

NATHANIEL MORRIS

**SOLDIERS, SAINTS,  
and SHAMANS**

**Indigenous Communities and the  
Revolutionary State in Mexico's  
Gran Nayar, 1910-1940**



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# CONTENTS

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Note on Ethnic Nomenclature</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>xiii</i>
<i>Abbreviations</i>	<i>xvii</i>
<i>The Caciques of the Gran Nayar</i>	<i>xix</i>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. The Gran Nayar: From Conquest to Revolution</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>2. The “Armed Phase” of the Revolution in the Gran Nayar, 1910–1920</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>3. Schools, State-Building, and Communal Autonomy Under the Sonorans, 1920–1925</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>4. The Cristero Rebellion in the Gran Nayar, 1926–1929</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>5. Boarding Schools, Factional Feuds, and Unlikely Alliances During the Maximato, 1929–1934</b>	<b>176</b>
<b>6. Cardenismo and the Second Cristero Rebellion in the Gran Nayar, 1935–1940</b>	<b>214</b>
<b>Epilogue</b>	<b>263</b>
<i>Notes</i>	<i>269</i>
<i>Bibliography</i>	<i>337</i>
<i>Index</i>	<i>357</i>

# ILLUSTRATIONS

## FIGURES

1. Children in the Náayari Baja doing manual labor	79
2. Cristero leader Porfirio Mayorquín with his lieutenants	126
3. Children conscripted into Federico Vázquez's rebel forces in Durango	129
4. Wixárika cristero leader Juan Bautista and his lieutenants	134
5. Wixárika cristeros, somewhere in Jalisco	140
6. Pro-government defensa commanders of the Sierra Náayari gathered for a meeting in Jesús María, Nayarit	180
7. Young Náayari pupils of Santa Teresa's new school	183
8. Meeting of the traditional Náayari authorities of Jesús María	185
9. Wixárika man in Jesús María, Nayarit, who was persuaded to pose for the camera together with SEP inspector Joaquín Rivera	232
10. Federico Vázquez, last of the Gran Nayar's cristero chieftains, with his O'dam and mestizo lieutenants	252

## MAPS

1. Gran Nayar overview	5
2. Nayarit, close-up with scale	18
3. Jalisco, close-up with scale	19
4. Durango, close-up with scale	20

## TABLE

1. Population estimates for Indigenous peoples of the Gran Nayar, 1890–1910	38
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## NOTE ON ETHNIC NOMENCLATURE

**THIS BOOK CONCERNS**, above all, the four Indigenous peoples of the Gran Nayar, often known, both in Spanish and English, as the Coras, Huichols, Southern Tepehuanos (sometimes spelled Tepehuanes), and Mexicaneros. Each people has their own language, all belonging to the Uto-Aztecan family. Cora (Náayari) and Huichol (Wixárika) constitute the family's Corachol branch (to which various other now-extinct local languages also belonged). Southern Tepehuano (divided between the O'dam and Audam dialects) and its closely related but now-extinct variant Tepecano belong to the Tepiman branch (along with the Northern Tepehuano, Pima, and Tohono O'odham languages). Finally, the language of the Mexicaneros is a peripheral dialect of Nahuatl.

Increasingly, members of the first three groups would prefer that outsiders call them by their own names for themselves rather than use the terms Spanish missionaries and administrators first imposed on them as part of an ongoing process of physical, political, and cultural subjugation that was accompanied by brutal violence and the despoliation of their lands. Over the following chapters, then, I use the terms *Náayari* (singular) or *Náayarite* (plural) in place of "Cora" and "Coras," *Wixárika* (singular) and *Wixáritari* (plural) in place of "Huichol" and "Huichols," and *O'dam* (singular and plural) in place of "Tepehuano" or "Tepehuanos" (as to try and use both *O'dam* and *Audam* would, I fear, become rather confusing). The Mexicanero endonym actually comes from their own language (in common with many other Nahuatl-speaking groups throughout Mexico), and I will therefore continue to refer to them as *Mexicaneros*.

# THE CACIQUES OF THE GRAN NAYAR

## SIERRA NÁAYARI, NAYARIT

*Evaristo Castañeda*, Náayari cacique and defensa commander in Santa Teresa

*León Contreras*, Náayari cacique and defensa commander in Jesús María

*Eutimio Domínguez*, Náayari cacique of the Náayari Baja region, from San Juan

Corapan

*Eusebio González*, Náayari cacique and defensa commander in San Pedro Ixcatán

*Mariano Mejía*, mestizo cacique of Náayari Alta region, later a local cristero

commander

*J. Jesús Meza*, mestizo army officer, official head of defensas of the Sierra Náayari

*Mariano Solís*, Náayari leader of La Mesa, former bandit and later municipal

president

## SIERRA WIXÁRIKA, JALISCO

*Juan Bautista*, Wixárika cacique and commander of San Sebastián's cristero forces

