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Archives, Citizenship, and Interculturalism

Panel: "Social Sciences Projects"

Archives and New Perspectives on the Cultural and Imperial Borderlands of the Americas

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"Borderlands" as a concept and a field of academic inquiry has opened new dimensions of interdisciplinary and critical thought in the last quarter-century at the same time that ethnohistorical approaches to imperialism and colonialism have produced critical analyses of European imperial spheres in the Americas and other world regions. Borderlands encompass political boundaries, but our understanding of them has expanded to comprehend spaces of cultural exchange and ecological transition as well as zones of political encounters and negotiations. Comparative research has enriched the conceptual frameworks that define borderlands, expanding their theoretical significance for history, social sciences, and humanities. It has become an exciting field of scholarship that includes environmental change, powerful indigenous federations in both North and South America, gendered histories in the mixed social fabrics of borderlands, the complex degrees of difference between freedom and bondage, and Afro-descendant populations in the Iberian borderlands.

The contributions of archival research to crafting new perspectives on the borderlands of the Americas are evident in the collective project entitled "Borderlands of the Iberian World," under contract with Oxford University Press for release in 2018, will be published in print format and in a simultaneous electronic edition. Forty authors have brought their original research to integrate interdisciplinary approaches to this central theme and illustrate the historical processes that produced borderlands in the Americas and connected them to global circuits of exchange

and migration in the early modern world. The project brings together specialists in different world regions that have a historical connection with the Spanish and Portuguese imperial spheres and with their geographic and cultural borderlands in both South and North America, extending to maritime networks across the Caribbean, Atlantic, and Pacific oceans. The result is a balanced state-of-the-art educational tool representing innovative research for teaching and scholarship on the Iberian borderlands. The completed volume, submitted for publication, provides a synthesis of new research as well as primary source materials of texts, images, and digital artifacts via open-access websites, contextualized with historical summaries and personalized stories that will serve educational needs and reach a broad public outside the academy.

The innovative contributions of borderlands studies to history and related disciplines in the social sciences and humanities have emerged from research in archaeology, ethnohistory, and cultural geography as well as new currents in literature, Native American studies, Africana diaspora, and gender and sexuality studies. Histories of displacements and migrations have problematized the identities of peoples as diverse as the Latino/a communities of North America, the mixed populations of the Caribbean basin, and the cultural mosaics of highland and lowland South America. The commercial networks forged by Portuguese and Spanish imperial ambitions established trade networks that set in motion both forced and voluntary migrations extending from South Asia across the Americas and to Africa, creating transcontinental borderlands of vast geographical and historical proportions. The chronological depth and spatial breadth of the imperial spheres and heterogeneous populations of the Iberian World provide a unique perspective on global history. This volume foregrounds the Iberian borderlands in the early modern period. Its chronological framework, extending from the fifteenth to the nineteenth-centuries, presents a critical view of empire as a European-centered extension of power,

emphasizing histories of overlapping and competing spheres of power. The contributing authors built their chapters on interpretive syntheses of the existing literature together with their original research, illustrating different methodological approaches to archives and other kinds of primary sources.

*Borderlands of the Iberian World* is structured around the following broad themes: environmental change and the production of humanly crafted landscapes; the important role of indigenous allies in the Spanish and Portuguese military expeditions into the borderlands of North and South America; negotiations of power across imperial lines and indigenous chiefdoms; the parallel development of subsistence and commercial economies, highlighting both terrestrial and maritime trade routes; labor and the corridors of forced and free migration that led to changing social and ethnic identities; exchanges of plants, animals, and microorganisms that altered demographic and social configurations; histories of science and cartography; musical and visual artistic traditions in the religious cultures of both South and North America; gender and sexuality, emphasizing distinct roles and experiences documented for men and women in the borderlands.

The book's geographical scope extends to the historical creation of imperial borderlands in what today is northern Mexico and southern United States; the greater Caribbean basin, including cross-imperial borderlands among the islands and portions of coastal Florida and internal indigenous trade routes of Central America; the greater Paraguayan river basin, including the Gran Chaco and the lowland areas of Brazil, Paraguay, and Bolivia; the Amazonian borderlands; the grasslands and steppes of Patagonia and Araucanía and the archipelagos of maritime inlets in the "*frontera de arriba*" surrounding the Strait of Magellan. It includes Iberian trade networks that created oceanic borderlands connecting the Americas to Africa and Asia.

While centered in the Iberian colonial period, it is framed by chapters on the pre-contact Mesoamerican borderlands of North America and the Amazonian borderlands of South America. Chapters include nineteenth-century historical developments for those regions where the continuity of inter-ethnic relations with the colonial period is particularly salient, like the lowland tropical regions of northern Bolivia and central Brazil or the Mapuche/Pehuenche captaincies in South America. In summary, then, archival research comprises a central part this collective work, understood here as a social science project, to produce each of the chapters and to guide the vision for the entire volume on Borderlands of the Iberian World. This project has come to fruition thanks to the generous support of universities and research centers like CIESAS and UAM-Azcapotzalco, in Mexico, the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, the Mexican Consulate-General in Raleigh, North Carolina, the Council of American Overseas Research Centers, and the Americas Research Network.

