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## Introduction

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While traveling through Sonora in April 1887, a reporter from the *Tucson Daily Citizen* witnessed the public execution of Cajeme, one of Mexican history's great enigmas.<sup>1</sup> José María Leyva, as he was less commonly known, had been born to Yaqui Indian parents and raised in the Yaqui village of Ráum in southern Sonora, but lived much of his life in another world entirely. Shortly after the young Leyva and his father returned from Gold Rush-era California having failed to strike it rich, his parents made the no doubt difficult decision to entrust their son to Prefect Cayetano Navarro of nearby Guaymas. It was at this moment that Leyva left his Yaqui home for what appears to have been the last time. In Guaymas he began his education, supplementing the smattering of English he had learned in California by learning to read, write, and speak Spanish. He completed his studies at the age of eighteen and left Guaymas literate, trilingual, and well traveled—in other words, a very atypical Yaqui. At some point during his residence in Guaymas, however, he had evidently ceased to identify himself as such.

Rather than return to his village, Leyva entered into a period of aimlessness, joining, then abandoning, the military repeatedly, briefly apprenticing with a blacksmith, and working in a mine for a short period of time until drifting back to Sonora around 1861. Upon his return, he learned that the Mexican government was in the process of putting down the latest in a string of Yaqui uprisings. He immediately, and inexplicably, enlisted in the expeditionary force sent to quell the rebellion. They succeeded and then disbanded. From there, Leyva drifted around Sonora with no stable occupation until 1867, when he again enlisted in the military following reports of yet another Yaqui uprising. This latest campaign was especially violent, culminating in the so-called BÁCUM Massacre, in which 120 Yaquis lost their lives when a church Mexican soldiers were using as a makeshift prison for some 450 captives mysteriously went up in flames. It is remembered, to this day, as one of the darkest chapters in Yaqui history.<sup>2</sup>

Why Leyva took up arms against his own people during this period is an intriguing unknown, though it has been the subject of speculation. It has been argued, for example, that since he had had virtually no contact with

the Yaquis since departing for Guaymas he probably no longer felt rooted in his Yaqui heritage, if he ever had in the first place.<sup>3</sup> Opportunism also cannot be discounted as a possibility. His acquaintance with the Yaqui language placed Leyva on the fast track within the Sonoran military establishment, providing opportunities available to few enlistees, opportunities that must have seemed attractive given his perpetual lack of occupational stability. Whatever his motivations may have been, Leyva quickly distinguished himself as a respected Indian fighter and a dependable member of the local militia. In 1874, Sonoran governor Ignacio Pesqueira handpicked Leyva for the post of *alcalde mayor* of the Yaqui River valley, charging him with the governorship of the lands encompassing the Yaquis' eight pueblos with the expectation that Leyva would help pacify his people.<sup>4</sup> Leyva apparently made quite a bit of progress in his new post, with the creation of a regional tax system, a commercial market that connected the Yaquis with outsiders, and a more refined system of local government on his list of accomplishments. But for reasons that are not entirely clear, Leyva ultimately vacated his government post and traded his Spanish name for Cajeme, which in the Yaqui language translates as "he who does not drink," a name attributable to his habit of drinking water only once a day, at four in the afternoon, as a form of self-discipline. He then seized control, through infamously violent means, of the eight Yaqui pueblos, and, from there, directed one of the largest indigenous uprisings in North American history. Cajeme's objective, put simply, was to win Yaqui independence from Mexico, and he had what the Mexican military estimated to be between 4,000 and 5,000 Yaqui soldiers—organized into cavalry, artillery, and infantry units and possessing some 12,000 firearms—backing him up as he attempted to establish control of the Yaqui River valley.<sup>5</sup>

Mexican soldiers sent to quell the rebellion found Cajeme to be surprisingly elusive. In fact, some Mexican authorities began to question whether he existed at all. As one Mexican soldier put it, "He seemed to be an imaginary being, invisible, a myth created by the fantasy of his people."<sup>6</sup> More pragmatic military officials, meanwhile, were predicting that the cunning and crafty Yaqui leader would most likely try to disguise himself and head for the U.S.-Mexico border.<sup>7</sup> Cajeme managed to remain at large until 1887, when an Indian spotted him just outside of Guaymas and notified the military. When finally ferreted out of hiding, he reportedly put up no struggle and, at least according to one account, appeared relieved. The Mexican military transported Cajeme by ship to the Yaqui River valley and paraded him through the streets of the tribe's various pueblos to erase any doubt that

he had been apprehended and would be executed. His “tour” ended in Cócorit. Sonora’s governor at the time, Ramón Corral, allowed Cajeme to visit with friends, family, and even the general public while awaiting execution. Corral was apparently so taken with Cajeme that he went on to become the Yaqui leader’s first biographer. He would characterize him as not the stuff of myth, but “a man of medium height, slim but not skinny, with an astute smile on his wide mouth, friendly and good-natured and communicative as few Indians are.”<sup>8</sup>

