

Delineating the Peace: Marking Oaxaca's State Boundaries, 1856–1912

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Abstract. This article analyses efforts by the state of Oaxaca to mark its border from 1856 to 1912. State officials hoped to demarcate a permanent border along the frontier as a way to delineate a peaceful ending to on-going boundary disputes, some of which allegedly dated to pre-Columbian times. The activity of marking Oaxaca's boundary effectively represented a literal process of Mexican state formation. Oaxaca officials attempted to negotiate the state's jurisdictional limits in cooperation with other federations as well as with their own citizens as they located the parameters of the state and the limits of its authority during the era.

Keywords: state formation, Oaxaca, Mexico, land disputes, spatial history

'There is no doubt that the most important factor ensuring the sovereignty of any nation or state is the possession of a distinct territory wherein the populace can pursue its interests in a regulated manner.'

Governor Luis Mier y Terán, 1885

As Oaxaca joined the new federal republic of Mexico as a state in 1824, a new question related to its territorial sovereignty soon revealed itself. Simply stated, where exactly did the new state's borders lie? At first glance, the issue seemed uncomplicated. During the late colonial period, the Bourbons had streamlined New Spain's bureaucracy by dividing the viceroyalty into intendancies, including Oaxaca, each comprised of numerous *municipios*. When Oaxaca became a state, its officials hoped simply to reiterate these intendancy boundaries, transforming the territorial limits of frontier municipalities into Oaxaca's *límites* (boundaries) with other federations. The expectation was that municipal councils had marked their territorial margins reasonably accurately in colonial times and that, if not, they possessed historical titles providing detailed

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descriptions of village landholdings that would enable such an undertaking. Considering these factors, marking the precise location of the state's borders appeared to be a routine matter to bureaucrats just after independence.¹

Due largely to Mexico's – and consequently Oaxaca's – political instability, the task nevertheless proved difficult to carry out in practice. It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century, following the enactment of federal land laws in 1856, that a new generation of liberal leaders was able to devote serious attention to surveying and marking the boundary. These labours continued throughout the following decades, especially during the Porfiriato (1876–1911). Even so, the state's venture repeatedly met with frustration. After decades spent on the project, the arduous and contentious work of demarcating a boundary with Oaxaca's neighbouring states – Chiapas, Guerrero, Puebla and Veracruz – was only marginally completed by the time the 1910 revolution began.²

A major complication involved a developing redefinition of state territoriality after independence. As Peter Sahlins explained in his examination of the Spanish–French border in the Pyrenees, royal authority was traditionally envisioned in terms of sovereignty over 'subjects' residing in municipalities as opposed to mere jurisdiction over a delimited territory.³ This concept appears to have prevailed in New Spain, and Oaxaca's intendancy limits were never rigidly defined in terms of strict territoriality during the colony. As the federal system took hold after independence and the concept of private property evolved along with incipient capitalism, individual states began to redefine their administrative provinces in terms of *bounded space*. Just as importantly, officials began to imagine state territoriality as permanently demarcated, an assumption that tended to defy lived experience along Oaxaca's vast frontier.⁴ In practice, the municipal boundaries that bureaucrats had hoped to reiterate as state borders proved difficult to specify. Officials did not often encounter established boundaries along the frontier; rather, they found seemingly ubiquitous conflict regarding *límites* – a macrocosm of contradictory, indefinite and amorphous boundaries that often provoked violent disagreement regarding their whereabouts. The entire frontier region

¹ Gobierno del Estado de Oaxaca, *Memoria del Ejecutivo del Estado presentada al Honorable Congreso, 1844–1910* (Oaxaca: Imprenta del Estado, 1844–1910), p. 16 (hereafter Oaxaca, *Memorias*).

² Archivo General de la Nación (hereafter AGN), Gobernación: Autógrafos de leyes y decretos. 1888–1905. Vol. 2, exp. 47, Fs. 146–7; 1901–1910. Vol. 3, exp. 105, Fs. 167.

³ Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 2, 6; for Bourbon intendancies, see Lillian Estelle Fisher, 'The Intendant System in Spanish America', *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, 8: 1 (Feb. 1928), pp. 3–13.

⁴ Raymond B. Craib, *Cartographic Mexico: A History of State Fixations and Fugitive Landscapes* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), pp. 7–13, referred to this as an official 'fixation'.

seemed rife with boundary disputes that gave the impression of lawlessness along Oaxaca's periphery.

Building on Raymond Craib's observation that state formation in part involves efforts to 'define, codify and naturalize space', this article focuses on Oaxaca's contentious efforts to mark its territorial sovereignty – its state border – during the period 1856–1912.⁵ The evidence suggests that, efforts to institute private land tenure in rural Mexico aside, officials hoped to demarcate a permanent state border as a way to delineate a peaceful ending to these on-going *limites* conflicts. By focusing on the state's various campaigns to outline its jurisdictional province *on the ground*, we can observe the social, political and practical aspects of the formalisation of state authority in rural Oaxaca. These efforts, which took place over the course of nearly six decades, also demonstrate how frontier citizens sought to reaccommodate or, in Kapil Raj's terms, 'reposition' themselves according to the newly defined parameters of centralising state power during the era.⁶ As such, we might interpret Oaxaca's boundary marking as efforts to physically delineate the material and institutional parameters of state authority or, put another way, as a literal process of state formation, the results of which ironically demonstrate the state's inability to fortify its presence along its periphery in the decades prior to the revolution.

Internal Boundaries

Scholars from a variety of academic disciplines began paying serious attention to the historical and cultural construction of space by the 1980s.⁷ Building on a long tradition of cartographic history, studies in spatial history have often focused on exploration, discovery and the dialogic production of space.⁸ Recently, a burgeoning historiography owing much to the pioneering work of J. B. Harley has analysed the emergence of cartographic science as a critical tool of imperialism and nation building. Paying particular attention to the

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁶ Kapil Raj, *Relocating Modern Science: Circulation and the Construction of Knowledge in South Asia and Europe, 1650–1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 19.

⁷ Classic works of this extensive literature include Michel Foucault and Paul Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), pp. 239–56; Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Exploration of Landscape and History* (New York: Knopf, 1988); Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); this scholarship complemented a tradition of cartographic history. See J. B. Harley and David Woodward, *The History of Cartography*, 3 vols. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

⁸ On the dialogic construction of space, see Doreen Massey, 'Places and Their Pasts', *History Workshop Journal* 39: 1 (1995), pp. 182–92; and *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*; Greg Denning, *Islands and Beaches: Discourse on a Silent Land: Marquesas, 1774–1880* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1980).

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, these scholars generally view the historical production of maps and boundaries as processes embedded with interests related to statecraft.⁹ Many of these studies focus on the role of cartography in asserting national distinctiveness and have stressed the significance of borders in generating a common sense of national history unfolding, often anachronistically, on a permanently ‘fixed’ historical stage.¹⁰ Working from Thongchai’s maxim, that ‘a map is a model for, not a model of, what it purport[s] to represent’, many scholars have focused their studies on the construction of national borders via the process of map-making.¹¹

In Mexico, national boundaries represented a serious and sensitive public issue, especially after the cession of roughly half the nation’s territories to the United States in 1848. Arguably, the establishment of recognised national borders subsequently enabled the government to project a sense of its permanence on an otherwise chaotic political scenario. At the very least, the fabrication of maps featuring national borders evidenced the emergence of a visual culture that, as in other nations, worked to promote a collective sense of national identity among Mexicans.¹² By the turn of the twentieth century, a burgeoning geographic awareness contributed to a growing sense of common nationalism.

⁹ On cartography and empire, see Ricardo Padrón, *The Spacious Word: Cartography, Literature, and Empire in Early Modern Spain* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Matthew H. Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765–1843* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997); James Akerman, *The Imperial Map: Cartography and the Mastery of Empire* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Anne Godlewska and Neil Smith, *Geography and Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994); Ian J. Barrow, *Making History, Drawing Territory: British Mapping in India, c.1756–1905* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003); D. Graham Burnett, *Masters of All They Surveyed: Exploration, Geography, and a British El Dorado* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000); for a primer see J. B. Harley and Paul Laxton, *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); for cartography and Latin America, see Jordana Dym and Karl Offen (eds.), *Mapping Latin America: A Cartographic Reader* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

¹⁰ Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1994); Craib, *Cartographic Mexico*; these studies built on Carter, *Botany Bay*.

¹¹ Thongchai, *Siam Mapped*, p. 130; see for example, Barrow, *Making History, Drawing Territory*, p. 12.

¹² Magali Carrera, *Traveling from New Spain to Mexico: Mapping Practices of Nineteenth-Century Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); for cartography in Mexico beyond the Porfiriato, see Barbara E. Mundy, *The Mapping of New Spain: Indigenous Cartography and the Maps of the Relaciones Geográficas* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Michael A. Ervin, ‘Statistics, Maps, and Legibility: Negotiating Nationalism in Post-Revolutionary Mexico’, *The Americas*, 66: 2 (2009), pp. 155–79; Héctor Mendoza Vargas and Michel Antochiw (eds.), *México a través de los mapas* (México, DF: UNAM, 2000); Paula Rebert, *La Gran Línea: Mapping the United States–Mexico Boundary, 1849–1857* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2001).

Scholars interested in cartography's relationship to state formation have paid less attention to the historical production of internal spaces *within* national boundaries. The existent scholarship in this area has nevertheless generated innovative analyses of topics ranging from the implementation of private property regimes to the extension of state authority into previously (at least partly) autonomous rural provinces.¹³ Interestingly, the marking of individual states' borders – either in Mexico or abroad – has rarely been explored in academic scholarship.¹⁴ During the second half of the nineteenth century, almost all Mexican states – but especially Oaxaca, Veracruz, Puebla, Guerrero, Sonora, Tabasco, Chiapas, Tamaulipas and Nuevo León – made efforts to definitively formalise their jurisdictional boundaries. Bureaucrats in these states hoped to impose order on an otherwise confused reality along poorly defined state borders, where incessant *conflictos por límites* (boundary disputes) routinely disrupted everyday life and provided officials with both a metaphorical and a literal illustration of the limits of state power. By the late nineteenth century, liberal regimes intended to rectify this situation as a means of asserting governmental authority to overcome what they perceived as rural chaos. All told, surveying efforts aimed at rationalising rural property continued well into the twentieth century.¹⁵

Official campaigns to survey, map and mark state and other internal boundaries in Oaxaca proved contentious. Whereas the construction of Mexico's national borders arguably promoted unity around a common historical narrative, the practice of delineating state borders threatened to *divide* citizens and enflame territorial disputes, some of which had reputedly existed since pre-Columbian times.¹⁶ State officials nevertheless prioritised this activity between 1856 and 1912. They deemed it vital to rationalise the state's jurisdictional limits, seeing the implementation of defined boundaries as necessary in facilitating efficient government. In effect, Oaxaca officials believed that establishing a well-defined state boundary would translate to increased social and

¹³ Craib, *Cartographic Mexico*, pp. 163–92, provides a nuanced and elegant discussion of such efforts in Mexico; as do Robert H. Holden, *Mexico and the Survey of Public Lands: The Management of Modernization, 1876–1911* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1994); and Emilio Kouri, *A Pueblo Divided: Business, Property, and Community in Papanula, Mexico* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).