The relationship between archives, citizenship, and interculturality has many dimensions in the external borderlands of nations and empires and in the internal borderlands within nation-states. Let us consider a few of the different venues for carrying out research directly in the archives and for transmitting the knowledge gleaned from them to contemporary communities. Many of us working on different themes and time periods of Mexico's history in the Archivo General de la Nación have observed small groups of *campesinos*, rural villagers, enter the galleries to find documents that substantiate the communities' claims to parcels of land and their political jurisdictions. At the same time, ethnohistorians, anthropologists, sociologists, legal historians, and cultural geographers have contributed their expertise to construct the histories of indigenous communities in numerous cases of formal litigation or simply community interest to trace their roots and social evolution over time. In recent decades, in a significant development,

members of indigenous communities have themselves joined the ranks of academically trained researchers, directing their talents to the revitalization of languages, the strengthening of cultural traditions, and the writing of local histories. Archives figure in important ways in all of these dimensions to reconcile the diversity of ethnic identities and polities, as implied in the concept of *interculturality*, with the principle of national citizenship.

I recently had the opportunity to share my research with the participants in the National Gathering of Indigenous Peoples of Northern Mexico (Encuentro Nacional de Pueblos y Tribus Indígenas del Norte de México), held in the village of Cohuirimpo, in the Mayo river valley of southern Sonora. The meeting was sponsored by INAH, the Colegio de San Luis, the Center for Orientation and Advisement for Indigenous Peoples, and the community of Cohuirimpo with financial support from the Ford Foundation. Over two days of workshops representatives of indigenous communities from Chihuahua, Baja California, Sonora, Sinaloa and Nayarit (all in northwestern Mexico) shared their experiences of defining and defending their territories and of confronting local and state authorities over large-scale hydraulic and energy projects that can affect their peoples adversely.

The organizers invited me to give the opening *plática*, an informative talk, to lead off the discussions. As an archival historian whose research focuses on this region, I experienced both the opportunity and the challenge of bringing together the well-documented history of the *Yoremem* peoples of the Mayo river basin with the cultural and ecological issues that they face in the present time. My objectives were two-fold: first, to show them that the landscapes of *both* cultivable land and the *monte* or uncultivated scrub forests and grass lands stretching away from the river's floodplain, were created by human action over time; in a word, that nature and culture are entwined; secondly, and to make this idea more concrete, to demonstrate how archival

documents become powerful tools in the hands of historians and of local communities. I selected a Jesuit census of the eight missions in the Mayo river valley at mid-eighteenth century, a list that included the village of Cohuirimpo, located in the center of the valley, meaning “where the river turns.” I then took examples of disputes between indigenous communities and Spanish landowners over territorial boundaries from the upper portion of the river, deep in the foothills of the Sierra Madre Occidental, during the early eighteenth century, and from the lower river valley in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. By projecting portions of the texts and photographs of the surrounding countryside, I endeavored to show how the language of land titles and measurements from the *titulos primordiales*, documents that were produced for fiscal and legal purposes, give valuable information about the sources of water, vegetation, land contours, and vestiges of human habitation that create living histories. These documentary trails are traceable in the land itself. The message I tried to convey to the assembled representatives of indigenous communities, and particularly to our hosts, emphasized the *persistence* of native peoples in their social bonds and territories even in the face of undeniable power dynamics between different historical actors in the economies of land management and the symbolic meanings of territory over time.

Archives and oral traditions meet along intercultural pathways in ways that are complex with abundantly different meanings. An especially fulfilling outcome of my visit to Cohuirimpo was the opportunity to talk with two elderly gentlemen from the community to help me in my reading of the documents. Each of the land titles I had prepared for my presentation contained place names with variant spellings of indigenous spoken words, as these were heard and eventually written down by their colonial interlocutors. I needed to learn from knowledgeable persons in the locality what their meanings might be for this region and its cultural landscapes.

We consulted among the three of us on Sunday morning, in the small village chapel, and from our conversation I was able to glean the meanings of terms that appeared in the documents, of the names of a number of the historic and present-day Yoreme villages along the river basin, and of other plants and animals that populate the living environment and the memories of these two narrators, supplemented with the offerings of other participants in the gathering. I also learned about the lives of these two gentlemen, their childhood memories, and their experiences as peasant farmers *and* as members of an indigenous community, in the complex and often contentious history of post-revolutionary Mexico.

It is commonplace – and no less true for being so – that archives are at the center of the institutional memory of nation-states. It is equally true that archives express the soul of local communities, especially when integrated with oral traditions, artifacts, and the contours of the land itself. The concept of citizenship, grounded in Enlightenment ideas of nationhood and equality before the law, is at the foundation of the constitution of Mexico, observed in its centennial this year. In recent decades, the demands of indigenous communities for the recognition of their cultural and linguistic identities, including their internal institutions of governance, have complicated the inherited meaning of citizenship with the concepts of pluri- or inter-culturalism and multi-ethnicity, terms that have been integrated into many of the constitutions of Latin America. This new understanding of citizenship has contested the traditional practices of statecraft, inherited from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At the same time it has generated new kinds of archives with both textual and non-textual materials and created the necessity for thinking about the connections between archives and historical processes in innovative ways. Archival history and oral history have long been partners in the recreation of past memories and experiences. Within these parallel currents of historical inquiry, to

view the nation from the plaza of a small community like Cohuirimpo is to raise new questions about cultural belonging and the political practice of citizenship.