

PROBLEMATIZING SECURITIZATION AT THE U.S.—MEXICO BORDER:
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE TOHONO O'ODHAM NATION

By

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Abstract

The United States federal government's policies of border securitization have significant and negative tangible and symbolic effects on the Tohono O'odham Nation, an Indigenous nation that is spatially and culturally divided by the U.S.-Mexico border. In this thesis, I review U.S. border securitization policies and practices over the past three decades, starting with the strategy of "prevention through deterrence" beginning in the mid-1990s, and the effects of cultural degradation these policies and strategies have had on the Tohono O'odham. The implications of U.S. border securitization on the Tohono O'odham culture can be observed through the destruction of the natural environment on and around the Tohono O'odham Nation and the restriction of Tohono O'odham people's mobility, which precipitates the loss of traditional language, impaired ceremonial practices, and a disconnect between Tohono O'odham people on either side of the U.S. Mexico border. I aim with this thesis to problematize and criticize processes of border securitization for their problematic foundations and their harmful implications. This problematization will be informed by Harsha Walia's conceptualization of border imperialism, Lindsey Kingston's discussion of cultural genocide, and the critical perspective of O'odham activist, Ofelia Rivas.

Introduction

United States border securitization policies, infrastructure, and methods have significantly impacted the Tohono O’odham Nation, whose lives are directly and tangibly shaped and changed by these U.S. practices. Discussions of the politics and policies related to the United States-Mexico border are most often centered around themes of immigration and migrants, drug-related activities, and United States national security. Too often excluded from discussion and analysis of the United States-Mexico border are the Indigenous nations and their people, whose lands have been encroached on, policed, and controlled by nation-states whose existence is much newer than any Indigenous tribe in the Americas. The hostile, heavily policed, and heavily surveilled environment that has been created at the U.S.-Mexico border reflects an imperialist exercise of control imposed upon the Tohono O’odham nation, violating their sovereignty and damaging different elements of their culture.

Several Indigenous tribes’ land and reservations have been territorially bisected and culturally divided by the United States-Mexico border. One of these tribes is the Tohono O’odham Nation, located in and around Southern Arizona in the United States and Sonora in Northern Mexico. The Tohono O’odham people have been divided by the imposition of the U.S.-Mexico border. This division has been increasingly solidified, policed, and enforced as a result of policies and practices of securitization enacted by the United States federal government, notably over the past three decades. Securitization at the U.S.-Mexico border entails not only the construction and fortification of a physical barrier separating the two nation-states, but also increased presence of federal agencies like U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) who police the border with increasingly militarized weapons and technologies in addition to expansive mechanisms of surveillance by the

U.S. government, including the construction of Integrated Fixed Towers (IFTs). Specifically, the United States' securitization strategy of "prevention through deterrence" established in 1994 attempted to deter potential migrants from major crossing points, effectively funneling a significant amount of migration traffic directly through Tohono O'odham land. Increased unauthorized border crossings through the Tohono O'odham Nation are simultaneously a result of United States immigration and border policy and a reality which serves to justify further construction, policing, and surveillance by the United States government on Tohono O'odham sovereign land.

This paper will describe the history of United States border securitization policy over the past three decades, and specifically discuss how these policies have contributed to the degradation of the Tohono O'odham culture. While not explicitly targeting the Indigenous culture of the Tohono O'odham, U.S. border policies have far reaching implications which certainly and seriously impact the traditions and practices intrinsic to Tohono O'odham culture. The cultural implications of U.S. policies of securitization at the Southern border will be analyzed in two sections. The first is the cultural implications of the destruction of land and natural environment on and around the Tohono O'odham reservation, and the second is the cultural implications of the limited and restricted mobility of Tohono O'odham people as a result of U.S. border securitization. The second section on the cultural implications of mobility limitations will be further divided into three subsections: loss of traditional language, impaired ceremonial practices, and the disconnect that has developed between Tohono O'odham tribal members on either side of the border. These sections will specifically discuss the ways in which various aspects of the culture of the Tohono O'odham have been harmed as a result of U.S. securitization policies at the U.S.-Mexico border.

In this paper, I aim to problematize and criticize processes of border securitization designed and carried out by the United States government both for their problematic foundations and their harmful effects on Indigenous peoples, the natural environment, and migrating populations. My critical analysis proceeds using two different critical theoretical frameworks which can be applied specifically to the case of the cultural destruction experienced by the Tohono O’odham. My analysis also draws on the experience and critical viewpoints of Tohono O’odham activist Ofelia Rivas. These critical frameworks include Harsha Walia’s conceptualization of border imperialism and Lindsey Kingston’s explanation of cultural genocide. Walia’s (2013) border imperialism posits that “Western governance and statehood is constituted through multiple modes... including the primacy of the border that delineates and reproduces territorial, political, economic, cultural, and social control” (p. 22).

Similar ideas are voiced by O’odham activist Ofelia Rivas, who discusses the repressive regulation of racialized groups (Black and brown migrants, Indigenous peoples) at the hands of U.S. border securitization forces, as well as the imperialistic violation of Tohono O’odham sovereignty. Rivas also describes the “cultural genocide” the Tohono O’odham are being subjected to. Lindsey Kingston’s discussion of cultural genocide, drawing on George E. Tinker’s definition, provides an explanation of what cultural genocide looks like and how it functions. These important critical perspectives productively analyze and problematize the detrimental actions of the United States government for the ostensible purpose of national security.

I aim in this thesis to critically assess and analyze the harmful effects of U.S. border securitization on the culture of the Tohono O’odham, in turn focusing on the inclusion of Indigenous voices and experiences into critical academic discussions of border politics. Indigenous perspectives and experiences with the United States-Mexico border are necessary to

examine but are too often omitted from discussions of U.S. border politics. The organization of this thesis will proceed as follows. First, I will be providing crucial background information that is necessary to the discussion of this thesis; this includes defining and clarifying my use of the terms securitization and Indigenous sovereignty, providing a brief introduction to history and culture of the Tohono O’odham Indigenous tribe, and an in-depth timeline of the U.S. border securitization policies and practices since the early/mid-1990s. Next, I will describe the various and significant implications of U.S. border securitization for Tohono O’odham cultural aspects and practices. I will then present a critical analysis and problematization of U.S. border securitization and its impact on the culture of the Tohono O’odham, informed by Harsha Walia’s presentation of border imperialism, Lindsey Kingston’s discussion of cultural genocide, and the critical insight of Ofelia Rivas. My conclusion will review key takeaways from my analysis and will emphasize the importance of substantively including Indigenous perspectives in discussions of U.S. border policy and securitization. Lastly, it is necessary to note that this paper was completed as an honors thesis project for the University of Arizona; the University of Arizona resides upon the traditional and ancestral lands of the Tohono O’odham people.