¹⁴ A notable exception for the state of Oaxaca is Édgar Mendoza García, *Los bienes de comunidad y la defensa de las tierras en la Mixteca oaxaqueña: cohesión y autonomía del municipio de Santo Domingo Tepehene, 1856–1912* (México, DF: Senado de la República, 2004); and *Municipios, cofradías y tierras comunales: los pueblos chocholtecos de Oaxaca en el siglo XIX* (Oaxaca: Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez, 2011); see also Edmundo O'Gorman, *Historia de las divisiones territoriales de México* (México, DF: Porrúa, 1966).

¹⁵ Matthew Butler and Antonio Escobar Ohmstede (eds.), *Mexico in Transition: New Perspectives on Mexican Agrarian History, Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (México, DF: CIESAS, 2013), pp. 33–80.

¹⁶ William B. Taylor, *Landlord and Peasant in Colonial Oaxaca* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1972), pp. 75–89, analyses indigenous land disputes in the Spanish era.

political order; clarifying internal boundaries would put an end to recurrent *límites* conflicts and enable officials literally to delineate the peace among frontier communities.¹⁷

Despite these efforts, numerous boundary disputes existed along Oaxaca's periphery on the eve of the 1910 revolution. In fact, the incidence of reported border conflicts steadily increased throughout the nineteenth century, *after* officials began seriously to demarcate state boundaries.¹⁸ This occurrence leads one to consider whether efforts to mark Oaxaca's borders after 1856 brought innumerable, previously existing territorial disputes into the state's 'field of vision', as most officials effectively concluded during the era, or whether the routines of marking definitive boundaries actually created altogether new disputes.¹⁹

'Conflictos por Límites'

Oaxaca's ill-defined borderlands both fascinated and frustrated officials. The state government first established an actual commission to demarcate its boundaries in 1826, though it never entered the field.²⁰ Eighty years later, officials bemoaned seemingly countless, recurrent and often violent disputes over such wide-ranging, yet closely related issues as land tenure, rental agreements and access to water and other resources.²¹ Whenever such disputes existed among indigenous villages, as was often the case along Oaxaca's frontier, their origins were understood to have predated the arrival of the Spanish and were attributed to a stereotypical propensity toward violence and disorder supposedly inherent among indigenes.²² Officials consistently interpreted rural conflict as evidence of a pressing need to civilise Indians who, though not 'nearly so nomadic' as in previous eras, nevertheless would benefit from the administrative and consequent social order attributed to the existence of properly demarcated political boundaries.²³

¹⁷ Examples appear in 'Plano Topográfico', Oaxaca, *Memorias*, 1848, p. 16; Mariano Jiménez, 'Límites Guerrero', Oaxaca, *Memorias*, 1883, p. 5; Luis Mier y Terán, 'Límites', Oaxaca, *Memorias*, 1885, pp. 4–5.

¹⁸ Taylor, *Landlord and Peasant in Colonial Oaxaca*, pp. 84–5, finds this to be the case; as does Craib, *Cartographic Mexico*, pp. 65–9.

¹⁹ On state vision, see James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997).

²⁰ Oaxaca, *Memorias*, 1908, p. 2; Jorge Fernando Iturrigarria, *Historia de Oaxaca, 1821–1854* (Oaxaca: Ediciones ERB, 1935), pp. 43–58, also mentions this date.

²¹ Oaxaca's state archives are rife with such incidents. See the un-indexed *Límites* files under Gobierno: Archivo General del Poder Ejecutivo de Oaxaca (hereafter AGPEO), Gobierno, Límites, Legajos 91–4, 99–101.

²² See José M. Águila to Governor (hereafter 'Gov.') of Oaxaca, 30 April 1895, AGPEO, Gobierno, Límites, Legajo 99/3.

²³ Oaxaca, *Memorias*, 1885, pp. 4–5; Taylor, *Landlord and Peasant in Colonial Oaxaca*, pp. 67–110, showed the opposite: indigenous pueblos were both numerous and sedentary in colonial times.

By the Porfirian era, officials held that an antidote to rural chaos along the frontier was to mark unmistakable borders that would be respected locally due to their assumed historical validity. While officials clearly sought to define limits so as to ‘spur agricultural development, foreign investment, colonization and commercial development’ by the late nineteenth century, they just as surely believed that distinct boundaries would put an end to countless ‘age-old’ land disputes.²⁴ Consistent with an intensifying belief in the mythical *pax porfiriana*, administrators hoped that the delineation of permanent boundaries would pacify rural Mexico.

Despite the contemporary argument that Oaxaca's land disputes were ancient in origin, rural Mexicans experienced changes during the second half of the nineteenth century that exacerbated existing boundary conflicts and probably created novel problems along the state's frontier.²⁵ Historians attribute much of rural Mexico's transformation during the era to the implementation of the 1856 Ley Lerdo and its supporting legislation. The law, which was included in the 1857 Constitution as part of a liberal package known as the *reforma*, effectively reified private property by stripping corporations, including the Church and indigenous villages, of their landholdings. The reform laws intended to create a rural middle class by transferring ex-communal lands to private owners, ideally indigenous villagers, who in turn would provide *municipios* with a tax base in rural property, thereby also establishing long-term government stability.²⁶

When applied, the reform laws produced erratic, sometimes contradictory, and significant changes in the countryside. On a national level, they generally disrupted traditional communal landholding patterns among indigenous villagers, and scholars have long considered reaction to the reform laws as a factor in the coming of the agrarian revolution of 1910. As Paul Garner has pointed out, historians have traditionally seen the *reforma* as emblematic of state efforts to ‘modernise’ rural Mexico, and its results – the loss of traditional landholdings and local sovereignty among rural inhabitants – provided a main focus for agrarian revolutionaries’ subsequent demands for ‘*tierra y libertad*’.²⁷ While

²⁴ Craib, *Cartographic Mexico*, p. 164; Oaxaca, *Memorias*, 1902, p. 6–7; and Oaxaca, *Memorias*, 1905, pp. 1–10.

²⁵ Margarita Menegus Bornemann, *La Mixteca Baja entre la revolución y la reforma: cacicazgo, territorialidad y gobierno: siglos XVIII–XIX* (Oaxaca: Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez, 2009), pp. 99–104, shows that land disputes in Oaxaca from 1821 to 1856 often involved contradictory claims to *cacicazgo* ownership (*cacicazgo* – land ruled by a *cacique*).

²⁶ Butler and Escobar Ohmstede (eds.), *Mexico in Transition*, p. 45.

²⁷ Paul Garner, *Porfirio Díaz: entre el mito y la historia* (México, DF: Ediciones Culturales Paidós, 2015), p. 285; see also Mark Saad Saka, *For God and Revolution: Priest, Peasant, and Agrarian Socialism in the Mexican Huasteca* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2013); for an excellent case study, see Romana Falcón, ‘Force and the Search for Consent: The Role of the *Jefaturas Políticas* of Coahuila in National State Formation’, in Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniel Nugent (eds.), *Everyday Forms of State*

recent scholarship on Mexico interprets the revolution as part of a *longue durée* reordering of the countryside over the course of more than a century, it also maintains the centrality of the *reforma* in initiating rural change.²⁸

Parts of Oaxaca, particularly the centre and coastal areas, experienced fairly extensive commercial growth during the late nineteenth century following the *reforma*. Especially after 1880, the infusion of considerable domestic and foreign capital ensured the production of various export crops, while a new railway infrastructure tied the state's economy to outside markets.²⁹ Nevertheless, elite wealth in Oaxaca mainly lay in commercial ventures as opposed to landownership. As such, the new laws failed to transform communal landholding in Oaxaca to the degree to which they may have in other states.³⁰ As Benjamin Smith has shown, 'land was not the problem' in most of rural Oaxaca, where communities used a variety of strategies to avoid the worst effects of the reform laws. In particular, rural villagers formed *sociedades agrícolas* (agricultural societies) whose members purchased land privately, much like the peasant stockholders, or *condueños*, in other states. However, in Oaxaca they did so to continue practising communal farming traditions, thereby manipulating the new laws in their own favour as best they could by distributing land among members.³¹

Many villagers along Oaxaca's border formed *sociedades agrícolas* during the late nineteenth century.³² They did so not only to outmanoeuvre the Lerdo law in Oaxaca, but apparently for another important reason: to avoid

Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), pp. 107–34.

²⁸ Romana Falcón, 'Bajo la imperiosa necesidad de vivir: las profundas raíces agraristas en Chalco (Estado de México)', in Butler and Escobar Ohmstede (eds.), *Mexico in Transition*, pp. 111–48.

²⁹ Compare Francie R. Chassen de López, *From Liberal to Revolutionary Oaxaca: The View from the South: Mexico, 1867–1911* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004); with Paul Garner, *Regional Development in Oaxaca during the Porfiriato, 1876–1911* (Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 1995) for post-*reforma* economic development.

³⁰ See Charles R. Berry, *The Reform in Oaxaca, 1856–1876: A Microhistory of the Liberal Revolution* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1981); and Manuel Esparza, 'Los proyectos de los liberales en Oaxaca (1856–1910)', in Leticia Reina (ed.), *Historia de la cuestión agraria mexicana, Estado de Oaxaca*, 2 vols. (México, DF: UABJO), vol. 1, pp. 271–329.

