

# New crops, new landscapes and new socio-political relationships in the *cañada* de Yosotiche (Mixteca region, Oaxaca, Mexico), 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries

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**KEYWORDS:** ecological complementarity, *yuhuitayu*, sugar cane, Mixteca region.

**JEL CODES:** N56, N96, O33, Q15.

**O**ur aim is to determine continuities and changes in the *cañada* of Yosotiche environment since the introduction by Spanish conquerors and settlers of new crops, especially sugarcane. A study of the biological modifications of a particular ecosystem allows inferences on changes and continuities in socio-political relations. This particular case study contributes to a discussion of the general model of Mixtec political territoriality. The methodology applied here involves a convergence that integrates the analysis of historical documents, archaeological data, fieldwork and anthropological information, along with discoveries made by earlier research. It offers insight into occupational dynamics and their ties to the political, administrative, economic and social structures within the *cañada* during colonial times.

The introduction of foreign crops produced changes in the ecological complementarity system practiced by the villages that possessed lands in the *cañada*, consequently modifying the labour relations of the inhabitants. An analysis of this situation reveals the singular status of the lands owned by Tlaxiaco, which seemingly fit the regulations dictated by the Laws of the Indies but, in essence, meant the continuity of pre-Hispanic traditions.

## Nuevos cultivos, nuevos paisajes y nuevas relaciones político-sociales en la cañada de Yosotiche (región mixteca, Oaxaca, México), siglos XVI-XVIII

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** complementariedad ecológica, *yuhuitayu*, caña de azúcar, región mixteca.

**CÓDIGOS JEL:** N56, N96, O33, Q15.

**N**uestro propósito es mostrar algunos de los cambios y continuidades que se produjeron en los ámbitos ecológico, político y social en la cañada de Yosotiche a partir de la introducción de nuevos cultivos, especialmente de la caña de azúcar, por parte de los españoles. El estudio de la modificación biológica de un ecosistema particular permite hacer inferencias sobre el devenir de las relaciones sociopolíticas, y así contribuir a la discusión del modelo general de territorialidad política mixteca a partir de un estudio de caso.

*Hemos empleado una metodología convergente que integra el análisis de documentos históricos, datos arqueológicos, trabajo de campo e información antropológica, junto con descubrimientos hechos por las investigaciones previas. Esto nos permite comprender la dinámica ocupacional y sus vínculos con las estructuras políticas, administrativas, económicas y sociales en la cañada durante la colonia.*

*La introducción de cultivos foráneos produjo cambios en el sistema de complementariedad ecológica practicado por los pueblos que poseían tierras en la cañada, modificando así las relaciones laborales de sus habitantes. El análisis de esta situación ha revelado el estatus particular que poseían las tierras propiedad de Tlaxiaco, el cual, aparentemente, se ajustaba a las Leyes de Indias pero, en esencia, significaba la continuidad de las tradiciones prehispánicas.*

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Received : 2016-07-12 • Revised: 2017-06-18 • Accepted: 2017-07-14

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the Mixteca region has received a significant amount of attention from researchers. In spite of the existence of what are now considered classic studies, along with recent ones analysing diverse spheres of life in this region (Dahlgren, 1990; Pastor, 1987; Romero, 1990; Smith, 1973; Spores, 1967, 2007; Terraciano, 2001), when we compare the volume of literature to the existing amount referencing the centre of Mexico (the Nahua influence area), we find that interest in Mixteca has been lower<sup>1</sup>. There are micro-regions whose history is still waiting to be reconstructed, and we have a good extent of documents to analyse that will open the door to the exploration of new matters through the revision of particular cases of study.

This paper examines some of the changes and continuities produced in ecological, political and social spheres in a particular area of the ancient *señorío* (lordship) of Tlaxiaco, in the *cañada* of Yosotiche<sup>2</sup>, from the agricultural innovations that took place after the arrival of the Spaniards and their interest in the exploitation of the indigenous workforce and local fertile lands. Our analysis is based on two perspectives of study that we consider complementary: on the one hand, on the political-territorial conceptualization of Mixtec indigenous lordship and its adaptation to the Spanish administrative model during the sixteenth century<sup>3</sup>; and on the other hand, on the approaches developed by the relatively young discipline baptised as environmental history. The latter alludes to the interaction of the human being with modified ecosystems, resulting in a double transformation: the natural environment, along with administrative, political, labour, social and even ritual relations between the peoples that interact with said milieu (Worster, 1989).

Thus, the literature that supports the research is framed within those studies that investigate the political characterization of the colonial Indian community in New Spain as a corporate entity modelled by the need to adapt to a new European administrative rationality (Ouweneel & Miller, 1990; Lockhart, 1992). After decades of research, it is well proved that the Spanish administration rested on indigenous structures. Particularly for

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1. To obtain a historiographical account of the studies on the Mixteca in various fields, see the 1990 edition of the classic work by Barbro Dahlgren, which includes a section that shows half a century of research. Kevin TERRACIANO (2001: 5-8) provides an assessment that updates and expands Dahlgren's, although a similar recount incorporating the most recent studies is to be published yet.

2. The Spanish term *cañada* that define Yosotiche means "small valley" or "narrow pass". As we explain later, the space of the *cañada* was occupied by several lordships, but in this work we focus exclusively on the pertaining to Tlaxiaco, the most important one in colonial time.

3. This encompasses other issues as important as land tenure, which is a problem that has traditionally concerned rural history.

the region that concerns us, ethno-historical and linguistic studies have produced particular analytical categories essential for the examination of the Mixtec political and territorial organization, both in pre-Hispanic times and during the colonial period. Even so, the general model for the organization of the territory still presents some significant gaps and generates debates between academics. So, each new case study contributes to clarifying and completing the proposed pattern.

To the date, the former *señorío* of Tlaxiaco had not been approached in all its extent and complexity<sup>4</sup>, and in particular, we can make some contributions in this respect through the analysis exposed here. In order to do this, it is essential to take into account the inquiries carried out by Kevin Terraciano (2001) and Ronald Spores (2007) in the description of possible models of *yuhuitayu-señorío*, and by Margarita Menegus (2005, 2009) and John K. Chance (2004, 2010) around the institution of indigenous *cacicazgo* (lordly estate) from the sixteenth century and its relationship with the *cabildo* (Spanish town council) or republic of Indians<sup>5</sup>.

On the other hand, the research is related to the first of the three trends recognized by Stefania Gallini (2005: 5-6) within environmental history, which addresses the interactions of certain human societies with their ecosystems and the continuous changes produced thereon<sup>6</sup>. In America, inevitably many of these changes were triggered by the arrival of the Europeans and their conquests, so the biological and cultural consequences of transoceanic exchange have attracted interest for decades (*e.g.* Crosby, 1972; Sempat, 2006). In this context and keeping within the interests of the present work, a pioneer researcher was William Cronon (1983), who through the study of New England ecology, demonstrated the impact on the land of the widely disparate conceptions of ownership held by Native Americans and English colonists.

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4. The author's PhD dissertation, entitled *Territoriality and landscape from the moves and congregations of peoples in the Mixteca, sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries: Tlaxiaco and its sujetos* (CIESAS), is a first comprehensive study of this ancient jurisdiction.

5. The inter-institutional projects coordinated between 2012-2015 and 2016-2019 by Manuel Hermann from the Centre of Research and High Studies in Social Anthropology (CIESAS, Mexico City), entitled "Society, Government and Territory in the *Señoríos* of the Mixteca: Sixteenth-Eighteenth Centuries" (First and Second Phases), with the participation of the author, have combined works in this direction (HERMANN, 2015).

6. We can review a historiographical, epistemological and methodological assessment of the evolution of environmental history, also in Latin America, in GALLINI (2005) and MCNEILL (2005).

Mexico has been a fruitful place in research on the ecological aspects of pre-Hispanic and colonial production and its relation to the socio-political structural framework<sup>7</sup>. For the dynamics that concern us, the works of María de los Ángeles Romero (1990) on the production variations and the new economy raised by the Spaniards in the Mixteca Alta, and Elinor G. K. Melville (1994) on the impact of the introduction of wool cattle in the Mezquital valley serve as examples.

The ecological change that we are interested to highlight particularly is the one provoked by the introduction of sugar cane. The literature on this crop in America is very prolific. Although numerous studies have privileged –due to their enormous importance in the geopolitical configuration of the Modern Ages– an economic perspective of study, around the commercialization and slave trade (*e.g.* Schwartz, 2004), there have also been attempts to take care of the social aspects of its historical production, as we have observed in some of the works carried out on cane production in New Spain (Sandoval, 1951; Motta & Velasco, 2003; Wobeser, 2004).

Paying attention to our specific area of study, the *cañada* of Yosotiche was referred to by Rodolfo Pastor (1987) in relation to the production of sugar by wealthy Spaniards since eighteenth century. The dynamics of conflict between communities and landowners since the disentanglement process taken place at the mid-nineteenth century have also attracted the consideration of some researchers (Sánchez Silva, 1998: chapter VI; Hamnett, 2002; in more detail than the previous ones, Chassen, 2003). The latter took the path opened by John Monaghan (1990, 1994), the first researcher to observe the *cañada* in detail. Attracted by contemporary anthropological problems, and in relation to the dynamics of land ownership during the nineteenth century, he also made incursions into some aspects of the colonial past, especially in the composition and functions of lordly estates. His contributions constitute, in good measure, the basis of the research presented here.

In particular, the contribution we make extends Monaghan's field of analysis by incorporating an integral vision of the Tlaxiaco lordship in order to be able to compare the *cañada* to other regions of the province, to pay attention to the models of *yuhuitayu* and *cacicazgo*, and to observe the corresponding land tenure regime, and, consequently, the interrelation between different types of jurisdictional traditions: the indigenous –studied from its own categories– and the European one<sup>8</sup>. In this way, the study of the biological

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7. Much of Mexican anthropology and history has been strongly influenced by the adoption by Angel Palerm, Pedro Armillas, Eric Wolf and William T. Sanders of the *Oriental Despotism* model postulated by Karl Wittfogel, plus the influence of the Cultural ecology driven by Julian H. Steward.

