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Guadalupe: A Story of Migration, Suffering, and Hope

Walking through the streets of Guadalupe, one can tell the deep and vibrant history of the little town. Looking around, Guadalupe's dilapidated stores, homes, and parks starkly contrast the reality of the neighboring chaotic, exorbitant, and extensive areas of Metro Phoenix. However, with every ounce of culture thats been preserved in the town, it doesn't take long to notice the amount of suffering that the founders of Guadalupe endured to create an enclave “for [their] grandchildren to be able to say Guadalupe is still their home [1].” The town’s original conception came about during the turn of the early 20th century by a group of Yaqui Indians from Mexico fleeing the oppressive policies.

Most anthropological works regarding the Yaqui date back to the Spaniards’ initial interactions with the tribe during the expansion of Mexican territory. Failures in early Spanish conquest attempts of the Yaqui peoples led to a ‘shoaling’ of their lands (Lecture 1/23/24). The ‘shoal’ was effectively broken by Jesuit missionaries in 1617, affecting Yaqui culture considerably [2, pg 3]. The religious effects of this successful missionary system were that “Yaqui culture and beliefs combined with Spanish Catholicism … to form a distinct syncretic religion [3, pg 4].” In order to advance the Spaniard's assimilation goals, the Jesuits convinced the Yaqui to transform their societal structure from “scattered rancherías into eight large pueblos, each with its church at the center [2, pg 3].” This textbook case of De La Pena’s notion of Acculturation formed the “backbone of [contemporary] Yaqui social, political, and cultural life” and allowed for a shift towards Yaqui autonomy after the expulsion of the Jesuits [3, pg 4] [4]. The following “two-hundred-year-old strife” was characterized by the encroachment and exploitation of Yaqui resources by Mexican settlers and the Yaquis’ “saga of constant guerilla warfare … to retain their land [2, pg 6].” Yaqui anthropological researchers like

Hu-DeHart argued that the Yaqui's "insistence on political autonomy and rejection of assimilation allowed their culture and identity to survive" a critical component of Yaqui, and subsequently, Guadalupe's culture, that allowed for the town in existence today [2, pg 6] [5].

This resistance came to an end with the extermination and enslavement policies under the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz, similar to many other Native groups. As a result, "all but a few hundred Yaqui fled into Arizona Territory", with the aid of the Jesuit and Catholic missionaries with whom they had maintained a symbiotic relationship [6, pg 3]. Due to their refugee status as a backdrop to this border crossing, their immediate future was quasi-predetermined, a clear example of St. John's writings on border crossing [4]. With the help of Franciscan Friars, the Yaqui refugees successfully established their settlement in 1904 on five donated acres, building the First Lady of Guadalupe Church as a community center, and homes of "mesquite and cactus ribs [6, pg 2-3]." Unlike countless other refugee groups, in an act of decolonization, the Yaqui had managed to bring their traditional architecture, celebrations, and societal structures to the desolate Phoenix region [10]. Due to the arid nature of the Arizona Valley region, the effects of state and federal-level irrigation, water rights, and land grant programs had drastic effects on vulnerable populations like the Yaqui. Resulting from "disputes over water rights and farmers' actions", a local court order forced the Yaqui off their land in 1910 [6, pg 2]. In 1914, Woodrow Wilson granted the Yaqui "40 acres" of unirrigable land outside the Kent Decree's coverage [1]. Due to the lack of fertile land, the Yaqui became dependent on the labor market surrounding them, particularly in the work camps of the Salt River Project [7]. The Yaquis "were consistently the most vital contributors" towards these critical infrastructure projects, highlighting the group's hand in developing contemporary Phoenix [3, pg 41]. The development of the Mexican-American border, which impeded the migration of many Hispanic-origin peoples, was balanced by the SRP's political ties into the immigration process,

influencing politicians to “amend the immigration laws” [8] [3, pg 47]. Over the years, this pushed Guadalupe’s population from a handful of families to the 5,300 figure today [9]. Finally, from a cultural perspective, Guadalupe’s state was similar to Anzalduan’s notion of ‘nepantla’, indicating a time and place of great fluidity [11]. The safety of Guadalupe allowed for the faster switch from ‘survival’ to revival of their “customs and community organization’, a chronically difficult component for diaspora communities, yet the majority of their political structure was Westernized.

Guadalupe continued to grow throughout the next 100 years, but the metropolitan areas surrounding it grew even faster. Today, Guadalupe remains a vibrant community enriched by its deep Yaqui and Mexican-American migrant roots, yet it faces a multitude of socioeconomic challenges. The town’s economic landscape is marked by limited local employment options, leading to situations where the “town’s expenses are projected to exceed revenues [1].” This directly impacts the educational attainment that Guadalupe schools can provide, and the effects of this are blatantly obvious in census data. Further, Guadalupe grapples with the common ethnic enclave struggles of preserving its cultural heritage amid rapid urbanization, westernization, and growing capitalist influences of the surrounding communities. This has not only led to an encroachment of the town's lands but has also put barriers to the transmission of Yaqui cultural practices to the younger generations. However, Guadalupe’s commitment to the annual celebration of the “Yaqui Lenten Period and Easter Ceremony”, in addition to the preservation of its Yaqui, English, and Spanish religious services highlights Guadalupe’s cultural perseverance [3, pg 57]. The US’s chronic racialization of the Mexican-American border and the people of the borderlands has caused significant problems for Guadalupe. From the overwhelming amount of crime-related reports regarding Guadalupe by Cable News to Maricopa County Sherrif Arpaio launching repeated racially-motivated raids within Guadalupe, Arizonan's racialized view of Guadalupe as a site of

extreme ‘immigrant’ crime has been chronically propagated [12] [13]. This view couldn't be farther from the truth. As many problems as it has, Guadalupe has proved that decolonialized, vibrantly cultured ethnic enclaves *can* function and persevere in the 21st century.

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