³¹ Benjamin T. Smith, *The Roots of Conservatism in Mexico: Catholicism, Society, and Politics in the Mixteca Baja, 1750–1962* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2012); for this subject elsewhere, see Antonio Escobar Ohmstede and Frans Schryer, 'Las sociedades agrarias en el norte de Hidalgo, 1856–99', *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*, 8: 1 (1992), pp. 1–21.

³² See for example J. Vicente Fagoaga to C. Juez de la Primera Instancia, 28 May 1907, Archivo Histórico Judicial de Oaxaca (hereafter AHJO), Civil, Legajo 2/5; José Lucas Cruz to C. Juez de la Primera Instancia, 10 Feb. 1910, AHJO, Civil, Legajo 107/5.

encroachments from villagers and private landholders *in surrounding states* that had seen more extensive land privatisations. As communal property was transferred to individuals and *condueños* in the states of Veracruz, Puebla and Guerrero, conflicts along Oaxaca's borders became progressively more apparent throughout the second half of the century. Evidence suggests that boundary conflicts became especially urgent in four cases: 1) when municipalities made historical claims to landed possessions across poorly defined state lines; 2) when privately held *rancherías*, haciendas or *fincas* (estates) appeared along the border; 3) when either of the first two situations altered customary land uses and thereby threatened various established, generally malleable frontier spatial practices, and; 4) when authorities announced their intentions to demarcate a *permanent* boundary as a way to resolve an existing land dispute.³³

For Oaxaqueños along the state's border, land – and in particular its use and access to it – would indeed become an issue during the decades prior to the revolution. Although distinct boundaries had demarcated local municipalities, ranches, *fincas* and haciendas since colonial times, such boundaries were rarely seen – as they increasingly would be in the late nineteenth century – as either indisputable or permanent. Instead, land use practices along the border tended to reflect present needs, and boundaries were often renegotiated among local authorities and residents with the expectation that future circumstances could require further modifications.³⁴ These constant negotiations of land use and access produced many disputes and, as a result, officials became ever more convinced that the forever-changing frontier landscape required the implementation and enforcement of definitive borders. As such, state efforts to demarcate boundaries that officials billed as permanent created tension for residents in these areas.

Yet, local actors clearly also *led* efforts to implement boundaries on the state's margins after 1856. In an attempt to demonstrate lasting title to increasingly commodified land along the frontier, both municipalities and private landholders consistently financed their own surveys and boundary markings.³⁵ This controversial activity illustrated a basic fact that state officials understood well. That is, far from ensuring a peaceful end to existing problems, locally financed boundary demarcations held the potential to exacerbate or even inspire *límites* conflicts, particularly when they attempted to execute margins that ran counter to complex local land use customs. Privately financed boundary markings threatened to limit routine access to important sources of water,

³³ Each of these factors was involved in an on-going dispute in Zapotitlán Lagunas. 'Problema por límites entre este lugar y Xochihuehuetlan del Edo. de Guerrero, Zapotitlán Lagunas, Silacayoapam, 1910', AGPEO, Gobierno, Límites, Legajo 100/9.

³⁴ J. Carrera to Gov., 28 Feb. 1890, AGPEO, Gobierno, Conflictos por Límites de Tierras, 1710–1919, Legajo 85/8.

³⁵ Ramón Santaella to Gov., 29 May 1899, AGPEO, Gobierno, Conflictos por Límites de Tierras, 1710–1919, Legajo 55/39.

pasture and woodlands, as well as cultivable terrains based on rents and taxation. While the former had been widely practised, the latter had not been. Many tracts of land (*parajes*) had provided multiple traditional uses; a single *paraje* could offer different villages in neighbouring states a source for cutting palms, hunting game, accessing water, grazing cattle and sheep, reaping hardwoods and for other resources.³⁶ Over the years, local residents had devised elaborate customs granting multiple-party ingress to such areas, some of which was free of charge and some rent based.³⁷ Additionally, frontier lands were of disparate quality, and attempts to disentail productive terrains created understandable apprehension.³⁸

Concerned about the ramifications of hastily produced private surveys and border markings, the state of Oaxaca declared them illegal in 1884.³⁹ Federal law had since 1863 previously encouraged private landholders to survey their properties as a way to determine the extent of the nation's public lands (*terrenos baldíos*) and accelerate land reform.⁴⁰ However, when the national government changed its approach in 1883 and determined that only federally contracted survey companies could carry out such work, Oaxaca quickly followed suit by banning private surveys and boundary markings along its frontier, arguing that it was the responsibility of the state governments involved, and not private parties, to demarcate state lines. Nevertheless, as we will see, this controversial activity continued throughout the period.

The states of Guerrero, Puebla, Veracruz and Oaxaca each experienced individualised transformations in land tenure after the *reforma*. Along Oaxaca's frontier, changes in land use and ownership apparently inspired villagers to seek compensation elsewhere, often with the backing of *municipio* governments.⁴¹ Frontier residents especially objected when a private property owner or neighbouring villagers monopolised access to a source of water or transformed a customarily multipurpose *paraje* into a single-use tract, such as for growing coffee or sugar. Many border villages already suffered from a dearth of arable soil as well as of access to water and forestlands necessary for their sustenance. Traditionally, frontier residents had resolved this matter by renting cultivable *terrenos* and access to forest and pasturelands from nearby municipalities, some of which enjoyed ownership of excess

³⁶ Lorenzo Barroso to Gov., 27 May 1910, AGPEO, Gobierno, Conflictos por Límites de Tierras, 1710–1919, Legajo 60/10.

³⁷ In some areas, these customs grew out of the old *cacicazgo* system. See Menegus Bornemann, *La Mixteca Baja*, pp. 99–104.

³⁸ Kourí, *A Pueblo Divided*, p. 135.

³⁹ Mucio P. Martínez, *Arbitraje sobre límites territoriales entre los estados: Guerrero y Oaxaca* (Puebla: M. Corona y Cervantes, 1890), pp. 18–19.

⁴⁰ Holden, *Mexico and the Survey of Public Lands*, p. 15.

⁴¹ Lorenzo Barroso to Emilio Pimentel, 20 June 1910, AGPEO, Gobierno, Legajo 60/10; Emilio Pimentel to Mucio P. Martínez, 20 June 1910, AGPEO, Gobierno, Límites, Legajo 100/9.

acreage. Not surprisingly, villagers commonly rented and farmed lands from *municipios* lying across poorly defined state limits.⁴²

After 1856, the status of rented parcels became increasingly controversial. According to the new land laws, *municipios* no longer technically owned rural property and eventually were required to reallocate their possessions among villagers. Municipal governments nevertheless found it difficult to redistribute occupied rented plots, and often simply continued to collect from them. Frontier residents habitually claimed that rental agreements reflected unfair practices carrying over from colonial and *cacicazgo* days, whereby villagers were obliged to pay rents and perform duties for landlords as *terrazgueros*.⁴³ Villagers argued that they should either be granted *usuario* status – that is, access to lands rent-free – or simply enjoy permanent ownership of the plots they tended. Renters hoped to have these lands deemed *demasías* (overages), which effectively would have made them *baldíos* and enabled villagers to acquire clear title to them.⁴⁴ Municipalities also occasionally feuded over the right to rent land to so-called '*haciendas volantes*' – literally, mobile haciendas – for pasturing.⁴⁵

In this way, an already tense relationship became all the more complicated. *Vecinos* from border towns either sought permanent title to lands they had traditionally rented or argued that they already possessed title to these parcels.⁴⁶ By the 1870s, as it became evident that the authorities intended to clarify these matters with a definitive state boundary, border villagers began carrying out municipal surveys of lands to which they claimed ownership, seeking to demonstrate that rented lands actually lay on their side of the impending boundary. To complicate matters, private parties routinely sought to acquire rural property where controversy existed regarding rented *terrenos*. By carrying out their own surveys, private parties were often able to acquire title to these disputed territories under the nation's colonisation laws, which enabled individuals to claim *baldíos* once they made improvements to them. Situations such as these often led to prolonged, even violent *límites* disputes.

One such case near the Veracruz border illustrates this point. In the early 1890s, Plácido Pérez Figueroa, from Acatlán, Veracruz, acquired a recently designated *baldío* outside Soyaltepec, Oaxaca, that had traditionally been

⁴² Felisfón Estrada to Gov., 17 Dec. 1906, AGPEO, Gobierno, Conflictos por Límites de Tierras, 1710–1919, Legajo 1/22.

⁴³ *Terrazgueros* – sharecroppers.

⁴⁴ Mariano Arrellano to Gov., Oaxaca, 27 Feb. 1896, AGPEO, Gobierno de los Distritos, Legajo 54/14.

⁴⁵ 'Títulos pertenecientes a Don Guillermo Acho (Problema por límites entre Oaxaca y Guerrero)', AGPEO, Límites, Legajo 101/4.

⁴⁶ Gov. Oaxaca to Secretary ('Sec.') Fomento, 3 Dec. 1886, AGPEO, Gobierno, Conflictos por Límites de Tierras, 1710–1919, Legajo 1/14.

rented to residents of nearby Tenango. Soyaltepec had been experiencing conflicts with several Oaxaca and Veracruz communities over access to this land since the previous decade.⁴⁷ Tenango renters soon began to challenge both the title to and extent of Pérez's landholdings, in any case insisting they should be given control of the fields they had customarily tended. Pérez responded with a privately financed *apeo* (survey) and *deslinde* (boundary marking) to outline his new possessions, and was soon named head of the local rural constabulary.⁴⁸ But the Tenangoans continued to dispute the matter, complaining that they were paying double rents and taxes because of the poorly defined district limits of Tuxtepec with the state of Veracruz. They even demanded that the Jefe Político (head district official) of Tuxtepec assume payment of taxes that Pérez demanded from them. To their surprise, Pérez claimed that, as a result of his owning the property, the tract of land now belonged to Veracruz! In 1908, Pérez at last defended his legal title to the land, though it remained in Oaxaca.⁴⁹ Such outcomes, which altered land use (Pérez introduced coffee cultivation) and limited access to crucial local resources, represented a significant recurring grievance among frontier residents.

