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James Griffith

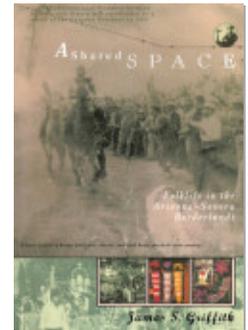
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A Few Final Words

What can be said in conclusion to this collection of disparate essays? Perhaps not much needs to be said; each essay stands alone as a treatment of a specific aspect of the rich folklife of the Arizona-Sonora borderlands. However, certain patterns emerge, and perhaps it is worth noting them once more.

In the first place, this is a region of strong continuities. Not only does Mission San Xavier del Bac still stand relatively unchanged since 1797, but also the organizational principles that governed its decoration are still powerful forces in the life of contemporary Mexican Americans in the region, two hundred years after the baroque went out of fashion in mainstream Mexican culture. Many other persistent aspects of regional culture—the making and use of cascarones, respect for the dead, reverence for the San Francisco image in Magdalena, devotion to non-canonical saints—are discussed in these essays.

But continuity does not imply a static existence. Cascarones have been made and used in the Santa Cruz Valley since at least the mid-nineteenth century, but today's cascarones differ from their predecessors in form, use, and meaning. El Tiradito is a part of life in Tucson just as it was in 1893, but its role (along with its appearance and location) has changed considerably. Horse-race corridos have been part of local culture for over a hundred years, but new corridos have replaced the older ones in the repertoires of singers and musicians.

Some of the changes that have taken place relate to the increasing immigration that is still an important regional dynamic. In Arizona, dominant Anglo American society has provided much of the impetus for change: by setting conditions, by wishing to participate in regional culture on its own terms, by reinterpreting items of local culture to fit its understanding and values. In some cases, a new meaning has simply been added to the traditional set; in others, the entire shape of the tradition seems to have been changed by Anglo participation.

Nor are the influences entirely from the north. In Nogales, Sonora, recent arrivals from other parts of Mexico have changed the

ways in which people honor the memory of their dead. In the 1850s, the Black Christ statue in Tucson was associated with Our Lord of Esquipulas; today the Guatemalan connection seems forgotten and legends tie it and the Black Christ in Aconchi to Mexico City.

In addition to the realities of immigration, many of the essays reflect in one way or another the fact of the border. The cemeteries of Ambos Nogales illustrate a coming together of traditions from the United States and Mexico. The Magdalena glass paintings are created and sold in Sonora but used to a great extent in the United States. Leonardo Yañez' corridos have been recorded and sung on both sides of the border; one of Relámpago's races actually took place along the border fence.

But the border between the United States and Mexico is not the only cultural dividing line at work in this region. The very real borders between cultures: O'odham, Anglo, and Mexican American, Mormon and Gentile, miner and cowboy—all these lend their dynamics to the local folklife. The chapter on "The Mormon Cowboy," in addition to demonstrating ties to the occupational tradition of cowboy song and the fledgling national recording industry, reveals some of the dynamics between the occupational and religious communities of a part of Gila County that may on the surface look culturally monolithic.

Finally, the binational Pimería Alta cuts across more recent boundaries to remind us once more of the depth of many of our region's continuities. It is fitting that the Pimería be represented in this collection by the Magdalena glass painting, because the devotion to San Francisco is one of the strongest forces that still ties the region together.

Continuity and change, the coming together of cultures: these are the main themes of this collection of essays. Some of the traditions discussed here are strong; others, like "The Mormon Cowboy," seem to be on their way out. All contribute to the special flavor of the Arizona-Sonora border country, tying the region to other parts of the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands while at the same time demonstrating its historical and contemporary uniqueness.

These, then, are some of the themes that have engaged me over the past two decades of working as a folklorist in the Pimería Alta. What has always interested me—what I have been drawn to, often without realizing it—are places where two or more cultures come together. In addition, I am and always have been fascinated by the many ways in which "the more things change, they more they stay the

same.” The picture I see of this multicultural region is compounded equally of two important dynamics: continuity and adaptive change.

My view is on the whole an optimistic one. Where others might see cultural co-option by the dominant society, I find attempts to cope with alien materials in a new land and make them meaningful. Today’s Pimería Alta is being flooded with immigrants from both north and south; I have hopes that at least some aspects of regional culture will survive this onslaught. The drug war and the attitudes it engenders are devastating the borderlands; I feel there is a possibility that some solution will be eventually found. It’s not that I wholeheartedly embrace these hopeful predictions; it’s simply that they seem more profitable than pessimism as starting points for action.

And much of my time here has been dedicated to that action. As a public folklorist I have lectured and produced educational radio and TV programs, organized and curated exhibitions, and organized an annual folklife festival, all with the aim of easing, however slightly, some of the tensions and misunderstandings that divide people. The essays reproduced here were written, as it were, in my “spare time.”

I should make it clear that I did not choose the topics in this book because of any theoretical considerations or interests. I was first drawn to the material—art objects, legends, songs—because they engaged my interest on a very personal and usually aesthetic level. I experienced something, be it a *cascarón*, a performance of “*el Moro de Cumpas*,” or a story about *el Tiradito*, and was drawn to learn more about it. After arriving at an understanding of the general shape of the tradition I was learning about, I became curious about the cultural dynamics the tradition seemed to display. “What’s going on here?” is as basic a question as “what is this?,” and I tried to answer both to the best of my ability. But my first and passionate engagement was always with the traditions and with the individuals and cultures who maintain those traditions.

I have placed myself in some of these essays for a simple reason: in many cases my presence has changed the traditions I was studying. Through displaying *cascarones* in public exhibitions, through inviting *pajareros* to demonstrate their skills on the National Mall and exhibiting their work in Arizona museums and galleries, through discussing *el Tiradito* in popular articles and on radio and TV programs, I have in some way altered all those traditions. It is therefore fitting that I factor myself into their study.

It should be obvious to the reader that this book is in no way a complete study of the folklife of the region I have chosen as my field of

study. Another twenty years of work will doubtless produce essays on a host of different topics. Other folklorists will find other, equally exciting themes, other equally fascinating material. They will bring to this material different personalities, training, interests, and perceptions than mine. I long for their arrival.

Less obvious, perhaps, is the fact that each of the studies in the book is of necessity itself incomplete. In the first place, the cultures I have written about are living cultures, constantly changing and adapting to changing times. Not a single one of the customs and art forms I have examined is likely to remain the same for even a few years. All I have done is to try to present them as they were at a certain time.

The studies are incomplete in other ways as well. Between the first and final drafts of this book—a space of a year and a half—I have learned many details concerning my chosen topics. Each piece of information arrived fortuitously, without warning. I fully expect that process to continue. The essays I would write on these same subjects in five years' time would inevitably be different in many details from the ones in this book.

All of which simply goes to demonstrate that the work isn't yet done, that the answers are not yet all in, and that even the questions are in many cases imperfectly understood. It also provides an excellent excuse to stick around for a while longer, watching, listening, learning. For this is in deep ways my selected field of study, my chosen place to live. The late Van Holyoak, a cowboy from Arizona's White Mountains, made a statement about his part of the state that I cheerfully stole from him and have been using as my own for almost twenty years. "If there was any place I'd rather be, I would have gone there."