Background

Defining Terms

Before engaging in my analysis, it is important to understand two key terms: securitization and tribal sovereignty. This paper reviews the history of securitization on the United States/Mexico border, with specific emphasis on the borderlands bisecting the traditional and reservation lands of the Tohono O’odham nation. Additionally, this thesis will discuss how these securitization policies in some instances constitute effective violations of Indigenous

sovereignty In this section, I first define the term securitization and will distinguish it conceptually from the term militarization and then present an explanation of what is meant by tribal sovereignty.

Richelle Bernazzoli and Colin Flint (2009) state that “the term ‘militarism’... has evolved from one that once denoted the evolution of a separate, dangerous military ethos to one that, presently, emphasizes the embeddedness of a militaristic mentality in civil society” (p. 449). In their view, the conceptualization of militarization “rests on a largely false binary” of separate military and civilian spheres (Bernazzoli & Flint, 2009, p. 449). According to these authors, “at a broad scale, the military does not exist apart from society,” and on an individual level, “analyses attempt to place actors and activities into clear categories of ‘military’ and ‘civilian’” (Bernazzoli & Flint, 2009, p. 449). They argue that “such distinctions lack utility for understanding how policies that sustain the military and their actions are enacted and gain broad support” (Bernazzoli & Flint, 2009, p. 449). The authors argue that securitization/securitism provides a more complete and necessarily more complex understanding of the processes usually identified as facets of militarization.

Securitization in this context can be understood as “ongoing processes of securing society by guarding both material and discursive borders” (Bernazzoli & Flint, 2009, p. 449). As this description suggests, securitization is a multifaceted and constantly evolving concept in practice. The enactment of policies and practices of securitization is fluid in and shifts with time and context. Securitization at the U.S./Mexico border takes the form of U.S. military presence, Customs and Border Patrol presence, the construction of a physical wall or barrier, and even stringent and/or restrictive immigration and border policies enacted by the United States government. As can be seen in the context of the U.S./Mexico border, the securitization policies

and practices of the United States government occur in numerous ways through various governmental and non-governmental agencies. Informed by the distinctions and definitions presented by Bernazzoli and Flint (2009), I will be using the conceptualization of securitization rather than militarization in an effort to provide a more holistic understanding of the defense-related security practices of the United States government in the context of the southern border

Sovereignty is a highly complex and contested term; this is particularly true in the case of Indigenous peoples in the United States. According to Amanda J. Cobb (2005), the term sovereignty “[carries] with it multiple meanings and multiple implications for Native nations” (p. 115). Cobb (2005) cautions that “our understanding of sovereignty must be flexible and negotiable,” but not to the extent that the term loses its substantive meaning (p. 116). Sovereignty describes “a nation’s power to self-govern, to determine its own way of life, and to live that life—to whatever extent possible—free from interference” (Cobb, 2005, p. 118). This expansive definition of sovereignty can be applied to the powers held by various nation-states around the globe.

This understanding of sovereignty can also be applied to Indigenous nations in the form of tribal sovereignty. As Cobb (2005) highlights, “native nations are culturally distinct peoples with recognizable governments and, in most cases, recognizable and defined territories” (p. 118). However, tribal sovereignty is more nuanced and complicated. Cobb (2005) understands Indigenous tribal sovereignty to be both “inherent and ancient” (p. 118). Tribal sovereignty is ancient in that Indigenous nations have existed for over a thousand years, and their practices of self-governance and self-determination long predate the existence of the colonial United States (Cobb, 2005). Further, Cobb (2005) argues that “the underscoring of the inherent nature of sovereignty is critical because of the colonial process—a process that continues to dramatically

diminish [Indigenous peoples'] ability to fully exercise tribal sovereignty” (p. 119). I interpret Cobb’s use of the word *inherent* to emphasize the fact that tribal sovereignty was not a *gift* given to native nations by the colonial United States. Cobb points to statements made by former President Bush to and about Middle Eastern nations to illustrate this point. Cobb (2005) notes that when asked “a question about what ‘tribal sovereignty means in the 21st century,’ Bush responded, “Tribal sovereignty means that...You've been *given* sovereignty, and you're viewed as a sovereign entity’ (italics added [by Cobb])” (p. 119). Cobb (2005) notes that the fact that the former “President referred to sovereignty as America's apparent ‘gift’ to occupied tribal and Middle Eastern nations is disturbing on many levels, not least of which is the extent to which such comments belie the colonizer's view of itself as controlling the sovereignty of the colonized” (p. 119). Cobb argues that tribal sovereignty is inherent, and in turn was established by Indigenous nations themselves and was never “gifted” to them by colonizing United States.

Emphasizing the inherence of tribal sovereignty illuminates a crucial point: “inherency and recognition are characteristics of sovereignty for all nations; however, the recognition and respect necessary to exercise sovereignty fully has not been consistently accorded Native nations by other sovereigns, particularly the United States” (Cobb, 2005, p. 119). With this, Cobb (2005) argues that “because [Indigenous tribes] are paracolonial nations, the foreign or colonizing powers' recognition of our sovereignty is fragile and tenuous, and tribal powers are therefore constantly buffeted by outside forces” (p. 120). The hegemonic force of the United States federal government in turn makes sovereignty an incredibly complex and important issue for Indigenous tribes.

Moreover, Cobb (2005) argues that “sovereignty is, in effect, cultural continuance,” importantly noting that “cultural or national identity is a part of the United States' understanding

of its own sovereignty” while at the same time, “for the United States, tribal cultural integrity is viewed not as a natural part of an inherent sovereign but instead as a criterion... that Native nations must *prove* for their sovereign status to be recognized” (p. 121, emphasis added). In this way, Cobb (2005) critiques how “cultural integrity can function not as the act of indigenous self-definition that it is, but instead as a way for the colonizer to define and control the colonized” (p. 121). Cobb (2005) concludes that “if [Indigenous peoples’] inter-sovereign relationship with the United States has been controlled by the United States’ conceptualization of sovereignty, if they have practiced rhetorical imperialism by setting the terms of the debate, then what Native communities have been doing is ‘reinventing the enemy’s language’ or transforming the discourse of sovereignty on [their] own terms” (p. 126).

A Brief History of the Tohono O’odham Nation and Cultural Practices

The Tohono O’odham people and their ancestors, the Hohokam, have inhabited their land for more than a thousand years. The Hohokam, as well as the Mogollon and the Anasazi civilizations, developed in the area now known as the American Southwest between the years 700 and 1400 (Weinstein, 2001). The Tohono O’odham nation and its people long predate the nation-states that have encroached on and bisected their ancestral lands. Their predecessors, the Hohokam, “settled along the Salt, Gila, and Santa Cruz Rivers” and were “master dwellers of the desert” (Tohono O’odham Nation, 2016b, para. 1). The Hohokam developed sophisticated irrigation systems for their cotton, tobacco, beans, squash, and corn crops, “built vast ball courts and huge ceremonial mounds and left behind fine red-on-buff pottery and exquisite jewelry of stone, shell, and clay” (Tohono O’odham Nation, 2016b, para. 1). Both historically and currently, the Tohono O’odham follow the example of their ancestors in that they “used and

continue to use meteorological principles to establish planting, harvesting, ceremonial cycles and [they] developed complex water storage and delivery systems” (Tohono O’odham Nation, 2016b, para. 2).