8. We understand *jurisdiction* both as a territorial space and as an extension of political dominance.

modification of a particular ecosystem allows us to make inferences about the changes and continuities of socio-political relations, therefore contributing to our understanding of a general model of Mixtec political territoriality.

In order to carry out this work, besides the bibliographical review on the different issues addressed, a wide corpus of archive data was consulted, along with field work, oral history compilation, archaeological information review and indigenous toponymy study<sup>9</sup>. In the first section, we will characterize our area of study based on its environmental dynamics, the behaviour of political-territorial structures and the institution of the *cacicazgo*; we will then observe the sequence of lawsuits provoked by the desire to control the land in the *cañada*, which is intensely linked with the introduction of foreign crops –especially sugar cane– and with the alteration of an ancestral ecological complementarity, explained in the following section; and finally, we analyse the changes and continuities produced in Yosotiche in terms of jurisdiction and land exploitation.

## 2. SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MIXTECA REGION

### 2.1. General environmental characteristics

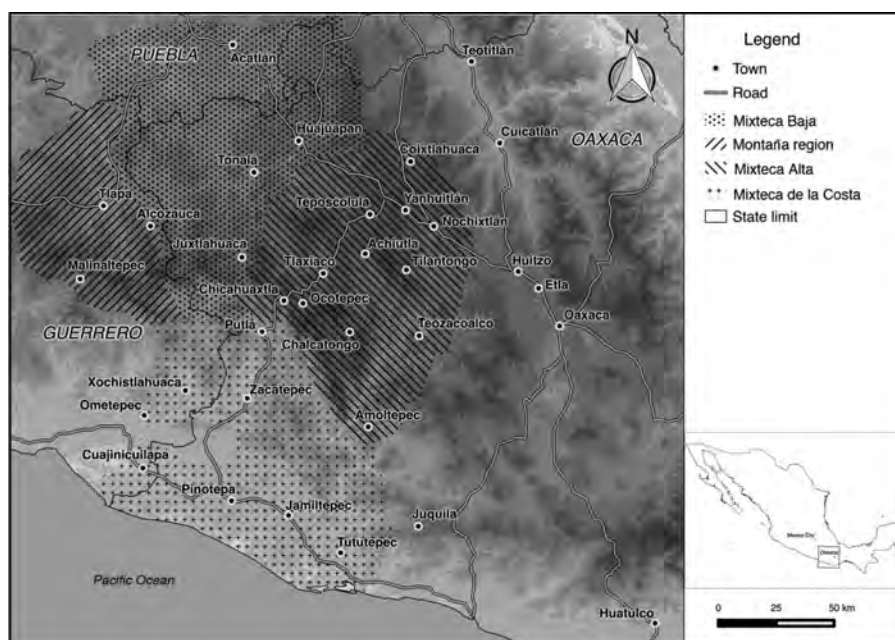
The Mixteca is one of the largest regions amongst the eight that currently make up the Mexican state of Oaxaca. It occupies the northwest section of the state, but considered as a cultural region (defined principally by the presence of *tu'un savi* or Mixtec language

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9. The historical documents consulted are shield in various national, state, local and private archives: Archivo General de Indias de Sevilla (hereinafter AGI), Archivo General de la Nación de México (AGNM), Archivo General del Poder Ejecutivo del Estado de Oaxaca (AGEPEO), Archivo Histórico Judicial de Oaxaca (AHJO), Archivo Histórico Municipal de la Heroica Ciudad de Tlaxiaco (AHMT), Archivo Histórico Parroquial de Tlaxiaco (AHPT) and Newberry Library (Chicago). Also of great importance, are several materials that are out of circulation but to which we have had access in one way or another: the document that records the proceedings carried out in 1599 by Ruy Díaz Cerón to carry out congregations of villages in the jurisdiction of Tlaxiaco, and several files that gave account of the land suits between Tlaxiaco and Ocotepéc. The first was found in the town council of Tlaxiaco in the 1980s, and after suffering a serious accidental deterioration, is currently under restoration in the Taller de Restauración del Exconvento de Santo Domingo, in Oaxaca de Juárez. We would like to express our gratitude to Ronald Spores for the possibility of obtaining for us a photographic copy of the file. The latter was preserved in the now destroyed Archivo Municipal de Santa María Yucuhiti. They consisted of a copy made in the nineteenth century of files kept in the Archivo General de la Nación. Unfortunately, today the originals are not in this last repository, and this copy was damaged along with the archive building in Yucuhiti. We have been in a position to know its contents thanks to the notes that John Monaghan took during his long stay in the region in 1984, which he has kindly provided to us for carrying out this research.

speakers and some shared cultural practices) it also extends to the west part of the Oaxaca coast, the south of the state of Puebla and the eastern strip of Guerrero. The terrain presents formations with different heights but very intricately connected, which leads to a small number of large or open plains and valleys. However, this circumstance has not impeded the development of agriculture on practically all types of surfaces. The topography (plains, hills, mountains, crags, valleys) and climate (hot, temperate, cold, and dry, demi-dry, humid) are very diverse. As a result, there is a high assortment of micro-ecosystems, which noticeably affected the historical and cultural development of the region (Spores, 2007: 5-8).

**FIGURE 1**  
**Map of the Mixtec sub-regions and their main towns**



Source: preparation by the author.

Conventionally, this vast area has been divided into three geographic regions depending on natural environment and topography: the Mixteca Baja, with arid and semi-arid climate; the Mixteca Alta, with temperate and cold climates and both semi-dry and humid zones; and Mixteca de la Costa, with predominance of hot and humid climate (Figure 1) (Spores, 2007: 7)<sup>10</sup>. Since pre-Hispanic times, political alliances were established

10. This modern streamlining was based on the geographic and cultural criteria previously observed by the ancient Mixtecs, before the arrival of the Spaniards: the Mixteca Alta Was known as *nudz-*

among these three sub-regions, and these promoted the composition of exchange networks of products from different ecological niches. This dynamic allowed the economic self-sufficiency of Mixtec large political units, distributed generally over big vertical spaces, which encompassed a variety of types of soils and climates. But this latter feature did not mean to say that the territorial extensions were continuous (Pastor, 1987: 43-44). This dynamic is observable through the jurisdictional relations established by both the *yuhuitayu* and the *cacicazgo*, which we characterize below to achieve an adequate understanding of the phenomena analysed in the surroundings of the *cañada*.

## 2.2. *Yuhuitayu*, *cacicazgo* and land tenure

The larger autonomous political units, formed as a political arrangement created through dynastic alliances, were denominated *yuhuitayu*, and in the sixteenth century this reality was translated and conceptualized as *kingdom* or *señorío* (lordship). In turn, it was divided into other smaller entities: the *ñuu*, which we can understand as a city-state, and the *siqui*, *dzimi* or *siña*, the neighbourhoods (Terraciano, 2001: 165, 248)<sup>11</sup>.

The political-territorial categories were closely linked with the social ones, since both were ultimately under the powerful influence of kinship<sup>12</sup>. Ronald Spores (1967: 9-10; 2007: 87, 99, 106) proposes that the *yuhuitayu*, later transformed into *cacicazgos* under Spanish domination, had a hierarchical organization, headed by a supreme authority called *yya tmuhu* or *yya toniñe*, “king” or “lord”, and by a group of “nobles” or “principals”, *tay toho*. These two social classes controlled the positions of power and authority, the productive lands, the natural resources, the mode of production and distribution of goods and services, and the ceremonial institutions, besides receiving tribute (*daha*), and personal services from the inhabitants of the *yuhuitayu*, the *tay ñuu* or *tay yucu*, the “common people”, and the *tay situndayu*, called *terrazgueros* in Spanish (tenant farmers). In

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*vuiñuhu*, “land of the people of the rain”; the Mixteca Baja as *ñuniñe* or *ñuiñe*, “hot land”; and Mixteca de la Costa as *ñundaa*, “plain land”, or *nundehui*, “land of the sky” (term associated with *sahandevui*, “foot of the sky”, referencing the horizon) (Reyes, 1890: I-II). In Figure 1 we have incorporated the region called Montaña de Guerrero, because coexist Mixtec villages with Nahuas and *Me’phaa* or Tlapanec people.

11. *Yuhuitayu* is a term compound of the words *yuvui*, “petate” (mat made of palm leaves), and *tayu*, “asiento” (chair). Manuel HERMANN (2005: 210-211) explains that it would be a concept created through metonymy that is established from a relationship of contiguity. The terms “mat” and “chair”, *yuvui* *tayu*, are directly related to the figure of the ruler, because they are the objects that belong to or are immanent in their charge, so they can designate him without using the word “ruler” (translation by the author).

12. For a discussion regarding the importance of kinship, see PASTOR (1987: 28-36), TERRACIANO (2001: chap. IV) and CHANCE (2004).



return, its population received protection, ceremonial patronage and titles of usufruct for the cultivated lands.

From sources in the sixteenth century Mixtec language, it was deduced that the indigenous universe divided the land into three categories (irrigated, naturally fertile and sterile), which in turn were classified in other subclasses. The intensive labour of the farmers was organized in two levels, systematized in Table 1:

**TABLE 1**  
**Levels of organization and kinds of cultivated lands**

Level of organization	Kind of cultivated land	Description
House	<i>ñuhu huahi</i> or <i>solar</i> (property of the ancestral house)	Plots associated with a particular domestic unit, both of lords and commoners
	<i>ñuhu chiyo</i>	Ancient inalienable patrimonial lands of the house
Neighbourhood	<i>ñuhu ñuu</i>	Lands claimed by the <i>ñuu</i>
	<i>ñuhu siña</i>	Lands of the neighbourhood
	<i>ñuhu aniñe</i>	Lands of the lordly house or the palace (part of the colonial <i>cacicazgo</i> )
	<i>ñuhu nidzico</i>	Noble's lands, acquired by purchase <sup>13</sup>

Sources: made from the information collected by Pastor (1987: 38) and Terraciano (2001: chap. 7).