The tradition of renting *terrenos* across state lines contributed to many of the existing conflicts along the frontier. As in Tenango, after years of cultivating or foraging a particular tract, villagers apparently could become so accustomed to its stewardship that they simply declared the allotment their own inalienable property. Especially after rented lands became earmarked as *baldíos*, villagers who had traditionally worked such plots were forced to defend them as their own or risk losing access to them; villagers almost always argued that the land they cultivated had been theirs 'since time immemorial'.⁵⁰ In cases where such occupants refused to pay customary rents, local authorities understood them as 'land invasions' and usually defused them temporarily by meeting with officials from the disputing towns and evaluating their documentation pertaining to the areas in question, including the location of boundary markers (*mojoneras* or *linderos*), while walking the questionable margin with them.⁵¹ However, even in cases where documentation abounded,

⁴⁷ Oaxaca, *Memorias*, 1885, pp. 4–5; José Luis Zavila to Gov., 9 Feb. 1906, AGPEO, Gobierno, Conflictos por Límites de Tierras, 1710–1919, Legajo 85/1.

⁴⁸ Emilio Pimentel to Gov., Veracruz, 28 March 1905, AGPEO, Gobierno, Límites, 1901–1911, Legajo 60/3.

⁴⁹ Plácido Pérez to Emilio Pimentel, 8 June 1908, Gobierno, Conflictos por Límites de Tierras, 1710–1919, Legajo 85/18.

⁵⁰ Maximino Martínez to Gov., 8 May 1907, AGPEO, Gobierno, Conflictos por Límites de Tierras, 1710–1919, Legajo 60/5; 'El pueblo de Guadalupe Ramírez vs. Sra. Ramírez sobre terrenos que aquellos tienen arrendados, 1896–97', AGPEO, Gobierno, Conflictos por Límites de Tierras, 1710–1919, Legajo 75/14; and Oaxaca, *Memorias*, 1902, p. 5.

⁵¹ Yanna Yannakakis, 'Witnesses, Spatial Practices, and a Land Dispute in Colonial Oaxaca', *The Americas*, 65: 2 (2008), pp. 161–92, describes this practice in colonial Oaxaca.

such disputes could drag on for decades, as demarcating the exact location of an uncertain boundary failed to resolve the larger problem of scant access to local resources. This was certainly the case in the troubled area around Zapotitlán Lagunas, which was embroiled in a series of interrelated *límites* disputes with villagers from both Guerrero and Puebla from the 1850s through to the 1910s.⁵² These disputes became especially violent from 1891 to 1913 – tellingly, after the state's permanent boundary was supposedly marked.⁵³

But the 'odious and violent' events around Zapotitlán were far from anomalous.⁵⁴ Dozens of conflicts involving rental agreements occurred along the frontier in the decades before the revolution.⁵⁵ Not surprisingly, the *límites* issue formed a prominent part of official business. By the 1880s, it became commonplace for the governor to address the matter in the state's annual *Memorias administrativas*, revealing a tumultuous situation. Taking for example 1902 alone, officials complained of a typical array of issues associated with the state's boundaries. Various municipal authorities from Veracruz had mistakenly crossed into Oaxaca in pursuit of criminals on several occasions that year.⁵⁶ Elsewhere, a dispute between Tlaxiataquilla, Guerrero, and Tlachichilco, Oaxaca, began when *vecinos* from the former municipality torched a tree marking the boundary between them. District officials issued a demand customary during the era by insisting that the state government erect a 'permanent boundary' by which to put an end to such conflicts.⁵⁷ This request irritated state authorities because a joint commission between Oaxaca and Guerrero had already established a 'permanent' boundary in 1888 (see below). But the problems persisted; even efforts to improve municipal infrastructures along the border, especially via road construction, could embroil residents in territorial conflicts.⁵⁸

Frustrated Oaxaca officials attempted to inventory the existing *límites* disputes in 1907. The consequent register demonstrated that the majority of

⁵² 'Zapotitlán Lagunas se quejan de invasiones de los pueblos limítrofes de Puebla y Guerrero, 1905', AGPEO, Gobierno, Conflictos por Límites de Tierras, 1710–1919, Legajo 75/22.

⁵³ Lorenzo Barroso to Gov., 21 Nov. 1910, AGPEO, Gobierno, Conflictos por Límites de Tierras, 1710–1919, Legajo 60/10.

⁵⁴ Manuel Chávez, 'Informe', 31 July 1889, AGPEO, Gobierno, Conflictos por Límites de Tierras, 1710–1919, Legajo 60/2.

⁵⁵ 'Inventario relativo a cuestiones de terrenos que se hallan en la Sec. 6a para su arreglo cronológico, siendo de años muy anteriores al 1907', AGPEO, Gobierno, Conflictos por Límites de Tierras, 1710–1919, Legajo 60/4; 'Problema por límites, Tlahuapa de Edo. de Guerrero. Juxtaluaca, Petlacala', 16 Jan. 1903, AGPEO, Gobierno, Límites, Legajo 100/5.

⁵⁶ Oaxaca, *Memorias*, 1902, p. 3; by 1894, law officers could pursue criminals across state lines. Emilio Pimentel to Gov., Veracruz, 28 March 1905, AGPEO, Gobierno, Conflictos por Límites de Tierras, 1710–1919, Legajo 60/3.

⁵⁷ Joaquín Serrano to Gov., 30 Oct. 1909, AGPEO, Gobierno, Conflictos por Límites de Tierras, 1710–1919, Legajo 54/22; Oaxaca, *Memorias*, 1908, p. 5, contains a similar plea; as does Oaxaca, *Memorias*, 1902, p. 5.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

these disagreements occurred along the borders with Guerrero and Puebla, with the most serious conflicts taking place near the aforementioned Zapotitlán Lagunas. By that time, comparatively fewer problems occurred along the once volatile Veracruz border, while the situation on the relatively under-populated boundary with Chiapas proved mostly tranquil. The inventory listed 49 disputes along the frontier (along with dozens of boundary disputes within Oaxaca itself) between 1890 and 1901 alone.⁵⁹ During the period 1848–1910, several dozen *límites* conflicts were reported, with the majority occurring between 1888 and 1910.⁶⁰ From the perspective of state officials in Oaxaca, this situation proved embarrassing. It suggested that state authority and its main benefits by their definition – peace and prosperity – remained largely hypothetical even in late Porfirian Oaxaca.

Evidence of a Historical Boundary

‘No individual state’s territorial boundaries are indisputable.’

Mucio P. Martínez, 1890

The recurrent chaos on the frontier proved frustrating not least of all because Oaxaca’s boundaries, according to Governor Mariano Jiménez, were ‘well-known’ historically.⁶¹ Since colonial times, Oaxaca’s intendancy, provincial and state territorial limits seemed firmly established in the popular, literary and legal imaginations. Official documents, travellers’ accounts, geographical primers and schoolbooks, not to mention dozens of maps and an array of physical boundary markers purported to demonstrate the state’s territorial province by the second half of the nineteenth century.⁶² Oaxaca’s historical boundaries were so taken for granted at the time that historians of the era could speak anachronistically of the state’s role in the independence wars, when Morelos’s forces ‘invaded’ it via Huajuapam.⁶³ Convinced of the

⁵⁹ ‘Inventario relativo a cuestiones de terrenos que se hallan en la Sec. 6a para su arreglo cronológico, siendo de años muy anteriores al 1907’, AGPEO, Gobierno, Conflictos por Límites de Tierras, 1710–1919, Legajo 60/4.

⁶⁰ For specific litigation, see the following AGPEO collections: Gobierno, Gobierno de los Distritos (see Legajos related to border districts); Gobierno, Conflictos por Límites de Tierras, 1710–1919: see Legajo 75/6, especially; the Límites collection, Gobierno, Legajos 91–4, 99–101; also AHJO, Ramo Civil (Silacayoapam, Huajuapam de León, Jamiltepec).

⁶¹ Oaxaca, *Memorias*, 1883, p. 1.

⁶² See Johann Wilhelm von Müller, *Viajes por los Estados Unidos, Canadá y México*, reprint (México, DF: Tule, 1998); Cayetano Esteva, *Nociones elementales de geografía histórica del estado de Oaxaca* (México, DF: Hermanos San Germán, 1913); Antonio García Cubas, *Atlas Metódico para la enseñanza de la geografía de la República Mexicana* (México, DF: Sandoval y Vázquez, 1874); Alonso Luis Velasco, *Geografía y estadística del estado de Oaxaca* (México, DF: Oficina Tipográfica de la Secretaría de Fomento, 1891).

⁶³ Francisco Belmar, *Breve reseña histórica y geográfica del estado de Oaxaca* (Oaxaca: Imprenta del Comercio, 1901), p. 24.

state's well-established spatio-juridical permanence, Oaxaca officials consistently maintained that its borders were non-negotiable; that New Spain had designated clear boundaries when it created the Intendancies of Puebla and Oaxaca in 1718 and reaffirmed them in 1786, which Oaxaca later proclaimed as its territorial limits in the state constitution of 1825.⁶⁴ To their dismay, officials would gradually find that no such linear, permanent boundary had ever existed. Instead, intendancies' limits were defined by the controversial and often mutated territorial possessions of their constituent municipalities.

Nineteenth-century Oaxacans could point to a variety of legal documents indicating possession of various *parajes* belonging to *municipios* along the perceived state boundary as well as numerous *mojoneras* delineating them.⁶⁵ Yet such documentation, much of which dated to the colonial era, rarely convinced disputants along the boundary itself. Over time, many *límites* markers had either fallen into disrepair, become lost altogether, or had been destroyed, moved or forgotten.⁶⁶ In effect, whatever physical, overtly visible boundary existed between Oaxaca and its neighbouring federations did so in various states of repair during the second half of the nineteenth century, a fact that lent itself to controversy regarding the border's assumed location. Viewing this situation largely through the centralising lens of Oaxaca's state government, period officials nevertheless did not doubt the boundary's existence.