*Agustín Carrillo*, Wixárika cacique and defensa commander in Santa Catarina

*Agustín Mijares Cosío*, Wixárika teacher and pro-government leader in Santa

Catarina

*Patricio "Mezquite"*, Wixárika cacique, leader of San Sebastián's Carrancista forces

*Nieves and Petronilo Muñoz*, father and son, heads of Huajimic's ruling mestizo clan

*Pedro Quintanar*, mestizo Carrancista cacique of Huejuquilla, later cristero general

*Griseldo Salazar*, Mezquitic's pro-government mestizo cacique and defensa

commander

*José “Pepe” Sánchez*, mestizo cristero leader from near Mezquitic  
*Cenobio Sánchez de la Cruz*, Wixárika cacique and defensa commander in Tuxpan  
*Clemente Villa*, Wixárika Carrancista commander and cacique of San Andrés

#### SIERRA O’DAM, DURANGO

*Valente Acevedo*, mestizo cristero commander from near San Bernardino  
*Ascensión “Chon” Aguilar*, O’dam defensa commander from Xoconoxtle  
*Gregorio Aguilar*, father of Ascensión, Carrancista fighter and defensa commander  
*Dámaso Barraza*, O’dam defensa commander in Yonora, later cristero general  
*Florencio and Frumencio Estrada*, mestizo cristero commanders from Huazamota  
*José María Gutiérrez*, O’dam cacique of San Francisco Ocotán  
*Porfirio Mayorquín*, mestizo from Acajoneta, cristero commander in Durango  
*Sixto Mendía*, O’dam cacique and defensa commander in Santa María Ocotán  
*Trinidad Mora*, mestizo from Santiago Bayacora, commander of Durango’s cristeros  
*Nabor, Vicente, and Tiburcio Muñoz*, heads of Huazamota’s ruling mestizo clan  
*Primo Ortiz*, former cacique of Huazamota, overthrown there by los Muñoz  
*Cosme Solís*, O’dam cacique and defensa commander in Santa María Ocotán  
*Macario and Ireneo Valdés*, O’dam cristero leaders from Temoaya  
*Federico Vázquez*, mestizo cristero commander, last of Mexico’s cristero rebels

## INTRODUCTION

**ON A HOT** June morning in 1928, a column of eighty federal soldiers set out across the mountains of southern Durango in search of a group of rebels who, in the name of “Christ the King,” had declared a holy war on Mexico’s revolutionary government. Around midday, the nervous conscripts and their Indigenous O’dam guides began to climb the ridge known locally as Cerro de las Papas (Potato Hill). As they passed along a narrow path bounded on both sides by sheer rock walls, the O’dam rolled up their white cotton trousers and pulled red bandanas from their shoulder bags. When the soldiers asked them why, their leader, Luciano Carrillo, replied simply that they were hot.

Satisfied with this answer, the federal commander, Colonel José Ruiz, mounted on a magnificent white horse, motioned his men onward. A handful of earth and pebbles slid down onto the path a few meters ahead of him, but he paid no attention and continued forward. Then a boulder crashed toward him from the forested slopes above, and wheeling around on his startled horse, Ruiz shouted for his men to halt. The crack of gunfire began to echo about the mountains, and Ruiz saw first one and then another of his men fall to the ground. Carrillo’s O’dam, marked out from the soldiers by their rolled-up trousers and bandanas, seemed oblivious to the bullets. The federals scabbled frantically for shelter, but they found little cover on the barren mountainside. Luciano Carrillo and the other O’dam had led the soldiers straight into a trap in which most of them would succumb to the bullets and boulders of *cristero* guerrillas led by Carrillo’s ally, the O’dam warlord Juan Andrés Soto.<sup>1</sup>

The massacre at Cerro de las Papas remains the most notorious of the battles that took place in the mountains of southern Durango during the Mexican Revolution, a

