

THE IDEOLOGICAL APPROPRIATION OF LA MALINCHE

IN MEXICAN AND CHICANO LITERATURE

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La Malinche is one of the most controversial figures in Mexican and Chicano literature. The historical facts about her life before and after the Spanish Conquest are largely speculative. What is reliably known is that she had a significant role as translator, which developed into something of mythic proportions. The ideological appropriation of her image by three authors, Octavio Paz, Laura Esquivel and Cherríe Moraga, are explored in this thesis.

The full extent of the proposed rendition of La Malinche by Octavio Paz is the basis of the second chapter. The conclusion drawn by Paz, in *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950) is that La Malinche is what he calls *la chingada* [the raped/violated one] and proposes that all women are always open to conquest, sexually and otherwise.

Laura Esquivel's novel *Malinche* (2006) is a re-interpretation that focuses on the tongue as the source of power and language as the ultimate source of autonomy for La Malinche. This aspect of La Malinche and the contrast of Paz's understanding are the basis of the third chapter of this thesis.

Cherríe Moraga, in *Loving in the War Years* (1983), proposes that if women are to be traitors, it is not each other that they should betray but their cultural roles as mothers and wives. She writes that in order to avoid being the one who is passively colonized, women often times become *el chingón*. However, ultimately women are free of these limiting dichotomous roles are able to autonomously define themselves in a way that goes beyond these labels. This is only possible when La Malinche is re-interpreted by these by different authors.

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CHAPTER 1

LA MALINCHE: FROM THE HISTORICAL TO THE MYTHICAL

La Malinche, also known as Malintzin Tenepal, Doña Marina or Malinalli, is one of the most controversial figures in Mexican and Chicano literature.¹ The historical facts about her life before and after the conquest are largely speculative in nature and deeply ideologically appropriated and determined. What is known reliably is that she had a significant role in the Conquest as translator and this position developed into something of mythic proportions. In the Spanish chronicles, such as Bernal Díaz del Castillo's *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*, she is acknowledged as an important aid in the conquest and appears next to Cortés, as an ally in the indigenous accounts (Díaz 66-67). As colonial chroniclers retell accounts of the conquests, they focus on different aspects of La Malinche, which reveals a distinct historical, political and ideological perspective.

In the period following the Mexican Revolution, the image of La Malinche as a respected counterpart to Cortés was transformed into a symbol of treason and betrayal. As the country looked to form a new national and cultural identity, it glorified the indigenous past and rejected the notions of conquest and subjugation of its indigenous population. At the same time, La Malinche became associated with those who had allied themselves with foreigners against their own people and country. This portrayal of La Malinche as betrayer of her people is one

¹ She has been called by all of these names and the most recent of these is Malinche. I am opting to call her La Malinche because it is the name by which she is most recognized. Bernal Díaz del Castillo refers to her as Doña Marina, using *Doña* as the honorific title given to Spanish ladies at the time. The Spaniards named her Marina as she was baptism. From the Spanish chronicles it is known that others also referred to her by this name, including Cortés. The indigenous accounts refer to her as Malintzin. While it is not known with certainty where her name originates, it is most likely derived from one of the 20 days signs of the Aztec calendar, Malinalli, meaning hierba torcida.

thoroughly situated in a patriarchal, specifically heterosexist and deeply nationalistic framework. My thesis examines the various interpretations of La Malinche, in particular, that of three prominent authors in Mexican and Chicano literature. Octavio Paz, Laura Esquivel and Cherríe Moraga ideologically use images of La Malinche as a paradigm through which they present a particular vision of the world. My focus is first to explore the relationship between the written work of the authors and their depictions of La Malinche and second, to compare these different versions of La Malinche and their ideological grounding to one another.

In order to understand the various interpretations, it is important to first understand the historical period in which life and myth of La Malinche emerges. The Conquest of Mexico by the Spanish conquistadors began in 1519. Historically, it was an extraordinary military feat that brought a multitude of disparate indigenous cultures under a unified Spanish rule. This was only possible because of the slaughter of thousands of indigenous people and the subsequent subjugation and enslavement of survivors. However, its overall effect was the establishment of a complete *mestizaje*² (Candelaria 2).