After Cajeme’s execution, the aforementioned reporter from the *Tucson Daily Citizen* watched as a grieving Yaqui approached the tree against which Cajeme was felled and affixed to it a small cross containing the inscription “INR, aque [*sic*] fallecio General Cajeme, Abril 23, 1887, a los 11 y 5 la mañana.” The abbreviation INR is Latin for Jesus of Nazareth, King. Among at least some of the Yaqui people, Cajeme was akin to a deity.<sup>9</sup> Among his enemies, however, he personified a disturbing conviction, one deeply held by indigenous peoples across the Americas: that only Indians should govern Indians. It is this conviction that forms the heart of the present study. A relentless insistence on political and cultural autonomy became a fundamental component of indigenous identity virtually from the moment of European contact, and this impulse remained just as acute even after geopolitical borders coalesced, gained international recognition, and gave rise to powerful, omnipresent nation-states. These nation-states had as their primary objective the smothering of any and all competing claims to sovereignty within their borders, and indigenous peoples, it turned out, tended to represent the biggest obstacle in these nationalizing projects. Stories of indigenous resistance in this context are extraordinarily common. Less common, however, are stories of indigenous resistance in a transnational context, or stories of Indian peoples challenging, subverting, capitalizing upon, or just plain ignoring any geopolitical border that sought to contain, neutralize, and ultimately extinguish their *own* nationalistic aspirations. And stories of Indian peoples *winning* these contests, as the Yaquis ultimately would, are even fewer and farther between.

Under Cajeme, or from roughly 1875 through 1887, the Yaquis entered into a bitter and violent bid for independence that displaced and nearly destroyed the tribe. It was akin to blowing on a dandelion clock: the Yaquis, like seed-bearing spores, scattered aimlessly in all directions, entering into a period of dormancy while awaiting the opportunity to flower. They became, in the words of the anthropologist Edward Spicer, “the most widely scattered people in North America,” thinly and precariously settled from

central and southern Arizona and California all the way down to the Yucatán Peninsula.<sup>10</sup> In hindsight, however, it appears that Cajeme did the Yaquis more of a service than many would have predicted during those tumultuous years. He helped reawaken and reinvigorate a once-powerful nationalist impulse that had waned somewhat among the Yaquis in the years leading up to the late nineteenth-century cycle of rebellion. And although the rebellion under Cajeme had wide-ranging consequences, when the dust finally settled the Yaquis were in a much better position to bargain with Mexican authorities in their push for the greatest degree of Yaqui autonomy possible, an opportunity they did not hesitate to seize. Once it was safe to come out of hiding, a portion of the tribe negotiated its return to the Yaqui River valley, and thereafter maintained at least a precarious peace with Mexican authorities. Other Yaquis, meanwhile, looked to the United States for refuge during and in the immediate wake of the tumultuous Cajeme years, founding what would become a series of vital transborder communities, one of which would ultimately gain official sanction as an “American” Indian reservation despite the fact that the tribe originated in Mexico. Over the course of the twentieth century, the tribal whole would work toward not only forging transborder ties in order to link these far-flung settlements, but also reconstituting the Yaqui nation. It was an unusual strategy for overcoming seemingly insurmountable obstacles in maintaining political cohesion and cultural continuity. Not surprisingly, other tribes inhabiting the border region hit upon a similar strategy, with some even enjoying a similar degree of success.

While the Mexican government waged war on the Yaquis during the latter years of the nineteenth century, the U.S. government waged a war of a different sort on Kickapoo Indians living in Oklahoma. They became one of many targets of the government’s ill-fated 1887 General Allotment Act, designed to hasten the Indians’ assimilation by undercutting their more traditional land use practices, or by dividing communally held reservation lands into private plots. As in the Yaqui case, many Kickapoos responded to this assault on their autonomy by simply crossing the border. Kickapoos had been migrating to Mexico since at least the 1820s, arriving in a succession of waves for a variety of reasons. The Mexican government, looking to bolster defenses along its northern periphery, typically welcomed these migrants, gave them land, and even guaranteed their right to speak their own language and maintain their distinctive culture. Still, the population of Kickapoos in Mexico fluctuated wildly for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as Kickapoo bands traveled back and forth between

Mexico and Oklahoma. At one point Mexico boasted a Kickapoo population of several thousand, at another point less than twenty. Gradually, however, the tribe solidified and legitimized its transnational orientation. As in the Yaqui case, what began as a last-gasp effort to maintain tribal cohesion and cultural continuity evolved into an utterly new way of life, though not one without unique pitfalls.<sup>11</sup>

