mayo identity to survive. As Ochoa Zazueta, Gill, and myself write about, and Carlos Salcedo stated in an interview, Bachomo’s objectives were not focused on just land, but they were also concerned with retaining indigenous cultural/religious practices. In this manner it would appear that leading up to this insurrection, cultural autonomy, including rituals, and local governance were in real danger of disappearing. Later in this dissertation, I show examples of how the loss of access to land and the Fuerte River, as well as the dwindling availability of natural raw materials has strained the integrity of Mayo culture at the end of the twentieth century. Land, raw materials, and cultural practice were inevitably intertwined. Bachomo’s fight for land was also a struggle, in this case a successful one, for the persistence of Mayo culture.

\textsuperscript{176} Ochoa Zazueta, 298-300. President Lázaro Cárdenas made Mayo land ownership in the Fuerte Valley (and among many campesinos throughout Mexico) official in the late 1930s through his extensive agrarian reform program.
The survival of Mayo religious practices up to present day attests to Bachomo’s success in helping to keep indigenous culture alive in the Fuerte Valley. Mayo elder Alejandro Inzunza explained that, “We see Bachomo as a savior for us. If it was not for him I would not be talking to you today, because my parents would not have survived.” Mr. Inzunza was most likely referring to the fact that his parents’ indigenous identity, and therefore their very existence were in danger. Following this reasoning, he would have been born even if Bachomo did not rise up. But since Mayo identity and cultural autonomy would have disappeared in the Fuerte Valley, he would not be a Yoreme, he would not exist in this sense.

**Conclusion**

Bachomo’s defeat meant that armed insurrection was no longer a viable option among indigenous people in the Fuerte Valley. Unable to accomplish wide-spread social change through Mayo military alliance, indigenous people had to settle for the victory of keeping their culture intact. Indigenous military unity resulted in cultural cohesion among Mayos, but taking up new practices that could potentially antagonize the powerful oligarchy would have to be approached with caution. It is perhaps the lessons learned from their failed armed insurrection that resulted in Mayos taking divergent approaches to implementing irrigation infrastructure, starting in the 1920s. The execution of plans to use the Fuerte River in both conventional and new ways constituted the next step in Mayo cycles of resistance.

In the early twentieth century the Fuerte Valley endured massive changes as outsiders ravaged its physical environment in order to establish large scale agricultural operations. These

alterations depended largely on the existence of an unequal system that placed Mayo indigenous 
people at the bottom, relying on their labor, and making their lands available to outsiders. These 
inequities surfaced due to patterns of mistreatment and land dispossession, which had been 
practiced, and nearly perfected over hundreds of years. Tracking these patterns has allowed me 
to describe Mayo cycles of resistance, which helped to ensure the survival of their cultural 
practices, but also united these indigenous people into a more cohesive group. Focusing on 
indigenous actions in relation to their physical environment and with Yoris, I have set the stage 
for analyzing motives for engaging in both conventional and new practices using the Fuerte 
River in the years 1926 to 1970.

The diverse physical environment of the Fuerte Valley is vital to understanding the 
relationships between Mayos and Yoris, which led to an unequal system, and thus regular 
indigenous uprisings. The unique topography and ecosystems of the Fuerte Valley allowed this 
region to remain relatively intact leading up to the twentieth century. This, along with the 
combination of uprisings and migration from the Mayo Valley, helped to ensure the existence of 
vibrant indigenous communities into the twentieth century.

The transition of Fuerte Valley indigenous people into a united Yoreme group can only 
be understood by first examining the many strands of cultural influence, and practices of the 
earliest inhabitants of this region. The shared experiences and consequent repression at the hands 
of first Spaniards, and then Mexicans, led to indigenous uprisings. These rebellions, the 
implementation of centralized ceremonial locations, the consolidation of indigenous people into 
mission settlements, and the acceptance of migrating Mayos from Sonora, enabled Cáhitas of the 
Fuerte Valley to eventually define themselves as Yoremes by the early twentieth century.
This Pan-Mayo unity and ethnogenesis took a major step forward during Felipe Bachomo’s rebellion. Indigenous people in the Fuerte Valley identified as Yoremes at this time. Self-representation was a key component to communal action as the use of the ethnonym Yoreme was one of the factors that unified once-disparate indigenous villages. Bachomo gained unparalleled support from indigenous communities that rallied behind a common cause of defending both land and culture. Bachomo’s eventual decision to fight outside the Fuerte Valley negated his tactical advantages and led to his demise.

The ultimate failure of this insurrection to legitimately challenge the extant power structure in the Fuerte Valley was a vital factor as to why Mayos took on less uniform practices in the 1920s through 1960s. The irrigation technology used by outsiders, and the experiences Mayos had in acting as the labor force to construct such irrigation infrastructure, convinced some indigenous people to begin using such technology as dams, pumps, and canals for their own purposes of communal subsistence agriculture. I will discuss Mayo uses of hydraulic technology and its effects on their communities in its entirety in chapter two.
Chapter 2
Their Technology, Our Way: Mayo Uses of Fuerte River Infrastructure, 1926 to 1942

On May 13, 1931, agrarian leaders from the Mayo towns Camayeca and Los Goros collectively petitioned Mexico’s Ministry of Agriculture and Development for the rights to use a water pump to irrigate their crops. The filing of this petition exhibited a particular strategy which indigenous communities of the Fuerte Valley undertook in order to obtain irrigation water in the postrevolutionary period. Several Mayo communities found allies in both corporations and state agencies in their quest to secure irrigation water from the mid-1920s through early 1940s. This struggle over water also brought into relief different social positions within indigenous communities as it created incentives to divide people. The legitimization of water rights also allowed Mayo villages to protect their farming practices which were intimately linked to their social structure. This chapter analyzes how some Mayos used petitions and alliances in order to access river water in new ways from 1926 to 1942, which in turn kept their communities intact.

New agricultural opportunities for indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley became possible as legislative changes in Mexico regulated the irrigation privileges of large corporations, and opened the door for small farmers and communities to secure irrigation rights. Mexico passed the Law of Irrigation with Federal Waters in 1926, which nationalized private irrigation systems, legislated construction of new irrigation systems, and established the National Irrigation Commission (CNI).¹ This new law helped curb the power of some of the major agricultural corporations in the Fuerte Valley, such as the United Sugar Companies. Such corporations continued to enjoy irrigation rights, but federal agencies started to grant permission to more companies that proportioned water to small farmers, and at times gave rights to smallholders

¹ Enge and Whiteford, The Keepers of Water and Earth.
directly. All stakeholders were required to share rivers and eventually some Mayo villages came
to rely on irrigation water for both their cultural and physical survival.

In the mid-1920s, some Mayos continued to use fence rows and weirs (tapones) to divert
river water, steal irrigation water, or rely solely on rain water for irrigation. Others embraced the
use of water pumps, canals, aqueducts, and dams to meet their crops’ water requirements. In
contrast to the private, entrepreneurial interests in the Fuerte Valley, most Mayo farmers who
adopted hydraulic technology used it for subsistence agriculture. The federal government claimed
ultimate authority on surface water while corporations, communities, and individuals alike were
required to petition the Secretaría de Agricultura y Fomento (Ministry of Agriculture and
Development) for water concessions. Some ejidos received water rights attached to their
dotaciones (communal land grants of usufruct use). From the mid-1920s through early 1940s,
Mayo communities and individuals formally applied for recognition of their water rights as well
as for permission to use new water pumps and build concrete-lined canals.

Mayos utilized such petitions to gain access to enough irrigation water to ensure the
survival of farming practices, while community boundaries and terms of member recognition
shifted and changed. The introduction to this dissertation explained how new irrigation projects
decreased the flow of the Fuerte River and prevented Mayos living along the banks of the river
from using floodplain agriculture, a system they had employed for centuries. Most Mayos started
to depend solely on rainwater to grow their crops, which was not a completely reliable source
that often limited harvests.

Mayos had a long-standing connection with agriculture based on a reciprocal agreement
in which they combined water, earth, and seed, to create plant life, which in turn helped sustain
them. Now that water started to disappear from the equation, some indigenous people took it
upon themselves to find new ways to extend their connection to the river. Such efforts reflected desires for both self-preservation and so that the cycle of life would persevere. Irrigation infrastructure became the answer for some indigenous villages and individuals. The ability of some Mayos to gain access to dams, pumps, and aqueducts showed that particular villages were more prepared to adapt to changes in the physical and political landscape. It also reflected the growing multiplicity of indigenous people’s practices in the Fuerte Valley which facilitated the resilience of their culture.

Irrigation technology helped some Mayo farmers create productive agricultural lands. Having experienced land dispossession throughout the colonial era, and into the early twentieth century, indigenous people learned strategies on how to defend their property. Regimes and laws dealing with land tenure changed throughout Mexican history. Since the nineteenth century the one common thread was that government leaders—at least wanted it to appear—that all land was used productively. This goal of maintaining productive lands was directly tied into the Mexican state’s notion of economic stability and growth. Apparently some of the tenets of positivism, or social progress through economic solidity and order, still survived even after the Mexican Revolution.

Mayo communities secured ejidos in the 1930s and sometimes water rights were attached. Some water grants were not sufficient, forcing some indigenous ejidos to apply for additional water dotaciones or make agreements with individuals or companies to sell them water. This irrigation helped them increase the agricultural output of their lands and decreased the surface area not under cultivation. Land productivity made it more difficult for outsiders to establish the argument that these properties were barren, and claim them for themselves. Perhaps
more importantly it showed the federal government that the land they were given usufruct use of was utilized efficiently.

Mayo uses of irrigation technology from 1926 to 1942 assisted in community reproduction and land preservation. Retaining their productive agricultural land also made it easier for indigenous people to keep their surrounding forests, pastures, and river banks, which were sometimes included in their ejidal grants. These territories were vital for performing religious rituals and accessing raw materials for these same ceremonies. Indigenous religious practices in turn facilitated the persistence of their social structure and community. Their culture also adapted and was altered in accordance with both internal and external forces, yet nevertheless persevered.

The process of requesting an ejido restructured Mayo villages as they negotiated this new opportunity for legalizing their land, while avoiding pitfalls that could potentially divide their communities. Indigenous villages elected agrarian leaders to petition the government for these agrarian rights, and at times these elected officials also found companies and individuals to proportion water to them. The actions of agrarian leaders revealed interesting information about how their villages chose who would represent them, leading to questions as to whether the leaders represented the best interests of the entire village, or if their motivations were driven by aspirations of personal financial gain. Mayo ejidos were also willing to align with postrevolutionary government agencies in order to gain the rights they needed to keep both their farming practices as well as their communities intact.

In addition to alliances with the federal government, agreements made with both individuals and corporations to share irrigation water with indigenous communities, showed a mix of capricious, tenuous, or sometimes mutually beneficial situations. In response to
deleterious, or inversely, positive treatment they received in securing these deals, Mayo communities used a diverse array of tactics to obtain advantageous arrangements. The capacity to reach such agreements, or break them when they no longer served their interests, revealed the ingenuity and plurality of Mayo village practices in the postrevolutionary period.

This chapter analyzes how from 1926 to 1942 some Mayo communities in the Fuerte Valley used irrigation infrastructure for farming, and through a variety of local strategies altered internal and external social relations to keep their communities intact. I will use case studies of three Mayo villages, Los Goros, La Palma, and Bamoa. Each village’s stories of land reform and irrigation water usage revealed the heterogeneity of indigenous people’s approaches to specific obstacles. The growing plurality of Mayo practices, through their adoption of hydrological technology, resulted in multiple and complex river histories in the Fuerte Valley from the mid-1920s through early 1940s. These river histories show that although the struggle to access river water sometimes divided communities, the indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley combined social, cultural, and political practices to ensure the survival of their villages and culture.

The Fuerte River and Mayo Reciprocity

The Fuerte River had long played an integral role in the lives of the indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley, dating back before the arrival of Spaniards. The importance of the river derived from its utility of providing such essentials as drinking water, irrigation for crops, and fish to eat. In exchange for the gifts the river provided, Mayos reciprocated by performing religious rituals to honor the river and acted as its guardians. This approach to giving back to the river separated Mayos from Yori inhabitants of the Fuerte Valley, and helped to distinguish the two groups throughout the twentieth century.
The importance of the Fuerte River on the Mayos of the Fuerte Valley was expressed through their settlement patterns along the river itself. Mexican ethnologist Hugo López explained this connection between Mayos and the Fuerte River, “The spatial structure and policy of the old villages derive in the first place from their relation to the Fuerte River, it appears this way especially, because of the impact of agricultural development in the fertile plains.”

Indigenous villages were therefore created and maintained on the banks of the Fuerte River because they depended on the planned overflow of the water to irrigate their crops. Interdependence with the river took shape over hundreds of years as the Mayo came to view themselves as protectors of this riverine system.

Some brief references to the relationship between Mayos and the Fuerte River notwithstanding, the complexities of this historical relationship have been largely ignored by scholars. I am therefore compelled to rely on Mayo voices to tell this story. The Mayo people’s continued reliance on the river led to it taking on anthropomorphic traits, as Mayo elder Daniel Galaviz of Camajoa explained that,

The river itself is alive. It is an entity that breathes, thinks, and reacts. It serves all living creatures. The relationship is reciprocal. Water provides life for Yoremes, but we are also serving the river. This function is ancestral, a vital component to our history. We see the river as a blessing, the ability to access water for so many things is a blessing. For this we must pay homage through rituals, to pay tribute for all the river has done for us.

River water acted as the life blood for the Mayo people who felt obligated to treat the river with reverence. It is no coincidence that the Fuerte River was the centerpiece behind such ceremonies as the San Juan ritual which bound indigenous people to the river.

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It is in fact their reciprocal connection to the Fuerte River that help to define Mayos as an ethnic group. Because of their understanding of the river as vital to their survival, indigenous people in turn performed religious rituals there. Mayo elder Librado Cuadros of La Palma explained the importance of some of these rituals,

The river symbolizes knowledge. The Fuerte River is the river of knowledge because Yoremes could extract information from it. When one wanted something from the river, including knowledge, they would request it from the river by singing and dancing. We have to give back if we are to receive.4

The river itself provided water necessary for the sustenance of Mayo bodies. The river also took on human characteristics through its role as a local historian, or even oracle of sorts. Mayos communicated with the river to learn information and did so by practicing various religious rituals. Yet these rituals also acted as an offering to the river, it is what the Mayos gave back in exchange for both knowledge, and for the water that kept them alive.

By the twentieth century one of the ways in which Mayos communicated with the river and paid it back for its water was through the performance of religious rituals in which indigenous music played a pivotal role. Because of the inclusion of new types of instruments, the type of music used in these ceremonies has transformed over several hundred years. According to Mexican ethnomusicologist José Sandoval Gómez,

Mayos have been integrating Yori musical instruments into their religious ceremonies and celebrations dating as far back as the late sixteenth century when Jesuits introduced them to the local indigenous populations. They were taught to make the instruments by the Jesuits, and learned Catholic songs. The Jesuits had hopes of evangelizing them through music. Mayos adopted this music and made it their own, as part of their syncretic religious rituals.5

The history of the Fuerte Valley is filled with several examples of indigenous people appropriating outside technologies for their own uses. Mayo use of musical instruments is one

5 José Sandoval Gómez, Interview by James Mestaz, Los Mochis, Municip. Ahome, Sinaloa, Mexico, August 2, 2014.
example of an adaptation technique that allowed them to maintain their sacred bond with their natural environment.

The ability of Mayos to find innovative uses of the Fuerte River helped them to keep their communities intact. By the mid-twentieth century, music played an integral role in connecting indigenous people to their natural landscape, and particularly to the Fuerte River. Mayo elders Narciso Bachomo and Carlos Salcedo of Camajoa explained that,

The river was a place where you could hear music and become inspired. The walls, or chasms created by the river acted as a natural barrier to capture the sounds of the music better. The music would inspire those who heard it. The river was a special place. Yoremes gathered to make speeches, to make requests to God, to make music. They wanted to make contact with the spirits, with the soul, to learn to communicate with the sun, with the deer.\footnote{Narciso Bachomo and Carlos Salcedo, Interview by James Mestaz, Camajoa, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, March 21, 2014.}

The Rio Zuaque acted as a meeting place for Mayo people for generations, as it continued to do even after outsiders came in and diverted its water for irrigation, and changed its name to the Fuerte River. Use of the river’s rock wall formations to create a natural amphitheater expressed the important connections that Mayos made with their natural landscape. These links were vital to Mayos performing religious ceremonies to fulfill their obligations to the Fuerte River.

This idea of reciprocity between indigenous people and their river systems was not unique to the Fuerte Valley. For instance, environmental scholar Cassandra Brooks discussed the reciprocal connection the Wabanaki people of the northeastern United States developed with their river system,

Wabanaki people had developed an embedded knowledge based on longstanding resource use and reciprocal relationships of exchange with their human and ‘other-than-human’ relations in this place…The seasonal cycles of scarcity and abundance had taught them that overexploitation of the river they belonged to would result in dire consequences for their own survival. Wabanaki people
developed a matrix of stories, ceremonies, and subsistence practices that enabled long-term survival in the places to which they belonged.\footnote{Brooks, Cassandra and Brooks, Lisa. “The Reciprocity Principle and Traditional Ecological Knowledge” \textit{International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies}.}

For such indigenous groups as the Mayo and Wabanaki these systems of reciprocity were dependent on their obligation to perform rituals that paid back their rivers and nature in general. Another important role these indigenous groups played was their practice of restraint in avoiding overexploitation of their ecosystems. It appears that such indigenous groups understood that they were under a contract in which they were welcome to enjoy the benefits of the river as long as they did not affect its ability to run its natural course.

The Fuerte River (or Rio Zuaque as Mayos referred to it), was therefore vital to the Mayo people for several reasons. The centrality of the river in Mayo life was reflected in their cosmology. Elders and teachers of the Mayo language, Narciso Bachomo and Carlos Salcedo explained that,

\begin{quote}
The Word Zuaque comes from the native Mayo word Zua, it means reasoning and intelligence. Yoremes are those concentrating on the part of reasoning, and that is our ethnicity. Then the whites officially changed the name of the river to Fuerte. But a name change made no difference. The natural connection of the ethnic Yoremes to the river remained, even until today.\footnote{Narciso Bachomo and Carlos Salcedo, Interview by James Mestaz, Camajoa, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, March 21, 2014.}
\end{quote}

Before the incursion of Spaniards in the sixteenth century, Mayos had a special relationship with the Fuerte River, which continued to define them as a people thereafter. According to these linguists, Mayo culture was centered on their ability to reason. Their connection to the river allowed Mayos to retain their wisdom through reasoning.

The centrality of the Fuerte River to indigenous identity helps to explain the lengths Mayos took to retain their symbolic relationship. In the years 1926 to 1942 the Mayo used
irrigation infrastructure to extend their connection to the Fuerte River. Mayo motivations for using such new technology likely came from recognizing the success outsiders like Benjamin Johnston had in the Fuerte Valley, even though his purposes were quite different.

The United Sugar Company Takes Control of the Fuerte Valley

The United Sugar Companies was a conglomerate, consisting of subsidiaries under the ultimate control of Johnston. In 1901 Johnston’s Sinaloa Sugar Company was granted a water concession for use of waters of the Fuerte River, and he renewed this concession each year to irrigate his sugar plantations. His businesses made a steady profit, but were not overly successful, and he even accrued some debt. The Mexican Revolution devalued the peso enormously, and Johnston chose to pay off his debts with pesos at this point, as most of his fortune was still invested in American dollars and gold. Johnston’s businesses also benefitted from the shortage of sugar and alcohol during World War I, which helped him accumulate more wealth than most local entrepreneurs.9 By the end of the first World War and the Mexican Revolution, Johnston stood poised to use the Fuerte River’s waters to consolidate his power.

One of the companies under the United Sugar umbrella was the Compañía Explotadora de las Aguas del Rio Fuerte, or “Water Utilization Company of the Fuerte River.” In 1918, it received a concession for the use of eight cubic meters per second from the Fuerte River from the Ministry of Development and Agriculture. The water was used by the company’s clients, which consisted of the sugar producing haciendas and ranchos of the United Sugar Companies, for agricultural purposes. In 1917, Compañía Explotadora alone used over 252 million cubic

9 Quintero, 547.
meters of water from the Fuerte River, in which it paid the government a sum of just over 12,000 pesos.\textsuperscript{10}

This concession accounts for a great deal of water even by today’s standards. Further, the amount paid for this water was miniscule considering that in 1924 United Sugar properties were appraised at seventeen million U.S. dollars. By this time, they owned nearly fifty cane producing plantations and ranchos in the Municipalities of Ahome, El Fuerte, and Choix, which totaled over 400,000 acres. This was a huge collection of land, especially since the Fuerte River only had the capacity to irrigate about one million acres. United Sugar controlled subsidiaries such as Rafael G. Ibarra and Company, Mexico Import Company, Compañía Explotadora, Sinaloa Sugar Company, and El Aguila, which allowed them to produce 27,000 tons of sugar in 1924 alone.\textsuperscript{11}

With United Sugar’s increased use of the waters of the Fuerte River, this left less water available for other companies, which did not necessarily agree with their water agreement.

United Sugar’s dominance created conflicts for water in the 1920s, some of them due to the government’s over-parceling of river water in granting concessions. The competition for water belied United Sugar’s assertion that, “the diversion of the flowing waters of the Fuerte River into the canal system of the United Sugar Companies has been continuous and undisputed for years.”\textsuperscript{12} At the end of 1920, large estate owner José Zakany wrote a complaint to the Ministry of Agriculture and Development, citing that the Rafael Ibarra and Company’s rights to seven cubic meters a second would essentially nullify his own concession. This new concession essentially eliminated all available water in the river, especially since the government had

\textsuperscript{10} January 16, 1918, AHA, Aprovechamientos Superficiales, Caja 4728, Expediente 65446.
\textsuperscript{11} Olmstead, \textit{Report on the properties of the United Sugar Companies}, 80
\textsuperscript{12} Olmstead, 87.
already granted water rights to both the Compañía Explotadora and El Aguila Company in the amount of thirteen cubic meters a second.\textsuperscript{13}

By the 1920s, United Sugar Company officially had the legal rights to access a large amount of the flow of the Fuerte River. In order to protect these rights, or to maintain their near control of water distribution, United Sugar opposed other proposed water concessions. Every time a new party solicited rights for the use of waters from the Fuerte River, United Sugar Company representatives, usually via their lawyer Julio Zapata, wrote a letter opposing the concession.

The irrigation law of 1926 made it easier for new parties to gain access to river water in the Fuerte Valley. This law was part of President Calles’ overall strategy to create a Mexican agrarian middle-class. The irrigation infrastructure and distribution of water to be used in this transformation was modeled after California-style agriculture, which became prominent in Calles’ home state of Sonora.\textsuperscript{14} Calles wanted to avoid another revolution and spur economic development simultaneously. Historian Mikael Wolfe argued that, “technology would bring social liberation to the agrarian masses without the government having to radically alter existing land-tenure patterns.”\textsuperscript{15} In Sinaloa, this ability to appease the masses came about through the increased availability of water concessions in the mid-1920s.

Prior to the mid-1920s United Sugar obtained most water concessions along the Fuerte River and irrigated their massive tracts of land. That began to change in 1926 when new companies and individuals started to attain rights to use river water for irrigation. That year alone, United Sugar formally opposed twenty-two new irrigation water concessions granted to

\textsuperscript{13} December 31, 1920, AHA, Aprovechamientos Superficiales, Caja 891, Expediente 12763
\textsuperscript{15} Wolfe, 204.
individuals and companies. Many of the corporations that were granted access on both the Fuerte and Sinaloa Rivers re-sold some of their water to small farmers.

Some Mayos took their cue from powerful adversaries like Johnston, and used river infrastructure to irrigate their crops. Resistance strategies of indigenous people thus entered a new phase, marked by the use of water rights and infrastructure to keep their communities intact. The ultimate failure of Felipe Bachomo’s insurrection to legitimately challenge the extant power structure in the Fuerte Valley became a pivotal reason for why Mayo communities took on less uniform practices in the mid-1920s through early 1940s. Some indigenous villages were simply better equipped to adapt to the changes around them. How, or if they adopted the use of river infrastructure like dams, pumps, and canals was a decision each village made independently, and the answer depended on a wide range of factors. The experiences of Mayos in the labor force, through constructing such irrigation infrastructure, convinced many of them to begin using such technology as dams and pumps for their own purposes of subsistence agriculture.

Water Wells and Mayo Communities

The divergence in uses or lack of use of wells in Mayo villages was a microcosm of the lack of uniformity among the indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley in their adoption of hydraulic technology in the early to mid-twentieth century. Some Mayo communities discovered the advantage of using water wells in the early twentieth century while others never managed to integrate such practices. The uses and non-uses of water wells were another example of the growing multiplicity of Mayo practices that helped to make their culture more resilient.

Oral histories help us to gain a sense of the modifications Mayos made surrounding their use of water wells. In some Mayo communities, like Tehueco, the appearance of wells was a

16 July 8, 1926, AHA, Aprovechamientos Superficiales, Caja 499, Expediente 14040
welcome change, but it took some time to learn how to use them efficiently. According to Mayo elder and local historian Salvador Valenzuela of Tehueco,

We used wells for many years. At first there was very unhealthy water that came out of there. It was dirty water. It had a consistency like barley. But we needed it to survive. If you stored the water from there in a big drum, it would leave a white cream residue on the top of it. But after some time we learned how to perfect the process and we got a crystal clean drinking water from there.\(^\text{17}\)

Wells therefore made the process of obtaining clean drinking water easier for some Mayo villages, but not without struggles in learning how to most efficiently use them. In this particular case, the Mayos of Tehueco, through trial and error discovered a way to access drinking water without having to engage directly with the Fuerte River.

As in other parts of Mexico, wells came to the Fuerte Valley in different ways, and helped change the manner in which individuals and villages approached water sources. Mexican water historian Luis Aboites pointed out that in the Yaqui Valley in 1920,

wells became a crucial part of agricultural and urban life, proliferating and tapping ever-deeper water sources. For the first time in history humankind had the technology to overcome their dependency on gravity-based water systems.\(^\text{18}\)

It would seem logical that well technology would trickle 200 kilometers south into the Fuerte Valley in the 1920s. Water well technology apparently provoked major changes in the Yaqui Valley, but its effects on the agricultural and cultural life in the Fuerte Valley were less pronounced. The changes that wells brought within some Mayo communities are worth noting here because it helps to show their willingness to use new water technology. It also revealed the economic disparities and technological opportunities of Mayos versus their Yori counterparts.

\(^{17}\) Salvador Valenzuela, Interview by James Mestaz, Tehueco, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, July 14, 2014.

\(^{18}\) Aboites, 71
For some Mayo villages the use of wells helped them alter their approach to gathering clean drinking water. For other individuals in the Fuerte Valley, wells also helped change agricultural practices. Mayo elder Raúl Fernández of Pochotal pointed out that,

Some Yoris taught Yoremes how to make wells and then they spread this information to others. Some Yoris used pumps to draw water, but it did not always come out. This was not as reliable as getting water from the river that was always running.  

Some Mayo villages, such as Tehueco, found use of wells for drinking water but did not use it for irrigation purposes. Yoris were the only ones who could afford to use wells for irrigation. The cost for purchasing a pump, tube, and motor to draw well water for irrigation, was at least 20,000 pesos. Neither archival documents nor oral histories mentioned Mayo communities getting irrigation water from wells or even securing deals for water from other parties who used this system.

Some Yoris in the Fuerte Valley placed pumps in wells to get irrigation water. Other regions of Northern Mexico began to rely on underground water for irrigation. Mikael Wolfe analyzed how in La Laguna, the uneven flow of the Nazas River led to farmers relying on wells for irrigation. Over one-thousand pumps were installed in wells, because salt-free aquifers were discovered. Fuerte Valley’s aquifers however could not produce such an abundance of water, making water well irrigation unreliable, and therefore uncommon. The constant flow of the Fuerte River allowed farmers, including Yoremes, to depend on river infrastructure for irrigation purposes.

The inefficiency and high cost of using water wells for irrigation helps to explain their relatively small impact on agrarian practices in the Fuerte Valley. In some Mayo villages, wells

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20 Wolfe, 212.
were also an unreliable way of gathering drinking water. Mayo elder Gabriel Ramos of Huepaco explained that, “We tried to dig wells but it did not work. When we got water it eventually dried up. We gave up and got our water from the river.”\(^{22}\) This is a good example of the diverse approaches Mayo villages took with water technology, only using the resources that could benefit them.

Yoremes of Tehueco stuck with the process and perfected the practice of well water management, while the inhabitants of Huepaco found no success and abandoned it altogether. This showed how the differences in physical landscape often altered the ways Mayo villages either accepted or rejected hydrological technology. Some indigenous people were also less than enthusiastic about changing their river practices than others.

**Los Goros and Margarito Aguilar**

Petitions to use irrigation infrastructure became an important way by which Mayos of the Fuerte Valley changed their interaction with rivers. In the group of petitions various indigenous communities filed with the state and federal governments between 1926 and 1942, the community of Los Goros, provides an example of Mayos using the new legal and irrigation infrastructure of the postrevolutionary period. Margarito Aguilar became the president of the Executive Agrarian Committee of the Mayo towns of Los Goros and Camayeca in the early 1930s, and became active in trying to secure their water and land rights. Petitions this committee filed for land and water rights in the 1930s and 1940s showed the varied tactics this community was willing to use. Oral histories also provide some insight into the type of leaders these Mayo communities elected and motivation for their actions.

Prior to ascension into his role as an agrarian leader of Los Goros, Margarito Aguilar filed documents in attempts to attain water rights to irrigate his small property. On January 28, 1927, Aguilar submitted a petition to the Ministry of Agriculture and Development (SAyF) asking for a concession of 150,000 annual cubic meters of the calm waters of the Fuerte River. This was an excessive amount of irrigation water for this small farmer to request. As it turns out, Aguilar was attempting to procure these water rights for Lorenzo Valdés and Company, who intended to use pumps and canals to distribute this water to not only Aguilar, but to additional small farmers.

Valdés and Company experienced difficulties securing permanent permission to access irrigation water in order to re-sell it. Aguilar filed the petition on behalf of himself and his brothers Apolonio, Alejandro, and Rosalindo, and of course in the interests of Lorenzo Valdés and Company. The SAyF responded to Aguilar’s petition in April of the same year, telling him that it could not approve his request, and recommended that he and other farmers form a cooperative and re-apply for rights to the rough waters of the Fuerte River. The Ministry also suggested that to prevent being exploited, the petitioners should disassociate themselves from Lorenzo Valdés and Company which was rumored to charge 40% of farmer’s harvests in exchange for irrigation water.23

Aguilar responded that November with another petition to SAyF, and this time he requested the right to utilize 320,000 annual cubic meters of irrigation water from the rough waters of the Fuerte River. He also sent a separate letter defending the actions of Lorenzo Valdés and Company. Aguilar asserted that,

We have formed a cooperative society with Lorenzo Valdés and Company, and other small farmers. We are poor, and our small plots of land are barely sufficient for our families. None of us could raise enough money to purchase a pump or

23 January 28, 1927, AHA, Aguas Nacionales, Caja 1008, Expediente 14157.
maintain its upkeep. The reports that this company charges 40% of farmer’s harvests for water are exaggerated, and the only ones that will be hurt by not granting these rights are small farmers. If we do not get water for our lots, we will have to leave them and seek wage labor, which does not pay enough. We have been exchanging 25% of our crop to this company for water. They provide us with other material aid that other companies do not.\(^2\)

This letter showed the flexibility that Aguilar, and this company for that matter, exhibited through their willingness to change their request from the calm waters to rough waters of the river. The rough waters, formed as a result of the annual flooding from the rainy season, were easier to obtain since there was more water for government agencies to proportion.

Upon further scrutiny this letter was most likely written by a representative of the company and then signed by Aguilar. If Aguilar had written the letter, then he possessed an extensive knowledge of the conditions of the irrigation business of the Fuerte Valley at the time. It is possible that he did possess an acute awareness of the local irrigation industry, yet it is also suspicious that Aguilar addressed each and every concern that the SAyF raised previously. For instance, the Ministry had suggested that the small formers form a cooperative, and he responded by saying that their arrangement with Valdés and Company constituted a cooperative.

Regardless of who authored the letter, the fact that Aguilar described his group as poor farmers, and unable to purchase pumps, or to pay for their upkeep brought into question the equity of agricultural production. It would have been difficult for these impoverished small farmers to form a cooperative and have enough money to purchase a pump, much less to pay for its upkeep.\(^3\) For the time being, poor individuals and communities relied on the financial

\(^{2}\) November 4, 1927, Ibid.

\(^{3}\) This suggestion to form a cooperative could also be seen as foretelling the formation of the SICAЕ sugar cane cooperative that did in fact pull their resources and construct irrigation infrastructure starting in the late 1930s, I will detail these developments in chapter three.
resources of corporations like Lorenzo Valdés and Company to provide them with pumps for irrigation.

The apparent synergy between small farmers and this corporation highlighted this case as an example in which certain Mayo communities and individuals used cracks in the system to take their destiny into their own hands. It is probable that an employee from Valdés and Company wrote the letter, but additional documents show that they treated Aguilar and his brothers better than other companies, at least at that moment in time. The fact that Valdés and Company dealt with them ethically, and offered an alternative to wage labor showed that there existed a diversity of corporate practices within the Fuerte Valley, some despotic, and others based on cooperation and mutual benefit. Mayos learned how to deal with both.

Aguilar’s petition was not approved, leading to further actions by the corporation. After admitting that they had been illegally selling water to such farmers as Aguilar, Valdés and Company soon attempted to establish full water rights in its own name. These documents show that despite the implementation of the 1926 irrigation law that opened the possibility for new water concessions, such use required an economic investment that was simply unattainable for Mayo communities and individuals.

Indigenous villages and individuals relied on second parties with water concessions to sell them water in the 1920s and 1930s, revealing a multitude of interactions between the two. Sometimes the relations between Mayos and water providers were amicable and mutually beneficial. Margarito Aguilar’s actions proved that as early as 1926 some Mayos were already using irrigation infrastructure to cultivate their crops. They were willing to try just about anything to maintain their business arrangements.

February 24, 1928, AHA, Aguas Nacionales, Caja 1008, Expediente 14157.
The community of Los Goros always had a close relationship to the Fuerte River. The toponymy of the word Goros signifies “place of white herons.” It is an alteration of the Mayo word corohue or coroche, meaning “water birds.” Their community’s name, and logically their village had always been tied to the Fuerte River. They spent the time period 1926 to 1942 trying to retain their symbolic connection to the river, through the use of petitions and the legal system.

In December 1930, Juan Kelly sent a formal request to the SAyF for the use of the rough waters of the Fuerte River to irrigate lands. He received a response in January 1931, saying that his petition was incomplete based on his inability to specify who would benefit from the proposed irrigation. In order to secure water rights and irrigate other peoples’ lands, Kelly was required to prove that the owners of said properties were in agreement with the former’s plans. Kelly expressed a desire to use his pump to irrigate other lots and receive compensation. The ministry’s response showed that they likely doubted the provenance of this request.

I mentioned in the introduction of this chapter that on May 13, 1931, agrarian leaders from the Mayo towns Camayeca and Los Goros collectively asked the SAyF to grant them rights to use a water pump. The pump was apparently owned by Juan Kelly (Kellis as spelled out in this document). By May of 1931, these leaders had reached an agreement with Juan Kelly in which they would pay him twenty percent of their annual harvest, in exchange for the use of his water pump. The self-defined “Indígenas” of Camayeca and Los Goros claimed to be the owners of eighteen lots of land, whose titles they inherited from their grandparents, who allegedly were the original land recipients of grants authorized by President Benito Juárez. Their land titles had allegedly disappeared over the course of the Mexican Revolution. In total, their lots consisted of approximately 150 hectares, of which 140 hectares were susceptible to cultivation. At the time,

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28 January 9, 1931, AHA, Aprovechamientos Superficiales, Caja 1631, Expediente 14045
the land could only be seasonally cultivated, as no canalization works existed to produce year round harvests. Therefore they requested the use of Kelly’s ten inch water pump, in order to irrigate their crops.29

The first striking thing about this petition was the claim that these Mayos owned original land titles that were granted to their grandparents during the Juárez presidency. President Benito Juárez (1858-1872) is often wrongly misrepresented as one of the staunchest defenders of indigenous peoples’ rights in Mexico. Despite the fact that Juárez was a full-blooded Zapotec Indian from Oaxaca, his liberal policies probably did more to hinder indigenous community rights than empower them. For instance, Juárez fully supported such liberal laws as the Ley Lerdo which was aimed at breaking up excessive Church lands. In reality the law’s mandate for individual ownership of land led to many indigenous communities losing their legal recognition as corporate (ejido) lands.30

The claim that the Mayos of Los Goros and Camayeca received individual land titles does fit with Juárez’s penchant for breaking up communal lands and redistributing them as individual lots. Moreover, Juarez did assign land grants to some indigenous communities in the north while in exile during French intervention, namely in states such as Chihuahua. There is no indication that he extended such grants to indigenous villages further west in Sinaloa.

This first petition of 1931 was submitted on behalf of these Mayos by community representatives Margarito Aguilar, Eligio Sevejeca, and Sotero Yocupicio, and signed by the heads of eighteen families. The document mentioned that these were the descendants of the original owners of the lots, meaning that they were obtained by individual families, and not communal (ejidal) lands. Individual ownership was in tune with the growing rate of individual

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29 May 13, 1931, Ibid.
land acquisitions of mid-to-late nineteenth century Mexico. Perhaps these communities solidified their land rights through the decree signed in Alamos in 1866, which ensured rebels fighting the Liberal Mexican Forces, the return of lands illegally stripped from them. There is also the possibility that they never had legal titles to these properties, and that they ascertained that Juarez, an Indian himself, could have granted land titles en masse to indigenous people. Physical land titles and other agrarian documents from Sinaloa dating back to the nineteenth century rarely survived to the present day. It is nearly impossible to verify claims that these villagers had previously possessed land titles. The important point here is that these communities claimed they possessed legal title to the land.

If these communities did not own land titles they were still capable of holding onto these lots for three generations amidst the massive land disposessions during the Porfiriato. Maintaining possession without titles would have been an even more difficult task. There is no mention of how these lands might have figured into the Bachomo insurgency, or if there was ever any attempt by outsiders to usurp these lots. The villagers from both Camayeca and Los Goros did fight alongside Bachomo in his campaigns. The idea that the land titles were lost over the course of the Mexican Revolution is indicative of the confusion and violence of that era.

On March 26, 1931, the Director of Water, Lands, and Colonization sent a response to Aguilar, stating that Kelly still needed to submit a completed petition. Perhaps the villagers never received the letter, because they sought help from other government offices in their quest for expedient patronage. On May 13, these Mayo leaders wrote an additional letter to Mexican President Pascual Ortiz Rubio and included a copy of their original request.

In this new letter, they represented themselves as members of the Federación de Agrupaciones Agrarias del Rio Fuerte. The correspondence must have left an impression on

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Footnote 31

I talk about this decree in Chapter 1, which also ensured fair pay, and the prevention against future land grabs.
President Ortiz Rubio, as his secretary soon penned a letter to the SAyF urging their office to resolve this manner using terms of strict justice. The SAyF then sent another letter to Aguilar on May 26, which again stated that it needed the correct petition to be filed by Juan Kelly.\footnote{May 26, 1931, AHA, Aprovechamientos Superficiales, Caja 4861, Expediente 67555} At this point it is logical to ask why Juan Kelly did not simply complete his request for a water concession correctly. Kelly had received written permission from the communities that were set to receive irrigation waters from the Fuerte River. He would merely have to re-submit his original request from December 1930, and attach a letter of approval from these Mayo leaders. There is a chance that these Mayo leaders never saw this letter, as a return-to-sender envelope originally addressed to Aguilar, postmarked May 27th, was returned to the SAyF.\footnote{May 26, 1931, Ibid.}

It is unclear why these Mayo leaders continued to submit petitions when the proper legal course of action was to have Kelly re-submit his original petition. Maybe they felt that a presidential order would expedite their request. It is also possible that they thought the government would grant them water directly, thus helping them leverage a more advantageous deal with Kelly. Throughout this process, Mayo leaders continued to present petitions, as each successive correspondence used new language that they felt would give them the best opportunity to legally receive access to Kelly’s pump.

Mayo leaders submitted the last, in this group of petitions, on August 30, 1931. It represented their best efforts to appeal to the postrevolutionary government in order to attain their land and water rights. The new petition, sent directly to President Ortiz Rubio, was very similar to the original submitted in May, with a few changes. The letterhead now indicated that this group represented the \textit{Comité Particular Ejecutivo Agrario de Los Goros y Camayeca}, suggesting that they had complied with land reform legislation to create an ejido. They were also

\footnote{May 26, 1931, Ibid.}
apparently members of the Federación Sindicalista de Obreros y Campesinos de la Zona Norte del Estado de Sinaloa. They stated that their grandparents and parents, since they were indigenous, had occupied the lands of Los Goros and Camayeca since time immemorial, the same lots where they currently resided. They pointed out that, “all of the occupants of our lands are indigenous people who want irrigation to improve our harvest yields. We understand that before we can request a water concession, we first need to validate ownership of our land, because we lack formal titles.” Their inability to produce land titles led to their request being denied.

These villages probably also used the name of their communities in these formal legal documents for a particular purpose. Their properties were owned by 18 individuals, but they stated that they were members of the Los Goros and Camayeca communities in order to help protect their lands. The lands of entire communities were expropriated during the Porfiriato under reparto de tierras (land distribution), but it was much easier to confiscate lands of individuals. By writing the names of their communities on these legal documents these leaders made it easier for government agencies to recognize the validity and existence of these communities. This not only helped these leaders protect their property but it also served as an integral step in eventually being recognized as an ejido.

It is also noteworthy that these communities continually referred to themselves as “indígenas” throughout the entire petitions process. By the early 1930s indigenismo was beginning to gather steam in Mexico. Environmental historian Chris Boyer points out that postrevolutionary indigenismo was, “a political and intellectual movement suggesting that native culture had an intrinsic value and that the state bore a responsibility to lift Indian communities

34 August 30, 1931, AHA, Aprovechamientos Superficiales, Caja 4861, Expediente 67555
Mayos of Los Goros and Camayeca likely understood that it was a good political strategy to classify themselves as indígenas. By identifying as such it also became possible for these leaders to claim that they had owned these lands since time immemorial.

The tendency to self-represent as indigenous people was not very common in this region and time period, as evident through the rare use of this term within official documents. Alejandro Inzunza, an indigenous elder from Los Goros explained that, “we were all natives in Los Goros and Camayeca, and very proud of it. We wanted to gain our rights as Indians, to show that our connection to land and water was different from Yoris, our struggle was different.”

The leaders of Los Goros and Camayeca apparently sought out to set a precedent by identifying themselves as indigenous, one that would culminate in their people gaining specific rights based on their ancestral ties to the land and water. This explanation could be viewed as romanticized and idealistic as it may have been influenced retrospectively. Mayo actions combined with their cosmology did set them historically apart from Yoris. Their ethnic heterogeneity and specific rights to land and water were however not officially recognized at this point in this region.

There are possibilities as to why these leaders referred to themselves as indigenous in these petitions. Margarito Aguilar and the leaders of these Mayo communities may have self-defined as indigenous in order to catch the attention of President Pascual Ortiz Rubio (1930-1932), who was known for being a direct descendant of Purépecha indigenous nobles in the state of Michoacán. This president was not necessarily a full-blooded Purépecha, but perhaps these Mayo leaders felt they could appeal for ethnic solidarity or at least compassion. A year earlier, Ortiz Rubio had asked state governments and the people of Mexico for help in, “the regeneration

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35 Boyer, Political Landscapes, 169
37 Cornyn, “New President of Mexico has Blue Blood” Chicago Daily Tribune. November 19, 1929. 17.
and incorporation of the native races.”

He focused specifically in trying to open schools to educate all indigenous children. However, favoritism by Ortiz Rubio on behalf of indigenous communities would have been unprecedented, as there is no record of him granting land or water rights based solely on indigeneity. It is also possible that these particular Mayos unlike the majority of indigenous people in the Fuerte Valley, may have used the term indígena simply because of the growing strength of indigenismo.

Some Mayos understood that the legal system of petitions could potentially provide access to new irrigation infrastructure and technology. Alejandro Inzunza recalled that, “Our leaders understood the legal system, and used it to defend our rights.”

This shift in strategy of working within the political system revealed Mayo willingness to use modern technology in order to protect their social structure. They were unable to secure permission to use irrigation water in this case, but later documents suggest that leaders of Los Goros either reached an agreement with another party, or illegally used Kelley’s pumps. Had they elected for the latter this meant that despite their predilection for using the legal system they were not above circumventing it. These leaders also understood the social and political dynamics of the Fuerte Valley as outsiders increasingly encroached on their lands. Through their uses of hydrological technology, Mayos of Los Goros and Camayeca improved their agricultural productivity and made usurpation of their lands more difficult. They also proved that land and water combined were necessary for their cultural and physical survival.

Some Mayos embraced the use of irrigation infrastructure yet the indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley employed a heterogeneous approach to river practices exemplified by their array of different reactions to the presence of river technology. On March 14, 1932, a little more

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than six months after his last petition for land and water rights, Margarito Aguilar wrote another letter to the SAyF. This correspondence complained about the presence of Canal de Avenidas on the property of Los Goros and Camayeca, which Lorenzo Valdés and Company constructed. Apparently the canal had not been in use since December 1925, the date in which Valdés and Company began using a pump to draw water from the Fuerte River. They asked therefore that under Paragraph One, Article 34 of the Law of Waters of National Property and its regulation, that this company’s rights to the use of this canal be cancelled, as the date of their provisional use had expired.40

This document and ensuing paperwork dealing with this issue tell us a great deal about the continuing strategies of Mayos of Los Goros and Camayeca in their interaction with not only irrigation infrastructure, but also with water-selling corporations. The fact that they invoked specific federal water laws suggests that they were likely using the services of a schoolteacher, lawyer, or other educated individual that understood the nuances of irrigation legislation. Article 34 of national property water laws, published in 1930, dealt with water concession revocation. Paragraph One stated that a water concession would be revoked if it had not been in use for a period of three consecutive years.41 Knowledge of this law and correct use of it showed that Mayo leaders were willing to engage with outsiders in order to benefit from the Mexican legal system.

Having received no response, Margarito Aguilar sent a follow up letter with more detail to the SAyF on August 14, 1932. Aguilar stated that in July, his community informed local officials of their intent to demolish the Canal de Avenidas. In their attempts to proceed with destroying the canal and reclaiming the lands of members of their community, they were halted

40 March 14, 1932, AGA, Dotación y Accesión de Aguas, Expediente 2466, Legajo 1, Asunto Toca, Los Goros, Municipio Ahome.
41 Ley de Aguas de Propiedad Nacional y su Reglamento, Paragraph 1, Article 34, pg. 16.
by the Municipal Commissioner of Cachoana. They requested that the SAyF give them direct permission to demolish the canal, and reclaim their lands.\footnote{August 14, 1932, AGA, Dotación y Accesión de Aguas, Expediente 2466, Legajo 1, Asunto Toca, Los Goros, Municipio Ahome.}

The fact that just five years previously, Margarito Aguilar had praised this company and submitted a petition on their behalf underscores the capricious nature of the relationships between Mayo villages and companies that supplied them with irrigation water. Limited information makes it difficult to know exactly why this relationship changed, but since they denounced their water supplier, they probably found another party to proportion their irrigation water. Maybe they ignored the government’s ruling and received water illegally from Juan Kelly. The Canal de Avenidas was probably the same structure in which they originally received water from Valdés and Company, so it is safe to assume that the canal no longer benefitted Los Goros. Rejection of this canal shows that Mayo villages only supported irrigation infrastructure that advanced their community.

Aguilar sent a third petition to the SAyF ten days later, arguing that the canal was located on ejidal lands, and as such, they had always believed that this would fall under the jurisdiction of the SAyF. Aguilar also pointed out that earlier that year on April seventh the SAyF dictated an agreement in which the temporary water permit assigned to Valdés and Company was declared null and void.\footnote{August 24, 1932, Ibid.} The content of this letter was strikingly different than the previous two, particularly in its insistence on stating false information. It is unlikely that the SAyF actually decreed that Valdés and Company’s water permit was null and void, so it is curious that Aguilar would make such an assertion, when the SAyF could just check their records and verify that this was false. There is also no rational explanation as to why Aguilar claimed this land was ejidal when it clearly was not.
The first time Los Goros applied for a land dotación was on July 21, 1931, which was during the period in which they were submitting their petitions to gain water rights. In this particular dotación request, Aguilar explained that Los Goros, Camayeca, and Tosalibampo formed one community, and that, “because we are a core of farmers, and keeping in mind that the purpose of this government is that the promises of the revolution are crystallized in laws that we have hereby invoked.”\textsuperscript{44} Petitions submitted by Aguilar suggest that Los Goros was a completely unified indigenous community. In fact, I was unable to locate any documentation or interviewees that suggested any type of internal discord.

It is difficult to believe that there were not at least some feelings of envy present in a village like Los Goros where only some inhabitants owned property and most did not. It would be difficult to argue that Margarito Aguilar’s actions were not at least partially motivated by aspirations to gain personal wealth. Through all of his attempts at trying to secure land and water rights for some of Los Goros’ inhabitants, Aguilar also dedicated an equal amount of time into applying for a dotación, which would in theory benefit the entire village. Perhaps the fact that leaders and property owners, like Aguilar, fought tirelessly to obtain a dotación kept Los Goros united. Aguilar likely saw that his actions benefitted both his own interests and that of his village at the same time.

After several more requests, the National Agrarian Commission finally sent two representatives to conduct an in-depth study of the Los Goros village on July 14, 1934.\textsuperscript{45} They found that there were 429 inhabitants, 134 of which had legitimate rights to a share of an ejido. These surveyor’s detailed findings also revealed a lot about not only the conditions within the

\textsuperscript{44} July 21, 1931, AGA, Dotación, Expediente 23/1362, Legajo 1, Asunto Local, Los Goros, Municipio Ahome.
\textsuperscript{45} The ejido presumably included Camayeca, as Tosalibampo later received its own ejido
The surveyor Luis Llanes described Los Goros and its inhabitants as,

Almost all of them are farmers. They are all Mayos, and their language is spoken with much more frequency than Spanish. Many of the natives kept small lots which have not been taken away, or which, through great sacrifices they have managed to buy. But still with large families, this is not sufficient enough for them to live. The life they lead is full of miseries and shortages and although most are workers, it is not possible to survive on the stunted wages that are paid in this region, (one peso per day). In this village they still preserve many ancient, primitive customs of the Mayos, and its inhabitants are obedient workers.46

The surveyor pointed out that these indigenous people were able to hang onto some land tracts, and even purchase them. It is unclear whether these were the same 18 lots that were mentioned in the 1931 petition, in which the physical land deeds had been lost over time. Apparently somewhere along the way, some of the lots belonging to inhabitants of Los Goros had been purchased. Llanes never thought to consider the possibility that some of these lands may have been rewarded to them during Bachomo’s campaign of which many inhabitants of Los Goros participated.

There was also a paternalistic tone in these words. Llanes pointed out that this village still preserved many ancient, “primitive” customs of the Mayos. He also suggested that they were “obedient” workers, which was close to comparing them to animals. The notion that their poverty was directly correlated to employer wages took all agency out of their hands and overlooked the fact that some Mayos who owned land raised their own crops. The tone and overall message of this report was therefore that these were backward Indians that needed to be saved by the government.

It took three more years, and four more letters sent by Margarito Aguilar for the government to finalize a dotación for Los Goros. It officially became an ejido under the

46 July 14, 1934, Ibid.
Presidential Resolution of July 21, 1937, which was published in Mexico’s Official Journal of record on October 18, 1937. Los Goros was granted a total of 1,480 hectares, expropriated from the private lots of individuals and estates. Of these lands, 870 hectares were under mechanical irrigation. 208 hectares were un-cleared thorn scrub labeled as susceptible to farming. 400 hectares were mountainous areas that were formerly classified as national property. The land was to be split up into equal parcels among 134 ejidatarios, in addition to a school parcel, with the rest for communal purposes.\(^47\)

On September 21, 1938, Los Goros was awarded an extension (ampliación) of 1,103 hectares. Of this land, 670 hectares were for use as pastures, 317 hectares were to be used for seasonal agriculture, and 116 hectares were to be irrigated to serve the needs of 68 ejidatarios. A water grant was also established at a set volume sufficient to satisfy the irrigation needs of these 116 hectares.\(^48\) Some of this land received through ampliación was soon dedicated to growing sugarcane collectively. The challenges to communal harmony that Los Goros faced as a result of joining a sugarcane cooperative will be the topic of the next chapter.

The land distributed to the Los Goros ejido was located next to the small property owners of the same community, facilitating the persistence of their village beyond the boundaries introduced by the ejido system. Members of the ejido had most likely been living on or near this same land previously, and used portions of the 400 hectares of mountainous areas that they received, for religious ceremonies, and to procure raw materials necessary to carry out these rituals. This symbolic connection to the natural landscape through the enactment of religious rituals was essential to preserving the Mayo social structure and community. The legitimization

\(^{47}\) September 21, 1938, AGA, Dotación y Accesión de Aguas, Expediente 33/5655, Legajo 1, Asunto Toca de Dotacion, Los Goros, Municipio Ahome.  
\(^{48}\) Ibid.
of ejidal land titles, despite shifting the geographical boundaries of their community, gave them unimpeded access to this territory that enabled them to keep their community intact.

After Los Goros established their ejido, it appears that some inhabitants continued to own small tracts of property. Survey maps show that the properties of the smallholders of Los Goros were located along the river shore while ejidal lands were located just in-land. River shore land became more valuable in the early twentieth century and several indigenous communities lost their properties along the river. The ability of some of Los Goros’ inhabitants to secure land titles prior to the community receiving its ejido explains how they maintained land tracks along the river shore.

Access to the river shore proved beneficial for Los Goros. It allowed members to perform religious ceremonies along the river and collect raw materials for such rituals. This arrangement also created the conditions by which companies depended on these smallholders for permission to build irrigation infrastructure on their land. Some ejidatarios also owned private property and had years of experience dealing with water providers, making it easier for Los Goros to accept hydraulic technology into their communities.

Water supplies were guaranteed to the ejido of Los Goros through the 1937 dotación (mechanized irrigated lands), as well as from the water grant for the lands ceded through the land extension the following year. Small property owners of this community were forced to secure their own water rights separate from the ejido. In January 1938, small property owners of Los Goros signed an agreement with Cecilio Román in which they received water from a pump that he installed on the banks of the Fuerte River in Camayeca in exchange for 20% of their harvest. These smallholders wrote a letter in the same month to the SAyF stating that they were all small property owners who had been in possession of their land for more than thirty years. The letter

49 No Date, AGA, Dotación, Expediente 23/128, Legajo 7, Ejecución, Los Goros, Municipio Ahome.
also confirmed their deal with Mr. Román and included the size of the tracts of the 42 small property holders, ranging from one hectare to eight hectares.\textsuperscript{50}

The largest tract of land, 8.2 hectares was owned by Margarito Aguilar, raising issues regarding internal dynamics. Land ownership might help explain why Aguilar worked so tirelessly in attempting to secure water rights for these small property owners. As President of the Agrarian Committee for Los Goros and Camayeca, Aguilar was also a strong proponent of establishing Los Goros as an ejido. In October of 1937, as Los Goros was granted a dotación, the community elected an ejidal commission that would take up the leadership role. Aguilar was listed as one of the outgoing officers of the executive committee, but again turned up in the official record as president of the ejidal commission in 1946, meaning he had received a portion of the ejidal land. Other small property owners such as Isidiro Aguilar and Sotero Yocupicio, were also listed as ejidatarios in the 1930s and 1950s, which meant that at least some of these small property owners were also ejidatarios.\textsuperscript{51}

These examples show that agreements made with corporations and individuals for irrigation water did not last forever. On October of 1942, small property owners of Los Goros sent a complaint to the SAyF. They described how Cecilio Román had entered into a partnership with Juan and Rosario Valdés which culminated in the founding of the \textit{Compañía Irrigadora del Río del Fuerte} (Irrigation Company of the Fuerte River). This company intended to widen a canal that the people of Los Goros had originally helped him construct. The company came to realize that in order to widen the canal they would need to receive permission from the property owners of Los Goros. They planned to meet with the village’s leaders in order to discuss an arrangement. The company then informed the villagers that they did not need the community’s

\textsuperscript{50} January 31, 1938, AHA, Aprovechamientos Superficiales, Caja 1929, Expediente 29006
\textsuperscript{51} October 14, 1937; April 27, 1946; October 31, 1937; October 31, 1955, AGA, Ampliación de ejidos, Expediente 25/11427, Legajo 8, Ejecución, Los Goros, Municipio Ahome.
permission and would simply expropriate their lands in order to proceed with the construction. The leaders of Los Goros asserted they would not let the company abuse their properties in order to gain more space for the canal.\textsuperscript{52}

Further troubling for these smallholders was the response of the Municipal President when they travelled to Los Mochis to discuss the matter with him. Apparently the Municipal President’s lawyer threatened the indigenous leaders of Los Goros but in the same breath told them that they were ready to provide them “help” in this case, and always in a completely fair and legal manner. In a letter to the SayF these leaders made sure to convey that they, “we are in no way intransigent, but are being forced into signing a one-sided contract that would hurt our interests as small property owners, and leave us in a state of destitution.”\textsuperscript{53}

The unethical treatment that they received at the hands of the irrigation company exhibited the uneven relationships Mayos established with water providers. In matters by which they faced exploitation, villagers recognized they had recourse available to them through their complaints to federal government agencies. In this specific instance, Mayos of Los Goros also had to contend with a prejudicial, and perhaps corrupt municipal government that wanted to force them into signing an uneven agreement. The postrevolutionary government apparatus in this case acted as a counterweight to this unfair treatment.

An equally fascinating aspect is the way in which this letter referred to the connection between the Los Goros community and the canal itself. The letter stated that, “we are in the best disposition to sign a contract. We also need to take into account the special circumstances of

\textsuperscript{52} October 24, 1942, AHA, Aprovechamientos Superficiales, Caja 1929, Expediente 29006
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
first, having built the canal ourselves, and second, our desire to the guarantee of our *patrimonio.* In this context, it appears that patrimonio most likely meant their property.

The other meaning of patrimonio—heritage, or legacy—likely applied equally. Since they had built the canal with their hands, they felt they had every right to continue using it for their own purposes. After constructing the canal and using it to irrigate their crops, it assisted them in keeping their village intact. Mayos of Los Goros integrated this artificial structure into their practices, and it became a vital part of their community that they intended to protect. This process of adopting hydraulic technology into their practices was a great example of the growing multiplicity of Mayo culture that made it more resilient.

Internal memos within the SAyF suggest that there was no record of Mr. Román ever having permission to carry out irrigation construction plans, as he was never granted rights to water. In December 1942, the small property owners of Los Goros wrote a follow up letter to the SAyF saying that they had not received a response from their previous complaint. They added that,

> We are Indígenas who have owned our land since time immemorial. We do not want our rights violated by the ambitions of profits sought by this company. Hopefully our written acknowledgment will resolve this matter. We fear that this company is protected by powerful influences, in order to carry out their sinister purposes in relation to their pretension.

The fact that these villagers continued to self-define as indígenas is significant. Perhaps they felt that by attaching this ethnic label to their plight, they might receive some compassion. Or, if we believe Alejandro Inzunza, Mayos of Los Goros recognized their continued efforts within the context of a broader struggle for all indigenous people. Also, these Mayo could not allege

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54 Ibid.
55 November 5, 1942, Ibid.
56 December 11, 1942, Ibid.
ownership since “time immemorial” if they were not indigenous, making it necessary to make this statement. By holding onto their lands and using irrigation infrastructure in their own way, some Mayos were also put in direct opposition with ambitious entrepreneurs, hoping to dispossess them in order to profit. They found an ally in state agencies such as the SAyF who they often turned to in times of crisis.

There were several indigenous leaders responsible for the defense of their rights in the early days of their ejidos, Alejandro Inzunza of Los Goros explained that,

During my childhood there were people of courage, they confronted tough situations. It was hard to maintain imagination in those times. We did not know who the president was, or the governor. We were disconnected and could not worry about anyone or anything. We were hoping that someone would speak up for us or take responsibility. For this is what started the political movement of Los Goros and Camayeca. Yoremes such as Lorenzo Leyva used the legal system that was now more accessible to them after the Revolution. Leyva fought alongside Bachomo as his first Captain. After the Revolution he returned to his village of Tesolibampo and defended their rights, as well as the rights of nearby Mayo towns of Los Goros and Camayeca.  

Mayos transformed their tactics from armed insurgency to utilizing the legal system thanks to the leadership within particular communities like Los Goros. Lorenzo Leyva started this trend and Margarito Aguilar continued it.

According to oral testimony extracted from his nephew, Alejandro Inzunza, Margarito Aguilar was apparently well respected within the community. He regularly visited each family, addressing individual concerns, and warning them of the negative effects of drinking alcohol. Being fluent in both the Mayo language and Spanish allowed him great mobility within both his community and local political circles. He became a great regional leader because he was adept at understanding his community’s rights. He wrote petitions that not only defended his people but

also asked the state to solidify their rights to land and water. Although he became a great community leader, he was never the cobanaro, or spiritual leader of Los Goros.\(^{58}\)

Through his actions Aguilar fit the mold of what Chris Boyer and Eric Wolf referred to as village revolutionaries. According to Boyer, these village revolutionaries, “stood with one foot in the community and one in the outside world of regional politics and revolutionary ideology.”\(^{59}\) Aguilar also fit Boyer’s description of a *cacique*, or local agrarian leader. Like some of these caciques, Aguilar gained respect within his family network, and possessed the particular skill of political knowhow. Unlike other rural leaders, Aguilar apparently did not use force and intimidation to gain respect.\(^{60}\) Perhaps one of the ways he did earn respect was through the fact that he owned more property than anyone else within Los Goros or maybe he used his leverage as a leader to accumulate more property.

I mentioned in chapter one how Aguilar’s family (ancestors of Inzunza) originally came from the Mayo community of San Pedro, Sonora in the mid-nineteenth century. His ancestors intermarried with Mayos in Camayeca, and these extended family and kinship alliances help explain why these two ejidos often chose to struggle as one community, and eventually joined together to form an ejido.\(^{61}\) Alejandro Inzunza added that,

> At first we did not want to learn Spanish. Yoremes were not always organized at first, and being poor, we were brought down and kept in our place. We were not informed well about our own community, and did not know about things outside our community either. Things changed when we were coordinated by the leaders Sotero, Lorenzo, and Margarito Aguilar. All the people went to work and helped these leaders organize. We had more of a voice after that.\(^{62}\)

\(^{58}\) Ibid.


\(^{60}\) Oral testimonies assert that he did not use intimidation, but that does not mean these oral histories were completely accurate. See Boyer, 123. Boyer discussed three ways by which caciques earned respect, Aguilar fit the mold of the first two, but not the third.


In contrast to histories of indigenous victimization, some leaders learned to address their peoples’ concerns regarding water and land usage. Interrogating the processes of indigenous communal organization revealed the diversity in approaches villages undertook in the 1920s through 1940s.

In the first decades of the postrevolutionary period, Mayo communities made proper and astute use of not only the legal system, but also new irrigation technology that was available to them. Over time, usually around the 1950s and 1960s, access to the legal system and irrigation became increasingly more difficult for Mayos to attain, signaling a transition into a new era in which they exhibited less control over their water resources. The years between 1926 and 1942 were pivotal as some Mayos found new ways to use irrigation technology to maintain local control.

**Bamoa**

Bamoa was another example of a Fuerte Valley Yoreme community that successfully utilized petitions to gain access to river water for irrigation. The difference between Bamoa and the other two Mayo communities I analyze in this chapter is that it was located on the banks of the Sinaloa River, just south of the Fuerte River, in the municipality of Guasave. Some Bamoas used irrigation infrastructure to harvest crops for export instead of the traditional subsistence agriculture used by ejidatarios of Los Goros and La Palma.

Historically Bamoas have fallen under many different ethnic categories. They are said to have descended from the Lower Pimas, or Nebomes of Northern Sonora, who migrated to Northern Sinaloa in the early Colonial Period. By 1785, a report by Spanish officials claimed
that Bamoa was comprised of a mix of Sinaloas and Mayos. Depending on whom you ask today, villagers of Bamoa could be referred to as either Bamoas or Mayos. What is not under dispute is that they are considered Yoremes, and probably referred to themselves as such in this time period 1926 to 1942.

The word Bamoa itself comes from the Cáhita word *Bamoya*. This derives from *Ba*, which means river or water, and *Moya* which means shore, which combined would mean “river shore.” More specifically, Bamoya could also mean water bird. Much like Los Goros, the name Bamoa, and their community for that matter were always tied to the river.

Leaders of Bamoa applied for *restitución*, (the legal and definite return of village lands) as early as 1918. In Bamoa’s initial agrarian petition they referred to themselves as *Sociedad Agrícola Indígena de Bamoa* (Indian Agricultural Society of Bamoa), defining their goals as the defense, farming, and use of their communal lands. The National Agrarian Commission conducted various studies over the next few years, in order to determine the validity of Bamoa’s land claims.

In 1924, a report detailed that residents of Bamoa had owned their lands since time immemorial, quietly, peacefully, and continuously, which was not a common finding by agrarian officials. Bamoa had attained individual land titles in 1848, and their village was subjected to a land demarcation in 1849. The land was farmed “communally” into the twentieth century. Each inhabitant harvested the ground according to internal agreements. Sometimes sections were more productive than others, leaving vacant land. The report showed that nearly 3,000 hectares of Bamoa’s lands were going uncultivated. Although it was opposed by some community members, restitución was awarded to Bamoa on December 3, 1924, in the amount of 414 hectares.

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63 Rodríguez Villareal, *Los Indios Sinaloenses*, 238.
65 January 22, 1943, AHA, Aguas Nacionales, Expediente 10872, Caja 873
Recognition of such indigenous peoples’ land rights were somewhat rare in Mexico, and very few communities received any type of land concessions as part of the postrevolutionary land reform process by the mid-1920s. Their award was not nearly enough land to satisfy the needs of its 760 residents, 316 of whom were heads of families or men over eighteen.\textsuperscript{66} With these new property rights, this community continued to cultivate their lands.

Water became more readily available in this region in the twentieth century, and other landowners started growing vegetables as a cash crop. Outsiders moved in and harvested crops on massive tracts of neighboring lands. As water pumps were installed on the river, these lands went up for sale to U.S., Chinese, Spanish, Greek, and domestic companies and individuals. The economic prospects of this region were promising, as once the land was irrigated, it proved to be of superb quality for growing crops, much the same as that of the land along the Fuerte River.\textsuperscript{67}

The land became more valuable and sought after by outsiders, forcing the community members of Bamoa to define their village’s geographic boundaries. In 1926, villagers of Bamoa began fencing in the “free lands” of their ancient community, combining it with the land they were awarded through restitución.\textsuperscript{68} These free lands included the nearly 3,000 uncultivated hectares that were withheld from them as they lay barren. By combining this land with the lots awarded to them through restitución, Bamoas harvested on this fenced-in land, essentially uninterrupted for the next six years.\textsuperscript{69} By 1930, residents of Bamoa had a deal in place to purchase water from Ignacio Guerrero, who used pumps owned by the American Fruit Company.\textsuperscript{70}

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{68} October 8, 1933, AGN, Abelardo L. Rodríguez, 552.14/91
\textsuperscript{69} January 22, 1943, AHA, Aguas Nacionales, Expediente 10872, Caja 873
\textsuperscript{70} December 20, 1930, AHA, Aprovechamientos Superficiales, Expediente 14512, 1031
It is more than likely not a coincidence that Bamoa started to consolidate and demarcate their territories in the year 1926. The new federal irrigation laws opened up the possibility for publicly regulated irrigation systems, which sparked multitudes of petitions from private users for rights to utilize waters from the federally owned river waters. The increase in individuals owning water rights led to more landowners leasing water to communities or companies, making this uncultivated land more attractive to outsiders. The alterations in the physical environment, near the Sinaloa River, led to Bamoa claiming territory they believed was theirs.

The pertinent issue here is that these villagers took it upon themselves to reclaim their lands in anticipation of a dotación that would be granted to them six years later in 1932. By fencing in their lands and starting to cultivate them more extensively, Bamoa Yoremes re-defined, but also protected their community. They did so by defining and expanding their physical territory, and exhibiting the productivity of these lands. Farming was tied into their culture, constituting these acts a defense of their social structure and community.

It is unclear what process was used to demarcate the boundaries of their ancestral lands. These particular properties perhaps coincided with the original land grants they received in the seventeenth century, when the original Lower Pima inhabitants migrated from the upper Yaqui Valley. These boundaries probably overlapped with mission lands that Bamoas inhabited through most of the colonial era, which more than likely sat upon their original land grants received upon arrival from Sonora. Nearby indigenous communities probably also consolidated into the mission in the colonial era, making it difficult to determine who were the original inhabitants.

On April 30, 1932 Bamoa was awarded a dotación of 7,850 hectares which was located on both the right and left margins of the Sinaloa River. Of this land, 58 hectares were farmed communally to grow vegetables for export. The fundo legal, or common area including the
church and town center, consisted of 1,775 hectares, 1,825 hectares were occupied by the descendants of those who purchased these plots in 1889. Agrarian officials noted that 3,607 hectares of good quality land was sufficient for 698 individuals entitled to property under land reform law, which would help them meet their economic needs.  

There was no mention as to how much, if any of this land contained mountains or forests. This brings into question whether or not Bamoas had any land set aside in order to perform religious rituals, or if perhaps some of their ritually important territory became lost in the shuffle of agrarian reform. Because some of their property was dedicated to producing cash crops for export, they were also setting themselves up to compete in a capitalist economy. This increased wealth perhaps also assisted in protecting their properties, by preventing members from having to engage in wage labor on their neighbor’s lands.