Throughout the 16th-18th centuries, the U.S. Southwest and Mexico were colonized, with extensive effects on the Tohono O’odham and their ancestral land. Notably, in 1848, following the Mexican American War, “the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo established the boundary line between the U.S. and Mexico at the Gila River, which meant that the territories of” the Tohono O’odham “became part of Mexico” (Singleton, 2009, p. 4). Soon after, in 1854, “the Gadsden Purchase established the southern boundary of the United States at its present location, and in so doing, bisected the territory of the Tohono O’odham” (Singleton, 2009, p. 4).

As is typical of colonial history, the Indigenous Tohono O’odham were excluded from involvement in this transaction (Heidepriem, 2015, p. 109). The main Tohono O’odham reservation was established in 1917 (Tohono O’odham Nation, 2016b). Currently, the land of the Tohono O’odham “is comprised of 2.8 million acres” with 75 miles of the U.S.-Mexico border cutting through the nation (Singleton, 2009, p. 4). The Tohono O’odham Nation “is the second largest [reservation] in Arizona in both population and geographical size” and currently has about 28,000 members (Tohono O’odham Nation, 2016a, para. 1). It is estimated that over 1,000 of them reside on the Mexican side of the border (Singleton, 2009, p. 4). Traveling around and through the border is extremely culturally important to the Tohono O’odham people. The Tohono O’odham rely on the ability to travel “to gather medicinal plants, to collect a type of clay used at childbirth, [and] to practice the annual round of ceremonies that sustain the traditional religion and culture” (Singleton, 2009, p. 5). Mobility continues to be essential to the Tohono

O’odham for other purposes, like food collection, family visitation, healthcare services, and economic migration, for example (Heidepriem, 2015, p. 110).

Timeline of Border Policy and Securitization

In this section, I will be providing crucial contextual information through a timeline of U.S. practices and policies of border securitization from the early/mid-1990s to the present day. I note that the practice of policing at the U.S.-Mexico border traces much further back than the 1990s. However, the Southwest Border Strategy is an appropriate starting point for this timeline and my analysis due to its specific and tangible effects of colonization and cultural destruction that have unfolded and profoundly shaped the situation we currently see at the U.S.-Mexico border. This is not to deny that directly and/or indirectly harmful colonial and anti-Indigenous policies were previously enacted by the United States in the borderlands, but my analysis is focused on the period from the early/mid-1990s to the present.

The border securitization policies and strategies in the early-mid 1990s reflected growing perceptions of a link between terrorism and undocumented immigration (Kashyap, 2021). Attitudes of fear and distrust towards immigrants fostered the expansion of border securitization and control policies by the United States government. One of these initial policies, implemented in 1993 under the Clinton administration, was known as Operation Blockade, later known as Operation Hold the Line. (Dowd, 2013). This policy, enacted by then Border Patrol Sector Chief Silvestre Reyes, was put into place “along the El Paso/Ciudad Juarez border” in 1993 (Meyers, 2006, Selected Timeline). Operation Hold the Line “deviated from the traditional enforcement strategy of apprehension and removal by deploying more than 400 of the sector’s 650 agents to 24/7 duty along the border line” (Meyers, 2006, para. 32). Specifically, Border Patrol in El Paso

“[formed] a human and vehicle blockade,” with the “four hundred agents and vehicles every 100 yards from one side of El Paso to the other” (Dowd, 2013, para. 1). This operation was successful in the eyes of the U.S. federal government, resulting in “significantly reduced... illegal migration as well as [a decreased number of] apprehensions in the busy city of El Paso in 1994” (Reistad, 2013, para. 2).

The results of Operation Hold the Line inspired the employment of a similar procedure in San Diego. This procedure, called Operation Gatekeeper, was launched on October 1, 1994 and was made up of similar features to Operation Hold the Line, including a proposed doubling of “the Border Patrol’s force,” the construction of “more fences and walls,” and the implementation of “high-tech land and air surveillance.” (Reistad, 2013, para. 2). These two local operations served as the basis for the Border Patrol Strategic Plan for 1994 and Beyond, a plan which was constructed around the idea of “prevention through deterrence” (U.S. Border Patrol, 1994, p. 6). In other words, by massively increasing the levels of securitization, surveillance, and policing at high-traffic border crossing points (such as in El Paso and San Diego), undocumented migrants would consider altering their routes to venture through “more ‘hostile terrain’ which would place them in ‘mortal danger’” (Amnesty International, 2012, p. 17).

The goal of this strategy, as reported to Congress, was to “[deploy] Border Patrol agents at the border to prevent or deter illegal entry, rather than apprehending undocumented immigrants after they have entered the United States” (Krouse, 1997, p. 2). The 1994 Plan and the U.S. government’s strategy going forward was based around the use of increased securitization at busy points of entry combined with the natural danger and hostility of the desert landscape. The “prevention through deterrence” strategy continued to inform policy and procedure at the U.S.-Mexico border throughout the 1990s. This took the form of operations

similar to Hold the Line and Gatekeeper, also including “the addition of hundreds of agents and motion-detection sensors in... selected sectors [of the border]; construction of high-intensity, stadium-type lighting, new roads, and miles of steel fencing; and installation of an automated fingerprint system” (Meyers, 2006, para. 37).

Two specific examples of these operations include Operation Safeguard, which was implemented in Tucson, Arizona in 1995, and Operation Rio Grande in McAllen, Texas in 1997 (Krouse, 1997). The “prevention through deterrence” strategy resulted in a large increase in resources allocated to U.S. Border Patrol. Between fiscal years 1993 and 1997 alone, “Congress... substantially increased the Border Patrol’s budget from \$362 million to \$727 million, and the number of Border Patrol agents... increased from 3,991 to 6,848” (Krouse, 1997, p. 2). In September of 2000, “the Border Patrol had reached over 9,000 agents, with 93 percent of them deployed along the Southwest border, and a budget in excess of \$1 billion per year” (Meyers, 2006, para. 56). Further, at this point “76 miles of barrier fences” had been constructed (Meyers, 2006, para. 56). In short, securitization along the U.S.-Mexico border was increased and significantly strengthened throughout the 1990s, and this trend would be continued following the events of September 11, 2001.