The institution of the *cacicazgo* was established in colonial times when recognizing the rights of the principals and of the pre-Hispanic *señores naturales* (native lords) of the different spaces of New Spain and other places of the Empire. A very general idea leads us to consider the *caciques* and *cacicas* (male and female lords) as mediating figures between the Spanish administration and the indigenous society in the Indian towns, where they maintained their ancestral rights and privileges: goods and services rendered by the commoners attached to them (*terrazgo*), market rights, tributes, properties bonded to the lineage and succession, and estate rights, among others. In this way, the *cacicazgo* –understood as an exercise of a special jurisdiction– consolidated a group of power that occupied an important place in the colonial political apparatus for long time in the Mixteca region, which had continuity as an important landowner until the first moments of an independent Mexico (Chance, 2010).

13. This would indicate that, although it accentuated in colonial time, during pre-Hispanic times also operated some type of transaction over the lands.

The main mechanism of integration and maintenance of *cacicazgo* in the Mixteca was the creation of alliances between the heads or the direct heirs of the different royal lineages, sealed via matrimony. Also, as Ronald Spores (1974: 297) pointed out, this strategy was significant *in the creation of a social, political, and economic network that linked numerous communities and political domains into a broad social field bridging varied geographical zones ranging from tropical lowlands to highland valleys*.

Unlike what happened in central Mexico, in the Mixteca, the power of stately houses remained strong during the sixteenth century (Terraciano, 2001: chap. 7). On the political level, the nobles and principals, the *tay toho*, came to occupy the key positions of the town council, whereas the old supreme authority, *yya tmuhu* or *yya toniñe*, was recognized like natural lord and erected to the category of *cacique* (Spores, 2007: chap. 8).

**TABLE 2**  
**Colonial land typology**

Land type	Description
<i>Fundo legal</i> or extension of the populated area	Lands where the urban nucleus is settled.
Lands of the community	<i>Propios</i> : served to defray the maintenance of the community (payment of salaries, tribute, and judicial and worship costs, among other charges), through the profits derived from their exploitation or lease. <i>Comunales</i> (communals): they were distributed in plots for their tillage and thus obtain the maintenance of the family. Community forests and grazing lands: for private use by all members of the community. Lands assigned to citizens and servants without access to communal lands.
Lands of the neighbourhood	Lands divided and worked separately by individuals and families in the neighbourhoods.
Private lands	Generally, in the hands of the nobility.

Sources: drawn from the researches developed by Taylor (1998: chap. 3) in the Valley of Oaxaca and by Menegus (2009, 2016) in the Mixteca.

A very relevant social group linked to the *cacicazgo* was the *tay situndayu* or *terrazgueros*, who paid an income to occupy lands, worked plots and made personal services. In other words, their condition combined the *economic rent* and the lordly bonds of personal dependence. In this way, the *cacique* possessed the *direct ownership* over the lands, and the *terrazguero* the *beneficial ownership* (Taylor, 1998: 59; Sempat, 2006: 286; Menegus, 2009: 56).

This scene of indigenous relationships and land tenure was forced to adjust, at least nominally, to a scheme of European tradition that sought to become homogeneous throughout the viceroyalty. In Table 2, we systematize the new land typology instituted.

In the Mixteca Baja the *terrazgueros* were especially numerous, and although the Crown tried to introduce them into the pattern of regular tributaries through the creation of Indian town councils (later called *repúblicas de indios*, “Indian republics”) and by giving of land grants during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, there is evidence of the creation those type of councils inside the territory of the *caciques*: seemingly, the republic was given only *urban* core for their settlement and *proprios* lands, omitting *comunales*, those of communal use. So, for their subsistence they continued relying on the *cacique*’s lands and on the payment of a *terrazgo*, personal service and obedience to him (Menegus, 2009: 50, 56; 2015)<sup>14</sup>.

In other words, when the *yya toniñe* became *caciques*, they came to possess the *ñuhu aniñe* and their *ñuhu chiyo* with a “patrimonial” sense attached to the European juridical tradition, which included the *terrazgueros* associated with their lordship (Menegus, 2005). In this sense, Terraciano (2001: 206) suggests that *noble houses subsumed many corporate landholding responsibilities in the Mixteca [...]. This tendency seems most pronounced in the Mixteca Baja, where yya normally considered the lands and laborers of dzimi [barrio] as part of their patrimonies*<sup>15</sup>. As we shall show later, we believe that these relations of stately dependence also operated in the ancient lordship of Tlaxiaco, although with a significant particularity: disengaged from the main ruling lineage.

14. In the Mixteca, we have identified several cases of Indian republics inserted inside *cacicazgos*: Santo Tomás Ocoatepec, Santiago Nuyoo, Santa Cruz Nundaco and San Esteban Atlatluha, inside *cacicazgo* of Doña Pascuala Feliciano García de Rojas, in 1556 (AGEPEO, Alcaldías Mayores, leg. 54, exp. 19); Chicahuaxtla, inside lands of the *cacique* Juan Antonio de la Cruz y Guzmán, in 1756 (AGEPEO, Alcaldías Mayores, leg. 54, exp. 23, fs. 2-2v); Yucuhiti within the jurisdiction of Rafael de Castro, in 1731 (AHJO, Tēposcolula Civil, leg. 25, exp. 02.61); and Santiago Yosondúa, San Mateo Yucutindaco, San Miguel el Grande and Santo Domingo Ixcatlán inside the one of Fernández Velasco, in 1766 (AGEPEO, Alcaldías Mayores, leg. 55, exp. 23, 30). In the ancient jurisdiction of Tlaxiaco, well into the eighteenth century, we also find some examples of villages inserted in *cacicazgos*, such as Magdalena Peñasco, San Agustín Tlacotepec and San Antonio Sinicahua, who had their boundaries within the possessions of Don Pablo de Castro Morales (AGEPEO, Alcaldías Mayores, leg. 56, exp. 12); and San Pedro Mártir Yucuxaco, San Juan Ñumi, San Antonino, San Sebastián Almoloya and Santo Domingo, politically subjects to the head town of Tlaxiaco but inserted in the *cacicazgo* of Don Pedro de Chávez y Guzmán (AGEPEO, Alcaldías Mayores, leg. 54, exp. 5). Kevin TERRACIANO (2001: 137-145) provides a linguistic analysis of the Mixtec terms referring to the different types of workers, and concludes that their interchangeability in the sources reinforces the argument put forward.

15. TERRACIANO (2001: 207-208) notes that the term *ñuhu aniñe* (see Table 1) continued to be used in indigenous language documents produced in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which he interprets as a proof of the persistence of the power of noble houses.

All these features lead us to emphasize the importance of the *cacicazgo* as an administrator of the local economies through the possession of lands and the management of the labour force of its *terrazgueros*. This allowed the *cacicazgo* to build notable family estates and to be a key aspect of the economic structure of colonial Oaxaca. One hypothesis consists in that this situation could have been maintained for a longer time in the Mixteca than in other areas in New Spain due to the mediating need of the *caciques* in a region where the presence of Spaniards was not as intense as elsewhere (Spores, 2007: 82).

### 2.3. Territoriality and landscape in the *yuhuitayu* of Tlaxiaco

The Mixtec toponym of Tlaxiaco was and also today is Ndisi Nuu, “Good Sight”. In this vast *yuhuitayu* coexisted Mixtec population (the most abundant), Triqui (in minority, in the west and southwest parts), and Nahua (since the establishment of a Mexica garrison in the mid-fifteenth century, promoted by the Emperor Motecuhzoma Ilhuicamina [1440-1468]). With the arrival of the Spaniards, this space was reconfigured under the thrust of the Laws of the Indies in a complex system consisting of a *cabecera* (head town) and several *sujetos* (subject villages).

The more detailed description of the jurisdiction that we have so far is dated from 1599, and consists of the proceedings made by Ruy Díaz Cerón regarding the plan to accomplish one congregation or *reducción* of villages<sup>16</sup>. We identified the historical places mentioned in the document with current localities correlating the historical information supplied within, especially the distances between settlements, with data obtained using fieldwork, the analysis of toponymy, and the available archaeological record. The result is a jurisdiction consisting of the *cabecera* of Tlaxiaco and thirty-one *estancias* (subject villages), spread out from north to south 80 km, and from east to west along a 35 km wide strip (Figure 2)<sup>17</sup>. This space was not a continuum; instead, the territories were interspersed. In the southeast, the villages under Tlaxiaco were mixed and bordered with those of the *señoríos* of Chalcatongo and Yolotepec-Ixcatlán, and in the west-southwest with Cuquila, Chicahuaxtla, Putla and Ocotepéc.

16. “Diligencias para la congregación de Tlaxiaco efectuadas por Ruy Díaz Cerón, 1599” (Taller de Restauración del Exconvento de Santo Domingo, Oaxaca de Juárez). Ronald SPORES (2005) published a brief summary and some comments on it.

17. Reconstruction of the Tlaxiaco jurisdiction presented here plus the analysis of its evolution during the sixteenth century is part of the author’s unpublished doctoral research.

The traditional historiography concerning the Mixteca has presented Tlaxiaco as one of the most important lordships in the area at the time of the Spanish arrival (Dahlgren, 1990). But the archaeological and ethnohistorical studies, the latter supported mainly on the analysis of codices or pre-Hispanic pictorial manuscripts, reveal that there was a progressive concentration of power around the small valley of Tlaxiaco, which culminated in the decade of 1550. We summarize below our interpretation and its implications.

**FIGURE 2**  
**Map of the villages under the jurisdiction of Tlaxiaco, 1599**



Source: preparation by the author based on the “Diligencias para la congregación de Tlaxiaco”, 1599. Archivo Histórico Municipal de la Heroica Ciudad de Tlaxiaco.

During the Classic period (400-1100 A.D.) the valley had a dispersed settlement pattern, with the dwellings at the top and on the slopes of the hills encircling it. Also, in the area of influence of the subsequent *señorío*, existed other centres that concentrated significant quantities of population and could be conceived as effective market places<sup>18</sup>. During the Post-classic period (1100-1521 A.D.), a process of progressive densification of the population in the valley began (Spores, 2005: 14-15), and in the sixteenth century, the pre-Hispanic *yuhuitayu* begun to articulate in political and administrative structures according to Spanish custom due to the establishment of one church and later of a Dominican monastery in 1548, and with the gathering of the population around it, initiated in 1553<sup>19</sup>.

