

Elizabeth Vasquez-Sanchez

Dr. Carolyn Gonzalez

SPAN 307

6 December 2020

### The Virgin of Guadalupe: the Two Stories of Mexico's National Symbol

For my final project I have decided to research what the Virgin of Guadalupe represents for Mexicans and how her image may have been used to help with the conquest of Mexico by the Spaniards. I first heard the idea that the Spaniards created the Virgin of Guadalupe to facilitate the conquest of the indigenous in my HCOM 245: Introduction to Mexican American Studies course. I was further intrigued by the concept with the discussions we had about the role of the Virgin of Guadalupe. In my HCOM 245 class, we also touched on how the conquest affected Mexican immigrants religiously. Once learning that catholicism was forced on the indigenous in SPAN 307, I decided to further investigate the use of saints for the colonization of Mexico, but more specifically the Virgin of Guadalupe. With my project, I hope to take the idea that was briefly introduced, in the past, and what we have learned about the Virgin of Guadalupe to find out whether or not her apparition was used to convert the indigenous to catholicism. If this were the case, I would like to learn more about how this process took place. I would also like to touch on the Virgin of Guadalupe becoming part of Mexico's national identity, despite being a patriarchal society.

The incorporation of *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* by Rodolfo Acuña has been incorporated into the drawing so far by bringing to the table the question of who or what the Virgin of Guadalupe symbolizes. Is she a symbol of Mexico's national identity because she

facilitated the conquest? Or is she a symbol of national identity because of cultural, historical, and religious (outside of the conquest) value?

For many years, Mexicans in Mexico and the United States gather and celebrate the Virgin of Guadalupe on the 12th of December. The Virgin of Guadalupe first appeared to Juan Diego on his way to mass at the hill of Tepeyac. During this first encounter, Guadalupe spoke to him in Náhuatl, his native tongue, and asked him to tell the archbishop, Juan de Zumarraga, that she wanted a church to be built there. Zumarraga did not believe this the first time, so he asked for proof. On December 12, 1531, Juan Diego presented the archbishop with the evidence he asked for. Where Juan Diego had collected the roses Guadalupe asked him, appeared the image of Guadalupe, that can now be found in her basilica in the city of Mexico (Univision).

For nearly 500 years, this is the story that is retold in Mexican families and the catholic church during the nine days before the annual celebration of December 12. What is not told, is the other side of the formation of the Virgin of Guadalupe, and how her apparition may have been plotted by the church to facilitate the conquest of the indigenours in Mexico (Acuña). The first years of colonization were not as easy as the Spaniards would have wished. Despite their efforts of evangelization, the indigenous were still resisting dominance by revolting against the Spaniards and maintaining their own religious beliefs and practices (Peterson 40). A modified version of the Virgin Mary, an existing catholic figure, appeared to be a brilliant way to persuade the indigenous to convert to catholicism in a way where the indigenous now saw themselves reflected in the religion that was being imposed on them. At first sight it appears not, but “...the Virgin of Guadalupe conveniently reflected the colonial church’s image of the native population that it sought to bring under its control.” (Peterson 40). The image of Guadalupe includes dark-complected skin, or as known in Spanish: *piel morena*, “straight black hair...[,] humble

attitude [,] and pious gesture” (Peterson 40). Instead of having to reinvent the wheel, the Spaniards modified what was already part of the indigenous’ beliefs for their own benefits: the conquest of ‘New Spain.’ In addition to creating a catholic figure that resembled indigenous traits, the Spaniards also chose the site for her basilica wisely: Tepeyac, a hill that before the apparition was known as a “pilgrimage site dedicated to several pre-Columbian earth deities” (Peterson 39). For this reason, many refer to the Virgin of Guadalupe as Coatlicue Tonantzin, both Nahuatl words. Tonantzin is one of the facets of Coatlicue, an Aztec deity. Tonantzin being “our mother” and Coatlicue being the “mother of the Gods and mortals” (Encyclopædia Britannica). Because there are correlations between the role that the Virgin of Guadalupe plays to Mexico today and what Coatlicue represented for the indigenous, it is believed that the Spaniards got their inspiration for their modified version of the Virgin Mary from the indigenous’ gods.

The appropriation of indigenous beliefs was not the only thing that contributed to the acceptance of Guadalupe by the entire nation, including the indigenous, creoles, etc. There are three known events in which the Virgin of Guadalupe was placed as the leader of the people that led to her being known as a national symbol: the epidemic of 1737, Mexico’s fight for independence (1810), and the Mexican Revolution (1910’s). During the epidemic of 1737, about 90,000 people had passed away due to a plague. It wasn’t until “the Virgin had been invoked” that the epidemic began to fade away (Peterson 43). Because of the aid that was provided to the people of New Spain, she was declared the “principal protectress” (Peterson 44). The result of this invocation benefited everyone, especially those living in the Mexico City and Puebla regions, but even then the Virgin mostly had the support from those that were part of the higher end in the hierarchy. The following century, in 1810, Mexico was in need of more help from the Virgin of Guadalupe as Mexicans sought to become independent from Spain. The second plea for

help came when all those living in New Spain wanted to become independent from Spain. This includes creoles, indigenous, mestizos, etc., despite their differences in social status. This time, the people didn't unite in prayer, rather Father Miguel Hidalgo named the Virgin the "General Captain" of the movement (Peterson 45). Like in 1737, the people were once again thankful for the favor that the Virgin had conceded, therefore she began to gain more followers. Lastly, we see the virgin becoming a symbol for a movement in the decade of 1910, during the Mexican Revolution where Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata "invoked the Virgin of Guadalupe to support their cause" (Peterson 45). At the time of the epidemic, Mexico's fight for independence, and the Mexican Revolution, there was still a social hierarchy between the indigenous, creoles, mestizos, etc., but they were able to unite under one symbol for the good of not them as individuals, but also the nation as a whole.