The 9/11 attacks had the effect of emphasizing national security as a policy priority in the early 2000s and through to the present day. Following 9/11, “federal, state, and local governments... embarked on ambitious efforts to strengthen national security, and this has occasioned significant hardening of borders” (Singleton, 2009, p. 2). In effect, “the 9/11 attacks provided the high-level political support necessary to advance a broader understanding of border enforcement” (Meyers 2006, para. 66).

A significant development in border/immigration policy post-9/11 was the dissolving of Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS, the previous department responsible for immigration enforcement) and the creation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in 2003 (Meyers, 2006). Immigration-related enforcement responsibility was transferred to three key components of the newly established DHS: the Bureau of Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) (Meyers, 2006). In March of 2005, Border Patrol (now under the purview of CBP) “formally prioritized preventing terrorists and terrorist weapons from entering the United States. The statement also reaffirmed the agency’s traditional mission of preventing the entry of ‘illegal aliens, smugglers, narcotics, and other contraband’” (Meyers, 2006, para. 63).

Along with these institutional changes, throughout the 2000s and into the present-day, Border Patrol staffing has been consistently and significantly increasing. Additionally, since the early 1990s, the vast majority of all Border Patrol agents and forces nationally have been stationed at the U.S.-Mexico border (U.S. Customs and Border Protection, 2020). In 2004, 9,506 of the 10,819 Border Patrol agents were stationed at the southern border (U.S. Customs and Border Protection, 2020). In 2019, that number increased to 16,731 agents of the 19,648 agents nationwide being staffed at the U.S.-Mexico border (U.S. Customs and Border Protection, 2020).

Those figures represent an 81.6% increase in number of agents nationwide from 2004 to 2019, and a 374.7% increase since 1992.

In addition to increased Border Patrol agents and staff, the past few decades have also seen an increase in physical structures which function to carry out the “prevention through

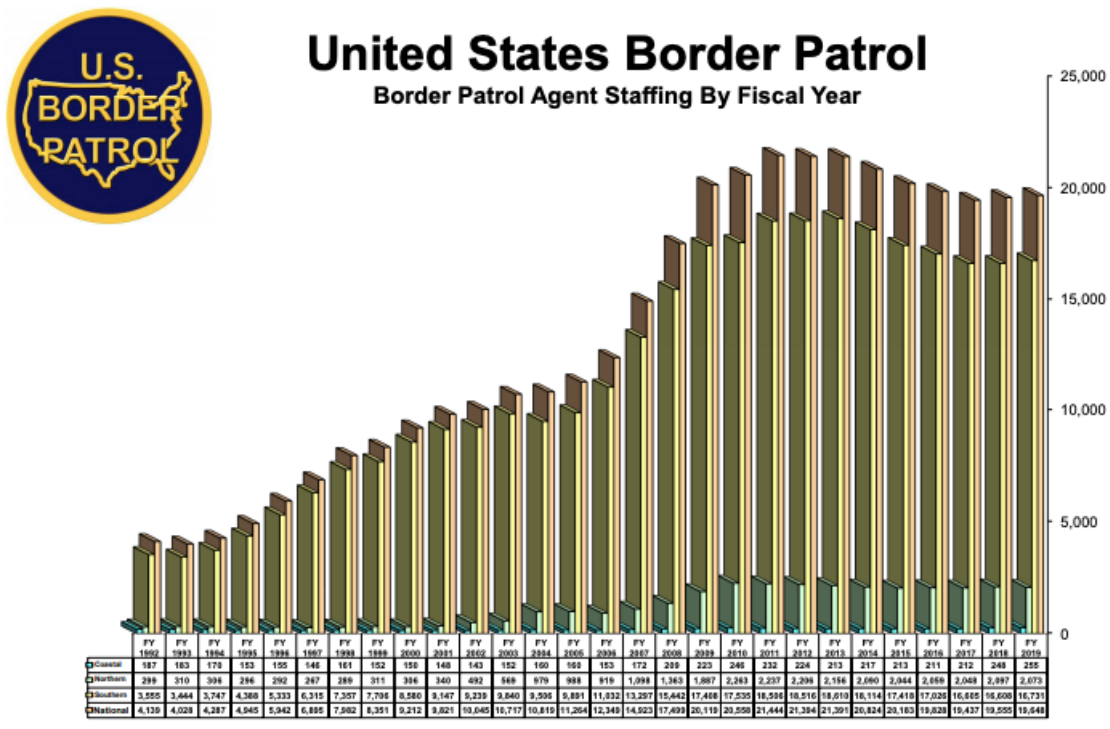


Figure 1: (U.S. Customs and Border Protection, 2020)

deterrence” strategy. Geoffrey Boyce and Samuel Chambers (2021) refer to “the network of walls, checkpoints, and surveillance infrastructures [combined] with natural obstacles of landscape and terrain” as a “corral apparatus” (p. 2). The construction of this “corral apparatus” began in the mid-1990s with the installation of sheet-metal fences in major cities like El Paso, TX and San Diego, CA (Boyce & Chambers, 2021).

In 2005, major legal groundwork was laid for the construction of border security infrastructure with the 2005 Real ID Act. This act “allowed the U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security to waive any laws ‘necessary to ensure expeditious construction of barriers and roads

under this section” (Boyce & Chambers, 2021, p. 3). In 2006, the Secure Fence Act was passed by Congress, “[mandating] the construction of some 700 miles of barrier along the border, including replacing many of the 1990s-era sheet-metal fencing with much more robust slotted-metal fencing” (Boyce & Chambers, 2021, pp. 2-3). By 2009, because of the nearly unfettered control given to the Secretary of Homeland Security by the 2005 act, “hundreds of miles of tactical barriers extended deep into the desert and into protected areas like Organ Pipe National Monument” (Boyce & Chambers, 2021, p. 3). Between 2006 and 2011, several vehicle checkpoints were established on highways throughout southern Arizona (Boyce & Chambers, 2021, p. 3). Also during this time, “the Department of Homeland Security contracted with the Boeing corporation to launch a high-tech integrated surveillance network titled “SBIInet” comprised of nine Integrated Fixed Towers (IFTs) along a 28-mile cross section of the Altar Valley” in southern Arizona (Boyce & Chambers, 2021, p. 3).

Integrated Fixed Towers are sophisticated surveillance structures. Standing 120-180 feet high, these towers are “equipped with a range of surveillance equipment designed to... identify and classify ‘items of interest’ near the border” (Blanchfield & Kolowratnik, 2018, para. 6). The technology on these towers include: “radio-frequency radar that can detect moving bodies within a 9.3-mile radius, long-range video cameras to capture everything within a range of 13.5 miles, another radio-frequency radar that can detect moving vehicles within an 18.6-mile radius, and microwave communication receivers that transmit up to 40 miles,” as well as “spotlights and laser illuminators for night operations” (Blanchfield & Kolowratnik, 2018, para. 6). The network of IFTs contracted in 2006 “went live in December 2007, and the Border Patrol has since expanded its IFT network through a 2014 contract with Elbit Systems of America to build 55

surveillance towers in the Tumacacori mountain range...and a 2019 contract with Elbit for an additional 10 towers across the Tohono O’odham Nation” (Boyce & Chambers, 2021, p. 3).