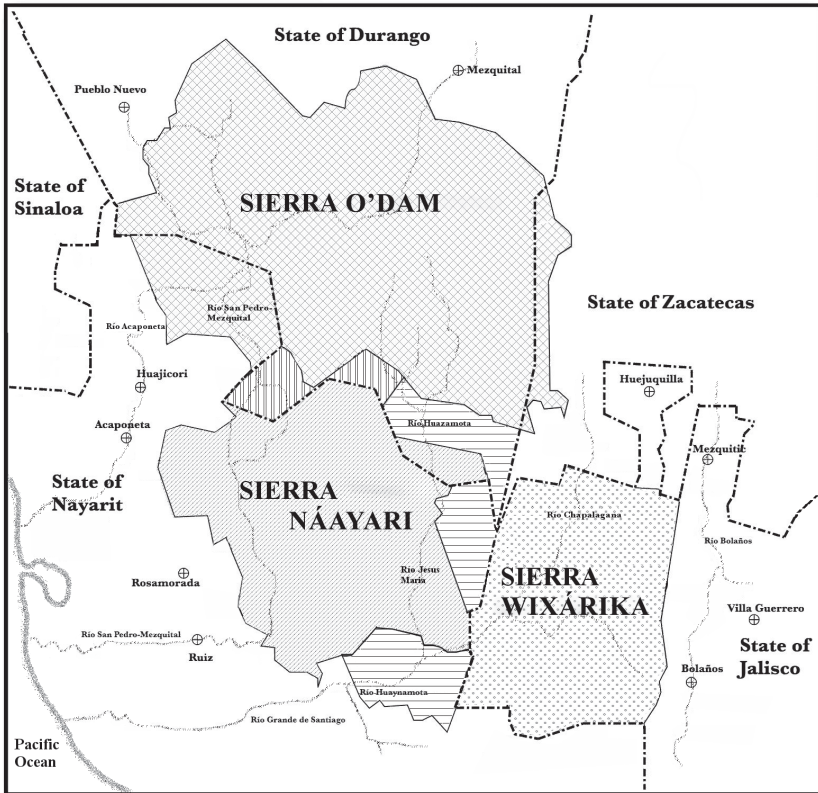


thirty-year period of violent upheaval that began with a popular uprising against the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz in 1910 and ended with the consolidation of the modern Mexican state in the late 1930s, during the radical presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas. The pines that stand in the forests near Cerro de las Papas are today still scarred by cristero bullets, reminding local people of the ambush there, which has passed into O'dam lore and continues to be celebrated in their stories and songs. A nearby government-run school is even named, somewhat ironically, after the school-burning rebel Juan Andrés Soto, while the name of another local landmark—Nabat bo', or "the reclining mestizo"—commemorates the spot where the O'dam rebels killed Colonel Ruiz himself.

The O'dam homeland in southern Durango is part of a wider cultural-geographical region known as the *Gran Nayar*: a 20,000 km<sup>2</sup> expanse of mountains and canyons that stretches into the neighboring states of Nayarit, Jalisco, and Zacatecas. The Gran Nayar comprises one of northwestern Mexico's most ethnically diverse areas. In addition to the O'dam, it is the homeland of the Indigenous Wixárika, Náayari, and Mexicanero peoples, all closely linked by culture, history, geography, trade, and religious practice. A Spanish-speaking mestizo minority also lives in the region.<sup>2</sup> All of these groups played active roles in the civil wars that followed the overthrow of Díaz; in the coups, countercoups, and military rebellions that accompanied the revolutionary power struggles of the 1920s; in the Cristero Rebellion, or *cristiada*, that consumed much of Mexico between 1926 and 1929; and in the land reforms, "socialist" education programs, and renewed cristero violence of the 1930s. Like that of Juan Andrés Soto, the names of the Gran Nayar's other revolutionary-era leaders have also passed into local legend: men like Wixárika cristero chief Juan Bautista, pro-government Náayari militia leader Eutimio Domínguez, and the mestizo Mariano Mejía, who fought for the Carrancistas before raising the communities of Nayarit's mountains against the revolutionary regime—an act immortalized in the nationally famous ballad "Valentín de la Sierra."

Despite the vibrancy of local oral traditions concerning the revolution, only a handful of scholars have explored how the upheavals of this period affected the Gran Nayar. This is all the more surprising given the existence of a substantial body of research into other aspects of Náayari, Wixárika, O'dam, and Mexicanero history,<sup>3</sup> not to mention a profusion of ethnographic studies into their cultures, religious practices, and use of the hallucinogenic peyote cactus.<sup>4</sup> This lack of academic interest in the role the Gran Nayar's inhabitants have played in modern Mexican history is directly related to their status as amongst the least assimilated Indians in the Americas, which has given rise to popular images of them as living in a timeless vacuum. It is also a consequence of the idea—prevalent in Mexico since the colonial era—that Indian "history" is that of

# THE GRAN NAYAR AND ITS CONSTITUENT REGIONS



**KEY TO PATTERNS AND SYMBOLS**

	NÁAYARITE
	WIXÁRITARI
	O'DAM
	MEXICANEROS
	MESTIZO ENCLAVE
	MUNICIPAL SEAT
	STATE BORDER
	MAJOR RIVER



MAP 1 Overview of Gran Nayar. Map by the author, based on Plan Lerma, *Operación HUICOT*.

the glorious pre-Hispanic past, leaving their descendants worthy of interest only to anthropologists and a few romantics interested in folklore.<sup>5</sup>