18. Some of these places were Dzinicahua, in the southeast, and Huamelúlpam, in the northeast. We follow the collective publication *Origins of the Nuu. Archeology in the Mixteca Alta* to learn more about the progression of human occupation in the jurisdiction (KOWALEWSKI *et al.*, 2009).

19. “Sobre la congregación de Tlaxiaco”, 1552 (Newberry Library, Ayer MS 1121, fs. 195v-196r);

Some sources from the middle of the sixteenth century show a hierarchical complexity not appreciated in other Mixtec lordships: Tlaxiaco came to be the head of nine subject towns, which in turn had other subordinate villages, 108 in total<sup>20</sup>. The deciphering of the preserved codices, especially the reverse side of *Codex Bodley*, also supports the idea that Tlaxiaco gradually acquired political power from the Classic period onwards. In this process, the establishment of marital bonds that served to seal strategic alliances between the ruling dynasties became essential, also as a means of obtaining the legitimacy that emanated from the most renowned lineage with divine origin from Tilantongo (Jansen, 2004).

We are inclined to think that the ancient *yuhuitayu* of Tlaxiaco, before the Spaniards arrival, could be a compound or complex *señorío*, that is, with various *yya toniñe* or “kings” in charge of certain sections, but sharing authority in some way<sup>21</sup>. After the conquest, this situation would have been simplified and the power would concentrate around the *cabecera* of Tlaxiaco through an assorted combination of mechanisms, such as the congregation of the population around the monastery.

To finish contextualizing our space, we need to characterize its environment. The judge that crossed the jurisdiction in 1599 wrote down the characteristics of the climates (called *temples* in Spanish) assigned to each village (hot, temperate, cold), their crops and means of maintenance (called *granjerías*), and the use intended to be allocated to barren lands by the Spaniards once four congregations of villages were set up<sup>22</sup>. Summarizing, the majority of the settlements were in places described as cold, in elevations over 2,000 metres above sea level. Seven places were temperate, placed between 1,600 and 1,900 metres above sea level; two of them were in the north edge of the jurisdiction, in the transitional zone to the Mixteca Baja, where the land turns more arid; one is situated on the slopes of the mountains that flank the *cañada* of Yosotiche, and the rest are in the southeast area of Tlaxiaco, in the mountain range that runs to the coast. Finally, two villages are said to be hot, and they lay at the bottom of the *cañada*, at 800 metres above sea level.

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“Mandamiento para la congregación de Tlaxiaco”, 1553 (Library of Congress, Kraus MS 140, f. 415).

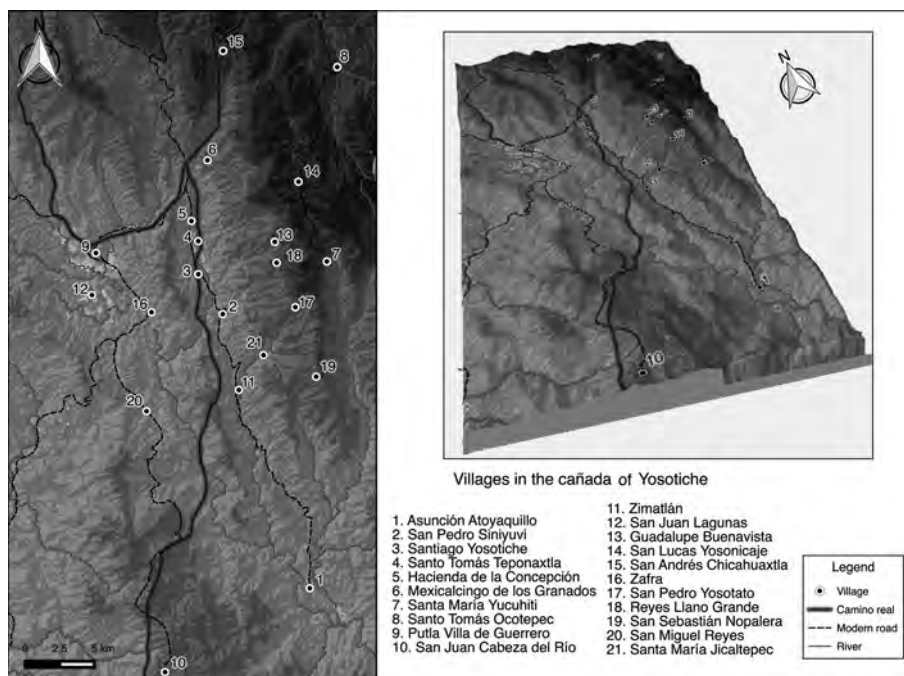
20. “Suma de visitas de pueblos de la Nueva España” (1548-1550), following the transcription by GARCÍA CASTRO (2013: 386-388).

21. Hypothetically, because the documents found to the date do not allow us to affirm it with total certainty, we can say that each ruler would take charge of an ethnic group, as it happened in the region of Coixtlahuaca (located in the limits of the Mixteca Alta, Northeast of Tlaxiaco) where Mixtecs, Ngiwas or Cochos and Nahuas coexisted (DOESBURG, 2003). The nature of some complex *señorios* is well documented in central Mexico (*e.g.*, see LOCKHART, 1992: chap. 2).

22. “Diligencias para la congregación de Tlaxiaco efectuadas por Ruy Díaz Cerón, 1599”.

FIGURE 3

Map of the *cañada* of Yosotiche ecosystem today and its main villages



Source: preparation by the author.

Without analysing the productive capacity of each village, which was between 3 and 13 *almudes* of corn sowed by each tributary Indian<sup>23</sup>, we can generally observe that corn and beans were present all over the territory, just like particular fruit trees, that wheat and maguey were grown in some cold areas, that banana and citrus fruits were typical of temperate places, and that cotton and cocoa were grown just in hot lands. The Spanish authorities believed that a good part of the empty lands between the villages, excepting the mountainous and intricate places, could be good for the establishment of estates for small livestock or mares, or growing corn and wheat fields.

In this special context, the *cañada* of Yosotiche, situated at about 70 km south of Tlaxiaco, occupies a prominent place. It is 12 km long and 3 km at its widest, at the bottom of a valley that is shaped by alluvium plains. But, what we recognise as the ecosystem of the *cañada* encompasses in addition the settlements upon the heights and slopes of the

23. *Almud* is an ancient capacity measurement for dry products, from Arab origin. It is equivalent to 10 or 11 cubic decimetres.

mountains that limit it. This territory is in a transitional zone between the cold lands of the Mixteca Alta and the hot lands of the Mixteca de la Costa, and is irrigated by a series of rivers that originate in the high sections of the mountains and flow to the south (Monaghan, 1994: 144) (Figure 3). These characteristics make the *cañada* a perfect stage to sow, both on the slopes and upon the valley floor, a wide range of products, especially those imported from the Old World, like banana and sugar cane. The “royal route” (*camino real*) passed through this space, connecting the central Mixteca Alta to the important coastal town of Pinotepa del Rey, and from there, to Huatulco, the most important Pacific port during the two first thirds of sixteenth century, until it was displaced by Acapulco (Romero, 1990: 28).

With these features, it is not strange that Tlaxiaco aspired to control lands in the *cañada* since pre-Hispanic times, even when it was quite far from the *cabecera* and was, and is still today, difficult to reach by paved roads.

### **3. PRODUCTIVE CONTEXT AND DYNAMIC OF LAND TENURE IN THE CAÑADA OF YOSOTICHE**

#### **3.1. Crops in the sixteenth century: coexistence of native plants with those of new introduction**

We do not know with certainty which products were grown predominantly in Yosotiche and adjacent areas before the Spaniards arrival, but the sixteenth century documents state that around 1550, traditional Mesoamerican crops coexisted with new plants introduced by Europeans: abundant cocoa gardens and plantations of corn, chilli and cotton, as well as bananas, wheat, mulberry, *fruits and seeds from Castile* and sugar cane were raised by means of irrigation systems. In addition, in the rivers that cross the bottom of the valley, trout were fished, and all these products supplied the markets of the Mixteca Alta and Baja<sup>24</sup>. That is to say, the *cañada* was conceived as an appreciated greenhouse of tropical products for a large part of the northern territories.

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24. Data about Putla and Zacatepec in the “Suma de visitas de pueblos” (GARCÍA CASTRO, 2013: 95-96; 252); documents from 1591 about lawsuits between Tlaxiaco and Ocotepc kept in the now destroyed Archivo Municipal de Yucuhiti; “Diligencias para la congregación de Tlaxiaco efectuadas por Ruy Díaz Cerón”, 1599.



The strong presence of cocoa refers to two outstanding matters<sup>25</sup>. On one hand, cocoa was grown in gardens, just like bananas, which imply the presence of irrigation systems<sup>26</sup>. These could also benefit other crops, like corn, whose productive cycle would be different from that raised in other heights and conditions. And on the other, cocoa was a high-value product in the pre-Hispanic economy, because, among other features, it was used in ritual contexts and served as coin for the payment of the tribute, even in early colonial times (Aranda, 2005)<sup>27</sup>. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, Mixtec Indians still trade with cacao and had *reales* invested in this product, despite the efforts of the viceroy Luis de Velasco “The Old” to eradicate this practice (Romero, 1990: 107-108). The fact that the plots where the gardens were grown had Mixtec names, and were assigned to certain individuals to benefit from them, allows us to think that these lands would be under a particular land tenure regime. We will discuss this matter later.

The particular conditions of the ecosystem of the *cañada* allowed the colonial political and administrative complexes we call *cabecera-sujeto* to develop an ecological complementarity system. John Monaghan (1990: 349-351; 1994: 148) identified it as *Na Sama* during his anthropological and ethno-historical research developed in the 1980s, and it consisted of the following. The scarcity in the mountainous localities of the *cañada* (among others, Santa María Yucuhiti, Santiago Nuyoo and San Pedro Yosotato) began in July and gave way to the months denominated *yoo tama* (of famine); at this time the corn cultivated at the bottom of the valley could be available, because it was sowed between December and January with irrigation systems and harvested between July and August. Then, when *yoo tama* began in the valley, between March and April, they could get the mountain maize seeded between February and May and harvested between November and January<sup>28</sup>.