In recent years, the Trump administration has become infamous for the emphasis placed on the construction of “the wall.” In January of 2017, the former president issued Executive Order 13767, titled “Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements” (Trump, 2017). This Executive Order specifically instituted policy to “secure the southern border of the United States through the immediate construction of a physical wall on the southern border” (Trump, 2017, sec. 2(a)). Before Trump took office, “there were 654 miles... of barrier along the southern border – made up of 354 miles of barricades to stop pedestrians and 300 miles of anti-vehicle fencing” (Rodgers & Bailey, 2020, para. 4).

As of October 2020, “669 miles of ‘primary barrier’... and 65 miles of ‘secondary barrier’ - which usually runs behind the primary structure as a further obstacle” have been constructed (Rodgers & Bailey, 2020, para 5.). This includes the construction of “15 miles of new, primary barrier” —where there had been no barricades previously— and roughly “350 miles... of replacement structures and some new secondary barrier” (Rodgers & Bailey, 2020, para. 6-7). Current President Biden “signed an order on [January 20, 2021] ending the national emergency at the border and launching a 60-day review of the project, pausing all construction and calling for a plan to redirect unspent funds” (Siegel, 2021, para. 3). However, the exact future of the border wall and its construction remains uncertain (Siegel, 2021).

The installation of these physical securitization measures coupled with the surge in Border Patrol staffing over the past three decades has created a highly policed, surveilled, and militarized environment at the U.S.-Mexico border. This intense securitization has in turn also taken place on Tohono O’odham land with violative and harmful consequences.

The Impact of Border Securitization Policies on the Culture of the Tohono O’odham

Nation

The increased securitization of the United States-Mexico border has had substantial and significant effects on the lives, land, and culture of the Tohono O’odham. This section will specifically focus on effects of cultural degradation. Cultural degradation in this context can be understood as both symbolic and tangible harms to the sanctity and perseverance of the culture of the Tohono O’odham. Effects of cultural degradation as examined here can be separated into two categories: destruction of land and environment and restricted mobility. The category of restricted mobility will be further divided into three resulting harms: loss of native language, impaired ceremonial practices, and disconnect between Tohono O’odham populations on either side of the United States-Mexico border. A number of testimonies show how “border enforcement measures [have and continue to] disrupt the Tohono O’odham’s ability to fulfill a traditional sense of purpose as caretakers of the land and to sustain the vitality of their people” (Leza, 2019, p. 60).

I also note that policies of securitization and their aftermath are interpreted and responded to in diverse ways by different Tohono O’odham tribal members. For example, there are documented differences between Tohono O’odham government leadership’s and various Tohono O’odham activist groups’ responses to the actions of Border Patrol and the policies of the U.S. government. It is necessary to point out that the viewpoints and perspectives of the Tohono O’odham people on the subject of U.S. securitization are not homogenous. The following sections will describe different concerns voiced by different groups and individuals within the Tohono O’odham tribe, clearly stating which person or entity has raised specific issues.

The Cultural Implications of the Destruction of Land and Environment

As discussed in the previous section, a significant aspect of increased policies and practices of securitization along the U.S.-Mexico border include the construction of a built environment designed for security and surveillance. This built environment, including various kinds of walls, fences, and vehicle barriers, roads and paths, as well as Integrated Fixed Towers, has already and continues to create severe consequences for both the natural desert landscape and numerous sacred Tohono O’odham sites. With respect to this built environment, the history of the Tohono O’odham’s cooperation with U.S. federal agencies in implementing securitization measures is mixed and complex. Instances of cooperation with U.S. federal agencies have been motivated by the security issues faced by the Tohono O’odham nation as a result of the funneling effect of the Southwest Border Strategy of “prevention through deterrence.”

Beginning in the early/mid-1990s, these U.S. policies had the effect of directing undocumented migrants and drug-related activities through the Tohono O’odham reservation, creating vulnerability for the Nation. In the early 2000s, it is reported that the Tohono O’odham “tribal leadership... invited the Border Patrol and other federal law enforcement to assist in stemming the flow of drugs and undocumented immigrants” and subsequently “approved the construction of permanent Border Patrol facilities on Tohono O’odham land” (Singleton, 2009, p. 6). However, “while the tribe... [at one point] supported the construction of a barrier to vehicles along its border, Tribal Chairman Ned Norris [went] on record... opposing... [a] heavily-fortified wall” thought to be planned “under the ‘Secure Border Fence Act’” (Singleton, 2009, p. 6). The issue of wall construction remains controversial.

Construction of a physical barrier at the southern border has produced several kinds of cultural and environmental damage on Tohono O’odham land. For example, in May of 2007, it is recorded that “at least three ancestral bodies were unearthed during barrier construction on the Tohono O’odham reservation” (Leza, 2019, p. 64). In a 2013 press release, the activist group O’odham VOICE Against The Wall, which was founded by Tohono O’odham activist Ofelia Rivas, stated that securitization policies enacted and enforced by the Department of Homeland Security and Customs and Border Protection/Border Patrol have resulted in “[trespassing] and [destruction of] O’odham cultural property” (Trespassed and Destroyed O’odham Cultural Property section). The press release states that several policies and actions of United States government agencies were violative and destructive, and specifically lists the following securitization practices as harmful:

...creating numerous access roads without authorization, including use of community hunting and fire wood gathering roads, grading and destroying mountains and hills including ceremonial use mountains and lands, and handling and destruction of burial sites on mountains and lands, removal of burial items, driving on and over marked burial [areas] such as cemeteries, destroying natural habitat of animals and plants of great significance to O’odham ceremonial use, uses for medicines, and destruction and surveying of mountain tops for proposed surveillance towers without authorization, including assembly of portable surveillance equipment on mountains and hills, and making access roads to these areas without authorization, parking on ceremonial grounds, parking in cemeteries and near or by burial areas, making numerous roads by homes and within communities (O’odham VOICE Against the Wall, 2013, Trespassed and Destroyed O’odham Cultural Property section).

Another activist group, the Baboquivari Defense Project (BDP), has also raised concerns about damage done to culturally significant and sacred sites by Border Patrol specifically. The focus of the BDP, as the name suggests, is Baboquivari Peak or “Waw kiwalik” which is an area that is known to the Tohono O’odham to be “the home of I’ittoi (Elder Brother), the creator of humans, and ‘the navel of the world’ as the location of O’odham emergence” (Leza, 2019, p. 58). BDP activists have “observed and spoken against Border Patrol presence in and damage to sacred areas of Baboquivari Peak” and other sacred spaces (Leza, 2019, p. 58). For example, in November 2007, BDP activists “Dennis Manuel and Ernest Moristo... shared photos of deep tire tracks left behind by Border Patrol vehicles at Baboquivari as well as pictures of trash in this area that they are confident was left behind by Border Patrol agents” (Leza, 2019, p. 59).

