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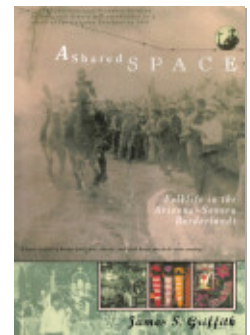
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Introduction

*A Fence in the Desert*¹

Southern Arizona is border country in a number of ways. In the first place, its southern boundary is also an international border, shared with the Mexican state of Sonora. The borderline, as well as the broader cultural zone of the border, are basic realities of life in southern Arizona and northern Sonora. But southern Arizona is itself a multi-cultural region with its own system of what one might call internal borders. It is home to several Indian nations: the Quechans (formerly the Yuma), Cocopah, and Tohono O'odham or Desert People (formerly the Papago Indians) who have lived here for time out of mind, and several communities of Yaquis, descended from nineteenth-century political refugees from the Yaqui homeland in Sonora, Mexico.² Each of these groups has its own reservation. There is also a large Mexican American and Chicano population, some families of which have been in the region for two centuries.³

These cultures interact with each other and with the dominant Anglo American society. This latter group started arriving in the 1850s, gained an almost exclusive hold on political and economic power in the 1880s and 1890s, and continues to grow through birth and through immigration from elsewhere.

The term Anglo American, or Anglo, as it is used in the American Southwest, really means anyone who isn't Hispanic or Indian. Thus, Chinese Americans, African Americans, and even Serbian Americans, all of whom have had an important presence in southern Arizona since the late nineteenth century, are somehow all Anglos. Even without taking into consideration these ethnic differences, the dominant society carries within it what might be described as its own series of internal borders. Catholics, Protestants, and Latter-day

Saints; miners, farmers, and cowboys; urban, suburban and rural dwellers: all these distinctions have long been important ones in the Arizona-Sonora borderlands, as indeed they have all over the American Southwest.

This cultural complexity is paralleled to some extent in the neighboring state of Sonora, Mexico. O'odham live and claim a homeland in northern Sonora just as they do in southern Arizona. Northern Sonora holds no Yaqui communities, to be sure, but Yaquis travel through the region on their way between the Yaqui communities in Arizona and southern Sonora. Magdalena, Sonora, sixty miles south of the border, is an important Yaqui pilgrimage focus. Anglos interact with Mexicanos in Sonora as they do in Arizona, albeit on different terms. And northern Sonora enjoys an increasing variety of ethnic groups, religions, and traditional occupations, as thousands of people from all over Mexico come to the border in search of economic opportunity.

The international boundary between Arizona and Sonora was established as a result of the Gadsden Purchase in 1853. In its simplest conception, it is a dividing line on a map, running from New Mexico northwest to California. On the ground, it takes the form of a fence. It runs over hills and through valleys, through a countryside that shades from the Chihuahuan Desert on the east through a zone of grasslands and oak-covered hills to the Sonoran Desert, which starts near the border city of Nogales. From Nogales, the line travels through an increasingly dry Sonoran Desert until it reaches the Colorado River and California.

There are six ports of entry on the Arizona-Sonora border. With the exception of the westernmost town, each community has a counterpart on the other side of the line. From east to west the paired border towns are: Douglas/Agua Prieta, Naco/Naco, Nogales/Nogales, Sasabe/Sasabe, and Lukeville/Sonoyta. San Luis Río Colorado, Sonora, the sixth port, has no corresponding town in the United States. Connecting these clusters of population stretches the border fence, marked as well with cement monuments so placed that each one can be seen from those to the east and west of it. The fence runs mostly through lonely country, more frequented by four-legged than by two-legged animals.

Where it traverses true desert (and deserted) country, the fence is made of several strands of barbed wire. In more settled stretches it changes to chain-link. The fence serves as a barrier to human traffic

but only to a degree. Shoppers crossed daily in the 1980s through holes in the Nogales chain-link fence, while a rural international market has for years taken place on weekends at a gap in the fence where it runs along the southern boundary of Tohono O'odham Nation (formerly the Papago Indian Reservation). This permeability is changing; as I write in April, 1994, steel strips have replaced the chain fencing in San Luis and Nogales, and there are plans to install them in Naco as well.