The U.S.-Mexico border has also profoundly affected the Tohono O'odham tribe of southern Arizona and northern Sonora, though in a different way. In contrast to the Yaqui and Kickapoo cases, the Tohono O'odham's division by the U.S.-Mexico border was not the result of either voluntary or forced migration, but of simple geographic orientation. Essentially, the 1853 Gadsden Purchase, which added the far southern portions of the present-day states of New Mexico and Arizona to U.S. territory, cut the Tohono O'odham in two, leaving a portion on the U.S. side and a portion on the Mexican side.<sup>12</sup> Like the Yaquis and Kickapoos, the O'odham often jumped at the chance to capitalize on borderlands dynamics. At the turn of the century, the O'odham entered the cash economy, laboring on both Mexican and American ranches, plantations, and mines. More long-standing subsistence patterns, however, gradually fell by the wayside. The O'odham quickly slid into a pattern of dependency on both sides of the border, with little holding the two halves of the tribal whole together. Then in 1916, concerned U.S. officials created a formal reservation for the tribe. While a protected land base might seem like a good thing, the reservation symbolized a kind of compartmentalization of the O'odham, or a tacit recognition that there were now two kinds of O'odham: "American" and "Mexican." In short, the reservation ultimately fostered a sense of displacement on both sides of the border despite the fact that the tribe had not actually moved. However, although the O'odham may appear to have come up short as nation builders when examined alongside the Yaquis and Kickapoos, the fact is that they emerged with their collective identity, many of their traditional lifeways, and a respectable (although vastly reduced) portion of their ancestral land base intact. Even O'odham residing south of the border who were being forced to endure what the historians Andrae Marak and Laura Tuennenman characterized as a "massive assault" on their ancestral lands by non-Indians could not be purged of their O'odham identity.<sup>13</sup> Regardless, for at least a few decades after the border's advent, the O'odham, like the Yaquis and Kickapoos, would successfully use it to at least their economic advantage. For a variety of reasons, however, the window of time in which they were able to do so would be frustratingly narrow. Put simply, it would not take long for the United States and Mexico

to step up their bureaucratic presence in the border region and attempt to more meaningfully manage transborder traffic. While the Yaquis and Kickapoo proved to be remarkably adept at navigating these changes, the O'odham often seemed to be surviving in spite of, rather than because of, the existence of the international boundary.

Still, for much of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, historical parallels between the three groups are easy to locate. Spurred to action by unremitting assaults on their sovereignty, each developed a counterstrategy that included, first and foremost, exploiting U.S.-Mexico borderlands dynamics, a strategy that they carefully expanded and refined over time. For these Indians, border crossings became acts of "creative defiance," as the historian Oscar Martínez phrased it in a more general discussion of what he termed "border people." Such crossings were a way to capitalize—economically, politically, and culturally—on a political line of demarcation created without their consent (and in some cases without their knowledge), but one that nonetheless held a tremendous amount of promise. Like Cajeme, these Indians gradually grew adept at moving between an array of individual and group identities and ethnic and cultural worlds, all the while maintaining a specific indigenous identity and a nationalistic agenda. Border crossings, then, enabled these Indians to strike a balance between asserting their sovereignty and maintaining their anonymity.<sup>14</sup>

Along the U.S.-Mexico border alone there are a host of indigenous groups that have assumed a transnational orientation in response to pressures at home, including the Mixtecos, Zapatecos, Triquis, Otomías, Purépechas, Cocopahs, Kumeyaays, and Nahuas, among others.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, similar processes continue to play themselves out not just along the U.S.-Canada border, but essentially anywhere tribal and nonstate peoples have challenged the authority of nation-states to restrict their movements and dictate their national loyalties. Formal international boundaries have historically been notorious for inviting the creation of transborder networks that enable and even encourage transnational interaction. Such was the case with, for example, the Baluchis, divided by the borders of Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, or the Kurds, divided by the borders of Turkey, Iraq, and Iran. The Yaquis and Tohono O'odham, incidentally, could easily be added to this list in that while they technically belong to a nation-state, they nonetheless continue to harbor the sense of being a people apart.<sup>16</sup>

But the stories contained herein are not merely case studies of individuals, families, and/or communities struggling to adapt to the reality of geopolitical borders while also attempting to capitalize on those same borders.

## 6 Introduction

Focusing primarily on the three groups of border Indians discussed above—the Yaquis of Sonora/Arizona, the Kickapoos of Texas/Coahuila, and the Tohono O’odham of Sonora/Arizona—this book highlights moments when these peoples began, in a sense, nation building in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Although their transnational orientation complicated this pursuit considerably, it also, serendipitously enough, made its realization far more likely. Near-constant movement on a transnational scale kept these indigenous groups beyond the political and cultural purview of each of the nation-states within which they resided (or to which they migrated), exempted them, in many cases, from detrimental Indian policy currents on both sides of the border, and, above all, helped them maintain a measure of anonymity, which allowed them both the physical and ideological space within which to enact their *own* vision of nationhood. The resultant trans-border settlements, some of which non-Indians initially viewed as little more than refugee camps or way stations, gradually became officially sanctioned, durable, and dynamic centers of indigenous life.