The BDP and other environmental activists are also notably “concerned about the Border Patrol’s practice of ‘tire dragging,’” where Border Patrol vehicles drag heavy tires behind them in order “to smooth out the ground where undocumented migrants may tread in order to better track their movement” (Leza, 2019, p. 58). The practice of tire dragging, “along with the constant development of new roads for Border Patrol movement... [is believed to be] degrading O’odham lands and disturbing the desert habitat” (Leza, 2019, pp. 58-59). The Baboquivari Defense Project is an example of an activist group that has “clashed with... Tohono O’odham Nation officials, demanding that tribal leaders better protect the Baboquivari sacred area from both Border Patrol activities” (Leza, 2019, p. 59).

Further degradation of the natural environment and culturally significant sites is observed in the wake of former President Donald Trump’s executive order mandating the construction of a wall along the southern border. In 2017, the Tohono O’odham Legislative Council issued Resolution No. 17-035 which specified an extensive list of concerns regarding the construction

of a contiguous wall. The resolution barred access to and destruction of sacred and burial sites, harm to wildlife and plants which are culturally significant, and disturbance and destruction of human remains. Resolution No. 17-035 (2017), officially titled Border Security and Immigration Enforcement on the Tohono O’odham Nation, specifically states that:

...a continuous wall on the Nation’s southern boundary would further divide the Nation’s historic lands and communities; and prevent Nation’s members from making traditional crossings for domestic, ceremonial, and religious purposes, including the annual St. Francis pilgrimage to Magdalena, Mexico and cultural runs; deny tribal members access to cultural sites, ceremonies, and traditional cemeteries for burying family members; prevent wildlife from conducting migrations essential for survival and general life, health and existence; injure endangered species such as the jaguar and other wildlife sacred to the Tohono O’odham; destroy saguaro cactus and other culturally significant plants; militarize the lands on the Nation’s southern boundary; disturb or destroy tribal archeological, sacred sites, and human remains (p. 3).

The concerns listed in Resolution No. 17-035 identify the cultural harms of securitization at the U.S.-Mexico border. Unfortunately, despite the issues raised by the resolution, wall construction moved forward under the Trump Administration. In February of 2020, Chairman Ned Norris Jr. of the Tohono O’odham Nation testified before Congress detailing the cultural harms caused by construction of the border wall. In this testimony, Chairman Norris (2020) references the border policies of the 1990s, stating that “federal policy designed to move undocumented migrants from ports of entry pushed people onto the nation’s lands, greatly increasing border traffic and causing environmental and cultural harm” (para. 6).

In reference to current issues, Chairman Norris (2020) states that Tohono O’odham “sacred sites and burial grounds” that are of incredibly deep significance to the tribe “have been run over and blown up with a seemingly proud indifference by federal contractors as they rush to build President Donald Trump’s border wall” (para. 2). Chairman Norris identifies specific sacred and culturally important sites that have been damaged and/or destroyed by processes of wall construction. These sites include “Quitobaquito Springs and Monument Hill,” sacred sites that “include burial grounds, and... are located in what is now Organ Pipe National Monument” (Norris Jr., 2020, para. 8). Norris (2020) states that “the National Park Service — the federal government’s own agency — recognizes that there are burial sites located in these areas. Yet U.S. Customs and Border Protection contractors have dismissed these facts and plowed ahead with bulldozing and blasting large portions of this land, [leading] to the ruin of an O’odham burial site and a location historically used for religious ceremonies and as the final resting place for many [Tohono O’odham] tribal ancestors” (para. 8-9). According to Norris (2020), the Trump “administration commenced this destruction with no advance consultation, no notice of the destruction after the fact and no effort to mitigate or avoid irreparable damage to the sacred sites” (para. 9). This lack of notice, communication with and consent of the Tohono O’odham Nation is made possible by sweeping legislation, including the Real ID Act, which allows the federal government to bypass protections for Indigenous land and sacred sites.

The Cultural Implications of Restricted Mobility

Due to the effects of border securitization, the Tohono O’odham people “in Mexico and the United States find it exceedingly challenging to freely move on the land they retain control

over” (Heidepriem, 2015, p. 109). In particular, the “O’odham struggle to cross the United States-Mexico border,” which is something they were able to do “at will until a few decades ago” (Heidepriem, 2015, p. 109). The implementation of rigid fences and walls, enhanced surveillance and policing by Border Patrol agents, as well as the closure of important crossing sites have decreased the ability of the Tohono O’odham to travel freely on their own land.

An additionally significant barrier to free travel for the Tohono O’odham is the fact that “O’odham can only pass through the border at official points, and O’odham without sufficient documentation (e.g., birth certificates, tribal IDs, etc.) cannot cross” (Heidepriem, 2015, pp. 112-113). This severely restricted mobility across the border has effectively endangered several aspects of the Tohono O’odham culture, including their Indigenous language, their ability to practice culturally significant ceremonies, and the unity and connectedness of the O’odham population divided by the border. Christina Leza (2019) quotes “Joseph Joaquin, an O’odham elder and Tohono O’odham Nation cultural resource specialist” as stating:

We were brought into this world for a purpose, to be the caretakers of this land,’ but due to present border enforcement policies and procedures, ‘ancestors’ graves are unvisited; relatives go years without seeing family; and fiestas, wakes, and ceremonial offerings go unattended. Elders, hampered from crossing for a number of reasons, fail to share traditional stories, and to pass on knowledge about the past, about plants and animals, and about caring for their desert home (p. 58).

1) Disconnect Between Populations on Either Side of the Border

I emphasize that the border, as well as both Mexico and the United States as nations, were forcefully imposed upon the Tohono O’odham and their land. The Tribe has existed in the

areas now known as Sonora, Mexico and the American Southwest for upwards of a thousand years. Given this, the border as a symbol and as a built environment effectively bisected the Tohono O’odham nation, in turn dividing communities and families. Presently, within the Tohono O’odham tribe, “many families... have relatives on both the American and Mexican sides” of the border and in turn, “many Tribe members want to cross the border for the simple purpose of keeping in touch with each other and their relatives” (Heidepriem, 2015, pp. 111-112). Further, the Tohono O’odham on the United States side of the border have been able to more effectively retain their culture and traditional language than O’odham on the Mexican side of the border. This division has created a situation in which Tohono O’odham tribal members on either side of the border feel disconnected from one another. In Peter Heidepriem’s (2013) words, “O’odham life on the Mexican side of the border feels like the life of a second-class citizen” (p. 113).