However, Náayari, Wixárika, O'dam, and Mexicanero memories of the Mexican Revolution have a significance that goes beyond the folkloric. On closer examination, stories like that of the ambush at Cerro de las Papas—at first glance a simple tale of canny Catholic guerrillas defeating foolhardy federal interlopers—raise important questions about the nature of many of the developments of the revolutionary period. In the 1920s, revolutionary statesmen and rebel ideologues alike claimed that the Cristero Rebellion was motivated by Catholic zealotry, while more recently, historians have argued that support for the rebels was predicated less on belief and more on the cultural, social, and political consequences of Catholic practice.<sup>6</sup> But both of these interpretations are challenged by the fact that only a few of the O'dam guerrillas who mounted the attack at Cerro de las Papas were even baptized Catholics and most arrived at the ambush fresh from celebrating a shamanic ritual, or *mitote*, that dated back to pre-Hispanic times and was viewed by the church as incompatible with orthodox Catholic practice.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, Náayari, Wixárika, O'dam, and Mexicanero religious traditions are so heterodox that Pope John XXIII declared their homeland *terra nullius* (no-man's-land) in 1962 and sent Franciscan missionaries to convert them to the “true faith.” Even the pope could make little headway in the Gran Nayar, whose peoples today continue to practice their distinctive ethnic religions, complete with complex cosmologies, rituals, mythological epics, and, in the case of the Wixáritari, purpose-built pagan temples, all of which fascinate anthropologists and cause their mestizo neighbors to disparage them as heathens. What, then, led so many of the region's Indigenous inhabitants to join the Catholic insurgents of the 1920s and 1930s to the extent that the last cristeros in the country to lay down their arms were Wixáritari and O'dam?

Furthermore, the rebels' ruse was only successful because many other local people had declared their support for the government and had played a key role in regional anti-cristero campaigns, working with federal forces as guides and auxiliary fighters. Only by feigning such sympathies were Carrillo and his O'dam cristeros able to lure Colonel Ruiz into their trap. Why then did so many of the Gran Nayar's Indigenous inhabitants choose to turn against their rebellious ethnic compatriots and align themselves with a government that actively sought to curb their cherished cultural and political autonomy in the name of revolutionary nation-building?

The participation of the Náayarite, Wixáritari, O'dam, and Mexicaneros in the popular mobilizations and revolutionary infighting that preceded the first Cristero Rebellion, and in the agrarian reform and second Cristero Rebellion that followed it, raises additional questions about the dynamics of the Mexican Revolution while also challenging widespread ideas about the Gran Nayar itself. Although geographers,

anthropologists, and historians have often represented the region's peoples as "closed off in their own ethnocentric worlds,"<sup>8</sup> they threw themselves into the events of the revolutionary period with such gusto that bloody interethnic conflicts and intracomunal "civil wars" broke out throughout the Gran Nayar. While some of the region's culturally distinct and politically self-governing communities may have been carried along by the violence that swept Mexico between 1910 and 1940, others were genuinely attracted to the rival ideologies of Villistas or Carrancistas, *cristeros*, and radical agrarian reformers. At the same time, their unique and markedly magical ways of understanding the world also helped to shape these sympathies, with important effects on their societies and cultures and on the local, regional, and national outcomes of the Mexican Revolution and, therefore, on the emergence of the Mexican nation-state as we know it today.

To make sense of this complex history, this book—the first systematic study of the participation of the Gran Nayar's inhabitants in the Mexican Revolution—initially explores how and why the Náayarite, Wixáritari, O'dam, and Mexicaneros took part in the "armed phase" of the revolution, between 1910 and 1920. Alan Knight has convincingly argued that although it resulted in the dramatic reconfiguration of both state and nation,<sup>9</sup> the armed revolution consisted of a multitude of popular rural movements "motivated by local concerns."<sup>10</sup> Above all, these concerns related to threats to local political and/or cultural autonomy, which inspired to action those independent-minded and often mountain-dwelling revolutionary actors Knight classes as *serranos*, or, alternatively, to the usurpation of peasant lands, which drove *agraristas* to take up arms in their defense.<sup>11</sup> However, as Knight himself has pointed out, the distinction between the two groups is not always rigid.<sup>12</sup> This is certainly true in the case of the Gran Nayar, where local revolutionaries viewed the political and cultural autonomy of their communities as inseparable from their continued control of communal lands—all of which were under severe pressure on the eve of the revolution.

Náayari, Wixárika, O'dam, and Mexicanero leaders sought to use, with some success, the tumult of the revolution's armed phase to reassert their political autonomy and reclaim control of lost territory. However, the regime that rose from the ashes of Porfirian Mexico soon threatened their gains. In common with contemporary nationalists throughout the world,<sup>13</sup> Mexico's revolutionary ideologues saw the consolidation of the modern nation-state as dependent on the reformation of previous "activities and cultural forms that have provided modes of organization, social practice and identity."<sup>14</sup> The destruction of "primitive" Indigenous political structures, languages, and "superstitions" throughout rural Mexico was envisaged as an essential part of this process.