Sugarcane (*Saccharum officinarum*) arrived in the American continent from the Canary Islands, from where Christopher Columbus transported it to the island of Hispan-

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25. In the documents dated 1588 and 1591 preserved in the Archivo Municipal de Yucuhiti are recorded the people who were benefiting gardens and plots in the disputed lands between Tlaxiaco and Ocoatepec. They mention the names of the farmers and lands, in Mixtec language, the number of plots cultivated, its products (cocoa, banana, maize, chilli and cane) and the extension, expressed in number of fathoms.

26. Ángel PALERM (1972) identified the cocoa growing areas in New Spain in the sixteenth century, and highlighted some technical aspects of the maintenance of the gardens. Most regions have similar environmental conditions to the *cañada*.

27. For example, in 1550 Putla was giving as tribute every fourteen days 16,000 cocoa, among other goods (GARCÍA CASTRO, 2013: 252).

28. In this exchange was also involved the highest and coldest mountain areas in other parts of the jurisdiction of Tlaxiaco, where maize was sown long before the spring rains when the ground was damp thanks to the fog which dominates the region.

iola on its second voyage in 1594. From there, it passed to Cuba and Puerto Rico. Its introduction to New Spain was carried out by Hernán Cortés, who had become familiar with it during his service in Cuba, and soon cane experienced a quick entrenchment in the central lands of Veracruz and in the region of Cuernavaca and Cuautla (in the present Morelos), part of the land assigned to the Marquisate of the Valley of Oaxaca, the patrimony of the conqueror, cultivated with a view to export. Throughout the sixteenth century it spread south and west to the warm lands of Michoacán and Jalisco, to the rich valleys of Atlixco and Izúcar, near the city of Puebla, and to different points of the present state of Oaxaca (Sandoval, 1951: chaps. 2, 3; Wobeser, 2004: chap. 1).

The institution of the *encomienda*, which nominally respected the right to indigenous property, intervened decisively in the founding of the first sugar mills<sup>29</sup>. However, the Spaniards soon deployed legal and extralegal mechanisms to gain access to the lands and waters of the Indians to plant and process sugarcane: land grants, special licenses, purchase, lease, donation (in the case of religious congregations), and also dispossession (Sandoval, 1951: 35, Wobeser, 2004: 44 *et seq.*). Production was quickly subject to tax regulation. Under a law issued by the Catholic Monarchs in Granada in 1501, agricultural products of the Indies were encumbered with a ten percent (*diezmo*, in Spanish), which included sugar (Sandoval, 1951: 37).

In New Spain, after an initial period of limited expansion, between 1600 and 1690 there was a very remarkable growth and stabilization of production due to the abolition of some restrictive measures, the introduction of black slaves, the availability of credit, the large supply of water and land derived from the dramatic demographic decline, as well as to the increase in sugar demand. Then, between 1690 and 1760, it supervened a general period of crisis due, among other factors, to the imbalance of supply and demand, which led to a withdrawal to the domestic market. Finally, in the last third of the eighteenth century production was again recovered (Wobeser, 2004: chaps. 2, 3)<sup>30</sup>.

29. The Crown rewarded the conquering efforts with Indians granted in *encomienda* and other privileges, according to the usage of the late medieval war. The *encomendero* of a certain region did not possess the indigenous lands, since these conserved their useful domain, but benefited from the results of labour of their inhabitants through the perception of a tribute (first established in kind), and of their personal service (ZAVALA, 1973). According to Ethelia Ruiz MEDRANO (1991), personal interests turned many conquerors-*encomenderos* into authentic entrepreneurs who propelled the New-Hispanic and metropolitan economy.

30. Two types of production units were established: the sugar mills (*trapiches*) and the factories (*ingenios*). The factories were larger, processed more cane, operated with hydraulic power and could produce refined sugar, while mills were more modest, used animal power and produced other types of products, such as unrefined sugar (*piloncillo* or *panela*) and honey. Consequently, the investment required for the latter was substantially lower (WOBESER, 2004: 58-59).

The workforce employed underwent various regulations over time. In the beginning, indigenous labour was mobilized by virtue of the services associated with the *encomienda*, and also Indian slaves who had acquired this status by war and blacks purchased by royal licenses were incorporated. New Laws issued in 1542 decreed the liberation of the indigenous population, and this measure was reinforced by successive decrees that prohibited the payment of the tribute to the Crown or the *encomendero* in personal service. The door to the lease of the indigenous labour force had been set up. In the time of the Viceroy Martín Enríquez (1568-1580) the distribution of forced labour (*repartimiento de indios*) was instituted. It meant that the landowners went to special judges (*jueces repartidores*) to assign them Indians who worked in a rotating way in return for a daily wage. Viceroy Conde de Monterrey (1595-1603) prohibited this type of forced labour and urged the use of free and paid indigenous workforce. A royal decree issued by Philip III in 1601 went further and banned all indigenous enslaved or wage-earner in the sugar industry. This set the stage for the massive acquisition of black labour, but despite these measures, many documents inform us that indigenous people continued to be employed in the sugar industry (Sandoval, 1951: 51-64).

The coexistence of workers of both types is also related to the differentiation of activities in production. The farming of sugar cane was very demanding, because, as well as the attention required to control the irrigation of the fields, the plant needed special care, which demanded a numerous workforce, especially in the time of cutting, preparation and hauling the reeds to be placed inside the sugar mill boilers<sup>31</sup>.

Systematic exploitation of cane in the *cañada* of Yosotiche began at the end of the sixteenth century by Spaniards who obtained land thanks to the land grants or through their leasing. The first owner we have news about was the *encomendero* of Tlaxiaco, Matías Vázquez Láinez, who was given in 1585 a grant to establish a sugar mill, houses for service people and corrals, as well as the mountains, pastures and waters necessary for the sustenance of his property, plus a cattle ranch<sup>32</sup>. Thereafter, there were numerous grants to establish mills, on lands leased to the community of Tlaxiaco or to *cacicazgos* that extended their jurisdiction over part of the *cañada*, as Ocoatepec, Chicahuaxtla and Za-

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31. WOBESER (2004: chap. 6) details the types of workers employed (slaves, free resident workers, temporary, independent and trusted employees, such as *majordomo*, administrator, master of sugar and ox herdsman, among others). She also points out that Indians were commonly used to harvest, while black slaves dealt with the burning of stubble and milling of the trunks, the two most toxic and heavy processes affecting the health of workers. To know in detail the process of cultivation and processing of cane and the infrastructure employed in New Spain, see WOBESER (2004: chaps. 4, 5).

32. AGNM, Mercedes, vol. 13, f. 206r. In 1599 he was exhorted not to sell the sugar mill (AHJO, Teposcolula Civil, leg. 05, exp. 67.04).

catepec. It is to be noted that all the production units were modest, and that no great factory was set up until the nineteenth century<sup>33</sup>. It is complicated to establish a certain sequence of progression of the mills in the area due to the fragmentary documentation available. However, we observe that it was at the beginning of the eighteenth century when the cultivation turned actually systematic. From 1715 onwards, grants increased, probably thanks to the decrease in the need to exploit community sowings, when the royal and community tribute began to be demanded exclusively in money, no longer in kind, and due to the greater availability of indigenous workforce because of their population recovery (Taylor, 1998: 96; Sempat, 2006). Some of the best known mills were La Concepción (later, Hacienda de La Concepción), San José, San Vicente and Nuestra Señora del Rosario<sup>34</sup>.

Sugar cane cultivation meant a severe blow to the system of ecological complementarity that people had developed for ages. Because of crop substitution, corn that saved the *yoo tama* months of the mountain villages began to be scarce, and the inhabitants who frequently covered a short three hour distance to the valley floor in order to exchange products, were forced to sell their labour in the sugar mills and plantations (Monaghan, 1990: 350). These different forms of land use centred around sugar cane, modified the labour relations of the inhabitants of a substantial area of the jurisdiction. Nonetheless, a detailed analysis of the system of land tenure and the operation of the *cacicazgo* allows us to observe an interesting local perspective regarding the survival of inherited relationships of the ancient *yuhuitayu*. Below we will summarize the process of jurisdictional adaptation in the *cañada* to better understand this situation.

33. We refer to Hacienda Ingenio de la Concepción, owned by the Esperón Brothers, who were some of the richest men in Oaxaca in the second half of the nineteenth century. The formation of the *hacienda* and part of the history of its change of hands is documented in a lawsuit between two owners of the mills and the town of Tlaxiaco (AGNM, Tierras, 1331, exp. 1, 1716-1739, 1801-1807). To know its nineteenth-century history, see MONAGHAN (1994) and CHASSEN (2003).

34. It is impossible to describe here the dynamics of foundations, change of hands and lawsuits started by its limits and those of neighbouring sugar mills or *cacicazgo* lands. Some sources documenting this history can be found in the Archivo General de la Nación (AGNM, Mercedes, vol. 70, fs. 12v, 13, 14, 18v, 113v, 114, 115, 115v; Tierras, vol. 1331, exp. 1), in the Archivo Histórico Judicial de Oaxaca (AHJO, Teposcolula Civil, leg. 27, exp. 16.23; leg. 35, exp. 35; leg. 37, exp. 91, fs. 57-74; leg. 41, exp. 16, fs. 175v, 177, 179v, 181, 183; leg. 42, exp. 1; leg. 44, exp. 20.11) and in the Archivo Histórico Municipal de la Heroica Ciudad de Tlaxiaco (AHMT, Gobierno, Tierras, Correspondencia y Límites; Justicia). We consider especially significant, the *Libro en que constan los bienes de la comunidad de la cabecera de Tlaxiaco y en que se apuntan las cuentas de cargo y descargo* (1765-1782), *donde se detallan las tierras poseídas por la comunidad arrendadas para explotar trapiches* (AHMT, Gobierno, Tierras, Correspondencia, box 212, exp. 1), and the lawsuits filed from 1793 between Don Esteban García and Juan Antonio Guergue for the boundaries between the mills of La Concepción and San José (AGN, Tierras, vol. 3605, exp. 1).

### 3.2. Jurisdictional problems in the *cañada*: old and new lawsuits

In this section we will briefly observe some of the problems involved in the adaptation of the framework of pre-Hispanic indigenous territoriality to the European one, through the lawsuits brought between two types of agents with their peers: on the one hand, the Spanish *encomenderos*, and on the other, the indigenous entities of the community and the *cacicazgo*.