The use of the U.S.-Mexico border as a strategy for group survival, and ultimately group expansion, required the ability to identify and capitalize on holes in the immigration system (which these groups often had a penchant for locating) and the audacity and vigilance to confidently assert their legal privileges as indigenous peoples, privileges that both the United States and Mexico were morally obligated, if not treaty-bound, to respect. Doing so helped them carve out a unique (and uniquely legal) position for themselves within the borders of both the United States and Mexico, a position from which they negotiated, little by little, an almost staggering degree of autonomy. This is a remarkable feat even in the arena of transnational history, where stories of displacement and survival are the norm. One scholar defined “transnationalism” as “a process through which migrants cross international boundaries and synthesize two societies in a single social field, linking their country of origin with their country of immigration.”<sup>17</sup> Far more improbable, however, is the endeavor of *nation building* across extant international boundaries.

Reorienting one’s perspective within these *indigenous* nations, then, allows one to approach these three groups’ histories as might a historian of foreign policy or international diplomacy. Native peoples were no strangers to external relations with European powers prior to the advent of the United States and Mexico. Add other indigenous groups to the mix, and Indian diplomacy assumes a complexity that would baffle even established nation-states as they attempted to navigate the world stage. However, the



temptation has long been to regard Indian history as, in the words of the historian Donald Fixico, “a special or exotic subfield” or “a minority history of less importance.” Yet even a cursory look at these three groups reveals that they were far from “internal subjects.” Instead, they consistently displayed a determination to assert some form of control over foreign relations, often with surprising degrees of success.<sup>18</sup> Rather than present these Indians as variables moving within a larger transnational system, then, this book inverts this formulation and demonstrates that the Indian peoples examined herein envisioned their *own* system, a system within which both the U.S. and Mexican governments, and neighboring Indian nations for that matter, were but variables.

Thus, more than simply being a line on a map, the U.S.-Mexico border affected and still affects individual and group processes of identity construction and retention in profound ways. Traversing the physical border often meant traversing less tangible classification systems. The indigenous peoples discussed in this book experiment with countless combinations of identities—tribal versus pan-Indian, Mexican versus American, Mexican versus Indian, American versus Indian, along with a host of regional and intertribal identities—all the while maintaining an inherent and inalienable sense of Indianness fed by a desire for independent nationhood, one that was not often articulated but, as will be shown, was always deeply felt. Although they did not boast borders that marked the landscape in as formidable a fashion as that separating the United States and Mexico, the conception of themselves as distinct political and cultural entities was no less acute. Writing about the Yaquis in the 1950s, one anthropologist observed, “As present Yaqui leaders conceive it, their government is for Yaquis only and is one which exists by virtue of a divine, or supernatural, mandate.”<sup>19</sup> It would prove difficult for both the United States and Mexico to argue with this brand of logic.

This book, then, examines in comparative fashion these Indians’ experiences as they struggled to reconcile an indigenous vision of nationhood with that of two powerful, omnipresent nation-states. But it also highlights those moments when the realities of international coexistence forced these indigenous nations, like other transborder peoples, to forfeit some of their hard-won autonomy, or to learn to share power with surrounding nation-states. After all, maintaining one’s political isolation and unqualified sovereignty in an increasingly interconnected world is no small task. Still, the surprising end to this story is that these three groups managed to force two powerful nation-states to essentially redraw their borders, or to at least

rethink the real and imagined limits of their own nationhood.<sup>20</sup> What we are left with, then, is a distinctly different North American legal, political, and cultural milieu than those typically proffered by historians, one in which nations and nation-states not only abut one another, but also overlap and interact from varying positions of power and with varying degrees of consequence. It is one in which “borderlands” appear more multidimensional and less binary than the term “transnational” implies, since formal lines of demarcation, when viewed from the ground rather than on a map, all too often command little, if any, respect.<sup>21</sup> Finally, it is one in which “nationhood” is, more often than not, really in the eye of the beholder.

The larger U.S.-Mexico border region has long been a contested space and meeting place, even prior to the creation of the formal border. At different moments during the colonial period, Spain, France, and England all competed for control of the region with both one another and the indigenous peoples who called the region home. First explored by the Spanish during the sixteenth century, the arc that came to be known as the Spanish Borderlands, which reached from present-day Florida to present-day California, changed hands repeatedly as the fortunes of colonial powers and, later, nation-states rose and fell. Spanish, French, and British colonial powers came into increasingly regular contact in the region during the eighteenth century as the French expanded from the Great Lakes region into the Mississippi River valley and as the British began their own exploration of and expansion into parts west and south. Thus began the often violent process of staking territorial claims. The first to leave the region were the French, who, at the end of the French and Indian War, forfeited their claims to Louisiana, leaving the region temporarily in Spanish hands. The British continued pressing south and west, putting the Spanish on the defensive. After gaining its independence from England, the new United States continued the British tradition of contesting Spanish claims. Its efforts produced a slow but steady southward recession of the Spanish frontier. In the early nineteenth century, Louisiana changed hands yet again, passing from Spanish to French hands, only to be sold to the United States shortly thereafter. The fact that France failed to specify the Louisiana Purchase’s exact boundaries, however, virtually assured continued conflict between the United States and Spain.<sup>22</sup>