After receiving their ejido, Bamoa’s leaders began purchasing water from several different sources in order to harvest their crops. By 1933, the ejido of Bamo a bought water from Ignacio Guerrero, compensating him with 20% of their garbanzo and tomato crop. The American Fruit Company was the actual owner of the water pump, but since it was a U.S. Corporation, Mr. Guerrero himself acted as a proxy and owned a concession to water rights of the Sinaloa River. In June of 1933, the National Agrarian Commission wrote a letter to the SAyF stating that Mr. Guerrero was opposed to proportioning more water to Bamo a. The SAyF then wrote a letter to the American Fruit Company asking it to provide water necessary for Bamo a to irrigate 200 hectares, either for free, or for a fair price.  

These documents showed that the corporations and individuals that sold water to indigenous ejidos such as Bamo a or Los Goros, treated them both

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71 January 22, 1943, AHA, Aguas Nacionales, Expediente 10872, Caja 873
72 June 2, 1933, AHA, Aprovechamientos Superficiales, Expediente 14512, 1031
fairly and negatively. In some cases state agencies stepped in to defend the rights of these communities when it became necessary.

Conflict within indigenous ejidos of northern Sinaloa is sometimes difficult to find within the historical record. Elder interlocutors often do not want to reveal past discord within their communities out of fear that it would result in future fissures, or that it may show that they were not a united front. Archival documents can only reveal certain details, since petitions and other official documents are usually only generated by ejidal leaders whose actions may or may not have reflected the wishes of the majority of the community.

As for Bamoa, division within their ejido apparently began almost immediately after villagers received their dotación. On February 15, 1934, several ejidatarios wrote to the President of Mexico, and the Governor of Sinaloa to level a complaint regarding the leadership within their ejido. The complaint alleged that after receiving their dotación, the engineer delegated by the National Agricultural Commission to survey their land appointed an ejidal commission on his own. These officers were not voted in by the community, and were considered outsiders. The commission proceeded to charge personal taxes to the ejidatarios of one to two pesos for practically everything. What made matters worse was that the officers themselves did not own a plow, meaning that they were truly outsiders since they did not harvest the land. The letter was signed by several ejidatarios and included a separate sheet with the names of 536 ejidatarios who allegedly opposed the administrative committee.73

There were several possibilities as to why this letter was actually written. There was a good chance that the ejidal leaders were actually outsiders installed by the Agricultural Commission, and backed by other federal agencies, as this was not an uncommon occurrence.

The official survey conducted by the National Agricultural Commission noted that 698 men were

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73 February 15, 1934, AGN, Abelardo L. Rodríguez, 552.14/91
entitled to rights as ejidatarios. With the 536 names included in the letter, that meant that 162 names were unaccounted for. What was more likely in this case was that individuals within this minority of 162 ejidatarios gained administrative control over the ejido and spoke for it in all political matters.

This letter brought into question the validity of ejidal leadership, as to whether this minority truly spoke for the wishes of the majority. The fact that the ejidal leaders signing their names to legal petitions that Bamoa submitted into the 1950s, were not among the 536 names appearing on the opposition list, suggested that this small faction continued to make decisions for the majority. The vital issue was if these decisions benefitted the entire ejido, or only those making decisions. I was unable to locate any additional letters complaining about ejidal leadership. It is possible that these leaders started to make decisions that most ejido members backed, or at least did not sternly oppose.

Leaders of Bamoa took it upon themselves to protect their interests, which were often intimately tied to the benefits of companies that were also utilizing the water of the Sinaloa River. In May 1935, the pumps of Herrera Cazares and Company were shut down because they interfered with Dolores Alcalde viuda de Cazares’ water rights. Leaders of Bamoa sent a letter to the SAyF that same month, complaining against this shut down. They had been receiving water from Herrera Cazares and Company, and this shut down left them with no water to irrigate their lands. They begged for the reinstatement of this company’s water rights, pointing out that the complaint against the company was filed by merely one person (Alcalde), whereas the benefits Bamoa received were collective.⁷⁴ This is a good example of how Bamoa’s leaders were able to frame this argument in terms of the greater good taking precedent over a single person’s wishes.

⁷⁴ May 11, 1935, AHA, Aguas Nacionales, Expediente 14227, Caja 1013
By that same token, it is unclear whether these leaders represented the best interests of the majority of their own community.

By the following year, the contract between Bamoa and Herrera Cazares and Company was jeopardized, apparently because Bamoa refused to pay the agreed upon 20% of their harvest in exchange for irrigation water. In July of 1936, the SAyF wrote an internal memo saying how the Departamento de Asuntos Indígenas (Department of Indian Affairs) was speaking with the Procurador de Comunidades Indígenas de Sinaloa (Attorney for Indigenous Communities of Sinaloa) to come up with a solution to solve this problem. The memo was not clear as to why Bamoa held out its payment, but the subject line at the top of the page stated, “Requesting collaboration so the water concessionaire does not exploit the ejidatarios.”

From the details provided in these documents it can be inferred that leaders of Bamoa withheld payment because they felt they were being exploited. If Bamoa was in fact exploited by this company, then withholding payment for water reflected an example of one of the options of resistance that they had at their disposal. Resistance for the indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley was no longer confined to armed conflict under leaders like Felipe Bachomo.

By the 1930s Yoremes of the Fuerte Valley moved past direct armed resistance and employed new strategies. In refusing to pay the agreed upon 20% of their harvest, Bamoas practiced what James Scott called everyday resistance. This form of struggle utilizes the ordinary weapons of powerless groups, is informal, requires little to no planning, and is concerned with immediate, de facto gains. This particular every day resistance act of Bamoas took the form of passive noncompliance, and it can be argued that this quiet evasion was more effective than massive and defiant confrontation. Bamoas found some success in using this everyday

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75 July 27, 1936, Ibid.
76 Scott, Weapons of the Weak, 27-33.
resistance, but it was not without its limitations. Local elites controlled what Scott described as
the public stage. Bamoa leader actions put their reputation on the line. By withholding payment
they risked social and economic sanctions. Other water providers were likely more cautious and
apprehensive about doing business with them.\textsuperscript{77}

Another means available for northwest indigenous communities to lessen their burden,
and minimize the potential of being exploited, was to align with state agencies. In this case the
SAyF assisted the ejido of Bamoa. They also received help from the Attorney of Indigenous
Communities of Sinaloa and the Department of Indian Affairs, who all searched for ways to
arrive at a solution to this problem. These agencies specifically oversaw the interests of
indigenous people, suggesting that state agencies still perceived Bamoa as an indigenous ejido.
By participating in the legal system of the postrevolutionary state, Bamoas found an ally in state
functionaries. They also found allies in some of the companies and individuals who agreed to
proportion water to them.

Earlier that year, in February of 1936, Bamoa’s leaders had reached an agreement to
receive water from the pumps of Alicia Alcalde, which irrigated 350 hectares of their land,
where they grew mostly tomatoes for export. They honored this agreement for the next six years,
and in July of 1942 wrote a letter on behalf of Alicia Alcalde, asking the SAyF to approve her
permit for use of national waters for that year.\textsuperscript{78} The 350 hectares used in this case showed that
Bamoa had many different agricultural operations occurring simultaneously. These particular
properties were used to cultivate tomatoes for export, meaning that a growing number of
ejidatarios no longer used their land purely for subsistence agriculture.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid, 24-25.
\textsuperscript{78} July 20, 1942, AHA, Aguas Nacionales, Expediente 17661, Caja 1310
The move away from purely subsistence farming raises the question as to whether Bamoa ejidatario actions reflected their need for community preservation, or if they simply wanted to increase their income. The two of these motivations were not necessarily mutually exclusive. Even if some Bamoas diverged from subsistence farming, they continued to utilize the soil and stay connected to the river, which in itself kept some elements of their social structure intact.

This is also another example of an instance in which an indigenous community rewarded the ethical behavior of one of their business associates. Alcalde’s actions led to a letter written on her behalf that helped her secure water rights. This remains in stark contrast to the negative treatment Bamoas received from Herrera Cazares and Company that led to their actions of withholding payment for services. Indigenous people of Sinaloa continued to utilize the weapons at their disposal in order to leverage advantageous deals with individuals and companies.

This mutually beneficial agreement notwithstanding, there were other parties who continued to impede the progress of Bamoa’s irrigation practices. In December of the same year, the ejidal commissioner of Bamo wrote another letter to the SAyF, stating that they had been using the waters purchased from Alicia Alcalde, yet they had a problem with another local resident Dolores Alcalde viuda de Cazares, who also provided water to companies harvesting in the area. They argued that,

We rarely benefit from her canal that passes in front of us. The only ones benefitting are Americans, and some of them have defrauded our interests. There is also a company (owned by) Greeks, aligned with her who constitute a serious threat to our interests. Although for the moment even with work and expenses we could survive without water pumps. But in the months of crises, a lack of water causes conflict, because they take serious proportions (of our water), and are willing to defend each other. Our investments have more roots, importance, and time than the aforementioned parties.  

79 December 7, 1942, AHA, Aguas Nacionales, Expediente 17661, Caja 1310
These comments are crucial to understanding Bamoa tactics. By saying their investment had more roots, importance, and time than the others shows that the villagers recognized their worth as indigenous people of the region. These Yoris used the land to benefit economically, and they had no apparent emotional or spiritual ties to this territory. Bamoa practices were tied into this soil and water for centuries. By using this irrigation technology, they gave back to the land by seeding and watering it, this was a reciprocal approach that kept their community intact.

Leaders of Bamoa also channeled a nationalistic tone in this letter, by pointing out that those benefitting from the canal were foreigners. This reflected the political situation of the Lázaro Cárdenas era (1934-40) in which local farmer’s interests were often given preference over foreign companies. Bamoa leaders were a little bit late in proposing such an argument, as Manuel Ávila Camacho became president of Mexico in 1940, and declared war on the Axis Powers two months before the writing of the petition. This marked a new era in not only foreign policy, but in how river water was accessed. These two issues became inextricably tied on the Fuerte River, but not as much on other local water sources such as the Sinaloa River, which will be a major topic of my discussion in chapter three.

**La Palma**

La Palma, located in the Fuerte Municipality, along the Fuerte River, represented another Mayo ejido whose beneficiaries used irrigation infrastructure when it benefitted them communally. La Palma lagged about fifteen years behind Los Goros, and ten years behind Bamoa, in grasping the utilization of petitions to request water resources from the federal government. Archival documents suggest that La Palma’s leaders were constrained by different
local circumstances that prevented them from accessing irrigation water as early as the other two villages.

Most of La Palma’s political struggles for, and against, the implementation of irrigation infrastructure took place in the 1940s. Their delay in petitioning the government led to additional difficulties, as the Fuerte Valley experienced vast social and political changes with the onset of World War II. La Palma also differed from these other two villages in that some of the land they requested as part of their dotación was attached to hacienda land. La Palma’s agrarian struggles and incipient efforts to secure irrigation technology revealed a great deal about the diverse experiences of Mayo communities in the Fuerte Valley from 1926 to 1942.

Agrarian leaders of La Palma first applied for an ejido in December 1929, sending a hand-written request for a dotación to the Agrarian Commission. They followed up this petition with several more over the next two years as they began using a type-writer, defining specific laws that would bestow them rights to land, and even pointing out particular tracts of land that they wanted. In September 1931, the Executive Committee wrote a more eloquent petition (as compared to its 1929 predecessor) to the National Agrarian Commission which asked that they approve their petition from 1929, and also asserted that,

We do not have enough food to survive. To exit the backward state in which we find ourselves in, we beg you. In order to ascend to the campesino class of Sinaloa, which was promised by the revolution, that as soon as we can become campesinos in our ejido, we will leave our state of poverty, and this will solve our economic problems.

The wording and tone here were similar to many other indigenous and peasant village petitions to the federal government in the 1920s and 1930s. Such communities took note of nationalistic

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80 December 15, 1929, AGA, Dotación, Expediente 23/1122, Legajo 1, Asunto Ejecucion, La Palma, Municipio El Fuerte.
currents of some postrevolutionary leaders who sought to mobilize the countryside. These rural villages often used this revolutionary vocabulary to express their allegiance to change.

These currents of revolutionary fervor often led to political action throughout Mexico. Chris Boyer summed up revolutionary agrarian action best in describing how these rural folks,

Tentatively engaged postrevolutionary notions of class and citizenship. In the process, many of them came to regard themselves as members of an abstract collectivity with a shared historical legacy, similar social attributes, and a unique set of collective politico-economic interests, and in this sense to imagine that they belonged to a new social category that had never existed in Mexico before, a collectivity of class-conscious revolutionary citizens known as campesinos.  

The petitions written by the leaders of La Palma suggested they began to envision themselves in notions of class consciousness. The difference here was that La Palma’s leaders represented themselves as poor people who wanted the opportunity to ascend to the position of campesinos, which was promised by the Revolution. They were not quite members of this campesino collectivity yet, but with help from the state they could realize this dream. Their emergence as campesinos would bring them out of their impoverished state. Framing their argument in terms of class consciousness, suggested that leaders of La Palma understood well the national political trends of this era and how it could help them receive land.

These leaders’ comprehension of political matters and the increase in quality of their petitions makes it appear that maybe there were outside influences at work here. The example of the evolution of their writing skills with each successive petition is similar to Los Goros, in that these petitions kept getting better over time. It is also a mystery as to where they, or the other two communities for that matter, acquired access to a typewriter to write these petitions.

In April 1936, an engineer was sent in to La Palma to perform a census and land assessment, and he presented his findings in July of that year. The engineer concluded that in the

82 Boyer, Becoming Campesinos, 20.
village of La Palma, there were 921 inhabitants and 206 heads of families. No type of works to
capture water from the Fuerte River existed, but there was a place where they could install a
pump. The majority of the inhabitants were of Mayan descent.  

The fact that no irrigation infrastructure was used by the inhabitants of La Palma did not
necessarily mean that they overlooked the value of irrigating their lands. Documents pertaining
to La Palma and their neighbors exhibited massive contention. Perhaps this was a case of La
Palma’s leaders not wanting to cooperate with those they despised in order to get irrigation
water. There was also a possibility that these villagers used extralegal means such as weirs or
fencerows, or other ways to divert water to irrigate their crops.

Today La Palma is considered a mixed ejido, with both Yoris and Mayos, but apparently
its origins were as an indigenous community. According to oral sources La Palma was founded
as a purely indigenous ejido. Mayo elder Librado Cuadros asserted that, “At first, all the
ejidatarios of La Palma were Yoremes, then around the 1950s, Yoris started to become
members.” The fact that the engineer mistakenly referred to the inhabitants as “Mayans”
instead of “Mayos”, showed the lack of information, and perhaps apathy of this state bureaucrat
in determining their race. It is difficult to know how he established who was, or was not
indigenous, as some inhabitants were bilingual and likely addressed him in Spanish.

On February 12, 1937, La Palma finally received their definitive dotación in the amount
of 2,437 hectares. Of this property, 112 hectares of seasonal land came from Filiberto Quintero,
meaning it was not irrigated, and could only be harvested by using the seasonal rain. From the
estate of San José de Cahuinahua, they received 294 hectares of moist soil, and 200 hectares of
low hills. Most of their land was expropriated from the hacienda of Sara H. Viuda de Vega, the

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widow of the recently deceased Eudoro Vega. Of which they received 46 hectares of land with moist soil, 163 hectares of seasonal (mechanically irrigated) land, 22 hectares of irrigated land, and 1,800 hectares of wild pasture.\textsuperscript{85} Sections of the 1,800 hectares of wild pasture, and 200 hectares of low hills could probably be used for religious ceremonies and to gather natural raw materials for religious purposes. It is unclear if any of this new land replaced the territory used for such purposes.

Water rights for the new ejidatarios were limited. The listing of the 163 hectares of seasonal (mechanical irrigation) apparently meant that the Vega estate only had permission to capture the rough waters of the Fuerte River during the rainy season. The 22 hectares of irrigated land had a water permit attached, meaning they receive water pumped in from the river all year long. Both of these rights were therefore transferred over to the ejido of La Palma.

La Palma villagers did not own additional tracts of private property like some of the ejidatarios of Los Goros. This helps to explain why smallholders of Los Goros maintained land tracks along the river shore while ejidatarios of La Palma did not. Land development documents show that most of La Palma’s ejidal lands were not only fragmented, but the majority of them were separated from the river. Most of the property along the river shore was either privately owned by outsiders, or delegated as property of the nation.\textsuperscript{86} The inability of La Palma’s inhabitants to secure land titles prior to receiving their ejido may also help explain the delay of accepting irrigation infrastructure into their practices.

Attempts by some of La Palma’s ejidatarios to secure individual river shore property brought into question ejidal community cohesion. On January 20, 1937, less than a month before La Palma definitively received their ejido, Victor Ontiveros sent an application to the SAyF

\textsuperscript{85} February 6, 1953, AGA, Dotación, Expediente 23/1122, Legajo 1, Asunto Ejecucion, La Palma, Municipio El Fuerte.
\textsuperscript{86} December 30, 1936, Ibid.
requesting the right to rent four hectares of national property located on the river shore. The petition was also signed, and apparently endorsed by the president of the executive agrarian committee of La Palma.\textsuperscript{87} Ontiveros was an ejidatario of La Palma, and signed his name on the official documents that granted the ejidal lands to La Palma a few weeks later on February twelfth.\textsuperscript{88} Even after the disbursement of ejidal lands, Ontiveros continued to submit petitions for the right to rent property owned by the Mexican government. It is unclear as to why Ontiveros, an ejidatario with rights to ejidal land attempted to request more land, or why the executive agrarian committee endorsed this action.

Victor Ontiveros was given permission to rent this property in 1937 and continued to harvest crops and pay rent until 1939. He lost these rights in 1939 when Jesus Manzanarez took possession, likely because the SAyF discovered Ontiveros was an ejidatario.\textsuperscript{89} Ontiveros submitted new applications to the SAyF for the right to rent this government land. On February 12, 1940 the SAyF sent a response to Ontiveros. The Ministry instructed Ontiveros to re-submit his petition in triplicate, warned him of the consequences of submitting false documents, and added that,

\begin{quote}
ajeidatarios do not have the right to obtain concessions for land along the river. Let it be noted, that all the ejidos being calculated, for the total number of campesinos considered eligible for ejidal parcel, are considered to have solved their economic problems. There are also another large number of campesinos that are landless, that also have the right to ejidal land. This merits official attention, and for those (landless campesinos) we reserve the lands along the river shore…If you have ejidal land, we suggest you renounce it so that you can obtain this concession.\textsuperscript{90}
\end{quote}

This response by the SAyF showed that they were aware of the increased demand for river shore property. The fact that only a small portion of ejidal lands granted to La Palma were located

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\textsuperscript{87} January 20, 1937, AHA, Aguas Nacionales, Expediente 64579, Caja 7749 \\
\textsuperscript{88} February 12, 1937, AGA, Dotación, Expediente 23/1122, Legajo 3, Asunto Ejecucion, La Palma, Municipio El Fuerte. \\
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
along the river shore suggests that this state agency believed villagers owned enough prime, damp land to fit their economic needs.

The fact that Ontiveras was an ejidatario further complicated his requests. The SAyF’s response to Ontiveros’ petition in 1940 marked the earliest date of a document from a state agency in the Fuerte Valley that I encountered, explaining that ejidatarios could not request land along the river shore. Ontiveros proceeded with his petition and was eventually granted the right to rent land along the river shore in July of 1940, which suggests that he followed the SAyF’s advice and denounced his rights as an ejidatario.

It is unclear why Ontiveros denounced his ejidal rights in favor of renting private property along the river shore. Perhaps he was never assigned a plot of ejidal land or he was not enthusiastic about the property he was rewarded. Maybe he simply recognized the opportunity of acquiring better property near the riverbanks and found the means to pay the rent on this land. Either way it appears he renounced his ejidal rights in order to rent prime river shore land from the state. It is possible Ontiveros did not feel attached to the community of La Palma or that he was always considered an outsider. La Palma was not the only village to become split after it gained ejidal status, and Ontiveros’ actions brought ejidal community cohesion into question.

La Palma received their ejido in 1937 which included some irrigation rights, yet the amount of river water available to them was limited. The 22 hectares of irrigated land and 163 hectares of only seasonally irrigated land were enough to sustain them in their first few years of transition as an ejido. Their efforts to gain more irrigated land could have derived from their ancient beliefs of having symbolic ties to the soil and water. Mayo elder Alfonso Luque of La Palma described that,

At that point we could no longer rely on the (flood) waters of the Fuerte River to irrigate our crops. We had a bond with nature, with the water and the earth. We
were intermediaries that helped create (plant) life. But when that water stopped, then our bond was broken. We needed to find a way to recreate this. 91

This bond that Luque mentioned derived from Mayo beliefs that they played an integral role within nature. Nature finds a way to adapt to transformations in ecosystems. As outsiders changed the physical surroundings of the Fuerte Valley and cut off their irrigation water from the Fuertes River, some indigenous villages took personal responsibility in regaining this symbolic connection.

Ejidal leaders from La Palma first requested additional water rights in 1942. In April of that year, ejidal commissioner Bartolo Valenzuela and his officers petitioned the SAyF for water rights for their lots 250 meters away from the Fuerte River.92 The petition did not mention if these rights were to be added to those they already held, but it did show that they recognized the necessity of pump-irrigated lands.

The SAyF’s initial response was to deny their request, which was not uncommon for this time period. The reasoning was that the ejido needed to go through the proper channels. After sending in the correct paperwork the ejido was then informed that they also needed blueprints, and specific details on the irrigation process, in order to be granted this permission. After submitting more documents, the ejido of La Palma was finally granted a provisional permit for the use of the Fuerte River’s waters in July 1942.93 This process represented the obstacles state officials placed in the way, and subsequent difficulties Mayo communities needed to overcome in order to gain water rights in the mid-twentieth century. Perhaps ejidal leaders of La Palma learned from the success and failure of Los Goros and their struggles for water rights during the 1930s.

91 Alfonso Luque, Interview by James Mestaz, La Palma, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, April 17, 2014.
92 April 26, 1942AHA, Aguas Nacionales, Expediente 6151, Caja 555
93 July 22, 1942, Ibid.
By continuing to harvest their fields, ejidatarios of La Palma ensured the survival of their community. Mayo spirituality was the backbone of their culture, and securing irrigation water became intimately linked to their social structure and community. Agricultural ecologist Gary Paul Nabhan described that,

some currently existing cultures contend that the way one farms and cares for local resources has everything to do with the spiritual life of the community …These cultural communities offer us insights into the mutually reinforcing earthly spiritual life, and skilled concern for the ecological integrity of food-producing land and plants.\(^\text{94}\)

Indigenous villages in the Fuerte Valley, and La Palma specifically, fit the mold of these cultural communities whose spiritual integrity remained intact due to their adoption of irrigation technology. The right to use hydrological infrastructure were short term victories for communities like La Palma who faced major changes in the political structure of the Fuerte Valley by the mid-1940s.

**Conclusion**

From 1926 to 1942, Mayo communities engaged with the state, with capitalist corporations and individuals, and with irrigation technology in novel, divergent, and sometimes surprising ways. The strategies they followed depended on the texture of local communities, the geographic characteristics of land, and the options at their disposal. These factors helped to determine the relative success or failure that each of these indigenous communities reached in accessing irrigation technology within the Fuerte Valley.

The three communities under analysis offer different lessons in struggles for land and water from 1926 to 1942. The increased availability of water and land rights brought new leaders to the forefront in Los Goros and Bamoa, which brought into question just how much they

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\(^{94}\) Nabhan, *Enduring Seeds*, 71
represented their communities. The ability of these two communities to secure certain land rights ahead of official dotaciones, allowed them to gain experience in dealing with both private water providers, and with state agencies. Perhaps this is how they were able to integrate water infrastructure into their communities faster than ejidos like La Palma.

The specific ways in which each community altered the physical dimensions and terms of membership into their communities, exhibited first the growing multiplicity of Mayo practices, and second the importance they placed on community survival. Los Goros’ community consisted of both smallholders and ejidatarios, Bama consolidated land gained through both restitución and dotación into one community, and La Palma apparently allowed an ejidatario to denounce his ejidal rights to gain access to river shore property. This diversity of actions challenged the conventional notions of Mayo community as they fit within the structure of new, complex circumstances dealing with access to land and water.

Mayo petitions for water and land rights did not differ drastically from Yori campesinos seeking similar privileges. Yet the nascent Yori communities, and fabricated ejidos created by state functionaries lumping campesinos together, did not have the same historical ties to land and water as these indigenous villages. In this sense, it is absolutely significant that Mayo villages took often drastic and unorthodox steps to gain land and water rights. Such actions revealed their ability to find cracks within the system, and helped guarantee that new uses of land and water remained consistent with spiritual practices, while their villages were altered and changed in order to keep them intact.

These diverse river histories provide insight into how Mayo villages confronted obstacles by using all the tools at their disposal and creating opportunities that today distinguish the history of their particular community. Their stories offer solid historical inquiry into such themes as
indigenous cultural persistence, political maneuvering, uses and rejection of new technology, and environmental adaptability, which this dissertation will continue to focus on. These particular river histories also act as a cornerstone to launching into detailed examinations of the time periods that I cover in the next three chapters, of the 1940s and 1950s.

As Mexico entered the Second World War in 1942, the state soon granted a sugar cane producing cooperative exclusive rights to the use of the Fuerte River for four months out of the year. Membership in this sugarcane cooperative played a major role in the transformation, and sometimes fragmentation of indigenous communities, but also in their relationships with Yori individuals and corporations. The next two chapters will therefore focus largely on the changes to Mayo ejidos on the Fuerte River as they reformulated their community and social structure which altered their culture, but kept it intact.
The formation of the SICAE sugarcane cooperative came in response to peasant demands for both labor rights and access to land in the Fuerte Valley in the late 1930s. The Agricultural Association of Collective Ejidal Interest, Proletarian Emancipation (Sociedad de Interés Colectivo Agrícola Ejidal, or SICAE) was created in 1938, as an amalgamation of local unions and non-union workers. Thanks to labor organizing efforts, President Lázaro Cárdenas expropriated the lands of United Sugar (USCOS) in the same year, and turned them over to the 34 collective ejidos who fell under the administrative powers of the SICAE. These collective communities were then obligated to continue producing sugarcane collectively.

The SICAE’s leadership consisted primarily of unionists working for improved conditions of sugarcane workers. The cooperative’s intentions early on seem to have been quite noble, if not idealistic. The SICAE organized these sugarcane producing communities and paid members a fair wage for their labor. The cooperative’s leaders soon struggled to provide enough irrigated lands for their affiliated communities, as sugarcane requires massive amounts of irrigation water to ensure productive harvests.

The SICAE administration eventually devised strategies that favored their affiliated ejidatarios over other members of ejidos who were not part of the cooperative. The collective began integrating a developmentalist policy that treated the landscape of the Fuerte Valley as if it were a blank canvas, devoid of populations of people, flora, and fauna. In their early years of its

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1 Schobert, *La SICAE.*
development (1938 to 1946) the SICAE’s repressive actions deepened existing cleavages within Mayo villages and even created new ones.

In most cases ejidatarios viewed inclusion into the sugarcane cooperative as desirable and village cliques became members, while refusing to let others join. Several communities of the Fuerte Valley became fragmented between self-proclaimed collectivist members of the cooperative and independent individualists. Affiliated ejidatarios were granted a regular salary, received irrigation water to grow sugarcane, allowed to harvest their own crops on individual plots, and promised a share of the profits the cooperative earned. Individualists were left with few options especially since they were no longer granted formal irrigation water concessions.

For some Mayo communities membership within the SICAE became a contentious issue early on. Los Goros ejidatarios were all Mayos, while the ejidos Zapotillo and El Teroque consisted of both indigenous and Yori (non-Mayo) ejidatarios. In these mixed-race ejidos, membership within the SICAE came to be based largely along ethnic lines. Most Mayos either eschewed membership, or mestizos refused to let them join the cooperative. The fact that the majority of collectivists were mestizos suggests that the SICAE’s administration felt that the former were more prepared to collaborate with this state-backed agency. We can also see by the split within these ejidos that some Mayo communities regarded their ejido as just one component of their identity.

The following two chapters investigate how the struggle over irrigation rights, through both groups’ divergent approaches to accessing the Fuerte River, exacerbated an already volatile situation. Collectivists acted as the SICAE’s foot soldiers and seized individualists’ properties, while the latter developed tactics to both defend their lands and access irrigation water. By the late 1930s, some Mayo farmers relied more heavily on pumps and canals for successful harvests.
In the early 1940s, the SICAE and their affiliated ejidos were granted a four-month monopoly on irrigation water from the Fuerte River. The cooperative’s enforcement of this seasonal monopoly and control of the river left individualists, and other Mayo ejidatarios not affiliated with the SICAE, without water concessions. This forced the indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley to use all means at their disposal to retain access to water.

The capacity of both collectivists and individualists to gain and maintain control of productive land was predicated on securing irrigation infrastructure. The inability to access irrigation water often led to underproduction, leaving these lands susceptible to annexation. Some outsiders declared such properties as unused in attempts to claim them. Access to hydraulic technology thus played a pivotal role in the struggle between collectivists and individualists in northern Sinaloa. Other less conventional and often illegal means were sometimes used by Mayo farmers to capture irrigation water.

In this chapter I analyze the significance of the rise of the SICAE as it related to the history of ejidos in the Fuerte Valley, and why Mayo approaches to land and water use not only altered their communities, it also changed the strategies of the sugarcane cooperative. I accomplish this by first tracing the historical importance of sugarcane to the world economy. Examining the history of the most prominent collective ejidos in Mexico allows me to distinguish the unique characteristics of the ejidos that joined the SICAE. I then outline the rise of the SICAE within the context of sugarcane laborer struggles within the Fuerte Valley, and also the importance of the cooperative’s official four-month river monopoly that started in 1943.

The bulk of this chapter is dedicated to analyzing the beginning stages of conflicts between individualists and collectivists in the three Mayo communities of Zapotillo, Los Goros, and El Teroque from 1938 to 1946. The best approach for such an inquiry was to investigate the
disparity in water rights between collectivists and individualists within these three ejidos. I argue that the SICAE’s more subtle approach to acquiring irrigated properties in this time period delayed contention between individualists and collectivists, postponing some of the animosity directed toward the cooperative long enough to gain almost total control of the Fuerte River, and increase its power and political influence. To further show how Mayos navigated the SICAE’s despotic control over the Fuerte Valley and river monopoly, I examine how indigenous ejidatarios of Tehueco and Jahuara found creative ways to access irrigation water. The divergences in the histories of each of these five ejidos reveal the various ways Mayos both negotiated and rebelled against the SICAE’s uneven use of natural resources from the late 1930s through mid-1940s.

Sugarcane in Mexico and in the World

Sugarcane has been one of the most profitable yet polarizing crops in the history of the world. It is responsible for producing inestimable wealth for some countries and individuals, yet its labor force and natural environment were greatly exploited simultaneously. American historian Elizabeth Abbott argued that the sugar industry uprooted the peoples and their civilizations, and the agriculture and the very soil of the new world, but was also responsible for, “the creation of major trade routes; the redefinition of taste standards and the addiction of millions of people to sweetness and unhealthy, disease-causing diets; the development of the language of human rights; and fatal damage to the planet’s flora and fauna.” ² Sugarcane has done more than any other crop to harm human and animal populations and their environments while creating massive economic disparities and empires.

² Abbott, Sugar, 27.
Sugarcane was first domesticated over 2,000 years ago in New Guinea, and perhaps simultaneously in Indonesia. Honey was the most popular sweetener in the world until sugar began to replace it. Not only does sugar enhance flavors instead of overpowering them like honey, but it is also easier to produce on an industrial scale. Anthropologist Sidney Mintz explained that sucrose is the substance extracted primarily from sugarcane, which has been its main source for more than a millennium. Sugarcane is mostly a tropical crop that requires a great deal of water. It can survive without irrigation, but it yields better when watered regularly in an environment with minimal temperature fluctuation.

Environmental determinants help to explain sugarcane’s rapid growth in the Americas. Historian of Brazil, Stuart Schwartz explained that, “the opening of the New World to European settlement and exploitation created new and seemingly endless opportunities for the expansion of large-scale export agriculture, for which sugar was the most logical and probably most lucrative crop.” Sugar was also a huge factor in the establishment of the transatlantic slave trade. Sugarcane was every bit as responsible for building the Americas and creating economic opportunities as it was for destroying or altering cultures.

The sugar industry started in Mexico in 1552 when Spaniards brought sugarcane from their homeland and planted it near the city of Veracruz. The climate and soil of this coastal region were perfect for sugarcane, and the crops flourished initially. Perhaps due to its constant need for water, and Mexico’s underdeveloped irrigation infrastructure, sugarcane was not among this country’s most widely produced crops from the outset. Innovations in hydraulic technology, and the influx of Mexican and U.S. private investment by the late nineteenth century, led to sugar becoming a significant economic factor in such states as Sinaloa and Morelos. With much

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3 Ibid, 15.
of the irrigation infrastructure destroyed during the Mexican Revolution in Morelos, Veracruz became the major grower of sugarcane, and continued to hold that crown throughout the mid-twentieth century. Production of sugarcane has grown steadily every year since 1925, and by the mid-twentieth century, became the second largest crop grown (by volume) in Mexico behind corn.\(^6\)

The growth of Mexico’s sugarcane industry grew in conjunction with its rise to prominence in the Fuerte Valley. As I discussed in Chapter two, the United Sugar Companies came to dominate the sugarcane industry by cornering concessions to the Fuerte River that resulted in a virtual monopoly. After United Sugar lands were expropriated and awarded as dotaciones, the state mandated that all properties previously under sugar cultivation would remain as such, and produced cooperatively by these ejidatarios. These new sugarcane farmers still did not have enough irrigation water to utilize their lands optimally as only about one-half of their tracts were irrigated.\(^7\)

Other than the limitations in irrigation availability, there were environmental factors that proved favorable for the sugarcane producing ejidos. The only sugarcane plant disease in Mexico was known as *mosaico* (mosaic disease). The strain of sugarcane used primarily in Sinaloa was the POJ2878 variety, indigenous to Java, which is resistant to mosaic disease. This strain’s only limitation is that it suffers during frost conditions, which are not very common in the Fuerte Valley. There were also a limited number of parasite species within the Fuerte Valley that could attack sugarcane plants. In earlier times in Sinaloa there were two types of parasites that were potentially harmful to the sugarcane crop, the indigenous fly known as *Theresia*, as well as the Cuban Fly. Yet neither became a huge threat, because of either the adverse weather conditions,

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\(^6\) Banco de Mexico, *La Industria Azucarera de Mexico*, Tomo 1, 23, 39, 41.

\(^7\) Banco de Mexico, *La Industria*, Tomo Segundo Primera Parte, 3, 60
or the absence of their preferred host\textsuperscript{8}. Seasonal shortages of precipitation notwithstanding, the conditions within the Fuerte Valley were nearly perfect to grow sugarcane.

Sugarcane production presents some obstacles but it is a somewhat easy crop to plant. Elizabeth Abbott explained that it is, “propagated asexually from stem cuttings that must include one of the nodes, bands that circle the stem. The cuttings are planted in soil, and the buds begin to root and grow their own stems…It grows again without replanting for several seasons, giving progressively less sugar.”\textsuperscript{9} Within the Fuerte Valley, sugarcane farmers learned the most efficient ways to cultivate this crop. In October, December, and February, farmers or other hired laborers prepared the soil by clearing, plowing, and disk ing, using tractors, plows, cultivators, beasts of burden, and disc harrows. Farmers then planted sugarcane rods in February and March. To raise one hectare of sugarcane, planters used approximately 1,200 rods, which yielded in about twelve months.\textsuperscript{10}

In the late-1950s, sugarcane was the most profitable crop grown in the Fuerte Valley. The cost of planting and harvesting a hectare of sugarcane was around $1,400 pesos. This produced about sixty tons of sugarcane, which on the open market sold for almost $3,000 pesos. The price paid per ton by the USCOS sugar mill in Los Mochis varied. If sugarcane growers found these prices unfavorable, it sometimes led to strikes or work stoppages. The cost to grow a hectare of corn, on the other hand, was around $350 pesos. This yielded approximately one and a half tons of corn, which sold for about $1,200 pesos, or acted as the main staple crop in these farmers’ diets.\textsuperscript{11} Sugarcane was profitable, but also required the largest amount of irrigation water and initial investment. Ejidatarios and the Ejidal Bank took on risk if it was harvested by individual

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid, 19-20, 34.
\textsuperscript{9} Abbott, 13.
\textsuperscript{10} March 12, 1958. AGA, División de Ejidos, Expediente 231.3/94, Legajo 1, Asunto Ejecución , Camajoa, Municipio El Fuerte.
\textsuperscript{11} March 12, 1958, Ibid.
farmers, which is generally the reason why President Lázaro Cárdenas made it mandatory for sugarcane to be produced collectively.

**Collective Ejidos**

The SICAE-affiliated collectivist ejidos exemplified the new types of agricultural producing communities that sprouted up throughout Mexico in the 1930s. According to Mexican historian Salomon Eckstein, who wrote favorably about Cardenas and the cooperatives, a more accurate term to describe collective ejidos of Mexico were “ejidal societies of cooperative production.” Based on its experimental nature, this communal strategy of harvesting various crops throughout Mexico garnered significant attention initially from the media, politicians, and academics. In the early to mid-twentieth century only a few countries in the western hemisphere practiced cooperative agriculture, and none on the same scale as Mexico.\(^\text{12}\)

The growth of collective ejidos in Mexico directly correlated with the beliefs and motives of arguably its most progressive president, Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940). Prominent historian of Mexico, Alan Knight suggested that, “the drift of the argument so far is that the Cárdenas regime adopted radical policies and rhetoric and that, no less important, both supporters and opponents saw the regime as attempting radical new initiatives that they loved or loathed according to taste.”\(^\text{13}\) The Cárdenas administration’s insistence on carrying out radical measures in the Fuerte Valley created a great divide between those who supported and rejected these actions.

Cárdenas attempted to consolidate the progressive measures of the 1917 Constitution by carrying out unprecedented reforms, while limiting foreign investment. These agrarian reforms

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\(^{13}\) Knight, “Cardenismo: Juggernaut or Jalopy?” *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 90.
echoed Cárdenas’ goals of mobilizing peasants, but also revealed his strategy of using irrigation to develop both individualist ejidos and collectives. Cárdenas’ policies have also been described by environmental historians Emily Wakild and Chris Boyer as, “development minded social landscaping, that is, holistic political project intended to manage rural society and nature together to rationalize the countryside.”\(^{14}\) The creation of collective ejidos exemplified Cárdenas’ ability to diverge from traditional styles of governance and experiment with new programs designed to empower peasants and their communities.

The choice of the regions that would utilize this new type of cooperative agricultural production was not coincidental. Under Cárdenas, approximately 700-800 collective societies were established in the most fertile regions of Mexico.\(^ {15}\) The 1937 Agrarian Code was a major change in ejidal policy that did not outlive Cardenismo in its intended form as a means of campesino empowerment. Article 139 of the Agrarian Code said that all crops that required a process of industrialization, and therefore were superior to individual economic capacity of the ejidatarios’ investments, exploitation would be organized collectively. Article 148 stated that the Agrarian Department and the National Bank of Ejidal Credit were the appropriate bodies to organize ejidos and credit societies, exercising functions of direction and oversight of these organisms.\(^ {16}\) As much as Cárdenas wanted to empower ejidatarios, he was reluctant to give them total control over agricultural regions whose output remained pivotal to the growth of the national economy. This form of Cárdenista governance, as Chris Boyer referred to as regimented empowerment, or “empowering rural folk by constituting them as an undifferentiated mass of

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\(^{14}\) Boyer and Wakild, “Social Landscaping in the Forests of Mexico” Hispanic American Historical Review, and Boyer, A Land Between Waters, 11.

\(^{15}\) Eckstein, 1.

campesinos with a purportedly common set of political interests,” was not as successful as Cárdenas anticipated.\(^{17}\)

The largest, the most productive, and most studied collectives were in the regions of La Laguna, the Yaqui Valley, the Fuerte Valley, and in the states of Yucatán, and Michoacán. The main similarities between these collectives was that their ejidatarios were organized and overseen by the Agrarian Department and National Bank of Ejidal Credit, received regular salaries for their labor, were entitled to share in some of the profits, and that a good number of ejidatarios eventually became dissatisfied with inclusion in their credit society. From here the differences were pretty profound, and reflect the reality of local politics, divisions, and other factors determined by their particular geographic region. Identifying these differences and similarities will help me explain the specific nature of the collectivist ejidos in the Fuerte Valley that joined the SICAE in the late 1930s and early 1940s.

The largest grouping of these collective ejidos was located in the area of La Comarca Lagunera, or La Laguna, which is situated in the northern states of Coahuila and Durango. In 1936, President Cárdenas expropriated 447,516 hectares of mostly irrigated land, and awarded them to almost 35,000 campesinos who formed 296 ejidos. Commercial farmers had primarily harvested cotton in the region, but ejidatarios also grew such crops as wheat, corn, and alfalfa.\(^{18}\)

Unlike in the Fuerte Valley that had a large number of indigenous ejidatarios, the majority of collective members in La Laguna were mestizos. Another difference was that collective ejidos of La Laguna, among the first of their kind, served as a testing ground for this new cooperative system. According to Salomon Eckstein and Iván Restrepo Fernández, La

\(^{17}\) Boyer, \textit{Becoming Campesinos}, 228.

\(^{18}\) Restrepo and Eckstein, \textit{La Agricultura Colectiva en Mexico}, 34. Several other works discuss the cooperatives of La Laguna including, Wolfe, \textit{Water and Revolution}; Blanco Macías, \textit{La Laguna y su desarrollo bajo el sistema colectivo de trabajo}; and Vargas-Lobsinger, \textit{La Comarca Lagunera}. 174
Laguna collectives were isolated, and did not constitute an optimal unit, or viable framework. The collectives near Los Mochis [Fuerte Valley], on the other hand, learned from the mistakes made in La Laguna. Therefore they faced their problems head on, and found better cooperation within their ejidos.\textsuperscript{19} The SICAE’s administrators likely learned from the mistakes committed in La Laguna. The following two chapters, however, will revise the history of political harmony within the Fuerte Valley collectives as related by such authors as Eckstein and Restrepo.

In addition to the contrasts between the collective ejidos in these two regions, they were not without their similarities. Eckstein and Restrepo pointed out three main factors that brought about the creation of the collectives in La Laguna. The region was of prime importance to the country’s economy, the trade union movement played a predominant role in the realization of the reform, and the unions later appeared as instruments to persuade ejidatarios to adopt the collective system.\textsuperscript{20} Correspondingly, the Fuerte Valley’s profitable sugarcane industry made it an indispensable cornerstone to Mexico’s economic plans. The union movement was a key factor in the major expropriations of haciendas in the Fuerte Valley, and the charismatic union leaders who came to form the SICAE administration were pivotal in recruiting ejidatarios to the collectivist sector.

The collective ejidos formed in the Yaqui Valley in the late 1930s also shared some similarities with their nearby neighbors to the south in the Fuerte Valley. In 1938, 2,160 ejidatarios received a total of 17,400 hectares of irrigated land and 36,000 hectares of unirrigated pasture land. This was a particularly large amount of irrigated land based on the number of ejidatarios in comparison to other dotaciones in Mexico. These ejidos were immediately organized into local collective societies under the management of the National Bank of Ejidal

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, 159, 176.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid, 31.
Credit. The collectives harvested mostly wheat and rice, along with some vegetables. They encountered many difficulties initially but the collectives soon recovered and produced relatively successful harvests.\textsuperscript{21}

One of the obstacles the collectives of the Yaqui Valley encountered, which resembled the situation in the Fuerte Valley, were the serious conflicts between collectivist and individualist ejidatarios.\textsuperscript{22} The difference here was that in the Yaqui Valley, collectivist ejidos made up entirely of indigenous people did not exist. In 1937, President Cárdenas awarded Yaquis a 1.2 million acre lot as an ejido they held in common. With the large number of Yaquis in the area, it is almost certain that not all of their land needs were satisfied, especially considering that only about 18,000 hectares of this land was irrigated farming property. Although no studies have examined this, indications are that few, if any Yaquis joined Yori communities and became ejidatarios in mixed ejidos. This is based primarily on the fact that racial tensions between Yaquis and Yoris/military were very strong. It is unclear whether the divisions between ejidatarios who wanted to harvest collectively, and those wanting to separate from the collective, were based on ethnic loyalties, as they were in the Fuerte Valley.

The collective ejidos in Yucatán were strikingly different from the rest of the collectives that I discuss here. This is mostly because Canto Echeverría, the state governor, insisted on keeping the collectives completely separate from the Agrarian Bank and not dependent on the federal government. The 272 ejidos in this henequen-producing zone made up this “Great Ejido” that came to fruition in 1938. They fell under one single bureaucracy, instead of individual credit societies.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{21} Banco Nacional de Credito, \textit{El sistema de producción colectiva}, 21.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid, 22.
\textsuperscript{23} Fallaw, \textit{Cárdenas Compromised}, 126.
Analogous to the Fuerte Valley, there were also ties between collectives and indigenous communities in Yucatán. Governor Echeverría linked the creation of this Great Ejido to indigenismo, suggesting that it was a return to traditional Mayan agricultural practices. Apparently U.S. archaeologist Sylvannius Morley told him that the Maya had historically worked the land collectively, not individually. To what extent Mayans farmed communally is a matter of debate. Although ownership of Mayo lands in the Fuerte Valley was traditionally communal, they harvested their crops on individual tracts of land that were probably assigned by their village leader (Cobanaro). Having no antecedents, collective farming was perhaps more difficult to adopt for Mayos of the Fuerte Valley, than for Mayans of Yucatán.

The Great Ejido enjoyed success in rooting federal government influence out of Yucatán, helping it to fend off the expansion of both the CNC and the CTM. Therefore the small battlefields that erupted in the Fuerte Valley between these two state-backed peasant and worker mobilization groups were non-existent in Yucatán. The major contention that did develop within Yucatán was between the “rich” ejidos that wanted to dismantle the Great Ejido, and other ejidos and the politicians they supported, that wanted to keep it in place. These rich ejidos that had received favorable land grants, produced more than others, and did not think it was fair to subsidize “poor” ejidos. In some form or another, the emergence of all collective ejidos was inevitably accompanied with massive contention and conflict.

The Collective Ejidos of Nueva Italia in the western state of Michoacán also differed greatly from the other collectives mentioned in this chapter. In June of 1938, President Cárdenas expropriated 32,136 hectares from large haciendas in the area. He awarded this land to 1,375 ejidatarios in five ejidos, whose region was often referred to as Nueva Italia. The principal crop

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24 Ibid, 127.
26 Fallaw, 134.
grown here was rice, which required excessive amounts of water to harvest the crop, similar to sugarcane.

The major difference between Nueva Italia and these other collectives was the ethnicity of the ejidatarios. Susana Glantz explained that Nueva Italia’s ejidatarios had much more heterogeneous origins than the other collectives, with less standing ties and relations. The majority of Nueva Italia’s inhabitants originated from other parts of Mexico, and in many cases had mixed their blood with Italians and Spaniards, giving them a unique physiognomy.\(^27\)

The one similarity between the collectives of Nueva Italia, and that of the Fuerte Valley were the factions within the ejidos that this system created. Within the collectives of Nueva Italia, several sectors of 70-100 ejidatarios united based on family and friendship networks, which may have coincided with ethnicity and place of origin. Each of these informal groups chose a leader who was in charge of assigning labor tasks, paying the ejidatarios, and representing them in front of the Ejidal Bank.\(^28\) These sectors bore a resemblance to the two factions that formed in the collective ejidos in the Fuerte Valley. The difference here was that instead of having one sector that opted out, or were barred from joining the collective, the ejidos of Nueva Italia remained within their collective, but chose leaders who best represented their particular political values and needs. These unique separations within collectives of both of these regions, exhibited not only the adaptability of ejidatarios, but also a tendency to self-segregate based, at least partially, on ethnic differences.

Ejidal forestry producer cooperatives differed from these agricultural cooperatives in the fact that the postrevolutionary Mexican state helped organize the latter based on their perceived importance to the economy. The Cárdenas administration encouraged ejidos to join forestry

\(^{27}\) Glantz, *El Ejido Colectivo de Nueva Italia*, 17, 100. John Gledhill's *Casi Nada: A Study in Agrarian Reform in the Homeland of Cardenismo*, is also an important source for the analysis of these Michoacán collectives.

\(^{28}\) Ibid, 141.
cooperatives, as according to Chris Boyer, “they could function as vehicles for organizing rural people into small-scale institutions that worked with foresters and federal administration, while at the same time giving rural people greater authority over their own resources.” These two types of cooperatives did share similarities in the ways by which affiliates often barred others from their community from membership, and with help from state sponsored institutions, cornered and monopolized natural resources.

There is very little information about the forestry cooperative started by the Mayo ejido of Jahuara, other than that ejidal leaders were given permission to create it at the same time they were granted a dotación in 1938. The cooperative was forbidden to sell or lease its mountains to any individuals or foreign companies. The Department of Forestry, Hunting and Fishing could intervene in the operation of the cooperative if necessary. The forest cooperative was also prohibited from logging in forest areas that had been declared a National Forest or National Park Reserve.

This forestry cooperative of Jahuara was fairly rare in the Fuerte Valley, as most of the ejidal cooperatives joined the SICAE in harvesting sugarcane. On a national level, this type of forestry producer cooperative grew extensively in the late 1930s. In fact by 1940, 866 forestry cooperatives had registered with the Department of Agriculture, comprising 64 percent of forest ejidos. Similar to the SICAE and many other Mexican cooperatives, the forestry cooperative of Jahuara became exclusionary, comprising members of the village elite. Chris Boyer argued that, “cooperatives established a means for communicating the ideals of scientific forestry to the ‘people’ and, if necessary, for sanctioning illegal behavior”. It is highly likely that cooperative

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29 Boyer, Political Landscapes, 104.
31 Departamento Agrario, Memoria del Departamento Agrario, 1941-1942, 232. Boyer, Political Landscapes, 104.
32 Boyer, Political Landscapes, 106.
members of Jahuara found ways to bend the law in their logging endeavors. What is undeniable is that much like the collectivists affiliated with the SICAЕ, the way cooperative members of Jahuara accessed irrigation infrastructure often straddled the lines of legality.

Collective societies also sprouted up in the nearby Mayo Valley. The difference here was that unlike in these other collectivist ejidos focused on producing a particular crop, the collectivists in the Mayo Valley grew a range of different crops, with garbanzo as the primary. The economic importance of these aforementioned collectives meant that they received a great deal of support from the Mexican state (especially during the Cárdenas administration).

The Mayo Valley was one of the most fertile regions of Mexico, yet the inability of its collectivist ejidatarios to produce more economically successful crops is one of the reason why collectivist societies did not catch on to the extent that they did in these other regions. Another reason is that there was a push back against these collectives. Jeffrey Banister pointed out that local farmers supported Sonoran Governor Yocupicio for his support of individualists, and that, “an overwhelming majority of people in the Valley were rumored to oppose collective production.”33 The absence of a powerful state-backed agency like the SICAЕ could also explain why collectivists in the Mayo Valley never gained the foothold that they did in the Fuerte Valley.

There are other similarities in the effects that collectivist societies had on the ejidos of both the Mayo and Fuerte Valleys. The presence of collective ejidos, and the Ejidal Bank which backed these collectivists, created divisions in the Mayo Valley, and as in the Fuerte Valley, many ejidos became separated between collectivists and individualists. Mexican historian Adrian Bantjes explained that in the Mayo Valley, ejidatarios split into distinct groups, and that, “Conflicts within these ejidos, often divided like ‘mortal enemies’, became violent, especially

33 Banister, *Rio Revuelto*, 207.
because ejidatarios had become armed by Cárdenas.”

Collective societies created opportunities for some ejidatarios, but they also led to intense divisions within the communities where they operated.

The divisions that collective societies created within both the Mayo and Fuerte Valleys need to be understood in terms of ethnicity. In a similar way to the Fuerte Valley, although some indigenous people became collectivists in the Mayo Valley, the majority of indigenous farmers wanted to produce crops individually. According to Mexican Historian Ignacio Almada Bay, Mayos took up the rallying cry, “We do not want unions, we do not want associations, we do not want minimum salaries, we want our temples.” The influx of outsiders trying to change the local political landscape was thus met with a certain level of distrust by Mayos of both Sonora and Sinaloa. The indigenous people of the Mayo Valley wanted to be smallholders, while most of their brothers of northern Sinaloa became ejidatarios. The ability of indigenous people in both valleys to undermine the efforts of collective societies should be understood as one of the factors that united them as Mayos. The inclusion of some Mayo ejidos and ejidatarios into the SICAE complicates the history of collective ejidos and hydrological politics in the Fuerte Valley in the late 1930s through mid-1940s.

The Birth and Growth of the SICAE

The SICAE became one of the most powerful and influential political entities of the Fuerte Valley in the mid-twentieth century. Its leaders were largely responsible for the confiscation and redistribution of thousands of hectares of the United Sugar Company lands. Once installed, the SICAE oversaw the clearing, planting, and irrigation of what would turn out

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34 Bantjes, As If Jesus Walked on Earth, 143.
35 AGN, DGG, 2.012.8 (22), exp.53, October 8, 1935; Almada Bay, La Conexion Yocupicio, 205.
to be huge tracts of additional sugarcane land. The cooperative controlled properties indirectly through agreements with ejidos, and utilized their affiliated ejidatarios as foot soldiers to annex their neighbors’ properties through both legal and illegal means. The SICAE’s relentless quest to control more land and irrigation marginalized whole communities, and at times led to ejidos permanently splitting into two. The cooperative’s actions forever changed the political, social, and community dynamics of the Fuerte Valley.

The pace of labor, and administrative tactics set by the SICAE, were unprecedented at the time, leading to modifications in the relationship between employers and employees. Lorena Schobert explained that,

The SICAE showed a broad organizational capacity expressed in the joint efforts of 34 ejidos to raise the performance levels of their agricultural lands. They established solid and agile mechanisms of social participation, creating a sense of solidarity in production, rarely seen in our country...The SICAE’s administrative transparency resulted in collective benefits for its members and their people...helping to define the entrepreneurial spirit that has characterized the peasants and farmers of northern Sinaloa. The SICAE was a hotbed for social leaders who raided national and regional political offices. Several of its members later became mayors, deputies, politicians, and other types of political leaders.  

Schobert neglected to mention that most of these profound changes took place in the defined first era of her periodization (1939-1947). Her detailed investigation also failed to analyze the extreme social and political alterations within these sugarcane producing communities. There was also no commentary as to what influence the SICAE’s actions had on individualist sectors, and whole Mayo communities of the Fuerte Valley that were barred from membership, or chose not to join the cooperative. The bulk of the following two dissertation chapters are dedicated to filling in these blanks, which in turn uncover how the SICAE’s approach to land and irrigation transformed Mayo communities.

36 Schobert, 13.
The accomplishments of the SICAE, and the labor movements that preceded it, can only be understood by first establishing a firm grasp on the power of the United Sugar Companies in the early twentieth century. The production of sugar in the Fuerte Valley brought the newest technology and innovation to the area, as United Sugar improved its technology annually. By 1922 it produced 1,200 tons of sugar a day, and thanks to innovations in machinery by 1928, it had the capacity to produce 1,800 tons a day. USCOS owned over 100,000 hectares of land, which was mostly dedicated to sugarcane production. USCOS also dominated the Fuerte Valley politically and economically, by controlling the majority of the companies in the area. For instance, in the valley’s largest city Los Mochis, United Sugar’s subsidiaries owned the local electric company, potable water company, telephone company, and ice company.37

United Sugar did not adequately compensate its workers or treat them humanely. According to Mexican scholar Maria Eugenia Romero Ibarra, “although United Sugar had great facilities, its workers were living in caves like wild beasts, exposed to malaria and other diseases.”38 United Sugar’s wealth was in fact a direct function of worker and land/water exploitation. In order to ensure living wages and fair labor practices, unions began to organize sugarcane workers of northern Sinaloa.

The Regional Confederation of Mexican Workers (CROM) organized the first sugarcane workers union in the Fuerte Valley in the 1920s, consisting of laborers from both the fields and the sugar mill.39 By 1924, these workers executed a strike against United Sugar, and the local fishermen joined in solidarity.40 In 1928, the Union of Workers of Various Crafts asked the

39 Sánchez Arce, Cronica de Los Mochis, 83.
40 Schobert, 109.
National Federation of Sugar Workers and Alcohol Industries (affiliate of CROM), for a mediator to assist them in its conflict with United Sugar. In May these laborers made a pact to carry out a work slowdown. United Sugar responded by dispensing hired thugs, known as white guards, to pursue and terrorize these protestors. These intimidation practices escalated over the next ten years. Governors of Sinaloa became complicit in this violence, sending state police forces to join the white guards, entering workspaces and beating up workers who joined unions.

These sugarcane workers faced many more obstacles in the 1930s as collusion between USCOS and local politicians grew even more rampant. An overproduction of sugarcane in 1930 led to United Sugar lowering worker wages. In 1934 one of the primary leaders of the Fuerte Valley sugarcane labor movement, Carlos Ramon García Ceceña went to Mexico City to meet with the most influential union leader of Mexico, Vicente Lombardo Toledano, then the secretary general of the General Confederation of Workers and Peasants of Mexico (Confederación General de Obreros y Campesinos de México). Understanding the urgency and importance of assisting in this struggle, Lombardo Toledano pledged his support to García Ceceña, and informed him that he could probably convince President elect Lázaro Cárdenas to get involved as well.

After several more sugarcane worker strikes and state-sanctioned violence, union organizers felt that the conditions were ripe for massive social change. García Ceceña finally got the opportunity to meet with Lázaro Cárdenas. He informed the President of the great injustices sugarcane workers faced, of worker mistreatment, lands that were illegally taken, and Governor Manuel Páez’s plans to cede additional territory to the American owned United Sugar

41 Ibid, 111
42 Sánchez Arce, 84.
43 Romero-Ibarra, “La Reforma Agraria de Cárdenas”, 110
44 Schobert, 75.
Companies. Cárdenas became convinced that he needed to expropriate these sugarcane lands, and turn them over to its workers. He immediately dispatched government functionaries to the Fuerte Valley to survey the land and identify the ejidos that would receive a dotación.\[^{45}\]

In December of 1938, Cárdenas granted a dotación to thirty-five ejidos, and a land extension to four existing ones in the Fuerte Valley. From the beginning, thirty-four of these ejidos were converted to local collective ejidal credit societies dedicated to growing mostly sugarcane, but also limited amounts of alfalfa and Sudan grass.\[^{46}\] The total amount of land expropriated was almost 84,000 hectares, of which most were non-irrigated, and overgrown with vegetation. 61,000 of these hectares went to ejidatarios affiliated with the SICAÉ, and 55,000 were originally property of USCOS.\[^{47}\]

The thirty-four ejidos were technically under the direction of the SICAÉ. It is difficult to know if all ejidatarios understood what this affiliation meant, or if they were unanimously in favor of being members of the cooperative at all. The limited number of irrigated lands and finite amounts of water from the Fuerte River meant that only some ejidatarios could join the SICAÉ. This uncertainty and exclusivity led to serious internal dissension within these ejidos.

The National Ejidal Credit Bank was placed in control of managing affiliated ejidos and supplying them with credit. The bank was formed in December 1935 to loan money to ejidatarios for such things as agricultural implements, property, seeds, and to lend technical advice.\[^{48}\] Specifically for the SICAÉ the Ejidal Bank facilitated the money to acquire United Sugar’s farm implements, livestock, machinery, pumping units, buildings of the cane fields and other tools necessary for production. The total value, including the United Sugar property, was three million

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\[^{45}\] Ibid, 79.
\[^{47}\] Ibid, 16.
\[^{48}\] Schobert, 53.
pesos. The bank also lent another two and a half million pesos to the SICAЕ for new sugarcane farming equipment. All of the five and a half million pesos were to be paid back in ten years.\(^{49}\)

The sugar mill itself was not confiscated and remained in the hands of United Sugar, creating an ambivalent relationship between the company and its laborers. The SICAЕ communities became the sole producers of sugarcane, and the sugar mill in Los Mochis was their only buyers. As Sidney Mintz clarified, sugar production requires both, “brute field labor and skilled artisanal knowledge.”\(^{50}\) The brute field laborers in this case became the SICAЕ affiliated collectivists, while United Sugar employees took care of the artisanal work. In contrast to the paltry wages United Sugar traditionally paid these “brutes”, the SICAЕ fairly compensated the sugarcane laborers.

The irrigation infrastructure constructed by the United Sugar Companies also came mostly under the control of the SICAЕ administration. In the presidential order that ceded these lands to the new ejidos, Cárcenas explained that in keeping with article 91 of the Agrarian Code, irrigation rights were included in the ejidal expropriation.\(^{51}\) Many of the lands that fell under the jurisdiction of the SICAЕ were confiscated from USCOS, which held control over irrigation. The SICAЕ became the de-facto regulator of the Fuerte River. Ultimate authority rested in the hands of the Ministry of Agriculture and Development (SAyF), but the cooperative dominated and controlled the irrigation of the Fuerte River for the next decade and a half. The SICAЕ largely decided not only who received irrigation, but also how irrigation infrastructure of the river was constructed. The cooperative was awarded a four-month monopoly on the irrigation water of the Fuerte River in 1943, as its control over the Fuerte Valley irrigation district increased even more.


\(^{50}\) Mintz, 47.

\(^{51}\) January 11, 1939, AGN, Lázaro Cárdenas, 404.1/1593.
The first few years of the SICAE’s existence were very tense, as powerful land owners reeled from their land losses. Leaders of the SICAE carried guns at first because of death threats leveled against them. Workers of the sugar mill, who were still employees of United Sugar, made a solidarity pact with the field workers, as they collectively tried to find a way to take control of the mill as well.\(^{52}\) This never happened, perhaps because United Sugar was able to maintain enough political power. It is also probable that local politicians trusted the business acumen of this company, and/or received bribes in some form or another.

At first the collective produced well. During the 1940-1941 harvest, the growers provided enough sugarcane, so that the USCOS mill generated more sugar than all others throughout Mexico. The surplus the SICAE earned allowed it to pay salaries, to start repaying its debt, and to distribute some benefits to its members. The SICAE eventually became a political force in the Fuerte Valley, and nationally. For example, in 1944 President Ávila Camacho named the SICAE president Carlos Ramon García Ceceña to be the representative to negotiate a set price for domestic sugarcane sold to the sugar mills in Mexico.\(^{53}\) The SICAE and its collectivist ejidos continued to clear land, install irrigation infrastructure, and harvest sugarcane. Its future appeared bright in the early to mid-1940s.

Current scholarship regarding the SICAE tends to focus on the major advancements it made on behalf of peasants, as well as the political undercurrents and struggles between powerful adversaries in the Fuerte Valley. There are no studies that draw attention to the effects of the SICAE within either its affiliated ejidos or in Mayo communities in general, which reflects the overabundance of official histories. In the interests of uncovering and placing peasant actions into historical context, some Mexican scholars positioned their work within the field of subaltern


\(^{53}\) Ibid, 23.
studies. Mexican academic Rodolfo Stavenhagen asked for the, “de-elitization of social sciences as part of the process of intellectual decolonization.”

My approach to analyzing the SICAE from the perspective of Mayo communities opens critical dialogue as to the efficacy of collective ejidos over the duration of several presidential regimes. It also speaks to the adaptation skills of Mayo communities who transformed their political tactics and defended their livelihood by maintaining land and water rights.

With such incredible influence and ability to create widespread change, it is strange that only limited scholarship exists regarding the SICAE. The only manuscript that focuses solely on this sugarcane cooperative is *La SICAE: Historia de Una Gesta Obrero Campesina* by Mexican historian Lorena Schobert. Her study concentrated primarily on the SICAE’s administrative agenda through tracing its ascendance, political struggles, and its eventual demise. To accomplish this, Schobert established a periodization to distinguish two important eras in the SICAE’s existence 1) The more encouraging period of the SICAE, from 1939 to 1947. This is when the company achieved its constitution, and its most visible development, which laid the foundations for its future collapse. 2) The end of the organization 1947 to 1959, when there was a substantial reduction in social belligerence and, above all, a decrease in levels of production, until its liquidation at the beginning of the Adolfo López Mateos presidential regime. Within these periods, Schobert also traced the SICAE’s incredible political influence, which allowed it to significantly alter the region’s physical landscape and construct massive irrigation infrastructure.

My own research on the SICAE and some of its affiliated ejidos, as well as on the cooperative’s impact on irrigation infrastructure in the Fuerte Valley has allowed me to also

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55 Schobert, 21.
identify two distinct historical periods. Like Schobert, I consider this first era to consist of the birth of the SICAE from its humble beginnings, in which rebellious sugarcane laborers became members of the postrevolutionary state apparatus in exchange for social benefits. Yet my analysis identifies this first era from 1938 to 1946 as the time period in which this cooperative began to use collectivists as foot soldiers to maintain its water monopoly. In this era, the SICAE took a more subtle approach in its schemes to acquire irrigated land. This was also a time in which individualists and Mayo ejidatarios not involved with the SICAE found innovative ways to access irrigation water despite the enforcement of the SICAE’s river monopoly.

The second time period I identify also deals largely with the downfall of the SICAE, but I classify this era as ranging from 1946 to 1957. My periodization also diverges from Scho bert’s in that I argue that contention between individualists and collectivists, and conflicts within each of these sectors facilitated the death of the SICAE. Struggles dealing with land and irrigation rights led both sides to seek allies with either of the official labor and agrarian organizations the CTM or the CNC, as organizing efforts of the latter was also responsible for the SICAE’s demise. In accordance with my defined time periods, the following two chapters will be organized chronologically and thematically. This particular chapter deals with the first era (1938-1946), and the fourth chapter deals with the latter (1946-1957).

The collectivist ejidatarios linked to the SICAE were in a very privileged position as clients of a powerful official organization capable of controlling water, land, and labor. Therefore the very terms “collectivists” and “individualists” are somewhat misleading. While the collectivists may have belonged to the SICAE, it appears that they were looking out for themselves over and above their individualist neighbors. Collectivists earned wages from the SICAE in exchange for clearing vegetation from land, planting and harvesting sugarcane,
building irrigation infrastructure, annexing individualists’ lands, and various other tasks. Their form of labor, in producing the sugarcane crop was therefore not specifically “collective”, as their name indicated. The term “individualist” held somewhat pejorative connotations for groups of mostly Mayo ejidatarios.

These terms were most likely chosen and assigned by the SICAE officials themselves in attempts to gain support for their side. The SICAE’s ability to set the discourse of language exhibited its enormous power from the late 1930s through the late 1950s, and highlights the challenges that Mayo communities not aligned with the cooperative faced. I utilize the terms “collectivist” and “individualist” in the following two chapters because both sectors came to identify with these labels.

Mayo communities in general were suspicious of state-sponsored organizations, and were prudent about making alliances with outsiders. In most cases collectivists were in fact a sort of local aristocracy who took control of the quality irrigated lands of their ejidos, appropriated additional lands from individualists, and prevented them from acquiring irrigation rights. It is also likely that some collectivists outsourced their labor to individualists, who cultivated sugarcane on these collectivist properties. For Mayo ejidatarios on both sides, their affiliation with the SICAE significantly influenced their political activity, approach to land and water rights, and helped determine their membership within these newly formed ejido communities.

The SICAE and its Seasonal Water Monopoly

In 1943, Cárdenas’ successor Manuel Ávila Camacho, by Presidential Decree, granted exclusive water rights to the Fuerte River for four months out of the year, to communities joining the SICAE. The decree stated that in order to reach the goal of supplying the Los Mochis sugar
mill with at least 500,000 tons of sugarcane annually, the communities dedicated to sugarcane production would receive all of the water from the Fuerte River from March 1st to June 30th for irrigation purposes. The only communities producing sugarcane belonged to the cooperative, leaving the SICAE in charge of administering irrigation water from the river for at least one-third of the year. This seasonal monopoly on water solidified the federal government’s commitment to not only the SICAE, but also to the sugarcane industry in general. It obviously did not sit well with everyone else in the Fuerte Valley who did not belong to the SICAE.

The seasonal monopoly on water resulted in the formation of unlikely coalitions aimed at repealing this decree. As the popular idiom goes, politics makes strange bedfellows. The law was not enacted until 1943, and it was met with massive opposition from the very beginning. In April of that year the League of Users of the Fuerte River, the Regional Agrarian Committee Number Five, fifty-two ejidos (that were not identified), and the Farmers of the Colonized Lands of Los Mochis came together to print a flier addressed to President Ávila Camacho.

The leaflet, which was apparently also circulated throughout the Fuerte Valley, outlined the negative impact of the water monopoly. It pointed out some compelling, yet partially inaccurate statistics. Apparently, out of forty-nine ejidos that used water from the Fuerte River, only nineteen grew sugarcane. The flier also summarized the rights of water users before the decree and how it would do much more harm than good for the agricultural sector of the Fuerte Valley. The number of ejidos utilizing the river for irrigation purposes was larger than nineteen, since at least thirty-four of them collectively harvested sugarcane, which required irrigation water.

56 August 11, 1943, AHA, Aguas Nacionales, Expediente 17668, Caja 1314.
57 (No Date) AGN, Manuel Ávila Camacho, 404.2/310.
This flier is thoroughly fascinating because it suggested that sectors of the farming community, with historically opposing interests, became allies in their struggle against the SICAE and its water monopoly. Ejidatarios and private property owners of the Fuerte Valley struggled for access to land and water rights, which often pitted them against one another. The two groups that had the most contention between them were the Farmers of the Colonized Lands of Los Mochis and the ejidatarios of these fifty-two ejidos. It is impossible to say to what extent these sides disliked one-another, especially since there is no way of determining which ejidos, if any, were part of this protest group. Many of the indigenous ejidatarios, or their ancestors had once lived on some of the lands that these settlers “colonized.” Several Mayos found themselves working for these mestizo newcomers on haciendas in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. And this same land that may have belonged to ejidatarios or their families at some point was eventually expropriated from these settlers and given to the former as a dotación. These dotaciones often included existing water rights as well. These land and irrigation transfers often resulted in negative feelings directed towards the new property owners. In this instance, both sides allegedly joined together in order to protest a perceived injustice that outweighed their negative feelings toward one another.

