17TH INTERNATIONAL ARCHITECTURE EXHIBITION
LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA
PAVILION OF TURKEY

Paperwork 14

THE MISSION INDIAN AGENCY JURISDICTION

MANUEL SHVARTZBERG CARRIÓ

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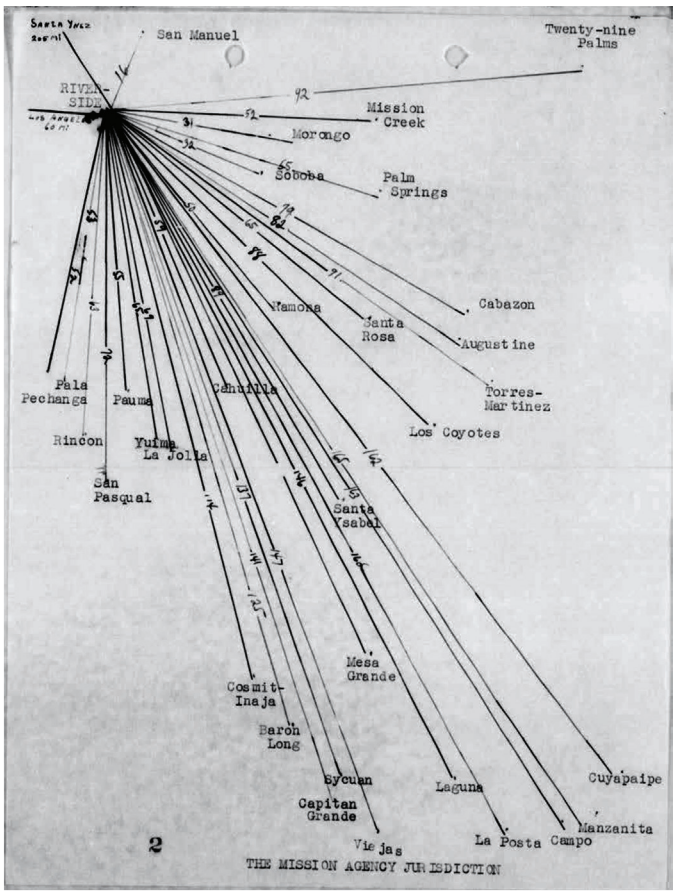

Narrative Report, Mission Indian Agency, California, 1937, by John W. Dady, Superintendent. Source: The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration.

When thinking about decolonization, it is essential to consider the ways in which it can—if it can—be measured. To do so means contending with the measure of measure itself. In political terms, how are techniques of jurisdiction imbricated with techniques of epistemology?

If coloniality is enacted through technologies that recast Indigenous land and lifeworlds as so many colonial jurisdictions—thereby effectively rendering Indigenous epistemologies themselves subsidiary at best, and non-existent at worse—then decolonization requires the reversing of jurisdictional impositions by reading back those epistemologies through and beyond the instruments that sought to erase them. Take for example this jurisdictional map of the Mission Indian Agency in Southern California (USA) from 1937. The map represents the very zenith of colonial inscription in this land: the last time when the federal government was invested in operationalizing the powers of the state to construct a yearly accounting of the First Nations living in this region, the most populated part of Indigenous North America before European colonization. The lines emanate from the "jurisdiction" office located in the city of Riverside to each distinct Native American reservation, showing the distances between them.

This is a diagram that denotes two physical measures, mileage (distance) and orientation (direction), while also connoting the very centralization of colonial power involved in the federal system of Indian administration set up by the U.S. The diagram flattens multiple Indigenous nations, cultures, and epistemologies as if they were all the same, suggesting that the diverse geographies and contested sovereignties of the region do not exist.

As a colonial document, it tells a story of bureaucratic centralization and objectification, embodying the Bureau of Indian Affairs' progressive shift from the narrative to the numerical, beginning with the founding of the Statistics Section in 1909 and the complete abandonment of narrative reporting by the mid-1930s. If, however, colonial management sought to be sharpened by this move, its horizon was the total disestablishment of Native sovereignty itself, as enacted by Native Termination legislation thereafter. Decolonization proceeds by reversing this process: writing in the absences inscribed by colonial bureaucracy with the goal of ultimately terminating the colonial archive itself.

About the author

Manuel Shvartzberg Carrió is Assistant Professor in Urban Studies and Planning at University of California, San Diego. An architect and architectural historian, he researches histories and theories of architecture and geopolitics, particularly how modern architectural technologies and territorial infrastructures mediate regimes of settler colonialism, racial capitalism, and processes of decolonization.