Although many of them were excellent by period standards, Oaxaca's numerous state maps proved impressionistic when it came to using them to mark or locate the boundary (Figure 1). This situation continued through to the end of the century. The most accurate maps during the late 1880s usually depicted Oaxaca nestled in among its adjacent federations at the preferred 1:100 000 scale, but with little more than a series of dashes providing the impression of the state's border.⁶⁷ In 1884, the renowned geographer

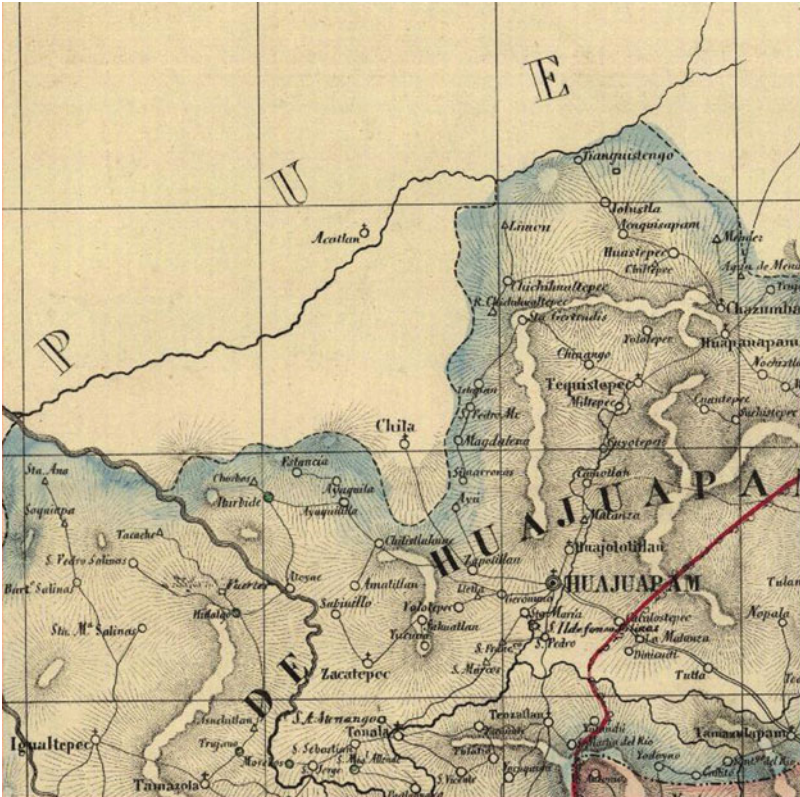
⁶⁴ Francisco Magro, *Alegato de bien probado de la parte de Oaxaca en el juicio arbitral que sigue con Puebla sobre límites de ambos estados* (Oaxaca: Talleres Cromotipográficos El Fénix, 1907), pp. v–vi.

⁶⁵ Jesús Acevedo to Gov. of Oaxaca, 9 Feb. 1889, AGPEO, Gobierno, Límites, Legajo 99/2.

⁶⁶ See the 1890 example in *Actas relativas a la discusión de los comisionados para arreglar la cuestión de límites entre el Distrito de Tehuacán, Puebla y los de Coixtlahuaca y Teotitlán, Oaxaca* (Puebla: Estado de Puebla, 1906), p. 15.

⁶⁷ Nineteenth-century maps of Oaxaca circulated widely. See Mapoteca (Map Collection) Manuel Orozco y Berra, Mexico City (hereafter MOB): José Siliceo A., 'Estado de Oaxaca' (Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Obras Públicas, 1901); G. Niox, 'Plan d'Oajaca' (Expédition du Mexique, 1861–1867); Manuel Ortega Reyes, 'Carta corográfica del estado de Oaxaca y de su capital y alrededores' (1882), featuring the 1:100 000 scale mentioned above; Massot Delafond E., 'Mapa del estado de Oaxaca' (1857); Manuel Ortega Reyes, 'Carta corográfica del estado de Oaxaca y de su Obispado' (1857). Antonio García Cubas, *Atlas mexicano* (México, DF, 1884–7) featured a map of the state; J. Sotomayor, 'Carta general del estado de Oaxaca' (1912–16) was the most accurate map to that date, resulting largely from the survey work described in this article; the British Library holds the 'Plano del Obispado e Yntendencia de Oaxaca en el Reyno de NE' (1804); and the Perry Castañeda

Figure 1. Detail from ‘Chorographic Map of Oaxaca and its Bishopric’ by Manuel Ortega Reyes, 1857



Note: The dotted line shows the border with the state of Puebla.

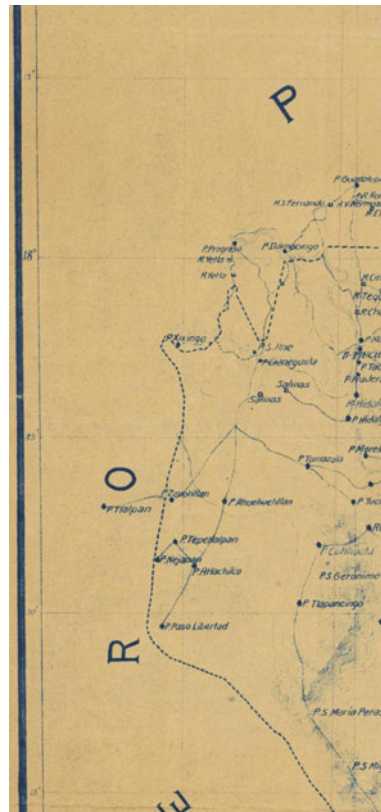
Source: Mapoteca Manuel Orozco y Berra.

Antonio García Cubas published what many considered the best map of Oaxaca in existence until the Comisión Geográfico-Exploradora (CGE) issued a meticulous, if as yet incomplete, state map in 1912 (Figure 2).⁶⁸ From independence on, most nineteenth-century maps portrayed the state’s boundaries as equivalent to those administered by the Bishopric of Oaxaca, which produced its own maps (see Figure 3); to some degree marking and subsequently enforcing state power along the frontier represented an effort to demonstrate the sovereignty of the federation based on its ability to accurately produce geographic knowledge.

Library at the University of Texas–Austin the ‘Mapa del Departamento Oaxaqueño que Dedicado al Señor Director Don Higinio Castañeda’ (1840).

⁶⁸ García Cubas, *Atlas mexicano*, p. 83.

Figure 2. Detail from the Map of Oaxaca Produced by the Comisión Geográfico-Exploradora in 1912, Recommissioned 1916



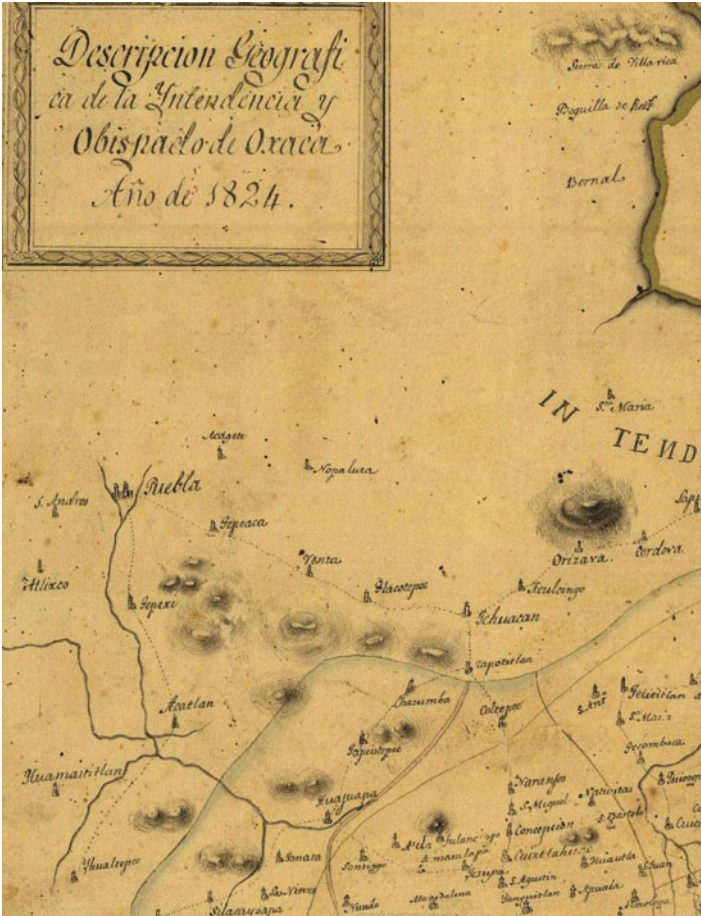
Note: This map simply reiterates the controversial Guerrero boundary shown in García Cubas's 1884 map. The large letters are from GUERRERO and PUEBLA. 'P' stands for 'pueblo', 'R' for 'río' in some cases and 'rancho' in others; 'H' stands for 'hacienda' and the letters following 'H' are usually part of the name of the hacienda: for example, 'H S Fernando' is 'Hacienda San Fernando' and 'H V Hermosa' is 'Hacienda Villa Hermosa'.

Source: Mapoteca Manuel Orozco y Berra.

Local maps, if and when they did exist, were similarly problematic. They tended to represent the varied interests of competing frontier actors, from municipal councils and agrarian societies to private parties. They were just as unreliable as the various general state maps in resolving real-world boundary disputes because they related local spatial perceptions developed outside the register of contemporary cartographic science (Figure 4).⁶⁹ As in Veracruz,

⁶⁹ Good examples include 'Plan de los terrenos de Santa Ana Rayón', AGPEO, Gobierno, Límites, Legajo 93/2; 'Río Lalana', AGPEO, Gobierno, Límites, Legajo 94/11; 'Zapotitlán Lagunas', AGPEO, Gobierno, Límites, Legajo 100/7.

Figure 3. Detail from 1824 Map of the State and Bishopric of Oaxaca Portraying their Territorialities as Equivalent



Note the repeated use of the ‘church’ symbol and the locations of mountains. The shaded band (bottom left to middle right) is the bishopric’s border, basically showing its equivalence with the border of the intendency of Oaxaca. The jagged line (top right) is the coast of the Gulf of Mexico.