The fence itself is featured in local Spanish. One illegally enters one country from another *de alambre*—through the wire. A person who does this is an *alambrista*, a “wireist.” Not all informal crossings are above ground through the wire, however. In the late 1980s, customs officials discovered an elaborate tunnel leading from a warehouse in Agua Prieta, Sonora, to a similar structure in Douglas, Arizona. Powerful hydraulic lifts had been installed at either end, and the whole set-up was capable of handling considerable quantities of goods. At least two *corridos*, or Mexican ballads, about “El Tunel de Agua Prieta” have been written, recorded, and issued on commercial cassettes.⁴

El túnel doesn't stand alone as an underground path across the border. Tucson and Nogales newspapers in March, 1994, were full of accounts of young criminals who lived in trans-border drainage pipes and robbed people who tried to use these pathways to cross the border. And tunnels from the 1920s and 1930s, reputedly used to smuggle liquor or Chinese or both, figure in Nogales oral traditions.

The fence serves other, more social purposes from time to time. During the 1980s, international volleyball games were regularly held near Naco. Each team played in its own country, with the chain-link border fence serving as the net.⁵

To the east of Naco, in Agua Prieta, Sonora, match racing between selected horses has long been an important form of recreation. In 1957, an Agua Prieta horse named *Relámpago* (Lightning) won an important race and became the instant target of many challenges.⁶ One of the challengers was *Chiltepín* (named after the fiery local wild chile), from Pirtleville, Arizona, a small town near Douglas. Hoof-and-mouth disease regulations made it impossible for either horse to enter the other's country for the race. The match was finally held, however, following a suggestion which is said to have been made by the chief of U.S. Customs in Douglas. A level stretch of border fence was chosen, and each horse ran in its own country.⁷

The Border as a Cultural Region

The border is more than a boundary separating one country from another. It is also a cultural region which extends for many miles into each nation.

I am often told that a border town such as Nogales, Sonora, “isn’t the real Mexico.” That is perfectly true, of course, just as Nogales, Arizona, “isn’t the real United States.” Each is a border community, a place of cultural negotiation. Each attracts residents and visitors from the other side of the line. Folks cross the border daily in both directions to shop, to work, to socialize. Each town has taken on some of the character of the town on the other side of the border. This border zone actually extends for many miles on either side of the border towns themselves. For the traveller from Michigan, U.S.A., or from Michoacan, Mexico, the foreign flavor starts long before one arrives at the boundary line between the two nations, and reminders of home persist long after one has crossed over into the other country.

The society of the border communities is to a great extent bilingual and bicultural. Thus equipped, individuals can successfully negotiate between the two languages—and the two worlds—which come together along the border. The existence of these two worlds—the fact that the individual is coexisting with a system which may not be perfectly understood but which has the power to affect one’s life—can lead to a certain amount of anxiety. Very often in human society, jokes cluster around such areas of anxiety, and the border is no exception. A whole body of bilingual, bicultural jokelore exists all along the U.S.-Mexico border. Some of the jokes follow traditional one-liner formulas, like the following:

Knock-knock
 Who’s there?
 Kelly
 Kelly who?
 ¿*Qué le importa?* (What difference does it make to you?)

Or the toast,

Here’s to Mexico, where the *sopa’s* not soap and the *ropa’s*
 not rope, and the *butter’s* meant to kill ya.

This joke does two things: it plays with two false cognates (*sopa* is Spanish for “soup,” and *ropa* means “clothing”). With the pun on the Spanish word for butter (*mantquilla*, roughly pronounced “meant to kill ya”), it also reminds the listener of the unsanitary stereotypic burden borne by Mexican food.

A longer narrative joke suggests the advantages of speaking two languages:

A man robbed a bank in Tucson and fled for the border, hotly pursued by the FBI. He got to the border first and slipped across, while the FBI had to get permission to cross and get their papers all in order. When they finally crossed the border, he was long gone. But the FBI always gets its man, and so they caught him, way up in the hills, in the little village of Bacadéhuachi, Sonora. When they caught him, he didn’t have the money with him. He spoke no English and the FBI guys spoke no Spanish, so the agents hired an interpreter.