In terms of territoriality and according to Rodolfo Pastor (1987: 68-69), the distribution of *encomiendas* in Oaxaca was based on the organization of the tribute collection centres of the Mexica Triple Alliance, which in turn reproduced the divisions of the lordships. In some cases, as in ours, the *encomienda* preserved the integration of different ecological niches. Thus, in general, we observe that this institution was based on the principle of personal association (*Personenverband*) practiced in pre-Hispanic times, as opposed to the territorial association (*Territorialverband*) typical of the European tradition of the Modern Age (Hoekstra, 1990). However, the misunderstanding of the pre-Hispanic territorial organization sometimes led to legally match some small subject lordships to the larger ones, and the first were granted separately. Therefore, the *encomienda* mediated in some extent in the subsequent demarcation of territory, tearing apart some great lordships (Pastor, 1987: 69). It is likely that the ambitions of the *encomenderos* around the territories of the *cañada* of Yosotiche came to foster the latter in Tlaxiaco.

The vast province of Tlaxiaco was first granted to Juan Núñez Sedeño, but in 1528 it was reassigned by Hernán Cortés to the conqueror Martín Vázquez Laínez, who owned, in addition, the neighboring towns of Mixtepec, Chichahuaxtla, Ocotepec and Atoyaque, with their respective subject villages<sup>35</sup>. Between 1531 and 1533 Martín Vázquez held a lawsuit with Francisco Maldonado, *encomendero* of Achiutla and Tecomaxtlahuaca, both in the Mixteca, on the rights of the village of Atoyaque (today Asunción Atoyaquillo, located at the southern end of the *cañada*)<sup>36</sup>. A few years later, between 1538 and 1541, it was Francisco Maldonado who started a legal action against Martín Vázquez for the partition of the *encomienda* of Tlaxiaco, where the towns located in the *cañada* were es-

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35. Due to accusations of abusive treatment and excessive demands on the Indians, in 1529 this right was revoked. He finally recovered it in 1530, after several appeals (AGI, Justicia, leg 107, exp. 2 r).

36. AGI, Justicia, leg. 115, exp. 3. Atoyaquillo or Yutacanu in Mixtec language, was also known as Atoyaque del Mariscal for having been entrusted to the Marshal of Castile Tristán de Luna y Arellano, who obtained it by marriage to Isabel de Rojas, the widow of Francisco Maldonado. We are not sure of its pre-Hispanic political status, but during colonial times it was a small independent head town bordering Zacatepec, an important lordship of the Costa region (SMITH, 1973: 103-105).

pecially involved<sup>37</sup>. Finally, in 1544 Francisco Maldonado requested that the Indians were reunited as before, for the benefit of both the natives and the *encomenderos*. In this agreement Martín Vázquez regained all Tlaxiaco jurisdiction, including the *cañada* subject villages of Teponaxtla and Ypalestlahuaca (corruption of the Nahuatl name of Santiago Yosotiche), but lost Ocotepec and Atoyaque<sup>38</sup>. It seems that from then onwards, despite lawsuits filed by the indigenous entities to define their limits, the successive *encomenderos* did not revive the matter again<sup>39</sup>.

Let us observe what happened in the indigenous context. The town of Santa María Yucuhiti, then a subject locality to Ocotepec, litigated against Tlaxiaco by the domination of the *cañada*. The matter was resolved in 1588 and countersigned in 1591: the Audience gave Ocotepec the lands located on the slopes of the mountains, and Tlaxiaco the fertile plains of the bottom of the valley. Both then rented part of the *cañada* to Spanish plantation owners and the slopes for the pasture of sheep and goats<sup>40</sup>.

In the eighteenth century the conflict flared up again. Tlaxiaco claimed to Yucuhiti, who then had consummated its separation from Ocotepec and held the title of *town* by itself, lands on the slopes and in the valley. But a royal writ issued in 1702 protected Yucuhiti in its possessions, and colonial authorities ordered the establishment of boundary markers and the formal demarcation of these villages. In 1732, the peoples of Tlaxiaco presented a new request and, as they argued later, the sentence was favourable to them and were given new titles (which then were misplaced) protecting the possession of Santiago Yosotiche and Teponaxtla, in the valley bottom<sup>41</sup>. In 1750, Yucuhiti accused Tlaxiaco, ar-

37. AGI, Justicia, leg. 134, exp. 2.

38. AGN, Mercedes, vol. 2, exp. 126, f. 105r. It seems that same year Francisco Maldonado could violate the agreement, since Martín Vázquez related that his jurisdiction had gotten into two subject villages, named Texexistlavaca (Santiago Yosotiche?) and Teponaxtla, and *grievances and damages* was executed.

39. Matías Vázquez Láinez passed away in 1603. After a brief period in which the towns became under the Crown, in 1605 Joan de Andrada Moctezuma was granted the *encomienda* by virtue of a royal order issued to grant *mercedes* for rents of certain amounts of pesos to the descendants of Doña Isabel de Moctezuma, daughter of the Mexica Emperor Motecuhzoma Xocoyotzin (AHJO, Teposcolula Civil, leg. 05, exp. 67.04; leg. 7, exp. 18bis; AGN, General de Parte, vol. 6, exp. 505). The *encomienda* continued in the hands of the family Andrada Moctezuma until the eighteenth century.

40. Cattle breeding was a very important activity in the Mixteca. It was developed through the granting of ranches of livestock to villages and towns, *caciques*, and Spaniards, as well as through the system of "flying ranches" (*haciendas volantes*), consisting of a kind of transhumance of goats and sheep from Tehuacán, in the Mixteca Baja, to the coast. Precisely, one of the routes crossed the *cañada*. Considering that this subject transcends the purposes of the present work, to find out more about it, consult ROMERO (1990) and PASTOR (1987: 233-235).

41. AGEPEO, Alcaldías Mayores, leg. 56, exp. 17.

guing that many of its people had emigrated and settled permanently in the *cañada*, penetrating the lands of Yucuhiti. Finally, the conflict reached a resolution in 1763: Yucuhiti confirmed its possessions and Tlaxiaco requested the legalization of its lands in the *cañada* and in the rest of the jurisdiction<sup>42</sup>. Due to subsequent population pressures, Yucuhiti ended up losing control of the west slopes and retained the eastern ones (Monaghan, 1990: 356).

Some of the leases made in the *cañada* were transferred from one village to another within the framework of these litigations. In 1733, after the town of Tlaxiaco won a lawsuit and recovered certain lands, it began to receive the benefit of various leases that were made with Ocotepec. Six years later, Tlaxiaco requested to terminate these contacts that had continued irregularly, arguing the small amount of money they received for land and the damage that the herds of goats possessed by one of the lessees caused to the surrounding indigenous crops<sup>43</sup>.

Thinking about the dynamics of these lawsuits together begs the question: did the conflict begin in the indigenous sphere, before the arrival of the Spaniards, or the distribution of *encomiendas* and the differences between the *encomenderos* detonated the problems between Tlaxiaco and Ocotepec? The towns of Santiago Yosotiche and Teponaxtla were recognized as subject villages of Tlaxiaco in 1538, at the moment of the distribution of the spheres of influence between the two *encomenderos*, and so they appear also in 1550<sup>44</sup>. Thus, we believe that they were part of the expanding and consolidating *yuhuitayu* of Tlaxiaco, just before the arrival of the conquerors. What seems clear is that the high productive potential of the *cañada* was an attraction that both Spaniards and Indians wanted to take advantage of, supported by the Spanish-American land tenure regulations and motivated by the high profitable new productive activities that the New World began to hold.

#### 4. CHANGES AND CONTINUITIES: LAND USE AND JURISDICTION

What has been shown so far allows us to observe some remarkable changes and continuities about different aspects of land use (productivity, work systems, environmental im-

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42. AGEPEO, Alcaldías Mayores, leg. 56, exps. 7, 9. Only the request for legalization has been preserved, not the land description made by the judge nor the demarcation process itself, in contrast with many other towns and villages of the Tlaxiaco jurisdiction. Therefore, we do not know if the lands of Yosotiche were legalized in this period.

43. AHJO, Teposcolula Civil, leg. 29, exp. 14.

44. AGN, Mercedes, vol. 2, exp. 126; "Suma de visitas de pueblos" (GARCÍA CASTRO, 2013: 338).

pact) and the adaptation to the new Hispanic jurisdictional system. In this section, we highlight some relevant points.

From an economic perspective, the introduction of new vegetable and animal species became highly profitable to these indigenous communities, unlike what happened in other areas of New Spain, where the benefit resulted in the expansion of European rural property<sup>45</sup>. In the case of Tlaxiaco, we have observed how sugar cane was cultivated fundamentally on community lands leased to Spaniards (civilians and also ecclesiastics), so the profits obtained fed the community treasury which covered expenses of the town<sup>46</sup>. Before the cane, sheep and goats had also become an important source of income, benefiting the *encomenderos* but especially the Indians, both *caciques* and communities (Romero, 1990: 91)<sup>47</sup>. The nobility as well as the community of Tlaxiaco was especially enterprising in regard to this activity, even going so far as buying some estates that had been previously granted to Spaniards<sup>48</sup>.

In the *cañada* of Yosotiche, the aforementioned lawsuits sought to consolidate the territories of the *yuhuitayu* of Tlaxiaco and Ocotepc in the most advantageous possible position for the exploitation of new productive activities, through community use or leasing them to Spaniards. Sugarcane affected significantly the ecological complementarity that guaranteed the everyday sustenance of the peoples of that ecosystem. However, in broader economic terms, its cultivation supposed a very limited contribution compared to other regions of New Spain, and the circulation of the product was local. In proportion, the production of Oaxaca was significantly greater in Huajuapán and surrounding areas, in the Mixteca Baja; in Putla, Jicayán and Pinotepa, on the Coast; in Cuicatlán and Teotilán, at the northeast; in the valley of Oaxaca, and in the area of Nejapa-Tehuantepec (Spores, 2007: 324). Mid-eighteenth century marked a significant watershed in the increase of production in Yosotiche, but still the production did not enter the international

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45. SEMPAT (2006) explains the process of consolidation of the latter from the progressive reduction of indigenous territoriality, but the particular studies on the Mixteca have demonstrated how the community and the *cacicazgo* in this region were able to effectively resist the expansion of Spanish property (e.g. ROMERO, 1990; MENEGUS, 2009). However, there was some alienation of Indian lands, such as the cases by Dominican friars mentioned by SPORES (2007: 331-34).