Source: Courtesy Mapoteca Orozco y Berra.

local actors often produced maps that distorted the depiction of area landscapes and thereby exaggerated claims to nearby territories.⁷⁰ Local maps usually served more as implied historical title to current land claims than as accurate guides to the surrounding topography and any political boundaries demarcated there. Officials thus knew well that the only way to produce an

⁷⁰ Craib, *Cartographic Mexico*, pp. 211–16.

authoritative map of the state's boundaries was to survey the border and subsequently chart it from newly established, 'definitive' coordinates represented on site by boundary markers. To do this, a boundary commission would somehow have to mark the border in a manner *agreed upon* by the numerous parties involved in what was by all accounts a long history of recurrent disputes along the frontier.⁷¹

Therein lay the problem. There existed little agreement as to the exact location of the border for good reason: *no such physical boundary had existed* along the length of the state's frontier at any given time historically. Instead, what came to be commonly understood as the state's general borders during the era was the result of several intertwined and deeply layered cultural, linguistic and symbolic conventions – a colonial-era map or land title here, a major waterway or a pile of stones marking a *lindero* there. The existing *mojoneras* had been erected piecemeal at various times in the past and had since experienced innumerable, often controversial fates, especially where they marked boundaries between human populations, the exact places where such markers were reckoned most necessary. Nevertheless, many officials clearly believed that an objective, historically verifiable state boundary did in fact exist, and that effectively *re-marking* it was a formality dependent on securing proper historical and legal documentation.⁷² Accordingly, boundary commissions usually considered a massive amount of locally produced evidence in their attempts to determine the border's correct location.⁷³

Oaxaca's first serious attempt to establish a commission to collect local data from which to survey and mark its boundaries did not take place until the 1840s under Governor Benito Juárez (1847–52), who linked the nation's political and social turmoil to its lack of geographic knowledge.⁷⁴ Yet, the state was not able actually to field a commission until the 1870s because generating the public funds necessary to finance such a logistical undertaking proved unrealisable.⁷⁵ Practical problems involved finding and kitting out enough qualified personnel to finish the work, whose arduous nature also presented an obstacle. Oaxaca's frontier region roughly marked its borders with surrounding states for good reason, and efforts to mark its boundaries in such isolated, difficult terrain cost several lives during the era.⁷⁶

Oaxaca's state government worked both independently and jointly with each of its neighbouring states to survey and mark its boundaries. Like other states,

⁷¹ Oaxaca, *Memorias*, 1902, pp. 3–4.

⁷² Gov. to Manuel Muñoz Gómez, 5 Sept. 1891, AGPEO, Gobierno, Conflictos por Límites de Tierras, 1710–1919, Legajo 1/21.

⁷³ A good example is Martínez, *Arbitraje*, *passim*.

⁷⁴ For Juárez's analogy, see Oaxaca, *Memorias*, 1848, p. 16.

⁷⁵ Luis Mier y Terán to Francisco Arce, 7 Feb. 1888, in Oaxaca, *Memorias*, 1888, n.p.

⁷⁶ Martínez, *Arbitraje*, p. 9; Jesús Acevedo to Gov. of Oaxaca, 3 Feb. 1889, AGPEO, Gobierno, Límites, Legajo 99/2.

notably Puebla and Veracruz, Oaxaca contracted with the CGE to accumulate geographical information for the purposes of elaborating a state map. The height of these efforts occurred when engineers Abel Díaz Covarrubias and Clemente Rulfo were commissioned to determine coordinates for several Oaxaca and Guerrero localities so as to better determine the states' respective boundaries in three 1902 'expeditions'.⁷⁷ Employing the 'Mexican method', these traverse surveys enabled cartographers to roughly sketch each of Oaxaca's political districts and to register some 1,166 previously 'unknown' communities.⁷⁸ CGE engineers did not carry out further work before the events of the revolution forced the organisation to suspend its operations. Nevertheless, based on its own incomplete work and considerable data provided by Oaxaca's various boundary commissions, the CGE produced its 'definitive' state map in 1912.

In general, federal law complicated the process of state boundary marking. According to Article 110 of the 1857 Constitution, the states, not the federal government, were responsible for such work, though the federal government would arbitrate disputes in such matters.⁷⁹ Thus, Oaxaca routinely named *comisiones deslindadoras* (boundary commissions) and charged them with carrying out this activity in cooperation with other states. In practice, Oaxaca regularly fielded three such commissions to work with their counterparts from Guerrero, Puebla and Veracruz between 1870 and 1911. Oaxaca never began its work with Chiapas before the revolution started, as the latter state was embroiled in its own *límites* conflict with Tabasco during the period.⁸⁰

Legally, each of the states involved in boundary marking was effectively a self-interested party seeking either to defend or to assert the existence of boundaries that best suited its individual territorial ambitions. This tendency was exacerbated when Oaxaca and the other states aimed to protect the claims of frontier municipalities seeking to extend jurisdictional limits as a source of tax income or the claims of private citizens holding title to lands in adjoining states. Parties from one state often purchased *terrenos* that effectively extended their properties across state lines. Hoping to avoid dealing with authorities in two different states, private landowners often sought and received backing from local authorities in their preferred federation, who in turn argued that the territories in question now fell under their jurisdiction.⁸¹ As a result,

⁷⁷ 'Memoria del Ing. Abel Díaz Covarrubias, 1902', MOB, Archivo Técnico, Caja 82/2.

⁷⁸ 'Áreas de los distritos del Estado de Oaxaca, 1902', MOB, Archivo Técnico, Caja 188/15; CGE, *Comisión Geográfico-Exploradora: 1:100 000, 1877–1914* (México, DF: Dirección General de Geografía y Meteorología, 1974), pp. 19–20; Craib, *Cartographic Mexico*, p. 176, notes the discovery of 2,841 'extra places' in Veracruz.

⁷⁹ Martínez, *Arbitraje*, p. 13.

⁸⁰ Ing. Marte R. Gómez, 'Memorias de trabajos en el Edo. de Chiapas, 1907', MOB, Caja 110/15; 'Enrique Suárez to H. Congreso Constituyente', 3 Jan. 1917 in *ibid*.

⁸¹ A summary of such issues is found in AGPEO, Gobierno, Límites, Legajo 99/4; D. Alvarez to Gov., 11 April 1882, AGPEO, Gobierno de los Distritos, Jamiltepec (Justicia), Legajo 18/26;

even rigorous technical work carried out by one state commission often met with passionate criticism when it contradicted, as it frequently did, the findings of another state's *comisión deslindadora*. The work of even the most amicable 'joint' boundary commissions (Oaxaca and Guerrero in the late 1880s, for example) consequently wound up in drawn-out litigation, especially in appeals, forcing the states to establish new commissions to redo previous work.⁸²

The state's objectives in marking its borders were diverse. While definitive boundaries would, as several scholars have shown, facilitate administrative order by enabling the timely and fair collection of taxes and rents, these efforts did not only reflect the fascination of a centralising state bureaucracy with rationalising government. Securing the peace and generating income were, to be sure, major factors, but the government also clearly sought to respond to the demands of local officials and residents along the frontier, many of which – far from protesting against the implementation of clear boundaries – complained often of the complications they endured by their absence. Local residents habitually protested that the lack of defined boundaries effectively trapped them between districts in adjacent federations, where they were forced to pay multiple rents and taxes to competing state and municipal agencies.⁸³

Similarly, licences were often required in separate states and criminals could be tried numerous times for the same offence in overlapping jurisdictions. In the inverse cases, entire communities went altogether unrepresented. Since no state, district or municipality lay jurisdictional claim to the areas in which such communities were located, residents lacked basic infrastructure and resources.⁸⁴ And, for every case featuring a community resistant to the implementation of a distinct limit, an opposed party applauded its enactment. Clearly, frontier residents did not regard the work of delineating state boundaries as a mere imposition. Rather, many of them saw this work as crucial to their own interests and supported state efforts when a boundary favoured their interpretation. Whereas the enactment of permanent boundaries was always controversial because it threatened a tradition of malleable local land use, residents also saw the potential benefits of permanent sovereignty over specific tracts of land.

and 'Relativo a los límites del estado de Oaxaca con los de Guerrero, Puebla, Veracruz y Chiapas', AGPEO, Gobierno, Límites, Legajo 92/3.

⁸² Martínez, *Arbitraje, passim*; detailed in AGPEO, Gobierno, Límites, Legajo 92/1.

⁸³ Martínez, *Arbitraje*, p. 26; for an example, see Felisón Estrada to Gov., 18 June 1906, AGPEO, Gobierno, Conflictos por Límites de Tierras, 1710–1919, Legajo 1/22.

⁸⁴ Manuel Santaella to Gov. of Oaxaca, 22 Nov. 1892, AGPEO, Gobierno, Límites, Legajo 99/3; Cristóbal Palacios to Gov. of Oaxaca, 26 May 1896, AGPEO, Gobierno, Límites, Legajo 100/1.

Delineating the Peace: Marking the Guerrero Border

Among the various efforts to mark Oaxaca's borders, the joint labours with Guerrero stand out as the most problematic, yet broadly representative, case study. The federal government created the state of Guerrero out of territories taken from Michoacán, Puebla and the Federal District in 1849. Despite the fact that no effort had ever been made to mark a border on the ground during the colonial or earlier national periods *per se*, Guerrero immediately inherited a series of 'age-old' boundary disputes among *municipios* located along its eastern frontier with Oaxaca.⁸⁵ Puebla's former jurisdiction over Guerrero's territorial limits in this area would cause considerable confusion in on-going *límites* conflicts with Oaxaca during the second half of the nineteenth century, to the extent that officials believed it impossible to understand Oaxaca's dispute with Guerrero without comprehension of the former and existing Puebla boundary controversies.⁸⁶

According to most period observers, the problems that Oaxaca and Guerrero began experiencing after 1849 stemmed from local judges and officials allegedly overstepping their authority.⁸⁷ Foremost, frontier courts in Oaxaca and Guerrero consistently approved territorial expansions into the other state. Local officials also apparently encouraged border residents to project municipal and private territories across state lines, often provoking violent conflict.⁸⁸ In combination, these administrative practices along the shared Oaxaca–Guerrero–Puebla frontier generated an enormous amount of 'legal' documentation supposedly justifying seemingly innumerable, contradictory land claims in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Local residents therefore believed that their actions, which higher officials usually interpreted as land invasions, enjoyed legal sanction; in fact, they did, often dating back decades or more. It was into this confused situation that boundary commissioners entered in the late 1880s. By 1910, several of these controversies had only intensified.⁸⁹

Interim Governor Mario Jiménez announced Oaxaca's latest and, to date, most serious efforts to mark a permanent border with Guerrero in August 1884. The initiative was intended not only to address confusion along the frontier evident since the Puebla era, but specifically to help resolve a conflict between residents of Ometepec, Guerrero, and José C. Añorbe's

⁸⁵ Martínez, *Arbitraje*, p. 29; on Guerrero, see Peter F. Guardino, *Peasants, Politics, and the Formation of Mexico's National State: Guerrero, 1800–1857* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 147–77.