The first thing the head FBI guy asked the interpreter was “Tell him to tell us where he hid the money.”

The interpreter turned to the prisoner and said: “Dice el señor que ¿dónde está el dinero?” (The man wants to know where the money is.)

The prisoner responded: “¿Dinero? Claro que había dinero, y debe que estar por alguna parte, pero no me acuerda precisamente que dónde está.” (Money? There sure *was* some money, but I don’t remember just where it is now.)

The interpreter turned to the FBI agent and said “He says he’s forgotten where he put the money.”

The FBI agent drew his pistol, cocked it, and laid it against the prisoner’s head, saying, “Tell him that if he doesn’t remember where he put it in two minutes, I’m going to blow his brains out.”

The interpreter turned to the prisoner and said, “Dice el señor que si no te acuerdas que dónde está el dinero entre de dos minutos, te va a dar un balazo por la cabeza.” (The man says that if you don’t remember where the money is within two minutes, he’s going to put a bullet through your head.)

And the prisoner answered, complete with gestures, “Pues en este caso, está el dinero atrás de la casita de mi

hermana. Es una casita blanca, en ésta mera calle, dos cuardras de aquí, al lado izquierda de la calle. Atrás de la casa hay un árbol muy grande, y diez pasos al norte del árbol, hay una piedra blanca. Abajo de la piedra blanca, allí está enterrado el dinero.” (Well, in that case, the money’s at my sister’s little house. It’s a white house, on this very street, on the left side of the street. Behind the house is a big tree, and ten paces north of the tree is a white stone. Under the stone, that’s where the money is.)

The interpreter turned to his employers, removed his hat, and said, “He says he’s willing to die like a man.”

As this story makes plain, power lies with the bilingual individual who can manipulate both sides. Incidentally, I first heard the joke in pretty much the form I have given it here. I have since heard the same story set in East Los Angeles and another telling set in sixteenth-century Mexico, as a conversation between Cortez and the Aztec, Cuauhtemoc, with Cortez’s famous Indian mistress, Doña Marina, also known as La Malinche, in the role of interpreter.

In recent years bilingual border jokes have spread beyond their original bicultural context. Since the 1950s I have heard the tale of a monolingual from Mexico who was looking for a pair of socks—*un par de calcetines*—in an American department store. After being shown a wide selection of clothing by an increasingly frustrated monolingual English-speaking salesman, he finally pounced on the first pair of socks he saw, exclaiming “*Eso, sí que es.*” (“That’s what it is!”) The clerk responded: “You dumb Mexican, if you can spell it, why can’t you say it?” In 1993, this bilingual pun was used in a radio commercial advertising a nationally-distributed brand of Spanish language instruction tapes.

Although other scholars have suggested different functions for this kind of joke,⁸ the genre in my experience serves to celebrate a special sort of person on the border—the bilingual. In Texas they may be primarily Chicano in-group jokes; I don’t think they are on the Arizona border. I have collected them from Chicanos and Anglos alike—*bilingual* Chicanos and Anglos, that is.

The Pimería Alta, A Binational Region

The central Arizona border region is made more complex by the presence of two Native American tribes. The ancestral home of the Tohono O'odham stretches on both sides of the international border from the Altar Valley west almost to Sonoita. On the U.S. side, the O'odham live on Tohono O'odham Nation, the second largest reservation in the United States, stretching from the border to just south of Interstate 10, and from the Baboquivari Mountains west to a line just east of Ajo. Although most Sonoran Papagos have moved to the United States within the present century, a few villages of O'odham still exist in Sonora. The O'odham have no Sonoran reservation lands, however, and the Indian communities are being encroached upon by Mexican ranchers and agriculturalists.