The process started off as a sketch, at the beginning of my research, of what I was hoping to find while conducting research. My first sketch includes a modified version of the Mexican flag. This version of the flag consists of the typical breakup: green, white, and red. The thing that changes? The eagle that was at the center of the flag changed into a modified version of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The modified version of Guadalupe is included to depict her as a national symbol of Mexico, hence the change of the eagle and snake at the center of the Mexican flag. The version of Guadalupe in the painting is a reflection of the information and identities that have been found throughout this research. Like in many of the interpretations encountered, the Virgin of Guadalupe is the central figure, because I focused on trying to figure out who Guadalupe really is, a question mark became the central figure. The question mark not only symbolizes the fact that this piece was the product research question, but also the fact that, in reality, Guadalupe is a mysterious figure within Mexican culture. Behind the question mark lay

the two stories of Guadalupe: the one known by the church and the one that is born through a further analysis of the first story. The top half pertains to the story told by the church. A cross is included to symbolize the evangelization of the Spaniards. To keep this interpretation relevant to the original Virgin of Guadalupe, the hands attached to the cross make reference to the original image, but also the prayer that the church suggests. The bottom half references the second story of Guadalupe; her ties to the indigenous. The brown background with the white print symbolizes, not only the skin color of the indigenous, but also their ties to the land. Relating to their ties to the land, and the appropriation of indigenous beliefs, the brown also represents the earth deity: Coatlicue. Coatlicue is further represented by including the separated hands in her statue and a snake since Coatlicue translates to “serpent skirt” from Náhuatl.

In addition to relating the flag and the Virgin of Guadalupe as factors of Mexican identity, I also included other factors that attribute to the Mexican identity. The first is at the top right corner, the night sky with the fireworks. This was included to draw the connection between the celebration of Mexico’s independence and the role that the Virgin of Guadalupe played. To this day, Mexico’s independence is celebrated with fireworks that are more visible at night. In the bottom corners I decided to include a clear, blue sky as a reference to “Cielito lindo,” a song well-known by all Mexicans.

## Work Cited

- Acuña, Rodolfo. *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*. New York : Pearson Longman, 2004. Accessed 6 Dec. 2020.
- Peterson, Jeanette Favrot. “The Virgin of Guadalupe: Symbol of Conquest or Liberation?” *Art Journal*, vol. 51, no. 4, 1992, pp. 39–47. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/777283](http://www.jstor.org/stable/777283). Accessed 7 Dec. 2020.
- Poole, Stafford C.M. *Our Lady of Guadalupe*. Tucson, The University of Arizona Press, 1996, pg. 214-225. Accessed 30 Nov. 2020.
- The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica. “Coatlicue.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 28 Jan. 2016, [www.britannica.com/topic/Coatlicue](http://www.britannica.com/topic/Coatlicue). Accessed 17 Dec. 2020.
- Univision. “¿Por qué celebramos a la Virgen de Guadalupe?” *Univision*. 8 Dic 2014. [www.univision.com/patrocinos/por-que-celebramos-a-la-virgen-de-guadalupe](http://www.univision.com/patrocinos/por-que-celebramos-a-la-virgen-de-guadalupe). Accessed 13 Dec. 2020.

## **Bibliography**

Gutierrez, Lizeth, Saucedo, Maria, Garcia, Silvia, et. al. "La cholita de Guadalupe." *Mujeres*

*Talk*. [mujerestalk.org/2014/11/04/la-cholita-de-guadalupe/](http://mujerestalk.org/2014/11/04/la-cholita-de-guadalupe/).

Lopez, Alma. "Our Lady." (1999) *Feminism and Religion*.

[feminismandreligion.com/2016/02/04/la-virgen-de-guadalupe-new-feminist-portrayals-by-jose-duran/](http://feminismandreligion.com/2016/02/04/la-virgen-de-guadalupe-new-feminist-portrayals-by-jose-duran/).

Noradoa. "La Virgen de Guadalupe." (2006) *Shutterstock*.

[www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/mexico-city-march-26-painting-guadalupe-241912906](http://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/mexico-city-march-26-painting-guadalupe-241912906)

Paz, Octavio. *El laberinto de la soledad*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 22 Aug, 2016, pg. 27-36, 24 Sep, 2020.

Rico, Israel. "Superwonder Lupana." (2009) *Feminism and Religion*.

[feminismandreligion.com/2016/02/04/la-virgen-de-guadalupe-new-feminist-portrayals-by-jose-duran/](http://feminismandreligion.com/2016/02/04/la-virgen-de-guadalupe-new-feminist-portrayals-by-jose-duran/)