⁸⁶ Oaxaca, *Memorias*, 1905, p. 5.

⁸⁷ Manuel D. Chávez, 'Informe', 31 July 1889, AGPEO, Gobierno, Límites, Legajo 99/2.

⁸⁸ Martínez, *Arbitraje*, pp. 22, 26; Luis Gómez Daza to Gov., 24 July 1901, AGPEO, Gobierno, Límites, 1901–1911, Legajo 60/1.

⁸⁹ Oaxaca, *Memorias*, 1910, p. 5.

Rancho de Soto, Jamiltepec, which had recently resulted in several casualties.⁹⁰ Jiménez stressed that Oaxaca had to ‘defend its borders’ against the ‘unjustified’ Guerreran land invasions, and that ‘while not perfectly defined, our border is well-enough known to protect’.⁹¹ Luis Mier y Terán, who became governor later that year, reiterated the state’s desire to protect its territory from constant incursions from surrounding federations, particularly Guerrero. Nevertheless, the authorities continued to intervene in violent border disputes over the next few years until in January 1888, Mier y Terán and Francisco Arce (governor of Guerrero) established a commission to collect historical material by which to mark the border.⁹² Paradoxically, the joint commissions were ordered to ‘establish a permanent and definite’ boundary that somehow ‘would not come under historical question’. Eventually, Mier y Terán clarified that the commissions would perfect ‘an established’ boundary.⁹³

The commissions met to discuss their joint venture in March 1888. Secretaries Agustín Alarcón (Oaxaca) and Gabriel Villanueva (Guerrero) made it clear during these meetings that their main intention was to ‘bring peace’ to the region by specifying the border’s location. Couched in elaborate patriotic rhetoric, the meetings left no doubt that the commissioners saw their duties as closely related to nation building. They intended to ‘restore the ancient harmony’ that had at one time apparently existed along the border, and only the most loyal citizens had been called to perform these duties.⁹⁴ Asserting that harmony was necessary between the states that had produced the nation’s two most important patriots – Vicente Guerrero and Benito Juárez – it was necessary to settle these ‘eternal boundary questions’ once and for all. Unfortunately, the commissioners immediately fell into disagreement regarding how work should proceed.⁹⁵

Wasting no time, entirely new commissions were organised in May.⁹⁶ When Oaxaca’s chief engineer Emilio Brachetti died from health complications as the work began that summer, the state arranged yet another venture led by engineer Abelardo Ávalos. In January 1889, work was finally resumed. Embarking from the Pacific coast, the commissions made their way north along the frontier toward Puebla. Despite mutual agreement on 96 common boundary points, serious discrepancies over measurements and place names

⁹⁰ D. Álvarez to Gov., 11 April 1882, AGPEO, Gobierno de los Distritos (Justicia), Legajo 18/26; Francisco Arce to Gov., Oaxaca, 4 May 1888, AGPEO, Gobierno, Límites, Legajo 99/1.

⁹¹ Oaxaca, *Memorias*, 1883, 1.

⁹² Luis Mier y Terán to Francisco Arce, 3 Jan. 1888, in Oaxaca, *Memorias*, 1888, n.p.

⁹³ Francisco Arce to Gov., 24 April 1888, AGPEO, Gobierno, Límites, Legajo 99/1.

⁹⁴ Comisión de Límites, Oaxaca, ‘Informe’, May, 1888, AGPEO, Gobierno, Límites, Legajo 91/3.

⁹⁵ Francisco Arce to Gov., Oaxaca, 16 Jan. 1889, AGPEO, Gobierno, Límites, Legajo 99/2.

⁹⁶ Martínez, *Arbitraje*, p. 9.

caused utter confusion. Boundary commissioners requesting legal title to locations in question soon recognised that local courts had complicated the issue by sanctioning land grabs across state lines. Respected local citizens were asked to weigh in as historical witnesses, reciting their interpretations of customary land tenure practices, which revealed a fluid, if not completely muddled, legal reality that seemed inimical to any effort to locate a ‘historically verifiable’ common boundary.⁹⁷

In a flash of genius, the commissioners at one point requested from both the state of Puebla and the National Archives a ‘definitive’ state map of Puebla, one made *before* Guerrero was created, which they believed would resolve the issue. Claiming they ‘desperately needed’ such a map, the commissioners were disappointed to learn that no such decisive evidence existed.⁹⁸ To complicate matters, commissioners also received word that several boundary disputes had erupted further afield toward Puebla. Villagers seeking possession of disputed territories along the frontier were occupying *tierras* in the hopes of convincing commissioners of the legitimacy of such claims once they arrived on the scene.⁹⁹ Thus, although the joint commissions managed to trudge their way along the entire boundary by July 1889, the work was never satisfactorily completed. Severe discrepancies remained.

Federal officials appointed General Mucio P. Martínez to preside over the inevitable arbitration in late 1889. Martínez, who later served as governor of Puebla (1893–1910), immediately called into question the strategies by which both the Guerrero and Oaxaca commissions used historical and legal documentation to evidence their claims. Using civil and penal records dating back to the colony, as well as locally produced maps, Oaxaca’s attorneys had often cited occasions wherein landowners along the frontier had traditionally paid taxes in their state, or in which crimes committed along the frontier were tried there. Oaxaca officials also argued that in 1878 they had sent in troops to defend the Jamiltepec border, implying that collectively such occurrences ‘proved’ Oaxaca’s historical dominion over disputed frontier territories.¹⁰⁰

Martínez accepted none of this, arguing that ‘incompetent’ local authorities had routinely overstepped their legitimate jurisdictions and had no right to proceed with such lack of authority. The arbitrator ruled that neither state was allowed to cite decisions from inferior district judges, whom Oaxaca itself in 1884 had barred from litigating in such matters.¹⁰¹ This invalidated

⁹⁷ Pablo Solís to Miguel González, 25 May 1889, AGPEO, Gobierno, Límites, Legajo 92/1.

⁹⁸ Albino Zertuche to Gov., 25 Dec. 1888, AGPEO, Gobierno, Límites, Legajo 99/1.

⁹⁹ Onésimo González to Gov., 11 April 1889, *ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Martínez, *Arbitraje*, pp. 48–9.

¹⁰¹ ‘El gobernador de Puebla habla con el gobernador de Oaxaca para tratar asuntos de límites, 1884’, AGPEO, Gobierno, Límites, Legajo 91/8.

a tremendous amount of ‘legal’ evidence that both states had relied upon in making their respective cases. Martínez accepted only local documents – in particular land titles – that had emanated from authorities at the state, national or vice-regal levels. At one point in the arbitration hearings, which generally went badly for the state, Oaxaca officials claimed that a ‘Ley Territorial de Oaxaca’ protected their interpretation of the boundary, but Martínez maintained that only federal authorities could ratify a state’s borders.¹⁰²

Martínez initially aimed to sort out controversial landmarks and place names so as to impose administrative clarity between the states. He ruled that in all instances whereby both states agreed upon a place name, that place would in turn be designated as a legitimate boundary between them. During the proceedings, both commissions were able to produce mutually recognisable place names *up to a certain point*, after which questionable evidence inevitably emerged. Martínez charged that both commissions were overstating the extent of their respective state’s jurisdiction by fabricating these names.¹⁰³ Changing property boundaries and seemingly endless land invasions along the boundary made any allusion to historical place names nearly pointless. Martínez observed that several properties and villages had changed names over the years, while others featured either similar (Coyocoyul and Coyocoyul Viejo, for example) or even identical (separate ranchos named El Ciruelo, for example) place names.

Martínez chose instead to privilege natural boundaries as border markers. Ideally, geographic features in the landscape – rivers, mountains, seasonal watercourses, etc. – would, where possible, provide ‘natural’ divisions between the states. By comparison, privately owned properties and ever-changing municipal boundaries were far less preferable due to their man-made origins. Seen from this view, *mojoneras* erected to mark natural boundaries were not simply ephemeral objects used to separate people, but would instead make clear previously existing geographical divisions among otherwise united Mexicans.¹⁰⁴ Although some private properties henceforth would straddle the newly defined state limits, these would only slightly alter existing jurisdictions of border districts, ensuring a peaceful coexistence within the broader union. The insistence on designating ‘natural’ boundaries had the effect of reassigning agency for the creation of borders to the objective category of the region’s physical geography and away from the material designs of competing bureaucracies and border populations, thereby ideally ending any dispute in the matter.

¹⁰² Martínez, *Arbitraje*, p. 30.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹⁰⁴ These proceedings can be found in AGPEO, Gobierno, Límites, Legajo 91/7.

The commissions were then sent back into the field to mark the boundary from Laguna de Monte Alto in the south to Cabeza de los Tres Ríos near Puebla.¹⁰⁵ They erected *mojoneras* to designate a straight path between natural boundary markers and presented residents with news of the ‘permanent’ *límites*, often clarifying for locals the Spanish equivalent for Mixtec place names. Whereas the commissioners always took seriously any boundary evidence that locals presented in the field, they consistently disqualified documents written in ‘*idioma extraño*’ (literally, ‘strange (or odd) language’, for which read: Mixtec), effectively subsuming local historical claims into the preferred legal hierarchy of Spanish and Mexican officialdom.¹⁰⁶ Serious disagreements continued to occur; at one point Martínez forced commissioners to walk a portion of the boundary over which they disagreed on 16 successive border designations to see whose version proved more plausible. Local officials and surveyors traversed the boundary, usually accompanied by dozens of villagers who witnessed continued disagreements over its new location, yet – according to the commissioners at least – acquiesced to the decision enacted so as to bring peace to their communities.¹⁰⁷

No such peace came, as nearly all parties involved soon challenged the ruling. Local residents, still claiming the legal validity of district court decisions and customary land uses, immediately renewed their traditional strategies of destroying boundary markers and all-out land invasions. They also made extensive use of the legal and political systems, as local agrarian societies challenged opposing land claims and petitioned local, district and state authorities to intervene on their behalf to clarify their particular version of a boundary. By 1891, Zapotitlán Lagunas’s many ongoing disputes had intensified.¹⁰⁸ Featuring both legal and direct action – including the production of still more locally financed *apeos* and *deslindes*, successive land occupations, the establishment of rural militias to protect land claims and several violent individual encounters – the dispute remained live even in 1913.¹⁰⁹

Officials in both states used these renewed *límites* disputes as an opportunity to appeal against Martínez’s ruling, claiming that he had been incorrect to

¹⁰⁵ ‘Acuerdo entre este estado y el de Guerrero por cuestión de límites, Centro 1890’, AGPEO, Gobierno, Límites, Legajo 99/3.