It is an article of faith among Tohono O'odham that the international agreement establishing the border also established O'odham rights to move freely from one side of their ancestral territory to another, without necessity of passports or other papers. I am not aware of any historical documents substantiating this belief.⁹

One occasion on which O'odham do in fact cross the border in great numbers is the annual Fiesta de San Francisco, held in Magdalena de Kino each October 4. This is the major folk Catholic event of the year for many O'odham, Mexicans, and Mexican Americans and is discussed at greater length elsewhere in this volume. Suffice it to say that the devotion to San Francisco is a highly complicated regional phenomenon involving a saint who seems to be a composite of St. Francis Xavier (whose statue it is), St. Francis of Assisi (on whose day the feast is celebrated), and Father Eusebio Francisco Kino, S.J. (the pioneer Jesuit missionary in the region, whose bones are on view in the Magdalena plaza in front of the church). Although each of the three cultural groups involved conceptualizes the saint in a different way, all participate in his annual fiesta and pilgrimage.¹⁰

The importance of San Francisco to Arizonans, as well as Sonorans, points to another aspect of the central Arizona-Sonora borderlands. This part of the border is a cultural region in its own right, even though an international border runs through the middle of it. Jesuit missionaries in the late seventeenth century referred to the area as the *Pimería Alta*, the "Land of the Upper (or Northern) Piman Speakers,"

to distinguish it from other areas to the south which were occupied by speakers of a related language. (Pima is the term used by Spaniards and others to refer to the people who call themselves O'odham. Piman traditionally includes the Desert People—the Tohono O'odham—as well as the River People—Akimel O'odham—of the Gila and Salt River Valleys.)

Today, over 300 years since the first permanent contact between natives and Europeans in the Pimería Alta, the region seems to be culturally distinct even though it reaches into two nations—Mexico and the United States—that did not exist until over a century after Kino's day. The presence of O'odham culture, the devotion to San Francisco, even the distribution throughout the region of a unique style of giant tortilla made of wheat flour, all attest to the persistence of the old Pimería Alta at the close of the twentieth century.

Cultures in Contact

It is important to realize that the Mexican Americans, O'odham, and Yaquis of Arizona all maintain their cultures in some relationship to dominant Anglo American society. Anglos have been in social, political, and economic control of southern Arizona since at least the 1880s and the arrival of the transcontinental railroad.

Anglos participate in the older traditions of the Pimería Alta in a number of ways. They consume selected cultural items such as the regional food locally called "Mexican food, Sonora style."¹¹ They purchase piñatas and cascarones, and either use them for their intended purposes as things to be destroyed while adding to the festive atmosphere of a party or place them in their homes as regional decorations. Some attend the Magdalena Fiesta, not as much out of a devotion to San Francisco as out of an interest in regional traditions.

In other words, many Anglos have begun to use items of traditional regional culture as symbols of the region itself. They display bits of traditional art and folklore physically or verbally as they assert their place in their adopted home. Anthropologists have long noted that items of culture can change in many ways as they move across cultural boundaries; this process can be seen over and over in the Pimería Alta.

Many Anglos living in the Pimería Alta conceive of themselves as living in a much larger cultural region—the American Southwest, or simply, the Southwest. It's a real region, of course: the southwestern

corner of the United States, distinguished physically by its dryness and culturally through its long history of influences from the Valley of Mexico. Ever since the late nineteenth century, when the Fred Harvey Company needed to convince travellers on the Santa Fe Railroad to stop at its hotels in New Mexico and Arizona, the Southwest has been marketed to Americans from other parts of the United States.

So it is that this area of diverse natural settings and traditional cultures has become in the minds of many Anglo Americans a unified region, taking much of its color from its hub of fashion, the area around Santa Fe, New Mexico. And so it is that aspects of a very real group of traditional cultures have been transformed into colorful accents in the lives of Anglo American immigrants.¹²

This can be seen in the various strategies used regionally to market salsa. The Spanish word *salsa* simply means “sauce”—any kind of sauce. (Worcestershire Sauce, for example, is called *salsa Inglés*, “English sauce,” in Mexico.) As a loan word in English, salsa has come to mean a particular kind of Mexican-style sauce containing chiles of some kind. In traditional Mexican culture, this kind of salsa is used as casually and as commonly as ketchup is in ours, and for the same purpose: to give extra flavor to one’s normal meals. In Anglo American culture salsa appears either as an accompaniment to a specialty cuisine called “Mexican food” or as something in which to dip tortilla chips at a party or before a meal. Mexican-based salsa companies tend to advertise their products either with representations of the ingredients or with some visual symbolic statement of the condiment’s hotness and regional character. Some Arizona companies use symbolic visual statements of the product’s Mexican character, often images of women wearing regional Mexican costume.