46. ROMERO (1990: appendices III, IV, 543-94) pointed out that the leasing of community and *cacique* lands, with different farming uses, was a widespread strategy throughout the Mixteca.

47. ROMERO (1990: 89) estimates that Mixtec communities and nobles received grants where they had approximately 158,000 heads of small livestock in the early seventeenth century.

48. In 1598, Tlaxiaco purchased from Spanish Martín Duarte 1,492 heads of goats and sheep, for a total of 1,119 pesos, plus a half-ranch, at 960 pesos, with their houses and pens. With the benefits of the exploitation of the cattle, Tlaxiaco expected to pay the royal tribute and fulfil needs of the community (AHJO, Teposcolula Civil, leg. 18, exp. 2, f. 17r).



market. The management of sugar mills by wealthy Spaniards allowed the formation of important regional fortunes arisen from what Rodolfo Pastor (1987: 292) called the *sugar emporium of Tlaxiaco*<sup>49</sup>.

Regarding the labour employed in the agricultural enterprises of the *cañada*, we would like to emphasize two aspects. At first, the *encomenderos* made use of the personal service of the Indians to obtain profits by means of tribute and to roll out their personal companies. We suppose that those companies also employed forced Indian labour<sup>50</sup>.

However, in the Mixteca there was no mass movement of Indians to plantations or farms, and extremely coercive agricultural work was not part of the picture (Spores, 2007: 327-28). Even though the parish registers leave some evidence of blacks and mulattoes<sup>51</sup>, and we know that Tlaxiaco was one of the slave-buying points in the Mixteca and that they were engaged in the sugar mills (Motta & Velasco, 2003, Spores, 2007: 204-5), no studies have yet been conducted to systematically assess their situation in the jurisdiction<sup>52</sup>. Oral accounts compiled in Yosotiche omit the historical presence of blacks and, on the contrary, they stress the use of Mixtecs and mestizos in the mills and estates. Eighteenth-century sources tell us about the seasonal mobility of workers in the jurisdiction: *Men worked in the Yodzotichii mills during the six months of dry season, and in their parcels of land in house fields and in the boundaries during the six months of water*<sup>53</sup>. In the description of the archbishopric of Antequera (Oaxaca) we read the following:

*In the present year [1803], all the parishioners have not yet complied with the annual precepts of confession and communion, because of the occupation in which they are engaged in the sugar mills of the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Tecomaxtlahuaca, which is twelve leagues distant. Most people from this head town and subject vil-*

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49. PASTOR (1987: 235-41, 295-302) shows how, after 1760, the sugar industry of Tlaxiaco was capitalised and it fell mainly in the hands of wealthy Spaniards. He gives the example of the formation of the fortune of Don José de Veitia and his descendants, owners of the sugar mill of San Vicente. After his death in 1758, Veitia had multiplied by fifteen his initial capital.

50. We are aware of the forced recruitment of Mixtecs to occupy them in public works, construction of churches and other buildings, as well as porters and workers in the mines, in return for a salary (e.g. AGNM, Indios, vol. 4, exp. 125).

51. AHPT, Libros de Bautismos y Matrimonio, from 1639 onwards.

52. In contrast, the presence of black slaves in the Cuicatlán sugarcane mills in the north of the state of Oaxaca is well documented, and has been studied profusely by Arturo Motta (e.g. MOTTA & VELASCO, 2003). We just know that in 1777, in Tlaxiaco jurisdiction there were 454 male mulattoes, mestizos and other castes members, compared to 10,146 married Indians (ESPARZA, 1994: 383).

53. "Relación geográfica de 1777. Tlaxiaco" (ESPARZA, 1994: 383). Translation by the author.

*lages attend to them in grinding time, and this happens every year [...]* (Huesca, Esparza & Castañeda, 1984: 334)<sup>54</sup>.

Locally, the need to provide sustenance to themselves once the system of ecological complementarity was interrupted, and also by the previously indicated monetisation of the tribute, explain the transfer of indigenous labour from the gardens and fields to the mills, contrary to what the laws indicated. But, what condition did the commoners who worked permanently in the *cañada* have? The comments we make below on the jurisdictional ascription shed light on this question.

On the ecological level, new productive activities inevitably changed the environment. As we have shown, at the end of the sixteenth century the communities had already acquired very numerous herds of goats and sheep. They used the slopes of the *cañada* to graze, or, from the middle of the seventeenth century, rent them to other Spanish owners as *flying ranches*<sup>55</sup>. Although this type of livestock entails loss of forest mass and reduction of soil productive capacity (Melville, 1994; Spores, 2007: 169, 405), the vegetal denseness of the *cañada* minimized the negative impact observed in other areas of the Mixteca, as in the Nochixtlán valley, where erosion is very evident. However, grazing always resulted in the risk of damage to crops.

Although sugar cane was already present from the middle of the sixteenth century, we believe that until its rise at the beginning of the eighteenth century it continued to be combined with other crops associated with the *milpa*<sup>56</sup>, such as maize and chile, and crops of high economic value such as cocoa and cotton, plus new ones, such as bananas<sup>57</sup>. When the sugar cane took over the bottom of the valley, the pine and oak forests in the slopes and mountains, plus the *ceibas* and *pochotes* typical of the valley humidity, were demanded

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54. At this time, the *cañada* was under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Tecomaxtlahuaca, parish of the district of Juxtahuaca (HUESCA, ESPARZA & CASTAÑEDA, 1984: 106-7). Translation by the author.

55. See note 40.

56. The *milpa* is the traditional Mesoamerican agroecosystem, whose main productive components are maize, beans and squash.

57. In pre-Hispanic times, the province of Tlaxiaco paid as tribute the Triple Alliance 400 loads of large cotton blankets. The *cañada* and other temperate zones were favourable places for the cultivation of the raw material (p. 45r of *Codex Mendoza*, in BERDAN & RIEFF, 1997). This tradition did not fade away immediately. At the end of the sixteenth century, it continued to be a resource produced and marketed in the jurisdiction (AHJO, Teposcolula Criminal, leg. 03, exp. 35), and was included as part of the gifts made by the commoners to the *cacica* of Tlaxiaco, María de Saavedra, and to the *cacique* of Yanhuatlán, Francisco de Guzmán, on the occasion of their marriage in 1587 (AHJO, Civil Teposcolula, leg. 22, exp. 12).

as fuel for the mill boilers and to fabricate other production inputs<sup>58</sup>. The plantations also monopolized the water of the Chicahuaxtla river and its tributaries, perhaps by similar means to those used to channel to the gardens the severe flooding that inundated the alluvial plains during the rainy season.

Carlos Sempat (2006) postulates that the great demographic crisis that came after the conquest –it is estimated a decrease in not less than 90%– severely affected certain forms of indigenous farming that required good social organization. More lands also became available for Spanish enterprises. We believe that the demographic decline and the territorial restructuring of the towns and villages can be related to the abandonment of areas of cultivation on terraces (*coo yuu*, in Mixtec language) in the small valley of Tlaxiaco, which demanded strict organization of the labour and work (Pérez Rodríguez, 2016). In fact, sources show a population decrease of 65% in the Tlaxiaco settlements in the *cañada*: in 1550 there were 197 tributaries, and as early as 1599 there were only 69. By the end of the eighteenth century, total indigenous population in the jurisdiction had significantly recovered: in 1550 there were 4,058 tributaries; in 1599 they had been reduced to 2,039, and in 1777 they were 10,146<sup>59</sup>. However, Ángel Palerm (1972: 65) indicates that, allegedly, most of the irrigation systems in Mesoamerican gardens had only local importance and did not require major hydraulic works. This could have been the case of the *cañada*, which could explain the continuity of productive activities and the non-giving ground to Spanish ambitions, and thereby, retention of lands in indigenous hands. Another factor to examine is the possibility of seasonal mobilization of workers. These two elements bring us to talk about jurisdictional relations.

The dependent villages on Tlaxiaco in the *cañada* of Yosotiche had two outstanding peculiarities with respect to the rest of the jurisdiction: they reported to the authorities a smaller population number, and administratively appeared to have a particular status. Regarding the second point, in 1550 two localities existed under Teponaxtla, in turn subordinated to Tlaxiaco. Fifty years later, this internal hierarchy had apparently diluted, and three villages were mentioned in the “hot lands” with similar status: Santo Tomás Teponaxtla (today, San Juan Teponaxtla), San Juan (we do not know if it corresponds to any cur-

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58. It is estimated that to produce 57.5 tons of sugar, 27.5 tons of wood were needed (MOTTA & VELASCO, 2003: 25).

59. It was considered *tributary* one married man in charge of a household unit; widows were counted as a half-tributary. Historical demographers of Mesoamerica provided multiplication ratios between 3.5 and 5 to calculate the total population from the number of tributaries (GARCÍA CASTRO, 2013: 13; 386-88; ESPARZA, 1994: 383; “Diligencias para la congregación de Tlaxiaco efectuadas por Ruy Díaz Cerón”, 1599).

rent locality) and Santiago Yosotiche<sup>60</sup>. What attracts our attention is that, despite being villages under Tlaxiaco, they did not have a government apparatus similar to the rest of them. The head town was the only that had a governor, besides *alcaldes* (mayors), an *alguacil mayor* (in charge of justice), *tequitlatos* (in charge of tribute), *regidores* (councilors) and other positions, whereas the subject places exercised their local power through *alcaldes*, *alguaciles*, *mayordomos* (kind of religious administrators) and *tequitlatos*. Despite in 1618 a royal cedula was issued establishing one *alcalde* and one *regidor* for 50 to 80 tributaries villages, two *alcaldes* and two, maximum four, *regidores* for those with more than 80 (Pastor, 1987: 88), it was not until 1703 when the Viceroy granted permission to Santiago Yosotiche to annually appoint an *alcalde*, a *regidor* and an *alguacil mayor* (major sheriff)<sup>61</sup>. As a result and in a systematic way, in all the lawsuits previously alluded hold by the control of the *cañada*, it was the “common and natives” of the head town of Tlaxiaco who came out in defense of the lands. This situation continued until the mid-nineteenth century, when the disentailment laws altered this type of communal property (Monaghan, 1990). We are facing a territory nominally mentioned as subject villages, but without direct political representation, the only one in the whole jurisdiction.