Protests by ejidatarios against the SICAE’s seasonal water monopoly continued throughout the 1940s. In February of 1944, the Ejidal Land Defense Committee, which was allegedly made up of thirty-two ejidos, sent a letter to President Ávila Camacho asking for the repeal of the water monopoly. They pointed out that this situation would lead to the ruin of ejidal lands. The petition also reminded the President that the region was one of the richest in the nation, because it produced millions of pesos in crops such as tomatoes and cotton.  

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58 February 14, 1955, Ibid.
This letter from 1944, similar to the previous publication from the previous year, did not identify which ejidos were members of this particular protest group. Individual ejidatarios, and ejidos as a group in the Fuerte Valley, had grown very comfortable with producing petitions to seek governmental redress. The lack of petitions from identified ejidos asking for the repeal of the water monopoly, in favor of letters stating how many ejidos were members of the protest group, was very suspicious. It is probable that powerful property owners, who spearheaded these letter writing campaigns, simply claimed they had the backing of numerous ejidos, when in fact this was not necessarily the case.

There was one letter, in which specifically identified ejidos complained about the misdistribution of water in the Fuerte Valley in the early 1940s. In October of 1943, the leaders of thirteen ejidos that included Los Goros and Zapotillo, met to write a petition to the SAyF. These ejidal leaders, some of whose ejidatarios were members in the SICAE, requested more direct rights to irrigation. They complained that the current regulation of waters and its distribution would harm the economy of these ejidos in a direct way.\(^{59}\)

This petition was different from the others in that it did not directly call for the repeal of the SICAE water monopoly. The letter written by ejidal leaders was more general in requesting a certain amount of autonomy in choosing their irrigation options. There is a possibility that these ejidos were citing their displeasure with the SICAE monopoly, yet historically ejidatarios understood their need for specificity in such petitions. These leaders were more likely referring to their inability to legally access sufficient irrigation water at all times of the year. This was largely a result of the finite amount of irrigation water, and the fact that the SICAE, and private property owners possessed most water concessions.

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\(^{59}\) October 11, 1943, AHA, Agüas Nacionales, Expediente 17668, Caja 1312.
Land owners and the SICAE had the privilege of fighting over how many months of the year they could utilize their existing irrigation rights. During the formative years of the SICAE and establishment of its water monopoly, these ejidal leaders cared less about what happened to the sugar cooperative itself than about the fact that their communities lacked necessary water to keep their lands productive. The SICAE’s enforcement of the river monopoly and unrelenting thirst to acquire more land and irrigation technology had much larger consequences for Mayo communities in the 1950s.

President Ávila Camacho’s decision to issue this decree for the SICAE monopoly fit within his developmentalist agenda. The 1940s and 1950s, mark an era known as the counter-revolution, in which the Mexican state diverged from Cárdenas’ indigenous and peasant mobilization efforts and moved toward capitalist development. Ávila Camacho’s presidency marked a decline in the pace of land distribution, and was instead dedicated to reforming such problem areas as communications, irrigation, mechanization, and education. Ávila Camacho also worked to solidify the land rights of small property owners and ejidatarios to prevent land transfer, which had the potential to destabilize the economy. These goals and priorities meant that this president did not wholeheartedly support collective ejidos.

With so much at stake economically, why did Ávila Camacho push for this water monopoly that threatened the stability of the ejidatarios and small property owners whom he wanted to protect? The evidence combined suggests that this president wanted to force these ejidos to produce sugarcane rather than subsistence crops. Mexico declared war on the Axis powers in October of 1942, marking its entrance into World War II. Mexican historians in hindsight concluded that many of Mexico’s economic policies after 1942 came about as a consequence of its membership in the Allied powers. Eckstein pointed out Mexico’s, “urgent

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60 Eckstein, 65.
need to increase agricultural production due to the demand created by World War II, making imperative the use of all means of production.”

Consequences of the war help explain the need to provide the SICAE with extra irrigation water. The state hoped to boost the sugarcane industry in assisting the Allied war effort. Lorena Schobert specifically justified the water monopoly by arguing that, “we need to remember the interest of Ávila Camacho for the production of sugar and food in general, under the situation of war.” There was also possibly a concerted effort among Allied Powers to boost the production of sugarcane to compete against Germany’s beet sugar production in the world economy. U.S. sugarcane production and German beet sugar production declined slightly after 1943, while Mexico’s sugarcane production increased steadily in the same time period.

The most logical justification for this seasonal water monopoly was that this president recognized the economic importance of the sugarcane industry in the Fuerte Valley. Sugarcane was the most profitable crop so Ávila Camacho wanted to provide its farmers with every advantage possible so that it would flourish. This president also likely wanted to offer incentives for the region’s farmers to switch to growing sugarcane. The war effort drained the Mexican economy so he wanted to boost the most profitable industries at the expense of other less lucrative ones. Ávila Camacho used the war as a means to minimize small-scale agriculture and ejidal production in favor of agroindustry.

The SICAE’s ability to establish a seasonal monopoly of the Fuerte River underscored its local power during its early years of development. Max Weber described power as, “the chance

\[61\] Ibid, 66.
\[62\] Schobert, 138.
\[63\] Banco de Mexico, Industria, Tomo 1, 364-366
of a person or a group to enforce their own will even against the resistance of others involved.”

Influential entities attempted to repeal the cooperative’s water agreement and the SICAE enforced its will by keeping the monopoly in place. The SICAE’s power derived from the support of not only the state, but also from its affiliated ejidatarios who did their dirty work such as annexing properties. Collectivist ejidatario backing of the cooperative in these early years gave the SICAE the power to impose its will on all non-affiliated communities, exacerbating existing cleavages within Mayo communities.

Zapotillo

The ejido of Zapotillo’s path of inclusion into the SICAE demonstrated the subsequent problems that surfaced between collectivists and individualists early on. The availability of new irrigation resources brought contention between these two groups. The ways by which collectivists and individualists procured these new resources helps to explain the specific issues of water inequality within Zapotillo. The SICAE’s use of collectivists to do its bidding and help enforce the river monopoly from 1938 to 1946 showed that the cooperative was able to deflect some hostility, which allowed it to consolidate power. These earlier schemes of dispossession and reciprocity gained traction and led to the SICAE intensifying its efforts in the 1950s, resulting in the tension and discord that split this community into two separate ejidos.

Agrarian leaders of Zapotillo applied for a dotación in June of 1933. The mixed agrarian commission carried out a census that found that 208 residents had rights to dotación. The

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64 Weber, “The distribution of power within the community: Classes, Stände, Parties”, *Journal of Classical Sociology* 137.
affected property owners of the land slated for redistribution raised objections. Property owners used a common argument, alleging that some individuals of the community did not have the legal capacity to be ejidatarios, because they were not locals, and many were laborers in neighboring farms. The veracity of these claims are still not completely clear. Nevertheless, Zapotillo received a provisional dotación in February of 1935. In December of 1938, Zapotillo received its definitive dotación, along with thirty-eight other ejidos that received land previously owned by mostly large sugarcane haciendas.65

The inhabitants of the Zapotillo ejido were ethnically mixed. It is unclear as to how this ejido came to include both indigenous and Yori ejidatarios, but it is clear that mestizos gained control of ejidal leadership early on. Ejidatarios of Zapotillo became split according to ethnicity and land use. Collectivists cultivated sugarcane for wages and individualists produced crops for subsistence. Ethnicity determined to a greater extent who was collectivist and who was individualist. According to Anabel Olivera, an elder Yori of Zapotillo, the ejido became split according to ethnicity, “At first the majority of individualists were Mayos, and all of the collectivists were Yoris.”66 This separation along ethnic lines, in that individualists were mostly indigenous, and collectivists were comprised mostly of Yoris, became a common pattern for the mixed-race ejidos that joined the SICAE. As in the other mixed ejidos under discussion here, mestizos reaped massive benefits by becoming members of the collective, while shutting most Mayos out from joining.

The total surface area of the Zapotillo dotación was 1,680 hectares, and the majority of the property was expropriated directly from Benjamin F. Johnston. Of this land, 170 hectares were irrigated, 860 hectares were susceptible to seasonal cultivation, and 650 hectares were

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65 December 6, 1954, AGA, Dotación, Expediente 23/456, Legajo 1, Asunto Ejecución, Zapotillo, Municipio Ahome. 
pasture lands to be used collectively. In the agreement to the dotación signed by ejidatarios of Zapotillo, and President Cárdenas, there was a provision which stated that, “In order to not break the equilibrium of industrial agriculture, the lands dedicated to producing sugarcane should proceed as such, and they should be harvested collectively, in accordance with the provisions of Article 139 of the Land Code in force.”  

Sugarcane required inordinate amounts of water to grow in the Fuerte Valley, creating divisions over water use. It is safe to say that the 170 hectares of irrigated land was used by the previous owners to grow sugarcane. The law technically required sugarcane to be grown collectively. Collectivists gained control of these irrigated lands, and SICAE officials organized labor and paid these ejidatarios accordingly. It is highly likely that the SICAE also paid individualists to do this work and that collectivists outsourced some of their labor to individualist Mayos. The remaining land was not subject to the agreement set forth in the dotación to continue to grow sugarcane. Community leaders, ejidatarios, and state agencies had differing opinions on how this land should be used, becoming a massive source of contention. Divergent approaches to land and water use led to a split in the ejido of Zapotillo, and ethnicity was also a factor in this division. Access to irrigation sources always played a major role in contention between collectivists and individualists as both sides struggled to keep their lands under constant cultivation.

There are no definitive dates available as to when collectivists split from individualists in Zapotillo. We do know that in July of 1941, leaders of both factions met in Los Mochis to demarcate the boundary lines to separate both groups. They reached a provisional agreement at least until the Agrarian Department could conduct a study and definitively rule which group had rights to particular plots. The pact stated that the collectivist group had rights to the part of the

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67 Ibid.
ejido located south of the Tastes Canal, which was between the canal and the national highway. Individualists controlled the territory between the Tastes Canal and the town of Zapotillo.\(^{68}\)

This agreement showed that collectivists recognized the importance of demarcating their boundaries in a manner that resulted in direct access to their main irrigation source, the Tastes Canal. The deal also certified the collectivists’ total control of irrigated lands in the ejido. These preoccupations over irrigation access became vital to the way both of these groups approached their political struggle over land. It is also possible that collectivists viewed the separation of this territory as a means to determine whether individualist Mayos would be allowed to work their own land in addition to laboring in the cane fields.

Individualists were left with no irrigation concessions, forcing them to find alternative methods to access water. Leaders from the individualist sector eventually sought governmental redress to irrigation water inequality issues. On October 10, 1945 individualist leaders petitioned President Ávila Camacho to intervene in their struggle for irrigation rights. They claimed that,

> We are growing 200 hectares of corn. We are losing our crop due to lack of water. We have a contract with Atanasio Hakelares, who owns a pump and canal, but is unable to provide water to us, due to the direct obstruction of the SICAE and the Ejidal Bank. Because of this sabotage, we telegraphed the Ministry of Agriculture and the State Governor, asking for guarantees, but have not received results. This directly affects me, the ejidal commissioner and leaves one-hundred affiliated families, and another one-hundred independent farmer families in misery.\(^{69}\)

The SICAE obstructed irrigation water availability to both individualists and additional families in the area with no regard for their well-being. This selfish approach to hoarding water became common for the SICAE.

The timing of this letter was of crucial importance because it was written in October. The seasonal SICAE monopoly of the Fuerte River lasted from March through late June. This meant

\(^{68}\) Ibid.

\(^{69}\) October 10, 1945, AGN, Manuel Ávila Camacho, 404.2/310
that the sugarcane cooperative continued to block irrigation from third party users even after their allotted window expired. For the SICAE and the Ejidal Bank to obstruct this irrigation water in October, or in the three months leading up to that, was illegal. This suggests that the cooperative ignored the seasonal regulations altogether and asserted complete year-round authority over the river. This was just one of many examples that showed how the SICAE and its affiliates went to great lengths in order to maintain control of irrigation rights, which became synonymous with power in the Fuerte Valley.

There were two types of corn grown in the Fuerte Valley in the mid-twentieth century, summer corn and water corn. Summer corn was planted in January, and harvested in June, while water corn was planted in July and harvested in December. This allowed farmers (with access to irrigation water) two annual yields.\textsuperscript{70} Individualists of Zapotillo were losing their water corn harvests due to lack of irrigation water. They planted this corn during the rainy months of July, and thanks to heavy precipitation, did not have to rely on irrigation water until September. Rainfall was particularly low in September and October of 1945, meaning they depended heavily on irrigation water in that year.\textsuperscript{71}

This petition shows that Mayos continued to recognize the importance of fighting for their water rights and ability to use irrigation infrastructure to grow their crops. Individualists continued to rely on third parties for irrigation water while those joining the SICAE got their water directly. In fact, these individualists were losing their corn crop due to lack of irrigation water. This means that these ejidatarios had shifted their harvesting techniques away from just utilizing seasonal rain water and the overflow of the Fuerte River and became dependent on pumps and canals.

\textsuperscript{70} November 3, 1936, AGA, División, Fusión, y Permutas, Expediente 231.3/94, Legajo 1, Asunto Ejecución, Camagüey, Municipio El Fuerte.

\textsuperscript{71} Comisión del Río Fuerte, Datos Hidrométricos, 13.
The individualists of Zapotillo had the ability to grow corn year round thanks to their use of irrigation infrastructure. They no longer relied on erratic rainfall and the flooding of the Fuerte River. It is unclear if they anticipated the unreliable flow of irrigation water as a result of the SICAЕ’s obstruction practices. Some affiliated ejidos which included a few Mayo communities, depended on the SICAЕ for political support and for helping them to access irrigation water. Other Mayo communities became locked out of the irrigation district and fought for their rights by formally appealing to state institutions.

Additional documents suggest that leaders of Zapotillo soon learned that this case was a little more complicated than the SICAЕ obstructing their irrigation. In February 1946, the Confederación Nacional Campesina, or CNC reported to the National Irrigation Commission that the executive ejidal committee of Zapotillo had issued a complaint. Zapotillo’s individualist leaders accused ejidatarios of El Teroque of destroying the former’s canal used for irrigation.72

An internal memo within the office of the SAyF in March of the same year explained the situation in greater detail. Atanasio Saquelares constructed a canal that ran through the ejido of El Teroque, which provided irrigation for the ejidos Zapotillo, San Miguel de Zapotitlán, and La Bajada de San Miguel. In exchange for allowing the canal to pass through the SICAЕ affiliated ejido of El Teroque, Saquelares was to compensate the SICAЕ with $474 pesos annually, paid directly to the Ejidal Bank. Saquelares apparently had not paid this sum in many years, which is why the ejidatarios (presumably collectivists) destroyed the canal. It turns out that neither Saquelares nor the three ejidos in question had obtained official irrigation rights from the state. The SAyF suggested that these ejidos should obtain irrigation concessions legally, at which point the canal would again become operable.73

72 February 6, 1946, AHA, Aguas Nacionales, Expediente 17668, Caja 1313.
73 March 25, 1946, Ibid.
These documents showed that the SICAÉ officials engaged in corrupt practices involving irrigation water as early as the mid-1940s. The SICAÉ leaders were supposed to receive payments in exchange for allowing illegal irrigation infrastructure to run through one of their affiliated ejidos. When the money was withheld, it appears that cooperative administrators ordered these collectivists from El Teroque to destroy the canal.

The agreement reached and the SICAÉ’s reaction once the terms were breached, were a good example of the power the cooperative exuded at this time. The canal partially obstructed the lands of El Teroque collectivists, yet the cooperative’s officials themselves received payment, not the ejidatarios of El Teroque. The destruction of the canal by the collectivists of El Teroque put them in direct conflict with the ejidatarios of Zapotillo, San Miguel, and La Bajada. The fact that ejidatarios of these three ejidos had to depend on illegally sourced water also showed the difficulty poor farmers faced in trying to access irrigation water in the face of the SICAÉ’s dominance.

It appears that the collectivists of El Teroque destroyed the canal under orders from the SICAÉ, revealing an emerging strategy of the cooperative. Collectivists of El Teroque received sufficient irrigation water to grow sugarcane, and their actions of demolishing the canal suggested that they were drawing water from an alternate source. The collectivists proved their loyalty to the SICAÉ by destroying this irrigation infrastructure, and impairing the interests of other ejidatarios. The collectivists’ actions undoubtedly turned the ejidatarios from the other three ejidos against them. By giving these orders, the SICAÉ ensured that there would be no solidarity between collectivists and the ejidatarios of these communities based on class interests, and that collectivists would only find unity with the cooperative itself. This tactic of using collectivists to do their bidding allowed the SICAÉ officials to manipulate and regulate the flow
of water from the Fuerte River, while seemingly attempting to hide their actions from ejidatarios whose irrigation interests became jeopardized as a result.

Political coalitions, led by powerful land owners, forced the SICAE to take a more indirect approach to regulating irrigation water. This type of furtive strategy defined the SICAE’s formative years in which its subtle tactics allowed the cooperative to gain control of the irrigation district while trying to limit the hostility against them. In this case the individualists of Zapotillo did in fact learn that the SICAE was behind the obstruction of their irrigation water. These Mayo ejidatarios of Zapotillo were able to see past the veneer of the SICAE, exhibiting proficiency in recognizing the source of their oppression and confronting it head on. Such patterns of recognition and action that Mayos practiced in this early stage became even more crucial to ejidatarios struggling for their irrigation rights in the 1950s during the SICAE’s more overt and aggressive tactics of irrigated land seizure.

These episodes in the mid-1940s showed that some Mayo communities were never unanimous in supporting the SICAE, and exhibited Mayo abilities to traverse the shifting modern political climate to gain or maintain access to the river. As long as collectivists did the SICAE’s bidding, they were rewarded with decent wages, land rights, and the backing of a ferociously powerful political entity that dominated the Fuerte Valley. Individualists belonging to affiliated ejidos, and ejidatarios who were not affiliated with the SICAE encountered a more turbulent political path in their quest to obtain and maintain land and water concessions.

**Los Goros**

The ejido of Los Goros became split between collectivists and individualists in the 1940s. Unlike Zapotillo that was ethnically mixed, the ejidatarios of Los Goros were made up entirely
of Mayos. Therefore the division of this ejido came about due to opposing approaches to land and water usage, and familial/kinship alliances, and not based on ethnicity. We learned in chapter two about Los Goros and the importance this community placed on using hydrological technology. This legacy of irrigation infrastructure use became pivotal in the contention that developed between collectivists and individualists early on, but also led to divisions within each of these sectors. The SICAÉ’s attempts to seize irrigated lands from individualists in the early to mid-1940s reflected the cooperative’s more stealthy schemes of dispossession during the formative years of both the ejido and the SICAÉ.\textsuperscript{74}

The definitive moment in the social transformation of Los Goros came about in the mid-1940s with its inclusion into the SICAÉ. It appears that at least some of the members of Los Goros became affiliates of the SICAÉ after receiving an extension (ampliación) of 1,103 hectares in 1938. The contention between individualists and collectivists in Los Goros came to light in the mid-1940s, and progressed exponentially thereafter.

An example of how land and water access split these two factions came about in 1944. On July 17, 1944 the President of the SICAÉ, Carlos Ramon García, wrote to the Commander of the First Battalion of Army Reserves. In this correspondence, García asked for armed intervention to prevent individualists from land grabs,

\begin{quote}
We seek the help of the army reserves, to aid us in marking the boundary of a portion of pasture land that belongs to the collectivist group. The individualist group aims to take possession of the total area of land designated for communal purposes as it was originally endowed to the ejido Los Goros.\textsuperscript{75}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{74} It was not until the late 1940s and 1950s when the SICAÉ’s more overt attempts at irrigated land dispossession caused major rifts between collectivists and individualists, and resulted in near chaos in both sectors. I discuss this in more depth in chapter four.

\textsuperscript{75} July 17, 1944, AGA, Dotación, Expediente 23/1362, Legajo 4, Asunto Toca, Los Goros, Municipio Ahome.
The wording in this letter was particularly significant because García asked for the army’s help in marking the boundaries of a portion of land. The underlying message García was trying to convey was that the SICAE needed the assistance of the army (using military force) to prevent the individualists from taking total control of the lands originally assigned for collective use.

According to the SICAE leader García, the individualists attempted to claim all of the 1,278 hectares of communal land as theirs. The individualists perhaps seized some of this land. The annexation of over one-thousand hectares of communal property fell outside the parameters of an unorganized sector of ejidatarios who were not backed by any powerful entities. García likely exaggerated the amount of hectares the individualists claimed in order to gain a favorable response from the army commander.

By bringing in armed forces, García was likely hoping to intimidate the individualists into relinquishing any lands they had appropriated, and discourage them from attempting to acquire more properties. The fact that the SICAE bypassed all political channels and appealed directly to the army reserves exhibited its confidence in navigating the state apparatus for its own purposes. It was also reminiscent of the United Sugar Company’s tactics of using state forces to intimidate its sugarcane workers. It appears that in some ways, the SICAE filled the political vacuum of Northern Sinaloa, after they themselves helped minimize the power of United Sugar.

The political power of the SICAE enabled the collectivists to counter and perhaps dissuade actions of the individualists. On July 29, 1944, the Ejidal Bank wrote a letter to the Agrarian Department, alleging that the individualists had seized the communal lands and split it up between themselves. The letter also explained that the SICAE intervened jointly with the collectivists and prevented further actions. The individualists found allies in the Fifth Regional Agrarian Committee, and all sides came together to devise a more equitable solution to the
division. This document showed that the political backing collectivists received, from both the very powerful SICAE and the Ejidal Bank, prevented individualists from accumulating additional tracts of communal land for their own purposes.

The individualists of Los Goros found some political allies such as the Fifth Regional Agrarian Committee in this case, and the CNC later on, yet all individualist sectors had a much more difficult time preventing the collectivists from executing land grabs. The SICAE’s ability to prevent individualists from utilizing communal lands opened up the possibility of claiming it for themselves. In this sense, the cooperative stuck to its strategy of low-profile schemes of land seizure early on, which perhaps prevented ejidatarios from developing strong feelings of animosity toward the SICAE at this time.

The demarcation of the boundaries separating the collectivists and individualists of Los Goros became a pivotal issue by the mid-1940s. On March 16, 1945, executive ejidal committees from both groups met with the SICAE, the Ejidal Bank, and the Agrarian Department to administer a split. The basic census of Los Goros in June 1942 revealed that there were fifty-nine ejidatarios in the census working the land collectively, forty-nine in the census worked individually, thirty-nine not appearing in the census had worked the land collectively for more than two years, and six not appearing in the census worked the land individually for more than two years. This latter group likely consisted of posesionarios, or members of the community that were not originally granted an ejidal plot. The document produced at this meeting stated that a certain amount of hectares were open to sugarcane cultivation for collectivists, but curiously the space that was supposed to indicate this amount of land was left blank.

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76 July 29, 1944, AGA, Dotación, Expediente 23/89, Legajo 3, Asunto Ejecución, Los Goros, Municipio Ahome.
77 March 16, 1945, AGA, Privacion de Derechos Agrarios y Nuevas Adjudicaciones, 271.71/35; June 9, 1942, Legajo 1, Asunto Toca, Los Goros, Municipio El Fuerte.
The existence of executive ejidal committees from each sector showed that both sides believed their particular ejidal committee had political power to make decisions affecting their members. It is unclear if there was actual political power bestowed on both of these ejidal committees through the local or federal government, or if they simply acted as such. There was no mention of how much land each side was to receive from the split so it is very likely that there were no definitive agreements reached at this time. The absence within this document of an exact amount of land that the collectivists were entitled to in order to grow sugarcane suggested that the SICAE affiliated ejidatarios were going to try and claim as much land as possible when the final division came. The uncertainty of an exact amount allowed collectivists to gain political leverage and resulted in a great disadvantage for the individualists. This may have also indicated a growing divide between enrolled ejidatarios and unenrolled posesionarios.

The unclear boundaries between these two groups created the conditions by which individualist leaders and the SICAE took actions that hurt the interests of particular ejidatarios. On Nov. 18, 1944, Ynocente Montiel wrote a letter to the President of Mexico on behalf of himself and other family members, who were ejidatarios in Los Goros. The letter stated that the executive ejidal committee (presumably under pressure from collectivists and the SICAE) was dispossessing these individualists of their ejidal land tracts. Apparently these members of the Montiel family had cleared their land for sowing, built irrigation canals, and harvested crops over the five previous years. They made deals with General Roberto Cruz and received irrigation water from his pumping plant.78 According to the individualist executive ejidal committee of Los Goros, the Montiel family did not agree with the fractioning of their ejido that took place earlier

78 November 8, 1944, AGA, Dotación, Expediente 23/89, Legajo 3, Asunto Ejecución, Los Goros, Municipio Ahome.
that year in July, which evidently would have resulted in confiscation of their lands and re-assignment of new plots.\footnote{January 5, 1945, AGA, Privacion de Derechos Agrarios y Nuevas Adjudicaciones, 271.71/35, Legajo 1, Asunto Toca, Los Goros, Municipio El Fuerte.}

The ejidal re-fractioning of 1944 was directly tied to the split between collectivists and individualists, and subsequent demarcation of Los Goros. The Montiel family property was valuable, particularly because it possessed irrigation infrastructure that could lead to productive crop yields all year round, or support the growth of sugarcane. Perhaps the inclusion of the Montiel irrigated properties into the deal separating Los Goros was a major sticking point. The inability of the individualist leaders to dispossess the Montiels may have been one of the reasons why the definitive split of the ejido was delayed for a few years.

The fact that the Montiels secured irrigation separately from the rest of their ejido was in itself an anomaly, as most irrigation agreements were acquired for entire ejidos. This was largely due to the high costs of constructing irrigation infrastructure, in addition to the price of the water itself. There was also a tendency of third party users refusing to do business with individual ejidatarios separate from their ejido. It was entirely possible that the individualist executive ejidal committee viewed this family’s actions unfavorably, and not beneficial to the entire community.

Regardless of the ejidal committee’s true feelings on the matter, the availability of irrigation water on Montiel properties led to the SICAE’s attempts to seize these lands. In this particular case, the SICAE used the fracturing of the community as an excuse to try to dispossess ejidatarios of irrigated properties. The uncertainty of spatial boundaries legitimized the SICAE’s requests for this land. The cooperative’s efforts to seize irrigated land in the later era (1946-1957), even after boundaries had been decided on, showed that the SICAE practiced more discretion in its land seizure endeavors in this earlier time period (1938-1946). The cooperative’s
bluntness and arrogance that accompanied irrigated land disposessions in later years created rifts between collectivists and individualists that resulted in the ejido of Los Goros splitting into two. 80

**El Teroque**

The ejido of El Teroque was similar to Zapotillo in that it consisted of both Yori and indigenous ejidatarios. The inclusion of a number of ejidatarios into the SICAE in the mid-1940s resulted in massive contention between El Teroque’s inhabitants. Subsequent struggles over land and water split the ejido, generally along ethnic lines, with Mayos becoming individualists while collectivists were made up by Yoris. It is difficult to imagine that members on either side could have predicted the intense contention that resulted over the next thirteen years. The ways in which El Teroque individualists unofficially secured irrigation water in this early time period revealed the SICAE’s power and tendencies to embrace corrupt practice. It also provided an example of Mayo farmers navigating the complex political order of the Fuerte Valley.

El Teroque’s leaders applied for a dotación in June of 1932, it was awarded in 1938, and executed in January 1939. The 146 ejidatarios received 2,730 hectares, 1,740 hectares for collective uses (pasture land, covered with vegetation), 186 hectares of irrigated land, and 804 hectares of land suitable for seasonal irrigation. 81 The internal dissension within El Teroque was exacerbated in 1945 when the SICAE recruited ejidatarios to join its collective. In that year, forty-two campesinos of this ejido split off to take part in the collective system of harvesting

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80 In chapter four I analyze the SICAE’s ability to split Los Goros into two ejidos, as well as the contention that developed within both the collectivist and individualist sectors.

81 December 20, 1938, AGA, Dotación, Expediente 23/12015, Legajo 1, Asunto Toca, El Teroque, Municipio El Fuerte. El Teroque ended up losing 203 hectares by 1940 because of errors in demarcating the ejido.
sugarcane. The collectivist sector was formed primarily by mestizos, giving them a privileged status within ejidal leadership.

It appears that some Mayo individualist farmers found ways to bypass the SICAE’s hold on the Fuerte River. According to oral sources, Juan José Rentería constructed a canal in the mid-1940s that ran from the Fuerte River through the individualist ejido of El Teroque. Mayo elder Felipe Buimena of El Teroque Viejo provided more details as he explained that,

Rentería, a Yori outsider, hired some of the Yoremes here to help him construct the canal. It was completed in 1945, and a pump on the river shore drew water from the river. The canal ran up the river bank and through our lot on this side of our house, and operated until the 1950s. Everyone in our ejido paid Rentería a percentage of their harvest for use of the canal, so we all supported its construction. Water was diverted from the canal to our individual ejidal plots.

A canal used to exist on the side of Buimena’s house. Evidence of its presence is based on remnants of a structure that are still there (See illustration 3.1). The cement and brick walls of the canal are nearly buried by dirt and vegetation these days. Yet the remains also reveal a high level of craftsmanship and technological achievement. A cement slab remain of the old canal provides the inscription of the date August 22, 1945, which Buimena verifies was the year and month that construction of the canal was completed (See illustration 3.2). Mr. Buimena also recalled his time as a youth when the canal played a vital role in the agricultural practices of individualists of El Teroque up to the 1950s.

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82 October 14, 1955, AGN, Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, 404.1/5375
Illustration 3.1 Walls of the Rentería Canal in El Teroque

Illustration 3.2 Concrete Slab of the Rentería Canal with Completion Date
Physical remains of the canal still exist, and first hand oral accounts verified that Mayos had access to the water that flowed from this structure. However, I was unable to locate any documents that confirmed an agreement between El Teroque’s individualist ejidatarios and Rentería, or any mention of this canal at all. It is unclear if Rentería legally constructed the canal or if he in fact had the right to draw water from the Fuerte River.

Tracing the official record of Juan José Rentería can help to provide a clearer picture of what actually transpired in El Teroque in the mid-1940s. According to reports submitted by the SAyF, Rentería owned a pumping plant on the left margin of the Fuerte River since 1911 which he used to irrigate cotton and tomatoes on his small properties near El Teroque. In 1938, the SAyF approved Rentería’s petition to construct an aqueduct that allowed him to irrigate an additional 620 hectares of land. The United Sugar Companies strongly opposed the construction of the aqueduct, as it would have obstructed its hold on the Fuerte River’s flow. 84

Leaders from two Mayo ejidos supported Rentería’s aqueduct project. On December 26, 1938, two similar letters were sent from the executive ejidal committees of Zapotillo and El Teroque to the Mexican Senate, describing how they supported Rentería’s proposed construction of an aqueduct. The basic theme of both letters was that the farmers of these ejidos could not afford to construct irrigation infrastructure in order to irrigate their crops. The rainfall both ejidos received was allegedly not sufficient to harvest their crops, so ejidatarios had to depend on the hydraulic works of Rentería to access water for irrigation. 85 Ejidatarios of both Zapotillo and El Teroque stood to benefit from the availability of irrigation water. It is unsurprising that leaders of both ejidos came out in support of the aqueduct. The proximity in the language and overall

84 December 27, 1938, AHA, Aprovechamientos Superficiales, Caja 1000, Expediente 14051.
85 December 26, 1938, AHA, Aprovechamientos Superficiales, Caja 1000, Expediente 14051.
message of both petitions suggests that they were written by the same person, likely a lawyer hired by Rentería.

It was very significant that leaders of both ejidos attempted to secure irrigation water from Rentería’s aqueduct. El Teroque and Zapotillo were granted dotaciones that included United Sugar property, and they were legally obligated to continue to harvest sugarcane. Along with such obligations, both ejidos also received irrigation water concessions. The fact that ejidal leaders attempted to secure rights to additional irrigation water exhibited the priority they placed on hydraulic technology to keep their lands productive.

Ejidal leaders’ support of the aqueduct also suggested that they did not trust sugarcane production to meet the economic needs of their respective communities. The leaders of El Teroque specifically asked that construction of the aqueduct be approved so that, “we can ensure our lands are irrigated, and thus secure our economic liberation apart from our communal harvesting.” Sugarcane was to be harvested communally, meaning these leaders were asserting that they needed irrigation water to grow other crops necessary for their economic survival. Mayo communities were always at least a little apprehensive about becoming affiliated with the SICAE but also with their obligation to grow sugarcane.

After Rentería attempted to secure permission to build an aqueduct in the late 1930s, his name essentially disappeared from the official record. It is possible that Rentería eventually built his aqueduct, yet it is more likely that his plans never came to fruition. Not a single member of El Teroque, Zapotillo, or any local historian recalled the existence of an aqueduct in the vicinity of El Teroque, and there are no remnants of such an aqueduct in the area. It is entirely possible that the SICAE’s leaders used their political influence to crush the project altogether. The

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86 Ibid.
SICAЕ’s power and virtual monopoly of the Fuerte River perhaps forced Rentería to construct a less conspicuous hydraulic structure.

Upon conducting inspections of pumps on the Fuerte River, the SAyF reported that by June 1943 Rentería had lost his irrigation concession, and his sixteen inch pump was no longer in use. Questions of legality of the canal that was constructed in 1945, and if the SICAЕ allowed it to exist come into question here. Such questions are particularly relevant since the SICAЕ’s officials often participated in corrupt practices such as selling irrigation water from the Fuerte River.

Regulating its monopoly on the Fuerte River was no easy task for the SICAЕ. The cooperative dispersed engineers up and down the Fuerte River to investigate whose water pumps functioned. The SICAЕ then cross-checked its findings with SAyF records to determine which pumps were operating illegally. Reports by the SICAЕ that it passed along to the SAyF in both 1947 and 1950 confirmed that there were several pumps functioning along the Fuerte River without the necessary permission to do so. These reports did not mention pumps operated by Rentería in El Teroque. The SICAЕ was extremely detail oriented when it came to matters of irrigation water. It is not possible the cooperative simply overlooked this pump, especially since its recipients were individualists who constantly clashed with the SICAЕ and its collectivist ejidatarios.

The fact that Mayo ejidatarios not affiliated with the SICAЕ were able to access irrigation water in this time period was somewhat remarkable. The enforcement of the SICAЕ’s four month water monopoly and tactics that practically gave it full control of the Fuerte River forced

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87 October 11, 1943, AHA, Aguas Nacionales, Caja 1313, Expediente 17668  
88 Earlier in the chapter I discussed the SICAЕ’s agreement to allow Saquelares to sell water to individualist ejidos. In chapter four I will provide more specific examples of the SICAЕ’s corruption and illegal water sales  
89 May 7, 1947, AHA, Aprovechamientos Superficiales, Caja 553, Expediente 8176; April 15, 1950, AHA, Aguas Nacionales, Caja 1314, Expediente 17668.
Mayos farmers to seek informal methods of irrigation water access. The history of Mayos in the Fuerte Valley has always been dominated by their keen capacity to adapt to change. Indigenous farmer’s ability to access irrigation water in the face of the SICAE’s hold on the Fuerte River was a perfect example of their resilience and ingenuity.

Tehueco

Most of the irrigation resources from the Fuerte River came under the control of the SICAE in the early 1940s. It is not coincidental that there was a definitive shortage of petitions from Mayo communities, and from ejidos in general asking the Mexican government for water concessions at this time. For those ejidos that did apply, they were almost always denied formal access to irrigation water from the Fuerte River. Facing seemingly insurmountable obstacles, some Mayo communities and private parties continued to find new ways to acquire irrigation water in the mid-twentieth century.

The actions of the ejidatarios of the Mayo ejido Tehueco were a great example of the innovative approaches some indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley took to gain access to irrigation water in the early to mid-1940s. In September of 1943 the executive ejidal committe from Tehueco wrote a petition to the Governor of Sinaloa asking for permission to draw irrigation water from the Jecolua Creek. The letter described that the Jecolua Dam had been constructed to capture the rough waters of the creek. Apparently a project to construct canals to direct water from the dam to private properties in Tehueco were started, but were not completed. The ejidatarios requested that a study be conducted to determine the appropriate amount of water that their ejido was entitled to in order to irrigate their lands.90

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90 September 12, 1943, AGA, Dotación y Accesión de Aguas , Expediente 33/3855, Legajo 9, Asunto Toca, Tehueco, Municipio El Fuerte.
This letter showed that likely due to the SICAE’s near monopoly on the Fuerte River, some Mayo farmers were forced to access other irrigation water sources. The Fuerte River was actually closer to the Tehueco ejido than the Jecolua Dam. In fact, many of the land tracts of the ejido itself were located right near the river shore. This suggested that ejidatarios of Tehueco thought they had a better chance of getting water from the geographically less-accessible dam than directly from the river.

The Jecolua Dam was built in the 1920s, and by the early 1930s, farmers recognized it as a reliable source to draw irrigation water. In fact, Jecolua Creek was also known for its consistent water flow. In 1937 engineers from the Agrarian Department discussed plans to build additional irrigation infrastructure to capture the flow of water from both the Jecolua and Barotén Creek tributaries.\(^9\) This amount of irrigation activity involving creeks showed that farmers and government functionaries of the Fuerte Valley were willing to explore every possible resource to access irrigation water. Finding additional sources of irrigation water took on increased significance in the early 1940s when the SICAE had locked most communities and private parties out of the irrigation district.

Some Mayo communities of the Fuerte Valley had water rights attached to their dotaciones but others like Tehueco did not. In December of 1938 Techueco received a dotación of 3,630 hectares, of which 1,080 hectares were seasonal and susceptible to cultivation, to be split among 135 ejidatarios. 2,550 hectares were pasture land to be used collectively.\(^9\) Despite their close proximity to the Fuerte River, ejidatarios of Tehueco were not allowed to access irrigation water from the same source they had depended on for generations. The Mayos of

\(^9\) June 2, 1937, AGA, Dotación y Accesión de Aguas, Expediente 33/3855, Legajo 9, Asunto Toca, Tehueco, Municipio El Fuerte.

\(^9\) December 21, 1938, AGA, Dotación, Expediente 23/1343, Legajo 1, Asunto Toca, Tehueco, Municipio El Fuerte.
Tehueco recognized the importance of using irrigation infrastructure to harvest crops but were forced to look beyond the Fuerte River to access water for irrigation.

Additional information suggests that perhaps ejidatarios of Tehueco had become aware of other sources of irrigation water early on. In June of 1937 engineers from the Agrarian Department conducted a general and agricultural census to help determine the specifics for awarding a dotación to Tehueco. The study pointed out that the lands of Luz G. Viuda de Ibarra, which were to be expropriated and included in the dotación, were of high quality. It also mentioned that the project to bring water from the Jecolua Dam would help satisfy Tehueco’s irrigation needs.\(^{93}\) Based on this information, it appears that Luz G. Viuda de Ibarra had funded the construction of irrigation canals to draw water from the Jecolua Dam. These were likely the same unfinished canals mentioned in the 1943 document. Tehueco’s dotación included all of this land owner’s properties, with the exception of 200 hectares she was able to keep. Therefore if Tehueco’s ejidatarios wanted to access water from the Jecolua Dam, their best chance would have been to complete the construction of these canals.\(^{94}\)

This brings us back to the original 1943 document in which Tehueco’s ejidatarios asked the governor’s permission to access water from the Jecolua Dam. Jecolua Creek, much like the Fuerte River was considered national property. In 1923 the SAyF wrote an internal memo stating that Alamos Creek (and all creeks for that matter) was declared national property under article twenty-seven of the Constitution.\(^{95}\) Ejidatarios were therefore required to petition the SAyF in order to receive water concessions from Jecolua Creek.

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93 June 28, 1937, AGA, Dotación y Accesión de Aguas, Expediente 33/3855, Legajo 9, Asunto Toca, Tehueco, Municipio El Fuerte.
94 No date, Ibid.
95 March 23, 1923, AHA, Aprovechamientos Superficiales, Caja 1733, Expediente 25606
It is unclear why Tehueco’s leaders alternatively petitioned the Governor of Sinaloa for irrigation rights. Perhaps this showed these ejidatarios’ unfamiliarity with the legal system. There was also the possibility that this was not the first petition Tehueco’s ejidatarios submitted. The SICAE’s virtual lock on the Fuerte Valley’s irrigation district made it difficult for ejidos to receive irrigation concessions. Perhaps after unsuccessful attempts at petitioning federal government functionaries, leaders of Tehueco thought they had a better chance of appealing to the governor of the state.

Was Tehueco able to use water from the Jecolua Dam? After the filing of this 1943 petition, documents dealing with Tehueco and irrigation rights seem to disappear from the official record. It is unclear if Tehueco was ever authorized to draw water from the Jecolua Dam. Oral sources revealed that ejidatarios of Tehueco did in fact use irrigation infrastructure by the mid-1940s. Mayo elder Mateo Quintero of Tehueco recalled how,

"Utilizing their own resources, ejidatarios used irrigation ditches by drawing water from the Jecolua Dam. Yoremes constructed the ditches in the mid-1940s by cutting large pieces of ash trees and dragging them with mules. Everyone in the community assisted in the efforts. With the help of irrigation, we harvested cotton, corn, and tomatoes. I remember as a child everyone in my family would go to our irrigated cornfields and work, and then we would eat lunch under a tree."  

The fact that villagers of Tehueco used mules to dig trenches suggests that ejidatarios either constructed new irrigation ditches, or expanded those already started by the laborers paid by Luz G. Viuda de Ibarra in the late 1930s. Quintero mentioned that they used water from the Jecolua Dam. He was most likely describing the completion of the irrigation trenches.

Questions still remain regarding Tehueco farmers’ use of irrigation infrastructure in the mid-1940s. Namely, did ejidatarios actually have permission to use this water from the Jecolua

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96 Mateo Quintero, Interview by James Mestaz, Tehueco, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, July 27, 2014
Dam? There are no records indicating that Tehueco’s ejidatario’s had an irrigation concession. The offices of the SAyF kept very detailed records in the Fuerte Valley, especially since all business dealing with irrigation access were of such great importance to all parties involved. The SICAE poured a lot of effort into regulating its monopoly of the Fuerte River. Diverting water from the river under the cooperative’s noses would have been a difficult task.

Regardless of if Tehueco’s ejidatarios did or did not secure a water concession, oral accounts indicated that they used the water from the Jecolua Dam to irrigate their crops. If these oral accounts are true, this means that the constraints placed on accessing water from the Fuerte River, as a result of the SICAE’s near monopoly in the 1940s, forced some Mayo ejidatarios to find alternative means to access irrigation sources. In this case, and similarly to indigenous people in the Mayo Valley, as described by Jeffrey Banister, “Indians had used space and mobility to create autonomous resource access.” Regulation of land and water sources prevented Mayos of the Fuerte Valley from enjoying complete autonomy, but they sometimes found cracks in the system that allowed them to access irrigation water.

**Jahuara**

Jahuara was another Fuert Valley Mayo ejido that discovered a unique way to access irrigation water in the mid-1940s. Jahuara, also known as Los Leyva, received a dotación in the amount of 4,606 hectares in December of 1938. Its ejido consisted of 160 hectares of water pump irrigated land, 696 hectares of seasonally rain irrigated land susceptible to cultivation, and 3,750 hectares of pastureland and forest overgrown with vegetation. Leaders of Jahuara were given permission to set up a forest cooperative, and collectively sell wood cut from their pastureland

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97 Banister, 224.
and forests. They received credit from the Ejidal Bank, and the bank oversaw the cooperative’s operation.\textsuperscript{98}

Only some of the 106 completely Mayo ejidatarios of Jahuara became members of the cooperative. It is likely that the most powerful individuals of the community dominated the forest cooperative and prevented others from joining. Cooperative leaders also used their relationship with the Ejidal Bank to leverage individualists out of irrigation rights, while claiming the best farming lands for themselves. The individualists of Jahuara were indeed victims of dispossession but they refused to accept their marginalization. Individualists’ attempts to secure irrigation rights in the face of not only the SICAE’s water monopoly, but also the obstructionist tactics of the Ejidal Bank, again exhibited the resilience and innovation of Mayo farmers in the mid-1940s.

Access to irrigation water highlighted the split between individualists and collectivists in Jahuara. Some of the territory that became part of the ejido of Jahuara was previously irrigated by a water pump owned by Cecilio Román.\textsuperscript{99} Jahuara received 160 hectares of irrigated land from its dotación. It appears that ejidatarios gained control of this pump to irrigate a portion of their ejido. By 1943, for reasons unknown, the water pump in Jahuara was owned and operated by the Ejidal Bank. Only ejidatarios affiliated with the bank, those who belonged to the forest cooperative, received irrigation water from the Ejidal Bank’s pump.\textsuperscript{100} The collectivists used their water access to leverage power against individualists, acting as the decision makers for the entire ejido.

\textsuperscript{98} January 13, 1970, AGA, Dotación, Expediente 23/13154, Legajo 1, Asunto Toca, Jahuara, Municipio El Fuerte.
\textsuperscript{99} No date, AHA, Aguas Nacionales, Caja 1312, Expediente 17668.
\textsuperscript{100} June 16, 1943, AHA, Aguas Nacionales, Caja 1312, Expediente 17668.
The Ejidal Bank did not have formal permission from the SAyF to operate this pump, yet the pump remained functional until 1948.\textsuperscript{101} The leeway the SAyF granted to the Ejidal Bank showed the immense power the state apparatus awarded certain institutions in its attempts at redesigning the social and political landscape of the Mexican countryside. In this process of reformation, some Mexicans, like the individualists of Jahuara were often left out of the equation.

Collaboration between state agencies allowed functionaries to exude power, at other times state-backed agencies undercut one-another. For example, in the mid-1940s the SICAE reported to the Ministry of Water Resources that the Ejidal Bank did not have official permission to use the pump in Jahuara.\textsuperscript{102} The Ejidal Bank and the SICAE often collaborated and flexed their political muscles to empower affiliated sugarcane producing collectivists. In this case the SICAE had no concern over the water rights of Jahuara collectivists belonging to the forest cooperative. In fact, the SICAE viewed these irrigation rights as detrimental to its monopoly on the Fuerte River. Issues of access to irrigation water in the Fuerte Valley continued to create tension and division, even between state-backed institutions.

The political conditions within Jahuara suggest that the collectivists had gained control of the pump, irrigated land early on, and prevented individualists from accessing irrigation water. Collectivists likely reached an agreement with the Ejidal Bank, which ceded the pump over to the bank, in exchange for credits to fund the operation of the forest cooperative. Much like in the SICAE affiliated ejidos, individualist ejidatarios of Jahuara were left with no water rights and were forced to find an imaginative way to gain access to irrigation water.

\textsuperscript{101} May 27, 1948, AHA, Aguas Nacionales, Caja 1314, Expediente 17668.  
\textsuperscript{102} May 7, 1947, AHA, Aprovechamientos Superficiales, Caja 553, Expediente 8176.
In September of 1944, individualists sent a petition to the SAyF requesting permission to build canals to drain water from their lagoon. The Mayo ejidatarios provided more details on this construction project as they explained that,

We request permission to drain water from some of our land that becomes flooded during times of rain. We will plant corn and beans on this land. These flood waters would be discharged into the Fuerte River. Before reaching the river the drain canal needs to cross an irrigation canal of the SICAE. With permission from the Ejidal Bank and the SICAE, we would like to build our drainage canal over the SICAE’s irrigation canal. We would ensure that there would be no collapses or leaks. After cooperative leaders left the offices of the Ejidal Bank, we noticed that they have made efforts to delay our project and damage our agricultural interests.103

What the petition did not mention was that the ejido was annually flooded during the rainy season because of the build-up of water in the Jahuara lagoon. The draining of the area that became an extension of the lagoon would free up additional land where crops could be planted.

The use of this moist land to grow crops were a modification of the traditional Mayo harvesting techniques that I described in chapter one. In contrast to their ancestors who relied on the annual flooding and receding of the Fuerte River to moisten land for planting, Mayos of Jahuara intended to use modern technology to eliminate water from flooded sections of the ejido, and plant crops there. This showed that although some Mayo farmers often appropriated irrigation infrastructure into their own practices, they did not hesitate to combine it with conventional methods of agriculture. Mayo practices expanded through their ability to integrate both new and old approaches to water and irrigation, adding to their growing body of knowledge.

The allegations leveled by individualists indicated that they believed collectivists delayed the project at the behest of the Ejidal Bank. This was similar to the situation in which the SICAE often convinced its collectivists to obstruct individualists’ projects and limit land and irrigation

103 September 5, 1944, AHA, Aguas Nacionales, Caja 1312, Expediente 17668.
rights. In both cases the actions of these collectivists became an extension of a powerful state-sponsored agency. Anger and frustration was then directed toward the collectivists, and sometimes split ejidos in two. The SICAE and the Ejidal Bank watched from the sidelines as conflict and contention grew between ejidal factions.

The difference here in Jahuara was that the collectivists did not encroach on individualist lands, as some of the SICAE affiliated ejidatarios raided the property of individualist communities such as El Teroque. Perhaps this is why there was less contention between collectivists and individualists in Jahuara, as compared to tensions and division within ejidos affiliated with the SICAE. Yet the mistrust individualists expressed toward collectivists showed that matters involving access to irrigation water were considered of utmost importance. The other difference here in Jahuara was that collectivists received direct access to irrigation water, through the Ejidal Bank’s pump, to use on their crops. The SICAE affiliated collectivists of other ejidos only received enough irrigation water to grow sugarcane, but could not use this water to cultivate their own crops. This disparity suggested that the SICAE cared more about gaining access to irrigation water to improve the sugarcane harvest than it did about the welfare of its affiliated ejidatarios.

Mayos of Jahuara continued to push for projects that would combine conventional and modern irrigation practices to fulfill their harvesting needs. Only four months after the individualists submitted their petition, the Ejidal Bank sent a letter to the SAyF voicing their opposition to the intended drainage construction. According to this letter, the proposed project would somehow also irrigate ejidal lands of individualists. The Ejidal Bank’s opposition to the drainage canal supported the individualists’ claim that collectivists’ efforts to stall construction came at the behest of the bank.

104 January 13, 1945, AHA, Aguas Nacionales, Caja 1312, Expediente 17668.
The SAyF responded to the Ejidal Bank’s letter in March of 1945. An engineer with the SAyF Raymundo Enriquez Cruz informed his superiors that, “the work is moving ahead without incident and benefits the entire village of Jahuara. Opponents of the project have agreed to give consent.” The letter indicated that the Ejidal Bank apparently withdrew its opposition to the proposed project. Since there was no mention of the drainage canal crossing the SICAE canal, it appears that individualists found a way to bypass the latter. No documents up to that point in time clarified as to how the individualists would use this water to irrigate their lands.

More specific details on the irrigation and drainage project of Jahuara emerged later in 1945. In August of that year the Agrarian Department wrote a letter to the SAyF precisely outlining the individualists’ construction plans and explaining that,

In order to irrigate a fraction of their ejidal lands, individualists plan to harness the waters from Laguna Jahuara, which can store enough water to irrigate 100 hectares. They will use this irrigation water to grow chickpeas. The individualist group, consisting of 32 ejidatarios has already built 1,430 meters of the drainage canal, and 1,845 meters of the irrigation canal. They are also installing a gate and spillway.

According to this letter, the individualists had made a great deal of progress in building both the irrigation and drainage canals. This indicated that the individualists chose not to mention their plans to build the irrigation canal in the first petition they sent in September 1944. The addition of an irrigation canal meant that the individualists could use the moist land (made available from the water removal) to grow crops. The project would also provide enough water to irrigate up to an additional 100 hectares of land. This plan perfectly blended conventional agriculture with contemporary irrigation techniques.

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105 March 23, 1945, AHA, Aguas Nacionales, Caja 1312, Expediente 17668.  
106 August 24, 1945, AHA, Aguas Nacionales, Caja 1313, Expediente 17668.
This combination of floodplain style agriculture and use of irrigation infrastructure drew from specific Mayo knowledge of the natural landscape, and also allowed them to move between traditional and modern worlds. This ability to navigate both the traditional and modern derived from the growing hybridity of Mayo culture, as described in the introduction to this dissertation. The use of Mayo knowledge systems to solve irrigation problems never gained traction among state-backed agencies that, ironically, struggled to find ways to maximize the hydrological potential of the Fuerte Valley. State mandated use of indigenous hydrological innovation could have possibly led to a more egalitarian system of irrigation distribution. It seems state functionaries were more concerned about fighting political battles than learning how to manage irrigation water from a group of Indians.

The Ejidal Bank apparently did not approve of the individualists’ project, as the engineer Enriquez first reported in March of 1945. In October of that same year the Ejidal Bank asked the SAyF to suspend construction so that they could conduct a census on the ejido of Jahuara to determine who had rights to the proposed irrigation water. The Ejidal Bank’s attempts to obstruct the individualists’ irrigation and drainage project shows that any matters involving irrigation water were treated with the utmost priority.

Collectivists of Jahuara, much like ejidatarios affiliated with the SICAE had a huge advantage in that a state-backed agency advocated on their behalf. The Ejidal Bank ensured that collectivists of Jahuara were the only ones receiving water from pumps owned by the bank. The bank now wanted collectivists to have rights to the irrigation infrastructure that individualists funded and constructed on their own. Like many state institutions, the Ejidal Bank was under enormous pressure to get its numbers in the black, which never happened. This helps to explain

107 October 25, 1945, AHA, Aguas Nacionales, Caja 1313, Expediente 17668.
why the bank was so intent on seeing certain groups succeed, which unfortunately came at the expense of others.

It is unclear if individualist ejidatarios of Jahuara ever completed their project and utilized the waters from the lagoon to irrigate ejidal lands. Oral sources indicate that this irrigation project possibly never came to fruition. Mayo elder Flor Escalante of Jahuara recalled that, “Some ejidatarios had irrigation in the 1940s, and the Yoris kept the rest from getting it. By the 1950s, none of us had irrigation.”\footnote{Flor Escalante, Interview by James Mestaz, Jahuara, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, July 13, 2014.} It is interesting that Escalante remembered the Yoris as responsible for keeping Mayos from accessing irrigation water. This was probably because the bank, and most government institutions in general, rarely promoted projects that benefitted all indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley. At the behest of the SICAE, the Ejidal Bank’s pump was shut down by 1948, which confirms Escalante’s assertion that no Mayos had irrigation water by the 1950s.\footnote{May 27, 1948, AHA, Aguas Nacionales, Caja 1314, Expediente 17668.} Perhaps this lack of disparity in irrigation water access by the end of the 1940s allowed the ejido of Jahuara to stay intact as an ejido at that time.

The most important fact about this case was that these individualist Mayo farmers took the necessary steps to gain access to irrigation water from their lagoon. The execution of this new method should be attributed to the difficulties indigenous communities of the Fuerte Valley faced in their attempts to secure irrigation rights, as a direct result of the SICAE’s water monopoly. In this instance, the Ejidal Bank’s ability to keep irrigation water out of the hands of individualists also forced them to concoct such an innovative scheme of gathering water from their lagoon. Government sponsored agencies such as the SICAE and the Ejidal Bank were set in place to assist ejidatarios in economic transition, yet the actions of such organizations prevented
the majority of Mayo ejidatarios from accessing the irrigation water necessary to keep their lands productive.

**Conclusion**

Sugarcane production of the early twentieth century helped transform the Fuerte Valley into an economically vital region. Unfortunately this came at the expense of oppressed sugarcane workers whose paltry wages and lack of labor rights were sanctioned by a corrupt local government. The labor friendly Cárdenas regime helped establish the SICAE sugarcane cooperative, expropriating land mostly from United Sugar, and granting it to sugarcane producing communities. The history of the SICAE is a cautionary tale of what could happen when labor leaders are given the opportunity to administrate thousands of workers, placed in charge of wealth driven resources like land and water, and become members of an increasingly corrupt postrevolutionary apparatus set up to benefit only some sectors of society.

The SICAE’s approach to irrigation water resulted in uneven consequences for Mayo ejidatarios of the Fuerte Valley. On the one hand, indigenous collectivists received access to irrigation infrastructure and acted as the main labor source for constructing canals, dams, and aqueducts. Mayo ejidatarios (with the exception of the collectivists of Jahuara) were never granted direct access to irrigation water. Indigenous affiliates of the SICAE received enough water to cultivate sugarcane, and received a decent salary in return for their labor. They were never given irrigation water to grow their own crops, and at times had to prove their loyalty to the SICAE by helping the cooperative deny irrigation water to individualists, while stealing their lands.

As restricted as collectivists’ access to irrigation infrastructure may have seemed, individualists actually faced more obstacles. The SICAE’s four-month water monopoly and
virtual control of the Fuerte River ushered in a new era in the way Mayos received irrigation water in the Fuerte Valley. Individualists and Mayos who were members of ejidos not affiliated with the SICAE became marginalized politically, which severely restricted availability of irrigation water. They were forced to diverge from the strategies of indigenous communities in the late 1930s and early 1940s that either paid third parties for irrigation water, or applied for water concessions from the Fuerte River.

The schemes used by indigenous ejidatarios of the Fuerte Valley to access irrigation water in the early to mid-1940s reflected the limited resources at their disposal. In hindsight Mayo ejidatarios deserve ample attention and recognition for their aptitude to employ innovative methods when official strategies, such as applying for water concessions, were no longer available to them. Mayos intended to keep getting water as they always had, but new restrictions implemented by the SICAE forced them to become more creative.

Drawing irrigation water from lagoons and creeks showed that Mayos comprehended the extent of the SICAE’s hold on the Fuerte River, and that they felt they had a better chance of getting irrigation infrastructure from alternative sources. Acquiring water from third parties using unsanctioned and illegal canals exhibited some ejidatarios’ ability to side-step the SICAE’s river monopoly. These schemes showed that some Mayos had a keen understanding of both their natural surroundings and the political landscape of the Fuerte Valley. They used this knowledge to its fullest extent, which in turn allowed at least some of these communities to use irrigation water to keep their lands productive.

The SICAE practiced some restraint and patience in its quest for gaining control of both hydraulic technology and irrigated lands in the late 1930s to mid-1940s. The cooperative faced opposition from powerful landowners who were upset with the four month river monopoly, so
the last thing they needed was to create more enemies. The SICAE’s use of collectivists to do its bidding during its formative years delayed major animosity toward the collective. This gave the cooperative the opportunity to both gain control of the irrigation district and build more political clout.

Mayo ejidatarios also developed strategies of resistance against the SICAE in this early time period that carried over to the later era I discuss in the next chapter (1946-1957). The SICAE employed furtive tactics that were likely aimed at disguising its motives in this earlier time period, but in most cases Mayos were able to identify who was pulling the strings, and mounted protests against the cooperative. The SICAE’s secretive strategies in these early years did give them the momentum necessary to mount a more aggressive campaign in the late 1940s to 1950s. These more overt strategies, consisting of taking individualists’ irrigated lands and obstructing water rights, drove an irreparable wedge between some Mayo communities that often led to definitive separations of ejidos.

Both individualists and collectivists joined labor and agrarian organizations such as the CNC or the CTM in order to defend their water and land rights in this later period. Membership within these organizations, similar to the SICAE affiliation, was largely split among ethnic lines. Indigenous ejidatarios usually joined the CNC and Yoris largely became members of the CTM. The increasingly oppressive tactics of the SICAE, highlighted by dispossessing of irrigated properties and water restriction, forced indigenous farmers to depend more on the CNC for political backing.

Mistreatment at the hands of the SICAE led to mass exodus of Mayo farmers from the SICAE, as well as more concerted and cogent protest against the sugarcane cooperative, which largely contributed to its demise. The major battles for land and water access between the SICAE
and Mayo ejidatarios, as well as within these indigenous communities took place in this later period. In order to understand why Mayo farmers continued to depend on irrigation water, I provided a clear analysis of the early history of the SICAE, and what transpired in the Fuerte Valley between 1938 and 1946. The patterns of resistance, alliance, and dispossession established in this first time period therefore set the tone and pushed the major developments in this second era that I discuss in the next chapter.
Chapter 4

Stay off of my Irrigated Land! The SICAE’s Land Seizures and Fracturing of Mayo Ejidos, 1946-1957

In the early months of 1956, armed Mayos invaded 607 hectares of land planted with sugarcane on their own ejido of El Teroque, Sinaloa. The incursion came as a result of what the invading ejidatarios described as the repressive actions perpetrated by the SICAE. Contention in El Teroque had increased in the mid-1940s through mid-1950s, as both individualist and collectivist sectors annexed their adversaries’ lands, accused the other side of dominating ejidal leadership, and impeded the other’s irrigation rights.¹ The events that transpired in El Teroque exemplified the deep rifts that developed within some Mayo ejidos during the mid-1940s through mid-1950s as a consequence of their inclusion into the SICAE, and the sugarcane cooperative’s increasingly bold strategies of appropriating irrigated properties.

This era of 1946 to 1957 provided a definitive break from the first era (1938 to 1946) that I discussed in chapter three. By the mid-1940s the SICAE began to employ more overt tactics of claiming irrigated properties and denying water rights to individualists. The SICAE started to lose its power in the Fuerte Valley while directing oppression inward to its affiliated collectivist communities. What resulted was unprecedented opposition and divisiveness toward the SICAE from both individualist and collectivist sectors. The actions taken by collectivists at the behest of the cooperative also caused irreparable damage to the communal integrity of these ejidos, resulting in permanent splits in most cases.

Individualists and collectivists continued to rely on irrigation water to keep their properties fertile. Unlike collectivists who were guaranteed water by the SICAE, individualists

¹ AGA, Division, Fusion, y Permutas, Expediente 231.3/138, Legajo 2, Asunto Local, El Teroque, Municipio El Fuerte.
were forced to struggle for every drop of irrigation water they could get. Under the agrarian code, anyone who left their ejidal plot uncultivated for two years could be deprived of their property, and anyone who cultivated a plot for two years would acquire rights to its use.\(^2\) Both sectors comprehended the critical role that irrigation water played in keeping their harvests fruitful all year round. Farmers could not depend on rain water the entire year, so access to irrigation prevented outsiders from annexing minimally productive or allegedly “fallow” lands.

In contrast to the SICAE’s more subtle strategies of the late 1930s to mid-1940s, the cooperative’s more aggressive approach of orchestrating the invasion of irrigated properties in this later time period played a much larger role in isolating individuals and ejidal sectors. Isolation and political marginalization resulted in Mayo ejidatarios taking not only modest approaches such as petition writing and joining peasant groups to defend their interests, but also more drastic actions such as the armed invasion of El Teroque.

The SICAE’s practices from the mid-1940s through the mid-1950s need to be understood as a reaction to the Mexican state’s increased monitoring of the cooperative, resulting in decreased autonomy. The cooperative’s aggressive tactics should also be attributed to the growth of black market sugar, corruption among its leaders, contention between individualists and collectivists, and opposition from peasant groups, ejidatarios, and powerful landowners. The SICAE’s forceful tactics in this time period facilitated the conditions for massive social, political, and ecological upheaval within Mayo communities.

It is important to understand the SICAE as a patronage organization that provided its collectivist ejidatarios with tangible benefits. By the mid-1940s, it became increasingly more difficult for the cooperative to allocate these resources. This chapter analyzes how this desperate sugarcane cooperative’s actions reflected its attempts to maintain power and stay relevant. The

state apparatus took away the SICAE’s autonomy while the cooperative faced no difficulty
directing their collectivists to encroach on the land and resources of their individualist neighbors.
This brought great animosity between the ejidatario groups and at times even resulted in the
definitive division of ejidos. Eventually the cooperative’s leaders even isolated its affiliated
ejidatarios by withholding benefits, leading collectivists to cut ties with the SICAE. Between the
years 1946 to 1957 the cooperative transformed from a powerful tyrant to a corrupt, desperate,
and inept extortionist.

Both individualists and collectivists wanted to use water from the river for irrigation, but
they differed in their approach. Collectivists followed the orders of the SICAE, and were paid for
performing such tasks as harvesting sugarcane, and constructing canals and dams. Collectivists’
voices were generally absent from the official record in the early years of the SICAE, as the
cooperative spoke for them in official matters. We start to hear from these collectivists in the
1950s as they expressed their displeasure with the SICAE. Individualists were constrained by
their lack of choices, inability to access irrigation water, and constant threats of collectivists
trying to steal their land. We have much richer accounts of individualists’ actions and
perspective, as they defended themselves against collectivists and the SICAE. Their affiliation
with peasant organizations further brought their voices into the forefront, forcing state
functionaries to account for their complaints.

As much as the trajectory of this chapter is based on Mayo reactions to the SICAE’s
annexation of their irrigated properties, part of the story is one of the socio-cultural impacts of
development. The Mayo ejidos that I analyze here had limited access to quality irrigated land.
The existence of such properties, and their redistribution and continued development, are what
led to the divisions within these ejidos. Boundaries between collectivists and individualists began
to blur. The value of irrigated properties increased, sometimes leading to land invasions and massive contention between both groups. In order to make acreage available for harvest, Mayo ejidatarios also cleared out large tracts of land overgrown with vegetation, which in turn limited the availability of raw materials they used in religious ceremonies. This signaled a change in the way some villages approached their physical landscape and affected their relationship with their local ecosystem for years to come.

Mayos of the Fuerte Valley found powerful political allies in the post-World War II era who helped defend their rights and facilitated their gaining control of additional properties and water sources. Collectivists became members of the SICA (an affiliate of the Confederation of Mexican Workers, or CTM), while individualists allied with the National Confederation of Campesinos (CNC). Collectivists and individualists were often divided ethnically as it appears that the majority of Mayos joined the CNC, while mestizos joined the CTM.

The CTM, the SICA, and its affiliate collectivist ejidos wielded extensive power in the Fuerte Valley in the 1940s and 1950s. This meant that the CNC came to rely more heavily on indigenous ejidatarios to fill its ranks, and increase its political power within the region. The CNC has been recognized historically for its advocacy work, particularly with helping rural peasants defend their land rights. In the Fuerte Valley the CNC also became responsible for promoting peasant irrigation rights, which often worked hand in hand with defense of ejidal properties. These actions exhibited the CNC’s adaptability in recognizing the most important political issues of particular regions. It also showed that the CNC was adept at creating political clienteles, explaining the influence that local peasants, in this case Mayo ejidatarios had on the organization’s decisions. The inclusion of Mayos into the CNC, and prevalence of mestizos in
the CTM allows me to delve into issues regarding state-formation, which revise the way we think about the Mexican state of the immediate post-WWII era.

The timing of inclusion into this cooperative, along with varying levels of participation resulted in distinct interactions with the SICAE within each of these ejidos. The entire Mayo ejido of Camajoa joined the SICAE immediately after receiving its dotación in 1939, eliminating any need, or possibility for ejidatarios to decide between joining or not. I discussed in chapter three how some members of the mixed-race ejido Zapotillo, and the entire Mayo ejido of Los Goros joined the SICAE immediately upon its creation. Ejidatarios of the mixed-race ejido of El Teroque deferred membership until the mid-1940s. Particular patterns that powerful individuals in the Fuerte Valley developed to disenfranchise and dispossess Mayos showed that the appearance of the SICAE forever changed the social dynamics and definitions of community within these Mayo ejidos.

This chapter will explain how the SICAE’s more aggressive strategies of engineering irrigated land seizures from 1946 to 1957 helped alter the social, political, and ecological dynamics within Mayo communities of the Fuerte Valley. The diverse range of reactions to the SICAE showed a concern for community retention directly related to Mayo use of the river and their natural landscape on the one hand, yet a willingness to use irrigation infrastructure for individual benefit on the other. It was in fact these divergent approaches that forced the SICAE to alter their strategies, yet also helped indigenous villagers determine membership within their newly formed communities.

This chapter is also a continuation of the narrative I established in chapter three that examines the struggles between collectivists and individualists. In this chapter I analyze the causes, trajectory, and outcome of the conflicts between these two groups in the four Mayo
ejidos of Zapotillo, Los Goros, El Teroque, and Camajoa from 1946 to 1957. I argue that it was not just the struggle over land, but precisely the struggle over irrigated land, that caused Mayo ejidatarios to join peasant groups, write petitions, alter their natural landscape, and invade each other’s properties. Access to canals, pumps, and aqueducts in the Fuerte Valley, which rested largely in the hands of the SICAE, needs to be understood for the crucial role it played in the hostilities that developed within Mayo communities from 1946 to 1957, as it forever changed the social, political, ecological, and ethnic dynamics of the Fuerte Valley.

The Decline and Demise of the SICAE: A General Overview

By the mid-1940s the SICAE fell into a downward slope, marked by its decline in power and influence that ended with its demise by the late 1950s. The degeneration of the cooperative became more noticeable as collectivist communities affiliated with the SICAE began to produce less sugarcane every year. This can be attributed partly to the growing strife between individualist ejidatarios wanting independence from the SICAE, and collectivists seeking to retain their affiliation. These struggles that resulted in such drastic actions as land seizures alone cannot account for the drop off in sugar production. Collectivist ejidatarios’ internal dissatisfaction with the SICAE administration also led to a decrease in sugarcane production.

An example of this internal dissension was captured by a local newspaper in the late-1940s. In an article entitled “The SICAE Officially Ends the Current Harvest”, published in the Los Mochis newspaper El Debate in May of 1947, we gain insight into the problems that developed between the collective’s administrators and some of its affiliated ejidatarios. The article describes how the Secretary of Agriculture asked the sugarcane cutting ejidatarios in the
area of Los Mochis to resume their work. The SICAE announced that it had officially ended that year’s harvest and that sugarcane grinding would also be finished for the year.³

From the article it appears that a large group of collectivists from several ejidos had grown unhappy with the SICAE administration and refused to cut the sugarcane in their fields. Instead of negotiating with these workers the SICAE decided to end that season’s harvest without collecting the sugarcane that was not yet cut and collected. The Secretary of Agriculture attempted to convince the SICAE administration to accept this sugarcane, or perhaps work out another arrangement.

The refusal of the leaders of the sugarcane cooperative to negotiate revealed their despotic nature, as the SICAE likely used the underproduction of sugarcane as an excuse to withhold payment to the ejidatarios. Through these actions, the sugarcane cooperative’s leaders expressed a limited concern for the welfare of its affiliated ejidatarios. These events also exhibited the SICAE’s power and wealth, in that it could afford to sacrifice a large portion of the sugarcane harvest in exchange for the idea of keeping its laborers in line.