The two nations settled the boundary dispute in 1819 by drawing a line of demarcation from the Sabine River in present-day Texas, north to the forty-second parallel, then west to the Pacific. Mexico’s independence from Spain in 1821 meant that the task of defending the northern frontier from

U.S. expansionist designs now fell to the nascent Mexican government, a task it was largely unprepared to undertake. Chaos reigned in the region from the early 1830s through the 1840s as the new nation was unable to forge a lasting peace with area Indians, and soon the northern third of Mexico degenerated into what one historian called a “vast theater of hatred, terror, and staggering loss for independent Indians and Mexicans alike.” Chaos and instability, in turn, left the region vulnerable to the United States’ designs. Another blow for Mexico came in 1836, with Texas’s independence, then another in 1845, with Texas’s annexation by the United States. It was the U.S.-Mexican War of 1846–48 and the resultant Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, however, that resulted in the most significant loss of land in Mexico’s history (the present-day American Southwest, which amounted to about half of its territorial holdings). The United States and Mexico took the last step in formalizing their boundary in 1853 with the Gadsden Purchase. Because of worsening financial woes, coupled with a great deal of pressure and intimidation emanating from Washington, the Mexican government sold southern sections of present-day New Mexico and Arizona to the U.S. government, which was then envisioning a potential route for a transcontinental railroad.<sup>23</sup>

It is important to keep in mind that those Indian groups situated closest to the border were among those borderlanders (and there were many) who were not convinced that the retreat of Mexico’s northern frontier was complete by 1853. Like everyone else in the region, they often contemplated how best to protect themselves and both their individual and collective agendas in such a volatile and unpredictable atmosphere, and were sometimes moved to action. For example, writing to an American military officer in 1873, Chief John Horse from the “Seminole Wildcat Party,” which briefly lived alongside the Kickapoos in Nacimiento, Coahuila, implored, “The [U.S.] Government might take Mexico every hour or minute and of course will take all the land and General please let us know what we shall do to keep our own.”<sup>24</sup> In the end, however, Chief John Horse’s fears proved unfounded. Although rumors of annexation schemes emanating from north of the border persisted until the end of the nineteenth century, and although Mexican officials would go so far as to query the U.S. State Department about these rumors, the State Department would ultimately deny any hand in their fabrication and any knowledge of their origin. And although efforts to either seize or purchase additional Mexican lands by either filibusters or more formal agents of the U.S. government did not cease in 1853, the boundary between the two nation-states moved very little in subsequent years.<sup>25</sup>

With the formal border separating the United States and Mexico now drawn, the region entered into a new phase in its long history, one in which local populations began mounting challenges to the efforts of distant centers of power to dictate their national loyalties and confine them within seemingly arbitrary boundaries. After all, though the United States and Mexico claimed ownership of their respective sides of the border, much of the region was actively controlled by indigenous peoples. This new trend produced what one scholar called a “confusion of identities” in the borderlands. In other words, the border region had officially become a site where once-stable identities were being “deterritorialized and renegotiated,” a process that challenged and even undermined “culture, class, and region, as well as gender and nation.”<sup>26</sup> But although the “confusion of identities” characterization is apt, borders can and often do have the opposite effect. Some of the indigenous peoples in this study were drawn to the region only after the United States and Mexico delineated the boundary between their national domains. It has not been unusual for indigenous peoples living on the “periphery” of their *own* “core” to re-create and revitalize social and cultural norms in even far-flung and unfamiliar geographic contexts. In fact, those living farthest from the group’s “traditional” core often prove the *most* determined to safeguard their indigenous identity, a trend that will be brought into sharp relief in subsequent chapters.<sup>27</sup>

Similarly, while the border may often divide peoples and places, it has also historically done the opposite. After all, national borders do not always deliver on the promise of national sovereignty. As the historians Elaine Carey and Andrae Marak observed, while borders are indeed “contested spaces that divide people, leading to the construction of seemingly distinct races, nationalities, genders, and cultural practices,” they also tend to “act as barriers across which social, political, cultural, and economic networks function.” Put simply, they very often create “nebulous spaces” that have the tendency to invite all manner of opportunism.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, since the U.S.-Mexico border’s advent, peoples, processes, and phenomena have conspired to keep transnational channels open. Mines and military posts in Arizona, for example, relied on supplies and laborers from Sonora from the second half of the nineteenth century on. In fact, a railroad connecting Sonora to Mexico City was not completed until 1927. By that point a railroad had connected Sonora and Arizona for over four decades. Religious events, such as the annual fiesta of San Francisco in Magdalena, Sonora, drew an international crowd, including Indians from both sides of the border as well as Mexican migrant workers, for much of the nineteenth and twentieth