Still other Arizona companies, aiming for a wider Anglo American market, use images—cattle brands, kachina masks, adobe houses, saguaro cactus, and mesas—that are evocative, not of a particular cultural tradition but of the American Southwest as a whole. Salsa in this context is no longer just a daily accompaniment to meals, or even part of a specialized kind of Mexican cooking. It has become part of a Southwestern lifestyle. It adds flavor, not to one’s bacon and eggs, but to one’s life as a consumer in an exotic region of the United States.¹³

In summary, the southern Arizona-northern Sonora border country is a culturally complex area in which the process of cultural negotiation has a long history. If we are to credit the work of archaeologist Charles Di Peso, traders and missionaries from central Mexico,

based near present Casas Grandes, Chihuahua, brought new goods and ideas into the region as early as 1000 A.D.¹⁴ More recently, Salado, Hohokam, and Trincheras cultures coexisted in the area covered by the essays in this book. With the arrival of Father Kino in 1688, a permanent European presence (including Spaniards, Mestizos, Basques, Catalans, and Jesuits from all over Europe) was established. The cultural makeup of this European presence has grown more complex over the years, with the addition in the nineteenth century of Anglos, Asians, and African Americans. The essays in this book examine in detail some of aspects of the folklife of this complex cultural region.

The Essays in this Volume

The first chapter treats various forms of cemetery art in the twin cities of Nogales, Arizona, and Nogales, Sonora, in an attempt to define some of the processes at work in this border community. Chapters Two and Three describe regionally important forms of folk art and discuss their iconization when they enter the dominant culture. Chapter Four describes a particular kind of supernatural being common to many parts of Mexico. A shrine in Tucson dedicated to one of these spirits has also been iconized by Anglo Americans.

The next two essays deal with the non-iconic reinterpretation of borrowed or shared cultural items. The narratives explaining a black crucifix currently in the church at Ímuris, Sonora, vary depending upon the group for whom (and by whom) the narrative was created. So do narratives concerning the Children's Shrine, a sacred place on Tohono O'odham Nation, depending on whether the story is being told by O'odham or local Anglos. Moving north in Arizona, the ballad, "The Mormon Cowboy," seems to belong to both Gentiles and Mormons in Gila County. Both groups have claimed authorship of the song. The text remains fairly constant in both cultures, but the meaning of the text seems to change depending upon what group is interpreting it.

While the essays so far mentioned deal with cross-cultural matters, the last two in the book are confined to material within a single cultural tradition—material which in each case gives the regional culture some of its distinguishing flavor. Leonardo Yañez of Douglas, Arizona, was a lifelong professional musician and a nationally famous composer of corridos, or Mexican ballads. Some of his compositions

deal with horse match races, one of the most important topics for regional corridos.

Also important locally is the set of organizational principles normally associated with the baroque style of eighteenth-century architectural decoration. Deeply rooted in Mexican (and indeed Aztec and Spanish) culture, baroque organization was firmly established in what is now Arizona in 1797 with the dedication of the mission of San Xavier del Bac, twelve miles south of present-day Tucson. The church is an example of a way of organizing one's surroundings that appears to remain vital in contemporary Mexican American culture.

A word about mechanics is in order. Although I feel it important to present detailed texts and descriptions of the material under discussion, such details have a way of impeding the flow of the text. Therefore, I have frequently resorted to appendices in order to supply such data. Finally, the notes to each chapter serve a dual purpose: to present my source material to my fellow scholars and to present peripheral ideas and details that, while important and interesting, should not intrude upon the main text.

Deciding which names to assign to groups of people can get complicated. The people who for years were called Papago Indians have formally changed their name to Tohono O'odham. I have used the latter name in contemporary descriptions; the former when dealing with the past. Their reservation, politically defined as Tohono O'odham Nation, is still the Papago Indian Reservation on maps. I have used both terms. Mexican Americans live in the United States; Mexicans in Sonora. I have used "Anglos" for participants in the various non-regional streams of United States culture, even though I wish there were a better term.



Cleaning a grave for el día de los muertos, Panteón Nacional, Nogales, Sonora, November, 1989. Photograph by David Burkhalter.