This project, which involved corporatist, state-managed agrarian reform, violent anticlerical crackdowns, and education programs designed to replace native languages

with Spanish and to challenge traditional gender and age roles within Indigenous communities,<sup>15</sup> inherently threatened not only the political autonomy but also the ways of life, the worldviews, and even the basic ethnic identities of many of Mexico's Indigenous inhabitants. In the Gran Nayar, it paved the way for a violent confrontation between highly autonomous Indigenous peasant communities and an expansionist revolutionary state: a clash between practitioners of subsistence agriculture and promoters of capitalist development, rival Indian generations and political factions, and distinct visions of the world, religion, and daily life.

These clashes produced some of the most severe defeats that the Mexican government's state- and nation-building programs suffered during this period, with sometimes counterintuitive consequences. Thus members of "traditionalist" Indigenous factions, who upheld a resolutely pagan religious tradition and defined themselves in opposition to local mestizos, became an important force within the Catholic-inspired, mestizo-dominated *cristero* rebel movements of the 1920s and 1930s. Similarly, the federal educational programs so often lauded for bringing literacy and "progress" to rural Mexico instead precipitated both passive resistance and violent opposition throughout the Gran Nayar, which extended to the burning of schools and even the murder of several teachers. And the radical land reforms of left-leaning President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–40), ostensibly designed to liberate the Mexican peasantry from social and economic oppression, instead facilitated the usurpation of Indigenous lands by mestizo ranchers and gave rise to many of the violent conflicts between local communities that still define life in the region today.

At the same time, the story of Náayari, Wixárika, O'dam, and Mexicanero interactions with the revolutionary state is not exclusively one of coercion, oppression, and resistance. Despite widespread local opposition to schools, influential minority factions supported their establishment in the hope of winning the government's support for their agrarian or territorial claims, believing that teachers would provide their communities with links to a government that promoted the idea of agrarian reform to shore up its legitimacy. Some, particularly the warlords and caciques (political bosses) who had risen to influence during the armed phase of the revolution, also had vested interests in promoting revolutionary political and economic change, which offered them avenues to power and wealth previously inaccessible in their traditionally gerontocratic and subsistence-based societies.<sup>16</sup> Some of these leaders, whom I will refer to as *cosmopolitans*,<sup>17</sup> also saw the arrival of schools and mestizo immigrants in their communities as undermining the "conservative" factions with whom they increasingly competed for power.<sup>18</sup>

Throughout the region, however, the Indigenous identities of members of both factions continued to be defined by *el costumbre*: an interlocking complex made up of descent group and communal-level ritual practices, church-based festivals, and faith in

the power of saints, ancestors, and pre-Hispanic gods. These were themselves bound up with cyclical conceptions of history and a belief that shifting subsistence agriculture, hunting, and gathering were sacred activities in which all “real people”—that is, the Indigenous inhabitants of the Gran Nayar—were obliged to participate. Thus unless they were willing to cease to be “Indians” by giving up *costumbre* entirely, even the region’s more aggressively “cosmopolitan” leaders remained to some extent bound to the “old ways,” even as political, social, and economic convulsions encouraged the integration of new gods, saints, and ceremonies into older politico-religious systems.

Contradictions and ambiguities therefore characterize the history of the revolution in the Gran Nayar. Unpicking these can also shed light on the inner contradictions of the Mexican Revolution itself. Thus the divergent responses of the region’s inhabitants to the developments of this period were tied not just to their own cultural, historical, and religious idiosyncrasies but also to the disparate ways in which outsiders claiming to represent either the Revolution or the Catholic Church—including soldiers, teachers, agronomists, priests, and rebels—enacted supposedly uniform national-level policies in the Gran Nayar between 1910 and 1940. The reality of such discrepancies challenges widely held interpretations of developments across Mexico as a whole in this period, casting doubt, for example, on the idea that the revolutionary state gradually evolved into an actor that genuinely negotiated with Indigenous Mexicans over the direction of social, political, and economic reforms.<sup>19</sup> The nature of the interactions between local people and government officials, military commanders, and rebel leaders also complicates views of the revolution’s rural teachers as noble martyrs in the service of popular liberation from oppression, poverty, and “backwardness”<sup>20</sup> and narratives of the *cristero* rebellions as either heroic “crusades” mounted by pious Catholic peasants against a Jacobinic state or as the self-interested efforts of regressive fundamentalists and wealthy landowners to overthrow a popular regime and roll back agrarian reform.<sup>21</sup> Delving into *Náayari*, *Wixárika*, *O’dam*, and *Mexicanero* participation in the revolution additionally highlights the hitherto neglected importance of communal militias—the so-called *defensas sociales*—in shaping state formation at both local and regional levels and in putting down the little-studied second *Cristero* Rebellion, which in the Gran Nayar was at least as devastating as the first *cristiada*.