centuries. Since mines and smelters on both sides of the border would often suspend operations for these occasions to allow workers to attend, some *Anglo-American* workers even joined in the festivities. Wayward cattle required transborder roundups, roundups in which local custom tended to trump the laws of the state. Law enforcement officials on both sides of the border often allowed one another to cross the border in the pursuit of alleged lawbreakers. To get around the illegality of such crossings, officials simply requested temporary leave prior to the transborder pursuit, thereby sidestepping international law. Thus, despite the efforts of distant policy-makers to impose a national divide, borderlanders themselves gradually forged economic networks and local customs that defied all efforts to sever hard-won, and often surprisingly active, transnational networks. By the twentieth century, then, many of the indigenous peoples in this story were moving on well-worn paths, paths between mines and fields, between ranches and smelters, even refugee pathways, all of which, sometimes coincidentally and sometimes not so coincidentally, traversed the international boundary. In the process, as this book will demonstrate, many also managed to locate so-called regions of refuge within which to exercise individual and group autonomy in the state's shadows, acting in defiance of not only the geopolitical boundary, but also the sovereign authority of two looming nation-states.<sup>29</sup>

But Indians were not your ordinary border crossers. Scholarship on transnational peoples and phenomena has all too often either ignored the indigenous perspective or done little to differentiate their experiences from those of other immigrant groups and/or ethnic/cultural enclaves, and the result has been a diminution of their significance in these debates. Certainly historians need to pursue *all* manner of border crossers so that they might more fully appreciate how even ordinary individuals defied the authority of the state in shaping and reshaping the border region, but they also need to remain mindful that as far as Indian peoples are concerned, Indians belong to nations, not shadowy enclaves. Defining "nation," however, is no small task, as the rich body of literature devoted to this effort can readily attest. Crafting a definition that does not exclude those political entities whose borders are not as tangibly delineated as those of, for example, the United States and Mexico, has required a bit of scholarly creativity, and even scholarly license. Benedict Anderson, for one, famously defined the nation as an "imagined political community" that is imagined as both "inherently limited" and "sovereign." It is *imagined* in the sense that its members, although

rarely personally acquainted with one another, still foster a sense of collective communion with fellow members. It is *limited* in the sense that it has, in Anderson's words, "finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations." It is *sovereign* in that the concept came of age in a postdynastic era in human, or at least Western, history. Finally, it is a *community* in the sense that its members tend to feel a kind of comradeship or fraternity that has made it possible, again in Anderson's words, "for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings." Anderson also acknowledges the increasingly visible phenomenon of what he calls "sub-nationalisms" within the borders of "old nations," political entities that not only challenge the dominant nationalistic impulse but also "dream of shedding [their] sub-ness one day."<sup>30</sup>

Historians of Native America, however, have tended to question the supposed "sub-ness" of competing nationalisms within "old nations." As the historian Jeffrey Shepherd reminds us in his study of the Hualapai, for example, "nations" need not "possess large populations, standing militaries, or bureaucratic states," as one might assume, but "they do include literal and figurative boundaries and cultural borders, common origin stories, a mother tongue, and the assertion of some superiority over surrounding groups." In fact, employment of the "rhetoric of the nation" alone goes a long way in "gaining control over the cultural, human, and natural resources of a people and using them in ways that further the survival of that nation." Similarly, in her history of Spanish colonial Texas, the historian Juliana Barr asserted that the "fluidity of native political configurations . . . does not negate their structural integrity or the aptness of characterizing them as 'nations.'" Networks of kinship, for example, often proved robust enough to provide "the infrastructure for native political and economic systems" and to codify "both domestic and foreign relations."<sup>31</sup> And as a 2008 study concluded, indigenous groups like the three discussed herein have had much in common with "other emergent and reemergent nations in the world" in that "they are trying to do everything at once—self-govern effectively, build economies, improve social conditions, and strengthen culture and identity. They are engaged in nation building."<sup>32</sup> Yet nations can be difficult to identify, at least for outsiders. The historian Thomas Holt argued that "nation" as a concept has much in common with "race" in that neither is "fixed in conceptual space"; both concepts are instead "in motion, their meanings constructed, their natures processual, their significance at any given moment shaped by their historical context." And it is not unusual for nations

to go through a process of reinvention should the need arise to determine “who belongs and who does not, who defines the character of the nation and who is its antithesis.”<sup>33</sup>