¹⁰⁶ This dismissive practice continued throughout. See Lorenzo Barroso to Gov., Oaxaca, 22 Oct. 1908, AGPEO, Gobierno, Límites, Legajo 99/7; for Oaxaca’s arbitration with Puebla, see *Actas relativas ... límites entre el Distrito de Tehuacán*, p. 39; see Sahlins, *Boundaries*, p. 268, for a similar interpretation in Europe.

¹⁰⁷ Onésimo González to Gov., 23 May 1889, AGPEO, Gobierno, Límites, Legajo 99/2.

¹⁰⁸ Francisco Arce to Gov., 7 July 1891, AGPEO, Gobierno, Límites, Legajo 99/5.

¹⁰⁹ See Presidente Municipal Ayacaxtepec to Ramón Santaella, 22 Oct. 1913, AGPEO, Gobierno, Conflictos por Límites de Tierras, 1710–1919, Legajo 55/44; Mucio Martínez to Emilio Pimentel, 11 July 1910, AGPEO, Gobierno, Conflictos por Límites de Tierras, 1710–1919, Legajo 60/8; Lorenzo Barroso to Gov., 1 Dec. 1910, Gobierno, Conflictos por Límites de Tierras, 1710–1919, Legajo 60/10.

omit local historical and legal evidence of jurisdiction.¹¹⁰ Renewed conflict along the border forced officials to re-establish the boundary, this time ‘provisionally’, in 1896, when Martínez himself returned to walk the boundary and attempt to clear up lingering discrepancies.¹¹¹ Another ‘provisional’ marking took place in 1903. For its part, Zapotitlán became embroiled in a pernicious *límites* dispute with nearby Xixingo, Puebla, that eventually drew Oaxaca into controversy regarding the entire frontier boundary with Puebla, which officials claimed had previously been ‘well-established and respected’.¹¹² In each of these cases of renewed controversy, local authorities and residents challenged the validity of the boundary’s novel permanence, again relying on municipal documents to assert the historical validity of their present territorial claims.

Despite these recurring problems, Oaxaca’s arbitration with Guerrero resulted in a strong statement of the supremacy of centralised judicial power. Interestingly, in arguing for its own jurisdiction, the state of Oaxaca had hoped that arbitration would effectively reinforce *local* autonomy as represented by the historical and legal evidence it could produce in these proceedings, almost all of which emanated from the frontier itself.¹¹³ But Martínez ruled otherwise and, in the process, the tradition of a fluid border that mutated according to local practices at least officially gave way to the state’s heightened preoccupation with permanency and hierarchy during the Porfiriato. Rather than simply reinforce Oaxaca’s federal sovereignty, permanent state boundaries also ironically expressed the presence and power of the federal government, whose territorial dominion was now, at least in theory, precisely delimited in the form of Oaxaca’s state border.

Conclusion: The Limits of State Formation

Drawing on the works of Antonio Gramsci, Raymond Williams, and Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, Mexicanists have in recent decades largely regarded state formation as a process wherein power holders, social groups and individuals continually renegotiate the parameters of authority.¹¹⁴ Many scholars see

¹¹⁰ Miguel Castro to Gov., 12 Dec. 1891, AGPEO, Gobierno, Límites, Legajo 99/3.

¹¹¹ Cristóbal Palacios to Gov., 10 May 1896, AGPEO, Gobierno, Límites, Legajo 100/1; J. Canseco to Gov., 1 Nov. 1896, AGPEO, Gobierno, Límites, Legajo 99/3.

¹¹² Mucio Martínez to Emilio Pimentel, 11 July 1910; AGPEO, Gobierno, Conflictos por Límites de Tierras, 1710–1919, Legajo 60/8; see also Juan de Ríos Flores y León to Gov., 30 April 1908, AGPEO, Gobierno, Conflictos por Límites de Tierras, 1710–1919, Legajo 61/8.

¹¹³ Oaxaca underwent arbitration with Puebla in 1905. See AGPEO, Gobierno, Límites, Legajo 93/1; also *Actas relativas ... límites entre el Distrito de Tehuacán, passim*.

¹¹⁴ G. M. Joseph and Jürgen Buchenau, *Mexico’s Once and Future Revolution: Social Upheaval and the Challenge of Rule since the Late Nineteenth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013); for classics that have influenced Mexicanists on state formation, see Philip Richard D. Corrigan and Derek Sayer, *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985); Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society*,

state power as contingent upon consent from below and have focused on the efforts of subordinates to avoid impositions through individual and collective acts of 'resistance', resulting in an uneasy social consensus.¹¹⁵ On the one hand, Oaxaca's efforts to mark its state boundaries represented a literal act of state formation wherein it attempted to outline the limitations of its authority on the ground in 'cooperation' with other federations and with its own citizens. On the other, the process featured several different levels of government – from the municipal and district to the state and federal – attempting to etch out the parameters of their distinctive jurisdictions in a metaphorical sense during an era of marked centralisation.

The campaign to clarify internal boundaries faced numerous challenges. While rationalised among Oaxaca officials as a necessary step toward overcoming 'age-old' *limites* conflicts on the frontier, the process in many ways demonstrated the limits of state formation in late nineteenth-century Mexico. Most significantly, rigidly defined internal boundaries, which officials quite menacingly billed as newly 'permanent', exacerbated divisions among citizens and often led to conflict. Even so, and perhaps strikingly given the urgency of the matter, state authorities never sought simply to impose a boundary on frontier residents. Authorities clearly attempted to respect citizens' appreciation of the frontier landscape by consistently examining the seemingly endless supply of documentation on the local history of land tenure. For their part, rural residents continually participated in the negotiation of boundaries. They alternately rejected or embraced proposed state lines depending on their agreement with area tenancy practices and local desires to collect or to avoid rents.

In so doing, frontier residents did not simply 'resist' some inevitable transition to the enactment of modern state power. Rather, they were perhaps able to 'reposition' themselves within the redefined parameters of centralised state

1780–1950 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958); Antonio Gramsci, Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (New York: International Publishers, 1972).

¹¹⁵ The classic is G. M. Joseph and Daniel Nugent (eds.), *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), pp. 102, 107–8, 141–2; this volume has inspired a large volume of scholarship on state formation in modern Mexico. See Jennie Purnell, *Popular Movements and State Formation in Revolutionary Mexico: The Agraristas and Cristeros of Michoacán* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999); Antonio Escobar Ohmstede, et al., *La arquitectura histórica del poder: naciones, nacionalismos y estados en América Latina: siglos XVIII, XIX y XX* (México, DF: El Colegio de México, 2010); and Benjamin T. Smith, *Pistoleros and Popular Movements: The Politics of State Formation in Postrevolutionary Oaxaca* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2009) for excellent examples; on resistance, see James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985).

authority during the era not by rejecting permanent borders and governmental hierarchy outright, but by making clear their preferences regarding the circumstances under which these borders were to be implemented.¹¹⁶ Importantly, the actions of frontier residents not only seriously disrupted the state's efforts to implement its permanent boundary; they literally *became* the boundary itself. The GCE's 1912 map of Oaxaca, though imperfect from a technical perspective, nevertheless provided an accurate portrait of the state's borders in vernacular terms that ironically demonstrated the limitations of state knowledge and authority. In practice, the state's 'definitive' map proved useless in determining the outcome of persistent land disputes.

The actions of frontier inhabitants did more than to simply foil the state's efforts to clarify its border. They also generally had the effect of reinforcing local sovereignty that, in the end, seemed to enjoy more allegiance along Oaxaca's frontier than did either the state or national governments. In light of this, it is remarkable that scholars of late nineteenth-century Mexico continue to emphasise the state's authority and hegemony as opposed to what Andrew Mathews would call its 'instability and fragility', the latter becoming eminently clear in 1910.¹¹⁷ If frontier Oaxacans by and large never saw fit to take up arms against the state during the revolution, it was perhaps because the central state's power was never fully solidified there. And where it was, locals themselves defined the boundaries of its rule.

Spanish and Portuguese abstracts

Spanish abstract. Este artículo analiza los esfuerzos del estado de Oaxaca para delimitar sus fronteras de 1856 a 1912. Los funcionarios estatales esperaron demarcar un borde permanente a lo largo de la frontera como forma de delinear un fin pacífico a las constantes disputas limítrofes, algunas de las cuales, se creía, se habían originado en la época prehispánica. El marcar la frontera de Oaxaca representó efectivamente un proceso literal de formación del estado en México. Los funcionarios oaxaqueños intentaron negociar los límites jurisdiccionales estatales en cooperación con otras federaciones así como con sus propios ciudadanos en la medida que definieron los parámetros del estado y los límites de su autoridad durante esa era.

Spanish keywords: formación estatal, Oaxaca, México, disputas de tierra, historia espacial

Portuguese abstract. Este artigo analisa os esforços do estado de Oaxaca em demarcar suas fronteiras entre os anos de 1856 e 1912. Funcionários públicos desejavam

¹¹⁶ Raj, *Relocating Modern Science*, p. 19.

¹¹⁷ Andrew S. Mathews, *Instituting Nature: Authority, Expertise, and Power in Mexican Forests* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), p. 11, bases his analysis on the twentieth-century state's unstable nature.

demarcar uma divisa permanente ao longo da fronteira como uma forma de promover um desfecho pacífico às constantes disputas fronteiriças, algumas das quais alegadamente datavam do período pré-colombiano. A atividade de demarcação dos limites de Oaxaca representou literalmente o processo de formação do Estado mexicano. Funcionários do estado de Oaxaca buscaram negociar os limites jurisdicionais do estado em cooperação com outros entes federados e com seus próprios cidadãos na medida em que localizavam os limites do Estado e o alcance de sua autoridade durante esta época.

Portuguese keywords: formação do Estado, Oaxaca, México, disputas territoriais, história espacial