The significance of the story presented in this book extends even beyond Mexico’s borders, as the processes of resistance and accommodation to *caciquismo* (boss politics), Catholic evangelization, factional violence, assimilatory pressures, and counterinsurgency operations that shook the Gran Nayar all have their counterparts elsewhere in the Global South. The case studies presented here can therefore provide insights into the dynamics of rural violence and the cultural, religious, and sociopolitical effects of state-building across much of rural Latin America<sup>22</sup> and above all into the causes and nature of clashes between Indigenous groups and national political

movements in countries such as Peru, Nicaragua, and Colombia, and beyond as far as India and Vietnam.<sup>23</sup> These insights are all the more relevant today given the critical importance of minority peoples—including Kurds, Druze, and Tuareg—in so many of the conflicts that still wrack the “decolonized world” and the vital role that religious faith and belief in the supernatural—so essential to shaping the revolution in the Gran Nayar—still plays in politics around the globe.

## TIME, SPACE, AND HISTORY IN THE GRAN NAYAR

Given the extent to which the beliefs, rituals, and other dictates of *costumbre* still permeate every aspect of Náayari, Wixárika, O'dam, and Mexicanero life, from farming and hunting to politics and warfare, the revolution was locally experienced—and is today remembered—as both a political and a supernatural event: an era of widespread intercommunal and factional conflict, when the still-unfinished agrarian reform that today divides the region first began; but also a time when local warlords channeled occult forces to defend their communities from raiders and when miraculous statues of Catholic saints resisted the attacks of bandits or soldiers, or even took on human form to lead the charge against their enemies.

It is natural, then, to find historical narratives of the Mexican Revolution embedded in the modern ceremonial practices of the Gran Nayar's inhabitants, whether in the form of bandolier-draped dancers demanding gold from village elders in Tuxpan de Bolaños; painted “devils” shouting their allegiance to the Carrancistas, Villistas, or *cristeros* in Santa Teresa; or glazed-eyed peyote pilgrims in Santa Catarina irreverently yelling “Long live the supreme government!” as they romp around their ritual dance grounds. Many of the political outcomes of the revolution are also conceived in terms of their effects on local ethno-religious identities, for they resulted in the written word becoming more politically important than traditional oral narratives. Within the local imaginary, the revolution therefore marks a watershed between a time of “savagery” during which forebears practiced *costumbre* “properly” and retained control of their ancestral lands and a postrevolutionary era of territorial and cultural loss accompanied by the arrival of “modern” forms of social organization and national-level political and cultural influence on local life.

This conception of history has a profound effect on the way the inhabitants of the Gran Nayar today understand their relationships with the Mexican government, the country's mestizo majority, and, indeed, one another. However, it also poses a challenge for outsiders seeking to construct a “rationalist” narrative based on local sources,<sup>24</sup> as these often ignore questions of ideology or wider political context when explaining historical actors' behavior, instead stressing their “lack of civilization” or

possession of supernatural abilities harnessed through *costumbre*. The fact that there are few people left in the Gran Nayar today who are old enough to remember the revolution poses another set of problems, as the testimonies of second-hand informants frequently compress events and mix up the identity of key characters, so that Pancho Villa becomes a *cristero* leader or Manuel Lozada ends up fighting the Carrancistas.<sup>25</sup>

Scholars wishing to use written records to piece together the regional story of the revolution face a rival set of difficulties. Only a handful of secondary accounts relating to the revolution in the Gran Nayar have ever been published, in large part because of outsiders' stereotypes of the region and its peoples. The Wixáritari, for example, have long been one of Mexico's most prominent Indigenous peoples, popularly regarded as a "tribe of artists," whose colorful designs adorn everything from T-shirts and tequila bottles to the buses of Nayarit's capital city, Tepic. But because their culture is held up as an archetypal example of a tradition "untarnished" by outside influences, few Mexicans, whether revolutionary government officials or scholars, politicians, or journalists writing more recently, believe they could have contributed much to such a grand and inherently national event as the revolution. Their Náayari, O'dam, and Mexicanero neighbors, meanwhile, are usually portrayed either as "closed," inward-facing primitives or, more recently, as dangerous cartel gunmen. In both cases, they are viewed as living in a Wild West backwoods that is too isolated from mainstream Mexican society for their forebears to have been involved in matters of national import. Local leaders do not feature in the Mexican state's official revolutionary hagiographies, and unlike the similarly rugged, Indigenous-majority regions of Sonora, Puebla, or Oaxaca, the Gran Nayar remains entirely absent from most Mexicans' mental maps of the period.

Archival documents are therefore the main written sources for local participation in the revolution. However, the few archives that still exist in the Gran Nayar itself have all suffered much from rebel attacks, insects, rainy-season storms, and the local custom of burying important papers "to keep them safe." State and federal archives contain rather more information, but much of this is still hard to use, as documents authored by local people usually provide only fragmentary snapshots of happenings in their communities or the wider region. The records produced by outsiders are similarly fragmentary and are additionally colored by ethnic and political bias and condescension toward the Indigenous people with whom they are concerned.