The “dissident ejidatarios”, as described by the article, expressed intentions that revealed their animosity toward the cooperative. The collectivists responded to the Secretary of Agriculture by saying that,

We will resume work cutting the sugarcane, as a sign of confidence to the government. The only condition is that the supply of sugarcane be deposited directly to the United Sugar Company mill, without any intervention from the current Manager or the Board of Directors of the SICAE. Instead of delivering the sugarcane to the current administration of the SICAE, we are willing to leave the crop in the fields, which would result in personal financial ruin.⁴

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⁴ Ibid.
Affiliated sugarcane cutters received a regular wage from the SICAE. This mention of financial ruin provided further evidence that the cooperative intended to withhold wages from the ejidatarios.

The willingness of these cane-cutting ejidatarios to risk their financial futures in order to fight against the repression perpetrated by the SICAE, exhibited just how bad relations between the workers and the cooperative had grown. It also showed how corruption among the cooperative’s leaders left less opportunity for these sugarcane cutters. What started as a noble enterprise to empower laborers turned into a mechanism for subjugating peasants. At least some of the cane producing communities took advantage of cracks in the system, which could also account for the decline of official sugarcane production in the Fuerte Valley.

Sugarcane that was sold on the black market became a huge problem in Mexico in the mid-1940s. An article in *El Debate* in May of 1945 described that the total national production of sugar for the previous year (1944-1945) was 500,000 tons, of which 100,000 tons ended up in the hands of the black market. This resulted in a general shortage in Mexico, causing prices to rise, and forcing the country to import sugar for domestic use. Sugarcane workers in the Fuerte Valley, both Mayo and Yori, took advantage of the growing black market in sugarcane in order to navigate their conditions of marginalization created by the SICAE.

The SICAE faced other major problems beginning in the mid-1940s. In 1946 the newly elected Mexican President, Miguel Alemán Valdés took office, which according to Mexican scholar María Eugenia Romero Ibarra, marked the beginning of the end for the SICAE. This president’s agenda diverged from Cárdenas’ social reforms, in favor of a major push toward industrialization. President Alemán ordered the reformation of the internal structure of the sugarcane cooperative. A technical commission directive took charge of labor assignments. The

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5 “There is no Sugar: Because it is Controlled by the Black Market in our Country” *El Debate*, May 18, 1945, pg.3
SICAE in the process lost more autonomy, which was one of the factors that precipitated its demise. Romero Ibarra also pointed out that there was talk that the collective embezzled $12 million pesos. A further blow to the SICAE’s power came when their charismatic president García Ceceña resigned in 1947.

Another development that led to the SICAE’s downfall was a federal irrigation law enacted in 1947. The law allowed for larger holdings of irrigated lands, sanctioned expansion of private agriculture in irrigation districts, and transferred water rights when land was confiscated by the state. Water could now be sold separately from land, allowing the private sector a greater opportunity to control irrigated land and water resources. The SICAE did benefit from the fact that confiscated properties had water rights attached to them. This new law ensured that the cooperative could continue to usurp ejidal lands, both legally and illegally, and turn them over to their affiliated ejidatarios. The SICAE’s four month monopoly on the Fuerte River stayed intact, but the ability of large land owners to access more irrigated land allowed them to eventually challenge the cooperative’s political dominance in the Fuerte Valley.

The late 1950s marked the end of the SICAE. In ejidos such as Mochicahui, ejidatarios stressed that they had major differences with the cooperative, and became independent. In 1955, four more ejidos separated from the SICAE, including Zapotillo. The Farm Credit Act of the same year included in its articles fifty-three, and third transitory provision, for the disappearance of societies of collective agricultural interest.

The SICAE was defunct by 1957. In February of that year, the twenty-two ejidos that still belonged to the cooperative, seceded from the SICAE, and joined the Union of Local Ejidal

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7 Enge and Whiteford, The Keepers of Water and Earth, 6-7.
8 Chapter five will provide more detail on the consequences of large landowners taking over power in the Fuerte Valley, and specifically what this meant for Mayo hydrological mobilization.
9 Schobert, La SICAE, 207, 212.
Credit Societies.\footnote{Ibid, 212.} In December of the same year, United Sugar repossessed land, machines, and buildings from the SICAE, to make up for the $5 million peso debt it was still owed.\footnote{Romero-Ibarra, 122.} These final two acts in 1957 spelled the total and definitive end to the SICAE’s existence, but not before it transformed the Fuerte Valley’s social and political landscape, and changed relationships within the communities that had become affiliates of the cooperative. The SICAE also directed the clearing of thousands of hectares of land, and construction of irrigation implements.

The historical legacy of the SICAE is still not completely clear. Lorena Schobert concluded that the SICAE improved the living standards of its ejidatarios.\footnote{Schobert, 223.} The hospital, houses, irrigation infrastructure, schools, affordable company stores, and jobs the SICAE created could all be cited as concrete examples of the progress that some workers and peasants shared in the Fuerte Valley from 1938 to 1957. The history of the SICAE was much more complicated than simply acknowledging the benefits that some members received. Meticulous historical scrutiny revealed the SICAE’s effects on Mayo communities, as the cooperative’s approach to land and water use resulted in massive contention and separation within indigenous ejidos.

The Continuation of the SICAE River Monopoly

I discussed in chapter three how under President Ávila Camacho (1940-1946) the SICAE used its four month monopoly to gain almost total control of the Fuerte River. This came largely at the expense of Mayo ejidatarios who had utilized a limited window in time to win irrigation water concessions. The transition from the Ávila Camacho to the Alemán Valdés regime in 1946 marked the beginning of the end for the SICAE. The cooperative’s four month monopoly on the
irrigation water from the Fuerte River was not an immediate casualty during the presidential transition.

The implementation of the river water monopoly initially resulted in widespread protest throughout the Fuerte Valley in 1943, and such resistance remained constant through the late 1940s. A vast array of opposition groups pleaded to government functionaries in attempts to repeal this water agreement. For instance, in April of 1948 small property owners wrote to president Alemán Valdés and asked him to end the monopoly. They argued that, “due to this arrangement, during times of drought there is a continuing detrimental effect on other crops such as corn, beans, cotton, linseed, fruits, sesame, and chickpeas.”13 This petition showed that despite all of the efforts of both the SICAE and large land owners to dominate irrigation accessibility, there were still small property owners who received irrigation water. These smallholders recognized petition writing as a legitimate strategy for expressing their opposition to the cooperative, and for maintaining access to water for part of the year.

Small property owners were not alone in their resistance to the monopoly, and were joined in their struggle by more influential groups and individuals. Filiberto Quintero was a powerful estate owner who held properties in such towns as Charay and La Palma. In his capacity as president of the League of Water Users of the Fuerte River, Quintero wrote to the Ministry of Water Resources in May of 1948, asking for the termination of the monopoly. Quintero added that, “due to the 1943 decree all pumps not belonging to the SICAE were shut down. This has put in eminent danger 800 hectares of cotton and 3,000 hectares of corn, some of which belong to ejidatarios.”14 It is unlikely that Quintero was generally concerned with the welfare of ejidatarios and their water rights. Sizable portions of his properties had been

13 April 3, 1948, AHA, Aguas Nacionales, Expediente 17668, Caja 1314.
14 June 11, 1948, Ibid.
expropriated and assigned to ejidos in the late 1930s, so it is likely he was still bitter about the land reform process. Quintero’s mention of the ejidatarios showed that he believed that state functionaries may have felt some empathy for these peasants.

Another similarity between the petitions opposing the monopoly in 1943 and those written in the late 1940s was the absence of ejidatario voices. It seems that political groups continued to portray the interests of ejidatarios as anti-water monopoly, when in fact ejidatarios were still struggling to establish any type of water concession for at least some months out of the year. The absence of petitions from ejidatarios asking for the repeal of the monopoly showed that it did not affect them to the extent it did for property owners. Ejidatarios were however able to find allies to help them in their struggle to gain and maintain irrigation rights.

The CNC fought for the land and water rights of ejidatarios of the Fuerte Valley, giving both mestizo and Mayo farmers an actual voice to counteract the actions of the SICA and large landowners. In May of 1948, the CNC wrote to the Ministry of Water Resources to defend the water rights of ejidatarios organized under the Fifth Regional Agrarian Committee. Apparently these ejidatarios had accessed water from the irrigation system of Los Mochis, but this flow of water had inextricably been cut off.¹⁵

This petition represented the type of regional political activity the CNC undertook in the late 1940s through 1950s in its attempts to represent ejidatarios, whose interests were becoming increasingly ignored in favor of the alleged economic progress that the cooperative’s water monopoly brought. The CNC is known historically for their work in advocating for ejidatario agrarian issues. Their strategy of defending the water rights of ejidatarios of the Fuerte Valley exhibited the adaptability of this advocacy group. They recognized the most pressing local peasant needs and took action. The CNC’s support of Mayo ejidatario’s water rights in particular

¹⁵ May 24, 1948, Ibid.
showed that indigenous farmers were forced to rely on outsider assistance to curb the SICAE’s local dominance.

The political power of the SICAE could help explain why the water monopoly remained in force. In fact, the agreement was even formally re-structured in 1949 to include communities, such as El Teroque, that had joined the SICAE after the 1943 monopoly was established. By this time, Mexico’s new president Miguel Alemán Valdés made it clear that he would drift further away from the progressive measures of Lázaro Cárdenas, and even diverged substantially from the more centrist Ávila Camacho. Alemán supported industrialization and attempted to make Mexico’s economy more productive and efficient. At the same time, he also helped establish monopolies and turned them over to his political allies.

The president of the SICAE sent a letter to Alemán in April 1948 asking him to not repeal the water monopoly. The letter was apparently convincing enough for the president to keep the river agreement intact. This sort of arrangement between this president and powerful entities was not surprising, considering the crony capitalism that Alemán established in Mexico.

Ironically, this seasonal water monopoly was not necessarily needed, or even used by the SICAE. During her extensive research on the SICAE, Lorena Schobert discovered a letter written between the cooperative’s officials Francisco Robledo García and Arturo Lopez. The letter revealed that the cooperative had only used this seasonal water to irrigate 25% of the sugarcane planted. Its crops were saved by the rains of July, August, early September, and mid-January. The monopoly stayed in effect until the early 1950s even though it was apparently useless, and rich and powerful farmers wrote numerous petitions asking for its repeal.

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16 Schobert, 189
17 June 8, 1954, Letter from the SICAE official Francisco Robledo García to Arturo Lopez. From personal archive of Hector M. García. Schobert 203
This ability of the SICAE to keep its inefficient and underutilized seasonal monopoly in force underscored its massive power and political influence at this time. The SICAE likely wanted to maintain this agreement in order to damage the interests of all other water users, decreasing competition, and increasing the amount of unproductive lands it could claim as its own. Nevertheless, it is still a mystery as to why the cooperative did not sell the excess water to property owners, or use it to create new clients.

The SICAE’s intentions with their irrigation monopoly notwithstanding, the changing political climate of the Fuerte Valley garnered a reaction by the cooperative. In contrast to its gradual approach of consolidating its power early on, the SICAE now undertook more aggressive tactics in the late 1940s through 1950s, as it amassed massive tracts of irrigated land and water rights, and turned them over to its collectivist ejidatarios. The SICAE’s ability to change practices of ejidatarios within its collectives soon led to divisions within Mayo ejidos.

Zapotillo

I described in chapter three how Zapotillo was a mixed-race ejido that became split between individualists and collectivists. The contention between these two sectors that developed in the early 1940s over access to irrigation water intensified in the mid-1940s. Limited access to irrigation water also brought discord within the individualist sector. Ejidal leaders had promised lands to ejidatarios if they cleared plots overgrown with vegetation, yet eventually awarded these properties to outsiders. These actions revealed a detrimental pattern that developed within some Mayo ejidos, as individualists were forced to struggle among each other for valuable irrigation water.
The limited amount of irrigation water in the Fuerte Valley meant that there was not enough liquid to serve the needs of all ejidatarios. This was particularly the case since a portion of these ejidatarios cultivated sugarcane, which required huge amounts of water. Geographer and river development expert Jeffrey Banister argued that, “Unevenness of water supply and poor soil quality generally characterized the ejidal sector. Article 75 of the national water law stipulated that ejidatarios should receive preferential treatment in cases of water scarcity.” In most regions of Mexico the state ignored this mandate as the private sector found ways to push ejidatarios onto the driest, least cultivable lands, and gain access to irrigated properties. In northern Sinaloa during most of the 1940s collectivist ejidatarios, rather than private property owners, were given preferential treatment in cases dealing with water scarcity. The SICAE and collectivists’ ability to acquire irrigated and cultivable lands, and monopolize irrigation access ensured this water inequity within the ejidos of the Fuerte Valley. This largely came at the expense of ejidatarios not affiliated with the SICAE.

Access to irrigation water was paramount to both collectivists and individualists. For collectivists, the survival of their sugarcane crop necessitated irrigation water, therefore their livelihood since they depended on the cultivation of this one crop in order to receive wages. For individualists, irrigation became intimately tied to the persistence of their food source, but also to the defense of their properties.

Irrigation issues came to a head in January 1947 when José Luis Torres, an engineer from the Agrarian Department, conducted a study in the individualist sector of Zapotillo. The land survey came as a result of allegations by Zapotillo collectivists that the individualists possessed plots of land that were not being cultivated. Torres wrote to the Agrarian Department in February

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18 Banister, *Rio Revuelto*, 262
19 The private sector’s influence became more pronounced in the Fuerte Valley in the late 1940s as the SICAE’s power began to dwindle, this will largely be the basis of my arguments in chapter five.
of the same year, and noted that, “all of the lands in this sector are under cultivation. In addition, there are ejidatarios who have rights to land, that do not have any portion of the ejido to grow crops.”

Torres visited this individualist sector at an opportune time for these ejidatarios, as the land was under cultivation. The rains of December, January, and February were steady that year, giving these farmers ample water to keep their summer corn (which relied less on irrigation water) to grow. Individualist properties were therefore identified as productive. If it had been classified as fallow, collectivists could have started planting on it, and eventually claimed it as their own.

The study that resulted from the complaints of the SICAЕ affiliated collectivists exhibited the power this sector possessed in order to push their agenda and create state functionary action. Torres wrote a follow up letter a month later that revealed additional details. He remarked that the only property not under cultivation in Zapotillo was pasture land for livestock. He also changed his story about the motivation behind this particular study. Torres now claimed that a group of (nameless) campesinos who were not ejidatarios, were looking for available, uncultivated land to claim. The alteration within this government functionary’s report was likely not due to prior misinformation. His new story that now omitted the role of collectivists was at least suspicious.

All stakeholders in the Fuerte Valley understood that access to irrigation was inextricably linked to both land acquisition and defense. We already know from chapter three that in 1946, under orders from the SICAЕ, collectivists of El Teroque destroyed the canal that had provided irrigation water to the individualists of Zapotillo. I was unable to locate records indicating that

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20 February 28, 1947, AGA, Dotación, Expediente 23/456, Legajo 1, Asunto Ejecución, Zapotillo, Municipio Ahome.
21 Secretaría de Agricultura y Recursos Hidraulicos, Datos Hidrométricos, 16.
22 March 5, 1947, Ibid.
Zapotillo received, or even applied for official irrigation rights from the SAyF by 1947. If these lands had been deemed uncultivated, this would have cleared the way for collectivists to plant sugarcane there, and claim it as their own. Individualists in Zapotillo had depended on irrigation water to keep their lands productive, but now that they had lost access, were vulnerable to outside encroachment. This is a great example of how the absence of irrigation infrastructure made it more difficult for Mayo ejidatarios to defend their property.

The problems that arose between individualist and collectivist groups in Zapotillo in the mid-1940s focused primarily on water and land rights. As early as 1945, both sides were asking the Agrarian Department to split up the Zapotillo ejido and grant additional lands to its ejidatarios. The individualist sector gained the support of the CNC which wrote a letter to the Agrarian Department on their behalf in that same year asking for the division.23 This petition showed how far the separation in Zapotillo progressed in just a few short years, as a consequence of its inclusion into the SICAE.

Divisions within ejidos were not uncommon in Mexico, especially if a cross-section of ejidatarios became linked to outside associations. Environmental historian Chris Boyer pointed out that, “Organizations that operated on a smaller scale than the ejido…often became lighting rods of local controversy because they excluded some ejidatarios.”24 In this particular case, some individualists were excluded from joining the SICAE. Other individualists kept their distance from the cooperative based on negative experiences with state sponsored organizations, but also due to divergent approaches to land and water usage, which came to light as a consequence of the availability of new resources.

23 July 17, 1945, AGA, Dotación, Expediente 23/456, Legajo 1, Asunto Ejecución, Zapotillo, Municipio Ahome.
24 Boyer, Political Landscapes, 252.
The obtainability of land and water in Zapotillo separated the individualist and collectivist groups and also played a role in creating rifts within the individualist sector. In May of 1951, a group of twenty individualists wrote a complaint to the Agrarian Department office in Culiacan. Some individualist ejidatarios alleged that,

In 1946, we were given permission to open up new plots within our ejido, and be rewarded this property. After clearing all the vegetation and getting it ready for planting, the executive ejidal committee began distributing these plots to individuals who had not cleared the land, many of whom did not even have rights to ejidal parcels. We request that land titles be given to the twenty ejidatarios who had cleared the land, and who have rights to ejidal plots. Despite our sacrifices, we are continually abused and exploited by the executive ejidal committee and engineers, both of whom ignore the CNC and President of the Republic’s requests to resolve the matter.25

This internal conflict proceeded amidst the dispute with the collectivists and the SICAE for final demarcation. The petition showed the potential problems that could arise as previously uncultivable properties were cleared, irrigated, and made available to ejidatarios.

Ejidos were by no means egalitarian utopias. Even within this mixed ejido whose division was largely based on ethnicity, the availability of new irrigated land led to divisions within the individualist sector which was comprised of mostly Mayos at the time. In an internal memo to a delegate in 1948, the director of the Agrarian Department stated that for the new lands awarded within Zapotillo, that the canal had sufficient capacity to irrigate them.26 These properties became valuable as whoever owned a portion had the capacity to irrigate their lands directly from the Tastes Canal, and bypass any third party water distributors. This may be a case of corrupt ejidal officials leasing land to the highest bidder.

More details on who was granted these new irrigated lands within the individualist section of Zapotillo came to light in 1951. In September of that year, the head of the National

25 Ibid.
26 October 30, 1948, Ibid.
Agrarian Registry wrote to the Ministry of Land and Water describing the recent events within Zapotillo. The letter explained that the majority of the surface area of Zapotillo was previously overrun by vegetation, especially the section under control by the individualists. Ejidatarios from the individualist sector cleared the majority of their land and put some of the small ejidal lots under cultivation. The two lots nearest the Tastes Canal were then leased by individuals (likely outsiders who were not members of the ejido) who harvested crops on these properties. The letter also concluded that the surface area controlled by the individualists was more than what the collectivists possessed, despite the fact that the latter outnumbered the former 103 to 90. The head of the National Agrarian Registry suggested that the collectivists take possession of a portion of the individualist land to even things out.27

The terms of this agreement revealed the power dynamics within the Fuerte Valley at this time. Agrarian laws prohibited ejidos from renting out lands to outsiders, yet it was not an uncommon practice by this time. Agrarian officials apparently became aware of such an arrangement but did not take action to prohibit it. These officials also neglected to mention that it was actually individualist ejidatarios who had cleared out this land that was eventually awarded to these outsiders. The fact that these agrarian officials suggested that collectivists should be awarded a portion of individualist lands exhibited the political power of the SICAE and its local allies. It could have also meant that agrarian officials preferred to work with relatively better off, less indigenous ejidatarios. Individualists allegedly controlled a larger surface area than collectivists, but their lands were not irrigated. The majority of the individualists’ land was originally overgrown with vegetation and not susceptible to cultivation. It took the efforts of individualist ejidatarios to clear these lots in order to prepare it for the planting of crops.

27 September 6, 1951, AGA, Dotación, Expediente 23/456, Legajo 1, Asunto Ejecucion, Zapotillo, Municipio Ahome.
The motivations of the leaders of the individualist sector are unclear. The individuals (outsiders) who rented this land likely had the means to construct irrigation technology to draw water from the Tastes Canal. It is unknown if these individuals apportioned water to themselves, to the ejidal leaders, or to the entire ejido. What is known is that the individuals who were finally awarded these plots nearest the canal were outsiders, and that they were not the laborers who had cleared the natural vegetation and made it susceptible to irrigation.

The Mayo ejidatarios of Zapotillo, as in other ejidos, were not awarded irrigation access even after they cleared land for cultivation. The SICAE not only wielded power, but depended on the fact that Mayos coveted irrigation access. The SICAE had gradually cornered the availability of irrigation resources in the Fuerte Valley by the 1950s, leaving individualists with fewer choices. Individualist ejidal leaders of Zapotillo created alliances with outsiders who may or may not have allocated irrigation water to ejidatarios. Members of the ejido with limited influence within their village took a chance by clearing land tracts in hopes that they would be rewarded with this cultivable land and irrigation water. Most individualist ejidatarios who had dreams of obtaining quality, irrigated properties would have become disappointed with the eventual outcome.

**Mayo Laborers and the Ecology of Development**

An unfortunate trend was forming within these Mayo ejidos regarding irrigation and land clearing. The majority of the land awarded to Mayo communities as dotaciones was overgrown with vegetation. A labor source was needed to clear it out to prepare it for cultivation. A large number of Mayo ejidatarios were promised irrigated plots as payment for clearing land. As soon as the vegetation was cleared, the land made susceptible to cultivation, and water rights awarded,
groups and individuals with the strongest political connections would gain access to the land. Individualist ejidatarios who acted as the labor force in clearing the land, made up of mostly Mayos in these ejidos analyzed here, almost always lost out in these scenarios.

Collectivists acquired irrigation rights and annexed more properties while individualists were often pushed onto less productive lands overgrown with vegetation, creating more havoc. The lands that individualists cleared in the mid-twentieth century was likely not the most productive. Most of the valuable properties with good soil had been previously cleared and cultivated by sugarcane producers and other farmers prior to agrarian reforms. When the time came to award dotaciones, ejidatarios rarely received sufficient cultivable land. Once ejidatarios cleared this less productive land and made it available for harvest, it therefore needed irrigation water in order to efficiently grow crops.

The SICAE had the resources to place recently cleared land under irrigation, which only benefitted a small sector. Ejidatarios without access to irrigation were obviously reluctant to clear vegetation from their own ejidal plots because they understood the challenges of cultivating crops on these properties without irrigation water. In most cases individualists had no other properties in which to grow crops and therefore had no other choice. In this arid region of northwestern Mexico, struggles over access to irrigation and cultivable land became particularly contentious, leading to serious rifts in ejidos, and splitting Mayo communities in two. In the mixed ejidos of El Teroque and Zapotillo, ethnicity also played a role in these divisions.

There was also an ecological aspect to this clearing of vegetation. Individualist Mayos became marginalized and often forced to make difficult decisions that damaged their cultural ties to their natural landscape. Several mesquite forests were permanently converted to agriculture,
indirectly, by the expanding sugar economy. These actions of cutting down their own woodlands diverged from Mayo conventional approaches to land and natural resources.

Mayos generally kept their farming lands and forests separate for key reasons. Before the massive development of the Fuerte Valley, Mayos depended on rain water and the natural overflow of the Fuerte River to irrigate their farmlands. Their forests were set aside as spaces for religious ceremonies and to provide firewood, construction material, medicinal plants, or other natural objects for costumes and other props necessary to conduct religious rituals. I discussed in the dissertation introduction how before extracting wood, Mayos asked the tree’s permission first. They only took enough wood that was necessary for each task, ensuring the tree’s survival.

Mayo farmers faced the decline of quality, cultivable land. They were often forced to convert their forests into farmland. This was undoubtedly a decision they did not take lightly as these woodlands were necessary for the survival of indigenous religion and culture. The decimation of these forests had lasting implications for the Mayo community for years to come. Indigenous people cleared the forests in anticipation of having irrigated lands. These actions could be construed as reflecting the value Mayos placed on irrigation infrastructure to create cultivable, productive lands. More accurately, the clearing of these forests should be viewed as a Mayo farmer’s last resort, and completely necessary in order to produce crops for survival. It was also a reflection of being more strongly tied to a cash economy.

The SICAE and their affiliated ejidatarios encroached on more lands, leaving Mayo ejidatarios with limited property available for planting, with increasingly fewer options. Clearing these forests, destroying the trees they valued, and altering their natural landscape tore at the souls of Mayos. Oralia Flores, a Mayo elder of Pochotal recalled that, “we were happy that we had land, but we started to lose it. The last thing we wanted was to cut down our forests, but we
had to grow food. These Yoris see land as money, we see it as life.”

The SICAÉ’s incessant greed and acquisition of ejidal lands forced Mayos to make difficult decisions in which they had to bring into account their changing relationship with the local ecology.

Unfortunately it was these difficult decisions to cut down their woodlands and forests that limited the availability of natural raw materials that Mayos used for religious ceremonies. Some Mayo elders even contend that this marked the beginning of the deterioration of their relationship with nature. This defense of land had major implications for Mayos in the mid-twentieth century. Arturo Escobar described a similar situation for indigenous and Afro-Colombians of the late twentieth century as, “the struggle for territory is thus a cultural struggle for autonomy and self-determination.” For Mayo communities like Pochotal and Zapotillo whose property rights extended only as far as their ejidal lands, their cultural practices and ability to make their own decisions were at stake in these contestations for territory.

Los Goros

For most Mayo villages, the land they received from their dotaciones encompassed the total area available for planting, limiting options for ejidatarios. There was one Mayo village, Los Goros, whose properties extended beyond their ejidal lands, and consequently their affiliation with the SICAÉ diverged from other ejidos in that aspect. Ejidatarios of Los Goros who joined the SICAÉ were not necessarily privileged villagers as in the other Mayo communities under discussion here. The divisions within Los Goros that arose in this time

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29 I will discuss this relationship between raw materials, Mayos, and nature in chapters five and six.
30 Escobar, Territories of Difference, 68.
period, due to its affiliation with the SICAE, were every bit as pronounced as in the other Mayo communities. The SICAE’s overt land acquisitions, monopolization of irrigation infrastructure, and uneven treatment of workers also led to collectivist member dissatisfaction with the cooperative, and isolated some individualist members from the Mayo community.

Los Goros differed from most of the Mayo ejidos of the Fuerte Valley in that some of the ejidatarios also owned small tracts of private property. Several of the smallholders mentioned in a document from 1938, were also listed as ejidatarios of the individualist sector in 1954. The appearance of such names as Sotero and Aureliano Yocupicio, as well as Rosalino and Isidiro Aguilar emerging from both of these lists, suggested that most of the small property owners were members of the individualist sector of Los Goros. The last names that dominated the list of smallholders, including Yocupicio and Aguilar, were also among the same last names in the list of individualists. It is likely that many of the descendants of these small property owners inherited private property, as well as ejidal tracts. There were no names of smallholders who appeared within any of the lists of Los Goros collectivists. Most of the last names of collectivists also did not coincide with that of small property owners.31

These documents suggested that unlike mixed ejidos whose split between collectivists and individualists were based largely on ethnicity, the division of Los Goros came as a result of familial and kinship loyalties. I discussed in chapter two how Los Goros united behind caciques such as Margarito Aguilar, whose knowledge and use of the legal system resulted in tangible rewards for the entire village. By the 1940s new opportunities offered by the SICAE allowed some of these non-privileged, non-property owning ejidatarios to gain political advantages over

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their brethren. The visibility of factions within indigenous communities, which resulted from emerging external political and social factors, was not unique to the Fuerte Valley. Ethnohistorian Paul Friedrich described how in a Purépecha community of Michoacán, “political ambitions and ideological or class interests had come to outweigh factors of cultural solidarity in the formerly ethnocentric community of Naranja.” 32 Both external and internal factors were responsible for rifts within the indigenous communities of Mexico.

Factions within Los Goros, as in all indigenous communities, had always existed but the inclusion of some of its ejidatarios into the SICAE only exacerbated these extant divisions. The fact that some of the ejidatarios of Los Goros owned additional private property, created a distinctive affiliation with the SICAE. Unlike in the other Mayo communities that I analyze in this chapter, Los Goros collectivists were not necessarily privileged members to begin with. In Los Goros, collectivists likely joined the SICAE to receive benefits and political backing that, as non-private property owners, fell just beyond their grasp. Individualists on the other hand fought continuously to defend their ejidal properties. Some of the ejidatarios of Los Goros did not have to depend solely on ejidal land tracts to produce food, as they also relied on their private property to grow crops. In other ejidos such as El Teroque where ejidatarios did not own additional private property, issues over land grew intense and even violent.

Issues of land tenure and irrigation sometimes tested local leadership and Mayos’ faith in those in charge. Leaders of the newly formed Los Goros ejido had fought to defend water and land rights of their community throughout the 1930s. The existence of newly irrigated, cultivable properties in the individualist sector of Los Goros resulted in further contention in the mid-1940s. For example, the individualists received a small ampliación (land extension) on November 7, 1945, in the amount of six and a half hectares. This property was also to receive

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32 Friedrich, 7.
irrigation from electric pumps. Mayo elder Alejandro Inzunza of Los Goros recalled how in 1946,

Los Goros received an extension of land in the amount of seven hectares the year prior. Twelve Yoreme families came to an agreement with the ejidal committee. We would clear out three of these hectares and be awarded this land for planting. It was hard work. There were large mesquite trees in those fields that took a long time to clear out with machetes and axes. We simultaneously planted cotton while clearing the fields, and received a good harvest that first year, especially since the land was irrigated. Then we were told these three hectares would not be our land, as was agreed upon. We were given the remaining four hectares of non-cleared land instead. We had put all of our resources into clearing and planting the original three hectares, and could not do the same with this new land. We had to abandon it. The [individualist] ejidal officers and their families took the three hectares we had cleared, and continued to plant cotton. They could have at least offered to help us clear out the remaining four hectares. The municipal president could not help us because we never received any land grant paperwork to verify our claims.

This small plot of ejidal property received irrigation access, making it extremely valuable. The only obstacle was finding a labor source to clear out the mesquite wood and thorn scrub to get it ready for planting. The executive ejidal committee duped these families into clearing it and even waited to see how well the first crop produced before confiscating it for themselves.

These actions by the more powerful ejidal leaders fit into the pattern established within other ejidos such as Zapotillo. Mayo ejidatarios acted as an unpaid labor source because they were promised this property in return for clearing it out. Their lack of political connections left them with no recourse after being swindled out of this land. In this time period when irrigation water became increasingly difficult for ejidatarios to acquire, new access generated conditions by which these individualist leaders made decisions based on the perceived value of irrigated, cultivable lands.

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33 April 14, 1947, AGA, Privacion de Derechos Agrarios y Nuevas Adjudicaciones, 271.71/35, Legajo 1, Asunto Toca, Los Goros, Municipio El Fuerte.
The uncertainty of the demarcation of the boundaries within Los Goros by the mid-1940s also played a major factor in the rising hostilities between individualists and collectivists. The two sides split up the irrigated lands of this ejido in 1946 but the ambiguity regarding the boundaries within Los Goros was still not eliminated. On June 28th of that year, the Agrarian Department reported that the collectivist group was to receive 598 hectares of irrigated land, and the individualists would get 366 hectares of irrigated land. There was also an understanding that individualists would receive 1,070 hectares of pasture land and scrub brush on the right bank of the Fuerte River. The fact that collectivists received the majority of irrigated property suggested that this division officially confirmed their expropriation of individualist lands. While individualists received an additional 1,070 hectares of un-cleared land, this indicated that perhaps the SICAЕ and collectivists anticipated that they would be able to annex this land after the individualists cleared it out.

The insistence of both sides to divide the irrigated lands before any other property shows the incredibly high value that they placed on water availability. The original dotación showed that 870 hectares were under mechanical irrigation, so this means that somewhere along the way, ejidatarios had increased the total amount of irrigated land by ninety-four hectares. The efforts of villagers such as the Montiel family (as mentioned in chapter three) to build irrigation ditches, and secure water agreements, as well as the actions of the SICAЕ to increase the irrigated surface area of its affiliated collectivists led to this growth.

The tentative division of irrigated lands within Los Goros was apparently not enough to prevent additional land grabs. On January 24, 1948 individualists wrote to the Agrarian Department to complain that collectivists fenced in numerous properties at will, as far as the eye could see, leaving the individualists with less land. They complained about this repeatedly, and

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suggested that if the local Agrarian Department delegate had originally taken action, these practices could have been avoided. The individualists added that hiring an engineer to divide the land correctly would cost them $3,000 pesos. As an alternative, they asked the Agrarian Department to split the ejido.\[36\]

Collectivists had initially received backing from the SICAE to prevent the individualists from land grabs. Collectivists then carried out the same practices that they fought so hard to deny individualists. The collectivists’ annexation of this property a year and half after the official division of irrigated lands suggested that the former waited for the latter to clear out some of this land before seizing it. This document also shows that unlike collectivists who had the political support of the influential SICAE, the individualists had to repeatedly submit petitions, and depend on peasant advocacy groups such as the CNC to defend their interests. The individualists’ persistence eventually paid off, as a formal study to divide the land of Los Goros began two months after this last letter.\[37\] Agreements to split up lands within Los Goros could not prevent competition over land and water, as contention grew between both sides, not to mention within each sector.

Division within the individualist group resulted largely from the limited availability of land and water that the SICAE had caused. Certain ejidatarios apparently tried to straddle the line between membership in both sectors, which led the Mayo community of Los Goros to question these individuals’ motives. In 1946 and 1947, the Municipal Commissioner of Los Goros, and the executive ejidal committee of Los Goros sent separate letters to the Agrarian Ejidal Organization, complaining about the actions of members of the Cevejeca family. Apparently the Cevejecas stopped attending community meetings, did not contribute to communal work or

\[36\] January 24, 1948, AGA, Dotación, Expediente 23/89, Legajo 2, Asunto Ejecución, Los Goros, Municipio Ahome 
\[37\] March 11, 1948, AGA, Dotación y Accesión de Aguas, Expediente 33/5655, Asunto Toca de Dotación, Los Goros, Municipio Ahome
school improvement, worked for wages in the collectivist sector, and stopped harvesting crops on their land for two years, leaving it abandoned. These local leaders wanted to confiscate the Cevejeca family lands on the basis that they were no longer members of their community, and that they were now considered strangers.\footnote{April 27, 1946, AGA, Dotación, Expediente 23/89, Legajo 2, Asunto Ejecución, Los Goros, Municipio Ahome; and June 23, 1947, AGA, Privacion de Derechos Agrarios y Nuevas Adjudicaciones, 271.71/35, Legajo 1, Asunto Toca, Los Goros, Municipio El Fuerte}

The charges leveled against the Cevejeca family showed that there were in fact individualists who were paid laborers for the collectivists, or that perhaps they were contracted directly from the SICAE. This letter also suggested that there were certain ejidal obligations that needed to be fulfilled in order to remain a member of the community. These formal duties, such as communal labor, would have invariably linked members of the ejido. Each ejidatario undertook the commitment to harvest their own land, as agreed upon when they received their dotaciones. It was a common expectation for both Yori and indigenous ejidatarios to raise crops on their land. This legal responsibility also fit particularly well within Mayo obligations to nature, in their commitment of combining seed, earth and water to complete the life cycle.

These ejidal leaders used the non-fulfillment of communal obligations to ostracize the Cevejecas from the village, when in fact defense of property was the main issue. Fallow lands posed a threat to the stability of a village, as outsiders were always ready to claim it as their own, legally or illegally. Contention and tensions were running high between the individualist and collectivist factions. Individualists likely perceived the Cevejeca family, alleged members of the SICAE, as a threat. Some individualist leaders may have thought the Cevejecas abandoned their land on purpose, so that the collectivists and the SICAE could lay claim to it.

In addition to these aforementioned formal obligations, ejidatarios also continued to perform religious ceremonies within Mayo ejidos such as Los Goros. These rituals allowed...
villagers to bond and reminded them who belonged to the community. The link between religious ritual and community acceptance in the Fuerte Valley shared similarities with the Purépecha village of Naranja, Michoacán, as discussed by Friedrich. In that community, a cacique’s participation in such ceremonies, “partly clarify his status in the moral order of the town.” 39 Both of the petitions from Los Goros officials omitted mention of these informal religious obligations. These leaders probably felt that Yori government functionaries would not understand their significance to communal bonds.

The Cevejeca family’s responses to allegations revealed how ejidatarios of Los Goros continued to stress their indigenous identity. In chapter two I suggested some possible reasons why inhabitants of Los Goros continued to identify themselves as “indigenous” throughout the 1930s and early 1940s, which shared similarities with the Cevejeca’s motives. In June of 1946, the Cevejeca family reacted to these charges leveled against them by writing a letter to the Agrarian Department. They had apparently spoken several times with local officials who refused to intervene on their behalf. The most interesting section of the letter was their allegations against these local bureaucrats, as the Cevejecas argued that,

In maneuvering against us and making artificial judgments, they take advantage of us because we are indigenous, unprepared for our defense. Our only hope is that we enjoy full rights within the agrarian code in force, and that there are higher authorities that know how to impart justice to those who have rights according to our laws. 40

The exploitation of these Mayos underscored a pattern set by the SICAE and its cronies. Local officials, often at the behest of the SICAE, attempted to expropriate individualist lands. These local politicians often targeted the properties of ejidatarios who were the least likely to possess

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39 Friedrich, 20.
40 June 26, 1946, AGA, Dotación, Expediente 23/89, Legajo 2, Asunto Ejecución, Los Goros, Municipio Ahome
the capacity to mount a defense against land seizure. In this case, the most likely candidates were Mayo ejidatarios.

The Cevejeca family, in the proud tradition of Mayos from Los Goros, used the Mexican legal system to their benefit. This indigenous family appealed to the Agrarian Department, apparently in attempts to pit the federal functionaries against allegedly corrupt local officials. By stating that “there are higher authorities that know how to impart justice”, the Cevejecas argued that local officials were subverting federal laws and it was the responsibility of federal officials to defend the legal system.

Ejidal property rights were apparently not the only thing at stake here. This was also an indictment of the equality of the postrevolutionary system, which was allegedly set in place to defend the rights of all Mexicans. It appears that the Cevejecas were also trying to argue that, because they were Mayos, they were still part of the Los Goros community. By defining themselves as indigenous they were making the argument that they had full rights to their land.

The limited amount of land and irrigation water available to ejidatarios of Los Goros continued to create divisions within the individualist sector. The SICAE’s strategy of seizing irrigated lands created conditions by which leaders of the individualist sector began to question the motives of some of its members. Membership within these newly formed Mayo communities was therefore contingent upon each individual’s relationship to the village, their approach to the Fuerte River, as well as their ties to the SICAE.

The 1950s marked an era in Los Goros in which there was less documented contention between the individualists and collectivists. Collectivist dissatisfaction with the SICAE also led to their separation from the cooperative in this decade. Mistreatment within their ejido played a major role in collectivist disillusionment with the SICAE. For example, in February 1951, the
executive ejidal committee of the collectivists attempted to strip individual plots of land from nineteen of their ejidatarios, because they allegedly did not harvest these plots for two consecutive years.\textsuperscript{41}

The actions of this executive ejidal committee revealed a great deal about the inner-workings of these collectivist sectors, that are absent from literature regarding the SICAE. It appears that collectivist ejidatarios harvested sugarcane on their ejidal land and received a daily wage from the SICAE. They also possessed their own individual ejidal plots in which to harvest additional crops. Similar to the individualists, these collectivist ejidatarios were obligated to grow crops annually on their individual plots, or risked confiscation by their executive ejidal committee. The enforcement of such duties by the ejidal committee may have come about out of fear that fallow lands could be encroached upon by outsiders. There is also the possibility that the SICAE pressured the executive ejidal committee into finding innovative ways to dispossess ejidatarios and transform their plots into collective sugarcane lands, creating more dependent wage workers.

Dissatisfaction among collectivist ejidatarios of Los Goros perhaps flowed upward to their ejidal leaders. No matter how it happened, even the executive ejidal committee, controlled by collectivists, eventually lost patience with the SICAE and asked to secede from the cooperative. On August 27, 1951 the collectivist executive ejidal committee of Los Goros wrote a letter to the President of Mexico stating that they were leaving the SICAE. They claimed to have received no benefit as members, and they refused to live in the misery they were facing.\textsuperscript{42}

The wages collectivists received were apparently not enough to keep them satisfied. An engineer

\textsuperscript{41} June 30, 1952, AGA, Privacion de Derechos Agrarios y Nuevas Adjudicaciones, 271.71/35, Legajo 3, Asunto Toca, Los Goros, Municipio El Fuerte
\textsuperscript{42} August 27, 1951, AGA, Privacion de Derechos Agrarios y Nuevas Adjudicaciones, 271.71/35, Legajo 1, Asunto Toca, Los Goros, Municipio El Fuerte

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from the Agrarian Department reported that the daily wage for collectivist ejidatarios in Los Goros was $6.50 pesos.\(^{43}\) Even with factoring in inflation (around three percent annually), and the devaluation of the peso over time, this was significantly higher than the daily one peso that wage laborers earned on haciendas in the early 1930s.\(^{44}\)

These ejidatarios did make substantially more money than they did on haciendas, but the SICAE began to cheat the collectivists. Their contract with the sugarcane collective stated that each affiliated ejido was to receive annual dividends (distribution of annual company earnings) from the cooperative. The collectivists of Los Goros had not received a bonus of this type since 1947.\(^{45}\) This helped to explain why collectivists claimed that they “received no benefit.” The withholding of bonuses was due in part to the SICAE’s decline in sugarcane production since the late 1940s, but it was also be attributed to corruption and economic mismanagement on the behalf of the SICAE officials. No matter the cause, collectivists of Los Goros concluded that they were better off without the cooperative.

There were other issues that came to the forefront that explained why collectivists of Los Goros wished to leave the SICAE. In June of 1953, the same executive ejidal committee wrote another letter to the President, which provided more details regarding their dissatisfaction with the cooperative. The letter argued that,

In 1939 we became part of the SICAE. We grew grain crops in the first two years. After that, and until today, we grew sugarcane. We were promised that after five years we would be released from our obligation. This still remains a promise, as it has not happened yet. We have now been working under the SICAE for fourteen years, and received no benefit. It has now agreed to our independence, and granting arable land for individual parceling.\(^{46}\)

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\(^{43}\) November 21, 1954, AGA, Privacion de Derechos Agrarios y Nuevas Adjudicaciones, 271.71/35, Legajo 2, Asunto Toca, Los Goros, Municipio El Fuerte
\(^{44}\) I pointed out this average wage in chapter two, as reported by a land reform engineer in the 1930s.
\(^{45}\) November 21, 1954, AGA, Privacion de Derechos Agrarios y Nuevas Adjudicaciones, 271.71/35, Legajo 2, Asunto Toca, Los Goros, Municipio El Fuerte
\(^{46}\) July 22, 1953, AGN, Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, 521.7/17
This is the only document that I encountered that mentioned an agreement between the SICAE and these collectivists, of the former promising independence to the latter after five years. If such an accord was reached it was likely verbal and apparently not binding. If the SICAE had forced collectivists of Los Goros, and other ejidatarios to remain affiliated, it can help to explain the growing rebellion against this cooperative. The document also suggested that these collectivists’ terrible experience with the SICAE increased their desire for individual land, moving at least some Mayo people away from collective landholding.

Eventually both the collectivists and individualists of Los Goros shared opposition to the SICAE. Adoption of new practices instituted by the cooperative among its collectivist members drove an irreparable wedge between members of the village. By 1962 Los Goros split into two ejidos, Los Goros and Los Goros I Individual. Unlike the mixed-race ejido of Zapotillo whose split was determined largely along ethnic lines, Los Goros was made up entirely of indigenous people. The divisions caused by unequal access to irrigation water showed that alteration in water and land usage had the power to rip Mayo communities into two.

**Ambivalent Mayo Identity Among Members Who Joined the SICAE**

The definitive split in some ejidos caused by affiliation with the SICAE raises the important question about whether Mayos who joined the cooperative continued to consider themselves Yoremes. The answer to this question depends largely on perspective and geographic location. The SICAE’s administrative power and ability to dictate ejidatario actions allowed Mayos to develop a multitude of approaches to the river and their natural landscape. The persistence of indigenous culture in the ejidos I discuss here suggests that despite the plurality of
approaches Mayos took toward land and water usage, they continued to defend their identity as Yoremes. Criteria for membership in the Mayo community was never fixed, and these new approaches to land and water expanded notions of what it meant to be Mayo even further. Some Mayo ejidatarios who aligned with Yoris, and whose use of the river and natural landscape did not benefit indigenous communities still considered themselves Yoreme.

In the Fuerte Valley, the attitude and sensibility of the ways Mayos accepted new technologies to access the Fuerte River shaped what space on the cultural continuum their communities placed them. Practices were an important way for Mayos to maintain their social order amid a rapidly changing social, political, cultural, and natural environment. As important as ethnic labeling was for Mayo communities, self-representation was also vital, as the criteria for Mayo identity expanded in this time period.

In conducting interviews with indigenous elders in such ejidos as El Teroque Viejo, which became split among Mayos (individualists) and Yoris (collectivists), the consensus was that indigenous ejidatarios who joined the SICAЕ became Yoris. Some Mayos believed that collectivist practices differed so radically from individualists, that since some of these actions impeded Yoreme interests, joining the SICAЕ signaled an abandonment of the indigenous community.47 The important thing to remember here is that Mayo identity was constantly in flux. Criteria for membership in these newly formed ejidos were based largely upon individual approaches to the Fuerte River. The determination as to who was classified as Yoreme or Yori was up for debate.

Mexican scholars who focus on the study of indigenous communities have attempted to define criteria for Indianness. The renowned anthropologist/archaeologist Alfonso Caso suggested that these five diagnostic criteria included, “race, customs, language, community of

47 Some of these elders of El Teroque Viejo included Felipe Buimena
birth, community of residence, and self-identity." The impetus behind such classic scholars to establish these criteria was based primarily on their need to define who was and was not Indian within their own research.

Some contemporary scholars have attempted to explain the phenomena that continue to unite indigenous people. Anthropologist Gabriel Uriarte, an expert on Mayo culture suggested that, “after the native language, traditional festivals are the main factor of cohesion.” Such new studies of culture shy away from outside judgment of Indianness, and allow indigenous people to decide these criteria for themselves.

As for Mayos in the mid-twentieth century, these criteria were decided both by self-representation, and by members of the Yoreme community, based on a number of factors which included an individual’s willingness to continue speaking the indigenous language, and participating in ancient religious rituals. I discussed in chapter one how indigenous elders today regard comprehension of the Mayo language and participation in ancient religious rituals as the two most important cultural identifiers among Yoremes. There were other factors here at play that helped villagers determine who was Yoreme, and who was Yori.

Hostilities within indigenous communities are inevitable, but membership within the Mayo community could have also been based on personal rivalries. Specifically, a villager could accuse another of being a Yori if he did not like him. These conflicting notions of what constituted Mayo identity can be understood by Paul Friedrich’s explanation of Purépecha identity, in which he asserted that, “A man always is a combination of what he feels he is, what others feel him to be, and the relations between these two sets of emotions.” Mayo identity was in a constant state of flux. Some villagers expanded their notion of what it meant to be Yoreme.

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48 Caso, “Definición del indio y de lo indio” América Indígena, 228.
49 Uriarte, Sinaloa Yoreme, 11.
50 Friedrich, 69.
Many individuals today that do not speak the Mayo language continue to identify themselves as Yoreme. It is true that some Mayos may appear more “traditional” than others, but this does not exclude these “less traditional” others that identify as Yoreme.

Self-representation could also be used strategically by individuals in particular cases, and refuted by other members. For instance, by claiming that the Cevejeca family members were outsiders, leaders of Los Goros were implicitly calling them Yoris. The Cevejeca family argued that they were indigenous in order to solidify their membership within their ejido, and certify their land rights. Falling within the parameters of Friedrich’s explanation, Mayo identity was determined both by self-representation as well as how other Yoremes categorized an individual.

In ejidos that were originally made up entirely of Mayos, such as Los Goros and Camajoa, the split between individualists and collectivists apparently did not alter ethnic identities. The SICAE’s actions were responsible for splitting Los Goros in half, but Mayos who joined the collectivist sector apparently continued to engage in their indigenous religious rituals and speak the Mayo dialect. According to Mayo elder Carlos Moroyoqui of Los Goros, “the collectivists were also Yoremes. They stopped performing some rituals with us, but they continued to attend the major ceremonies in San Miguel [de Zapotitlán].”51 Descendants of both sectors (now Los Goros and Los Goros I Individual) have since accepted Yoris into their ejidos, but ejidatarios identifying as Yoreme still exist in both ejidos today.

This plurality of Mayo identity can help to explain why it has survived until this day. I argued earlier that Los Goros may have differed from El Teroque because of the fact that some ejidatarios of the former owned private property. The contention between collectivists and individualists was less intense in Los Goros, probably because several individualists did not have to rely solely on their ejidal lands to produce crops, as did ejidatarios from El Teroque. Mayo

51 Carlos Moroyoqui, Interview by James Mestaz, Los Goros, Municip. Ahome, Sinaloa, Mexico, April, 10, 2014.
ejidatarios of each of these villages accepted different practices into their traditions and sometimes took divergent approaches to land and water, yet they continued to consider themselves Yoreme.

Additional oral sources inform us that Mayos retained their indigenous identity even after joining the SICAE. Bernabé Lopez, a local historian and expert on the SICAE, argued that there were absolutely Mayo members in the SICAE. In fact he claimed that, “Some Mayos were comfortable with their piece of land. They wanted to grow corn and live off of that. Others joined the SICAE, and even became leaders of this group such as Nicolás Valenzuela Bachomo, who was the nephew of the famous Felipe Bachomo.”

The fact that Mayo leaders such as Felipe Bachomo’s nephew joined the SICAE indicated that Yoreme identity and membership in the SICAE were not mutually exclusive. This also showed that some major Mayo leaders may have felt attracted to (or been recruited to) the SICAE.

**El Teroque**

The mid-1950s marked an era of increased confrontation in El Teroque. In chapter three I discussed some of the problems that arose as individualists and collectivists fought for irrigation in El Teroque, and the likelihood that individualists found ways to use Fuerte River water in the mid-1940s. The relative calm over the next decade soon led to a storm in the mid-1950s as the struggle between these two factions resulted in armed land invasion. The preceding political struggle had failed to produce any meaningful compromises on either side. These confrontations leading up to the invasions exhibited the bold tactics used by the SICAE in the 1950s, as well as the necessity of individualists to align with peasant organizations like the CNC in order to defend their land and water rights.

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By 1948 the SICAЕ convinced the Agrarian Department to order a clearing census of El Teroque to determine who had land rights, and what plots belonged to whom. The census, conducted by the Agrarian Department found that forty-eight ejidatarios were harvesting sugarcane collectively as members of the SICAЕ. Forty-one ejidatarios remained independent, working their plots individually. Sixty-four ejidatarios had not yet received land certificates, but had been working the land collectively for two years, and an additional fifty ejidatarios without certificates were working their land individually. I explained in chapter three how those without certificates were likely posesionarios, or members of the community who were not originally granted an ejidal plot. The most intriguing finding of this 1948 census was that the SICAЕ Canal had greatly increased El Teroque’s irrigation capacity from 190 hectares to 1,328 hectares, of which 506 hectares were already planted with sugarcane.\(^{53}\)

This immense increase in irrigated land was attributed to El Teroque’s affiliation with the SICAЕ. What was not mentioned in these findings was that only those ejidatarios belonging to the cooperative enjoyed the benefits of irrigation. This meant that at least 1,328 hectares of property were irrigated and controlled by collectivists who were either harvesting sugarcane or preparing the land for planting. Individualists did not enjoy a single hectare of that land for their crops. Also omitted from these findings were the exact amounts of territory assigned to both sides. It appears that out of the roughly 2,500 hectares of ejidal land in El Teroque, the individualists would become the minority stakeholders with less land, and no irrigation water. These discrepancies in water and land availability proved fundamental to the struggles between these two factions in the 1950s.

A large number of individualists began to align with the CNC by the mid-1950s in attempts to gain access to irrigated properties. Perhaps their new coalition with this peasant organization gave individualists of El Teroque the confidence it needed to become more vocal in expressing displeasure with their precarious circumstances. Correspondence of the mid-1950s supported this hypothesis of increased individualist confidence.

In November of 1954 El Teroque individualists pleaded their case to the General Secretary of the Agricultural Commission asking for irrigated lands. He then wrote a letter on their behalf to the Agrarian Department, stating that,

the individualists are in a difficult situation because they do have credits to obtain agricultural inputs necessary to grow crops, and also lack water for their harvests. Individualists want the power to elect their own executive ejidal committee, and the separation of their ejido. The problem is that within ejidos affiliated with the SICAE, the cooperative’s administration appoints the ejidal committee for the entire ejido, and these leaders only represent the interests of the collectivists.\footnote{November 5, 1954, AGA, Dotación, Expediente 23/3684, Legajo 1, Asunto Ejecución, El Teroque, Municipio El Fuerte.}

It is telling that individualists identified the lack of irrigation water and agricultural credits as their two biggest obstacles. The inability to access irrigation water and political marginalization were intimately tied together.

Indigenous ejidatarios realized that they needed to secure irrigation water in order to generate harvests large enough to survive, but also to stay productive enough to prevent outsiders from trying to claim their land. The struggle for irrigation water and direct opposition to the powerful SICAE proved to be an uphill battle. Individualists also proposed to divide their ejido in order to have the power to elect their own ejidal commission. Such elections would allow them to make their own decisions, as well as obtain a certain level of autonomy.
Individualists of El Teroque began to write petitions by 1955, which were more specific in not only defining their political aspirations, but also identifying laws that clarified their agenda. These specific and effective petitions can be explained by their affiliation with the CNC. In May of that year individualists wrote a letter to the Agrarian Department stating that with the help of Paragraph Four of Article 148, as well as Article 149 of the Agrarian Code, they sought the separation of their ejido. The division of the ejido, they added, was based on “demagogic and social conditions.” The identification of articles within the Agrarian Code, and use of such words as “demagogic” were a consequence of interaction with the CNC. This peasant organization was well-versed in agrarian codes and laws due to its vast experience in coordinating individualists’ struggles against the SICAE. The language in which individualists expressed their political interests changed, likely as a result from their interaction with the CNC. Individualists’ experiences informed them of their need to separate from the collectivist-dominated ejidal leadership.

With the help of the CNC, individualists identified specific issues and demands and related this directly to existing legislation. In August of 1955 Collectivists sent another petition to the Ejido Agrarian Organization, its main points asserted that,

There are 116 collectivists who are antagonistic to our ideology. The ejidal committee election in 1953 only had 81 of 220 ejidatarios voting, which violates the agrarian code articles seventeen and twenty-two. There is also division in the ejidos Zapotillo, El Porvenir, Los Goros, Los Mochis, Las Compuertas, Bagojo, and Las Grullas. Only three of these ejidos have successfully split in two. Please allow the Individualists to hold an election so we can have representation. This is the fourth time we are sending this petition. The recommendations of superiors have been ignored, perhaps in collusion with Miguel Leon Lopez, representative of the SICAE. The cooperative, backed by the harmful CTM, has become the enemy of the peasants who belong to the CNC. We cannot obtain credit privately or officially because no institution or company will enter into an agreement under these conditions. With the completed Miguel Hidalgo Dam, we have undertaken

55 May 18, 1955, AGA, Dotación, Expediente 23/3621, Legajo 1, Asunto Ejecución, El Teroque, Municipio El Fuerte.
an agreement to receive water from the Fuerte River Commission, but who has the power to endorse these contracts? The ejidal leadership will not do so.\textsuperscript{56}

Individualists pointed out that an executive ejidal committee election needed a majority vote under articles seventeen and twenty-two. A re-vote with a majority would nullify the results of the most current election, in which collectivists dominated office. Overturning the election would perhaps alleviate them from the despotic ejidal leadership that refused to represent them.

A critical point to their argument was that it was not just El Teroque that was split between collectivists and individualists. Three out of these seven ejidos had legally divided and formed their own executive ejidal commissions. Forming their own separate commissions would give the remaining four individualist groups the power to make decisions as such actions were not unprecedented.

The knowledge of these proceedings, coupled with the mention of the CNC, lends further evidence that the campesino organization helped them write this petition. This also marked the early development of the direct conflict between the CNC and the CTM in this region. The power of the SICAE was on the decline and their organization nearly defunct. The charges of collusion between this powerful cooperative, and local officials, soon carried over to the “harmful” CTM.

The most compelling claim in this petition had to do with water rights. The main problem the individualists faced was their powerlessness to make decisions regarding their future. They focused on highlighting their inability to access irrigation water to convincingly frame their argument and reveal their precarious position. Ejidos were supposed to provide enough land for campesinos to produce a sufficient amount of crops to survive. What happens, however, when

\textsuperscript{56} October 14, 1955, AGA, Division, Fusion, y Permutas, Expediente 231.3/138, Legajo 2, Asunto Local, El Teroque, Municipio El Fuerte.
ejidal leadership withholds access to land and water to a segment of the community, and even blocks them from securing water rights from a third party?

The inability to secure deals for irrigation water without ejidal leadership consent meant that individualists were forced to rely on seasonal rain water for irrigation. Such inconsistent irrigation practices left their lands vulnerable to underproduction and therefore open to outside intrusion. In fact, it gave the collectivists justification to continue expanding their properties by encroaching on individualist lands.

The Fuerte River Commission (CRF) was a federal agency, which in the 1950s was roughly modeled around the Tennessee Valley Authority, tasked with overseeing the development of the Fuerte River’s hydraulic modules to boost local agricultural output.\(^57\) The fact that individualists reached preliminary agreements with the CRF suggested that these ejidatarios viewed access to irrigation water as a means to maintain productive harvests, and protect their property. In helping these individualists express their need for irrigation water the CNC forged closer alliances with local communities and expanded their advocacy beyond issues of land reform.

These conflicts of interest within the SICAE, and preferential treatment in allocating water resources, underscored the need to take decisions regarding irrigation out of the cooperative’s hands. In fact, the following month, by resolution of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, and Ministry of Water Resources, the Fuerte River Commission was placed in charge of all irrigation systems of the Fuerte Valley. The head of the SICAE irrigation management, Calderon Nieves Caparro, became an employee of the CRF. Ejidatarios and property owners were the main recipients with irrigation fees paid in advance.\(^58\)

\(^{57}\) Chapter six offers a substantial discussion of the CRF and their interaction with Mayo villages.  
\(^{58}\) Schobert, 208.
The individualists of El Teroque had reached a preliminary arrangement with the Fuerte River Commission even before the latter was officially placed in charge of irrigation agreements. Without consent from their ejidal leadership, individualists could not officially execute these deals. The availability of irrigation water therefore took on even more significance for certain Mayo communities during these struggles between individualists and collectivists.

Individualists of El Teroque again stressed the importance of accessing irrigation water in October of 1955 when they wrote a letter to President Adolfo Ruiz Cortines. In addition to explaining their problems with the collectivists they also told the President that, “in order to conduct our work we request irrigation for our fields and construction of hydraulic distribution.” The demand for irrigation infrastructure showed that individualists of El Teroque had fully accepted its use into their practices. They continued to recognize its value to cultivate crops, and in doing so, defend their properties, their community, and religious rituals.

Collectivists expanded their territories and individualists were pushed onto less productive lands that required irrigation technology to grow crops. In order to secure any deals and utilize irrigation water they were forced to separate from the collectivists and elect their own executive ejidal committee. By the mid-1950s Mayo ejidatarios of El Teroque still had faith in the petitions process to help them secure irrigation water in order to grow enough food to survive and keep their lands and communities intact. The sugarcane industry and rapid development of the Fuerte Valley continued to privilege the collectivists, facilitating the separation of ejidos such as El Teroque.

Individualist Mayo ejidatarios simply wanted to maintain a symbolic relationship with the Fuerte River and grow their crops. Felipe Buimena, a Mayo elder from El Teroque recalled his parent’s mistrust of the SICAE as he stated that, “they did not want anyone telling them what

59 October 14, 1955, AGN, Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, 404.1/5375
they could grow. They also did not think anyone had the right to possess the river completely. The river was for everyone.\textsuperscript{60} Apparently Mr. Buimena remembered the four-month SICAE water monopoly as total control of the river, which suggested that the cooperative unofficially regulated the river year round. The obstructionism of collectivists, in not allowing individualists to establish irrigation deals with third parties could also account for this historical perception.

Some individualists believed that collectivists did not utilize the river for the collective benefit of El Teroque. In fact, collectivist approaches to irrigation impeded the individualist’s long standing connection to the river. River practices thus played a major role in allowing Mayos to decide who would be members of their newly-formed community. Mayos in El Teroque, as well as in other indigenous villages, forged their identity in the mid-twentieth century based on their uses and connection to the Fuerte River.

The tense situation between individualists on one side, and collectivists and the SICAE on the other, had grown contentious by the end of 1955. By August individualists of El Teroque had started demanding a portion of the land that collectivists had invaded. On August 31\textsuperscript{st} they wrote a letter to the National Ejidal Credit Bank explaining that they were entitled to this land that was presently planted with sugarcane. The important aspect about this land was that since it was used to cultivate sugarcane, it was also irrigated. The individualist leaders added that,

\begin{quote}
We are willing to [continue to] devote this land to the cultivation of sugarcane, as long as your institution provides us with necessary credit, but without any ties to the administration of the aforementioned SICAE. Under the direction of this agency, all affiliated ejidos, except for rare exceptions have been a resounding economic failure. We ask to stay unconnected to it, or otherwise devote ourselves to other crops.\textsuperscript{61}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{60} Felipe Buimena, Interview by James Mestaz, El Teroque Viejo, Municip. El Fuerte, February 14, 2014.\textsuperscript{61} August 31, 1955, AGA, Privacion de Derechos Agrarios y Nuevas Adjudicaciones, 271.71/10717, Legajo 7 Asunto Trabajos de Depuracion Censal, El Teroque, Municipio El Fuerte.
This letter exhibited not only the confidence individualists had in regaining control over this land, but also the flexibility in their willingness to produce sugarcane in exchange for agricultural credits.

The letter raised pertinent issues about this group’s options. The costs to raise sugarcane were very high compared to other crops. Individualists had a difficult time getting by on their 200 hectares of unirrigated land. If they did retrieve some of their ejidal land, there was also the issue of affording the implements necessary to cultivate sugarcane. The letter also revealed their deep mistrust of the SICAE administration. The cooperative was on its last legs, but individualists made it perfectly clear they wanted absolutely no ties to it. Perhaps the individualists aspired to driving a proverbial stake through the SICAE’s heart, and let the ejidal bank know that the cooperative was not welcome by the ejidos in the area.

Amid the rampant inequality and inability to access land and water rights in El Teroque, the individualists’ ally, the CNC, had initiated a letter writing campaign. The CNC’s apparent aim was to point out land tenure and irrigation access disparity, as well as the lack of political representation on behalf of the individualists. One of its primary goals was to acquire government approval to split the ejido of El Teroque into two.

The CNC resorted to several different tactics to reach their goals. In August of 1955, the CNC made allegations that the SICAE inflated the census to make it seem that there were more collectivist ejidatarios, which allowed them to maintain the majority of the land within the ejido.\textsuperscript{62} There is no proof that this was actually the case. Regardless of truth, the CNC was essentially calling for another census. A new census could potentially result in either a split of the ejido or individualists receiving additional land.

\textsuperscript{62} August 4, 1955, AGA, Dotación, Expediente 23/3621, Legajo 1, Asunto Ejecución, El Teroque, Municipio El Fuerte.
The CNC continued its campaign in September as its leaders wrote at least two letters to the Agrarian Department. The first argued that the collectivists had been invading individualist lands and planting sugarcane for ten years, and that they now possessed over 1,000 hectares of land planted with sugarcane. The second letter stated that, “the inclusion of ejidatarios into the SICAE blurred the boundaries of the community, and eventually led to individualists being left with only 200 hectares for 104 ejidatarios.”

Both of these letters brought to light specific statistics as to the surface area controlled by each group. By increasing their properties and planting sugar cane on at least 1,000 hectares, collectivists left the individualists with roughly 200 hectares in which to provide for their families. The number of collectivists was roughly equal to individualists, so this was a grossly disproportionate amount of land for each to control. These inequities were also highlighted by the fact that the individualists lacked irrigated lands, which also left these remaining lots vulnerable to seizure.

In October of 1955 the Regional Campesino Committee Number Five wrote a letter to the Agrarian Department alleging that the SICAE was trying to intimidate the individualists by forcing them to give up the small 200 hectares of land they had left. If true, this meant that the SICAE tried to completely eliminate the individualists from the ejido. With no ejidal properties in their possession it would have been very difficult for individualists to mount any type of political or legal defense.

In November, leaders from both sectors met with representatives from the Agrarian Department and the Regional Campesino Committee Number Five to solve the land problem and

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63 September 19, 1955, AGA, Dotación, Expediente 23/3684, Legajo 1, Asunto Ejecución, El Teroque, Municipio El Fuerte.
64 January 17, 1956, AGA, Dotación, Expediente 23/3684, Legajo 1, Asunto Ejecución, El Teroque, Municipio El Fuerte.
determine if collectivists had invaded properties belonging to individualists. Apparently more research was needed to establish the exact boundaries for both sides. In the meantime, the SICAE and its affiliates continued their tactics of marginalizing individualists.

In December of 1955, the CNC wrote a letter to the Agrarian Department explaining that some individualist ejidatarios were denied their land titles. When ejidal leaders allegedly delivered new land titles, some of the recipients were not home. These ejidatarios were forced to go to the offices of the SICAE to claim them, but were told that their certificates were lost. The withholding of land titles revealed the ruthlessness of SICAE official and their penchant for operating above the law.

The individualist invasion of 607 hectares of collectivist occupied land in 1956 was a manifestation of the feelings of disenfranchisement, anger, and frustration that had been building up for over ten years. After more than a decade of watching collectivists encroach on their land, obstruct irrigation agreements, deny land titles, and ultimately being relegated to a mere 200 hectares, individualists reached their tipping point. According to individualists, in the months leading up to the invasion, after several meetings between the two groups, the former were led to believe that they would finally be given more land. The anticipated land transfers were then withheld from them. Individualists realized that their interests would not be satisfied through purely political methods. With very little options at their disposal, they decided to invade these 607 hectares that were planted with sugarcane.

Individualists invaded the collectivist controlled sugarcane land in the early months of 1956. Armed with unspecified weapons, they prevented the collectivist group from performing

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66 November 24, 1955, Ibid.
the tasks necessary for sugarcane cultivation, such as cutting and irrigation. The original intent of the individualists was to destroy the sugarcane plants and replace them with other crops. The commissioned engineer from the Agrarian Department intervened and met with the individualists. He convinced them to hold off on obliterating the sugarcane until a meeting could be set between the two groups and arbitrated by state agencies.⁶⁹

An understated factor in the individualists’ decision to annex this property was the fact that it was irrigated. Individualists made it clear on several occasions leading up to the invasion that they needed irrigation water in order to cultivate their crops. Collectivists obstructed any deals the individualists could have made with third parties for irrigation water. The individualists’ plan to destroy the sugarcane plants and replace them with their own crops showed that it was not the sugarcane they were after, but rather the system of pumps and canals that was set up to cultivate the sugarcane. Access to water from the Fuerte River thus became one of the main factors as to why individualists chose to take such dramatic actions by invading this 607 hectare plot.

The value Mayo individualists placed on irrigation infrastructure raised questions as to the socio-cultural impacts of development. Mayo farmers did not always have access to irrigation water, yet by the mid-twentieth century they were willing to risk their lives in order to gain control of irrigated properties. These individualists had learned that not being able to control portions of irrigated land made raising crops more difficult, but perhaps more important, made it nearly impossible to prevent collectivist land seizures. For these individualists their quality of life was indeed at stake in this struggle over access to hydraulic infrastructure.

⁶⁹ June 14, 1956, AGA, Division, Fusion, y Permutas, Expediente 231.3/138, Legajo 2, Asunto Local, El Teroque, Municipio El Fuerte.
Collectivists of El Teroque claimed property and placed it under sugarcane cultivation, forcing the hand of individualists. These individualist Mayos were pushed onto less desirable lands that were not irrigated. The SICAE prevented the indigenous people of El Teroque from establishing irrigation rights, so these individualists apparently perceived their best option was to invade irrigated properties under control by collectivists. Likely because they had the most at stake, these actions by El Teroque individualists were the most radical of any of the Mayo ejidatarios that I discuss in this chapter. These actions were also indicative of the contention and division that the SICAE created within ejidos, as a result of the cooperative’s land seizures and near monopoly on water. In this sense, it was the SICAE’s more aggressive development strategies of the 1950s that split ejidos into two and created the conditions by which individualists took such drastic measures as invading collectivist lands.

The contention that precipitated this armed offensive needed to be straightened out rather quickly to avoid any possible violence. On April 10, 1956 there was a meeting between members of the collectivists, individualists, and the Agrarian Department in Los Mochis. The proceedings were recorded by a member of the Agrarian Department. Perfecto Castro represented the collectivists, and claimed that individualists had invaded 1,000 hectares of their land planted with sugarcane. He asked that, “this property be returned until the Agrarian Department could formally mark boundaries between the two groups. United Sugar Companies lent our group money to develop this land, so we are entitled to it.”70 He rounded up the number of hectares that were actually invaded from 607 to 1,000, perhaps in an attempt to make these actions appear more deplorable in the eyes of the Agrarian Department.

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70 April 10, 1956, AGA, Dotación, Expediente 23/3621, Legajo 1, Asunto Ejecución, El Teroque, Municipio El Fuerte.
Individualists were likely anxious to meet with government representatives to hash out a deal, realizing that maintaining an armed insurrection was potentially dangerous. Individualists were represented by Rufino Lopez, who responded by saying that,

There has never been such an invasion of which we are accused. The surface area of this ejido was intended to fulfill the needs of all 220 ejidatarios. We are unwilling to return these 1,000 hectares of planted sugarcane. For ten years the collectivists have utilized 2,000 hectares of land on our ejido, leaving us with only 300 hectares. By virtue of not having received any benefit from the land cultivated by the collectivist group, we ask that we be compensated fairly. As the collectivists have benefitted, they have passed miseries onto us.\(^71\)

It is curious that Lopez mentioned that his group possessed 1,000 hectares of planted sugarcane, when that total, confirmed on several occasions by state functionaries, was actually 607 hectares. Lopez did however bring forth the point that land was unevenly distributed in El Teroque, and it was apparently convincing enough to affect the judgement of the Agrarian Department.