We believe that localities placed in the *cañada* could be settlements of *terrazgueros* ascribed to the *cacicazgo* and to the nobility of Tlaxiaco. The oral tradition characterizes these places as foundations conducted by Tlaxiaco and Ocoatepec to avoid introductions by rival lordships. This was a very common strategy in Mesoamerica. Manuel Martínez Gracida (1883: “Yosotiche Santiago”) recalled that Santiago Yosotiche *was formerly a subject place established here to guard the plots in “hot land”, and it was promoted later to the village category. For this reason it lacks land, and the peasants have to rent those they need for their sowings*<sup>62</sup>. Other places in the mountainous zone, San Pedro Yosotato and Santa Cruz Nundaco, could also have been respectively set up by Tlaxiaco and Ocoatepec to avoid introductions (López Bárcenas in González & Sánchez, 2015: 148-49). Additionally, we know that this practice of founding settlements with *terrazgueros* to expand the dominion of the lordship was carried out by the *cacica* of Tlaxiaco, Doña María de Saavedra: in 1581, she sent some families to “populate and guard” patrimonial distant lands near San Juan Teita; and, in 1590, established *terrazgueros* close to Malinaltepec (today, San Bartolomé Yucuañe) to found a neighbourhood called Ñuuyucu<sup>63</sup>.

60. “Diligencias para la congregación de Tlaxiaco efectuadas por Ruy Díaz Cerón”, 1599.

61. AGNM, Indios, vol. 36, exp. 102, fs. 98r-99v.

62. Translation by the author.

63. AHJO, Teposcolula Criminal, leg. 9, exp. 15.

In 1573, the powerful and wealthy *cacique* of Tlaxiaco, Felipe de Saavedra, inherited to his daughter María a great amount of lands that included gardens and *milpas* in the most productive regions, fruit trees and grazing and extracting natural resources areas<sup>64</sup>. It was customary for the most valuable lands to be in hands of the nobility, especially the cocoa gardens, because their use and circulation was linked to the high social strata (Aranda, 2005: 1440). This matter supports the idea that lands in the *cañada* were lordly patrimony. In 1587, María de Saavedra married Francisco de Guzmán, the powerful heir of the *cacicazgo* of Yanhuitlán<sup>65</sup>. Her properties were just so extensive that, in 1581, Doña María donated or sold some high-quality lands to the Dominican monastery of Tlaxiaco. The *cacica* died in the middle of the decade of 1590 without descendants, so her direct line of succession was extinguished. She had not made a will, and the town council of Tlaxiaco claimed that just before her death she had stipulated that her possessions should go to the community, which was finally authorized by the Royal Audience<sup>66</sup>.

In spite of the fact that the *cañada* became property of the town council of Tlaxiaco, we believe that the domain continued having an important lordly nature, as well as its inhabitants as *terrazgueros*, which favored their mobilisation as labour in the mills. The highly complex *yuhuitayu* model that we have detected allowed the existence of other chiefdoms subsumed within the larger organization, and made the council an entity with lordly power. In this sense, stands out the participation of the Chávez family, *caciques* of San Juan Ñumí and other neighbouring villages, all under Tlaxiaco, as council officers in multiple occasions during sixteenth and seventeenth centuries<sup>67</sup>.

The awarding of land grants confirms Menegus's (2009: 50, 56; 2015) idea that a significant proportion of the population depended on lordly lands for their livelihood. Of the seventeen grants for cattle ranches and other necessities given during the sixteenth century, four were addressed to *caciques*, five to noble chiefs, one to the *encomendero*, and the largest number, six, to the community, but as *proprios* lands<sup>68</sup>.

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64. AHJ, Teposcolula Civil, leg. 22, exp. 12 (the testament in Mixtec language occupies fs. 3r-4r, and the copy of the translation, fs. 15r-16v). AGN, Tierras, vol. 3030, exp. 8, fs. 231r-234r.

65. AHJO, Teposcolula Civil, leg. 22, exp. 12.

66. The documents that prove these data were consulted by Ronald SPORES (2007: 310-11) in the former Archivo Municipal de Tlaxiaco and in the also former Archivo Histórico Judicial de Oaxaca. Unfortunately, the two documents referred to by him are not currently available.

67. AGN, Mercedes, vol. 13, exp. 19, f. 14r; AHJ, Teposcolula Civil, leg. 06, exp. 53; TERRACIANO (2001: 185).

68. AGN, Mercedes, vols. 3, exp. 92; 5, fs. 1r-2v; 10, fs. 8v-9v; 13, fs. 13r-13v, 206r; 14, f. 224v; 17, f. 96r; 18, fs. 224r-225r, 326v-327r; 19, f. 96v; 22, fs. 133v-134r; 23, f. 32v.

Finally, it is possible that the survival of these “disguised” seigniorial relationships could have favoured the retention of lands in indigenous hands and prevented the advance of Spanish property, together with the initial little interest shown by the Spaniards in the exploitation of the land in the Mixteca, expressing a greater tendency to control commercial activity (Romero, 1994). A group of four royal orders issued in 1591 provided the legal device to allow the Crown to appropriate the barren lands, considered *realengas* (of the royal domain), and to grant them in exchange for a payment. An ambitious project of congregation of villages, strongly promoted by the Viceroy Conde de Monterrey, followed these actions (Sempat, 2006). The intention of this plan, besides ensuring an optimal tax and religious control, was to evacuate indigenous lands to be placed in operation by Spaniards. The judge who visited the jurisdiction of Tlaxiaco in 1599 wanted to move the villages of the *cañada* to the Triqui region of Copala, about 20 km northwest<sup>69</sup>. It is estimated that the effects in New Spain of the 1591 royal orders were lower to those expected by the Crown, as well as failed the immense majority of the congregational plans in the Mixteca, also, the one of Tlaxiaco (Martín Gabaldón, 2015)<sup>70</sup>. This ensured a “massaged” continuity of indigenous property, adequate to the Hispanic regulation.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The Conquest and the construction of the colonial world unavoidably altered the indigenous organization in all its spheres. At the biological level, the introduction of some vegetable species with views to an intensive and commercial exploitation severely modified ecosystems and displaced traditional forms of production that guaranteed the subsistence and economic order of lordships. In the case study shown here, sugarcane significantly altered the ecological complementarity around the maize exchange practiced in the Yosotiche ecosystem, but, paradoxically and considering the community and lordly levels, this fact did not necessarily act to the detriment of these Indian villages, unlike what happened in other parts of New Spain.

Taking advantage of the legal artifices provided by the colonial administration, and thanks to the relatively little interest in the region by Spaniards until the eighteenth century, both communities and *caciques* managed to retain their lands, although the imple-

69. “Diligencias para la congregación de Tlaxiaco efectuadas por Ruy Díaz Cerón”, 1599 (Taller de Restauración del Exconvento de Santo Domingo, Oaxaca de Juárez).

70. On the contrary, effective congregations were achieved in the centre of New Spain and in other regions. Still we have to find out the reasons why the initiative was not successful in the Mixteca, and this aim could be fulfilled through meticulous comparative studies.

mentation of a European model of territoriality and jurisdiction provoked continuous litigations for the possession of such productive fields. What we observed in this region matches with the features detected by Arrijoa and Sánchez Silva (2012: 24-5)<sup>71</sup> among the colonial Oaxacan towns:

*The existence of communal lands legally ascribed to the indigenous governments and benefited by the so-called common Indians; the permanence of lands related to lordships and laboured by terrazgueros or macehuales; [and] the simulation of an agrarian market where the Indian governments leased the access and usufruct of their common lands in favour of neighbouring towns, haciendas, ranches, caciques and Indians with some economic solvency.*

However, contrary to the statement also made by these authors, that says that agricultural units of European origin constantly suffered the lack of indigenous labour force (Arrijoa & Sánchez Silva, 2012), we know that the sugar mills involved plentiful Mixtec workforce in Yosotiche in particular, and in general, in the ancient jurisdictions of Tlaxiaco, Ocotepec, Chicahuaxtla and Putla. The observed situation also differs from that identified in the *haciendas* of the Valley of Oaxaca by Taylor (1998: 153), where the fulltime labour came from debt peonage.

This situation can be explained by analysing the composition of the *yuhuitayu* and their conversion into “head-subjects complexes”. In particular, Tlaxiaco soon revealed a strong community (represented by the council) that managed and benefited from the livestock and agriculture practised in multiple lands of its patrimony, which also allowed the town to set itself up as an important regional trade centre. But the town council and the governing structure of its manifold subject villages masked lordly relations rooted in the pre-Hispanic tradition possibly related to its former condition of “compound lordship”<sup>72</sup>. These relationships allowed to exercise power over their commoners as *terrazgueros* and thus mobilise the necessary workforce to attend to the cultivation and processing of cane in the mills established from the sixteenth century, which gained momentum in the eighteenth century in Spanish hands on lands rented to the Indians.

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71. Translated from Spanish by the autor.

72. We believe that the anthropological “house” model postulated by Claude Lévi-Strauss and analysed in the Mixtec context by John CHANCE (2004) could serve to explain the functioning of the lordship of Tlaxiaco, but elaborating on this idea requires further research.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my special thanks to the Centre for Latin American Research and Documentation (CEDLA, Amsterdam) for partially funding this research. I am also immensely grateful with John Monaghan (University of Illinois at Chicago) for showing me his notes on the documents kept in the today ruined municipal archive of Yucuhiti, and to Manuel Hermann for accompany me on my field trip in the *cañada* of Yosotiche. Also, thanks to Maira Córdova Aguilar and Huemac Escalona Lüttig for sharing their knowledge on some specific aspects addressed in this work. Finally, I am grateful to the 3 anonymous reviewers for their critics and suggestions on the first version of text.

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