Given these problems, I have used what Paul Friedrich calls an *anthrohistorical* approach in order to construct the narrative framework of this book. I supplemented "personal letters, personal documents, local chronicles, published history, numbers, legal files, and laws" taken from a wide range of Mexican archives with "participant observation, gossip, [and] common sense" obtained through fieldwork.<sup>26</sup> In my search for documents, I spent several years working in the state archives of Jalisco and Durango,<sup>27</sup> the archives of both the Archdiocese of Guadalajara and the Franciscan



Mission at Zapopan, cristero archives in Mexico's National Autonomous University, and a range of federal archives in Mexico City. With regard to the latter, the reports of local teachers and zone inspectors stored in the Mexican national archives (AGN) proved particularly rich in information on politics, society, and culture in the Gran Nayar during the revolution. Meanwhile, two semiautobiographical novels—Antonio Estrada's *Rescoldo* and Ángel Menendez's *Nayar*—provided invaluable additional information in relation to the second Cristero Rebellion in the region.

Over the course of the more than five years it took to research this book, I also spent months at a time living in the communities of the Gran Nayar. I walked, rode horses, and hitched rides in the backs of pickup trucks in search of the region's surviving eyewitnesses to the revolution, managing to interview forty-six different informants, most of them extremely elderly. Their reminiscences were vital to filling gaps in the historical record left by the nonexistence, loss, or destruction of documents, gave me access to counterhegemonic narratives missing from existing documents, and, above all, provided me with the details of how the inhabitants of the Gran Nayar—both human and otherworldly—both experienced and participated in the revolution. While gathering this oral testimony—including songs as well as interviews—I lived with Náayari, Wixárika, O'dam, and Mexicanero families. I ate their food, slept on their floors, learned a little (far too little) of their languages, and listened to their own stories—often sad, sometimes hilarious—of life in the region. Fieldwork also helped me to grasp the scale of the Gran Nayar's rugged geography and its varied, often severe climates and gave me a chance not only to observe but also to take part in local ceremonies and festivals. Helping to prepare ritual feasts, dancing, praying, drinking, and, in Santa Teresa, running laps and fighting other stick-wielding “devils” helped me to understand how local rituals express both collective memories and more far-reaching mythical-historical narratives, all of which have been inflected to some degree by local experiences of the revolution.<sup>28</sup>

Fieldwork in the Gran Nayar was not always easy, however, and I found myself facing many of the same problems the emissaries of the revolutionary state had encountered long before I arrived in the mountains. Mexico's drug war today hinders outsiders' penetration of the Gran Nayar just as rebel activity did during the revolution, and it ultimately prevented me from reaching one of the region's two Mexicanero communities. I was also sometimes accused of being a “gringo spy” working for the DEA—not a comfortable situation when your accusers are carrying guns.<sup>29</sup> Dispersed local settlement patterns, widespread monolingualism, and a simple aversion to contact with outsiders—the latter often a consequence of bitter struggles to maintain cultural and political autonomy in the face of outside threats—also complicated my research.

In particular, older women were reluctant to talk to me, which compounded the notable lack of local female perspectives present in the documentary record. The

latter is a product both of patriarchal systems of Indigenous governance—hence local women didn't sign, far less write, petitions and other letters—and the fact that Indigenous women were frequently unwilling to even be seen by the outsiders who produced the other half of the documentary record.<sup>30</sup> I did eventually manage to carry out interviews with some women, which helped me to learn more about female experiences during the revolution. Thanks to the importance of the Gran Nayar's women in transmitting their cultures to subsequent generations, male elders also told me stories passed down to them by their mainly monolingual mothers and grandmothers (although in their telling, such tales are likely inflected by male perspectives).

To compensate for these problems and to shore up the ethnographical side of my investigation, I turned to the pioneering research of early anthropologists and explorers such as Carl Lumholtz and Konrad Theodor Preuss, both of whom traveled widely in the Gran Nayar in the two decades before the outbreak of the revolution. Their work provided the foundations of my analysis of the region's transformation during the first half of the twentieth century. And my analytical methodology was also influenced by the way in which Preuss, in particular, used the similarities and differences between the Gran Nayar's four peoples as the basis for deeper and more comprehensive analyses of each.<sup>31</sup> I also drew freely from the more recent research of Mexican scholars—many of them associated with Mexico's Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia (ENAH) and/or the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM)—who have led an important shift away from the idea of the Wixáritari, above all, as representatives of “uncorrupted” pre-Hispanic traditions, and of the Gran Nayar as a whole as a mystical backwater separated from modern Mexico by a distance of hundreds of miles and thousands of years.<sup>32</sup> Instead, they have helped to locate the region's cultures and costumbre within wider Mesoamerican, colonial, Porfirian, or modern Mexican contexts.<sup>33</sup>