In the end the Agrarian Department found that the individualists had the right to the section of the ejido they had invaded. These state officials convinced the individualists to continue to grow sugarcane on this property. On July 23 of the same year, representatives of each of the aforementioned parties met again to sign an accord to finalize this deal. Both groups agreed to maintain the production of sugarcane, and they would not intervene in the performance of their rival’s harvests. The agreement was to last until the Agrarian Department could push through the final division into two separate ejidos.\(^72\)

These contracts did not mention details on how the irrigation water would be distributed to individualists on these new lands. Since the Fuerte River Commission was now in charge of irrigation, individualists had the opportunity to purchase water rights directly, although this

\(^{71}\) Ibid.

\(^{72}\) July 23, 1956, AGA, Division, Fusion, y Permutas, Expediente 231.3/138, Legajo 2, Asunto Local, El Teroque, Municipio El Fuerte.
would have been very expensive. No documentation exists that explains how well the
individualists fared in sugarcane cultivation. Without any credits for sugarcane rods, tools, or
other necessary components, and the large quantities of water necessary to irrigate sugarcane, it
is hard to imagine that these individualists succeeded in their sugarcane growing venture.
Eventually the individualists abandoned sugarcane altogether, but at least they now had access to
irrigation water.

With an agreement in place that finally defined the territorial boundaries of both groups,
it would seem logical that fewer problems would arise thereafter. The contention created through
years of separation and fighting over land and natural resources was simply too hard to abolish
with a simple agreement. Up until the early 1960s there were several documented examples that
highlight the persistent hostility between these sectors. For instance, both sides continued to
accuse the other of dispossession and land invasions. Such aggressive tactics that the SICAE
initiated in the 1950s had left individualists with limited options other than the armed invasion of
sugarcane lands. The persistence of such actions eventually led to the definitive split of El
Teroque into two ejidos in 1963, El Teroque Viejo and Cinco de Mayo.

The significance of Mayo and Yori membership in the CTM and the CNC

In 1958 the executive ejidal committee of El Teroque individualists wrote a letter to the
Agrarian Department that described in hindsight some important events that transpired in 1954.
It mentioned that it was impossible for El Teroque to join a political organization due to
conflicting opinions on which should represent them. In that same year, 110 ejidatarios of El
Teroque joined the CTM, and 120 ejidatarios joined the CNC. The letter added that, “there are

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also antagonistic tendencies on the grounds that the first group [collectivists], are white farmers or ‘Yoris’, and the second group [individualists] are purely indigenous ‘Mayos’ and speak our dialect.”  

This letter showed that not only did collectivists and individualists separate according to ethnicity, the same criteria also largely determined membership within the CNC and the CTM.

The letter referred to the CNC in very favorable terms, revealing clues about Mayo relationships with peasant and worker organizations. This favorable tone fit well with the fact that the CNC and individualists collaborated extensively in formulating petitions in the 1950s for governmental redress. The document showed the growing links between indigenous communities and the CNC in the Fuerte Valley as both Mayos and the campesino organization benefitted from their alliance with one-another. The CNC and individualists became intimately linked in what became a contentious struggle for land and water rights as part of a larger battle between the CNC and the CTM.

These political groups relied on their campesino members’ support in order to consolidate their power within the countryside. The hostilities that developed between collectivists and individualists could therefore be viewed in terms of a broader struggle between the CTM and the CNC for the right to organize peasants and workers throughout Mexico. Jeffrey Banister described how in the nearby Mayo Valley,

There were official labor and agrarian organizations (CTM and CNC) under whose umbrella stood many smaller state and regional movements…they had managed to turn the valley-never exactly peaceful to begin with-into so many small theaters of combat into a larger war over how, to what political ends, water and land were to be governed.  

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75 Banister, 226.
The level of intensity of the battles between the CTM and the CNC varied according to region. The ways by which these political groups transformed the political landscape of the Mayo and Fuerte Valleys were nevertheless very similar. The additional property and irrigation resources that alliances with the CTM and the CNC netted led to contrasting approaches on how to use land and water. These battles in the Fuerte Valley were therefore not just between the CNC and the CTM, they became fundamental factors to determining acceptance within newly-formed ejido communities. The inequities in the availability of land and water precipitated the contention between collectivists and individualists and separated these ejidos.

The Confederation of Mexican Workers or CTM was founded in the late 1930s after the Marxist union leader Vicente Lombardo Toledano successfully united 3,000 unions and 600,000 workers throughout Mexico. Under Toledano’s leadership, the CTM finally helped Mexico pass a federal minimum wage law. The more conservative union leader Fidel Velázquez became the Organizational Secretary of the CTM when it was founded. He replaced Lombardo Toledano as president after the radical leader stepped down in 1941. The rise of Velázquez as an exploitative leader could help explain the growing corruption and nepotism of the CTM in the 1940s.

The SICAE and other unions affiliated with the CTM eventually enjoyed the advantages of state-sponsored backing. The CTM became officially aligned with the newly formed Institutional Revolutionary Party or PRI (formerly the Party of the Mexican Revolution) in the mid-1940s. The CTM supported the official party and helped keep it in power, and in exchange received its official backing. This allowed the CTM to eliminate many independent unions and keep the demands of its affiliated unions in check. The dwindling power of the SICAE in the 1940s and 1950s exemplified the CTM’s aptitude for cooptation. Not all members of the CTM became corrupt, yet the organization itself was notorious for its increasingly unethical behavior.

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76 Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, The Course of Mexican History, 531-532.
The National Confederation of Campesinos (CNC) got its start in the late 1930s as well. In many regions of Mexico, the CNC’s leadership was also co-opted. In reference to popular organizations such as the CNC and CTM, Chris Boyer argued that, “The presidents of the 1940s and 1950s succeeded for the most part in capturing these mass organizations and defanging their leaders through a judicious blend of patronage and repression.” This assessment was absolutely the case in regards to the CTM as its progressive organizing gave way to mainstream politics. The enormous official power exuded by the CTM forced the CNC to take a somewhat grass roots approach in some regions of Mexico.

In the Fuerte Valley the CNC fostered relationships with peasants, and focused on issues of agrarian reform and irrigation access. Situating itself as the underdog, the CNC’s partnership with Mayo ejidatarios was mutually beneficial. The CNC defended the rights of these individualist Mayo ejidatarios and the political group gained the trust of other campesinos which resulted in expanded local influence. This increasingly symbiotic relationship between Mayo ejidatarios and the CNC may help to explain the growth of indigenous leaders and members within the political group.

The CNC continued to struggle for the liberation of some of the rural downtrodden in Northern Sinaloa. In his book *La Confederación Nacional Campesina*, Mexican historian Moisés González Navarro analyzed the CNC’s ability to push agrarian reform throughout Mexico. Its primary means of acting as a lobbyist group for agrarian reform was through delivering speeches and petitions, in which its message could be heard or neglected, depending on the political leanings of government functionaries. The CNC’s perceived egalitarian values were constricted by the fact that campesinos themselves were never allowed to argue their cases in front of

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77 Boyer, 129.
The CTM wielded significant power in the Fuerte Valley thanks to the SICAE’s organizational abilities and ruthless tactics. This left the CNC with no other option but to forge a clientele among the politically marginalized individualists.

After the fall of the SICAE, the CTM took up the political fight directly against the CNC. The intense political struggles between individualists and collectivists, backed by the CNC and the SICAE respectively, eventually turned into an all-out direct battle between the CNC and the CTM to gain the allegiance of workers and peasants in the Fuerte Valley. These political groups’ struggle for patronage was visible across Mexico, but was particularly strong in the Fuerte Valley. The desirability of irrigated land was directly linked to this patronage. Thanks to the efforts of the SICAE as well as ejidal political mobilization, ejidatarios had more success gaining access to irrigation infrastructure in the Fuerte Valley than in most regions of Mexico. Possession of irrigated land gave ejidatarios a certain amount of power and influence that in turn afforded the CNC and the CTM more local political control.

Indications suggest that the majority of Mayos in the Fuerte Valley allied with the CNC, and mestizos with the CTM. This grouping based on ethnicity provided unique insight into the process of Mexican state formation following WWII. By the 1950s the Mexican state pushed an agenda of indigenous people’s assimilation in order to remedy socio-economic disproportion. Ejidatarios secured usufruct land rights, yet the inequities and lack of resources among Mayos in the Fuerte Valley that existed prior to the Mexican Revolution and reconstruction era, appeared alive and well. Government agencies designed to assist and integrate indigenous communities into the mainstream, such as the National Indigenous Institute (Instituto Nacional Indigenista or INI), never made a large impact in the Fuerte Valley.

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78 González Navarro, *La Confederación Nacional Campesina*, 160, 227
Mayos of the Fuerte Valley joined campesino organizations such as the CNC based on their need to align with such advocacy groups in order to defend their rights. Mayos had affiliated with government agencies in the postrevolutionary era in order to receive such tangible benefits as dotaciones. By the 1950s many of these indigenous communities saw their lands expropriated by the SICAE, their irrigation rights limited, and their political voices silenced. The SICAE’s development program thus ensured that the social advancements of the postrevolutionary era failed to significantly improve the lives of several of the indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley. Mestizos joined such state sponsored organizations as the CTM to gain additional political power. Mayos were relegated to aligning with the CNC to maintain or win back the political spaces they had previously carved for themselves during the postrevolutionary era.

The rising inequity based on ethnicity revealed the hypocrisy of post WWII state formation. State sponsored organizations like the CTM were originally designed to empower Mexican peasants. In the Fuerte Valley the CTM and the SICAE uplifted mestizos, often at the expense of infringing on Mayo land and water rights. Indigenous people were expected to assimilate into mestizo society, but extant socioeconomic disparities and political marginalization forced them to congeal under the umbrella of campesino organizations like the CNC.

The inclusion of Mayos into the mestizo-dominated CNC had the potential to integrate these indigenous people into the mainstream. The CNC facilitated the survival of indigenous identity by recruiting Mayo leaders and defending the basic rights of their villages, whose membership was often based on ethnicity. The SICAE and the CTM’s actions actually discouraged Mayos and mestizos from integrating with each other in certain ejidos such as...
Zapotillo. Instead of ensuring indigenous assimilation, state sponsored organizations like the CTM and the CNC actually forced ejidatarios to continue to unite as Mayos.

The direct battle between the CNC and the CTM in the Fuerte Valley appeared to gain steam in the late 1950s. The Los Mochis newspaper El Debate is riddled with articles from the late 1950s and early 1960s, regarding the political struggles between the CTM and the CNC within the Fuerte Valley. One such article published in 1959 with a clearly anti-CTM slant argued that,

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\text{the real intentions of the CTM is to provoke agitation in the fields…the unionization of farm workers is nothing more than a tactic of the CTM to try to enlist in its ranks a large number of workers who could help it keep its hands in rich city coffers, and discredit authorities in City Hall, who dubiously aid the CNC.}^{79}
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The contention between collectivists and individualists that sometimes resulted in the complete split of ejidos, was only one of these small theaters of combat as described by Jeffrey Banister. Some of the Mayo communities that transformed and congealed over hundreds of years of mutual struggle and resistance sometimes became casualties of these battles. Their split came about largely over the divergent notions of how to utilize the benefits and resources that the CTM and the CNC helped them attain.

Indigenous villages have rarely agreed unanimously on anything. Yet the new social, political, economic, and ecological conditions of the Fuerte Valley created discord and deepened existing divisions within some Mayo ejidos. The contention within indigenous communities that developed as a cause of new opportunities made available in the mid-twentieth century was not unique to northern Sinaloa. Chris Boyer pointed out that for some indigenous Purépechas of Michoacán, the increased presence of the logging industry brought similar division as, “the

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advent of industrial logging often opened divisions between villagers in a position to seize on the opportunity…versus those who hesitated.” It is highly likely that, in addition to making decisions based on economic self-interests, many of these individuals also believed that such choices would benefit, or protect their entire community.

The persistence of indigenous communities in Mexico was often determined by their ability to navigate the current social and political climate, and carefully weighing the cost-benefit ratio of opportunities that came their way. The CNC, the CTM, and the SICAE helped provide Mayos of the Fuerte Valley with the land and irrigation they needed both individually and as villages. This helps to explain the popularity and strength of these three organizations within Mayo ejidos in the mid-twentieth century.

Camajoa

The ejido of Camajoa was similar to Los Goros, in that its ejidatarios were made up entirely of Mayos. The difference with the other ejidos mentioned here, is that all ejidatarios of Camajoa initially joined the SICAE and collectively produced sugarcane. This early ejidal unity may help to explain why it took so long for Camajoa to eventually split between individualists and collectivist in the mid-1950s, and perhaps why they did not eventually divide into two ejidos like the other three communities. These ejidatarios’ approach to irrigation infrastructure and the ejido’s ethnic homogeneity may also help explain its perseverance. The experiences within Camajoa leading up to their separation into two sectors revealed a great deal about the capricious relationship between the SICAE and its affiliated ejidos.

The leaders of Camajoa originally requested a dotación in October of 1932, and were finally granted an ejido in 1938, which was inaugurated in February 1939. Camajoa’s dotación

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80 Boyer, 162.
consisted of 950 hectares, of which eighty-four were mechanically irrigated, and 866 were made up of overgrown pasture land for collective use. The definitive dotación signed by the sixty-one ejidatarios with land rights also stated that, in order to not break up the equilibrium of growing sugarcane, in those lands already dedicated to harvesting it, farmers will continue to grow this crop collectively. This meant that the eighty-four hectares of irrigated land was dedicated to growing sugarcane, while ejidatarios were required to clear the additional 866 hectares if they hoped to harvest crops on those plots as well.

A study carried out in 1936 to demarcate the boundaries, and determine who qualified for ejidal land in Camajoa, revealed pertinent information. The report found that hacendados charged farmers in Camajoa 25% of their crop to rent land, and an additional 25% for animals, seeds, and equipment for planting and harvesting. The village had a total of 141 heads of mature livestock, and 121 heads of young livestock. It was estimated that each ejidatario would need approximately two mules, two donkeys, and one horse to harvest their individual plots sufficiently. Ejidatarios generally did not have enough credit to afford implementations for planting, and most did not possess the sufficient livestock either. They were required to dedicate at least some of their land to growing sugarcane collectively, so it is not much of a surprise that the ejidatarios of Camajoa joined the SICAE.

The SICAE’s affiliated ejidos depended economically on sugarcane, but collectivists found that they needed other tools to get the job done. I mentioned earlier how beasts of burden were also necessary to help perform such tasks as preparing the soil for planting, and hauling sugarcane to the mill in Los Mochis. By 1946 the SICAE had 493 heads of mature livestock, including; mares, donkey stallions, riding horses and stallions, fillies, and jack donkeys to

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produce mule offspring. The cooperative also owned 241 heads of small livestock including foals and young mules. These animals were originally kept in the ejidos Campo Meaker and Mexico, but the cooperative’s administration felt that they should be re-located. The SICAE looked for new pasture land in their affiliated ejidos of Huepaco, Camajoa, Mochicahui, Los Torres, and Vinaterrias.  

The land in Camajoa became the best fit to house the SICAE’s livestock due to its vast amount of rangeland that was not being cultivated at that point. Members of the community cleared away most of the thorn scrub, mesquite, and other heavy vegetation in anticipation of extending the surface area of cultivated land. Unlike the eighty-four hectares of irrigated land where they communally harvested sugar cane, there was no irrigation provided for any of this recently-cleared land.

Grass was needed for these animals to graze. This was an arid region that depended on irrigation to grow or maintain grass. The only means for gaining additional irrigation to cultivate grass was by drilling wells and installing pumps and motors to extract the water from underground aquifers. I pointed out in chapter two how the aquifer water supply in the Fuerte Valley was limited and unreliable. In fact, the SICAE’s engineers were only able to extract enough water to irrigate 100 hectares of Sudan grass for pasture land. The cooperative also fenced in an additional 300 hectares of pasture land with barbed wire.  

The limited amount of irrigation water and the warm climate meant that Sudan grass was best to plant for livestock forage. This particular grass is known for its resilience and ability to grow in adverse conditions.

The alterations that the SICAE made showed its ability to adapt and work with its natural surroundings as best it could. Not only did the cooperative require enough water to plant and

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84 Ibid.
harvest the sugarcane crop, it also needed additional water to feed its animals, which ejidatarios depended on to help plant and haul the crop. Even with a four month monopoly on water from the Fuerte River, and vast water concessions, the SICAЕ struggled to access enough of a water supply to keep its sugar cane crop steady.

These actions showed the top-down decision making of the SICAЕ. Other than the assumed pasturage fees that Camajoa likely received, there were no obvious advantages for the ejido of Camajoa in moving this 400 hectares of pasture onto their property. It is unclear if this generated new jobs in Camajoa, or if community leaders actually had any say in the matter. Pasture land was not particularly amenable to planting, meaning the installation of these 400 hectares of grazing property reduced the amount of potentially cultivable land on Camajoa’s ejido. The large amount of irrigation water needed for sugarcane made it nearly impossible to grow on this unirrigated land anyway.

The SICAЕ Canal was completed in 1948, affecting irrigation options for several affiliated ejidos. It was constructed in order to help solve some of the water shortage issues that the SICAЕ had faced throughout the 1940s. Collectivist ejidos such as El Teroque and Camajoa received water from the SICAЕ Canal that allowed them to irrigate hundreds of hectares of additional sugarcane lands. The location and distribution of water from this canal was not necessarily an example of clientelism between the SICAЕ administration and Camajoa, since other ejidos such as El Teroque received much more water from the SICAЕ Canal. This was more of a case of ejidos obtaining benefits if they remained affiliated with the SICAЕ, and helping in any way the administration asked them.

In 1948 the Agrarian Department wrote a letter to the office of Agricultural Certificates stating how Camajoa was now receiving irrigation water from the SICAЕ Canal, which allowed
collectivists to harvest an additional 160 hectares of land. In September 1947 engineer Adolfo Orive Alba reported that the SICAE Canal was near completion, and that once opened it would irrigate 18,000 hectares of land through pumps, and up to 22,000 additional hectares. This would apparently satisfy the irrigation needs of 50% of ejidatarios affiliated with the SICAE.

Camajoa’s water concession was not nearly as large as that obtained by other ejidos, such as the amount that El Teroque received. Yet the concession, which allowed Camajoa to irrigate an additional 160 hectares, was politically significant. The irrigation capacity was raised considerably, but there was little indication that ejidos affiliated with the SICAE saw major increases in the amount of land irrigated. In fact, in the years after the SICAE Canal was installed, there was a massive decline in the amount of land growing sugarcane, from 10,316 hectares in 1947 to 6,800 in 1957. Other than the mention of Camajoa’s and El Teroque’s concessions, there were very few documents that detailed how much water ejidos received from the SICAE Canal, bringing into question the cooperative’s transparency. These documents must have existed because they were necessary for water management.

There are several factors that could help explain why the SICAE, which now had the irrigation capacity to at least double its agricultural output, planted less sugarcane. I discussed some of the more obvious answers in the beginning of this chapter which include the rise of political infighting, labor disputes between the SICAE and United Sugar, the black market for sugar, and the sometimes intense clashes between individualists and collectivists. Another reason may be that the SICAE officials never intended to exclusively provide its ejidatarios with this canal water.

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85 October 14, 1948, AGA, Privacion de Derechos Agrarios y Nuevas Adjudicaciones, Expediente 271.71/7208, Legajo 1, Asunto Investigacion de Usufructo Parcelario, Camajoa, Municipio El Fuerte.
86 September 17, 1947, AGN, Miguel Alemán Valdés, 508.1/250
87 Schobert, 182.
Lorena Schobert pointed out that in 1950 sugarcane cutters accused the SICAE of fraud in the amount of thirty billion pesos for the illegal sale of water from its irrigation system. The cooperative allegedly received help from an Ejidal Bank agent who was also the chairman of the Presidential Technical Commission Directive. If the allegations were true it showed that some of the SICAE officials were susceptible to corruption, as was the case with any organization placed in charge of distributing valuable resources. The fact that Camajoa actually received enough water to irrigate an additional 160 hectares suggested that these collectivists were being paid back for their loyalty, in remaining with the SICAE and agreeing to move the pasture land onto their ejido.

With the addition of the 160 hectares, Camajoa had 248 hectares of irrigated land where they continued to harvest sugar cane. By 1948 there were 81 ejidatarios with ejidal rights, and the fact that they continued to grow sugarcane collectively suggests that the entire ejido remained affiliated with the SICAE. Up to that point it would appear that the ejidatarios of Camajoa were generally content with their membership within the SICAE. Perhaps the negative treatment they received later spurred a sense of disillusionment in the mid-1950s.

There were few written records detailing the social conditions within ejidos associated with the SICAE, so we must rely heavily on oral histories to extract this type of information. Mayo elder Daniel Galaviz of Camajoa argued that there were advantages and disadvantages to the changes implemented by the SICAE,

The workers had credit, they could buy stuff for cheaper in the SICAE company stores. They had a hospital and doctors. The schools were helpful for children, but they were only primary and secondary schools, so we could only learn so much. There were a lot of social benefits the SICAE brought, but Yoremes never had access to these. They were only trained in the work. The SICAE told them, give

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88 Schobert, 193.
89 October 14, 1948, AGA, Privacion de Derechos Agrarios y Nuevas Adjudicaciones, Expediente 271.71/7208, Legajo 1, Asunto Investigacion de Usufructo Parcelario, Camajoa, Municipio El Fuerte.
me your labor. Some were taught arithmetic and they were in charge as a member Delegate, responsible for what they did in the ejido. This was according to ability. But I believe Yoremes were deceived by the SICAE and paid less in wages than other members.  

In addition to the hospital built by the SICAE and 150,000 pesos spent on medical services, the cooperative also allocated 100,000 pesos to construct school buildings, and built an additional 285 houses for some of its members.  

In theory the SICAE enriched the lives of its members by providing income, credit, and social services.

These improvements on behalf of ejidatarios notwithstanding, according to Galaviz, these services were not made available to the Mayo members of the SICAE. What made matters even worse was that some of its officials perhaps found ways to cheat the Mayos who belonged to the cooperative. This type of disenfranchisement within the SICAE may help to explain the defection of some of its members throughout the Fuerte Valley in the 1950s. The downfall of the cooperative did not prevent it from driving a wedge between collectivists and individualists.

The stresses created within Mayo villages as a consequence of their affiliation with the SICAE varied in intensity and length of time. It took until 1955 for major problems to finally arise in Camajoa, creating individualist and collectivist sectors. In June of that year Rufino and Refugio Aqui wrote a letter to the Agrarian Department. They argued that many of the ejidatarios of Camajoa had no rights within their ejido and that they had been sanctioned. They went on to add that nobody was being held accountable for the administration of the ejido. Another issue was that their leaders were renting properties to “individuals” even though the ejido had a limited amount of land to grow crops.  

It is probable that they meant that the SICAE, and all those

90 Ibid.  
91 Schobert, 145.  
92 June 2, 1955, AGA, Privacion de Derechos Agrarios y Nuevas Adjudicaciones, Expediente 271.71/7208, Legajo 1, Asunto Investigacion de Usufructo Parcelario, Camajoa, Municipio El Fuerte.
affiliated with it were these individuals, who did not have the same rights as ejidatarios. These “many ejidatarios” therefore began to view the SICAE as an outsider, whose economic interests of growing sugarcane communally, encroached on their rights to use their ejidal lands as they saw fit.

The disagreements between individualist ejidatarios and the SICAE came to a head in June of 1956 when groups of individualists reclaimed their lands in the ejidos Camajoa, Charay, and Pochotal. The Culiacan newspaper La Palabra recorded the story and Lorena Schobert re-told it, describing how,

Possessions of some of the SICAE sugarcane lands were claimed by Indians of these three communities, whose land certificates were duly legalized. Officials from the SICAE vigorously contested the validity of these land claims, but the Agrarian Department reaffirmed these indigenous people’s rights to the disputed properties. Land tracts within these villages under conflict were divided and turned over to the Indians.93

These newspaper articles and second-hand reporting by Schobert left out some very important details. The way that the authors reported this information made it appear that these Mayos were outsiders, or at least not originally members of this ejido. They omitted the fact that these indigenous people always had rights to land as ejidatarios, but that the irreconcilable differences that arose between groups of individualists and collectivists, led to the former asking for individual titles that certified their usufruct rights to particular plots within the ejido.

The reporting of the story also suggested that the individualists sought their land rights by defining themselves as Mayos. I have not encountered any documentation that supported this claim. What is most plausible is that in the mixed-race ejido of Charay, individualists were made up of Mayos, and collectivists consisted of mostly mestizos, similar to the situations in El Teroque and Zapotillo. Within Camajoa and Pochotal, which consisted entirely of indigenous

93 La Palabra, June 7 and 21, 1956, Culiacan, Sinaloa; and Schobert 210.
people, the ejidos remained split between collectivists and individualists. These reports neglected to mention that although some Mayos found independence, others remained affiliated with the SICAЕ, or at least with the CTM.

In August of 1956 individualists of Camajoa wrote to the Agrarian Department to ask for an engineer to mark economic plots for each of its members. 94 These actions suggested that although individualists were awarded a certain amount of land, they still needed to divide it among themselves. Individualists apparently received a portion of the land within their ejido. This did not prevent them from seeking the total and definitive separation from collectivists. In October of the same year, seven members of the Aqui family wrote to the Agrarian Department, asking for the separation of the Camajoa ejido based on demagogic and social differences that divided the two groups. 95

The demagogue the individualists referred to was probably not just the top-down administration of the SICAЕ, whose uneven policies had apparently left them with no voice, no land to grow their own crops, no irrigation water, and no access to the social services that other members of the SICAЕ enjoyed. The SICAЕ was almost non-existent by this point. The letter was more likely referring to the executive ejidal committee of Camajoa which continued to represent the interests of collectivists over individualists. The wording and tone of this letter was an almost exact match to the one written by individualists in El Teroque in May 1955, in which they also asked for a split in their ejido. These undeniable similarities highlighted the major political influence the CNC began to play in Camajoa and collaboration between the individualists and this peasant organization.

94 August 23, 1956, AGA, División, Fusión, y Permutas, Expediente 231.3/152, Legajo 1, Asunto Ejecucion, Camajoa, Municipio El Fuerte.
95 October 8, 1956, Ibid.
The differences between individualists and collectivists led to a desire to split the ejido. The separation of the ejido was not an easy task, as explained by an engineer from the Agrarian Department in May of 1957. One of the complex issues was determining how to divide irrigation rights between individualists and collectivists. The engineer was likely referring to the fact that the existing hydraulic infrastructure was impossible to divide between these two groups. At least some of the properties awarded to individualists in 1956 were planted with sugarcane and therefore irrigated. Building and modifying irrigation systems required a sizable investment. It would have proved difficult for these ejidarios to divide the existing hydraulic infrastructure used to draw water for these sugarcane properties.

The fact that this engineer stressed the challenges of splitting up irrigated lands showed that the members of each of the ejidos I analyze in this chapter continued to recognize the necessity of attaining and protecting hydraulic infrastructure. Cultural practices kept Mayo communities like Camajoa intact, but their approach to irrigated lands were also vital to the perseverance of this Mayo ejido. Neither the collectivist nor individualist sector of Camajoa was prepared to divide their irrigated properties. This is likely one of the reasons why the ejido never split into two like El Teroque, Zapotillo, and Los Goros. Both sectors realized that formally splitting their ejido would have put their existing irrigation rights into question. Both sides had major differences of opinion and attempted to divide their ejido, but neither the collectivists nor individualists were ready to risk losing access to irrigation water.

These differences in opinion grew more prominent in the late 1950s. Individualists of Camajoa formed a committee dedicated to dividing their ejido. In February an engineer from the Agrarian Department wrote a letter on behalf of this committee explaining the reasons behind their intent to separate from the collectivists. The letter stated that,

96 May 21, 1957, Ibid.
The other group [collectivists] work the land collectively and grow sugarcane, but that crop is not suitable for group number one [individualists]. They applied for this division, because it would be better for them to grow other crops, which would help them meet their economic needs. When they grew sugarcane, they lived in misery.\textsuperscript{97}

These petitions became progressively more complex through the years, as was evident in their attention to detail, in starting to list the specific reasons for wanting to separate from the collectivists. Like many of the petitions written in the postrevolutionary period, their tone reflected notions of autonomy and self-help, which could be achieved with a little assistance from the federal government. These individualists sought the ability to decide what they could grow, and with this freedom, would be able to provide for themselves. The fact that these Mayos convinced this engineer to write the letter on their behalf also showed that their aptitude for appealing to state agencies had dramatically improved. Through all of these differences of opinion and attempts to separate, Camajoa never split into two.

Camajoa individualists continued these strategies of specificity in their petition writing, showing that they likely received help from the CNC. In September of 1958, they wrote another letter to the Agrarian Department asking for shares of land equal to what the collectivists held. The petition pointed out that under the current conditions, every individualist possessed a tract of only about one-half of a hectare, which was not nearly enough to grow crops to support their families. They argued that every ejidatario with rights to land, if treated equally, should receive roughly nine hectares and 570 meters a piece.\textsuperscript{98} Yet curiously they did not indicate how much irrigated land each ejidatario was entitled to.

\textsuperscript{97} February 28, 1958, AGA, División, Fusión, y Permutas, Expediente 231.3/152, Legajo 1, Asunto Ejecucion, Camajoa, Municipio El Fuerte.

\textsuperscript{98} September 23, 1958, AGA, Dotación, Expediente 23/990, Legajo 3, Asunto Toca, Camajoa, Municipio El Fuerte.
By 1958 there were roughly one-hundred ejidatarios in Camajoa with rights to land, and since the original dotación ceded their community 950 hectares, it would seem logical to divide the ejido among ejidatarios equally. This simple math ignores the fact that eighty-four hectares were originally set aside specifically for the collective harvest of sugarcane, or that 160 additional hectares were made available in 1948 for the purposes of growing sugarcane. There was also no mention of the 400 hectares of pasture land that was relocated to Camajoa in 1946. This most likely means that at some point it was relocated again and the land made available to ejidatarios. This strategy of omitting certain details allowed state functionaries to see this situation in its simplest terms. It is more likely an example of misrepresentation of fact for strategic reason. Of course land distribution was obviously not determined based on simplicity, or even logic for that matter, which may explain why Camajoa was not divided into equal parts at that time. These divisions caused by the SICAE continued in Camajoa through the 1950s and 1960s in spite of the organization’s demise.

Oral Histories, Historical Memory, and the Mayo Community

These documented divisions caused by inclusion into the SICAE notwithstanding, some Mayo elders in Camajoa today refuse to acknowledge any rifts. Daniel Galaviz explained that,

Here in Camajoa the SICAE was accepted completely. My ancestors cultivated sugarcane communally, in the way they worked the land traditionally. They also had individual plots of six to eight hectares where they grew cotton, corn, and other crops. The SICAE instructed Mayos to split their labor into particular tasks. Some cut sugarcane, others hauled it to trucks, some loaded it, others drove it to the sugar mill, some cleared wild vegetation, and others built irrigation structures such as the SICAE Canal. There were individualists that wanted to harvest on their own, but they could not do it. They could only successfully cultivate as a team from here on out. The canals and dams the SICAE built benefitted all, even the individualists. In other ejidos, such as El Teroque, there were individualists
and collectivists, because both sides had different practices. Here the practices were the same.\textsuperscript{99}

These statements made in hindsight reflect an individual’s personal feelings and particular interaction with the SICAE. They also allow me to bring up several important issues regarding historical memory.

Galaviz suggested that his ancestors grew the sugarcane communally, similar to how they harvested traditionally. Anthropologist Ralph Beals noted that Mayo land ownership seemed to have been communal, but crop cultivation was based on farmers harvesting on individual plots of land.\textsuperscript{100} I do not know where Galaviz received his information but it seemed to contradict Beals’ findings. Ralph Beals published his study over seventy years ago, and much of his findings were not definitive. Mayo oral accounts that described ancient land use and farming techniques, such as that provided by Galaviz, could challenge existing studies of Mayo history in the Fuerte Valley.

The notion that individualists could not harvest crops on their own without working in a team needs to be interrogated further. Archival documents show that individualists of Camajoa did in fact break away from communal harvesting practices, although they struggled to find enough land on which to grow their crops. These documents show that Mayos harvested crops on individual plots, but this does not necessarily mean they ceased from working communally. In stating that ejidatarios of Camajoa grew sugarcane communally, Galaviz was making the point that his village stayed in unison with their ancestor’s indigenous agricultural practices. Some Mayos adapted to the presence of the SICAE by continuing to grow “traditional” crops like corn.

\textsuperscript{99} Daniel Galaviz, Interview by James Mestaz, Camajoa, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, March 6, 2014.
\textsuperscript{100} Beals, 12.
Other ejidatarios accommodated the cooperative by growing sugarcane, but their practices remained traditional through their communal agricultural techniques.

There was also the question as to whether the irrigation infrastructure the SICAE built actually benefitted the individualists. If the individualists of Camajoa did in fact receive a portion of the irrigated lands in 1956, then this statement was definitely true. There was also a chance that Mr. Galaviz meant that individualists found ways to steal water, or entered into informal agreements to buy irrigation water from corrupt SICAE officials. Both of which were not uncommon in by the 1950s. It is also true that all ejidos were eventually able to purchase water directly from the Fuerte River Commission starting in the mid-1950s, and the SICAE Canal made this irrigation water more accessible, yet the exorbitant cost of water eliminated this as an option for most indigenous ejidatarios.

There may be some truth to the notion that the reason why there was more of a rift between individualists and collectivists in El Teroque was because these groups had different practices. There was a somewhat contentious nature between individualists and collectivists in Camajoa, yet the division between the two groups never grew as extreme as it did in El Teroque. This may be explained in part because of the contrast in ethnic makeup between the two groups in both ejidos. While El Teroque was apparently split between Yoris (collectivists), and Mayos (individualists), Camajoa was made up entirely of indigenous people. The two sides in Camajoa wanted to split because of political differences, and approaches to irrigation and land use. I argued in chapter two that there was more than one way to define a community. This may explain why certain ejidos such as El Teroque and Los Goros were unable to settle their differences and split into two ejidos. Camajoa, despite their disagreements and divisions, remained intact.
There are a number of reasons why Mayos such as Galaviz choose not to admit this historic rift within their villages. There is a tendency for any oral history participant to romanticize and glorify the past in hindsight, posing the argument that things were much better in those days. Specifically within indigenous communities, many individuals do not want to bring up examples of division within their villages. Perhaps there is a subconscious or conscious fear that this information could be used to drive a wedge between members of the community, which could result in the loss of land and natural resources. This is probably a legitimate concern, as historically indigenous communities, and particularly in this case Mayo communities, have found themselves on the wrong end of these divide and conquer tactics. The important aspect here is not whether Galaviz was right or wrong in his assessment that there was no historic rift. What is more pivotal is that he had a warm memory of communal solidarity during the era of the SICAE.

Conclusion

The actions of the SICAE that I analyzed in this chapter bring into question how this organization was remembered within Mayo ejidos today. Drawing comparisons between the historical memory of the SICAE and the Mayo revolutionary Felipe Bachomo will help clarify my argument. Bachomo is remembered by Mayos today as a hero, a savior who defended his people, and kept indigenous traditions alive. Outside of the Mayo community, the historical memory of this indigenous revolutionary begins to diverge.

Yori accounts of Bachomo tend to vary, but most are not very favorable. At best he is regarded as a defender of Mayos. Within the city of Los Mochis he is sometimes referred to as a murderer, or a rapist who wanted to accumulate wealth. This is perhaps directly tied to his 1913
raid of that city in which some of his officers and soldiers were particularly brutal. In fact even
the SICAE’s former leader Carlos Ramon García Ceceña, in an interview, referred to Bachomo’s
men as vandals.101

The historical memory of the SICAE is not clearly as divided along ethnic lines as that of
the memory of Bachomo. Most Yoris remember the SICAE for the positive influence it had on
workers in the Fuerte Valley. Bernabè Lopez pointed out that the SICAE, “improved wages,
living conditions, and education. The cooperative built a hospital and medical clinics, and had
ambulances. Leaders were trained that went on to become politicians.”102 It is not uncommon for
Yoris to point out the specific accomplishments of the SICAE, which reflect the institutional
history, as retold by scholars such as Lorena Schobert.

Within indigenous communities of the Fuerte Valley there appears to be no official
consensus regarding the SICAE’s effect on their culture and way of life. Most Mayos I
interviewed believe that since the cooperative erected hydrological infrastructure that directly or
indirectly benefitted indigenous people, the SICAE had a somewhat positive influence on their
communities. The fact that the cooperative only constructed irrigation infrastructure to benefit
collectivist communities makes this assessment somewhat curious. The majority of Mayos did
not join the SICAE, meaning that most of the indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley today did
not have ancestors who were members of collectivist communities. Perhaps contemporary

101 Schobert, 65.
Mayos recall using canals that the SICAE constructed, even though they were not officially granted the permission to do so.

The SICAE implemented its development plans for the Fuerte Valley while Mayos continued to seek irrigation rights, perhaps even more so. The SICAE orchestrated the annexation of countless Mayo ejidal land tracts so that their affiliated ejidatarios could plant sugarcane. Indigenous ejidatarios were pushed onto less productive lands that could only produce crops through the use of irrigation infrastructure. In order to maintain their lands, keep their communities intact, and simply to survive, Mayos found ways to access irrigation water in spite of the SICAE’s control of the Fuerte River.

The SICAE’s insistence on harvesting sugarcane led it to engineering the theft of individualist’s lands and monopolizing the availability of irrigation water from the Fuerte River. It was in fact the cooperative’s more ruthless and aggressive development tactics they employed in this era of the mid-1940s through the mid-1950s that made several Mayo communities more dependent on hydrological technology. The availability of irrigation infrastructure largely became the impetus behind the divisions within these ejidos and was often the motivation for indigenous peoples’ actions against the other sector. The attempts of individualists to secure irrigation water through many different means are the types of hidden histories that remain inaccessible within the official histories of the SICAE, as promulgated by scholars.

Analyzing Mayo’s changing practices as a consequence of alterations to the Fuerte River, the arrival of irrigation infrastructure, and the SICAE’s rise to power has allowed me to open inquiries into other previously oppressed narratives. For instance, the SICAE’s acquisition of irrigated lands forced Mayo ejidatarios to clear their forests and woodlands to plant crops, which diverged greatly from their previous approach to their natural landscape. The SICAE’s
aggressive irrigated land invasions also forced Mayo individualists to rely heavily on such peasant organizations as the CNC to help defend their land and water rights. The very fact that each of the histories of contention and compromise I analyze in this chapter center around the acquisition of irrigated properties, highlights the divergence between Mayos who wanted to maintain their relationship to the Fuerte River in order to preserve their community and religious practices, and Mayos and Yoris who fetishized irrigated land to increase their wealth. What resulted from these divergent approaches had consequences for both Mayos and Yoris in the Fuerte Valley for years to come.

The practices of the SICAE altered the social fabric of some of the Mayo communities of the Fuerte Valley. Most indigenous villages of northern Sinaloa never became members of this sugarcane cooperative. These independent Mayo ejidos maintained a certain level of autonomy, yet were sometimes subject to the over-reaching political power of the SICAE. Mayo communities who had no ties to the SICAE became more dependent on irrigation infrastructure. They sometimes had no other alternative but to find ways to access pumps, aqueducts, and canals that were under the cooperative’s control, and constructed by collectivist ejidatarios.

Some independent indigenous ejidatarios found other ways to access the Fuerte River, at times serving as the labor pool for constructing irrigation apparatuses. These altered relationships to the river allowed Mayos to develop nuanced understandings of the importance of such things as rain, religious rituals, the local flora and fauna, and irrigation infrastructure itself, in respect to their natural landscape, which they themselves helped to transform. The actions of these independent Mayo communities in relation to the Fuerte River and water in general will be the focus of the next chapter.
Chapter 5

Two Negatives are not Positive: The Loss of Land and Irrigation Rights and their Effects on Mayo Perceptions of Community, Rain, and Religious Ceremonies, 1946-1957

In the late 1940s, irrigation water from canals was shut off. We were not surprised afterward when Yoris came in and dominated the land. We did what we could to survive. Farming became more difficult without irrigation water, so sometimes we had to abandon planting on our ejidal lands and work for the Yoris. We built the same canals that they would not let us use. Everything changed for us after that.¹

By the mid-1920s some Mayo individuals and communities had taken advantage of new opportunities to access irrigation water from the Fuerte River, which allowed them to boost their agricultural productivity that in turn provided a certain level of protection against outsiders attempting to steal their lands. By the mid-1940s changes to the political arena and power structure of the Fuerte Valley made it more difficult for Mayo farmers to use irrigation water. The simultaneous alterations to the political, physical, and social landscape of the Fuerte Valley largely came as a result of private entities gaining control over irrigation water that severely limited ejidatario access. The consequences to Mayo farmers’ inability to secure irrigation water were numerous and generally negative. In this chapter I will analyze the process by which a developmentalist Mexican state’s shift from its support of ejidal agriculture to large scale private production forced Mayo farmers to adapt to widespread changes within the Fuerte Valley.

From chapters three and four we understand the consequences of progressive union leaders being placed in charge of a bureaucratic state-backed agency such as the SICAЕ. The initial good intentions of the cooperative to mobilize ejidatarios could not prevent its ultimate failure. The sugarcane cooperative took control of the agricultural development of the Fuerte Valley, adopting a strategy that favored one sector of ejidatarios while isolating others.

SICAE’s efforts allowed some ejidatarios to enjoy the benefits of irrigation water while unaffiliated ejidos faced their own struggles. The short-lived political spaces some Mayo ejidatarios found during the SICAE’s reign diminished by the late 1940s and early 1950s, leaving indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley in increasingly vulnerable positions against powerful landowners intent on intensifying agricultural development, transforming the natural landscape, and consolidating property and water.

Changes in the local power structure took affect by the late-1940s despite the SICAE’s political domination and control of the flow of the Fuerte River. In this time period more private investors consolidated their power by funding the construction of irrigation apparatuses such as canals. Mayo farmers soon found themselves at the mercy of Yori development plans. The clearing of land, erection of canals and dams, and threat of ejidatario land dispossession was something Mayos had grown accustomed to under the SICAE. These privately funded development projects differed in that they did not mobilize sectors of Mayo communities. Ejidatarios also found it increasingly difficult to exploit cracks in the system to gain access to irrigation water, or combat these adversaries politically. The grandiose projects of the large landowners also surpassed the scale and intensity of any of the SICAE’s. Agricultural expansion projects, focused largely on the proliferation of irrigation infrastructure, did not take into account the values or aspirations of the indigenous farmers of the Fuerte Valley.

As a matter of comparison, this chapter often refers to the changing social, cultural, and political conditions of the Mayo Valley in the same time period. The historical trajectory of each valley created economic and political conditions that affected Mayo farmers in divergent ways. The indigenous farmers in each valley therefore approached accessibility to both land and water very differently in the postrevolutionary period. Indigenous farmers of the Mayo Valley aspired
to become small property owners, and built conventional irrigation infrastructure such as weirs and fencerows in order to subvert state development plans. Mayos in the Fuerte Valley generally aligned with the postrevolutionary state and reaped the benefits of land reform, becoming ejidatarios, and often using irrigation infrastructure to boost crop production.

The beginning of this chapter is dedicated to showing the diverse ways that Mayos of the Fuerte Valley captured irrigation water from the Fuerte River and how this changed over time. This will open up intriguing comparisons between how indigenous people of the Fuerte and Mayo Valleys accessed land and water. Such analysis allows me to focus more specifically on the shifting practices of the Mayos of the Fuerte Valley during this pivotal time period of the mid-1940s through mid-1950s as they adapted to a rapidly changing political and physical landscape.

There were inherent differences between the ways that Mayos of the Fuerte and Mayo Valleys reacted to changes, but the aspirations of a developmentalist state created similar conditions in both valleys that marginalized ejidatarios in the mid-twentieth century. Jeffrey Banister explained this process within the Mayo Valley by arguing that,

During these years of ‘counter reform,’ landowners found officials generally sympathetic to their efforts to push back against the ejidal organizations. Because the ejidos now controlled so much land, and had legitimate claims to so much water, maintaining extensive private farming operations meant devising ways—political, cultural, economic—to access them. The micro-politics of this practice, as well as of land sales and invasion, in turn, directly shaped the parameters of party politics throughout the region—indeed, in the northwest more broadly.²

In the Fuerte Valley the SICAE helped some ejidatarios gain control of land and water. The counter reform in northern Sinaloa thus consisted of powerful private property owners contesting the cooperative and its affiliated ejidatarios’ control of land and natural resources like water.

² Banister, Rio Revuelto, 253.
The gradual shift in power within the Fuerte Valley was a consequence of the Mexican state’s move away from a combination of ejido-based sugarcane production and subsistence farming, toward large-scale, privately funded agricultural production. These economic and development policies, which took root starting in the mid-1940s, eventually limited the decisions of both ejidatarios affiliated with the SICAE, and independent Mayo farmers. Starting in the late 1940s, property owners devised schemes that allowed them to take control of both water and land in northern Sinaloa. Independent Mayo ejidatarios generally had less access to irrigation water than SICAE affiliated ejidatarios, making it easier for private property owners to gain control of the former’s lands. Ejidatario affiliation with the SICAE notwithstanding, the trend toward private agricultural production created conditions within the Fuerte Valley that severely curbed the options of all Mayo farmers.

Non-affiliated Mayo ejidatarios became constrained by the SICAE’s control of land and water in the late 1930s to mid-1940s, but the agenda of the developmentalist state in giving private entities easier access to land and water, had more far reaching and negative effects on the indigenous farmers of the Fuerte Valley. In some Mayo ejidos such as La Palma, the expansion of privately funded irrigation infrastructure created more obstacles than opportunities. The corresponding and not coincidental restrictions on ejidatario access to irrigation water, combined with the new opportunities given to large land owners, left Mayo farmers in an increasingly disadvantaged position. This chapter describes how the Mexican state’s ability to take access to irrigation water out of the hands of ejidatarios and cede power to property owners in the Fuerte Valley, changed Mayo approaches to labor, land, community, rain, and religious rituals starting in the late-1940s.
Traditional Versus Modern River Technologies in the Mayo and Fuerte Valleys

Some Mayos of the Fuerte Valley used irrigation canals, ditches, and pumps in the late 1920s through 1950s, while others continued to use “traditional” Mayo technology such as weirs and fencerows to access river water. We can see that there was a drop off in the number of Mayo villages and individuals who received official irrigation concessions after 1943, when the SICAЕ took control of distributing the water of the Fuerte River. This may help to explain the growth of both unsanctioned uses of irrigation infrastructure to access water, but also a return to more conventional methods. The differences in how Mayos of the Fuerte Valley embraced hydrological technology, as compared to their brethren in the Mayo Valley, underscores each side’s divergent historical experiences and relationships to government regulatory agencies.

The use of irrigation infrastructure among Mayos in the Fuerte Valley in the mid-twentieth century was not at all uniform and varied greatly according to village. Even in some ejidos that were able to secure access to pumps and canals, there were several ejidatarios who did not enjoy the opportunity to use these irrigation implements. The deprived villagers were forced to find other means to draw water from the Fuerte River. This underscored the inequities inherent within ejidos, and access to irrigation water was but one indicator of developing ejidal hierarchies.

The inequities regarding access to irrigation water resulted in a variety of different outcomes within the Mayo ejidos of the Fuerte Valley. Mayo elder Gustavo Aguilar of Los Goros described how some Mayos, “used shovels to construct mini-canals to draw water from
larger canals, or sometimes directly from the river.”³ These makeshift structures were nowhere near as effective as the concrete lined canals that private investors funded throughout the Fuerte Valley in the early to mid-twentieth century. Major irrigation implements involving concrete were often too expensive for Mayos to assemble for themselves.⁴ This is one of the reasons why there are no recorded instances of indigenous people constructing concrete lined canals to be used exclusively by their entire village in the mid-twentieth century.

Several Mayos became experienced builders of canals, dams, and aqueducts but they were usually unable to afford the materials involved in construction. What’s more, if they managed to build such modern irrigation infrastructure, they were required by federal law to get a water concession and pay for a pump to direct the water to their fields. Getting water through a third party provider had also become a rare venture by the mid-1940s in the Fuerte Valley. By the early 1950s, farmers also had to pay a fee for water, which became increasingly difficult for the few Mayo ejidatarios who still had irrigation access. In some cases, inefficient and illegal canalitos were the only way some Mayo farmers could get irrigation water. In cases where Mayos built these small canals to draw water from larger ones, it would seem that the larger canals were not lined with concrete.⁵

The important facet about Mayo makeshift irrigation inventions was that although hydrological implements often did not benefit them initially, some indigenous farmers found ways to make them work for them. Some Mayos of the Fuerte Valley engaged with canals and embraced other less than legal exploits in order to capture water for irrigation. For example, Mayo elder Francisco Jacinto of Jahuara explained that,

⁴ I have not encountered any documentation in which Mayo villages or individuals seek governmental or private assistance in the form of loans in order to construct irrigation infrastructure such as canals.
⁵ This logic is based on the fact that creating a small canal from a larger concrete lined canal would have meant rupturing the latter.
When the first canals came here in the late 1940s, we were not allowed to use them. But we watered our land by flooding the field, and planted crops there in the damp earth. We opened the floodgate to the canal and let the water out, trying to keep it steady by using partitions. It was really difficult because most of our lands consisted of very steep and tilted fields, making it hard to control the base of the partitions. The water did not stay in the fields as long as we wanted sometimes, not long enough to seep into the ground. We often had to fight all day and night to keep the partitions steady so the water would not escape the field. Some people became really skilled at this process.6

The employment of damp earth to plant crops was based on conventional knowledge of floodplain agriculture that was no longer available to Mayo farmers. Similar to the indigenous ejidatarios of Jahuara who combined conventional and modern practices to drain their canal, it appears other individualists of Jahuara also exploited new technology for traditional purposes. This showed that the ejidatarios of Jahuara were willing to try anything in order to access water for irrigation. It also meant that some Mayos continued to approach modern hydraulic technology through the lens of their indigenous worldview and knowledge system.

Some Mayo farmers of the Fuerte Valley used the tools at their disposal and became proficient in rigging this new technology for communal benefit. Oral accounts like this also show that some indigenous farmers continued to value the use of canals to increase productivity on their ejidal lands, even after it became less accessible to them. Unlike individuals and entire ejidos that requested water rights from the Mexican state in the 1920s and 1930s, these ejidatarios illegally manipulated existing hydraulic technology for their own benefit. It appears that at least some Mayos turned to these unlawful strategies to access water as concessions became increasingly difficult for ejidatarios to obtain in the mid to late 1940s.

It would seem logical that such illicit use of canals would be a major issue locally, where all stakeholders attempted to keep tabs on every gallon of water drawn from the Fuerte River.

The absence of complaints against ejidatarios for stealing water suggested that they became very adept at taking just enough liquid so that regulators did not notice. This interaction with canals fit within the confines of Mayos’ relationship to the natural landscape in which they extracted only the required amount of raw materials for their purposes while keeping the ecosystem in balance.

If canal owners were aware of such water theft it could also mean that they did not want to antagonize their ejidatario neighbors by complaining to state officials. The abundance and annual consistent flow of water in the Fuerte River also created conditions that were a little more cordial than in the Mayo Valley, where water users were constantly bickering over limited and inconsistent river water. The limited number of oral accounts and archival documents recounting water theft suggest that less Mayos of northern Sinaloa embraced extralegal strategies of accessing irrigation water as compared to the Mayo Valley.

Another similar and illegal means of accessing irrigation water came in the form of conventional uses of natural materials to divert water from the Fuerte River. Mayo elder Manuel Galindo from La Bajada recalled that, “Some Yoremes used traditional technologies such as weirs and fencerows to get water from the river. But these practices were not very common here in the Fuerte Valley.” Unlike some Mayos who found ways to manipulate canals to draw water these ejidatarios used natural materials for the same purpose. Both of these strategies came as a result of Mayos’ inability to use the predictable flood waters of the Fuerte River to irrigate crops. The virtual elimination of opportunities to legally use canals left indigenous ejidatarios with few options. They could either petition for irrigation concessions, steal water, or hope that rain water would be sufficient enough to keep their lands productive.

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7 Manuel Galindo, Interview by James Mestaz, La Bajada, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, April 11, 2014.
The method of using raw materials to draw water from the Fuerte River was apparently rare, but some ejidatarios accepted it into their practices. Francisco Jacinto, a Mayo elder from Jahuara explained that,

A few Yoremes attempted to divert the flow of the river. They would put a plug in the river, putting branches in it, or using anything that might work. It is not possible to plug a river completely using these materials. This strategy is more of just a deviation, a curvature that gave them some water to irrigate their crops.\(^8\)

These conventional methods of diverting water from the river, similar to the attempts at stealing water from canals, were nowhere near as efficient as the use of the canals and aqueducts funded by powerful entities. This level of ineffectiveness is likely one of the many reasons that so few Mayo ejidatarios of the Fuerte Valley used this type of conventional technology to get irrigation water and why local state officials did not report such abuses as a major problem.

The decision to use these types of illegal strategies to access irrigation water came down to a number of factors. Ejidatarios carefully weighed their options and considered the risk factors involved. Some of these Mayos likely concluded that they possessed enough political power to gain access to irrigation water legitimately. Others may have liked their chances that they could fend off outsider incursions on underutilized, rain-irrigated ejidal lands. The absence of oral accounts and documents detailing water theft suggests that it was less common in the Fuerte Valley as compared to the Mayo Valley, and that the abundance of water in the Fuerte River created less regulations and monitoring of water theft.

In my extensive archival research I did not encounter any complaints dealing with the plugging of the Fuerte River. In fact there was only one such grievance officially filed against someone diverting irrigation water, and that individual was drawing water from a creek. In January 1948, the CNC wrote to the Ministry of Water Resources on behalf of the Mayo ejido

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Bacorehuis. They asked the Ministry to intervene by asking Maria viuda de Guerrero to unleash the creek that she had been plugging. The roles were reversed in this scenario as Mayo ejidatarios, with help from the CNC, sought state assistance to help regulate the flow of a water source. Some indigenous ejidatarios apparently still felt confident in seeking help from state functionaries. The filing of the petition also suggested that these indigenous ejidatarios still had access to the creek despite the growing difficulties in maintaining such connections.

I explained in chapter three how likely due to the SICAE’s ability to regulate the flow of the Fuerte River, several Mayos gathered water from alternative sources such as creeks. The flow from this secondary water source even became contentious. The minimal documentation and stories of water theft suggest that illegal water diversion was not a very popular practice in the Fuerte Valley, at least not nearly as common as in the Mayo Valley.

The use of conventional practices, such as illegal fence rows and weirs were much more widespread among the indigenous farmers of the Mayo Valley. There was a difference in the ways both sides used sauces (reed plants) to build weirs and fence rows. Mayo elder Francisco Jacinto of Jahuara explained that,

In the Mayo Valley, Yoremes used the sauces to plug up the river. We did not do that very often here. Mostly we used the sauces for crafts, such as baskets. There are craftsmen who are dedicated strictly to using sauces gathered at the river. It has become a part of Mayo culture [in the Fuerte Valley].

Mayos used natural raw materials for many different things. There was a divergence in the use of reed plants between the Mayo and Fuerte Valley as a consequence of indigenous people from the former using the plants to plug the river. This discrepancy in reed plant usage showed how Mayos found ways to utilize the materials at their disposal that best fit their local, immediate needs.

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9 January 8, 1948, AHA, Aguas Nacionales, Expediente 17668, Caja 1314.
Mayo uses of both natural, and artificial resources such as irrigation infrastructure was also based on particular regional needs in both Sinaloa and Sonora. Throughout the twentieth century there were a limited number of tales of Mayos of the Fuerte Valley using conventional technologies to access water for irrigation purposes. New hydraulic technologies such as canals, pumps, aqueducts, and dams diverged from Mayo conventional uses of the river. The former permanently changed the structure and flow of the river, while the latter was more likely to interfere with state sanctioned irrigation practices.

The limited use of conventional technologies to access the Fuerte River’s water stood in direct contrast to Mayo practices in the Mayo Valley. Geographer and expert on the Mayo River, Jeffrey Banister explained how Mayos in the mid-twentieth century continued to utilize man-made weirs and fencerows to clog up and divert water from the Mayo River for irrigation. The uses of such conventional technologies became so prevalent within the Mayo Valley that landowners and government officials (sometimes one in the same) lodged several complaints against Mayo communities. The question then is why did indigenous people in the Mayo Valley favor the use of conventional water technologies such as weirs, while Mayos in the Fuerte Valley continued their attempts to engage with pumps and canals?

Explanations by Fuerte Valley Mayos all seem to suggest that the reason had to do with the divergent opportunities Mayos encountered within each valley. For example, Carla Bacosegua, a Mayo elder from the ejido La Florida, located along the Fuerte River asserted that,

We had access to water. We built canals and dams and depended on pumps to water our harvests. But Yoremes did not do that in the Mayo Valley. Up there, indigenous people had to use old technologies to get what they could, because there was not as much water in their river, and not enough to go around.  

11 Banister, 159.
This explanation may be quite viable, and Mayo decisions on how best to engage with the river were made according to each village’s values and ambitions at the time. There were also historical factors that generated differing opportunities for Yoremes of the Mayo and Fuerte Valleys based on region.

Antonio Bacosegua’s Revival Movement and the Differences it Highlighted

One way to go about answering the question regarding the use of conventional versus new irrigation technology is to analyze the contrasting effects that a Mayo religious revival movement had on both the Mayo and Fuerte Valleys in the late 1950s. I explained in the introduction to this dissertation how God appeared to Antonio Bacosegua in 1957 in the ejido of La Florida and told him to make more religious fiestas in his name. According to Antonio’s goddaughter Carla Bacosegua,

My godfather Antonio Bacosegua had a gift that he utilized with the holy cross, with the altar. He was a healer, attending to many people. He organized Yoremes into creating religious parties every eight days in May. Many people came to him to be healed, and the others around him played the drum while he performed these miracles. He was very good at it, he healed many people, and they appreciated it. This movement that he created was as much about religion as it was about preserving Yoreme culture, the two were synonymous.13

The idea that Antonio Bacosegua actually healed people is a matter of debate, but he did use his vision and status as a healer to unite his people. The series of events that followed his vision suggested that the changes in how Mayos accessed the Fuerte River by the mid-1950s at least partially explained their reactions to the revival movement.

I explained in the introduction to this dissertation how indigenous people in the Mayo Valley believed God was going to bring rain to flood dams and destroy canals so there would be

13 Ibid.
no charge for His water, while providing water to Mayos. The rumors of a millenarian intervention by God that would give water to the indigenous people in the Mayo Valley expressed the latter’s displeasure with the local Office of Water Resources, whom Mayos felt had favored the rich by unjust means. This raises the important question as to why this prophecy, used by Sonoran Mayos to express political grievance against water distribution inequity, did not facilitate certain ways of understanding political movements and solidarities in the Fuerte Valley, where this religious movement originated. Did the Office of Water Resources in Sonora create conditions that were that drastically unjust?

Understanding the history of inequality in the Mayo Valley can help explain the trajectory of this millenarian movement in southern Sonora. Jeffrey Banister suggested that the whole history of irrigation development in the Mayo Valley from the time of the Porfiriato and, “well into the 1950s, then, colonization (and processes of colonialism, more broadly) had remained the official objective.” This long history of injustice invariably resulted in patterns in which Mayos continually found themselves having to struggle for irrigation water in the Mayo Valley.

Did this very process of what David Harvey calls accumulation by dispossession occur along the same trajectory in the Fuerte Valley? It is largely because of the historical differences between the Mayo and Fuerte Valleys that there was a discrepancy in the extent to which the indigenous people of both valleys chose this time to voice their disapproval of water availability. We must also remember that it was not a coincidence that Bacosegua wanted to revive Mayo identity at a time when irrigation water, and therefore their connection to the Fuerte River were

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14 Erasmus, Contemporary Change in Traditional Societies.
15 Banister, 243.
16 Harvey, The New Imperialism.
less accessible. Mayos of the Fuerte Valley did not protest water inequity as directly as their brethren in Sonora.

Charles Erasmus’ primary argument that the revival movement was a reaction to the increased financial costs for performing the religious fiestas, should not be regarded as the only motive. In calling for more fiestas, the Mayo people of both valleys did counteract the growing sentiment of the 1940s and 1950s that these rituals were too expensive to perform.\textsuperscript{17} Participation in this religious revival movement in northern Sinaloa also (at least indirectly) confronted the social and cultural fallout of the state taking irrigation access out of the hands of indigenous ejidatarios.

According to Charles Erasmus, rumors about God surfaced in the Fuerte Valley not long after Bacosegua’s vision. Apparently the old man (God) appeared to other Mayos while He stood on a Fuerte River dam. The Mayos told Him to get off the dam, and when they began to throw rocks at Him for not complying, He walked on the river water before disappearing. A possible explanation why these Mayos threw rocks at the old man was that they did not know he was God, and that they were defending the use of the dam. Another rumor tied to Bacosegua’s vision was that a Mayo nonbeliever drowned in an irrigation ditch. These stories have significant implications in describing the complex views Mayos developed in response to river technology. The fact that rumors spread about this old man appearing to other Mayos while standing on a Fuerte River Dam, and a nonbeliever drowned were not mere coincidences. These rumors expressed Mayo concern over water by connecting God to the Fuerte River.

These series of events are crucial to understanding how rumors within Mayo communities led to action. Erasmus explained that the chamber of commerce of Los Mochis hoped that rumors of God would help establish regularly scheduled fiestas on a date each month,

\textsuperscript{17} Erasmus, \textit{Man Takes Control}, 285.
bringing in tourist money. These plans did not pan out, but some prominent Yoris visited Bacosegua and attended fiestas. In Erasmus’ opinion, this gave the movement credibility and helped it survive.\textsuperscript{18}

It is unclear where rumors tying God to the river came from. Yoris owned and operated most canals and dams by 1957 and kept most indigenous ejidatarios from using them. Mayo support for such hydraulic structures would have helped substantiate Yori power locally. Mayos who continued to support the use of dams and canals could also have been responsible for spreading these rumors. The increased difficulty in accessing irrigation water by 1957 made this point in time crucial for Mayo individuals and villages to decide if they would continue to align with government functionaries and seek irrigation concessions. The ascension of the Fuerte Valley River Commission (CRF) as regulators of river irrigation water became a pivotal factor in these decisions.\textsuperscript{19}

The path of this religious revival movement sheds light on how Mayo communities viewed the actions of the CRF at this time, and how interaction with the Fuerte River changed. The inability of Mayos of the Fuerte Valley to use this religious movement to directly protest water inequity issues like their brothers in the Mayo Valley can partially be attributed to the former’s continued diversity of approaches to irrigation infrastructure. Some of the Mayo of the Fuerte Valley continued to embrace the use canals and pumps, which prevented indigenous farmers of this region from uniting behind issues of water inequity.

Other factors helped to explain why indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley did not take advantage of this movement to express their grievances with the water management policies of

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, 287. In the conclusion I provide more detail regarding the connection between Yori participation in Mayo rituals and cultural survival

\textsuperscript{19} In chapter six I give a more detailed analysis into the relationship between Mayos and the CRF in the 1950s and 1960s.
the CRF. By 1957, the CRF had been operating for a little more than five years in the Fuerte Valley. Mayos still maintained an ambivalent approach to this agency by that time. There is a chance that inaction in the Fuerte Valley can be attributed to concerns that protests would hurt their chances of procuring water rights. A good number of indigenous ejidatarios of the Fuerte Valley had success historically in aligning with government agencies, so at least some Mayos still believed in the process of government patronage. The throwing of rocks at God to defend the dam, and inaction against the CRF suggested that some Mayos continued to support the use of canals and dams even after most had lost access to them by 1957.

The apparent backing or at least toleration of the CRF by some Mayos did not mean that other indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley supported the actions of this government agency early on. The SICAE’s hold on the Fuerte River had reduced the opportunities for Mayos to access irrigation water, but the CRF’s tendency to favor corporate development placed even greater restrictions on ejidatarios attempting to secure water concessions. Mayos of northern Sinaloa faced growing difficulties, but continued to have divergent approaches to the use of irrigation infrastructure. As with the history of any powerful entity or government agency that came to control irrigation resources, some indigenous ejidatarios were more prepared than others to adapt to these changes. It is very likely that if Mayos did in fact defend the use of dams, canals, and the CRF by throwing rocks at God and not protesting, then these were probably individuals who continued to benefit.

Other historical and regional factors go into distinguishing the differences between the ways in which the indigenous farmers in the Mayo and Fuerte Valleys embraced irrigation infrastructure. For example, the indigenous people of the Mayo Valley endured years of dispossession prior to the Mexican Revolution as they relinquished their ancestral lands in
exchange for smaller individual plots. Mayos in the Fuerte Valley also lost a great deal of land to outsiders. Some Mayo communities of northern Sinaloa were able to secure land parcels of private property, such as Los Goros, but distribution of small plots was much less common in the Fuerte Valley during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The indigenous people of the Mayo Valley did not have a leader similar to Felipe Bachomo during the Mexican Revolution, whose forces were actually able to reclaim some Mayo lands. Instead, these Mayos of Sonora fought alongside Álvaro Obregón based on promises that he would reward them with land. Jeffrey Banister showed that after the Revolution these Mayo veterans’ land requests went largely ignored. They continued to support a system of small private property over the ejido system. A significant number of the indigenous people of the Mayo Valley depended on the use of traditional irrigation methods, such as weirs and fence rows to not only access water, but to subvert the postrevolutionary Mexican state that favored ejidal lands over their preferred system of small private properties.

Felipe Bachomo’s efforts helped some indigenous communities regain ancestral properties in the Fuerte Valley, yet most Mayos did not possess current, legally recognizable land titles. The notion of securing small private lots therefore remained outside the realm of possibility for most of these indigenous people. Without Obregón, or any other powerful politicians promising them land, many of the indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley supported the agrarian reforms of the 1930s. By forming alliances with government functionaries and taking part in the political process, a large number of these Mayo villages received dotaciones. In contrast to the Mayos in Sonora, Fuerte Valley indigenous people relied on political leverage as ejidatarios to confirm their water rights and navigate the new political and social landscape.

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20 Banister, 93.
21 Ibid, 183.
Cultural similarities between the groups of both valleys were also evident by migration patterns back and forth between Sonora and Sinaloa, and rituals that remained nearly identical. Even today, Mayos in both valleys consider the indigenous cultures of southern Sonora and northern Sinaloa to be the same. The ability of Mayos in both valleys to find ways to gain access to irrigation water revealed a penchant for combining an ever changing knowledge of the natural, social, and political landscape, as they took action accordingly. The actions and reactions of Mayos in both the Mayo and Fuerte Valleys reflected the growing hybridity of practices that allowed them to shift between traditional and modern worlds, facilitating cultural and physical survival throughout the twentieth century.

The Flood in La Palma and Mayo Reactions

The ability and inability of ejidatarios of La Palma to access irrigation water in the 1940s exemplified a capricious relationship contingent on a number of often uncontrollable factors. We learned in chapter two how the ejidatarios of La Palma did not request irrigation concessions until the early 1940s. Even after receiving irrigation water rights, La Palma’s ejidatarios soon faced more obstacles. New restrictions on water access forced the Mayo ejidatarios to resort to extralegal ways to maintain their connection to the Fuerte River. The Mexican state’s developmentalist agenda within the Fuerte Valley resulted in the placement of canals and dams near Mayo ejidos. The majority of Mayo ejidatarios did not benefit from the construction of new hydraulic structures in the late 1940s. In the case of La Palma the canal placed near their ejido was actually detrimental to Mayo agricultural practices and way of life.

The SICAE’s monopoly on water obviously hindered other water users’ rights. La Palma’s 1943 provisional water permit expired by 1944 when ejidatarios were again applying for
a concession. The SICAE’s water monopoly made the granting of new permits a difficult process, as even ejidatarios with existing rights soon found their agreements were not guaranteed.\textsuperscript{22} The leaders of La Palma found short-term success in gaining water concessions in 1943. After losing official access a year later, they remained without official rights through the 1940s.

The ejidatarios of La Palma likely ignored the official restrictions on water as they found another way to gain access. In May of 1947 president of the SICAE Carlos Ramon Garcia wrote to the Ejidal Bank and produced a list of individuals and communities who were using pumping plants owned by the latter, without official state sanction. The ejido of La Palma was among those on the list using such a water pump illegally.\textsuperscript{23} Apparently the letter from the SICAE’s leader worked and by May of 1948 every pump on the list was closed by higher order.\textsuperscript{24} La Palma’s concession from the Ejidal Bank allowed it to use irrigation water for five years but the SICAE’s power and influence brought this to an end. Even with its political power waning by this time, the cooperative still had enough influence to terminate La Palma’s water concession.

The SICAE still exuded influence in the late 1940s, yet the power structure within the Fuerte Valley was indeed turning by this time. Water legislation of the 1940s reflected a trend of state-backed private investment and development. Subsequently, large scale agricultural enterprises came to challenge the SICAE’s dominance in the Fuerte Valley. The 1947 federal irrigation law that allowed water to be sold separately from property enabled the private sector to cut into the SICAE’s control of irrigated land and water. By that time, more outsiders began to come into the Fuerte Valley and change the physical landscape. The SICAE’s seasonal water

\textsuperscript{22} The disappearance of irrigation rights is also a major focus of chapters three and four, as it created strange political allies.
\textsuperscript{23} May 7, 1947, AHA, Aprovechamientos Superficiales, Expediente 8176, Caja 553.
\textsuperscript{24} May 27, 1948, AHA, Aguas Nacionales, Expediente 17668, Caja 1314.
monopoly was still in place, but internal strife, corruption, grassroots opposition, and the increasing power of corporations challenged the cooperative’s dominance. The construction of privately funded canals starting in the late 1940s signaled the beginning of the end for the SICAЕ while simultaneously bringing more obstacles for Mayo ejidatarios.