2) Loss of Language

The division of the Tohono O’odham nation and the restricted ability of tribal members to travel back and forth across the border has had notable effects on the Tohono O’odham language. Ñiok is the name of the traditional Tohono O’odham language (Heidepriem, 2015). Only “a few generations ago, almost every O’odham, whether in the U.S. or Mexico,” spoke the traditional language (Kilpatrick, 2014, Facing Extinction section, para. 5). However, “in 2012, researchers from the Center of Research and Higher Studies in Social Anthropology (CIESAS) classified” ñiok (“still called Pápago in Mexico”) into the category “‘critically endangered’... with only 116 speakers” in Mexico (Kilpatrick, 2014, Facing Extinction section, para. 6). In contrast, according to “Jacob Franco Hernández, a Ph.D. student at the University of Sonora...

this count is not accurate” (Kilpatrick, 2014, Facing Extinction section, para. 6). Hernández “worked with the Sonoran O’odham” for years while doing research for “his 2010 master’s thesis” in which he “determined [that] there are only 24 fluent speakers in Mexico” (Kilpatrick, 2014, Facing Extinction section, para. 6).

The Tohono O’odham on “both sides of the border have adopted the dominant language (whether English or Spanish)” of the nation-state that has encroached on their land and culture (Kilpatrick, 2014, Facing Extinction section, para. 7). However, “those on the U.S. side have maintained a much stronger grip on their indigenous language, history and traditions” (Kilpatrick, 2014, Facing Extinction section, para. 7). It has been suggested that “that if those members [inhabiting the Mexican side of the border] of the Tribe could freely pass to and from Mexico, the language would not be so jeopardized” (Heidepriem, 2015, p. 114). The gradual disappearance of the traditional language of the Tohono O’odham on the Mexican side of the border is a clear example of the cultural damage incurred by the securitization policies of the United States government. The damage done by decreased understanding of ñiok on the Mexican side of the border is amplified by the fact that the traditional language is “a means of maintaining and advancing O’odham traditions and stories” (Heidepriem, 2015, p. 114). Further, the separation and stagnation of the Tohono O’odham tribe could pose serious threats to the continuation of significant aspects of Tohono O’odham culture and identity on the Mexican side of the border.

3) Impaired Ceremonial Practices

The restriction of free travel for Tohono O’odham tribal members also has damaging repercussions for a number of Tohono O’odham ceremonial and religious practices, many of

which require travel, and specifically movement across the imposed border. Both the closure of traditional crossing points and documentation requirements for border crossings pose serious obstacles to O’odham communities in carrying out sacred practices/journeys. One example of a culturally significant practice that is impaired by restricted mobility is “an annual ritual for some O’odham [which] entails a pilgrimage to Magdalena, Mexico, for prayer and meditation” (Heidepriem, 2015, p. 111). Another ceremonial journey which requires free travel is the Vikita ceremony, which requires “travel to a sacred area of Quitovac, Sonora” (Leza, 2019, p. 59). Additionally, “restrictions on border-crossing [have] limited or destroyed the ability of O’odham in Mexico to make traditional pilgrimages to Baboquivari Peak (Waw kiwalik) located on the U.S. side of the border” (Leza, 2019, p. 58). To repeat, Baboquivari Peak is an incredibly important location to the Tohono O’odham because it “is the home of I’itoyi (Elder Brother), the creator of humans, and ‘the navel of the world’ as the location of O’odham emergence” (Leza, 2019, p. 58).

Beyond culturally significant pilgrimages, ceremonial practices in O’odham communities also require the gathering and collecting of materials from the desert landscape. For example, natural materials with both “religious and cultural significance” to the Tohono O’odham include, but are not limited to, “bird feathers, pine leaves, and sweat grass” (Heidepriem, 2015, p. 111). A number of “essential O’odham practices require transporting these materials throughout their land,” something that has become increasingly difficult with the imposition of border securitization policies (Heidepriem, 2015, p. 111).

Finally, and while less directly related to the restricted mobility concerns of the Tohono O’odham, the practices of policing and surveillance along the border are *also* seen as impeding O’odham cultural and ceremonial practices. O’odham VOICE Against the Wall (2013) writes in

a press release that the activities of Border Patrol “[violate] O’odham cultural rights” by “interference and disruption of ceremonial hunts by their presence in hunting areas (even upon proper notice to their head authorities), disarming traditional hunters, helicopters flying over hunting area, trucks, ATV’s and horses in hunting areas, spotlighting ceremonial dancers, driving through ceremonial grounds and driving and parking in ceremonial grounds” (Violated O’odham Cultural Rights section).

Critical Analysis

My analysis in this section problematizes the fundamentals of the creation and enactment of U.S. policies of securitization along the southern border, contextualized by the cultural and material harms to marginalized communities and specifically, the Tohono O’odham. I argue that securitization is being carried out at the expense of the Tohono O’odham Nation, its culture, and its people. The two frameworks that have informed my analysis of the harms done by U.S. border securitization include characterizations of U.S. border securitization policies as a form of U.S. imperialism and as cultural genocide. Finally, I note the importance of acknowledging the Indigenous experience at the U.S.-Mexico border, a perspective that is too often omitted from discussions of U.S. immigration and border politics.

Imperialist policies of the United States government are not exclusively inflicted upon foreign nations, but in fact the securitization processes and policies being implemented at the US-Mexico border are constitutive of United States imperialism. Jeff Hendricks (2006) points out that “the United States government is a government of occupation here in North America and the lands that it continues to claim and occupy are in spirit still the autonomous territories of the indigenous tribes that existed here before the first European colonists stepped foot on the

continent” (p. 1). In this sense, the destruction of Indigenous land and culture, as well as the violation of Indigenous sovereignty, are direct and indirect consequences of U.S. securitization at the southern border, and the immigration and border policies of the United States are being implemented in ways that directly and indirectly harm the Tohono O’odham and their traditional way of life.

The destruction of Indigenous land and culture and violation of Indigenous sovereignty in pursuit of severe and expansive securitization are here understood as imperialist in nature. Harsha Walia (2013) coined the term “border imperialism” to reference the creation and reproduction of “global mass displacements and the conditions necessary for the legalized precarity of migrants which are inscribed by the racialized and gendered violence of empires as well as capitalist segregation and differential segmentation of labor” (p. 40). Walia (2013) argues that “borders represent a regime of practices, institutions, discourses, and systems that [Walia defines] as border imperialism” (p. 23). Walia (2013) further argues that “border imperialism not only makes possible the transgression and violation of non-Western communities’ autonomy in order to maintain the interests of the Western empire, it also denies any accountability for its own victims” (p. 24). Walia (2013) further justifies and explains these claims with the assertion that “Western governance and statehood is constituted through multiple modes,” notably “including the primacy of the border that delineates and reproduces territorial, political, economic, cultural, and social control” (p. 22).