The end result of this research is a fine-grained, microhistorical analysis of change and continuity in the Gran Nayar over the course of a period of great national ferment, as seen through the eyes of mestizo teachers, state governors, municipal authorities, cristero rebels and federal generals, and, most important, the local people themselves. The book begins with an outline of the cultural, social, and economic history of the Gran Nayar and its peoples from pre-Hispanic times to the outbreak of the revolution, which includes a discussion of the origins and development of the idea of the region as a remote, hermetically sealed world—a misconception key to the revolutionary state's local policies and one that continues to sustain popular perceptions of the area today (chapter 1). It then explores local participation in the armed phase of the revolution between 1910 and 1920 (chapter 2) and suggests why some of the Gran Nayar's communities were more deeply involved than others and how this involvement led to the rise of caciques in many communities formerly governed only by elders and

cargo-system hierarchies. Continuing on in chronological order to the early Sonoran period (1920–26), chapter 3 shows how the emergence of caciquismo combined with the effects of revolutionary state-building to foster increased intracommunal factional conflicts in some parts of the Gran Nayar and growing intercommunal conflicts in others.

This leads to a discussion (chapter 4) of the way in which these burgeoning conflicts, together with the historical and cultural particularities of each of the region's Indigenous communities, influenced local participation on either side of the first *cristiada*, as well as what this participation entailed. Chapter 5 returns to the issue of revolutionary state-building by examining the state's renewed attempts to "integrate" the Gran Nayar following the *de facto* defeat of the *cristero* rebels in 1929 and the ways in which continued factional conflict exacerbated preexisting tensions and led to the outbreak of another round of *cristero* violence in the region in 1934. The final part of the book explores local participation in this rebellion and its results at local, regional, and national levels, as well as the outcomes of the "socialist education" policies and agrarian reform enacted in the Gran Nayar between 1934 and 1940, during the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (chapter 6).

Many Náayarite, Wixáritari, O'dam, and Mexicaneros might struggle to understand this analysis as constituting a history, given that their histories are traditionally enshrined in ritual actions, in cyclical conceptions of time, and in complex mythical narratives. But even if my work is essentially an artifact of the same European-mestizo world whose intrusion into their time and space it itself seeks to analyze, it does at least try to respect and to reflect the ways in which the inhabitants of the Gran Nayar understand the world and their own place within it. At the same time, I hope to contribute to mainstream understandings of the revolution by showing that despite their long-standing absence in the historiography, the Náayarite, Wixáritari, O'dam, and Mexicaneros played a range of active roles in the Mexican Revolution. The nature of this participation varied from community to community (or even between factions from the same community) and changed over time, conditioned by local and regional historical and cultural idiosyncrasies; by the alliances or conflicts that existed both between and within different communities; and by the reactions of local people to the violence unleashed by the overthrow of Díaz and to the revolutionary government's subsequent attempts to "integrate" them into the Mexican nation. Thus, not all O'dam supported the *cristeros*, nor were all Náayarite Carrancistas; in fact, it is clear that between 1910 and 1940 there was as much—if not more—fighting between different communities of the same ethnic group, and between rival factions within the same communities, as there was between Wixáritari, say, and Náayarite, or "Indians" and "mestizos."

In conclusion, however, I argue that all of the different strategies that Náayari, Wixárika, O'dam, and Mexicanero communities, factions, and individuals employed during this tempestuous period to counter threats to their political autonomy and cultural identities, and to simultaneously obtain outside support in the context of agrarian, factional, or personal struggles, allowed them to shape the postrevolutionary settlement within the Gran Nayar and influence the course of the revolution across western Mexico as a whole. In some ways, the end result of this dual process of resistance and accommodation to the pressures and opportunities offered by the revolution was a Gran Nayar much changed by mestizo immigration, the rise of bicultural caciques, the development of new communal power structures and religious practices, the emergence of new conflicts or alliances between communities, and, in a few communities in particular, a shift toward an increasingly monetized and extractive local economy.

However, as Claude Lévi-Strauss noted more than half a century ago, Indigenous societies are far more flexible than is still often popularly imagined and are “not only capable of conserving what exists, or of retaining briefly a crumbling past, but also of elaborating audacious innovations, even though traditional structures are thus profoundly transformed.”<sup>34</sup> And so, especially given the centrality of ideas of creation and re-creation to the cultures of the region's Indigenous peoples,<sup>35</sup> their participation in the Mexican Revolution did not, except in a few specific cases, fundamentally alter their identities as Náayari, Wixárika, O'dam, or Mexicanero. Furthermore, the regional postrevolutionary settlement was in fact far from settled: it remained a “work in progress” into the era of unchallenged PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, or Institutional Revolutionary Party) hegemony in Mexico,<sup>36</sup> as the communities of the Gran Nayar continued to resist mestizo immigration and caciquismo, defend their rights to political and cultural autonomy, and petition for agrarian reform. As, indeed, they continue to do today.