By the late-1940s the developmentalist agenda in the Fuerte Valley made irrigation water harder for ejidatarios to procure, and an increasing number of Mayos found that canals could actually damage crops. Some indigenous ejidatarios protested both the limited availability of irrigation water, and the sometimes detrimental effects of canals and dams to their communities. Mayo voices were however often drowned out by individuals and corporations who profited from the proliferation of such hydraulic technology in the late 1940s.

The construction of the Cahuinahua canal started in 1948. The daily newspaper *El Debate* of Los Mochis explained the details of the canal, whose interests it would promote, and who would fund it. The Secretary of Agriculture paid for its construction through a four million peso loan from the Ejidal Bank and the Agricultural Credit Bank. The canal was designed to irrigate an additional 30,000 hectares of land for local farmers. The article from *El Debate* also added that, “It will benefit farmers who will ultimately pay for this [hydraulic] work, because the money contributed by banks will only be a loan.”25 State agencies therefore put up the capital to construct the canal, but its use was determined by the amount farmers contributed to reimburse the banks. Wealth bought water access and as water availability equaled power, large landowners found another way to empower themselves. Economically challenged Mayo ejidatarios reaped no reward from this new structure, and in fact Mayos of the ejido La Palma faced new challenges as it was constructed.

The Cahuinahua canal extended just south of the Mayo ejido of La Palma, a location that caused problems. In July of 1948 leaders from La Palma made an official complaint to the Mexican state. A telegram sent by the President of the executive ejidal committee of La Palma to the office of the President of Mexico argued that, “the placing of the Cahuinahua canal near our ejido is irresponsible. The poor construction of the canal, made of sand, led to floods in our community. These unplanned and unpredictable flood waters have ruined our crops.” The canal was completed in 1951 meaning that irrigation water was not routed from the Fuerte River into the canal until that time. The floods were a result of the buildup of rainwater into the canal, overflowing its banks made of sand and flooding the ejido of La Palma.

The leader of the ejidal committee also sent this same message directly to the federal treasury in order to prevent possible disaster. These petitions showed that ejidal leaders of La Palma adeptly defended their rights by appealing to the Mexican state. Floods of this magnitude were potentially disastrous for such communities that depended on productive harvests for not only sustenance, but also to protect ejidal territory from outsider incursions.

Complaints by the SICAE’s leaders led to the termination of La Palma’s water concessions two months prior to the writing of this petition. Left with no irrigation water, and now having to deal with an excess of flood waters, ejidatarios of La Palma struggled to save their crops. It would have been difficult enough to maintain productive lands without access to canals and pumps, but having to produce crops during times of unpredictable flooding was a nearly insurmountable obstacle. Outsiders could lay claim to fallow ejidal lands, so Mayos from La Palma turned to government functionaries to help them with the problems caused by this canal.

I was unable to locate any documents indicating a response by the Mexican President, treasury, or other appropriate government agencies in the weeks following the submission of the petition.

26 July 6, 1948, AGN, Expediente 508.1/18, Miguel Alemán Valdés
petition. It appears that the Mexican state’s inaction led to frustration among the ejidatarios of La Palma. The history of Mayos in the Fuerte Valley in the mid-twentieth century is filled with examples of ejidatario petitions for the redress of issues of inequality. Mayo protests and actions outside the legal framework should therefore be understood as a last resort that they embraced only after attempts to work within the system did not come to fruition.

The formal requests made by La Palma’s leaders soon escalated to protests within the ensuing weeks. There are no sources explaining what these protests entailed, but official reports indicate that the state saw these actions as a threat to the status quo. A state official’s report in late July warned about the potential threat of further unrest in La Palma. The Official Director of Construction wrote a letter to the Ministry of Water Resources, explaining also that, “This situation has been caused by the bad faith of some individuals who have incited the indigenous people of La Palma, for purely political purposes.”

Any type of actions endangering the use of this canal would have been a threat to the developmentalist agenda of both the Mexican state and powerful landowners. It was also unclear who this government official accused in inciting these ejidatarios of La Palma.

Oral sources painted a different picture than the one related by this government functionary. According to oral testimonies, Mayos from La Palma were not incited, but initiated these protests themselves. Librado Cuadros, a Mayo elder from La Palma explained that, “We were behind the protests. We did not need anyone else to tell us the problem. We could see the destruction was coming from the canal they put in our village.”

This divergence in the documentation suggested that local officials did not want authentic popular protests because it made them appear incompetent. The instigation of a rebellion also would have deterred the

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developmentalist state’s modernization campaign. The state and federal governments and especially powerful elites did not want to see the emergence of another revolutionary like Felipe Bachomo. This was one of the very few documented examples of the indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley protesting against the construction of river infrastructure. The complicity of some Mayo villages other than La Palma, in constructing and using canals and dams may have helped quell potential rebellions.

The type of capricious flooding that resulted from the poor construction of the Cahuinahua canal diverged significantly from the expected, and planned annual flooding from the Fuerte River that indigenous people had depended on for centuries. Before canals diverted water from the Fuerte River, Mayos had calculated the coming and receding of the flood waters to within days. They knew when to expect the waters, ensuring that all of their crops were harvested by that time to prevent ruin. Seeds were ready to be planted in the wet soil as soon as the water receded with the expectation that the waters would not return to drown the current crop.

The timing of the petitions ejidal leaders wrote suggested that the unexpected flood waters coming from the Cahuinahua canal ruined both the summer crop of 1948 and winter harvest of 1949. This erratic flooding left ejidatarios of La Palma in a precarious position. They were reluctant to plant anything in fear that the unpredictable flood waters would destroy crops. Mayos depended largely on agriculture as their food source. Making matters worse was the fact that access to irrigation was also officially cut off to La Palma by 1948. Mayos of La Palma had adapted to changing surroundings by using canals to access water, extending their connection the Fuerte River. Now that they were encouraged to participate in the social, political, and economic
system of the Fuerte Valley, these ejidatarios’ use of canals was restricted, and such structures were now ruining their crops, houses, and way of life.

It appears that still no action was taken by the federal government to deal with the flooding of the Cahuinahua canal by 1949. Perhaps this inaction was attributed, at least in part, to telegrams sent in by other ejidatarios and small property owners who wholeheartedly supported the continued construction of the canal. For instance, in April of 1948, Antonio Caballero wrote to the Mexican President thanking him on behalf of small farmers in the area for the construction of the Cahuinahua canal.\(^{29}\) The canal apparently brought great opportunities to some of the small farmers who were not alone in expressing approval for the canal.

Some ejidatarios encountered difficulty in accessing irrigation water, yet some also supported the building of the canal. In March of 1949, Lorenzo Robles wrote to the President, and on behalf of ejidatarios of the municipality of Ahome urged him to continue the construction of the canal. The difference with this latter petition was that these ejidatarios also asked the President for help with procuring pumps to divert this water from the canal to their fields.\(^{30}\) These documents showed that there was a discrepancy in how prepared small farmers were in the use of this canal versus ejidatarios who were unprepared to reap any benefits. Wealthy land owners had the means to purchase pumps and use this canal immediately, but ejidatarios were forced to depend on the state to help them gain access to pumps. To make matters worse, ejidatarios’ likely did not help fund the construction of the canal so they did not have access to the canal’s irrigation water at all.

There were also different levels in how certain ejidatarios were affected, negatively or positively, by the canal. As much as some ejidatarios were optimistic that the canal would allow

\(^{29}\) April 12, 1948, AGN, Expediente 508.1/360, Miguel Alemán Valdés

\(^{30}\) March 16, 1949, AGN, Expediente 508.1/250, Miguel Alemán Valdés
them to gain access to irrigation water, others witnessed detrimental transformations to the natural landscape as a cause of its construction. For example, by March 22, 1949, there were indications that these floods had grown worse in La Palma. Ejidatarios of La Palma were forced to formally request government assistance in compensating them for ruined fruit crops and land.  

The fact that the leaders of La Palma asked the state for help in replacing crops, as a consequence of the floods caused by the canal, showed that Mayo ejidatarios of this village held the state responsible for such losses. This represented a distinct disconnect between these Mayo farmers and the state. Some indigenous ejidatarios had successfully aligned with the postrevolutionary Mexican state on several occasions, reaping such rewards as dotaciones and water concessions. By the 1940s, it was becoming increasingly clear that the developmentalist Mexican state favored corporate development over subsistence farming. Mayos of La Palma perceived the detrimental effects of this canal as the responsibility of the state. The state supervised the construction of the canal, which through the perspective of the ejidatarios of La Palma, made the former complicit in the destruction of crops.

Whether Mayos were petitioning for the approved use of irrigation technologies or protesting against hydraulic technologies, they found ways to use the Mexican legal system to their advantage. The state became less responsive to ejidatarios’ needs by the late 1940s, yet Mayos of La Palma still regarded the petitions process as a legitimate tool for seeking political redress. Up to that point in time, ejidatarios of La Palma had never requested monetary compensation or protested against the presence of canals in the mid-twentieth century. The ability to employ new strategies based on changing circumstances and gained knowledge was a familiar narrative within Mayo history.

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31 March 22, 1949, AGN, Expediente 508.1/250, Miguel Alemán Valdés
The documents and oral interviews I have analyzed here revealed that Mayos only supported the irrigation infrastructure that they believed advanced their villages. The use of the Ejidal Bank’s pump to irrigate crops had been beneficial for ejidatarios in the 1940s. The fact that leaders of La Palma requested permission to use the Ejidal Bank’s water pump again in 1951 showed a continued support for the use of pumps and canals. As much as the Cahuinahua canal ruined ejidal land, ejidatarios of La Palma were able to draw a distinction between beneficial and detrimental irrigation technologies.

Virtually every person I interviewed for this dissertation agreed that initially in the first decades of the postrevolutionary period, some indigenous communities made proper and astute use of not only the legal system, but also new hydrological technology. The majority of these interlocutors also contended that over time, usually around the late 1940s or 1950s, that use of both the legal system and irrigation infrastructure became increasingly more difficult for Mayos to access. This signaled a transition into a new era in which the indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley’s limited control over water resources constrained their options in the mid-twentieth century.

Irrigation Access, Vulnerability, and Land Dispossession

Other problems soon surfaced in La Palma that exacerbated an already difficult situation in which the flooding from the Cahuinahua canal and restrictions from using irrigation water had damaged land, housing, and crops. These events help to open levels of analysis that interrogate the connection between irrigation water access and land defense. Up to this point in the dissertation, a major argument has been that some Mayos were able to use canals and pumps to increase crop productivity, and in doing so protected their ejidal properties against outside

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32 January 26, 1951, AHA, Aguas Nacionales, Expediente 6151, Caja 555.
encroachment. The availability of irrigation water became more difficult for ejidatarios to procure by the late 1940s while there was a related increase in land dispossession in the same era.

Oral histories suggested that diminished access to water facilitated outsider incursion, land theft, and the inclusion of Yoris into Mayo ejidos. For instance, Mayo elder Roberto Escalante of La Palma explained that,

Before the canal came, we had very good land for planting. We used the water pump to irrigate our ejidal plots. Then they took that away and brought in the Cahuinahua canal. It flooded our lands, and there was no way to stop it, no dam, nothing. At the time, there were just Yoremes living here, but the floods ruined our houses and crops. After that, Yoris moved in and started planting their own crops. They got irrigation water from the canal, but we did not. Some of these outsiders even became members of the ejido.33

The construction of the Cahuinahua canal and other privately funded irrigation infrastructure built in the late 1940s represented a turning point in the social, political, and physical landscape of the Fuerte Valley. Mayos encountered numerous obstacles in the postrevolutionary era, yet several indigenous villages mobilized through political action and accessed the system of petitions. This window of opportunity was however short-lived, as new legislation made access to water easier for private investors, while simultaneously limiting opportunities for these Mayo communities.

The precarious position that ejidatarios of La Palma found themselves in can be better understood by analyzing their increased level of vulnerability by the late 1940s. Some Mayos became increasingly vulnerable to loss through outside encroachment because they no longer had the opportunity to use canals. Ejidatarios of La Palma were also left at the mercy of a canal that flooded their lands. Some scholars have had success defining, and even quantifying vulnerability

within societies. In Climate and Society in Colonial Mexico environmental historian Georgina Endfield provided an overview of the arguments used by some of the leading scholars in this field, showing how vulnerability was used as an effective academic model to show change. In this overview, Geographer Susan L. Cutter described vulnerability as a people’s potential for loss.\(^{34}\) The potential for Mayo ejidatarios to lose their properties was particularly high as they began to navigate the state’s developmentalist agenda in the Fuerte Valley in the late 1940s.

This vulnerability model can further help explain this difficult moment in time in the history of Mayos of the Fuerte Valley. Environmental scientist Amy Luers defined vulnerability as, “the degree to which human and environmental systems are likely to experience harm due to perturbation or stress.”\(^{35}\) The placing of the Cahuinahua canal near La Palma, without giving Mayos access to it, resulted in a situation in which these indigenous people faced increased vulnerability. Mayos did not always find themselves in such a disadvantaged position, as vulnerability, similar to indigenous identity, is not static and changes over time.

Some academics traced the varying degrees of vulnerability within human populations, and their transformation throughout history. German Geographer Bruno Masserli argued that there is, “a trajectory of vulnerability through which all societies pass as they develop economically, technologically, and socially, that influence their relative vulnerability.”\(^{36}\) Mayo culture and social structure were constantly under construction, so it is possible to use this vulnerability model to analyze how some of the indigenous people’s lands of the Fuerte Valley became susceptible to annexation in the late 1940s.

\(^{34}\) Cutter, “Vulnerability to Environmental Hazards” Progress in Human Geography, 529; Endfield, Climate and Society in Colonial Mexico, 3.

\(^{35}\) Luers, Lobell, Sklar, Addams, Matson, “A Method for Quantifying Vulnerability” Global Environmental Change, 255; Endfield, 3.

\(^{36}\) Masserli, Bruno, Grosjean, Hofer, Nuñez, and Pfister, “From nature dominated to human dominated environmental changes” Quaternary Science Reviews, Endfield, 5.
There are different levels of vulnerability to change that every society has had to contend with throughout history. According to Masserli, a nature dominated society (such as those of the Cáhitas that Spaniards encountered in northern Sinaloa during first contact) was particularly vulnerable to change.\textsuperscript{37} I discussed in chapter one how the gradual technological development of the Fuerte Valley during the colonial era allowed local indigenous groups to adapt to changes. Every successive generation of Mayos adopted outside practices into their traditions a little more, and became less vulnerable. By the twentieth century Mayos became more active in transforming local ecosystems by clearing land for planting. The ability of some indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley to accept canals and pumps into their practices, in order to increase harvests showed that some communities were more prepared than others to adapt to change.

Some societies modified natural landscapes and accepted outside technology into their practices and traditions, creating a “buffer” to protect them from potentially detrimental changes. Mayo uses of dams, pumps, and canals acted as this buffer, keeping some indigenous villages and their culture in general resilient. Mayo uses of canals, pumps, and dams increased agricultural productivity and perhaps allowed indigenous ejidatarios to defend ejidal territories, yet it may have also led to their downfall. Masserli argued that, “the vulnerability of a particular society changes over time in conjunction with adaptive mechanisms and adjustments, some of which may in fact render society more vulnerable in the long run.”\textsuperscript{38}

Mayos in the Fuerte Valley who used irrigation infrastructure came to rely on this buffer system which also made them vulnerable. Some Mayo farmers became increasingly dependent on canals and pumps to boost crop production. The elimination of opportunities to use canals and pumps made it more difficult for Mayos to keep ejidal lands productive and avoid outside

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
encroachment. Local and federal laws of the late 1940s prioritized large scale economic
development over ejidatario rights. These legal changes made it difficult for communities like La
Palma to use canals and pumps. New obstacles to irrigation access therefore made some Mayo
villages vulnerable once again. The growing hybridity of Mayo practices also kept their culture
resilient. Not all villages became dependent on irrigation infrastructure, making the transition
from having access to no access less severe.

The changes that came about to the natural landscape of the Fuerte Valley during the
1940s through mid-1950s correlated directly to the permeation of canals and dams. The link
between the developmentalist agenda of the Mexican state, the growth of private irrigation
technology construction, and indigenous land dispossession are well known histories within
Mayo communities. Mayo elder Mateo Quintero of Tehueco explained that,

The new irrigation modules that were set in place in this time period modified all
the lands. This only happened because it was supported from the federal
government to push canalization for private development. These rich developers
got as much land as they needed. The beneficiaries were not Yoremes but those
people who bought and stole the lands from us.\(^{39}\)

The Mexican state pushed its developmentalist agenda in the Fuerte Valley while the
construction of dams and canals allowed private corporations to significantly alter the natural
landscape. According to oral sources, these corporations used permission to develop the
countryside as a means to dispossess Mayo ejidatarios.

The Cahuinahua canal’s flooding proved detrimental to the Mayo ejido of La Palma
while bringing increased opportunities for outsiders. There were numerous documented incidents
of Yoris given permission by the Mexican state apparatus to rent land in the town of La Palma in
the early 1950s. For instance, in June of 1952, Maria del Rosario del Ahumada was allowed to

rent six hectares of land in La Palma at ten pesos per hectare.\textsuperscript{40} There was a difference between the La Palma ejido and the town of La Palma. The former consisted of Mayo ejidatarios and the latter was mixed with both ejidatarios and non-ejidatarios who were either Mayo or Yori. In March of the same year, Jesús Soto was given permission to rent land in the town of La Palma. Soto’s land was bordered by the properties of Anselmo Soto to the north, Pablo Soto to the south, and the Fuerte River directly to the west.\textsuperscript{41} The increased number of outsiders pouring into the town of La Palma in the early 1950s was a result of new opportunities offered by the developmentalist Mexican state.

Oral sources indicated that this influx of outsiders was also directly related to opportunities that arose from the destruction of ejidatario lands in La Palma. According to Mayo ejidatario Roberto Escalante of La Palma, “the flooding of our ejido and elimination of irrigation rights combined to make our lands unproductive. This made it easier for outsiders to come in and claim portions of our ejido.”\textsuperscript{42} Escalante could have been referring at least partially to communal ejidal lands, which all ejidos received. These were generally lands overgrown with vegetation, or pasture lands used communally by ejidatarios, but not necessarily intended as farmland. Some ejidatarios had cleared such lands and used them to harvest crops.

Soto and Rosario del Ahumada represented a growing number of outsiders who came into the town of La Palma to rent lands. It is unclear if the lands rented by such outsiders were at any time ejidal lands of La Palma. We do know that none of their lands bordered the ejido of La Palma, so it is less likely that these particular properties were annexed ejidal lands. These new

\textsuperscript{40} June 17, 1952, AHA, Aprovechamientos Superficiales, Expediente 65544, Caja 4782.
\textsuperscript{41} March 14, 1952, AHA, Aprovechamientos Superficiales, Expediente 67381, Caja 4852.
\textsuperscript{42} Roberto Escalante, Interview by James Mestaz, La Palma, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, February 29, 2014
renters were also not Mayo ejidatarios. None of the Soto family, or Rosario del Ahumada family were included as members in initial lists of La Palma’s ejidatarios. 43

The question then becomes, did outsiders use the damage of ejidal lands caused by the flooding of the Cahuinahua canal as a means to seize or rent these same properties? Both Roberto Escalante and Librado Cuadros contended that this was absolutely the reason why their ejido was slowly transformed from an all Mayo membership to a mixed ejido.44 I explained in chapter two how an engineer from the mid-1930s asserted that, “the majority of the inhabitants [of La Palma] are of ‘Mayan descent.’” At the very least, most of the original ejidatarios of La Palma were Mayos. Today the majority of the ejidatarios of La Palma are Yoris, with a modest amount also claiming to be Yoremes. It is possible that some of these original indigenous ejidatarios and their descendants lost touch with indigenous cultural traditions over time, stopped speaking the language, ceased to consider themselves Mayos, and others stopped recognizing them as indigenous.

Oral interviews are sometimes the only source we have in explaining histories that cannot be found in the official record. A decline in Mayo cultural practice within La Palma could account for its changing demographics. Roberto Escalante provided a different explanation by contending that,

    After our property was destroyed by flooding, and then no irrigation available, Yoris moved in to the land around us. After the floods ended, Yoris started to plant their crops on our property and stealing it from us. Some of the Yoremes here also could not grow anything without irrigation water. They started renting out ejidal lands to Yoris, and then the outsiders became ejidatarios, making most of the decisions within our ejido.45

45 Roberto Escalante, Interview by James Mestaz, La Palma, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, February 29, 2014
If Escalante’s account was in fact true, then this would likely mean that some outsiders did use the declining productivity of lands in La Palma as a means to acquire ejidal lands. Since these Yori outsiders had access to pumps and canals, as well as the opportunity to utilize river shore property, this ensured productive harvests in the future. Neither Yori nor Mayo farmers could have harvested crops during the time of erratic flooding so logically the former waited until the flooding issue was resolved before planting.

A large number of Yoris moved into the town of La Palma in the early 1950s but it is unclear if any of them became ejidatarios at that point. It was common for outsiders to move into indigenous communities in the mid-twentieth century. There were several strategies outsiders used to become new ejidatarios. Legal methods allowed ejidal communities to bring in additional members. Sometimes this presented new problems and dissension, especially if all ejidatarios were not unanimous in allowing outsiders entrance. Outsiders could have also joined the ejido on a more informal status. Plots of ejidal land were technically supposed to be harvested by ejidatarios but there were numerous cases in which non-ejidal members either rented or bought these lands. We do not know what happened here but apparently as outsiders gained informal rights to these lands some Yoris assumed that this gave them a voice within the ejido’s decision making process.

The form of land dispossession experienced by La Palma was not the least bit specific to its ejido. Mayo ejidatarios throughout the Fuerte Valley found that Yoris used irrigation-led development projects as an excuse to appropriate indigenous ejidal lands. Sometimes they even inserted their voices into ejidal decisions. According to Mayo elder Laura Apodaca of La Misión,

> With few ways to make money, we accepted jobs from Yoris to build roads and structures for irrigation in the 1940s and 1950s. For a long time we did not allow Yori influence here. We did not want them involved because they always destroyed our culture and indigenous values. But I guess after we built those
things it got easier for them to get involved in our community. Those Yoris had no land here at first, but then Yoremes started selling and renting their ejidal lands. My dad sold some of our ejidal land [illegally] at 80 pesos a hectare. We were very poor and could not survive by harvesting crops, so he did not have a choice. Yoris also stole a lot of Yoreme lands. We could not fight against it legally, we did not have money. We also did not have enough weapons to start a war with them. After we lost those lands, there was always a Yori here, always putting their noses into ejido meetings, trying to divide us.  

Oral testimonies asserted that this theft of ejidal land was not uncommon in this time period, yet there was very little mention of court cases accusing Yoris of such theft. This was likely because some Mayo ejidatarios did not have the resources at their disposal to use the judicial system to fight against this dispossession. Unlike other communities that aligned with peasant groups like the CNC which advocated on their behalf, some ejidos like La Misión could not organize or had lost faith that this was a viable strategy.

Yori land theft notwithstanding, another explanation for the lack of ejidatario complaints could be tied to the fact that there was also a certain amount of complicity in these land transfers. Mayos without access to pumps and canals often had a difficult time producing crops. Some ejidatarios, such as Apodaca’s father, had no other choice but to illegally sell or rent their ejidal lands to outsiders. This often resulted in Yoris gaining an influential voice within indigenous ejidos. For some Mayo ejidatarios, participatory democracy within the ejido, one of the tangible benefits that came out of the postrevolutionary era was placed in jeopardy.

Geographic location and adjacency to the Fuerte River were prime factors in determining the types of tactics used by Yoris to dispossess ejidatarios. Rivershore property became increasingly valuable, and some outsiders used their advantage as land owners to leverage out Mayo ejidatarios. Mayo elder Jorge Robles of San Miguel recalled that,

46 Laura Apodaca, Interview by James Mestaz, La Misión, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, July 29, 2014.
The reality is that when the Yoris came here they were powerful and found ways to take the land. They dominated logically because of their connections and land they possessed. Some Yoremes like my parents used to have ejidal lands close to the river shore in the 1950s. This was valuable land because being close to the river, the owner could get access to the water. Yoris started buying up the land on the river shore and setting up canals directly from the river. My parents wanted irrigation water but they were not given access to it. It was hard to produce crops without irrigation, so my parents struggled. My parents started selling pieces of their ejidal land to these outsiders to get by, until little by little, it was all gone.\footnote{Jorge Robles, Interview by James Mestaz, San Miguel, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, May 25, 2014.}

I pointed out in chapter two that ejidatarios were not allowed to own river shore property yet this quote, and the fact that some Mayo ejidatarios possess such lands suggest otherwise. The process of dispossession described by Robles underscored the point as to the advantage that outsiders had gained over ejidatarios during this period in which the Mexican state pushed its developmentalist agenda. Private property owners slowly gained access to the river shore, allowing them to set up pumps and canals on the river. Some ejidatarios became dependent on irrigation water and limited access sometimes led to land dispossession.

The distinguishing characteristic that united each of these stories of land dispossession was that the developmentalist agenda of the Mexican state pushed outsiders onto Mayo ejidal properties. The privately funded irrigation initiatives prioritized large scale agricultural enterprise over ejidatario subsistence farming. This opened the door for several legal and illegal strategies that Yoris exercised in order to not only take control of some indigenous ejidal plots, but at times even resulted in non-ejidatarios gaining a voice in ejido decision making. These histories exhibited an undeniable link between new privately funded irrigation projects, limited irrigation access for ejidatarios, and land dispossession starting in the late 1940s.
The Mayo Workforce: A Hydraulic Army?

Mayos became skilled and experienced workers who constructed dams, pumps and aqueducts. Many of them traversed both the Fuerte Valley and other parts of northwestern Mexico, helping to erect structures that dispersed and controlled water. Mayos played a vital role in bringing canals and dams to the Fuerte Valley and contributed a great deal to the transformation of their natural landscape by building such irrigation structures. The actions Mayos took in creating such changes and altering their approach to local ecosystems was a complex matter that can only be understood in the context of their limited decisions at the time.

Several Mayo elders recollected days in which they traversed the Fuerte Valley helping to build dams and canals. Some even recalled the particular construction devices they used, and how this technology improved over time. Librado Cuadros of La Palma explained that,

> By 1948 I was helping to build canals all over this valley. I was only sixteen when I started. At first we opened the earth with just axes, and did not use machines or tractors. Eventually we started using tractors to clear the forests. This tractor was like an old jalopy with small tires, it whistled like a calf. After clearing the land, we built the walls of the canal, they were six meters high. We used huge rocks and filled them in with concrete. We put in the canals, and then they installed pumps to drain water for irrigation. I also helped to construct the bridge near Charay. I tried all the jobs available here because it was hard to survive by just farming. I got a lot of good work experience building these structures.⁴⁸

More money was invested in the construction of dams and canals and it appears that the technology used by workers also advanced. Mayo laborers benefitted from new development projects at least insofar as gaining valuable work experience with modern construction equipment.

New restrictions on accessing pumps and canals made milpa agriculture a more challenging subsistence strategy. In fact, it forced many indigenous ejidatarios to seek jobs as

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laborers, constructing the same hydraulic implements that they found increasingly difficult to get permission to use. It was likely not a coincidence that as a young man, Cuadros sought employment in the same year when his ejido lost access to a water pump, and ejidatario crops became ruined by the flood caused by the Cahuinahua canal. This elder from La Palma even stated that the reason he got an additional job was because it became too difficult to survive by merely farming his ejidal plot.

Employment opportunities as canal and dam construction workers started to become more frequent in the Fuerte Valley in the late 1940s, yet employers were not always reliable. Mayos sometimes sought employment elsewhere, likely due to rumors of other jobs that paid better, and compensated laborers more consistently. Some ejidatarios travelled to nearby areas such as Sonora to construct dams and canals, and usually encountered other indigenous laborers and participated in cultural exchanges. For instance, Roberto Escalante of La Palma explained that,

Some of us spent time working on a big dam just north of Obregon in the late 1940s. We went up there because the money was guaranteed, not like here. There we found other Yoremes working with us. They treated us like family, because we shared the same language and customs. But I did not like the food there in Sonora, because it was too sweet. But we lied to them and said we liked it because they were our brothers.49

Mr. Escalante did not specifically mention which construction project he worked on. By the years and location indicated, he apparently meant the Álvaro Obregón Dam on the Yaqui River. Workers began construction of the Obregón Dam in 1947 and it was completed in 1952.

The cordial cultural exchange between what were likely Yaquis of Sonora, and Mayos from Sinaloa was not an uncommon occurrence in the history of northwestern Mexico. This interaction underscored the contending notion that Yaquis and Mayos, despite some minor

49 Roberto Escalante, Interview by James Mestaz, La Palma, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, February 29, 2014
differences, continued to recognize each other as the same people. What was equally fascinating about this narrative was that these ejidatarios left the Fuerte Valley because some employers refused to pay them. The ability of Mayos to seek employment outside the Fuerte Valley was another tactic they employed to offset the sometimes exploitative nature of Yoris. It appears that other Mayo ejidatarios were duped into performing labor for free.

In the postrevolutionary era some Mayos had success gaining official irrigation rights from the state, and others struck deals with third party users for irrigation water. For other communities with no previous access to irrigation, the appearance of hydraulic technology near their ejidos must have seemed like a great opportunity to secure water rights. Apparently Yori newcomers used leverage to get Mayos to construct canals for free. Mayo elder Sabas Ynustrosa of La Mojonera explained that,

Yoremes were the ones who built the canals here in the early 1950s. I have friends and family who helped construct them after promises were made by the owners. The owners were Yoris that had property nearby. They said that we would have access to the water from the canals when we finished them. But once we were done constructing them, they did not let us use them. Yoris did not pay us anything either. They would not make any deals with us to use this irrigation water either. This kind of lying was typical of Yoris.50

The Mayo ejidatarios of La Mojonera recognized the value of using hydraulic technology to irrigate crops. In contrast to other Mayo farmers who found ways to negotiate with third party water providers, the ejidatarios of La Mojonera had a negative experience with the canal owners.

Another important aspect here was that these canal owners refused to negotiate a deal with the ejidatarios for access to water. In chapters two and three I discussed how water pump owners and irrigation permit holders worked out agreements with some Mayo communities, exchanging water for a percentage of the ejido’s harvest. Apparently these types of deals were no

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50 Sabas Ynustrosa, Interview by James Mestaz, La Mojonera, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, August 2, 2014.
longer on the table in this particular case. In fact, I was unable to find any instances of such agreements between water providers and Mayo ejidatarios after the 1940s.

The most logical explanation for the lack of deals between ejidatarios and water providers was that irrigation water had become too valuable for land owners to share. Yoris also saw Mayos as a cheap labor source, so eliminating irrigation water made it more difficult for the latter to depend on farming. Indigenous farmers with no irrigation water were often forced to sell or rent their lands and become laborers. Keeping irrigation water from Mayos not only opened ejidatario lands for rent or sale, but it also ensured that this labor pool would not run dry. I cannot prove that landowners conspired to make ejidatario lands less productive so that they could annex or rent these properties and turn Mayos into full time laborers. The limits to Yori ruthless expansionism during these years should however not be underestimated, so it is highly likely that at least some Yoris had such devious motives in mind.

Yori landowner development projects moved closer to Mayo properties and some of these outsiders even found ways to dispossess indigenous ejidatarios. Indigenous laborers of the Fuerte Valley continued to construct the same canals that transformed the physical landscape. The lies Yoris told Mayos to convince them to build canals and dams exhibited the importance of inequities inherent in the Fuerte Valley. The developmentalist agenda of the Mexican state set up a system designed for impoverished ejidatarios to fail and Yori landowners to prosper. With no access to irrigation water, ejidal land productivity was limited, as were the opportunities for ejidatarios to make a living through subsistence farming. In several instances, their only alternative was to seek additional employment that usually put them at the mercy of land owners who may or may not pay them for their labor. Mayo laborers who constructed dams and canals in
the Fuerte Valley therefore resembled what historian Karl Wittfogel described as a hydraulic army.

Karl Wittfogel is well known for his work that connected power to control of irrigation water. According to Wittfogel, a corvée, or drafted hydraulic army was conscripted by several ancient empires across the world to construct large irrigation implements. These hydraulic armies usually consisted of unpaid peasants from such places as Egypt, China, Mexico, and Peru. They were assigned to communal work teams, and their labor was a kind of taxation, imposed in the name of the common good but further enriching the state. The difference between these hydraulic armies and Mayo laborers was that the former were conscripted by the state, as Wittfogel focused largely on the history of Asiatic despots. Mayo laborers on the other hand were generally hired by private entities who did share some similarities with tyrants, but fell under a whole different economic system.

Donald Worster built on Wittfogel’s analysis of the hydraulic army by showing how a capitalist state disempowered people by creating massive water works in the southwestern United States. Worster’s discussion of crony capitalism, in which less powerful entities became disenfranchised by state functionaries ceding irrigation rights to powerful land owners, fits more closely to the situation of the Fuerte Valley. This exercise in raw power enabled Yori landowners to underpay Mayo laborers or trick them into building canals and dams that lead to the latter’s political marginalization.

The development of the Fuerte Valley centered on the diffusion of hydrological implements, so a labor source was necessary to push through the state’s developmentalist agenda. The ability of Yoris to convince large numbers of peasants to construct canals and dams

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52 Worster, *Rivers of Empire*. 
for cheap or even free was paramount to the economic growth of the Fuerte Valley. Mayo elder Mateo Quintero of Tehueco explained that,

I think whatever projects that were presented to Yoremes were deceitful and hidden under many lies. Many things that have gone unfavorably against us are due to broken promises. Yoremes constructed canals in hopes of using them. They were lied to by Yoris, because they were not allowed to use the canals after building them. Our history records several events in which Indians were convinced to work by lies being told. Yoris offered a lot of things, and they found ways to take what they wanted. But at that time, Yoremes did not know the Yoris would just take what they pleased. In some cases, rich people would hire Yoremes to work for them and then never pay them. This valley was built on those lies.\footnote{Mateo Quintero, Interview by James Mestaz, Tehueco, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, July 27, 2014}

The use of Mayos to construct dams and canals in the mid-twentieth century was well known by local historians in the Fuerte Valley. What was much less understood by scholars were the means by which Mayo labor was procured.

The most fascinating part of Quintero’s commentary was his use of the term “our history.” His identity as a Mayo suggested that he was referring to the history of his people, and that he recognized their accounts as divergent from that of Yoris. The inability of previous historians such as Mario Gill to record these important events of land dispossession and dishonest labor practices bring into question the contending narratives dealing with the Fuerte Valley in the mid-twentieth century.\footnote{Some works detailing the history of the Fuerte Valley, such as Mario Gill’s La Conquista del Valle del Fuerte give a very one-sided view without taking into account the dispossession of Mayo properties.} The triumphalist model in which elites used dams and canals to propel the Fuerte Valley into one of the most productive agricultural regions of Mexico is incomplete. We must also attribute this progress to the devious tactics of these entrepreneurial landowners who tricked Mayos into building hydrological structures, encroached on indigenous properties, and found ways to infiltrate ejidal committees.
The inequity and lack of opportunity Mayos encountered in the mid-twentieth century was due in part to new federal legislation that made it easier for powerful corporations and individuals to control irrigation water. The Mexican state either turned a blind eye or was perhaps complicit in the process of Mayo land dispossession and the dishonesty and broken promises used to convince Mayos to build canals and dams. It was also true that Mayos participated in the alteration of the natural landscape by constructing dams and canals, in the loss of ejidal land by illegally renting and selling it to outsiders, and the deterioration of political participation by allowing Yoris to become members of ejidos.

Mayo decisions in the late 1940s and early 1950s represented their best alternatives in a time when they had few options. In most cases they were left with few other choices but to take actions that they may or may not have known would result in negative consequences. The fact that Mayo decisions often resulted in inherently worse conditions underscored the power that land owners held. Reactions to oppression showed that these indigenous people combined decisions of practicality that allowed for their survival with options giving them the opportunity to maintain their reciprocal approach to the river.

This form of Mayo subjugation also became prevalent in the Mayo Valley in the mid-twentieth century. Jeffrey Banister explained that, “transforming river runoff into high-yield commercial crops has hinged upon the cooperation of so many political subjects who often as not have had little choice but to accept federal agents’ sweeping authority over a process that continues to marginalize them.”55 The limits in choices that Mayo ejidatarios had at this point were directly proportional to the growth in power and political influence of the large land owners who took control of irrigation access in the Fuerte Valley.

55 Banister, 33.
In order to fully comprehend the choices made by Mayo farmers of the Fuerte Valley to engage in the very system that subjugated them, we must also understand their participation as a consequence of aspirations. Banister continued his argument by adding that, “centralized water governance is also a production of hope, or the constitution of a ‘hydraulic subject’ who identifies with and continues to act on the promise of a better future through federal irrigation programs.” These ideas of hope were particularly inherent within the Fuerte Valley, as several Mayo farmers had first-hand experience in accessing canals and pumps to boost crop productivity. The Mexican state and large landowners did not conspire to offer irrigation water to Mayos and then take it away from them in order to garner support for large-scale hydrological development. These brief opportunities to access irrigation water absolutely gave some Mayos false hope and facilitated the marginalization of indigenous ejidatarios within the Fuerte Valley in the mid-twentieth century.

Mayo loss of land, access to irrigation water, a reduced voice in their ejido’s decision process, and the altering of the natural landscape were distinctly tied to each other, but were also attributed to the Mexican state’s developmentalist projects. The majority of this chapter has dealt with the losses of autonomy that Mayos incurred due to the rapid changes within the Fuerte Valley. The rest of this chapter will show how Mayos’ decreased autonomy transformed their notions of rain, rituals, and use of the natural landscape.

The Growing Importance of Rain in Mayo Ejidos

Starting in the late 1940s, private investment and the efforts of the SICAE led to increased production of canals and dams in the Fuerte Valley. The construction of such irrigation structures brought new job opportunities for Mayos, while ejidatarios also faced new difficulties

Banister, 36.
in accessing irrigation water. Coupled with Mayo farmers’ inability to use the planned flood waters of the Fuerte River to cultivate crops, these restrictions on irrigation water resulted in increasing reliance on rain. Mayo conceptions of rain and its use for growing crops took on new meanings as their connection to the Fuerte River changed. Tracing the Mayos’ shifting approach to rain in the past seventy years reveals patterns of adaptation as access to the Fuerte River became restricted.

In the 1930s and 1940s, several Mayo individuals and communities built diverters and irrigation ditches, virtually ending their reliance on rain water to irrigate crops. In ejidos such as El Añil that never used canals and pumps, new restrictions on water did not change its harvesting practices, as they remained as dependent as ever on the rain throughout this time period. For Mayo villages like La Palma that came to depend on the use of pumps and canals, new restrictions forced them to revert to relying on rainwater. Mayo elder Sabas Ynustrosa of La Mojonera explained that, “Because we could not get irrigation water, this became the life of most Yoremes by the 1950s. Using rain water, we worked our parcels. When it rained we took advantage of the water. We planted beans, squash, and corn.”

The diversion of water from the river eliminated the opportunity to use the planned flood waters for irrigation, and new restrictions on the use of canals also left Mayos with fewer irrigation options. The use of rainwater to harvest crops became the only method for the majority of Mayos in the Fuerte Valley. Complaints about the scarcity of rain soon surfaced.

These days, there is a general feeling from Mayo farmers of the Fuerte Valley that there is less rainwater than in previous years. This alleged decline in precipitation levels led to a decrease in annual crop yields for Mayo ejidatarios. Mayo elder Roberto Escalante of La Palma argued that,

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57 Sabas Ynustrosa, Interview by James Mestaz, La Mojonera, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, August 2, 2014.
Right now there is less rain than in the past. In June to August it rains, and as always I have to have planted before it rains. But if we do not get a good harvest, it is due to lack of water. Before we planted and harvested more, and we were never suffering from hunger. There was more rain before the 1950s, but we did not have to rely on it, because we had access to water through a pump. But we do not have enough water anymore. At times it rains, sometimes it does not rain. A lot of times it stops raining before the crop is ready, and the harvest is lost. The corn is dried, or beans, squash, or watermelon crops are ruined. Here for instance, we had planted four hectares of squash and it spoiled because we did not have enough water.\(^{58}\)

The general consensus among such Mayo elders as Escalante was that starting in the late 1940s, the gradual disappearance of water rights coincided with diminished rainfall within the Fuerte Valley. This double negative usually led to more challenges for Mayo farmers trying to produce crops for subsistence.

The Mexican state’s developmentalist agenda made it more difficult for Mayo ejidatarios to access irrigation water, but could modernization also be blamed for a decrease in precipitation levels? Some Mayo elders suggested a connection between the deforestation of the Fuerte Valley and a decrease in rainfall. For example, Mayo elder Juan Valenzuela of Camajoa claimed that,

There was a lot more vegetation sixty years ago. But then trees and shrubs started to disappear to make way for agriculture. The felling of forests resulted in less rain here. Some say it was progress for this valley to clear the land to plant crops and provide pastures for animals. But this was dangerous for those of us who needed rain to grow the crops we relied on to survive.\(^{59}\)

In chapter four I discussed how Mayos cleared vegetation in their own ejidos in order to have more cultivable land. This trend continued on a larger scale throughout the Fuerte Valley as the developmentalist state shifted its tactics to large scale agricultural production. There is no arguing that the surface area of the Fuerte Valley had much more natural vegetation sixty years ago, and that it was cleared to make way for agricultural purposes. The question here is whether deforestation actually resulted in less rainfall in the Fuerte Valley.

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\(^{58}\) Roberto Escalante, Interview by James Mestaz, La Palma, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, February 29, 2014.

It is unclear where Mayo elders such as Juan Valenzuela derived the notion that deforestation resulted in decreased precipitation. Mayo cosmology dictates that nature, animals, trees, and water, are all connected, and the elimination of one puts the others in jeopardy. I have not, however, encountered anthropological studies, folktales, or oral histories that explained how the removal of vegetation led to a decrease in rainwater.

The link between deforestation and precipitation has been made by other indigenous people of Mexico. Environmental historian Andrew Matthews argued that among the mountain (Serrano) indigenous people of Oaxaca, this link is probably, “an appropriation of state desiccation theory by the communities of the Sierra Juárez, in which internationally circulating environmental theories came to find new allies.”60 In the Oaxaca mountains the relationship between deforestation and precipitation likely came from outside theories.

The notion that deforestation led to a decrease in precipitation also probably came from outside sources in the Fuerte Valley. A good amount of scholarship has attempted to make such connections. A recent article by ecologist Douglas Sheil suggested that forest cover helps determine rainfall amounts and that, “forested regions generate large-scale flows in atmospheric water vapor.”61 Scientists have trended toward accepting the link between deforestation and a decrease in precipitation levels for decades, yet such connections are still as of yet scientifically inconclusive. Such outside theories likely encouraged Mayo elders to believe that the clearing of vegetation of the Fuerte Valley resulted in less rainfall.

Has there been less rain in the Fuerte Valley since the late 1940s as a result of the clearing of forests? Looking over official precipitation statistics provided by the Fuerte River Commission between 1930 and 1952, it appears that there is not a major discrepancy in the

amount of precipitation in the Fuerte Valley in those years, as compared to the last ten years. Precipitation measured at the El Fuerte precipitation station show that annual rainfall between 1930 and 1952 ranged between the lowest annual rainfall of 377 millimeters (1940 being the driest year), and 906 millimeters (1943 being the wettest year). More recent official precipitation statistics provided by the National Water Commission show that at the same El Fuerte precipitation station, the most recent dry year was in 2005, which measured 306 millimeters. The wettest recent year was in 2004 which measured 951 millimeters. July and August remained the months with the most precipitation by far. January through May recorded very little precipitation in every year. Basically speaking, there has not been a major drop off in the amount of rain in the Fuerte Valley since the mid-twentieth century, as suggested by a large number of Mayo elders.

Why do several Mayos have this perception that there was far greater rainfall in times past? One of the dangers of using oral histories is the fact that subjects sometimes exhibit a certain type of nostalgia for a time when things were better. This may help explain this perception among Mayo elders that it rained more in the past. In addition to this, we are also speaking of a time when irrigation infrastructure was less developed. There was less drainage available for instance, so when it rained, the water tended to sit on the ground for longer periods of time. This aided farmers who depended on this rain to water their crops.

There are other explanations as to why Mayo elders believe there was more rainfall in the past, when there actually was not. In the mid-1940s there were less canals and dams diverting water from the Fuerte River. Natural water sources like streams and creeks were more prevalent and would run closer to indigenous ejidos when it rained. The river may also have flooded more

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62 Comision del Rio Fuerte, Datos Hidrometricos
63 Instituto Nacional Estadistica y Geografia, Anuario Estadistico de Sinaloa.
frequently as not every drop of water was being diverted by hydraulic infrastructure. There is also the possibility that Mayos today are simply less prepared to use rainwater for growing crops as they were sixty or seventy years ago.

Some Mayo elders point out that the indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley used to possess a greater understanding of the rain and how to predict the coming rainfall. According to some of these elders the deteriorating knowledge is related to Mayos losing their connection with their natural landscape. Mayo elder Mauricio Mejías of Huepaco explained that,

Our parents grew more dependent on rain after they could not use the river or canals for irrigation. They channeled our ancient ways of reading nature. Elders knew when it was going to be a good season for planting, and when there would be a bad season. When they predicted a good season Yoremes spent all of their time in May preparing the earth for the coming rain in June. May is hot and all the grass is dried by then. And when the rain came it entered the clean, planted land. And that was the only advantage we had with the land. That was a knowledge that all Yoremes had, when there would be good or bad seasons. And they knew this because they were one with nature.64

The context of Mejías’ oral history suggested that he was referring to an advantage that Mayo farmers had over their Yori counterparts. With endless amounts of power and wealth, Yori outsiders monopolized irrigation water and cultivable lands. Mejías invoked historical memory of a time in which his people could predict rain in order to explain an agricultural advantage that is no longer available.

Other Mayo elders also seem to believe that past generations possessed a greater understanding of how to predict future precipitation patterns. Mayo elder Jorge Robles of San Miguel explained that,

By the mid-twentieth century, Yoremes based their seasonal planting cycles on the moon. They were able to tell when it was going to rain, and how much. The moon signals how much rain will come by the color of her porthole. When the portholes of the moon are very orange, this signifies the coming of the cold. The next shade of orange signifies that there will be a lot of rain. I have several notes

and results of portholes. There are not many of us Yoremes left that continue in this tradition of reading the moon’s colors, this is because most do not pay attention to the nature around us.\textsuperscript{65}

With less opportunity to use irrigation canals or the planned overflow of the Fuerte River by the 1950s, Mayo farmers relied more heavily on rainwater to cultivate their crops, changing their perception and approach to precipitation.

Some elders recalled a time when indigenous ejidatarios became adept at predicting the coming rain so they could plant accordingly. Oral testimonies suggest that over the last sixty years a decreasing number of indigenous people have retained this talent for rain prediction. These oral histories are undoubtedly colored by indigenous peoples’ diminished access to their natural landscape. In chapter six I will discuss the process by which Mayos have, in the words of several indigenous elders, “lost their connection with nature.”\textsuperscript{66} For now it is important to simply show some of the immediate effects of Mayos losing irrigation rights, and therefore their connection with the Fuerte River. The result was thus a reconfiguration of their relationship with rain.

\textbf{The Importance of Rain as Viewed Through the Yuco Conti Ceremony}

The changes to the natural landscape of the Fuerte Valley in the mid-twentieth century resulted in new ways that Mayos approached some of their religious ceremonies. In these last two sections I will show how an increased reliance on rain and restricted interaction with the Fuerte River altered the importance and performance of two Mayo religious rituals. The first of these ceremonies that I analyze deals with some Mayos’ changing approach to rainfall.

\textsuperscript{66} Several Mayo elders have made this reference, including Narciso Bachomo and Carlos Salcedo of Camajoa.
Before delving into the specifics of these rituals it is necessary to understand the importance of water and the river within indigenous religious ceremonies and the centrality of religion to Mayo culture. Mayo rituals contain very significant elements from the Catholic practice while maintaining indigenous cosmologies. The main point is that Mayo Catholicism has evolved over hundreds of years and is not the same formal religion introduced by Jesuits.

Some anthropologists have made it clear that the Mayo do not depend on Catholic officials for their religious ceremonies. In the 1950s, Charles Erasmus pointed out that, “the Indian maintains a religion which is almost independent of the official Roman Catholic church, except for baptism and marriage, which are performed by an ordained priest.”67 The best way to understand this relative independence from Catholic priests is through describing the role of the leader of these ceremonies. Mexican anthropologist Gabriel Uriarte pointed out that, “The maestro rezador (prayer teacher) is an independent religious authority to any group of people that have ceremonial centers.”68 Mayos maintain Roman Catholic elements but their major rituals are conducted by indigenous authorities.

The ability of the maestro rezador to oversee religious ceremonies exhibits some of the cultural autonomy Mayos still enjoy today. Loreto Coronado, an expert on Mayo culture explained the importance of the prayer teacher in greater detail,

The prayer teacher, or tenachi in the Mayo language is an indigenous holy man. He conducts the religious rituals in ceremonial centers. We see again the presence of water as an important element in the practice of traditional religion. Although it has elements of Catholicism, this indigenous religion does not belong to Catholicism completely. In the ceremonial centers there are no Catholic priests to officiate these rituals. The structure of the ceremonies is indigenous. Therefore the equivalent to a priest in the traditional indigenous religion would be this prayer teacher. Also, the tenachi conducts certain practices, such as baptizing

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67 Erasmus, Charles, Man Takes Control, 270.
68 Uriarte, Sinaloa Yoreme, 79.
ceremonial participants with water. This would correspond to a priestly anointing in traditional Roman Catholic religion.\(^6^9\)

The Mayo connection to their natural landscape has changed in the last sixty years. The functions of the tenachi have apparently not changed a great deal since the 1950s.\(^7^0\) The relatively unchanged role of the prayer teacher notwithstanding, the survival and alteration of some of these ceremonies show there is an interconnection between religious practice and historical context.

The inability of Mayo farmers to access irrigation water by the mid-twentieth century could help explain the growing importance of indigenous rain rituals in the Fuerte Valley. One such ritual takes place in June right before the rainy season begins in northern Sinaloa. Mayos gather at a central location to perform the *Yuco Conti* ceremony that calls for rain. According to Mayo elder Horacio Pitahaya of Boca de Arroyo,

> We invoke the saint San Isidro Labrador. This Saint derives from the God of the river *Bawahamjuna*. This ritual is called *Yuco Conti* in our language. We perform this ritual mostly in traditional ceremonial centers such as Tehueco, Mochicahui, or San Miguel. Before it was only enacted in the ceremonial centers, but that has changed in the past sixty years or so. Because of the scarcity of rain, some of these ejidos started to pay *fiesteros* or ritual experts to have this ceremony performed in their villages.\(^7^1\)

This ceremony is yet another representation of the cycle of nature that Mayos understand must happen in order for rain to come. Their preservation of these ceremonies exhibits the connection between Mayos and their natural landscape despite the massive changes around them.

Mayos increasingly lost access to pumps and canals in the mid-twentieth century and more became dependent on the rain in order to harvest crops. The growing prominence of the

\(^{6^9}\) Loreto Coronado, Interview by James Mestaz, Los Mochis, Municip. Ahome, Sinaloa, Mexico, August 7, 2014.

\(^{7^0}\) Charles Erasmus describes the role of the tenachi in great detail, or the *maestro* as he refers to these holy men, in his book *Man Takes Control*.

\(^{7^1}\) Horacio Pitahaya, Interview by James Mestaz, Boca de Arroyo, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, July 29, 2014.
Yoco Conti ceremony facilitated Mayo cultural survival while they depended on rain to keep ejidal lands productive. The fact that villages started to pay for individual ceremonies suggested that drought, and the reliance on rain to irrigate crops, posed significant challenges for Mayo farmers. Indigenous farmers were generally impoverished but still managed to pay performers for these ceremonies. This showed just how bad these water issues became for Mayos in the Fuerte Valley by the mid-twentieth century. Fewer Mayos retained their knowledge of rainfall prediction as more indigenous farmers, perhaps not coincidentally, relied more heavily on such rain ceremonies as Yuco Conti to bring needed rainfall.

Some Mayo elders complain about the danger of their culture disappearing. The enactment of such ceremonies as the Yuco Conti, exhibit the survival of their connection to nature. During this ritual, dancers take on the characteristics of animals through their movements. Mayo elders Narciso Bachomo and Carlos Salcedo, of Camajoa explained that,

In this ceremony, Yoremes perform all of their traditional dances, matachines, pascolas, venados. They have all the musicians there. The deer dress signifies the deer saint for instance. There is a dancer of pascola, they do an imitation of an animal. Musicians hit their drums to signify the thunder. The dancer imitates a lamapgo (lizard) sticking its tongue out. The dancer does this every time they hit the drum, and each time the tongue comes out simultaneously. This is a special interpretation of the lizard, and very unique, they also splash water up and around, representing the rainwater hitting the ground. The ceremony is asking for rainwater and it is important. Water is not just for the exploitation of farming, it is vital to man’s survival. Yet when there is no water to produce a harvest, they must do this ceremony, and it usually works.\(^{72}\)

The lizard in this case represents drought. This is because lizards can usually be seen when it has not rained for a long time. When it does start to rain lizards instinctively stick out their tongues. Mayo elders say that when this ceremony is performed a rain shower soon follows. Mayo belief in the efficacy of the Yuco Conti ritual underlines their vision of the universe. The growing

\(^{72}\) Narciso Bachomo and Carlos Salcedo, Interview by James Mestaz, Camajoa, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, March 21, 2014
reliance on the ceremony to provide rainwater for irrigation by the 1950s showed that most Mayo villages had lost access to pumps and canals and relied more heavily on conventional water extraction systems.

The importance of dance in Mayo rituals help to explain their approach to the natural landscape. Anthropologist Gabriel Uriarte described that,

The world of the Mayo dance breaks with our dimension to enter the magical, making tangible the old cosmogony. The human is an animal and vice versa. The plants, water, sun, earth, appear on stage in one way or another. They are contextualized by the various transformations of the dancers who know how to represent everything belonging to Juyya Annia [nature].

During the Yuco Conti ceremony, and other rituals that involve dancing, the performers represent animals through movement, bringing nature into their world. In the introduction to this dissertation I discussed how Mayos viewed themselves as playing an integral role within local ecosystems. Mayos invoke all of the elements of nature into their Yuco Conti ceremony and ensure that the natural cycles continue to persevere despite the vast changes to their ecosystem. Rain therefore continued to play its role in creating plant life, which in turn sustained the Mayo people.

During the Yuco Conti ceremony, the invocation of animals and nature does not end with the representation of lizards or deer in dances. The representation of toads within these ceremonies has also become more prevalent in recent years. When rain showers start, sapos (toads) come out into the open. Toads are therefore regarded as sacred animals among the Mayos, and are sometimes represented in the Yoco Conti ceremony. Mayo elder Laura Apodaca of La Misión points out that, “by the 1950s, sapos came to find a place within these ceremonies,

73 Uriarte, 44.
because they symbolize the coming of rain. Some Yoremes also think it will bring rain if you kill a toad and hang it.”

The increased use of toads in the Yuco Conti ceremony suggested that Mayos had transformed some of their belief systems in order to ensure the best opportunity at receiving rainwater. This works in conjunction with the growing prevalence of Mayos hiring performers to conduct the ceremony in indigenous villages. The survival of the Yuco Conti ceremony showed that despite their changing approach to the natural landscape, Mayos continued to perform rituals that invoked nature. The changes to the frequency of the ceremony, and use of new materials like frogs also suggested a Mayo tendency to believe that this ritual needed to be altered in order to work efficiently.

San Juan Ritual

One of the points I have made throughout this dissertation was that the growing hybridity of Mayo culture helped explain its survival from the 1920s through 1960s. The diversity of practices adopted by Mayos along the Fuerte River exemplified this hybridity. Though similar rituals utilizing both the banks and water of the Fuerte River exist in such ceremonial centers as Mochicahui and San Miguel, each village has their own version of rituals. For instance, in La Florida, judio dancers (those that invoke evil characteristics in ceremonies) are baptized there during the Semana Santa (Holy Week). Carla Bacosegua of La Florida explained that,

During Holy Week performers dress up as Judios (Jews) and re-enact the imprisonment and crucifixion of Jesus. After Jesus’ resurrection, Jews repent, burn their masks, machetes, and spears in repentance. We then bring Jews to the river to be baptized as they become Christians. The water has to be from the river. We fill pots with river water and we baptize them. Judios walk on the sand to accept their baptism. A tenachi creates a circle and lights candles there on the banks of the river. The baptism, the sand, the water, and the location itself all connect us to the river, and unite us as Yoremes.  

74 Laura Apodaca, Interview by James Mestaz, La Misión, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, July 29, 2014.
Mayos exhibit a plurality of practices, yet each of the religious ceremonies performed on the riverbanks and in the water itself ties them to the river. The river has always played a crucial role in connecting the indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley.

The Rio Zuaque acted as a meeting place for indigenous people for generations, as it continued to do after it was renamed the Rio Fuerte. The symbolic importance of the river as a sacred place which endured throughout the twentieth century derived from the belief that its waters possessed curative powers. These perceived curative properties were perhaps the main reason why indigenous people from all over Sinaloa continued to come to this river for specific purposes, while Mayos utilized the Fuerte for various religious ceremonies.76

Mayo religion and culture survived due to indigenous people’s ability to accept Christian practices and fuse them with their own beliefs. One ritual enduring from the colonial era through the present is the ceremony of San Juan. This ceremony was practiced by all Mayos in the mid-twentieth century. In fact, Mayos often point to the San Juan ritual as one of the practices that bound them together as a people during the massive changes to the natural landscape in the 1940s through 1950s.77 During this ritual, Mayos come to bathe in several different parts of the Fuerte River every June 24th. They believe that bathing in the river cures their ailments and also cleanses and energizes the soul.

The origins of the San Juan ceremony in the Fuerte Valley are not completely clear. Anthropologist Ralph Beals posited some theories regarding the roots of the San Juan ceremony, arguing that this ritual,

76 Narciso Bachomo and Carlos Salcedo, Interview by James Mestaz, Camajoa, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, March 21, 2014
May be due to [derive from] an aboriginal ceremony connected with the summer planting and the beginning of the rainy season. Some comparative material supports this assumption. San Juan is today considered owner of the seeds, a non-Christian idea so far as I know. However, the two-crop system of the Cahita makes it possible that the aboriginal ceremony postulated as the antecedent of San Juan’s festival might have been a harvest ceremony.\textsuperscript{78}

Beals’ assumption does seem to bear some validity in that the timing of the ceremony at the end of June directly coincides with the start of the rainy season. If the origins of this ceremony were in fact related to planting, then this could help explain its resilience throughout the years. What is unclear through Beals’ description is if the indigenous antecedent to the San Juan ceremony included Mayos bathing in the water. If so, how was this ceremony using the river connected to the harvest? We do know that Mayos depended on both the annual and planned overflow of the river, as well as on rainwater for planting and harvesting their crops. Perhaps they were making this connection between rainwater, river water, and crops through this ceremony.

Some Mayo elders today would disagree with Beals’ assertion that the San Juan ceremony is not connected to Christianity. Some would even contend that its roots in fact lie in the syncretism of the Mayo religion, an adaptation of Catholic beliefs. Oralia Flores of Pochotal explained that,

San Juan is associated with a much earlier time of Catholicism, when Saint John baptized people in the Jordan River. The Yoreme people have adopted it and made it an important tradition. It was brought by the Spaniards to the Mayos, but we have modified it over time. Yoremes had a belief in the sacred, but evangelization was brought here by the Jesuits. We turned their religion into our own beliefs and practices.\textsuperscript{79}

No matter where the ritual came from, there is no argument that San Juan today mixes elements of Roman Catholicism and pre-Hispanic indigenous beliefs. On the one hand Mayos are

\textsuperscript{78} Beals, Aboriginal Culture of the Cahita, 66.
\textsuperscript{79} Oralia Flores, Interview by James Mestaz, Pochotal, Municipio El Fuerte, March 25, 2014.
participating in what is a Catholic celebration but they are also holding and rescuing ancient cultural traditions.

The San Juan ritual has proven vital to the survival of Mayo culture. For centuries the indigenous people of northern Sinaloa treated the Fuerte River with reverence, understanding the location as spiritual and believing the water had curative properties. Some Mayos believe that on June 24th the water from the river takes on even more spiritual significance. Laura Apodaca of La Misión explained that,

The Fuerte River was always very important to Yoremes, which is why we often refer to it as the Golden River. On June 24th, the day of San Juan, the water has extra curative properties. We know that the first rays of the sun bless the water that day. Many people bathe in the river to grow their hair, to cure sores on the neck. The water for us is even more sacred on the day of San Juan. 80

In chapter two I pointed out how in one of the local indigenous origin myths, God created gold for Yoris, and work tools for Mayos. The fact that an indigenous elder suggested that Mayos refer to the river as “The Golden River” carries several possible interpretations.

This reference to gold could mean that some Mayos have adopted the Yori value system and seek to procure expensive raw materials such as gold. Such importance placed on wealth does not necessarily detract from Mayo ties to hard work, the land, or the river. Individual material gain could bring autonomy and opportunity to Mayo villages. There is also the possibility that Mayos refer to the river as “golden” because of the value that irrigation water brings to farmers, or perhaps because its spiritual properties can be compared to the wealth of gold. Regardless of why some Mayos refer to the river as “golden” it is obvious that everyone in the Fuerte Valley recognizes the monetary significance of water. For the Mayo, the value of

80 Laura Apodaca, Interview by James Mestaz, La Misión, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, July 29, 2014.
water was not just based on the possibilities that access to irrigation brought, but also in the spiritual properties of water that they had recognized for centuries.

The major changes to the natural landscape that Mayos encountered in the 1940s and 1950s resulted in alterations to some of their religious ceremonies. In the past sixty or seventy years, some Mayos have expressed concern about the waning popularity of the San Juan ritual. According to Mayo elder Felicitas Mejía of Vinaterías,

All Yoremes used to go to the river and bathe on June 24th. They would treat their ailments and the water gave them spiritual energy. There are many healing properties and benefits in that river water. We used to find Yoremes there who used the water to heal others. Around sixty years ago we started to see less of those healers, they were harder to find. Much less Yoremes went to the river to perform the ritual like before.\textsuperscript{81}

The developmentalist agenda of the Mexican state had lasting consequences for the Mayo communities of the Fuerte Valley. The decline of indigenous people participating in the San Juan ritual was one of the negative effects that modernization brought to the Fuerte Valley. There are also other specific explanations as to why the popularity of this ritual has appeared to decline over the past six or seven decades.

One compelling reason why Mayos are less prone to participate in the San Juan ritual is connected to the gradual deterioration of river water quality. Contamination of the Fuerte River has caused many Mayos to believe that the river water does not have the curing properties it once had, and that bathing in the water could in fact be dangerous. Mayo elder Horacio Pitahaya of Boca de Arroyo explained that,

When I was younger everyone used to bathe in the river during this ritual. But as the water became more and more contaminated, we started to have less faith in its curative properties. We no longer bathed in it because we were afraid it would harm us. It seems that poison started to drain down to the river, it was not like that

\textsuperscript{81} Felicitas Mejía, Interview by James Mestaz, Vinaterrias, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, July 17, 2014.
before. The water used to be very fresh and you could even drink directly from the river.\textsuperscript{82}

The growing toxicity of the Fuerte River water has resulted in reverse correlation to the number of Mayos bathing in the river during the San Juan ritual over time. The poisons that Pitahaya referred to are a combination of animal wastes, as well as pesticides and fertilizers used more prominently in the 1950s and 1960s during the Fuerte Valley’s shift toward large scale agriculture.\textsuperscript{83} I cannot provide definitive scientific proof that healing properties within the river water diminished as it became more toxic. What is important here is that some Mayos believed that the growing contamination of the river made the water less sacred as they made adjustments accordingly.

Another reason why some Mayos may have perceived that the Fuerte River’s water was less central to their culture was because they had less interaction with the river over time. The Mayos’ symbiotic relationship with the Fuerte River began to slowly disappear in the 1950s as indigenous farmers had less opportunity to access the river for both irrigation water and as a site for religious ceremonies. This was related to the rising number of private property owners who purchased irrigation rights, leaving significantly less water in the Fuerte River. In some parts of the river today the water flow has been reduced to a mere trickle. This lies in stark contrast to a time when boats were often used by Mayos to navigate the river for most of the year. The limited amount of water in the river has also made it more difficult for indigenous people to actually bathe in the water during the San Juan ritual.

Another important reason why the San Juan ritual has lost popularity over the last six decades could be attributed to new obstacles in accessing the river shore. Yori land owners have

\textsuperscript{82} Horacio Pitahaya, Interview by James Mestaz, Boca de Arroyo, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, July 29, 2014.

\textsuperscript{83} In chapter six I explain the effects the green revolution had within the Fuerte Valley and on Mayos specifically.
cut off access to the river in many of the traditional Mayo centers where they used to perform their rituals on the banks of the river. Mayo elder Mauricio Mejías of Huepaco described that,

I can recall several occasions when Yoremes were chased off at gunpoint or hit with belts by the owners of these lands on the riverbanks. Yoremes feel disrespected by not only the owners, but by the government itself for not protecting their ceremonial centers. Another factor leading to Yoremes losing access to the shores of the river is that this land has sometimes proved profitable for Yoris. They extract construction aggregate materials there, such as sand and gravel.84

Mayos living on the banks of the Fuerte River had a long history of allowing other indigenous groups into the river. This proved harmonious with the Mayo belief that the river belonged to all, that it was there to provide life. The Yoris who became landowners on the banks of the Fuerte River in the 1950s fenced in their valuable properties. They blocked off all river access to Mayos, whose identity was largely based on a long-standing interaction with the river. The loss of access to the water of the Fuerte River was particularly difficult for Mayos to cope with. The unavailability of the river to perform religious ceremonies also forced the indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley to make adjustments.

The alterations to the natural environment of the Fuerte Valley in the mid-twentieth century came as a consequence of a shift to large scale agricultural production. The availability of irrigation water was vital to the success of these mega crop producers. Along with indigenous people’s limited access to water, the influx of new canals allowed some Mayos to think outside the box. Mayo elders Narciso Bachomo and Carlos Salcedo of Camajoa explained that,

In places like Mochicahui we no longer bathe in the river during the San Juan ceremony. We started to bathe in a canal in the 1950s. Because of this we are a little lucky because we have a source of water there to come to for ceremonial rituals. Now we do not have to have that sort of negative interaction with those people who own the river bank land. Those Yoris bought all the property on the river and sometimes we have no chance to reach these ceremonial centers that we

84 Mauricio Mejías, Interview by James Mestaz, Huepaco, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, July 21, 2014
used to have there. These rituals are important to the survival of Yoreme culture. We have always had these concerns. We have complained to the government ever since those lands became less accessible, and have hindered our ability to carry out the rituals.\textsuperscript{85}

The ability to change their approach to the use of natural resources facilitated the survival of Mayo culture within a swiftly changing natural landscape. Yet some indigenous people were also able to use canals early on to boost ejidal land productivity, which in turn protected them from outsider incursion. Access to irrigation water became more elusive for Mayo farmers while some of these irrigation apparatuses like canals took on new religious and cultural functions. Canals were artificial man-made structures but still helped some of the indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley extend their connection to the river.

Criteria for Mayo culture expanded and contracted throughout the twentieth century as they adapted their practices and accepted some into traditions. In this process, Mayo adaptation led to more heterogeneous religious practices. Today such religious rituals as San Juan have their own individual flair depending on the locale. Mayo elder Librado Cuadros of La Palma explained that,

On June 24th we bathe in the \textit{bocatoma} [irrigation intake], and we are joined by the ejido of Cahuinahua. On the river bank on that side, they have a \textit{ramada} (wooden shelter) where the dances are performed. We still maintain our ancient rituals. For instance, we dance the Pascola and Matachin on the 24th. When we have the San Juan ritual, a lot of us come together and we bathe in the bocatoma. We cut our hair to symbolize a cleansing.\textsuperscript{86}

This added practice of Mayos of La Palma and Cahuinahua cutting their hair differs slightly from other ejidos such as Pochotal who believe the water assists in healthy hair growth. These subtle nuances of religious practices help villages maintain their own reputation within the Mayo

\textsuperscript{85} Narciso Bachomo and Carlos Salcedo, Interview by James Mestaz, Camajoa, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, March 21, 2014
\textsuperscript{86} Librado Cuadros, Interview by James Mestaz, La Palma, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, February 29, 2014
community. Villages are recognized for the specific ways in which they perform particular ceremonies, and none of them carry out these rituals in the exact same way. The persistence of such ceremonies like San Juan ties each of these villages together and is largely responsible for the survival of Mayo culture. It is also important that the La Palma and Cahuinahua ejidos use the river intake instead of the river to carry out this ritual, further speaking to their adaptation through the use of river infrastructure that was available to them.

The loss of lands along the banks of the Fuerte River in the mid-twentieth century gave Mayos less area to perform traditional religious ceremonies, and altered their relationship to the natural landscape. Mayos proved adept at finding new ways to perform religious rituals and maintain a cohesive identity. In these cases where they used canals and the bocatoma to perform religious rituals, the use of modern irrigation infrastructure facilitated this adaptation while extending their symbolic connection to the river. The massive changes to the landscape of the Fuerte Valley therefore forced Mayos to confront the ways they approached rainfall, irrigation infrastructure, and the river itself. Mayo adaptation to new challenges such as land dispossession ensured that although their lives and natural environment changed, they would still maintain a large sense of cultural autonomy within the Fuerte Valley.