Challenging the “sub-ness” of indigenous nationalisms in the face of “old” nationalisms is not a new trend in American Indian scholarship. In 1976, for example, the Yaqui specialist Edward Spicer presented a paper at a conference on border studies, held in El Paso, Texas, in which he argued that the era of the nation-state “has passed its period of ascendancy” in both scholarship and on the world stage. Its dominance, he concluded, “is being threatened by new forms of organization.” If one defines a nation on its most basic level, or, in Spicer’s words, as a collection of people “who identify with one another on the basis of some degree of awareness of common historical experience,” then indigenous groups easily qualify. Indian groups, like nation-states, share a unique, common experience, with their own set of symbols that “stand for and evoke . . . the sentiments which the people feel about their historical experience.” Thus, every modern state could be said to contain several or many nations. Spicer counted at least fifty in Mexico alone. A glance at an ethnographic map of that particular nation-state makes his point, showing a vast array of linguistic and cultural distinctions. In fact, to this day Mexico is peppered throughout with peoples who speak neither Spanish nor English, instead still relying on indigenous languages such as Triqui, Mixtec, and Zapotec, which are among the 162 “living languages” recognized by the Mexican government.<sup>34</sup> In conceptualizing the history of the Yaqui tribe, one of his specialties, Spicer admitted to mistakenly conceiving of Indian tribes and nation-states as two different entities, both with fixed boundaries. “It only slowly dawned on me,” he revealed, “that Yaqui boundaries were fluctuating and that the lines on the ethnographic maps were very misleading in many ways.” Compounding this problem was the fact that many Yaquis “accepted no border defined by mestizos.”<sup>35</sup>

Still, indigenous nationalism as a concept remains problematic. Utilizing a “borrowed” conceptual framework such as “nation,” one collection of scholars warned, could send the message that American Indian studies “cannot independently develop a core assumption or construct a model or paradigm based solely on internally generated information,” which could doom it to a life as a “tributary” field of history, sociology, political science, and so on. In short, it suggests that Indian studies “is not and probably cannot become a fully developed, autonomous discipline.” But more seriously, it saddles indigenous peoples with a paradigm that fails to paint an



accurate picture of “the ways in which [they] act, react, pass along knowledge, and connect with the ordinary as well as the supernatural worlds.” Instead, it imagines Indians as being on a very specific, very narrow political trajectory, the destination of which cannot but be parity with non-Indian nations. It also supposes that Indians lacked that parity prior to contact with Europeans.<sup>36</sup>

“Peoplehood” exists as an alternative. It is a conceptual framework that emphasizes the centrality of language, religion, land, and sacred history (or where they came from in a collective sense) in attempting to account for sets of social, cultural, political, economic, and ecological behaviors among peoples who are indigenous to particular territories. By eschewing modern political constructs and emphasizing instead ethnic sameness, peoplehood helps us more fully understand why modern indigenous nations, such as they exist, are so often built on a foundation of kin networks and village-level government, and also why native spirituality often figures so prominently in indigenous notions of national belonging. Finally, peoplehood reminds us that, in the words of the aforementioned collection of scholars, “nations come and go, but peoples maintain identity even when undergoing profound cultural change.”<sup>37</sup>

The fact remains, however, that the language of nationhood has been a constant in Indian-white relations virtually from the point of contact. The application of the word “nation” in an official capacity to describe Indian groups both within and on the perimeters of U.S. borders goes back at least to the 1830s, when Chief Justice John Marshall famously characterized Indians groups as “domestic dependent nations.” Similarly, one can find similar references in Mexican government correspondence dating back to the earliest decades of Mexican independence.<sup>38</sup> In the twentieth century especially, Indians and non-Indians alike on both sides of the border freely used the term. It is not unreasonable, then, to assume that Indians have gradually internalized the concept, either adopting it wholesale or adapting it to fit their own realities. As will be shown, the indigenous peoples in this story found the term “nation” to be a rather comfortable fit when finally forced to articulate their own conception of themselves. And it could be argued that the aforementioned four factors of peoplehood—language, religion, land, and sacred history—help explain their determination to legitimize claims to sovereignty via terminology that might not wholly apply to their historical experience and/or precise sense of rootedness. Like the non-Indians on their peripheries and/or in their midst, these Indians’ physical terrain was gradually made meaningful through a history of religious,



cultural, socioeconomic, political, and military engagement that very often arose from and revolved around a sacred attachment to place.<sup>39</sup>

A distinction should be made, however, between the “imagined” reality of *nationhood* and the more tangible reality of *self-government*. Nationhood, according to the historians Vine Deloria Jr. and Clifford Lytle, “implies a process of decision making that is free and uninhibited within the community, a community that is in fact almost completely insulated from external factors as it considers its possible options.” Self-government, on the other hand, “implies a recognition by the superior political power that some measure of local decision making is necessary but that this process must be monitored very carefully so that its products are compatible with the goals and policies of the larger political power.”<sup>40</sup> For most Indian individuals and groups, self-government has by and large become the contemporary reality, yet the conception of one’s group as something akin to a nation remains a central, transcendent component of indigenous identity. And while reducing the indigenous nationalistic impulse to something more “subnational” in character may be appropriate in some circumstances, especially given the reality and seeming durability of modern geopolitical borders, there are also circumstances in which indigenous peoples have, in fact, managed to shed their “sub-ness” in a more “official” capacity. The most notable of those circumstances is federal recognition, which, as will be shown, the Yaquis and Kickapoos both vigorously pursued in the mid- to late twentieth century in an attempt to carve out something more substantial than a mere “sub-national” existence.