I argue that Walia’s definition of border imperialism can be used to describe the U.S. government’s policies and practices of securitization at the southern border. The Tohono O’odham Nation and its people have experienced destruction of their land and culture, as well as the violation of their tribal sovereignty and individual rights to mobility and safety on their

ancestral land. They have suffered these harms as a result of United States border securitization, which prompts Andrea Smith (2013) to write that the Tohono O’odham nation “has essentially become a U.S. militarized zone” (p. 3). Referencing Indigenous activists who opposed Arizona’s notorious SB1070, Smith (2013) identifies “not migration but the nation-state and its reliance on control and ownership of territory as the problem. [Activists] are arguing that immigration is an Indigenous issue because settler colonialism ultimately depends on an exclusivist concept of nation based on control and ownership of land and territory that is demarcated by borders” (p. 4).

Tohono O’odham activist Ofelia Rivas has been a vocal critic of securitization policies implemented at the U.S.-Mexico border and a significant figure in the fight to defend O’odham land, sovereignty, and culture from infringement and damage by the United States government. In an interview with Jeff Hendricks (2006), Rivas argues that “the real ‘problem’ is racism and discrimination” and claims that in reality, “the threat against national security is used as the basis for the increased ‘monitoring’ of the borders and ‘enforcement’ of immigration laws and criminalization of humanitarian acts by the O’odham and other peoples” (p. 5). In effect, Rivas argues that that United States policies of securitization at the southern border are more substantively grounded in the regulation and restriction of racialized bodies, including Black and brown migrants and Indigenous peoples, rather than the ostensible goal of genuine national security. Further, Rivas states to Hendricks (2006) that “with the reservation now under federal control—ostensibly due to the ‘threat of national security’— the tribe has lost [its] ray of self-governance” (p. 6). Rivas is exposing how, in many ways, the United States government has taken unilateral control over Tohono O’odham land and is violating Tohono O’odham sovereignty.

In reference to the securitization policies which have socially, culturally, and physically divided the Tohono O’odham, Ofelia Rivas claims that “sealing of the international boundary is the demise of the remaining O’odham way of life,” characterizing it as “legal cultural genocide” (Hendricks, 2006, p. 7). Lindsey Kingston (2015) cites George E. Tinker, who “writes that ‘cultural genocide can be defined as the effective destruction of a people by systematically or systemically (intentionally or unintentionally in order to achieve other goals) destroying, eroding, or undermining the integrity of the culture and system of values that defines a people and gives them life’” (p. 65). Kingston (2015) also clarifies this position by giving a definition of culture, writing that “‘culture’ itself is a complex and often contested concept [that] should not be equated simply with ‘high culture’ such as literature or art, nor should it refute the possibility of survival and adaptation” (p. 65).

In the context of this thesis, culture “refers to the wider institutions that are central to group identity,” including, but not limited to “language, religious practices and objects, traditional practices and ways, and forms of expression” (Kingston, 2015, p. 65). Further, “markers of culture” for Indigenous peoples could “also include territory, modes of governance, and relationships to the natural environment, including plants and wildlife” (Kingston, 2015, p. 65). Several of these listed cultural components are aspects of Tohono O’odham life that have been both materially and figuratively damaged or destroyed by U.S. policies of securitization, thus embodying the definition of cultural genocide presented by George E. Tinker, who writes that “cultural genocide destroys the cultural structures of existence that give Indigenous people a sense of holistic, communal integrity” (Kingston, 2015, p. 67). This can clearly be observed in the case of the Tohono O’odham, who are quite literally divided by a nation-state border that separates the Nation physically, culturally, and socially.

The conceptual frameworks of both border imperialism and cultural genocide provide valuable insights regarding the effect of U.S. securitization on the Tohono O’odham. Analysis through the lens of border imperialism, as articulated by Harsha Walia, problematizes the very foundations of United States policymaking and in particular, the regulation of the border and its effects on the Tohono O’odham Nation. Walia (2013) makes two points: first, that “border imperialism works to extend and externalize the universalization of Western formations beyond its own boundaries through settler colonialism and military occupations,” and second, that the simultaneous “reinforcement of physical and psychological borders against racialized bodies is a key instrument through which to maintain the sanctity and myth of superiority of Western civilization” (p. 23). This argument underscores Walia’s understanding of United States border policy as grounded in settler colonialism and white supremacy and is clearly applicable to the context of the Tohono O’odham along the U.S.-Mexico border.

Settler colonialism and military force have historically relegated Indigenous populations to reservations, and in the case of the Tohono O’odham, these aspects have continued to materially and culturally harm the land and its people, ostensibly in pursuit of national security. This notion of defending and preserving national security, however, has been questioned by many, including O’odham activist Ofelia Rivas, who argues that the goals of the United States are to restrict and repress racialized and marginalized bodies. In addition, the framework of cultural genocide, as described by Lindsey Kingston, prompts a discussion of human rights and international law, and whether or not culture can/should be legally protected. Citing George Tinker’s definition, Kingston’s description of cultural genocide is taking place at the U.S.-Mexico border as a result of U.S. policies of securitization. The framework of cultural genocide expands the possibilities of intervention that may be taken to address the material and cultural

harms being faced by the Tohono O'odham, potentially expanding the terrain of re-imagining and changing international law to reflect acknowledgement of cultural genocide as a grievous harm and a necessary issue to address.

Conclusion

Several Indigenous nations, including the Yaqui, the O'odham, the Apaches, the Cocopah, the Kumeyaay, the Pai and the Kickapoo, had their ancestral and traditional lands divided by the imposition of the U.S.-Mexico border (Alianza Indígena Sin Fronteras & Leza, n.d.). Indigenous peoples are significantly and directly affected by U.S. border policies, yet the Indigenous perspective is one that is not commonly enough found in academic coverage of the U.S.-Mexico border conflicts and immigration policies. It is my perception that the dominant narrative of the U.S.-Mexico border revolves centrally around the United States perspective of security and U.S.-centric characterizations of Latin and South American migrants seeking to cross the border.

With this, border securitization by the United States has created a hostile, heavily policed and surveilled environment in the borderlands between the U.S. and Mexico and on the lands of the Tohono O'odham Nation. Policies and practices of securitization have had significant tangible and symbolic impacts on the Tohono O'odham, including harms to multiple traditional aspects of their culture. I argue not only that U.S. border securitization policies are incredibly problematic and harmful to the Tohono O'odham, but also that they constitute border imperialism and cultural genocide based on the numerous documented instances and trends of cultural degradation. I conclude that acknowledging, analyzing, and understanding the impact of U.S. border and immigration policies on Indigenous nations is vital to both academic discourse

and activist work. Critically engaging with the experience of the Tohono O'odham in the borderlands provides necessary insight for analysis of the border securitization policies of the United States government.

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