**Conclusion**

Plans to make the Fuerte Valley into one of the most productive agricultural regions of Mexico were initiated in the mid-1940s. By the mid-1960s, federal and private investment allowed the Fuerte Valley to become the fourth largest irrigated agricultural area in the country, containing nearly ten percent of all the farmland in the nation’s irrigated districts. The aridity of the Fuerte Valley ensured that agricultural development worked hand-in-hand with the
proliferation of dams and canals throughout the countryside. Some Mayo farmers had found great success using pumps and canals in the 1920s through 1940s to irrigate their lands. The shift to private large scale agricultural production severely limited ejidatario opportunities.

Two of the themes that keep arising throughout this dissertation are Mayo resilience and adaptation. After enduring through the conquest, disease epidemics, the mission system, land dispossession, encroachment by large corporations, and political subjectivity to the SICAE, Mayos faced one of their toughest challenges starting in the late-1940s. The Mexican state’s backing of large land owners and their expansion projects resulted in an attack on the Mayo connection to the river and natural landscape. Analyzing this problem from the perspective of irrigation access allows me to explain the interconnectivity between Mayo access to water and their way of life.

Describing the differences in how Mayos of the Fuerte and Mayo Valleys collected irrigation water is an efficient way to explain how the divergent histories of both valleys created different obstacles for these indigenous groups to deal with. Antonio Bacosegua’s sighting of God in the late 1950s resulted in different reactions by Mayos in the Fuerte and Mayo Valleys. These reactions highlighted the divergent ways that indigenous people from both valleys continued to approach irrigation infrastructure. Significant disparities arose in the ways the indigenous groups of the Fuerte and Mayo Valleys used both conventional and new irrigation technologies to adapt to their changing natural landscape. There were similarities in how large property owners’ growing power in the late 1940s left Mayo farmers of both valleys at a huge disadvantage. For the indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley the limitations to accessing irrigation water forced them to make significant adjustments to their lifestyle.
The spread of privately funded canals and dams throughout the Fuerte Valley had a positive effect on property owners, and there was often an inversely disastrous impression left on Mayo villages. In ejidos like La Palma, the inability to access irrigation water coupled with the simultaneous appearance of a canal that flooded their village, signaled an end to an era. Ejidatarios soon realized that they could no longer align with the postrevolutionary government in order to receive tangible benefits.

Ejidatarios of the Fuerte Valley found gaining access to irrigation water more difficult by the late 1940s, and faced an uphill battle keeping ejidal plots productive. The proliferation of canals and dams opened new employment opportunities for Mayo farmers, many of whom had no other choice but to abandon their underproductive lands to seek wages. In becoming the labor source responsible for constructing the canals and dams that they were not permitted to use, which in turn also significantly altered the natural landscape, Mayos made choices that were constrained by limited opportunities. The indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley were also inspired by their past uses of canals and pumps, and aspirations to rekindle such practices.

The increased difficulty for ejidatarios to access irrigation water facilitated the dispossession of Mayo lands, outsider encroachment into ejidal decision making, and limited access to the Fuerte River as a religious site. This resulted in Mayos becoming more dependent on rainwater to irrigate their crops. Changes to the ways Mayos carried out religious ceremonies, such as the Yuco Conti and San Juan rituals, expressed the concerns indigenous ejidatarios had for the changing natural landscape. These modifications also showed a practical adaptation that allowed Mayos to maintain a symbolic connection to both the Fuerte River and nature, and perhaps more importantly a relationship with each other.
The Fuerte River Commission (CRF) came to control the water sources and development initiatives of the Fuerte Valley in 1951. One of its priorities was to allow powerful property owners to use most of the irrigation water from the Fuerte River, in order to stimulate large scale agricultural projects that led to economic growth in the region. Ejidatario rights and opportunities were greatly compromised in this switch to large-scale farming. By the mid to late 1940s the SICAЕ had provided the blueprint for the CRF to perfect and streamline the practice of taking control of water and land out of the hands of Mayo farmers.

The generally negative ways that Mayos came to view outside government agencies like the CRF speaks to the latter’s ability, or more accurately inability to mobilize the former. In contrast to the postrevolutionary state apparatus that relied on ejidatarios for political patronage, powerful leaders of the 1950s and 1960s generally eschewed Mayo community autonomy in favor of economic progress. Land development initiatives and plans to build canals and dams stressed the importance of using natural landscapes that more easily supported construction efforts.

In comparison to the massive efforts and planning of irrigation projects such as the Miguel Hidalgo Dam, far less thought was put into the displacement of indigenous communities or their important ties to the physical landscape, which often accompanied this “development.” The massive changes to the political and natural landscape of the 1940s and 1950s that I discussed in this chapter, continued through the 1950s and 1960s, forcing Mayos to adapt even more. The ways that Mayos reacted to their new subjectivity to government agencies, the elimination of certain plants, the introduction of more mosquitos that brought malaria, disassociation from a contaminated river, approaches to animals, uses of potable water and other
new water sources, and substitution of raw materials in their religious ceremonies will be covered in chapter six.
Chapter 6
From Our River to Theirs: The Effects of Hydrological Development and the Switch to Large Scale Agriculture on Mayo Villages, 1955-1970

It is certain we viewed the river as an extension of nature. We are in contact with the cosmos, mountain, water, forest. These are especially respected and sacred. There is a connection between Indians and water. The four elements for us; water, fire, earth, wind, are all a divine gift from God, and they are reflected in the water.¹

Yori landowners and state functionaries collaborated to transform northern Sinaloa into a hub for large scale agricultural production from the mid-1950s through 1960s. The shift in land usage from ejidatario focused production depended on private farmers accessing large amounts of water to irrigate massive crop generating operations. The Fuerte River acted as the nerve center for the economic development and modernization of northern Sinaloa, altering the way Mayos accessed water in the mid-twentieth century.

All Fuerte Valley farmers came to depend largely on the Fuerte River for irrigation water, but the Mayo also had a more specific connection to the river. Mayos had developed a reciprocal approach to the Fuerte River over generations, reflecting their symbolic connection to the natural landscape as they helped maintain balance within local ecosystems. Yoris diverged substantially from previous indigenous sustainability approaches, interfering with the way Mayos accessed the river. Yori outsiders increased their personal wealth by accumulating natural resources and clearing out thousands of hectares of natural vegetation.

The divergent approaches of Yoris and Mayos toward the river and physical landscape in the 1950s and 1960s revealed a distinct separation in each group’s cultural values and views on the utility of natural resources. State agencies tended to back the accumulation tactics of Yoris who in turn treated environmental concerns as secondary. Mayos viewed these developmentalist

tactics with ever increasing concern as Yori and state collaborations politically marginalized the indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley. Mayos encountered further obstacles in accessing the Fuerte River and natural landscape in the mid-1950s through 1960s, leading to concerns about maintaining cultural autonomy, as well as the ability to survive in terms of economy and foodstuffs.

The Mexican state created a regional development agency in the mid-twentieth century known as the Fuerte River Commission (CRF) to oversee the construction of canals and dams that served as the backbone of the economic modernization of the Fuerte Valley. Some politically connected ejidos found ways to leverage benefits from state agencies, but this was generally not the case for Mayo ejidatarios. The CRF planned the intricate construction of the Hidalgo Dam, but did not consider the material and cultural costs to the indigenous ejidatarios displaced in the process. The CRF’s treatment of relocated Mayo ejidatarios reflected the state’s generally apathetic approach to indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley in the mid-1950s through 1960s. Floods caused by the construction of some of the CRF-built structures led to further Mayo distrust of the Mexican state.

The state encouraged Fuerte Valley farmers to use the latest agricultural techniques in the mid-1950s through 1960s. The uses of irrigation, fertilizers and pesticides to boost crop production became known as the Green Revolution. Mayos generally could not afford access to Green Revolution technologies and some indigenous farmers even viewed such techniques as detrimental to the natural environment. The contamination of the Fuerte River through the use of chemicals, as well as the influx of Yori owned industries such as pig farming, further separated some Mayos from the now-polluted Fuerte River. The availability of potable and tubed water, along with the impurity of the river, initiated a process by which some indigenous people began
to view river water as simply another Yori possession. Some elders believe that the lack of access to the river and changed perception of river water utility that was initiated sixty years ago, has slowly deteriorated their connection to nature, and therefore threatens their culture today.

Another factor that transformed the Mayo way of life came in the form of new obstacles to gathering raw materials used for religious ceremonies and animals that had become part of indigenous people’s diets. The development of the Fuerte Valley altered local ecosystems, making it more difficult for Mayos to acquire such raw materials as sacred álamos (cottonwood) trees used for constructing sacred ramadas (shelters). The spread of irrigation implements and clearing of vegetation also brought major changes to the natural environment, making it harder for Mayos to raise domesticated animals. Hydrological development altered local ecosystems as new plant and animal species appeared, and some of the animals Mayos had integrated into their diets disappeared. The ability to adopt such practices as fishing in canals showed some Mayo’s propensity for continually finding ways to connect with the Fuerte River, and again exhibited the fact that some villagers were more prepared to adapt to changes to the physical and political landscape than others.

Throughout this dissertation I have shown that some Mayos maintained a symbolic relationship by finding new uses and access to the Fuerte River which facilitated their physical and cultural survival. In this last chapter of the dissertation I will reveal how although Mayos innovated to maintain a symbolically reciprocal relationship to the Fuerte River and the natural landscape, state initiated hydraulic development projects eliminated many of the strategies villagers had depended on earlier. In the mid-1950s through 1960s large land owners and the state collaborated to construct massive irrigation structures such as the Miguel Hidalgo Dam, used new farming techniques to exploit the land for commercial usage, and changed the ways all
people gathered water. Reactions to the hydrological restructuring of the Fuerte Valley from the mid-1950s through 1960s revealed a multitude of strategies in which some villagers extended their connection to the river better than others. Mayo elders today believe that their culture began deteriorating in the mid-1950s. The reasons they give for cultural decline vary, and can at least partially be related to the success or failure each particular village had in maintaining access to the Fuerte River.

**Mayos, Yoris, and the Mexican State during Post-WWII Development**

Mayo struggles to retain their connection to the Fuerte River were often transformed by the way state functionaries and Yori property owners treated the river and natural landscape. Most Yoris viewed natural resources like the river as tools for generating wealth, while Mayos approached it as a life giving, living entity to be respected and protected. The differences in these approaches to the river became vital in mid-1950s through 1960s and helped distinguish Mayos from non-Mayos.

There were exceptions to the divergent ways Mayos and Yoris interacted with the river in this mid-twentieth century. For instance, there was a case in which a Mayo man accessed irrigation water in the same individualistic manner as Yoris. His perceived selfish approach changed his relationship with the Mayo community. Mayo elder Flor Escalante of Jahuara recalled that,

> There was a Yoreme man who lived here in Jahuara. In the 1950s he made a deal with the government and got irrigation water. He captured all that water for himself and did not share it with us. In his mind he remained Yoreme. He spoke our language and never changed his name. Yoremes never quarreled with him or fought, we just left him alone. Yoremes did not want any trouble. But nobody talked to him because he was no longer part of our community.²

The rising cost of water often made it nearly impossible for Mayos to procure irrigation concessions by the mid-1950s. This man was therefore likely more wealthy than the other villagers of Jahuara. Also, in this case membership within the Mayo community of Jahuara was partially determined by an individual’s approach to the Fuerte River. Villagers took issue with this man’s self-interested refusal to share irrigation water with the rest of the community.

Some indigenous people in the Mayo Valley also took actions that diverged from communal enterprise, which can help explain the man from Jahuara’s behavior. Mary O’Connor explained that indigenous individuals,

> Base their behavior and their interpretation of others’ behavior on a rather limited set of cultural rules. These rules exist only as a collectivity, for each individual’s behavior is based on his own understanding and manipulation of the rules…The person who is familiar with the ways of government agencies, who has many social and political networks and who knows how to use these, will prosper more than someone who is ill-at-ease outside his own family and kin group.”

The man from Jahuara was perhaps more prepared than the rest of the villagers of his ejido in dealing with changes coming from modernization. Other Mayo villages deployed a multitude of strategies to adapt to change, which also exhibited varying levels of preparedness.

This Mayo man of Jahuara either comprehended cultural rules far differently than his neighbors or simply decided to break the rules in favor of personal profit. It is completely possible that he was already unpopular in the community, and his use of water ended up being a pretext for symbolically removing him from the village. Either way, the overall rarity of Mayos drawing irrigation water for personal use in the mid-1950s and 1960s could be explained by economic limitations preventing ejidal farmers from purchasing water rights, but perhaps also by their comprehension of these rules that helped keep indigenous villages intact.

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3 O’Connor, *Descendants of Totoliquiqui*, 51.
By the mid-1950s most Mayo farmers of the Fuerte Valley had either grown distrustful of state-backed agencies because of their negative experiences with the SICAE, or simply could not afford to pay for agricultural implements and irrigation water. The consequences of losing access to irrigation water varied between indigenous villages and largely depended on their preparedness to react to change. Some elders today link the inability to use irrigation water in the 1950s to larger results, such as a change in their symbolic relationship with the Fuerte River and cultural deterioration. Others point to the fact that they were able to maintain a connection to the Fuerte River despite losing irrigation access.

Mateo Quintero of Tehueco is among the Mayo elders who made the connection between a loss of irrigation and river access, to cultural deterioration. He argued that, “By the 1950s we no longer got irrigation water. At the same time Yoris rented lands from ejidatarios here. They cut off access to the river, making it harder for us to have ceremonies like San Juan on the riverbanks. That is when our culture began to be lost more and more.”

For some indigenous ejidatarios losing access to irrigation water meant more than a material or economic threat. I showed throughout this dissertation how Mayo uses of hydraulic technology helped them protect territory used for religious ceremonies. In fact, Quintero asserted that their inability to draw irrigation water, which protected ejidal lands, was the main explanation for cultural deterioration.

Most Mayos lost access to irrigation water by the mid-1950s, but their reactions differed. Mayo elder Oralia Flores of Pochotal does not agree that their inability to draw irrigation water from the river was the primary reason for cultural deterioration. She contended that,

Our ejido lost access to irrigation water, just like the rest of the villages around here. We kept most of our lands on the riverbanks because we were more united than others. We had no trouble conducting religious ceremonies on the river. The

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real problems in the 1960s came from lack of materials for costumes used for ceremonies and the rising prices of fiestas.5

The ability of some villages to retain their rivershore properties allowed them to continued performing religious rituals on riverbanks and in the river itself, such as San Juan. Neighboring villages that lost their rivershore lands were forced to attend such ceremonies in other locales. This actually facilitated more intimate relationships between villages in some cases.

It is unclear if riverbank lands were among those reclaimed by individualists of Pochotal in 1956.6 If that was the case, it explains how the certification of these land titles helped these ejidataros maintain their properties while a great deal of others lost theirs. The difficulty to get irrigation water that indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley encountered by the mid-1950s was nearly universal. Their strategies of adaptation, some of which I will highlight in this chapter, showed how their diversity of experiences resulted in a more heterogeneous culture still united behind their similarities.

One of the similarities among elders today is the generally agreed upon notion that the mid-1950s and 1960s marked an era in which their culture began to deteriorate. Ejidatarios of Tehueco lost their lands on the riverbanks while Pochotal retained their properties. These experiences fundamentally colored elders’ perceptions of what led to the weakening of their culture. Mayo reactions to the massive hydrological changes in the Fuerte Valley from the mid-1950s though 1960s were by no means uniform. Such autonomous actions of villages help to explain the growing diversity of Mayo culture, which in the opinion of some elders became watered down over time, but still survives today.

5 Oralia Flores, Interview by James Mestaz, Pochotal, Municipio El Fuerte, March 25, 2014.
6 In chapter four I described how individualists of Pochotal, Camajoa, and Charay reclaimed portions of contested sugarcane lands.
It is also relevant that Flores attributed cultural deterioration to the rising prices of fiestas. In chapter five I mentioned how Bacosegua’s revival movement was partially a response to the growing sentiment of the 1940s and 1950s that the fiestas were too expensive to conduct. The millenarian movement of the late-1950s sparked more participation in these fiestas, but it did not change Mayo perceptions by the 1960s that the economic costs of the fiestas presented a significant challenge. The other obstacle Flores mentioned was the growing unavailability of raw materials used for religious ceremonies. I will discuss this issue in greater detail later on this chapter, and show that in some Mayo villages, limited access to the riverbanks was directly linked to the disappearance of some of these raw materials such as álamos trees.

Mayos in the Fuerte Valley found their opportunities limited during the mid-1950s through 1960s. Most of the state functionaries who Mayos came into contact with were Yoris, and some of the former also became land owners. Coupled with the fact that powerful Yori interests generally aligned with the Mexican state’s developmentalist agenda, Mayos began to see Yoris and the state as the same entity. Mateo Quintero explained this process in greater detail as he added that, “By the 1950s we no longer had a voice. The government was not for us. It was run by the Yoris, for the Yoris. Everything they did starting in those days, and until now benefited Yoris, and not us. That is why we speak of Yoris as the same as the government.” Mayo oral histories exposed deep feelings of hostility aimed at Yoris, particularly in the mid-1950s through 1960s. The conflation of Yoris and the state within Mayo oral histories revealed a great deal about indigenous people’s attitudes toward both the state’s development plans and its indigenous mobilization tactics.

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7 See my discussion in Chapter 5, and also Erasmus, Man Takes Control, 285.
During the mid-1950s through 1960s as the Mexican State carried out its developmentalist agenda in the Fuerte Valley, it also attempted to reach out to and mobilize indigenous communities. The extent to which certain state agencies interacted with Mayos in particular helps explain the discursive strategies employed by the indigenous people in the Fuerte Valley as they struggled to maintain symbolic connections to the Fuerte River and their natural landscape. The stated intentions of the development agency the Fuerte River Commission (CRF) in its mission statement as, “to assist rural communities,” appeared quite noble. The CRF’s actions, however, rarely matched up with these intentions. The ability of the CRF to boost economic opportunities for Yoris, but not for indigenous ejidatarios can help explain why Mayos continued to see the state and Yoris as the same entity. The following section will examine the causes of mistrust historically as Mayos adapted to a political climate in which they became incrementally marginalized over time.

The Fuerte River Commission and Uneven Development

By the mid-1950s, the postrevolutionary era had long departed and the federal government took up massive public works projects that maximized the efficiency of natural resources to make Mexico a modern state. State development agencies such as the CRF were tasked with stimulating the economy by increasing the number of profitable private agricultural ventures. The massive construction of private and state funded irrigation infrastructure led the way for this transition to large scale agricultural development in Mexico. The CRF was established in the Fuerte Valley in 1951, but the influence of the SICAE prevented the former from assuming total power until the mid-1950s.

9 Secretaria de Agricultura y Recursos Hidraulicos, Memoria de la Comision Del Rio Fuerte, 76.
One strategy initiated by the Mexican state was to push for development in certain areas of the country where officials determined that agricultural potential had not been reached. River Basin Projects were thus initiated by the Mexican state in the mid-1940s to boost regional economic development in key regions of the country. Economists David Barkin and Timothy King explained that river basin commissions,

Offered a way of planning and coordinating public expenditure in a region that was difficult to do through already established ministries and state government, quite apart from the economic desirability of investments made with a view to making the most efficient use of water, which is in such a scarce supply in some parts of Mexico, and at times is overabundant in others.\(^{10}\)

Local commissions were established in regions of Mexico to create development projects to maximize agricultural potential, revive commercial activity, and make specific territories economically relevant once again. A local commission started a river-based development project in the Papaloapan region that encompassed parts of Veracruz, Puebla, and Oaxaca in 1946. Similar commissions established other development projects such as the Tecaltepec project of the Pacific coast in 1947, the Grijalva project in Tabasco and Chiapas in 1951, and lastly the Fuerte Basin Project of 1951.

The Fuerte Basin Project came about in 1951 after years of planning, and was administrated by the Fuerte River Commission (CRF). State functionaries hand-picked CRF officials to take charge of the commission which was ultimately placed under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Water Resources (SRH). The specific objectives of the CRF from the outset were as follows,

- Develop studies and projects for the storage dams and diversion of the Fuerte River and its tributaries; planning, construction, and operation of the areas of irrigation; technical advice through agricultural extension by introducing campesinos to the latest and best techniques of irrigation; help expand and

\(^{10}\) Barkin and King, *Regional Economic Development*, 93.
improve the means and ways of communication between producers and consumers or consumer industries for agricultural products; build all works of social benefit in rural areas, and in urban areas contribute to the prosperity and preservation of the health of the user; study and plan works to prevent and control environmental pollution to air, water, land; and involvement in the planning and construction of works to achieve development under controlled conditions of waterways, and in unhealthy coastal lagoons and shorelines.\textsuperscript{11}

At first glance these stated objectives of the CRF appeared to benefit all sectors of society in the Fuerte Valley. The specific mention of construction of works for social benefit in rural areas and introducing campesinos to the latest agricultural technologies reflected earlier reforms by President Lázaro Cárdenas to empower ejidatarios. In some ways also reflecting such Cardenista initiatives, the actual implementation of these programs resulted in uneven benefits for Fuerte Valley ejidatarios.

I established in chapters three and four how the SICAE sugarcane cooperative was granted a four-month monopoly on the water from the Fuerte River. In 1953 President Adolfo Ruiz Cortines stripped the SICAE’s monopoly on water. By the mid-1950s the SICAE was no longer in charge of decisions regarding river infrastructure plans, as this responsibility was turned over to the CRF. The cessation of this agreement helped corporations and individual property owners gain control of most of the land and irrigation resources in the Fuerte Valley, further marginalizing Mayo ejidatarios in the process.

The Mexican state created the CRF with great ambition and hope in June of 1951. According to Barkin and King the stated goal of the commission was to, “improve, conserve, and expand the Fuerte River irrigation district.”\textsuperscript{12} The need to establish the CRF showed that there were serious concerns among state officials regarding the economic future of this region. It also

\textsuperscript{11} Secretaria de Agricultura y Recursos Hidraulicos, 76.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid, 110.
indicated that the Mexican state had lost faith in the SICAE’s ability to maximize the agricultural productivity of the Fuerte Valley and that a change needed to be made.

The CRF took root during the early years of the Miguel Alemán Valdés presidency. In chapter four we learned that Alemán pushed industrialization in order to stimulate economic activity. Apparently Alemán was impressed by the success of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and wanted to replicate this program in certain regions of Mexico. According to U.S. Historian David Ekbladh, the achievements of the TVA after its creation in 1933 led to it becoming, “a model for America's governmental efforts to seek to assist in the modernization of agrarian societies in the developing world.” The TVA served as a blueprint for the foundation of a state sponsored regional economic development agency capable of efficiently distributing water resources in Mexico.

As early as his first year in office (1946) President Alemán expressed his interest in creating local development agencies similar to the TVA. In one of his first official announcements, Alemán proposed the creation of,

A program for comprehensive regional development based on the successful resolution of the Tennessee Valley Authority. The Mexican government has decided to design, in two regions of our country, programs to exploit the basins of the rivers El Fuerte in Sinaloa and Papaloapan in Veracruz. The project involves the creation of a decentralized body with sufficient authority and economic resources to simultaneously solve the problems of the above two regions, in its many aspects.

The Mexican state created the Papaloapan Commission just one year after this announcement. It is unclear why it took five more years to establish the Fuerte River Commission. The delay could be explained in part by the lack of institutional capacity to move forward with multiple mega-projects simultaneously. State officials also understood the immense economic potential of the

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Ekbladh, "Mr. TVA: Grass-Roots Development" *Diplomatic History*, 335–374.

AGN, December 10, 1946, Miguel Alemán Valdés, 508.1/18
Fuerte Valley, so it is likely that they wanted to be sure all stakeholders were prepared for the transition, minimizing the potential for setbacks in this crucial region. The political power and influence of the SICAE in the Fuerte Valley could also partially explain this delay.

Just thirteen years after President Lázaro Cárdenas ceded thousands of hectares to ejidos under the control of the SICAE, and almost ten years after the cooperative gained almost total control of the water from the Fuerte River, farmers of the Fuerte Valley again fell under the system of another experimental development program. Comparable to the history of the SICAE, state-sponsored economic programs similar to the CRF had preceded it in other regions of Mexico, allowing officials in the Fuerte Valley to learn from past mistakes. Both the SICAE and the CRF, at least in theory, attempted to bring economic stability to northern Sinaloa to benefit all sectors of society.

The difference between the CRF and the SICAE was that the latter offered better opportunities for the ejidatarios who joined the cooperative, while protecting the economically pivotal sugarcane industry. The CRF was placed in charge of sparking economic growth by reviving the agricultural output of the crop systems that had suffered while sugarcane had received preference. The CRF was also given more financial resources and its officials found ways to partner with private investor’s interests that intersected with its own plans to develop the Fuerte Valley. In the process of implementing its developmentalist tactics the CRF granted an advantage to powerful land owners over ejidatarios. The SICAE had played favorites as the cooperative empowered its affiliated ejidatarios while isolating the majority of local independent ejidatarios.

Both agencies were responsible for supervising the construction of the irrigation infrastructure that came to be dominated by local elites. Ejidatarios were the intended
beneficiaries of the dams and canals built under the supervision of the SICAE, which gave some Mayo members of the cooperative access to these irrigation apparatuses. The beneficiaries of the dams and canals of CRF were explicitly the large land owners who controlled the majority of irrigation water from the Fuerte River. The preference the CRF granted to large land owners showed that the Mexican state and the development agencies it empowered never intended to equally distribute available resources to the people of the Fuerte Valley. Some indigenous ejidatarios found ways to navigate restrictions the SICAE placed on accessing the Fuerte River, but centralization of irrigation resources under the CRF marked the beginning of the end for most Mayo irrigation-based mobilization.

By the 1940s Mexico had turned inward in a bid to provide enough food to feed its growing population. The inability of the SICAE to consistently produce enough sugarcane in the Fuerte Valley to match Mexico’s demand forced the state to intervene in the 1950s. Economist Manuel Carlos asserted that the changes made by the CRF were,

> Related to a specific policy goal set by the federal government. The decision was made to increase the nation’s agricultural production by pouring most agricultural investments and technical skills into the Fuerte region and others like it, selected because they had the resources for irrigation agriculture and thus controlled agriculture...The object of these national policy goals was to end Mexico’s reliance on the ‘boom or bust’ crop cycles that characterize the unpredictable rainfall zones of the country. The government also ordered an increase in the provision of food for its growing population, doing so in order to end the loss of a steady flow of foreign exchange due to agricultural imports.\(^{15}\)

The developmentalist agenda exercised by the CRF was aimed at increasing the efficiency of Mexican farmland. This would hypothetically prevent the need to import crops, and in the case of the Fuerte Valley, to produce a surplus for both international export and domestic distribution.

\(^{15}\) Carlos, *Politics and Development in Rural Mexico*, 21.
This trend toward large scale agriculture meant that ejidatarios of the Fuerte Valley no longer received the sort of state backing associated with the postrevolutionary era.

The CRF’s initiatives aimed at mobilizing the rural sector of the Fuerte Valley had very uneven results. This could be due in part to the fact that the commission’s stated goals of constructing works for social benefit in rural areas did not come for free. Barkin and King explained in 1970 that,

All people who receive irrigation pay a water fee of 100 pesos per year, but the ejidatarios also pay ‘cuotas de cooperacion’ of a similar amount for ten years. These quotas are spent through the Commission on educational facilities and public facilities and services in the ejidos.\(^\text{16}\)

There are two important statements here that help to explain the effects that the CRF’s development initiatives had on Mayo communities. One of these has to do with the new irrigation water fees discussed below. First it is necessary to gauge Mayo reactions to both the charges for local development projects, and the patronage system that was set up to mobilize ejido communities.

The CRF’s ability to control the development plans of the Fuerte Valley helped reveal the fact that communities with access to political power had a better chance of receiving tangible benefits from this state agency. For some Mayo villages there was perhaps a social cost to obtaining such assistance. Mayo elder Mauricio Mejías of Huepaco explained that,

The CRF helped some Mayos by providing potable water, drainage, electricity, schools, housing, and sporting facilities. But this also led to these villages losing their indigenous identity. The CRF only set these facilities up in mixed villages that were no longer strictly Indian. As they used these technologies with Yoris, Yoremes slowly lost their cultural identity. All ejidos got charged fees by the CRF, but the ejidos made up of Yoris received much more than us. A school was constructed in our ejido but that was all we received. Ejidos need to create development projects in order to receive benefits. There are other ejidos that have better vision than us. These ejidos proposed projects and got what they wanted.

\(^{16}\) Barkin and King, 113.
Constancia and Charay for instance are large ejidos that have people involved in politics. That is why they received more. In small ejidos like ours, we have only 45 ejidatarios. We have to work all day to survive. We do not have time to be in politics, so we received very little from the CRF. It is also because we are all Yoremes and have a harder time dealing with the state than Yoris. We need to try harder to leverage the resource institutions that have control of water.\(^\text{17}\)

Some Mayos like Mejías made a connection between material survival and indigenous identity. He believed that common use of facilities with Yoris led to the deterioration of Mayo cultural identity. This is an individual’s personal perception and judgement of who was classified as Mayo. A community member’s notions have some bearing, an individual’s own perception of their indigenousness was equally important. The CRF’s control over local resources may or may not have contributed to the deterioration of Mayo cultural identity in the Fuerte Valley.

Equally relevant to understanding the CRF’s effect on Mayo communities was Mejías’ statement regarding political patronage. Just as certain individuals were able to adapt to the vast changes within the Fuerte Valley, whole villages became more adept at aligning with state agencies such as the CRF than others. In this case Mayos had less time to dedicate to political pursuits which left them at a disadvantage. Mayos were also forced to overcome cultural and linguistic barriers in order to appeal to Yori functionaries.

The success of some ejidos to align with the CRF more than others has been overlooked by some scholars. For instance, Manuel Carlos asserted that,

The CRF recognizes the special needs of the ejidatario and works to meet them through its Department of Ejido Affairs. This department coordinates all ejido community improvement projects and gives ejidatarios an established channel of access and communication with the agency and its top-level decision-makers.\(^\text{18}\)

The establishment of this Ejido Affairs Agency indicated the CRF’s attempts to encourage ejidatario participation in local development. The drawback to this approach was that some


\(^{18}\) Carlos, Manuel, 19.
ejidos, especially those with larger populations, had significantly more success in engaging with state functionaries to improve their village’s prospects. With generally less schooling, fluency in Spanish, and political experience, Mayos were left at a disadvantage.

Some Mayo ejidos were able to align with postrevolutionary state agencies to gain such benefits as access to canals and pumps in the 1920s through 1940s. By the mid-1950s Mayo ejidatarios had a more difficult time building political clout and designing elaborate community improvement initiatives. Part of the problem was that in the past Mayos simply applied for such benefits as irrigation access, and when granted, indigenous leaders distributed resources as they saw fit. This new system of political patronage gave state agencies more power to make decisions within these Mayo communities, resulting in indigenous people’s hesitancy to relinquish such control.

The creation of the Ejido Affairs Agency indicated that the CRF recognized the specific needs of ejidatarios and looked to address these concerns, which was not always the case. As ejidatarios, Mayos found themselves as members of a social class and political alliance alongside Yoris. Manuel Carlos argued that in the Fuerte Valley, “its rural populations have a tradition of pressuring government agencies for benefits, and there is a relatively long history of peasant political involvement in ejido and ejidatario regional organizations.”19 Carlos did point out that there were varying levels of political participation and mobilization among ejidos, but he did not stress that it was mostly Yori and mixed ejidos that received tangible benefits from the CRF in the 1950s and 1960s.

An equally important omission by Carlos was the fact that while some ejidos were able to gain irrigation concessions during these two decades, such access was granted largely to Yori farmers. Mayo ejidatarios lost irrigation access while they were simultaneously given the

19 Ibid, 12.
opportunity to participate in local development decisions. Indigenous ejidatarios’ lack of political clout and resources left them at a disadvantage in comparison to Yori counterparts. These rural benefits were likely offered to ejidatarios as a way to appease the more politically active sectors while preventing those without power from addressing the fact that they no longer had access to irrigation water.

Another vital change made by the CRF was the new charges it imposed for irrigation water. Mayo views and interaction with the CRF in the 1950s and 1960s can best be understood by the diminished access to canals. Mayo elder Alejandro Inzunza of Los Goros claimed that,

Before the creation of the CRF we made deals with Yoris, trading a percentage of our crop to get irrigation water. Things changed when the CRF took over. It started selling the water at a high price. Some of us Yoremes established a contract with the CRF to use water for ten years on our ejidal lands. We bought the water for twenty pesos per hectare, which was affordable. But as governments changed over and over, the price increased. I only irrigated my crops until 1960 because I could not afford it after that. Yoremes no longer had the means to use irrigation water, only the Yoris. So like the rest of the Yoremes here, I rented my land to Yoris and started working in the fields for them.20

By the time the CRF took charge as the administrators of irrigation water from the Fuerte River in the mid-1950s most Mayo villages had lost access to canals and pumps. For the Mayo villages that maintained irrigation rights into the 1950s, the CRF’s control of water and increased prices presented yet another obstacle.

The Mayo ejido of Los Goros had a long history of accessing the Fuerte River through the use of pumps and canals. Records from the Ministry of Water Management confirm that Los Goros (individualists), and some other mixed ejidos still had access to the water from the Camayeca aqueduct in 1949.21 If the ejidatarios of Los Goros were able to maintain access to

21 March 28, 1949, AHA, Aguas Nacionales, Expediente 17668, Caja 1314.
this aqueduct by the mid-1950s, this explains how these Mayo ejidatarios simply just bought the water from the CRF without having to apply for a new concession.

Barkin and King pointed out that ejidatarios were charged a 100 peso annual fee for irrigation water. According to Inzunza there was an additional irrigation fee of twenty pesos per hectare at first, and that this price increased throughout the years. It appears that this ejidatario came to a reasonable agreement with the CRF in the mid-1950s on a ten year water concession, but the terms of the deal were changed by 1960. Few Mayo ejidatarios were able to access irrigation water into the mid-1950s. The exorbitant prices that accompanied such a luxury became just too much for them to handle. Eventually a large number of Mayos illegally rented out ejidal lands to Yoris and joined the majority of their indigenous brethren as laborers. These Mayo experiences of dispossession were however not universal in the Fuerte Valley, as this chapter reveals a multitude of reactions to the loss of irrigation water access.

**CRF Construction Projects and the Miguel Hidalgo Dam as a Case Study**

The Fuerte River Commission immediately assumed responsibility for the hydraulic construction projects of the Fuerte Valley in 1951. The strategies implemented by the CRF led to significant changes in agricultural production in the Fuerte Valley. For instance, between 1955 and 1965, annual profits from crop production increased from 150 million to 750 million pesos. From the early 1950s to 1970, irrigated farmland increased from 40,000 to 250,000 hectares.\(^\text{22}\) These advancements in agricultural output speak to the CRF’s success in expanding irrigated properties and creating efficient farmlands. Such achievements however do not account for the social, cultural, or economic effects on indigenous ejidatarios. In theory the CRF’s centralization of power was aimed at mobilizing all sectors of society through the increased distribution of

\(^\text{22}\) Ibid, 13, 18
irrigation water. The result was often the dispossession of ejidatario farm land and irrigation water as it changed hands to large land owners.

Mayos found themselves increasingly under the employment of Yoris, making it easier for many of them to attribute their marginalized status to the actions of the CRF. In the Fuerte Valley today there is a general feeling among Mayos that the CRF’s work only contributed to the growing wealth of local elites. Felicitas Mejía, a Mayo elder from Vinaterias described that,

The CRF did a lot to boost the local economy. But for Yoremes the CRF mostly kept making promises to us, but it was just lying. It is untrue that its actions benefitted the poor. The CRF constructed dams and canals but these were only for the rich. It did nothing for or us Yoreme farmers. The CRF never gave us irrigation water. 23

This interview detailed some of the CRF’s economic achievements but also provided a very negative view of its effects on Mayo communities. Most elders seem to subscribe to the notion that the CRF assisted a limited number of Mayo ejidatarios who were tied into political networks.

The type of hydraulic apparatuses erected in the mid-1950s and 1960s and the process by which such structures were built reveal that the CRF’s developmentalist agenda gave priority to large land owners while marginalizing both Yori and Mayo ejidatarios. The best way to analyze the effects of the CRF’s hydrological construction projects on Mayo communities is to focus on the most ambitious project during the 1950s, the Miguel Hidalgo Dam. The construction of this massive dam resulted in two major obstacles for ejidatarios in the area, land dispossession and flooding.

The Miguel Hidalgo Dam was built near the ejido El Mahone in the Northeastern corner of the municipality of El Fuerte, which is why it was originally known as the El Mahone Dam.

The dam’s geographical coordinates are 26° 30' 0" North, 108° 34' 0" West. The erection of the Miguel Hidalgo Dam simultaneously created the state of Sinaloa’s largest water reservoir. The reservoir runs northeast of the dam and the water of the reservoir swallowed up small farmer properties including twelve ejidos in the municipality of Choix.

The Miguel Hidalgo Dam was completed in 1956, at which time the CRF published a pamphlet explaining the structure’s uses and how it would benefit the people of the Fuerte Valley. The brochure explained the purpose of the dam was to irrigate 230,000 hectares of farmland, generate electric energy, control the river floods, help develop aquatic fauna, grant water rights to some communities, and for recreational purposes.\textsuperscript{24} There were undoubtedly massive economic benefits the construction of the dam brought to the Fuerte Valley. The construction of the Miguel Hidalgo Dam, like the majority of the hydraulic infrastructure projects initiated by the CRF, led to generally negative consequences for Mayo communities.

The actual construction of the Miguel Hidalgo Dam did not begin until 1953, but this project was an enormous undertaking that took several years to plan. As early as the mid-1940s, dam experts were dispatched to the Fuerte Valley to commence the preliminary stages of designing a massive dam on the upper Fuerte River. Many of the engineers and scientists who consulted in the planning and construction of the Miguel Hidalgo Dam were from the U.S. Mexican water historian Luis Aboites explained that the National Irrigation Commission of Mexico (CNI) contracted American engineers based on their expertise and also because The CNI designated assistants to work side by side with these American engineers, with the idea that this work experience would transmit to the Mexican engineers’ knowledge and training in the construction of large irrigation works. For example, in the Conchos project the man

\textsuperscript{24} 1956, AHA, Consultivo Técnico, Expediente 6799, Caja 702.
responsible for construction was Max L. King, who had worked with the military engineer G.W. Goethals in the building of the Panama Canal, and the resident engineer was Andrew Weiss.\textsuperscript{25} Within the thousands of pages of blueprints, photographs, and studies performed by consultants on the Miguel Hidalgo Dam, the names Max King and Andrew Weiss appeared more than anyone else. These American engineers gained a reputation among Mexican officials as the top specialists in their field. The Ministry of Water Resources and CRF spared no expense in bringing them in to direct the construction of the Miguel Hidalgo Dam.

One of the striking features of the many documents generated by the hydraulic experts in the planning of the Miguel Hidalgo Dam was their incredible attention to detail. Along with the hydraulic engineers brought in to supervise the construction of the dam, scientists were also contracted to survey the natural landscape and determine the most convenient, economically efficient, and structurally sound location to place the dam. The rigorous detail of these scientists’ reports can be understood by looking at some of the findings of geologist Paul Waitz in 1947 in the upper Fuerte River. Waitz described that,

\begin{quote}
The zone which inspires less confidence is the one of the slope of the Mahone mountain where we have resting on the fast dipping surface of the formation strongly folded sericitic slates and therefore by itself propensed to slidings even in sound state a cover of detritus material of the same slates, in part compact but lubricated by clayey substances and in part broken and crushed with open insterstices mixed with layers and pockets of loose sands and gravels of the Baucarit formation.\textsuperscript{26}
\end{quote}

The thousands of pages of reports submitted by scientists in the planning of the Miguel Hidalgo Dam showed the immense focus on the natural landscape. Dam planners attempted to utilize rock formations and the layout of the Fuerte Valley to maximize the potential of the natural landscape as they converted a portion of it into an artificial apparatus. These surveys also


\textsuperscript{26} March 20, 1947, AHA, Consultivo Técnico, Expediente 7237, Caja 751

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indicated the number of hours dedicated to erecting a technologically advanced dam in an underdeveloped country engaged in massive development projects.

Dam experts and state functionaries devoted endless hours planning the construction of the Miguel Hidalgo Dam. Far less time was spent preparing for how the building of this structure would affect the local populations it geographically displaced. The pamphlet published by the CRF in 1956 stated that,

Because of the dispossession of lands of some of the inhabitants that lived in the vessel [where the dam water is stored], the CRF has had to make difficult decisions, consisting of evicting, rearranging, and providing these people defined economic means. The Commission bought the necessary land to provide each family head with a plot to ensure their subsistence. In addition it paid relocation costs of these villages to new towns and endowed them with water services, medical services, schools, etc. As well there were severance payments made for necessary construction.\(^\text{27}\)

This pamphlet indicated that farmers dispossessed of their lands due to the building of the dam were justly compensated with irrigated properties and services. The process of relocating and reimbursing these affected farmers was much more complicated than the pamphlet suggested.

Construction workers put the finishing touches on the Miguel Hidalgo Dam in 1956, while the CRF was still settling land issues with displaced communities. In the year prior to the dam’s completion, a group of small farmers and ejidatarios joined forces to seek political redress regarding the dam’s negative effects. The Committee of Ejidatarios and Small Property Farmers Affected by the Vessel of the Miguel Hidalgo Dam sent a letter to the Secretary to the President of Mexico in January of 1955 relating that,

It has been three months since we exposed to you the great problem we are facing. There are 1080 ejidatarios and 1396 small farmers who will lose our land to the construction of the Miguel Hidalgo Dam. We surveyed the lands purchased by the CRF to be granted to us [consisting of 5,700 hectares of largely salinated land]. CRF representatives told us that these are all the lands they can offer, declaring

\(^{27}\) 1956, AHA, Consultivo Técnico, Expediente 6799, Caja 702.
that we have always been willing to accept any property within the irrigation area and meeting the basic characteristics of planting…Each ejidatario will be granted 10 hectares. Some of that land will come from the ejidos Las Vacas and Bachoco. The lands must be within the irrigation zone and must be ready for planting.\textsuperscript{28}

The CRF was willing to work with the farmers affected by the construction of the Miguel Hidalgo Dam, yet the former appeared to be less flexible than the latter had hoped for. The farmers were unwilling to accept just any irrigated properties, the lands needed to be fit for raising crops. If the CRF was willing to grant ten hectares a piece to the 1,080 ejidatarios, this would have amounted to over 10,000 hectares of farmland, which does not include additional lands to be distributed to the small property owners.\textsuperscript{29} The nearly 6,000 hectares described in this petition would not have been nearly enough to distribute ten hectares to each ejidatario.

What is equally fascinating about this letter is the mention that additional lands were to be confiscated from the Las Vacas and Bachoco ejidatarios. In addition to these two ejidos, among the twelve ejidos to be relocated, it is certain that Agua Zarca, Los Picachos, Agua Caliente, and Baca had Mayo ejidatarios as members. These fourteen soon to be displaced ejidos consisted of both Yori and Mayo ejidatarios. The socio-cultural implications of dividing Mayo and Yori ejidatarios from their ejidal lands were not discussed in any of the documentation I encountered.

Several Mayos who became ejidatarios in the mid to late 1930s gained usufruct rights to the lands they had inhabited for generations. In some of these cases indigenous ejidatario relationships to the natural landscape, river, and raw materials used for religious ceremonies

\textsuperscript{28} The number of ejidatarios and small property owners affected by the dam’s construction were agreed upon by various state agencies including the CRF as well as the committee of farmers. January 31, 1955, AGN, Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, 508.1/207.

\textsuperscript{29} A chart showing the amount of land affected by the dam’s construction indicate that there was a lot of crossover between those designated as ejidatarios and small property owners, but there were some small property owners who were not ejidatarios. January 31, 1955, AGN, Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, 508.1/207.
were not drastically changed as a result of land reform. Some Mayos relocated to other regions of the Fuerte Valley in order to become ejidatarios, yet they were still able to forge relationships to the natural landscape in their new homes in the nearly twenty years since accepting dotaciones. Mayo and Yori farmers often approached the natural landscape in divergent ways, yet these soon to be displaced indigenous ejidatarios chose to align with mestizo neighbors in the mid-1950s in order to receive the best land possible.

The construction of the Miguel Hidalgo Dam physically displaced some ejidatarios. It also altered the natural landscape and Mayos’ long-running use of the local flora and fauna. Dam construction destroyed sacred religious sites and endangered indigenous cultural autonomy. Mayos still perform religious ceremonies today in such ejidos as Agua Zarca, Los Picachos, Agua Caliente, and Baca, suggesting that displaced indigenous ejidatarios still found a way to keep these traditions alive in their new locations. It is unclear exactly how the relocation of these Mayo ejidatarios affected the symbolic relationship with the river specifically. The choice of villagers to not point out their specific rights to the land and water as indigenous people in petitions to the state was likely a consequence of their determination that joining Yoris in the struggle as ejidatarios would garner more success.

The willingness of the Mexican state and specifically the CRF to relocate farmers and provide them with irrigated properties suggested a certain level of compassion and compromise on behalf of the commission. The CRF’s inflexibility and roadblocks it placed in the way of farmers showed that they viewed ejidatarios as obstacles to its goal of constructing the Miguel Hidalgo Dam, rather than people who depended on the land for survival. Three weeks after the farmers sent their first petition to the president’s secretary, they followed it up with another which described the intransigent nature of the CRF,
Up to this date NOT A SINGLE STEP HAS BEEN TAKEN TO SOLVING OUR PROBLEM. On the contrary, these gentlemen of the CRF have been causing serious agitation. We do not really understand their purpose. It is incomprehensible that these officials themselves are determined to discredit our government. We hope that it is possible that the President of the Republic can send a representative. By obtaining information and communicating to you the exact reality of developing events, we can get these people to act in a responsible and dignified manner.30

The wording of this letter was quite strategic. In the tradition of previous petitions submitted by ejidatarios of the Fuerte Valley, the writer attempted to question the allegiance of these state functionaries to the Mexican state. The direct appeal to the president asked him to hold the state-backed agency accountable for failures.

The displaced famers successfully allied to negotiate the terms of relocation while the CRF held fast to its limited offer. Documents produced by the CRF in the 1980s recalled the final outcome of this resettlement process, which described that,

To compensate individuals affected by this hydraulic work, the Ministry of Water Resources and CRF purchased 3,343 hectares in the Fuerte Valley. They used this to compensate twelve ejidos affected by the Miguel Hidalgo Dam’s construction… During the years since the closing of the dam’s curtain, periodically there have been various land claims. We assigned to their leaders irrigated land as compensation. But in most cases those who applied for land grants were not individuals whose properties were affected by the dam.31

This document showed that the farmers’ demands of ten hectares per ejidatario were nowhere near what were actually rewarded to them by the CRF. Based on the number of ejidatarios (1,080) displaced by the dam’s construction, it appears that the number of hectares awarded as compensation amounted to just over three hectares per ejidatario. It is unclear if any of these 1,080 ejidatarios were among those who received land compensation by petitioning the state after the dam’s construction was complete.

After the dam was finished in 1956, the President of Mexico continued to receive complaints regarding the ejidatarios who were affected. These displaced farmers were able to rally support for their cause from other ejidatarios and local politicians. For instance, on March 28, 1957 the Municipal Presidents of both Choix and El Fuerte sent separate telegrams asking for an audience with the Mexican President to discuss the problem of farmer relocation that the construction of the Miguel Hidalgo Dam had caused. These telegrams suggested that the CRF still had not solved the land problem for the displaced farmers by the time the dam’s construction was completed. Political pressure by these outside voices helped the displaced farmers attain irrigated lands, although the number of hectares they received was not nearly as much as they hoped for.

Similar telegrams were also sent on March 28th by executive ejidal committee presidents of the Mayo ejidos Jahuara and Tehueco. These telegrams asked the Mexican President to, “please grant our request to intervene on behalf of our friends affected by the building of the Miguel Hidalgo Dam.” The receipt of the four telegrams on the same day suggested that this was a coordinated effort likely orchestrated by the leaders of the Committee of Ejidatarios and Small Property Farmers Affected by the Vessel of the Miguel Hidalgo Dam.

The ejidos Jahuara and Tehueco are situated at least thirty kilometers southwest of the dam so its construction likely did not affect their land rights directly. The submission of the telegram expressed growing Mayo concerns over other ejidatarios losing land at the expense of the construction of large hydrological structures. Flooding became a problem for some Mayo villages located on the banks of the river after the construction of the dam. It is likely that leaders

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of Tehueco and Jahuara would have complained of flooding if this was the primary reason why they disapproved of the dam.

The main issue regarding the construction of the Miguel Hidalgo Dam was the hypocrisy exhibited by the CRF. This state-backed commission consulted numerous experts and took great labor in planning and executing the physical construction of the dam. As much effort was put into denying displaced farmers the quality land and quantity of hectares necessary for them to start over in new locations. The CRF did in fact relocate these dispossessed ejidatarios and provided them with irrigated land tracts. The approach of this state-backed commission indicated that it viewed these farmers more as obstacles to its developmentalist strategies rather than peers to confide in and assist in the hydraulic planning of the Fuerte Valley.

How Floods also Affected Mayo Perceptions of the CRF

The CRF’s social programs and construction of dams and canals played integral roles in the lives of Mayos in the 1950s and 1960s. I pointed out earlier in this chapter how the dams and canals built in the mid-twentieth century benefitted Yori land owners and not Mayo ejidatarios. This led most Mayos to perceive Yoris and state agencies such as the CRF as the same entity. Destruction by floods as a consequence of the canals and dams built by the CRF in the 1950s and 1960s also led Mayos to develop a sense of hostility toward the Mexican state, Yori farmers, and the agencies which did their bidding.

The vast changes centering on the expansion of canals and dams that state agencies such as the CRF initiated in the Fuerte Valley led some Mayos to believe that Yoris adopted an inefficient approach to natural resources. Mayo elder Jorge Robles of San Miguel argued that,

What I disagree with is how Yoris have always wanted to dominate nature. We can see this with their use of dams. For example they said in 1943 that with dams
we were not going to have any more flooding. Not long after we had a flood because there was only one major dam at that time. In 1960 we had two huge dams in place, but it still flooded. We know now that the flood in 1960 was caused because the new Hidalgo Dam was not tall enough. It was about twenty meters too short for it to be completely effective.  

Robles made an important point in highlighting Yori attempts to control nature, which contrasted with the idea of nature as part of the social compact to be protected. One of the defined purposes of the construction of the Miguel Hidalgo Dam was the control of flooding in the Fuerte Valley. Ironically, hydraulic engineering projects such as the installation of large dams as Miguel Hidalgo made the flooding of the Fuerte River more erratic. The flood of 1960 exposed the fact that Yoris and state agencies faced obstacles in taming the same river that they used to create massive levels of wealth disparity.

Mayos had always hoped for rain and even performed ceremonies to request precipitation from nature. After the CRF directed the construction of dams and canals, too much rain led to massive damage of crops and homes. In essence the reconfiguration of the Fuerte Valley into a major agricultural region made it a perfect target for floods. Mayo elder Gustavo Aguilar explained that,

These days everyone, especially Mayo ejidatarios, are glad when it rains because they depend on it to grow crops. Rain fills the reservoir of the dam and there are no destructive floods. In the years after the Yoris created the Hidalgo Dam and all of these canals, it would flood when it rained too much. Those living by the river would get inundated and suffered the most. We were members of these same communities that used to rely on the expected annual overflow of the river. Because of the Yoris, the river transformed from creator to destroyer. The flood in 1960 was bad. For fifteen days our village was flooded with water. It ruined all the crops and treated us very badly. We were forced to flee and live up on a hill.

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During the 1920s through mid-1950s, Mayo villagers had an advantage if they lived along the banks of the Fuerte River, because it gave them better access to irrigation water. The flooding caused by structures built by the CRF exposed the vulnerability of indigenous villagers living close to the river. Mayo villages were forced to adjust to the Yori modification of the natural landscape within the context of their varying geographical locations.

The new dams and canals caused floods when it rained, but some Mayos continued to call for precipitation through their performance of religious rituals such as the Yuco Conti that I described in chapter five. One reason for the necessity of such ceremonies was because the rain that fell on their crops was only partially responsible for causing floods. Water also overflowed the banks of the Fuerte River due to heavy precipitation in the Sierra Madre Mountains of Chihuahua, where the river began. The villages that paid dancers, musicians, and holy men to conduct such rituals were likely those located further away from the banks of the river, and less negatively affected by flooding than others. The range of Mayo reactions to the hydrological restructuring of the Fuerte Valley in the mid-twentieth century highlighted multiple river histories. There is less worry about flooding today, as compared to the 1960s, as rainwater irrigates crops and the three major dams prevent major inundations.

Several Mayos today believe that Yori insistence on controlling natural resources in the mid-twentieth century often led to the river revolting against these plans. The river did not discriminate in who it punished for trying to control it. In fact Mayos, whose existence as farmers tied them to the land, often had more to lose than Yoris. Mayo elder Oralia Flores of Pochotal explained that,

The Yoris wanted to get rich and that made life hard on us. They built canals and dams and those brought floods. We suffered because of their greed. But thank God the floods did not hurt our family and friends. We saw the river swell and we prayed for the survival of our people, crops, and animals. Cows, chickens, horses,
and dogs drowned in the flood but what could we do? After these floods there was a higher incidence of mud and dead animals. This brought more diseases. When the river finally dried we would see the dead cows and horses that contaminated the water, they also produced infection and disease. The floods also caused us to lose a lot of crops.36

The reciprocal connection to the Fuerte River, in which Mayos repaid the gifts the river provided, was altered in some villages by destructive flooding. The river used to be their friend, a non-human entity that gave them irrigation water, fish, knowledge, and helped them understand nature better. In some villages like Pochotal, Mayos turned to God to help control this destructive force that ruined crops, killed animals, and contaminated the water and land.

In addition to water contamination and crop destruction, the creation of the CRF’s dams and canals also directly, and indirectly, made Mayo religious practices more difficult to conduct. Mayo elder Carla Bacosegua of La Florida described how,

The CRF constructed a canal near our ejido in the 1960s. Unfortunately it was not made very sturdily. Eventually part of the canal burst open and released water. It flooded our ejido and the water destroyed one of the walls of our ceremonial center. They should have at least apologized or helped us fix it.37

The irrigation construction projects initiated by the CRF usually left indigenous communities out of the equation. In some cases the commissions’ structures separated Mayos from the river and its shores, making it more difficult to carry out religious ceremonies. In this particular case the CRF’s negligence literally ruined a Mayo religious ceremonial center.

This incident can be viewed as a metaphor for the relationship that developed between the CRF and some Mayo communities in the 1950s and 1960s. Economic growth came as a result of private investors collaborating with the CRF to construct dams, canals, and aqueducts throughout the Fuerte Valley. The distribution of resources the CRF provided Mayo

communities under their development programs was often uneven and at times negative. The hydraulic based development projects initiated by private investors and backed by the CRF limited Mayo access to the Fuerte River and natural landscape, indirectly making it more difficult to perform religious ceremonies. In La Florida a canal constructed by the CRF damaged a Mayo ceremonial center, directly infringing on their cultural rights to enact traditions. The CRF’s developmentalist agenda therefore both directly and indirectly placed significant obstacles in the path of Mayos attempting to retain their religious ceremonies and cultural autonomy.

The Green Revolution and Anti-Malaria Campaigns in the Fuerte Valley

The state’s developmentalist agenda was in full swing in the Fuerte Valley by the mid-1950s. Most farmers began growing crops to either export, or sell to other regions within Mexico. Competition sparked the need for farmers to seek advantages as they found ways to best utilize their land and agricultural implements. This trend toward large scale farming therefore resulted in the increased usage of pesticides, fertilizers, insecticides, and irrigation water. These agricultural techniques that relied more heavily on synthetic materials to boost crop production reflected a trend throughout Mexico known as the “Green Revolution”.

The Green Revolution started in Mexico in the 1940s but did not gain prominence in the Fuerte Valley until the mid-1950s. The power of the SICAE and its leaders’ inability to integrate these new agricultural techniques led to this delay. The growing power of large landowners in northern Sinaloa worked in unison with Green Revolution farming to increase crop productivity from the mid-1950s through the 1960s. The increased use of synthetic materials and irrigation water arguably played a role in the Fuerte Valley’s rise to prominence as one of the top agricultural producing regions of Mexico, but the side effects on the natural landscape and water
sources were devastating. Uses of Green Revolution techniques also helped Mayos to confirm
the divergence in the way Yoris approached the natural landscape.

The Green Revolution in Mexico largely centered on the treatment of the soil using
perceived technologically advanced techniques. Historian Angus Wright described the process as
one in which,

Mexican soils were held to be rich in most nutrients but chronically poor in
nitrogen. The Haber-Bosch process and the availability of commercially produced
ammonia fertilizers were the solution. ‘Improved’ crop varieties would be
designed to maximize nitrogen uptake. This would require abundant and reliable
water delivery that could only be had by the great expansion of irrigated acreages
through dams that would supply water to what were regarded as virtually empty
frontiers of lowland and desert land.38

The efficacy of ammonia fertilizers was therefore tied to farmers’ ability to access large amounts
of irrigation water. The massive growth and proliferation of canals, dams, and aqueducts
throughout the Fuerte Valley created the perfect opportunity for local farmers to combine the use
of ammonia fertilizers with an abundance of irrigation water. Such uses of cutting edge
agricultural techniques fit well with both state functionary and large scale farmer notions of
modernity and progress.

The attitude of farmers and state agencies toward the Green Revolution notwithstanding,
these types of agricultural techniques apparently had harmful effects on soil. Some scholars
today have very critical attitudes regarding the outcome of the Green Revolution. For instance,
Historian Lane Simonian argued that,

The Green Revolution itself contributed to Mexico’s agricultural woes by
showcasing a new system of farming that was based on the heavy use of chemical
inputs and extensive irrigation. In northwestern Mexico, the ‘home’ of the Green
Revolution, thirsty crops, such as alfalfa and cotton, depleted ground water
supplies. Poor drainage techniques produced waterlogged and saline soils
incapable of supporting agriculture. The delivery of cheap water encouraged the

38 Wright, “Downslope and North” A Land Between Waters, 35.
wasteful use of that precious resource. The excessive use of fertilizers burned the soils, killing microorganisms that break down organic material into a form usable by plants.\textsuperscript{39}

Heavy use of fertilizers probably degraded the soil for many farmers in the Fuerte Valley, when its intent was to make it more productive. Such inefficiency brings into question the notion that the use of the latest technologies, in this case the heavy use of ammonia fertilizers, were responsible for the success of agriculture in the Fuerte Valley. The negative effects of Green Revolution agricultural techniques on soils did not prevent farmers from dramatically increasing agricultural output in the Fuerte Valley. This meant that farmers in this region learned how to best manage these methods in order to become successful.

I must also clarify that although irrigation water had become readily available to farmers of the Fuerte Valley, Simonian’s description of water as “cheap” was relative. For Yori farmers who made fortunes in the Fuerte Valley, the cost of water was a drop in the bucket. I described in both chapter five and earlier in this chapter, that the rising costs of irrigation water actually priced out a large number of both Yori and Mayo ejidatarios, who often found no other alternative but to rent out their ejidal lands and become laborers.

Simonian did raise a significant point about water waste. Irrigation water came under the control of large landowners and it was more difficult for these large scale operations to monitor every hectare. For some of these wealthy landowners, overuse of water and the resultant ruin of a few hectares was not optimal but also not devastating. Ejidatarios were not necessarily more efficient irrigation water users, but excessive use had the potential for more damaging effects to their livelihood.

\textsuperscript{39} Simonian, \textit{Defending the Land of the Jaguar}, 171.
Mayo ejidatarios who resisted the temptation of renting out ejidal lands usually found Green Revolution agriculture techniques too expensive. Some Mayo elders even argued that this new approach to the land helped them to distinguish between Yori and indigenous farmers.

Mayo elder Alejandro Inzunza of Los Goros recalled that,

> Yoremes did not use fertilizers. We were lucky if we had irrigation water because that would help us produce a lot of crops. We had such a strong history and connection to our land that we knew how to make it work for us. Yoris wanted to sell their crops and get rich, so irrigation alone could only go so far. They started to feel the need to inject their soil. Those chemicals were like plant penicillin to make both the land and crops stronger and produce more. But this change in agriculture worried Yoremes a lot. Yoris probably had a vision that using these fertilizers would improve the life and situation of all farmers, even for the Yoremes. That was part of their reasoning for the change. But it just made things worse for us. Chemical use poisoned the water and ruined the land. But that is what Yoris do. They destroy everything to get rich.\(^{40}\)

Inzunza raised an important issue in pointing out that Yoris likely wanted to improve the situation of all farmers by using these new agricultural strategies. Preceding developmental strategies, enacted by the SICAE and the CRF for instance, also professed their good intentions. In most cases such projects did not have the best results for Mayos. In this case, the farmlands and waterways of the Fuerte Valley became contaminated by the overuse of fertilizers and pesticides.

The Green Revolution resulted in farmers’ increased use of fertilizers, which led to a growing reliance on pesticides. Angus Wright explained the need for pesticides during the Green Revolution in stating that, “the greater mass of plant material produced more densely in a more humid soil and field environment could be expected to attract more plant diseases and insect pests. This would require more use of the newly available synthetic pesticides.”\(^{41}\)

\(^{40}\) Alejandro Inzunza, Interview by James Mestaz, Los Goros, Municip. Ahome, Sinaloa, Mexico, February, 14, 2014.
\(^{41}\) Wright, 37; Stakman, Bradfield and Mangelsdorf, *Campaigns Against Hunger*, esp. chaps. 5 and 9.
plant diseases, both of which triggered the use of pesticides. The negative effects of using such chemical pesticides as DDT (dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane) were numerous in the Fuerte Valley.

The Mexican state encouraged large-scale farmers of the Fuerte Valley to use fertilizers, pesticides, and even herbicides, yet there was no regulation of such practices early on. Some farmers and state functionaries started to express a concern for the usage of herbicides in the early 1960s. A report in the daily Los Mochis newspaper *El Debate* in 1960 argued that herbicides harmed crops, and that, “it also emulsifies with water from canals that irrigate farmlands. The effects of herbicides can last up to three years.” The presence of this article suggested that the notion that chemical farming implements could harm soil, crops, and water supplies was at least public knowledge by the early 1960s.

Another explanation for the continued popularity of such pesticides as DDT was to control diseases such as malaria. The increase of crops and waterways such as dams and canals increased the number of pests like mosquitos to the Fuerte Valley that transmitted such dangerous diseases as malaria. Malaria never spread on a grand scale in northern Sinaloa, yet the use of DDT in this region showed how mother-nature sometimes had a skill for interrupting development plans.

Historian Timothy Mitchell described a process by which human directed economic development led to the agency of non-human actors. Mosquitos in Egypt multiplied thanks to the proliferation of irrigation works and changed patterns of water use. Dam construction of the Fuerte Valley, as in Egypt, was a means to control the non-human. Mitchell argued that the non-human, “shape a variety of social processes, sometimes according to human plans, but just as

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often not, or at least not quite.\textsuperscript{43} Just as the construction of hydraulic technology such as dams resulted in the river rebelling through an increase in destructive floods, this developmentalist agenda of the Fuerte Valley created the conditions that helped bring more mosquitos and malaria.

The spread of infectious diseases such as malaria became a concern in Mexico in the mid-twentieth century, leading to state action. Some state agencies tied the prevention of infectious diseases such as malaria to larger health campaigns throughout the country. Historian Stephanie Baker Opperman described that Mexican health officials looked to establish new connections with indigenous communities in three ways,

- First, they hoped to improve relations with groups of people who had grown to mistrust government officials...
- Second, health officials wanted to understand local languages and customs in order to communicate more effectively with community members...
- Third, given the lack of available state resources for health initiatives, healthcare workers needed collaborations with local groups to offset their limited personnel and budget.\textsuperscript{44}

The experience of public health efforts in the Fuerte Valley of the mid-1950s through 1960s were quite different from those described by Baker Opperman in the Tepalcatepec region of Michoacán in the 1950s. Such agencies as the Indigenous Improvement Brigades did have some success in bringing needed health care to Mayo communities in the 1960s, but a level of distrust toward state officials remained, limiting the efficacy of these campaigns.

Varying levels of trust may have been due in part to the major differences in the indigenous mobilization strategies of the local development commissions of these two regions. The Tepalcatepec Commission organized efforts for health workers to learn indigenous dialects and collaborate with local groups. The Fuerte River Commission remained a top-down agency

\textsuperscript{43} Mitchell, \textit{Rule of Experts}, 30.

\textsuperscript{44} Opperman, Stephanie Baker, "Modernization and Rural Health in Mexico," \textit{Endeavour}, 47.
that did not coordinate large scale health campaigns or encourage workers to learn the Mayo language in order to mobilize local indigenous communities.

Unlike the spread of malaria in Egypt that caused millions of deaths, the disease was not particularly acute in the Fuerte Valley. In fact statistics produced by the INI showed that Mayos of the Fuerte Valley had much fewer incidents of severe diseases such as malaria, cholera, or tuberculosis than other indigenous groups throughout Mexico.\footnote{INI, \textit{Riesgos y Desastres Naturales}, 47.} Low numbers of malaria cases, along with the inability of the Fuerte River Commission and other state agencies to mobilize rural and indigenous populations may help explain why a national malaria campaign took so long to reach the Fuerte Valley.

The relatively low number of malaria cases in the Fuerte Valley notwithstanding, control of the disease was tied to a national campaign started by President Adolfo Ruiz Cortínez (1958-64). Mayo elder Henrique Riestra of Cachoana recalled both the negative and positive aspects of this campaign,

\begin{quote}
I remember well the malaria education campaign started by President Ruiz Cortínez. He and members of his cabinet traveled around the Fuerte Valley in a few vehicles we called ‘Bugis.’ They informed all the people here about the malaria disease and the problems it caused. They also brought workers who sprayed every house with DDT. There was an almost disappearance of the mosquito which were the producers of malaria. By the 1960s malaria was eradicated here. The downside to this DDT spraying was that it caused diseases in Yoremes such as cancer, skin infections, skin burns, skin blackening. DDT was also damaging to food, killing the crops and poisoning water.\footnote{Henrique Riestra, Interview by James Mestaz, Cachoana, Municip. Ahome, Sinaloa, Mexico, March 10, 2014.}
\end{quote}

State officials attempted to control the river by building dams and canals, and the soil and plants by adding chemicals to them. The river retaliated by causing floods and collaborated with the soil and plants to bring malaria spreading mosquitoes. State functionaries had to compensate for
the mosquitos through the use of DDT in the Fuerte Valley, but some residents developed other diseases as a result from the use of the chemical.

The use of DDT to combat malaria-carrying mosquitos was not confined to the Fuerte Valley, as Mexican state officials heavily endorsed its use in the 1940s and 1950s. Angus Wright described how DDT emerged as a seemingly miraculous solution to malaria control. DDT-based campaigns achieved spectacular rates of malaria reduction around the world. By the early 1960s, however, two problems had developed. One was the rapid growth of resistance to DDT in mosquito populations, causing a strong resurgence of malaria in many regions. The second problem was the accumulation of evidence that DDT was causing significant environmental problems.\textsuperscript{47} State and local officials of other regions of Mexico had a long history of battling mosquitos and diseases like malaria. It appears that the Fuerte Valley’s limited malaria outbreak may have helped prevent mosquitos from developing a resistance to DDT. The environmental problems caused by the use of DDT were pretty significant in the Fuerte Valley.

Attempts to use DDT to fight against mosquitos and other pests led to increased health concerns within the Fuerte Valley. In fact, an environmental study concluded that,

\begin{quote}
In the Fuerte Valley, studies of childhood exposure to pesticides have shown notable mental and physical developmental problems that appears to be connected to ubiquitous background pesticide exposure in environments where pesticides are heavily used but where the children are not known to have suffered from acute poisoning incidents.\textsuperscript{48}
\end{quote}

The exposure of the Fuerte Valley’s population to pesticides such as DDT had far reaching health effects. A large number of people contaminated through direct contact with pesticides were undoubtedly Mayos who comprised a sizable portion of local farm laborers. It seems the

\textsuperscript{47} Wright, 42.
\textsuperscript{48} Guillette, Mez, Aguilar, Salinas, Soto, García, “An Anthropological Approach to the Evaluation of Preschool Children Exposed to Pesticides in Mexico”, \textit{Environmental Health Perspectives}, Wright, 41.
state’s developmentalist agenda, and attempts to control some of the problems it brought, again had a negative effect on Mayo populations and on local ecosystems.

The Contamination of the Fuerte River Changes Some Mayos’ Approaches to Water

Direct exposure to DDT and other chemicals were detrimental to the health of the Fuerte Valley’s inhabitants, but there were also indirect effects to the use of such chemicals that helped alter indigenous people’s connections to the Fuerte River. The Green Revolution largely changed the agricultural techniques of the Fuerte Valley. Historian Cynthia Radding explained that,

The price to pay for the chemically expanded production fostered by the Green Revolution included leached and saline soils, devastating consequences for farmworkers’ health, and contamination of waterways as irrigation runoff flowed into the rivers and reservoirs of northwestern Mexico.\(^49\)

The growing toxicity of the waters of the Fuerte River was one of the casualties of the Mexican state’s attempts to modernize and develop the Fuerte Valley through pushing large scale agricultural production.

The contamination of the Fuerte River through the use of pesticides as well as the growth of industries such as pig farming created a separation between some Mayos and their primary waterway they had depended on for generations. One of the implications of this separation was the eventual use of other man-made water sources. Mayo elder Francisco Jacinto of Jahuara explained that,

We used to go to the river to get drinking water, do laundry, or get water for food preparation. The trip was part of our daily routine. We would put a stick on our shoulders and balance the buckets of water on both sides to carry it home. But then Yoris started industries upstream. They brought in pig farms and grew crops with pesticides, and this began to contaminate the water. We did not have other

\(^49\) Radding, Cynthia, “Conclusion,” A Land Between Waters, 279.
water sources. We started to consume the water from the Cahuinahua Canal. In fact that canal was even closer to our ejido so the trip was shorter. Yet the canal was privately owned so we had to struggle to get water from there. We literally had to pry away the drinking water.\footnote{Francisco Jacinto, Interview by James Mestaz, Jahuara, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, July 13, 2014.}

In the previous two chapters I have shown how the proliferation of dams and canals in the 1940s through 1960s reduced the number of options Mayos had for gathering water. In this case these indigenous ejidatarios adapted by turning to this canal for their water source. Some Mayos continued to collect water illegally from the river by exploiting somewhat relaxed state regulations.