Federally recognized status, at least north of the border, affords Indians the opportunity to govern themselves in a more official capacity, with the (sometimes reluctant) sanction of neighboring communities and the surrounding nation-state or states. Thus, federal recognition represents a substantial realization of the impulse toward nationhood that is so prevalent in these tribes’ histories. Yet it also involved making a difficult choice. While recognition by the U.S. government meant an affirmation of at least semi-sovereign status for Indian groups, the pursuit of this status also meant acknowledging the United States as an arbiter of authenticity, and the *only* arbiter at that. It also meant, by and large, a more constricted existence for Indian groups that have historically resisted being bounded within such narrow constructs. Federal recognition, then, could prove to be the proverbial double-edged sword, complicating, if not ending, hard-won patterns of transnational migration, while effectively dividing indigenous peoples of similar cultural affinities, religious persuasions, and nationalistic conviction.

tions. But on the other hand, oftentimes the benefits of that status appeared worth the forfeiture of sovereignty, thus the dogged pursuit of a change in status under the U.S. government. In fact, federal recognition, as will be shown, was often a last resort, a strategy improvised at a moment of crisis and designed to meet a shorter-term goal.

In examining moments of transnational indigenous nation building, it is important to remain mindful of the strategies employed by both the U.S. and Mexican governments in their efforts to incorporate these Indians into their respective social, political, and economic arenas. Boasting remarkable parallels as well as notable differences, the policies enacted by both the U.S. and Mexican governments to govern “their” indigenous peoples met with mixed results, to say the least. It will be prudent, then, to examine both those similarities and dissimilarities in order to contextualize the experiences of the Yaquis, Kickapoos, and Tohono O’odham in the late nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth. Both governments frequently changed direction with regard to those legislative measures designed to catalyze change in indigenous communities. Depending on the presidential administration, the ideological climate, and, especially, the availability of funding, Indian groups were sometimes celebrated and subsidized, sometimes maligned and marginalized, and sometimes ignored altogether. Yet they were fairly consistently considered social, cultural, and economic burdens and even impediments, and, in turn, were most often treated as such. Although policy climates on both sides of the border did not always directly affect the Yaquis, Kickapoos, and Tohono O’odham, they do often explain these groups’ mobility, or their tendency to cross international borders and, thus, escape national prerogatives that usually proved detrimental to Indian peoples. Yet federal Indian policies could also serve as tools, or as a convenient means of pursuing either an immediate or a long-term agenda. Appealing to policymakers and/or submitting to prevailing Indian policies, as will be shown, could prove vital to the maintenance of a semiautonomous existence. However, it often did so at the expense of broader efforts at nation building. Some of these Indians were, in the end, forced to choose the lesser of the two evils when it came to U.S. and Mexican Indian policies, which meant finally severing the ties that bind at the increasingly formidable international boundary.

The stories contained herein all in some way highlight the efforts and degrees of success attained by the Yaquis, Kickapoos, and Tohono O’odham in negotiating and maintaining a measure of political, cultural, and religious autonomy given the increasingly pervasive federal presences. This

book places particular emphasis on efforts at transnational movement and tribal reconsolidation over the course of the twentieth century, including land acquisition and protection, federal recognition, and economic development. The progress made by Indian peoples in these arenas, in turn, prompted the U.S. and Mexican governments to respond by making their presence, and especially the weight of their sovereign authority, known to these Indians, sometimes as their benefactors and at other times as their hated enemies. After all, as the historian Miguel Tinker Salas observed, the United States and Mexico were both well aware that the “location of the border divided [some] indigenous peoples” while providing all that called the borderlands home “the opportunity to mitigate their situation and seek better treatment.”<sup>41</sup>

The task confronting both the United States and Mexico, then, became preventing the subversion of their authority by protecting the integrity of their borders, while also making sure that their efforts to do so meshed with broader, and ever-evolving, sentiment about what was and what was not acceptable behavior in Indian policy arenas. As for the Indians in this story, the lure of self-determination and group autonomy proved sufficiently strong to justify drastic measures, including nearly constant migration and deprivation, aggressive legal and political activism, and even violent rebellion. At the end of the day, however, these indigenous groups sought little more than a stable, secure existence in which their vision of nationhood was more real than imagined, a struggle that is just as relevant to the indigenous peoples of North America in the twenty-first century as it was in the sixteenth and seventeenth, and even before.