The contamination of the river led some Mayos to view water as a possession of Yoris, which in this case forced them to turn to the canal as their water source. The multitude of reactions to new restrictions on accessing the Fuerte River showed that some indigenous people were more prepared to adapt to change than others. The switch to using the canal to draw water, which was now heavily regulated by private interests, verified Mayo beliefs that water was no longer a human right. Indigenous villagers of the Fuerte Valley would now have to pay for drinking water or steal it from Yori neighbors.

Mayos such as Jacinto also drew a connection between river contamination and the emergence of such animal industries as pig farming. Animal raising activities poisoned the water in many ways, and some elders believe it was a lack of respect for the Fuerte River that led to its deterioration. Mayo elder Carla Bacosegua of La Florida related that,

\begin{quote}
Before we consumed water directly from the river, but we do not do that now. Large companies raising animals would bathe their herds in the river. The animals would excrete and urinate in there too, that was disrespectful. My generation respected the river. We did not interfere with the river. Yoremes did not let their animals go into the water because they knew that water was consumed by humans. Humans no longer drink that river water because it is very dirty. This change happened around the 1960’s when more Yoris came. Before we lived in
\end{quote}
harmony with the river, it was reciprocal. That has all changed because of the Yori.\footnote{Carla Bacosegua, Interview by James Mestaz, La Florida, Municip. Ahome, Sinaloa, Mexico, March 14, 2014.}

It is significant that Bacosegua viewed the 1960s as the turning point in which the river became contaminated. It is no coincidence that many of the elders I interviewed cited this time period as the era in which Mayos lost control of the river. The river lost many of its indigenous guardians through land dispossession and Yoris polluted the water while pursuing monetary wealth.

Pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers contaminated the river, yet animal waste was equally detrimental to river water purity. Bacosegua’s oral history again provided the perspective that Mayos and Yoris treated the river differently. Unlike Yoris, Mayos did not allow livestock to contaminate the river. It was in fact Yori practices and divergent value systems that led to the river’s contamination and helped change the connection between some Mayos and their river system.

The Fuerte River was transformed from a clean water source to a contaminated one. Some Mayos also underwent a transformation in understanding the river as just another possession of Yoris. Over time there was less of a concern among some Mayos with the way they treated their waterways. Mayo elders Narciso Bachomo and Carlos Salcedo of Camajoa explained that,

Our grandparents used to say to us catebamchichahoa, which in our language means do not throw trash into the river. The generation of our elders respected and took care of the river because they understood it took care of us. Elders knew the importance of water but also what the river meant to our people. But these new generations do not have the same respect for the river. Maybe this is because younger people do not think the river takes care of us anymore. They believe the river is owned by Yoris so there is less concern for the water.\footnote{Narciso Bachomo and Carlos Salcedo, Interview by James Mestaz, Camajoa, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, March 21, 2014.}
The fact that the Mayo had a specific word used to warn people not to throw trash in the river indicated that such actions had become a problem, and that elders valued the conservation of their waterway.

A large number of indigenous people today do not rely on water from the Fuerte River in the same way as their ancestors, leading some to believe that this is not their river water because it belongs to the rich Yori farmers for irrigation. Many Mayos today see the river as dirty and toxic, and as I explained in chapter five this is why some refused to bathe in the river during the San Juan Ritual. To what extent indigenous people viewed the Fuerte River as a possession of Yoris in the mid-1950s and 1960s is unclear. We do know that massive hydrological restructuring, subsequent contamination, and restrictions on accessing riverbanks at least changed some Mayo approaches to the river.

The influx of Yoris into the Fuerte Valley in the mid-twentieth century resulted in increased pollution. The growth of large industries helps to explain both migration into northern Sinaloa and toxicity of the Fuerte River. The Mexican state posed very relaxed restrictions on the amount of waste these industries could let flow into the Fuerte River. The growing toxicity of the river had widespread implications for indigenous people. Mayo elder Mauricio Mejías of Huepaco explained that,

“There is a big pollution problem in the Fuerte River. A lot of the poison comes from the packing plant upstream from our ejido as it contaminates the water. Back in the 1960s there were a lot of fish in the river near our ejido, especially mojarra fish. As the packing plant contaminated the river all the toxic water killed the fish here. But whenever I would go fishing upstream from the packing plant there were still plenty of mojarra up there."

The spread of Yori industries like packing plants resulted in some areas of the Fuerte River becoming more contaminated than others. Mayo reactions to the changes in the natural landscape

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and the Fuerte River varied, and were often proportional to the extent these alterations affected a particular village’s way of life.

The growing toxicity of river water changed the ways some Mayos gathered water, performed religious rituals, caught fish, and viewed ownership of the Fuerte River. Yoris benefitted by poisoning river water, albeit unintentionally, because it indirectly created a separation between some Mayos and the Fuerte River. This facilitated Yori monopolization of access to the water from the Fuerte River, also helping them consolidate both wealth and power. Mayo adaptation varied, and was contingent on how particular villages became affected by changes, and the strategies at their disposal.

**Potable Water, Tubed Water, and how their uses Revealed Inequity within the Fuerte Valley**

For some of the people in the Fuerte Valley in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the toxic river water and microbes became less of a problem. The development of water filtration systems made potable and tubed water available to residents in larger cities such as Los Mochis. On the one hand, the availability of filtered water solidified the Fuerte Valley as one of the most hydrologically advanced regions of Mexico. Access to potable and tubed water for only some residents of the Fuerte Valley revealed the harsh economic and political inequities that had become apparent by the 1960s. Political marginalization and poverty prevented most Mayos from enjoying the benefits of this sanitized water. When indigenous ejidatarios did gain access to such purified water it also changed some of their approaches to the Fuerte River.

The potable water system in the Fuerte Valley’s largest city of Los Mochis is advanced compared to the rest of Mexico. The Fuerte River Commission set up the city’s first water treatment facility in the 1960s and the filtration process has apparently not changed since. Today
the private company Japama purifies the water and sells it to residents in Los Mochis and select areas of the Fuerte Valley.

The water Japama uses for filtration comes directly from the three major dams, Huites, Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez, and Miguel Hidalgo. The first step in the procedure is to run the water through screens to remove the large solids such as leaves, tree branches, and garbage. Next is the chemical process of coagulation where scientists add aluminum sulfate and polymer to remove fine particulate matter, and a pre-chlorination to kill microorganisms. Water then flows through sedimentation basins to remove clay, silt, and other organic and synthetic matter. The water is then passed through sand beds to filter out any remaining matter or particles. The water goes through one last step of post-chlorination where more chlorine is added to adjust the chemical levels necessary to ensure that during the whole procedure the water stays disinfected. This is roughly the same practice used in most major U.S. cities, except that Los Mochis does not add fluoride to its water.54

The purity of the drinking water in Los Mochis has allowed Mochitenses to express a certain sense of pride. In fact, while living in Los Mochis, most of my colleagues often bragged about their drinking water and consumed it straight from the tap. Drinkable water availability in the Fuerte Valley raises several key issues about inequity. Local historian and hydraulic development expert José Infante explained that,

The drinking water in Los Mochis is the best throughout Mexico and many parts of America. Even the international shipping vessels arriving in Topolobampo Bay fill up here, saying it is the sweetest and tastiest. Yet the ejidos have a tougher time because they do not use the same purification system. Their system takes in some muddy water before the cleansing process. The purification process for tubed water, which involves putting in a mix of bleach and Sodium Hypochlorite, is not as thorough as it is for potable water, so it never comes out as good. But it is still much cleaner than the water in the canal or river these days. Most

54 Japama, Proceso de Potabilizacion, Video, 6:45, 2011.
ejidatarios only have access to tubed water and not potable water, so they only drink bottled water, which is more expensive.\footnote{José Infante, Interview by James Mestaz, Los Mochis, Municip. Ahome, Sinaloa, Mexico, March 9, 2014.}

It is important to specify the difference between potable water and tubed water. The quality of potable water is unsurpassed in this region. Most people do not drink tubed water because its purification process is not as rigorous, and it has been known to cause sicknesses. The availability of vital resources in Los Mochis such as potable water speaks to the historic inequities in the Fuerte Valley.

The history of the Fuerte Valley can be explained as a series of contrasts such as to whom gets preference for water and its quality. The residents of the upper Fuerte River in the municipalities of Choix and El Fuerte receive the highest hydraulic flow from the river, yet their inhabitants are among the most impoverished in the Fuerte Valley. Since the time of Albert Owen’s socialist Utopia, the region of the lower Fuerte River has always attracted the most industry, fared the best economically, and therefore received the most political resources. The lower Fuerte River, which is closer to the Gulf of California, is dominated by the municipality of Ahome, the home of the valley’s largest city of Los Mochis. The most wealthy and politically connected inhabitants of the Fuerte Valley mostly live in the municipality of Ahome, and especially in Los Mochis.

The geographical discrepancy in wealth and power has led to significant water shortages in the upper Fuerte River, and for ejidatarios throughout the entire region. The use of water for agricultural purposes has been prioritized over human consumption. This even led to purported humanitarian efforts and relief programs in the upper Fuerte River to bring potable water to Mayo ejidos in the early 1960s. For instance, an article in the Los Mochis daily newspaper *El Debate* in 1963 celebrated the, “goodwill of Fuerte River Commission officials, who allowed the
[Mayo] village of Capomos to improve its situation in regard to hygiene, by providing its inhabitants potable water.” The wording of this article was quite paternalistic, linking the efforts of the CRF to good will. The article suggested that this state agency was helping the poor villagers who were unable to provide for themselves. Instead of revising the system to make potable water available to more than just the wealthy or politically connected, the state chose to engage in alleged humanitarian efforts to assist the less fortunate.

As it turns out, even for some of the Mayo ejidos that were privileged enough to gain some political connections, getting access to potable or tubed water was not an easy task. Mayo elder Francisco Jacinto of Jahuara related that,

In the early 1960s we supported a local leader, a Yori named Ruben Vega. We told him our most serious problem was that we lacked drinking water. We promised him that if he helped us we would support him to eventually run for governor. The health center here compiled numerous reports on water quality and sent the findings to the state capital in Culiacán. We recorded the number of diseases in the elderly and children and connected that to studies done on our water supply. Vega said he would help us. He did not become governor but things changed, likely because of his support. By the mid-1960s we had tubed, treated water in our ejido. But nothing ever runs smoothly for us, there were problems. Sometimes the water was scarce and did not reach our houses. They sent experts to check the treated water and how it was distributed but it was never a perfect system. And it was not as filtered as potable water, so sometimes when we drank it we got sick.

This example illustrated how political patronage and water availability worked on the local level in the Fuerte Valley. Similar to other Mayo adaptations to changes in the hydrological landscape, Jahuara’s ability to receive tubed water as a consequence of their connection to an emerging local leader showed that some villages were more prepared to confront modernization than others. Even with political connections there were, however, limitations to the hydraulic benefits an economically underprivileged Mayo village received.

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Indigenous villagers often drank contaminated water that led to health defects, exhibiting the consequences of inequity in filtered water availability. In some Mayo ejidos that were unable to find political allies like Jahuara, the situation grew dire. Mayo elder Fermin Mopay of Camayeca explained that,

When I was young we rarely got sick when we drank water because it was natural. It came directly from the Fuerte River, and had no pollution at all. Then eventually we had access to tubed water from the river, around the 1960s. By that time it was polluted. Unlike in some other ejidos, it was not purified at all. When we drew the water it gave us a purple liquid. When we took children to the doctor they would ask if we were drinking tap water because that is what was making them sick.\(^{58}\)

The availability of tubed water may have appeared as a technological advancement for Mayo communities. In reality it often meant that they had easier access to contaminated water, instead of filtered water like their Yori neighbors. For some Mayo villages as Camayeca that were not politically connected, this new interaction with the Fuerte River resulted in higher incidents of sickness merely for consuming the liquid they had free access to for generations. The examples of Camayeca and Jahuara showed the diversity of strategies Mayos employed in dealing with change, and the sometimes devastating consequences of being less prepared to adapt.

The arrival of tubed water systems in the Fuerte Valley also facilitated the change in cultural ties between some Mayos and the Fuerte River, or in other words a separation between some villages and the river. Mayo elder Rudolfo Echamea of Borabampo explained that,

The drinking water in homes improved the standard of living of some Yoremes, but led to us disassociating with the river. We used to view the river as an important part of our lives. We no longer see the source of water, because dams prevent water from running along the bed of the river. The water coming into our homes is the replacement of water that was in the river, but it is not the same. Women used to go to the river in the morning to wash clothes and draw water for domestic use. The decline of drinking water in the river resulted in men coming to our villages on a wagon pulled by donkeys to sell potable water. Now with tubed

\(^{58}\) Fermin Mopay, Interview by James Mestaz, Camayeca, Municip. Ahome, Sinaloa, Mexico, February 27, 2014.
water Yoremes just turn a key and get water like that. This eliminated some of our practices involving the river completely.\textsuperscript{59}

Potable water systems were created in part to make life easier for the inhabitants of the Fuerte Valley, but no thought was given to how they would affect Mayo river practices. Alleged progress for some forced others to reconfigure their longstanding routines that tied them to the river.

Water in the Fuerte River became contaminated and unsafe to drink in the mid-twentieth century. This exposed the growing socioeconomic inequities of the Fuerte Valley as urban and wealthy residents were granted easier access to water filtration systems. Mayo ejidatarios, still at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder, rarely received filtered water. The less filtered tubed water came to Mayo communities with varying degrees of water purity proportional to a particular village’s political mobility. The replacement of river water with tubed and potable water changed some Mayo peoples’ approaches to the Fuerte River and the ways they perceived of this water source.

**Changing Approaches to Raw Materials Used in Mayo Religious Ceremonies**

A large number of Yoris moved in to the Fuerte Valley and dispossessed Mayos of most of what was left of their riverbank land by the 1950s. This had a profound effect on these indigenous peoples’ relationship to the natural environment, especially the local flora and fauna. This connection of Mayos to the natural landscape had already experienced profound changes in the early twentieth century. The difficulty of extending their connection to the natural landscape

\textsuperscript{59} Rudolfo Echamea, Interview by James Mestaz, Borabampo, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, July 23, 2014.
in the mid-1950s and 1960s was a precursor to Mayo perceptions that their indigenous culture was placed in jeopardy.

I discussed in chapter five how the San Juan ceremony played a central role to Mayo connections to the Fuerte River. As some Mayos faced increasing obstacles accessing the banks of the Fuerte River, their ability to perform this ceremony also became more challenging. For some Mayos, an integral component to the San Juan ceremony consisted of the planting of álamos (cottonwood) trees on the river shore. Álamos are considered sacred among Mayos in the Fuerte Valley and are believed to emit positive energy. Yoreme elder Carla Bacosegua of La Florida explained that,

The banks of the Fuerte River are filled with Yoris who own very large properties. We have limited access to the banks of the river, so we are unable to plant álamos trees like before. This is why there are almost no trees on the banks. In álamos trees we recognize the saints and their glory, all that is what binds us to the river. During the San Juan ceremony, we planted a tree where it came to rest before we would bathe in the river. Water was also thrown upon the álamos trees to signify the important ties between water, nature, and Yoremes. Unfortunately this connection is missing. Today there are no tree planting ceremonies using the álamos. We should have protected this part of the ceremony, but Yoris started owning most of that [river shore] property by the 1950s, killing this tradition for us.⁶⁰

Mayos began to lose access to the banks of the Fuerte River, preventing them from conducting certain religious ceremonies. Some indigenous ejidatarios also faced new obstacles in growing blessed álamos trees on the riverbanks. Some Mayos’ sacred connection to the river and natural landscape was put into distress, leading elders to argue that their very culture came into question.

In the beginning of the chapter I pointed out how a lot of Mayo villages lost their land on the riverbanks in the mid-twentieth century, but some ejidos such as Pochotal were able to

maintain these properties. This uneven access to the riverbanks led to a variety of experiences for the indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley. The ability of some Mayo villages like Pochotal and El Teroque to retain their riverbank lands allowed them to conduct such ceremonies as San Juan, whereas others had a more difficult time. Restricted access to the river therefore affected Mayos in different ways, resulting in a multitude of reactions that reflected the heterogeneity of experiences and histories in the mid-twentieth century.

In addition to the near disappearance of álamos tree planting ceremonies, there is another factor that can account for the reduction in the numbers of these revered trees in the Fuerte Valley. Mayo cultural expert Loreto Coronado explained that,

Yoremes cut álamos tree bark as a natural herbal remedy. Mayos never cut all of the bark because they know it will dry out the rest of the tree. Indigenous people will cut only a piece of bark, just enough to assist in healing an individual. Yoris remove the entire bark, leaving the inside of the tree naked. Eventually the leaves start to fall and the tree dies. And when Yoremes cut the tree for construction of their ramadas, they always ask for permission. The same is true for firewood. Yoremes cut only some branches and just enough wood to keep the tree alive. Yoris cut down the whole tree and would not plant more.61

The ways Mayos and Yoris approached natural resources were represented in diverging methods of extracting raw materials. The reciprocal connection between Mayos and álamo trees allowed the former to maintain a sustainable approach to local ecosystems. Yori practices centering on the accumulation of natural resources such as álamos trees severely altered the natural landscape of the Fuerte Valley in the mid-twentieth century.

This loss of sacred álamos trees has reverberated through Mayo communities within the last fifty years, resulting in what some Mayos would say is a loss of their indigenous culture and identity. Mayos used the wood from álamos trees to build ramadas (shelters). These ramadas were used by indigenous households as meeting places and for food storage, and also provided

enough shelter to sleep outside in the warm summer months. Mayos constructed some ramadas purely as the sacred sites for dancers, musicians, and holy men to perform religious rituals.

The shortage of álamos trees in the 1960s forced Mayos to use alternative objects such as other types of wood to construct ramadas. Some elders grew concerned that other materials did not possess the same sacred properties and energy as the álamos wood. Some Mayo elders believe perhaps the substitution of the wood from these revered trees for other materials helps explain the dwindling of Mayo cultural identity. Narciso Bachomo and Carlos Salcedo argued that, “for the Yoremes who respected nature, they knew that the ramada had to be made with álamos wood. If they could not gather enough of this wood to build the ramada, this hurt their relationship with nature.”62 The reduction in the amount of álamos trees in the 1960s was already a problem for some villages clinging to their traditions. Some Mayos used artificial apparatuses like canals to substitute for the river, yet the perceived sacred properties of álamos wood meant that alternative construction materials could not be used to substitute in this same manner.

We can see the effects that losing contact with riverbanks and álamos trees has had on Mayo culture since the mid-twentieth century. For instance, younger generations are less fluent in the Mayo language today. Elders also accuse younger Mayos of not respecting their natural landscape because they throw trash into the river. Some elders contend that this crisis in Mayo culture was directly related to a decreased interaction with their natural landscape starting in the late 1950s, and that the scarcity of álamos trees was a major cause.

While there was resilience in some of the natural flora and fauna of the Fuerte Valley, the expansion of large scale agriculture and natural resource extraction of the mid-1950s through 1960s forced Mayos to approach the raw materials used in religious rituals in new ways. Mayo

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elder Daniel Galaviz of Camajoa explained some of these changes as a consequence of Yori development practices,

Forests were cut down in the mid-twentieth century so that the tree branches could be used for rods to help the growth of tomato, cucumber and other crops. The trees were taken out of the mountains and that is where butterflies lived. Butterflies made cocoons that were used to make ténabarís. These are rattles that traditional Mayo dancers attached to their ankles. Threads of nylon rope or cotton are glued or sewn dried to these butterfly cocoons and are filled with small stones to make the rattling noise. The decline of butterflies in the Fuerte Valley made ténabarís very expensive.⁶³

In addition to Yoris cutting down forests for tree branches, vegetation was also cleared out to make room for farmland. The felling of forests had long term effects on both local ecosystems and Mayo religious ceremonies, of which Yoris were likely not aware of. The massive alterations to the natural landscape initiated by Yoris in the mid-twentieth century forced Mayos to adapt, which repositioned the latter’s connection with local ecosystems.

Mayos found adaptive ways to maintain a relationship to the natural landscape through the 1960s. It was in fact Yori insistence in gaining control of land, the river, and other natural resources in this time period that made it more difficult for some indigenous people to maintain a semblance of cultural autonomy. Respect for the natural landscape and the continuance of indigenous rituals were bound together as one thing, yet these things should not be seen as mutually exclusive. Even though younger generations of Mayos sometimes joined Yoris in polluting and poisoning the river, these younger indigenous people continued to fulfill their responsibility of performing indigenous religious ceremonies.

Effects of Irrigation-Based Developmentalist Projects on Mayo Animal Husbandry and Hunting

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In the early twentieth century, Mayos were forced to deal with an influx of outsiders moving into their lands, changes in how they accessed water, and alterations to the local flora and fauna. Their relationship to animals shifted as a result of the massive changes that came with the proliferation of canals and dams within the Fuerte Valley. With less forage for pasturage after land had been cleared to make room for crops, and poisoned waterways, Mayos found raising livestock increasingly difficult and many abandoned the practice altogether.

Yoris owned the vast majority of river bank land by the 1960s and banned Mayos from driving livestock through their properties located on the edge of rivers and creeks. Moreover, the widespread use of fertilizers and pesticides affected both herd and human health. Mayo elder Manuel Galindo of La Bajada recalled that, “Yoremes used to raise more animals. By the 1960s, most eventually had to stop. Life was too hard to sustain the animals. There were a lot of toxic crops on all sides of us, and no water for the herd. This prevented us from raising animals like we used to.”

The change to large scale agriculture brought Green Revolution farming techniques to the Fuerte Valley. The increased use of pesticides, herbicides, and ammonia fertilizers raised serious health risks for not only Mayos, but also for the animals they raised. The privatization of canals and dams and restrictions on accessing the water from the Fuerte River also made animal husbandry more difficult for Mayos.

The vast social and economic changes the Fuerte Valley encountered in the mid-twentieth century had far ranging effects on indigenous villages. Mayo farmers began illegally renting out ejidal lands and became laborers, changing their diets as a consequence. Mayo elder Fermin Mopay of Camayeca explained that,

We used to eat all natural food because I had chickens, turkeys, and ducks. I raised the animals and either sold or bartered mostly with Yoremes. I also sold eggs to many clients. My children and I ate some of the animals we raised. In

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64 Manuel Galindo, Interview by James Mestaz, La Bajada, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, April 11, 2014.
those days we ate healthier because everything was fresh. But it got harder to raise animals by the 1960s. Yoremes eventually could not afford to buy meat anymore, and most did not have land to raise crops to barter. Animal husbandry played a central role in the lives of the indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley for generations. Mayos relied on these animals to provide sustenance, or for trade for other items of need. Increased restrictions on irrigation water made it more difficult for Mayos to retain ejidal lands, and most were forced to illegally rent these properties to Yoris by the 1960s. The inability of Mayos to raise crops of their own made it more challenging for them to trade for animal meat, nearly eliminating the practice of animal husbandry in some Mayo villages.

Mayos had a more difficult time raising their own animals as Yoris altered the natural landscape. The reciprocal connection that Mayos maintained with local ecosystems again came under attack as the Yori mentality of exploiting natural resources for profit took precedence.

Mayo elder Mauricio Mejías of Huepaco recalled that,

Before the 1970s we used to have a lot of fish and shrimp ponds here. We also raised turtles and left frogs to run wild. Yoremes made sure not over-exploit resources because we depended on them. But then Yoris came in and started collecting turtles and frogs and selling them to restaurants. They also stole the fish and shrimp right out of our ponds. These animals have almost disappeared here because they were worth money. We never ate frogs because we see them as sacred. But we did eat turtles, they are delicious.

Yori exploitation of animals for profit altered the Mayo reciprocal connection with the local ecosystem. This changed Mayo diets and limited their economic opportunities. The decrease in the number of frogs also made it more difficult for some villages to use these animals in such ceremonies as the Yuco Conti. The Yori approach to natural resources therefore threatened Mayo material culture and their livelihood, forcing them to adjust accordingly.

65 Fermin Mopay, Interview by James Mestaz, Camayeca, Municip. Ahome, Sinaloa, Mexico, February 27, 2014.
The decrease in natural forage in the Fuerte Valley also led to a decline in the number and variety of wild animals. The disappearance of some animal species and appearance of new ones was apparently common in the Fuerte Valley in the 1950s and 1960s. Flora and fauna found ways to adapt and to survive, similar to the ways Mayos adjusted to the changing physical environment and appearance and disappearance of animals.

The proliferation of dams and canals in the Fuerte Valley not only eliminated the quantity of certain animals, it also increased the number of others. Certain dangerous animals like alligators disappeared, but other potentially threatening animals appeared. Eugenia Tico recalled that, “in villages like Cahuinahua that saw new artificial bodies of water appear, we started seeing more mosquitos and water snakes in the 1950s. A lot of these snakes were poisonous and dangerous. We had to be more careful when we walked near the river.” The growth of dams and canals in the Fuerte Valley brought animals to indigenous villages that presented new obstacles to their way of life. Poisonous snakes in and around waterways posed a new threat and forced Mayos to take a more cautious approach to their river practices.

The growth of canals and dams in the Fuerte Valley led to a myriad of changes to the local flora and fauna. Snakes made life more difficult for some Mayo villages, and they changed the balance of the food chain in other ejidos. Mayo elder Sabas Ynustrosa of La Mojonera explained that,

Canals and other new water structures brought more mosquitos and flies, but they also brought other animals. The new water here resulted in more insects like tarantulas, centipedes, and scorpions, which were not beneficial for us. But it also brought the cabeza prieta (ground snake) that ate all of these pests. That snake also went into the river and canals and ate rats. We started to see a lot less rats around here after the snake showed up.68

68 Sabas Ynustrosa, Interview by James Mestaz, La Mojonera, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, August 2, 2014.
The developmentalist agenda carried out in the Fuerte Valley forced Mayos to adjust to the alterations in local ecosystems, as the flora and fauna also adapted. Some animal species disappeared while others increased in number. It seems logical that predators like the ground snake would prevent the overpopulation of some of these animals. Mayo experiences with the natural landscape varied as hydrological development affected local ecosystems in equally different ways.

The growth of large scale agricultural operations led to a reduction in the number of wild game in northern Sinaloa such as deer and wild boar, making hunting more difficult for Mayos. Hunting was long considered a communal tradition among the Mayo. Ralph Beals explained in the 1940s that, “Large animals were generally hunted cooperatively…On the return of the hunters the chief divided the meat among all the villagers.” By the mid-1950s the Mayo faced increased obstacles in maintaining their hunting practices. As property lines became more defined, land cleared, and new waterways introduced, several animal species were either greatly reduced or disappeared altogether. Mayo hunters also became confined to smaller areas in which to hunt. The developmentalist agenda and subsequent hydrological projects of the Fuerte Valley was therefore responsible for new limitations placed on Mayo hunters.

The changes to the flora and fauna in the mid-twentieth century were very pronounced in the Fuerte Valley. Scrub brush and forests were cleared, as wild game fled to the mountains and hills, or disappeared altogether. Mayo elder Roberto Escalante of La Palma explained that,

There used to be a lot of deer, iguanas, puma, wild boar, bear, rabbit, armadillo, and snakes. We used to hunt most of those animals, except for the bear. The growth of the human population and the development of irrigation for agriculture reduced animals’ numbers. Yoris cleared out the trees and scrub brush which was the animals’ natural habitat. These wild animals had to go to the hills to live. We

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cannot hunt these animals anymore because there are barely any left. The Yoris also restricted and policed our hunting.\textsuperscript{70}

The growth of canals, dams, and aqueducts helped some crops thrive in the Fuerte Valley. The success of some of these crops also depended on the clearing of natural vegetation on thousands of hectares of land. Cash crops took precedence as naturally growing scrub brush and trees were viewed as just another obstacle to development. Yoris likely never considered that this natural vegetation provided a home for animals that had been integral to Mayo diets and communal hunting practices. The effects of hydrological development sometimes varied within the Fuerte Valley as some villages lost access to certain animals and others did not, but in general all Mayos had to deal with the near disappearance of animals like deer that were vital to their hunting traditions.

The disappearance of some animals often forced Mayos to depend on new sources of animal protein. For instance, Mayo elder Daniel Galaviz of Camajoa explained that,

My family owned a small portion of land. We labored there seasonally before losing it. And the waters brought changes and affected the fauna. For us impoverished Mayos, the animals we used to eat like deer and rabbits all disappeared. The only animal that remained was a rat. But it was very healthy for humans to eat, because the rats only ate the leaves that were high up in trees.\textsuperscript{71}

The disappearance of rats near La Mojonera and continuity of these vermin near Camajoa showed the variety of animals that existed within Fuerte Valley ecosystems. This diversity of local fauna directly affected Mayo strategies of adaptation and highlighted the differences between villages. The fact that some Mayos went from eating venison and rabbit meat to consuming rats served as a salient reminder of the changes that modernization of the Fuerte Valley water infrastructure produced within indigenous communities. By the same token, it also

\textsuperscript{70} Roberto Escalante, Interview by James Mestaz, La Palma, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, February 29, 2014
\textsuperscript{71} Daniel Galaviz, Interview by James Mestaz, Camajoa, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, March 6, 2014.
provided an example of the inventive ways Mayos quickly adjusted to a changing natural environment.

**Fishing Adaptations of Mayos in the Fuerte Valley**

Fishing has played an important role in the Mayo world for centuries as the Fuerte River provided enough aquatic creatures to help sustain indigenous people. The influx of Yoris into the Fuerte Valley forced Mayos to make significant adjustments in their fishing practices. Some Mayo villages could not sustain themselves by relying on subsistence farming and turned to fishing full time. No matter to what degree each Mayo ejido depended on fishing, all indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley were negatively affected by Yoris over-fishing local waterways.

In the 1920s, outsiders began to extract large amounts of fish and shrimp from the Fuerte River, such as a California based company that set up a shrimp-packing plant in the town of Topolobambo. In order to protect themselves against outside competitors and to ensure fair prices for the sale of their products, Mayo and mestizo fishermen in the area formed fishing cooperatives. Even in the 1940s, fishing was often viewed by Mayos as a communal enterprise, and their catch distributed to the village. Some fish that came to spawn at the mouth of the Fuerte River were poisoned with herbs and collected by a number of Mayo villages communally.  

By 1941 local fishermen created the *Fish Production Cooperative Society of the Fuerte River*. The cooperative’s constitution allowed Mayo and Yori fishermen who had lived in the Fuerte Valley for more than five years to join. The creation of this fishing cooperative was aimed at not only maximizing the potential of the river, but to prevent outsiders from over-fishing.  

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72 Beals, Ralph, *The Aboriginal Culture of the Câhita*, 18.
73 August 11, 1941, AGN, Manuel Ávila Camacho, 623.2/723.1
Similar fishing cooperatives permeated the Fuerte Valley in the mid-1950s and 1960s, yet these organizing efforts did not prevent the over-exploitation of the valley’s waterways.

The efforts of local Yori and Mayo fishermen to protect local waterways were not as successful as they had hoped. By the 1950s and 1960s, fishermen belonging to cooperatives in both the Fuerte River and Topolobampo Bay were often pushed aside by aggressive Yori outsiders. According to Mayo elder Manuel Galindo who was both a farmer and fishermen in La Bajada, “Yoremes made sure not to over-fish our resources. The Yori fishermen over-fished everything. Yoris also broke the law by fishing when it was not fishing season. Shrimp used to be bigger. By the 1970s there were less octopus and bass. The caguama (loggerhead turtle) were almost extinct.”

The reduction in the number of aquatic animals in the Fuerte Valley was a direct result of the Yori extractive approach and accumulating these commodities at as quick of a rate as they possibly could, in contrast from Mayo reciprocal approaches to natural resources. Some Mayos continued to fish in local waterways despite the reduction of aquatic animals, which again exhibited the ability of some villagers to adapt to changes better than others.

The reduction of fish and other aquatic animals forced Mayos to find other places to fish. The massive system of canals that began to spread through the Fuerte Valley changed some indigenous peoples’ river practices. The appearance of canals often had negative effects on the lives of Mayos, such as the increase of floods, mosquitos, and disease. Some villagers, however, found new ways to take advantage of these artificial water sources.

Following in the tradition of finding new uses for available technologies, Mayos learned to use canal water for a number of things. In addition to accessing canal water for irrigation, Mayos used these artificial waterways for such things as washing clothes, and gathering water

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74 Manuel Galindo, Interview by James Mestaz, La Bajada, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, April 11, 2014.
for drinking and cooking. Probably the most important adaptation that Mayos made with the appearance of canals was the ability to continue fishing. Carla Bacosesgua described that,

At first there were few fish or other edible creatures in the canals. Over time this changed as a lot of fish, shrimp, and even cauque (small lobster) began to appear. Yoremes continued to fish in the Fuerte River but they had less luck there. We found a way to adapt to the changing environment by fishing in canals.75

Yori monopolization of access to the Fuerte River severely limited access to the water system that represented the unifying source of Mayo culture. Use of canals for fishing was part of a long history of adaptation in the face of huge changes in the hydrological landscape. The proliferation of canals often had negative consequences for indigenous villages, but not necessarily in this case. Reactions to these changing circumstances revealed the multiple experiences of Mayo villages from the mid-1950s through 1970.

The developmentalist agenda of the Fuerte Valley from the mid-1950s through 1960s sometimes brought devastating consequences for Mayo ejidatarios who were forced to rent out their ejidal properties. Some Mayo farmers had no other choice but to adapt and use the canals to provide sustenance. For instance, Mayo elder Laura Apodaca of La Misión explained that,

When the canals came, this changed our lives. We lost most of our ejidal land and therefore did not have sufficient property to grow enough crops to feed ourselves. We were forced to learn how to fish in the canals and some Yoremes even caught fish at the dam reservoir. The people of our ejido, and many others spend most of our days fishing now. We have limited ways to get our daily food. We also catch a little extra to sell or trade for other items. Over the years we have become a fishing community.76

The purpose of canals in the Fuerte Valley was to boost crop output and turn the region into an economic powerhouse of Mexico. While this mission was accomplished they also created a new class of unintended Mayo fisherpeople.

76 Laura Apodaca, Interview by James Mestaz, La Misión, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, July 29, 2014.
Economic opportunities grew bleak in the mid-1950s through 1960s as Mayos established new approaches to canals. Canals in the Fuerte Valley soon developed new ecosystems, with flora and fauna that Mayos appropriated for their own purposes. Mayo experiences with these canals stand in direct contrast to the canals in western United States discussed by environmental historian Donald Worster, who pointed out that, “the modern canal, unlike a river, is not an ecosystem. It is simplified, abstracted Water, rigidly separated from the earth and firmly directed to raise food, fill pipes, and make money.”\(^{77}\) It is true that the main purpose of this canal water in the Fuerte Valley was also to make money. Unlike in the American west, the survival of a large indigenous population that had been particularly affected by these canals, depended largely on the very structures that created such chaos. Mayos living near canals became members of this new artificially created ecosystem by adeptly capturing canal fish and aquatic animals.

The reduced flow and contamination of the water in the Fuerte River made it more difficult for fish and other aquatic animals to survive. Riverine organisms found ways to adapt, and began to spread out into canals designed specifically to irrigate large scale agricultural properties. Mayos found it more difficult to access the Fuerte River by the 1950s and 1960s and were also forced to adapt to these changing circumstances. Yoris cut off the relationship between Mayos and fish, and the latter two reconnected in the canals that were not constructed for this specific purpose.

The use of canals for fishing showed that some villagers found a new way to extend their symbolic relationship to the river. Some Mayo elders today point to the 1950s and 1960s as the era in which their people lost their connection to nature, resulting in a deterioration of their culture. It is likely that every generation of Mayo elders since the time of Spanish Conquest

\(^{77}\) Worster, \textit{Rivers of Empire}, 5.
would have argued that their people were losing their culture over time. What is certain is that
indigenous villages of the Fuerte Valley experienced the effects of modernization in different
ways, and reacted by deploying multiple strategies of adaptation. The opinion of some
indigenous elders that cultural deterioration was tied to their lost connection to nature, or
specifically with the Fuerte River was perhaps valid in particular contexts. I pointed out earlier in
this chapter that elders’ beliefs regarding the link between lost access to the river and cultural
deterioration varied, and was often contingent upon their village’s ability or inability to retain
access to riverbank land. The fact that some villages extended their link to the Fuerte River,
through fishing in canals for instance, may have also affected some of their opinions.

**Conclusion**

Some Mayos fished in canals after both their connection with the Fuerte River was
altered and agricultural opportunities were reduced. This was another example of the many
strategies of adaptation taken by the indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley in the mid-1950s and
1960s. In the three decades leading up to the mid-1950s, some Mayos had used canals and
pumps to ensure a productive harvest. This had in turn helped indigenous ejidatarios protect
ejidal properties and a connection to the Fuerte River. The state’s developmentalist agenda of the
mid-twentieth century granted water use preference to large land owners over ejidatarios. The
loss of access to irrigation water, coupled with the changes to the natural landscape as a cause of
the proliferation of canals and dams, posed formidable challenges for Mayos. In the face of such
obstacles, some indigenous villages of the Fuerte Valley found ways to maintain a symbolic
connection to the Fuerte River in the mid-1950s and 1960s, while others struggled in this respect.
The differences in the ways Mayos and Yoris approached the natural landscape in the mid-twentieth century helped set them apart from one-another. It also led Mayos to conflate Yoris and the state agencies such as the CRF that supported the rapid development of the Fuerte Valley. Yori developmentalist practices led to the contamination of river water and massive changes to local ecosystems. Indigenous ejidatarios found that the state’s developmentalist agenda of the 1950s generally eschewed both Mayo political mobilization as well as specific cultural rights to the river and natural landscape.

State agencies such as the CRF set up development programs in Mayo communities with defined goals of politically mobilizing ejidatarios. This opening of political space shared some similarities with patronage systems that some indigenous villagers took advantage of in the mid-1920s through early 1940s. The difference with these new patronage systems was that in contrast to Mayos having some autonomy in deciding how benefits were distributed, state functionaries now made most of the decisions within indigenous communities with minimal local consultation. The paternalistic tendencies of state functionaries revealed their perspective that Mayos were more of an obstacle to development rather than worthy colleagues to be trusted in local decisions. The lack of trust on both sides is one of the reasons why Mayo alliances with state agencies never became a popular form of adaptation to changes in the political and social landscape of the Fuerte Valley in the mid-1950s and 1960s.

The Mexican state helped transform the Fuerte Valley into a hub for large scale agriculture in the mid-twentieth century. Yori farmers began using chemicals such as ammonia fertilizer and pesticides that contaminated the Fuerte River. Not coincidentally, state agencies also found ways to produce purified water in the mid-1950s and 1960s. Potable and tubed water replaced contaminated river water as some Mayos began changing long-standing river practices
and overall approach to the Fuerte River. Such changes in the connection to local ecosystems were also reflected in alterations in ways Mayos raised domestic animals, hunted, and fished.

Some Mayos had previously used pumps, canals, and other new hydraulic technologies in similar ways to Yoris. Continued Mayo practices involving the natural landscape and reciprocal approach to the Fuerte River distinguished them from non-Mayos. Some Mayo elders considered the mid-1950s and 1960s as the moment when their people’s culture began to deteriorate because of a reduced role of the river and natural landscape in their lives. This chapter shows that as riverine development became more centralized and irrigation access placed in the hands of private entities, some Mayos lost access to the river and natural landscape at a quicker pace than ever before. The multitude of reactions to these challenges expressed the diversity of Mayo experiences from the mid-1950s through 1960s, and helped to explain their physical and cultural survival in this pivotal era.

Disrupting the connection between Mayos and their riverine ecosystem (albeit unintentionally) facilitated the state’s economic development of the Fuerte Valley. The difficulty ejidatarios experienced in maintaining irrigation access was in fact responsible for massive changes in the lives of Mayos. The state’s related developmentalist schemes, which resulted in the clearing of forests and the contamination of the Fuerte River, forced some Mayos to shift their approach to the natural landscape. Mayo culture has historically shifted, but was always contingent on a reciprocal approach to both giving and taking from the river and natural landscape. The multitude of strategies Mayo villages deployed in the mid-1950s through 1970 help to explain how the connection to the river and natural landscape became more limited in some villages than in others, and can also account for the differing opinions today as to the primary causes behind cultural deterioration.
Conclusion

In this dissertation I traced the cultural and physical survival of the Mayo people in the face of changing access to the Fuerte River from 1926 to 1970. By examining the history of the indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley we see how their practices changed as they integrated hydraulic technologies that altered their social structure and community. The period from the 1920s through 1960s posed serious threats to the Mayo way of life as they confronted massive alterations to the political and physical landscape. The changing link between water technology and Mayo practice that I analyzed in this dissertation shows that we need to reconsider the pivotal role that water sources, in this case the Fuerte River, played in the lives of indigenous people.

Historically, the indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley used all resources at their disposal to fight for their cultural autonomy and physical existence. Such self-preservation strategies included their initial resistance to Spanish rule in 1533, the adaptation of their religious beliefs and integration of Christian ceremonies to maintain their culture in the mission period years, uprisings against land dispossession in the 18th through early 20th century, their role in building and using irrigation infrastructure from the 1920s through 1950s, the joining and then organizing against the SICAE from the late 1930s through mid-1950s, and their modification of ceremonies that symbolically embodied their ties to the river in the 1950s and 1960s while the pollution of the river itself had transformed it into a Yori possession. In this dissertation I have detailed specifically how Mayos navigated obstacles posed by the Mexican state and Yoris from the mid-1920s through 1960s, and how they incorporated new hydraulic technologies within their own cultural understandings, and the consequences this had for their social structure, identity, and communities.
A lot changed for the Mayo of the Fuerte Valley between 1926 and 1970. They went from living in traditional villages and isolated settlements to forming ejidos that may or may not have integrated Yoris. The role of the Fuerte River in Mayo lives also changed over time. The river was central to indigenous religious ceremonies and livelihoods in the mid-1920s, but by 1970 it was considered polluted literally as well as figuratively by Yoris. The ability of some Mayos to retain access to riverbanks allowed particular villages to continue performing riverine rituals such as San Juan, while others could not. Fishing, hunting, animal husbandry, and water gathering practices most Mayo had retained by the mid-1920s were interrupted by hydrological development projects by 1970. The multitude of reactions to changes in these practices created recognizable distinctions between villages and made Mayo culture more resilient to change.

Among the massive transformations in Mayo society from 1926 to 1970 there were other aspects that were either unaffected, or had undergone a process of change but by 1970 more or less reverted back to mid-1920s status. An example of this continuity was that other than occasional expressions of solidarity and assemblies to observe religious rituals, Mayos approached obstacles in a manner that best suited the cultural and physical needs of their particular village, which explained the plurality of indigenous people’s practices into the 1970s. Some aspects that were transformed in this time period eventually reverted to previous norms. This was exemplified by Mayo individuals and communities who formerly had very little interaction with the state, then aligned with postrevolutionary state functionaries to attain tangible benefits, and were again relegated to political marginalization by 1970.

One of the primary factors explaining both continuity and change in Mayo society from the 1920s through 1960s was its use of hydrological technology. What were the motivations behind some indigenous farmers using irrigation technology in the mid-twentieth century?
asked Mayo interlocutors to comment on the purpose and significance of their elders and ancestors using pumps, canals, and aqueducts. In retrospect, some elders saw these uses as resistance and others saw them as complicity. Of the respondents who saw these practices as resistance, generally their argument was that by using irrigation infrastructure, some Mayos extended their connection with the Fuerte River and maintained a sense of cultural autonomy instead of fully integrating into the dominant society.78

Other indigenous elders offered different explanations for the use of hydrological technology. Such a range of responses were indicative of the diversification of Mayo culture. Narciso Bachomo and Carlos Salcedo argued that, “this was neither resistance nor complicity, but rather adaptation. It was the acceptance of this technology, as in looking back at the past and seeing that less was accomplished without its use.”79 Throughout the early to mid-twentieth century indigenous villages and individuals could point to a number of reasons why they did or did not use particular hydraulic technologies. Even among indigenous farmers who used irrigation infrastructure there was not a universal understanding of what it meant to their community, and there is even a discrepancy in its significance today.

The multitude of approaches to hydraulic technologies in the early to mid-twentieth century expanded practices and in fact helped Mayos endure as a people as their villages became more resilient. In the introduction I used García Canclini’s term “hybrid” to explain changing Mayo practices in relation to the Fuerte River. Hybridization from the mid-1920s through 1970 allowed the indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley to be modern in some contexts and traditional in others.

78 Some of these respondents that believed it was resistance included Carla Bacosegua of La Florida and Alejandro Inzunza of Los Goros.
The Mayo provided a good example of García Canclini’s description of a people’s ability to enter and leave modernity, in that they used every advantage they could find in order to persevere in the early to mid-twentieth century, but always within the context of their knowledge systems. For instance, in chapter three I explained how Mayo ejidatarios of Jahuara attempted to construct a canal to drain water from their lagoon. This effort to plant crops in the drained, moist land of the lagoon was inspired by previous “traditional” uses of the fertile damp land left by the overflow of the Fuerte River. The diversion of lagoon water to grow additional crops represented a “modern” use of irrigation infrastructure. This irrigation project reflected astute adaptation through the deployment of practices based on an indigenous world view.

In this dissertation I advanced García Canclini’s use of the term hybrid by showing that the adoption of outsider practices like the use of irrigation infrastructure sometimes blurred the lines between Mayo and Yori practices. Mayos, however, used these technologies within their knowledge systems, allowing farmers to not only increase crop productivity, but to also protect the river and territory necessary to perform traditions like religious ceremonies. There are few recorded incidents in the historical record similar to Jahuara, where indigenous villages perfectly combined such old and new hydraulic technologies, but hybridity did play a major role in Mayo society from the mid-1920s through 1970. For some Mayo villages hybridity became a function of using a modern technology like canals to perform such riverine religious rituals as San Juan as access to the river was cut off. For others it meant joining the SICAE or the CNC to gain tangible benefits that helped protect their cultural practices.

All Mayo villages in some way or another adopted practices of the dominant Yori culture in order to survive physically. Their approaches to these practices, however, were also based on a desire to retain the cultural traditions that distinguished them from Yoris. This ability to embrace
outsider practices in order to move between the modern and traditional world facilitated Mayo cultural and physical survival from the mid-1920s through 1970, and also explains the vitality of indigenous culture in the Fuerte Valley today.

Various academics have attempted to account for cultural continuity and change in the Fuerte Valley in the early to mid-twentieth century. We have the advantage of scholars such as Charles Erasmus and Ralph Beals conducting field work in the Fuerte Valley in the 1930s through 1950s, as they traced changes in Mayo practices over time. Unfortunately neither of these scholars recognized the longstanding reciprocal connection between Mayos and the Fuerte River, or analyzed the importance of how massive changes to the physical landscape and hydrological development restricted their access to the river. I pointed out in the introduction that in the 1950s Erasmus predicted that Mayo culture would eventually disappear due to new economic opportunities and increased interaction with mestizos. Erasmus failed to account for the Mayo ability to integrate mestizo practices into their own, and by using outsider technology within the context of their own world view, deployed schemes that helped promote their own cultural autonomy. This dissertation has advanced such cultural studies of the mid-twentieth century by showing how Mayos found a multitude of ways to extend their connection to the Fuerte River, and in doing so kept intact one of their main sources of cultural communication.

This dissertation is not the first academic work to establish a connection between cultural survival and river access. In chapter four I pointed out the similarities between Mayo defense of territory, and Arturo Escobar’s argument that black and indigenous people’s specific uses and defense of territory in Colombia were paramount to their cultural and physical survival. The river was an extension of this territory, as Escobar argued that, “the discourse about the river as a

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80 Beals, The Aboriginal Culture of the Câhita Indians and The Contemporary Culture of the Câhita Indians, Erasmus, Man Takes Control.
81 Erasmus, Man Takes Control. See also O’Connor Descendants of Totoliguoqui.
The survival of traditions involving rivers was therefore essential to the maintenance of black and indigenous cultures in Colombia, as it was for the Mayo on the Fuerte River.

This dissertation complemented Escobar’s work by treating the Fuerte River as a vital territory in the preservation of Mayo culture. Both of our compositions provided clear examples of how local people used their knowledge systems to respond to changes in the river system. My work advanced Escobar’s notions of the link between rivers and culture by showing how Mayos appropriated outsider’s uses of hydrological technology. By integrating canals, pumps, and aqueducts into their practices, some Mayos changed the terms of their political and socioeconomic marginalization while simultaneously protecting river territory that allowed them to conduct some religious ceremonies that were the backbone of their culture.

Contemporary Mayo Cultural Survival

Mayo culture in the Fuerte Valley is still vibrant. A shared language and common religious rituals (although practiced somewhat differently in each village) distinguish the Mayo from their indigenous neighbors of northwestern Mexico. Religious ceremonies and fiestas, consisting of dancers, musicians, and prayer teachers, remain vital to the survival of Mayo culture. Rising expenses for the rituals and increased Yori participation as a consequence of growing popularity of the ceremonies present serious obstacles. As is customary through the ages, many of the elders complain that the old customs are changing and that their culture is deteriorating.

I discussed in chapters four and six how Mayo village membership in the mid-twentieth century was based partially on an individual’s approach to the river and irrigation infrastructure.

82 Escobar, Territories of Difference, 50.
Today the inability of all indigenous people to access irrigation water from the Fuerte River eliminates this as criteria for membership. This does not detract from the centrality of the river in the Mayo culture today. Access to irrigation water is no longer an option for indigenous farmers, but this has not prevented villages and individuals from fighting to gain rights to the use of the Fuerte River as a site for religious ceremonies.

Indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley shifted their political strategies in the post-1970s period. Instead of attempting to acquire irrigation rights, they turned their attention to more viable goals, shifting their argument to religious claims to the water. For instance, Mayo elders Narciso Bachomo and Carlos Salcedo pointed out that,

There are several Yoreme activists today fighting to recover land and water rights. They are trying to rescue the places that are vital to indigenous religious ceremonies. All Yoremes understand that certain land and the river are sacred. The activists contend that some religious ceremonies can only be practiced in the river and on the riverbanks so therefore we have a right to these locations. They have repeatedly informed the Indian Affairs Commission and Commission of Ecology that Yoremes have no access to the ceremonial centers on the river. Some government officials say that Yoremes have the right to practice their ceremonies and are entitled to a concession. Yet there is not much will on behalf of the government to make changes to preserve these rights. It is up to Yoreme leaders to organize this movement so that we can continue to preserve our culture. The activists are methodical about the process. Their fight is not just to appeal to Mexican officials. Their actions are a way to lay a foundation to eventually appeal to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.83

In contrast to their predecessors who attempted to gain access to irrigation water, contemporary Mayo political activists now focus on the goal of convincing the state that the river, as a site for conducting religious ceremonies, is a vital component to their culture. Current struggles also contain an international approach as they seek political redress from the Inter-American Court.

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These recent indigenous political movements suggest that current river availability is not sufficient to fit the ceremonial needs of the Mayo community, even though some indigenous ejidos like Pochotal still have access to their riverbanks, allowing them to perform religious ceremonies like San Juan. The connection between cultural and physical survival and access to the Fuerte River was expressed by strategies described in chapters two through six between 1926 and 1970. It is now embodied in ceremonies that, in some villages, could no longer be held at the river, and is being regenerated through more direct political mobilization today.

I mentioned in chapter six that Mayo elders have always had different opinions about the primary reason why their culture is declining. One of the examples elders use for such deterioration is the limited use of their language. Attempts are underway to revive and maintain the Mayo language in schools and classes, even though younger generations seldom speak the language at home, and fewer people are left who use the language in everyday life. Mayo teachers with the help of state functionaries have established such classes in the Fuerte Valley. Both Yori and indigenous teachers are now passing on the dialect to mostly indigenous students in northern Sinaloa. Language teachers of the Fuerte Valley have helped preserve the indigenous dialect despite the hesitancy of younger generations to speak it. The ability of both Yori and indigenous instructors to teach the language has facilitated the maintenance of Mayo culture.

Another issue currently faced by Mayos is the participation of Yoris in some of their ceremonies. According to some elders, the meaning of ceremonies is sometimes lost as Yoris appropriate these traditions into their own practices. The participation of mestizos in Mayo rituals seems to be an inevitable reality that elders approach in different ways. Some elders expressed concern for cultural disintegration as a consequence of Yoris appropriating indigenous

84 Such sentiments were expressed by interview subjects such as Carla Bacosegua, Narciso Bachomo, and Carlos Salcedo.
traditions such as dances, claiming that Yoris will never fully grasp the significance of the dances.\textsuperscript{85} Other elders take a more nuanced approach by teaching the dances and traditions to mestizos, believing they will help these practices endure because they understand their true meaning. In exchange for teaching them the old ways, these mestizos will pass these traditions on to Mayos and other culturally sensitive Yoris, ensuring their survival in the future.\textsuperscript{86} This sort of adaptation which was also practiced in the mid-1920s through 1960s, in understanding the dominant culture’s practices as inevitable and approaching them using their own knowledge systems, helped Mayos set the terms for fulfilling their own goals, which were at least partially aimed at cultural survival.

Another obstacle in the conservation of Mayo culture is the rising cost of religious ceremonies. This is reflected in the increase in prices of food, beverages, and costumes necessary to enact these rituals. Mayo elder Flor Escalante of Jahuara pointed out that,

\begin{quote}
It costs a lot of money to buy the ingredients to make the traditional food used in these festivities. Some now offer beer or wine during ceremonies and it all costs a lot. Also the tenábaris [leg rattles used by dancers] can cost between $800 and $1500 pesos [60-115 dollars], and who can afford to buy that? Some Yoremes make these costumes themselves, but even that is difficult. For example to construct a pair of tenábaris during certain times of the year, one has to go to the mountain and make many trips looking for particular buds of plants, and they have become more and more rare. Some Yoremes resorted to using synthetic materials like aluminum or plastic to make them but these materials do not produce the same sound. Some would say this fake material detracts from Yoreme culture.\textsuperscript{87}
\end{quote}

Mayo religious ceremonies have turned more extravagant and expensive throughout the years. It seems that at least since the 1950s, every generation of Mayos complained about the rising costs.

\textsuperscript{86} An example of such a mestizo learning traditions from indigenous elders is Oralia Inzunza who approaches these dances and traditions with respect. Oralia Inzunza, Interview by James Mestaz, Zapotillo, Municip. Ahome, Sinaloa, Mexico, January 20, 2014.
\textsuperscript{87} Flor Escalante, Interview by James Mestaz, Jahuara, Municip. El Fuerte, Sinaloa, Mexico, July 13, 2014.
of certain ceremonies.\textsuperscript{88} It is unclear if Yori participation and the growing popularity of the rituals are consequences of the increase in prices of necessary ceremony materials. It is likely that Yoris were allowed to participate in some of these ceremonies at least partially to help cover escalating expenses.

Escalante also pointed out how changes to the natural landscape have made certain raw materials harder to collect, driving the price of costumes up. In chapter six I showed how the decline of butterfly cocoons in the 1960s made it more difficult to construct tenábaris. Today the disappearance of certain plant buds has also become an obstacle as artificial materials are now used to replace the buds. Similar to the use of synthetic supplies like plastic to build ramadas (also discussed in chapter six), some Mayo elders are also concerned that such uses to construct tenábaris create a disconnect between themselves and nature, leading to cultural decline.

There are similarities and differences in the ways Mayos use synthetic materials like plastic to construct ramadas and tenábaris today, and their predecessors’ acceptance of pumps, canals, and aqueducts in the 1920s through 1950s. Some Mayos integrated these artificial river apparatuses into their practices as they were cut off from their conventional uses of the river, similar to how some indigenous people today substitute synthetic materials because of their limited access to the natural landscape. The difference was that uses of canals, pumps, and aqueducts were tied in to their physical survival and defense of territory, which also allowed Mayos to preserve cultural traditions like religious ceremonies. The substitution of synthetic materials to build ramadas and tenábaris is an adaptation that promotes cultural, not physical survival.

\textsuperscript{88} In chapter six I pointed out that some elders complained about the rising costs of these ceremonies in the 1960s. Charles Erasmus also related such complaints by Mayos in the 1950s, \textit{Man Takes Control}, 279.
It will be interesting to see if efforts will be made to regenerate the growth of álamos trees on the river shore so ramadas can be made in the traditional way, or if Mayos will try to grow more plants that produce the buds for the construction of tenábaris. It is also possible that the uses of synthetic materials like plastic will become more acceptable within indigenous villages. What is certain is that Mayo opinions about the utility of hydraulic technology always differed, so there is every reason to believe that the uses of synthetic versus natural materials will continue to be a topic for debate for many years.

In every era of the twentieth century to present, political mobilization and uses of available technology gave Mayos more options to protect their cultural traditions. Bachomo’s rebellion was the most direct and unified of these struggles. Indigenous ejidatario uses of hydraulic technology in the mid-twentieth century expanded practices, protected riverine traditions, and allowed Mayos to employ schemes that facilitated cultural survival in an era when their religious ceremonies did not generate massive interest like today.89

Yoris participating in ceremonies and appropriating Mayo traditions is one of the costs for cultural survival in the twenty-first century. There is no clear consensus as to what extent, if any this dilutes Mayo culture. The ability of indigenous elders to regulate who participates in ceremonies, or teach the significance of cultural traditions to Yoris so they will approach them with respect, may determine how future generations respond to outsider interest in their culture. Mayo traditions have remained fluid as some ceremonies relate the histories of their people’s struggles over time. Perhaps the growing interest in Mayo culture will help Yoris better understand the symbolic connection between these indigenous people and the Fuerte River. The popularity of indigenous religious ceremonies indicates that Mayo traditions have indeed become

89 See chapter five’s discussion of Bachomo’s revival movement and Los Mochis officials’ unsuccessful attempts to use it to draw tourists.
a vital part of the Fuerte Valley culture in general, something that would have seemed
unimaginable by Felipe Bachomo a century ago.

Mayo Adaptation and the Future

There are a few examples that help explain the similarities between the changing physical
landscape of the Fuerte Valley and Mayo culture in the mid-twentieth century. Throughout the
twentieth century and particularly in the 1950s, Yori farmers and entrepreneurs, sometimes with
the help of Mayos, cleared out thousands of hectares of scrub brush, trees, and other natural
vegetation to make room for large scale crop growing ventures. These attempts to create fertile
and open farmland to grow crops such as sugarcane, cotton, or fruit, proved to be more difficult
than Yoris anticipated, largely due to the local flora’s resilience. Mayo elder Felicitas Mejía of
Vinaterrias explained that,

Yoris came in and removed natural vegetation to make room for farmland and
canals. But it was not always easy to get rid of these plants. Plant roots are very
strong. Yoris had to dig deep within the earth to remove them. Sometimes when
they completely removed the plant and the root, the seed would fall to the earth
and the plant would be born again.⁹⁰

Could the resilience of natural vegetation and the switch to mass produced crops be used as
metaphors to describe the preservation of Mayo culture within the Fuerte Valley from the mid-
1920s through 1970?

Yoris and Mayos developed different approaches to the Fuerte River and natural
landscape over the course of several centuries. The former spent the majority of the twentieth
century attempting to separate the latter from the riverbanks and annex land that could be used to
generate profit. Yoris did not take into account the importance that the river and natural
landscape played in the maintenance of religious ceremonies and ultimately the protection of

Mayo culture. Yoris altered the natural landscape and limited Mayo access to property and natural resources, yet indigenous culture survived.

Yoris and (often reluctant) Mayos cleared out thousands of hectares of natural vegetation and replaced it with cash crops such as sugarcane and cotton. I discussed in chapters four through six that a large number of indigenous ejidatarios were dispossessed of their lands in the 1940s and 1950s, and the unavailability of irrigation water forced others to illegally sell or rent their ejidal properties to entrepreneurial Yoris. Indigenous people often become laborers on their former ejidal lands. Instead of growing corn, beans, and squash as before, these laborers were still fulfilling their longstanding role of working the soil and facilitating life within the local ecosystem. Milpa crops, as well as scrub brush, trees, and other natural vegetation were largely substituted with cash crops, but plant life persisted. Along those same lines, the structure of Mayo communities, relationship with the state, religious ceremonies, and utilization of natural resources (including the river) underwent drastic changes during the mid-twentieth century. Uses of such technologies as canals, pumps, and cooperatives by some Mayos diversified practices and allowed them to defend territory necessary to retain traditions. Such schemes and adaptation helped their culture survive, albeit in an altered state.

The removal of some Mayos from their ancestral lands and limited access to the Fuerte River and natural landscape by the 1960s resulted in the disappearance of particular religious rituals in some villages but not in others. For instance I pointed out in chapter six how the ejido of Tehueco stopped performing the San Juan ceremony, while the tradition survived in Pochotal. These changes created recognizable distinctions between villages but also helped bring them together. Villagers from Tehueco had the opportunity to partake in the San Juan ritual in Pochotal (or other villages that retained the ceremony).

91 Beals, The Contemporary Culture of the Cákita Indians, 207. Also see introduction to this dissertation.
Participation in other villages’ ceremonies united Mayos behind their similarities while acknowledging each other’s differences. This diversity of tradition dropped the seeds of cultural regeneration as indigenous religious practices were taken up by new generations of Mayos. This perpetual rebirth helped to ensure cultural survival in the mid-twentieth century up until today. Yoris never cleared away all of the natural vegetation of the Fuerte Valley because the roots were too strong. They also never completely separated Mayos from the river and natural landscape, or eliminated their cultural practices as indigenous peoples’ roots also proved resilient.

The retention of their symbolic connection to the Fuerte River facilitated the survival of Mayo culture through the twentieth century and into the present. The use of canals, pumps, and aqueducts from the mid-1920s through 1960s allowed some indigenous farmers to extend their connection to the river, which in turn protected religious ceremonies such as San Juan. The inability of Mayos to access irrigation infrastructure after the 1950s altered this arrangement, but it did not eliminate this symbolic relationship completely.

Mayos responded to the lack of access to irrigation in different ways. Some villages as Pochotal managed to hold onto their river shore properties and continued to practice such riverine rituals as San Juan. Other villages like Cahuinahua and La Palma, who lost their river shore lands, began to perform this ceremony in the irrigation intake structure. In villages such as La Misión, Mayos adapted to the elimination of access to irrigation water and the river itself by fishing in canals. These examples highlight multiple reactions to restrictions on accessing the Fuerte River by the mid-twentieth century. Wild vegetation was replaced by cash crops in the Fuerte Valley and similarly, Mayo uses of the Fuerte River also changed, but their ability to retain a riverine connection allowed for cultural survival, again in an altered state.
This dissertation therefore contributed to existing scholarship on cultural survival by analyzing the historical link between Mayos and their natural landscape. The indigenous people of the Fuerte Valley used technologies in numerous ways to adapt to the massive changes going on around them. In this particularly arid region of Mexico where access to irrigation water became synonymous with power, uses of hydraulic technology allowed Mayos more options for resilience from the mid-1920s through 1960s. Indigenous people’s approaches to their natural environment, particularly changes in practices involving their river systems therefore need to be understood in terms of strategies for both cultural and physical survival.

The voices of Mayo elders today relate intentions to continue maintaining a symbolic reciprocity with the river by embracing all technologies at their disposal. Mid-twentieth century uses of irrigation infrastructure such as pumps and canals, and interaction with the SICAE allowed Mayos a voice within local development decisions while changing the ways they accessed the Fuerte River. Time will tell if younger generations will listen to the voices of elders and let the actions of their ancestors inspire them to find their own means to engage the Fuerte River in a way that conserves their culture by adjusting to the changing physical landscape. The future of the Mayo, especially through the lens of their current limited economic opportunities and rights to the land and river appear somewhat bleak. Yet again these indigenous people have always found ways to adapt and survive by maintaining a symbolic connection to the Fuerte River.
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**Archives with Documents Cited**

(AGA)Archivo General Agrario

(AGN)Archivo General de la Nación

(AHA)Archivo Histórico del Agua
James V. Mestaz
Curriculum Vitae

Department of History
University of Iowa
268 Schaeffer Hall
Iowa City, Iowa 52242

721 Brown St, Iowa City, IA 52245
Email: j_mestaz@yahoo.com
Cell: 773/418-1507

Academic Appointments

2016-present  Visiting Assistant Professor, Department of History
University of Iowa

Education

2016  University of Illinois at Chicago
Ph.D., Department of History (Summa Cum Laude)
Dissertation Title: Fuerte River Histories and Ambivalent Mayo Modernity in
Mexico, 1926-1970
Dissertation Adviser: Christopher Boyer

University of Miami
2009  M.A. Latin American History (Cum Laude)

University of California, Los Angeles
1998  B.A. History/Specialization in Chicana/o Studies

Courses Taught at University of Iowa

HIST 4216: Mexican American History
HIST 4515: Introduction to Modern Latin America
HIST 1004: The Mexican Revolution

Additional Teaching Experience

Teaching Assistant, Department of History, University of Illinois at Chicago
2016  History of Western Civilization Since 1648
2015  History of Western Civilization to 1648
2013 Latin American History Since 1800
2012 World History Since 1400
2011, 2012 Mexican History Since 1850

Teaching Assistant, Department of History, University of Miami
2001, 2003 History of Western Civilization
2002 History of the United States

Classroom Lectures
2016 UIC, History of Western Civilization Since 1648, “The Russian Revolution”
2012 UIC, Mexican History Since 1850, “The Fuerte River: Mayos, Modernization, and Technology”
2011 UIC, Mexican History Since 1850, “Mayo and Yaqui Mobilization during the Mexican Revolution”

Honors
2016 Dean’s Scholar Fellowship, UIC (Declined Offer)
(Awarded to 20 advanced PhD students at UIC)
2014 Marion S. Miller Dissertation Fellowship, UIC
(Awarded to two PhD candidates annually in the UIC History Department)
2011 San Juan de Letras Society at Oaxaca Summer Institute
(For presenting outstanding research paper)
2010 Abraham Lincoln Graduate Fellowship, UIC
(Two year recruitment award granted to a limited number of UIC graduate students)

Honors and Travel Awards
2015 Best Graduate Student Paper Award (in honor of Adrian Bantjes)
Rocky Mountain Council for Latin American Studies Conference
2014   Graduate Scholar Award  
12th International Conference on New Directions in the Humanities, Madrid, Spain  

2012-2016   UIC Graduate Student Council Travel Award  

2012-2016   UIC College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Ph.D. Student Travel Award  

2012-2016   UIC Graduate Student Conference Presenter Award  

2013, 2015   UIC History Department Graduate Travel Award  

2011-2013   UIC History Department Doctoral Award (Enhanced Honorarium TAship)  

2012, 2013   UIC Chancellor’s Supplemental Research Fellowship  

2002-2004   University of Miami History Department Travel Award  

2000   U.S. Student Delegate  
Latin American and Caribbean Student Congress, Havana, Cuba  

1999   Witness for Peace Delegate  
(U.S. Delegate to Guatemala to monitor implementation of 1994 peace accords)  

**Conference Presentations**  


2011  “Yaqui and Mayo Adaptability: Resistance and Survival During the Mexican Revolution,”
Loyola University History Conference, Chicago, IL, November 5.

2011  "Yaqui Resistance and the Mexican Revolution," Eyes on the Mosaic Graduate Student
Conference on Race, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL, May 21.

**Community Service/Related Work Experience**

2010  Conducted Information Seminars "How to Get Accepted to Graduate School"
UIC Academic Center for Excellence, U.S. Hispanic Leadership Institute
Conference

2009-2010  Intern/Writer (online)
Indigenous People’s Issues and Resources

1999-2000  Coordinator
Chicano/Latino Student Resource Center, California State University, Los
Angeles

1999-2000  Volunteer Tutor
Chicano/Latino Student Resource Center, California State University, Los
Angeles

1993-1996  Office Manager/Researcher
National Center for History in the Schools, Los Angeles, California

1994-1996  Mentor and Tutor for Inner-City Youth
Amigos del Barrio, Los Angeles, California

**Service/Membership in Service Organizations**

2013-2016  Founding Member UIC Latina/o Graduate Student Association
Treasurer

2011-2015  UIC Latino Cultural Center Ambassador Group

2010-2013  UIC Windy City History Conference Committee

2010-2016  UIC History Graduate Society

1995-1997  UCLA Movimiento Estudiantial Chicano de Aztlan
1994-1996        UCLA Latin American Student Association
1993-1998        Theta Delta Chi National Fraternity (UCLA)
                 Chapter Vice President

**Membership in Professional Associations**

Conference on Latin American History
Rocky Mountain Council for Latin American Studies
Southwest Council for Latin American Studies

**Foreign Languages**

Fluent in Spanish (reading, writing, conversation, translation)
Determination Notice
Activity Does Not Meet the Definition “Research”

December 3, 2012

James Mestaz, PhD
History
2325 S. Leavitt Street, #2R
Phone: (305) 803-4309

RE: Research Protocol # 2012-1042
“Native Mayos of northern Sinaloa, and their relationship with water, specifically with the Fuerte River from 1916-1970”

Dear Dr. Mestaz:

The above proposal was reviewed on December 3, 2012 by OPRS staff/members of IRB #2. From the information you have provided, the proposal does not meet the definition of research as defined in 45 CFR 46.102(d). This proposal is not subject to the research regulations under the Federal Common Rule and oversight by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). However this proposal may be subject to other state, local or institutional regulations, policies or requirements.

The specific definition of research under 45 CFR 46.102(d) is:

Research means a systematic investigation, including research development, testing and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge. Activities which meet this definition constitute research for purposes of this policy, whether or not they are conducted or supported under a program which is considered research for other purposes. For example, some demonstration and service programs may include research activities.

All the documents associated with this proposal will be kept on file in the OPRS and a copy of this letter is being provided to your Department Head for the department's research files.

If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the OPRS office at (312) 996-1711 or me at (312) 355-2908. Please send any correspondence about this protocol to OPRS at 203 AOB, M/C 672.

Sincerely,

Charles W. Hoehne
Assistant Director
Office for the Protection of Research Subjects

cc: Eric Arnesen, History, M/C 198
Christopher Boyer, History, M/C 198