La Malinche's role in the Conquest of Mexico is known mainly through a portrait depicted in the Spanish chronicles and the indigenous codices. In this chapter, I begin with a brief overview of the biographical information about La Malinche: first, by analyzing her portrayal in the Spanish chronicles; and secondly, by analyzing the indigenous records of the Conquest via the codices. Finally, I present an overview of the positions held by the three authors that is the focus of the subsequent chapters.

² The term *mestizo* refers to persons of mixed blood, not in all cases referring to the specificity of such mix. Throughout this thesis, it refers specifically to those people of Amerindian/indigenous Blood European.

To understand the role of La Malinche within the Aztec society, it is important first to gain insight into the social structure, religion and place of women within the empire. The Mexica territory was increasingly stratified as the conquest of the surrounding states grew. At first, it was divided according to the different clans, *calpulli*, which had relatively democratic lines of responsibility and power. However, as the empire grew, the system became more rigid. A ruling class soon emerged, the *pipiltzin*, and it held the status of nobility, as the wealthiest and most powerful group within the empire (Candelaria 2). Cypress also states: "At the pinnacle [of the social stratification] was the emperor.... [who] once chosen, [was] considered a descendant of the sun and a deity who could not be touched or looked upon by the common people" (17). At the lower levels was the *macehualtin*, the working class, which was responsible for the day-to-day sustenance of the new order (Candelaria 2). At the bottom of the social structure were the slaves who were typically the victims of wartime captivity but could regain their freedom after they had fulfilled their work (Cypress 17).³ This social division was achieved among the Aztecs through the social forces of obedience. In the time leading to the arrival of the Spaniards, there are records indicating that the practice of ritual sacrifice increased considerably. Again, this leads to a better understanding of the internal discontent that the empire suffered before Cortés and his troops appeared in the land.

Religiously, Moctezuma reinforced habits of obedience, discipline and conformity (Candelaria 3). Religious belief dominated the daily lives of the Aztecs, as there was much importance placed upon the calendar. The calendar was composed of thirteen months each with 20 days. Each calendar day was associated with a symbol that was either fortunate or star-

³ It is speculated by some scholars that La Malinche was a slave at the time of Cortés' arrival but that she was born into the ruling class.

crossed. The day upon which a child was born dictated the destiny of that child. Hence, there was no belief in free will or individual initiative because an individual's destiny was ultimately in the hands of the gods. Cyclical destructions in the Aztec cosmogony were a large part of the understanding of determinism or predestination that dictated the lives and fates of the Mexicas. Central to this notion of determinism was the return of the Feathered Serpent, the god Quetzalcoatl. This god was the symbol of death and resurrection, and while there are a myriad of myths surrounding his departure from the sacred city of Tula, it was believed that he left to the east, to the coast of the Atlantic Ocean, with the promise of returning one day. Quetzalcoatl's followers believed that he would return on the year Ce-Acatl (One Reed) in the Aztec calendar, which was equivalent to the year 1519 A.D. Because of this faith in Quetzalcoatl's return, it is not surprising that upon the arrival of the Spaniards near the coast of Yucatan, the indigenous there believed that the Spaniards' arrival was in fact the return of the Quetzalcoatl. The Aztec people first assumed that the men who arrived in ships from the east were either accompanied by the incarnation of their benevolent god or they were their emissaries coming to regain the empire as Book 12 of the *Florentine Codex* states:

[The mexicas] got in canoes and began to row toward the ships. And when they arrived next to the ship and saw the Spaniards, they all kissed the prows of the canoes as a sign of worship. They thought it was the god Quetzalcoatl who was returning, whom they had been and are expecting, as appears in the history of this god. (Lockhart 59)

Of course, this possibility was dismissed as the Aztecs soon realized that the "peace-loving" god would not destroy his own sacred city of Cholula. As Cypress indicates, "The massacre [of Cholula]... must have dispelled the terrible misunderstanding" (22). The initial confusion and Moctezuma's vacillation in dealing with Cortés and his troops, contributed to the

volatility that was present within the empire. Further, it strengthened the Spaniards' efforts of conquest.

Before the arrival of the Spaniards in Mexico, the role of women in the Aztec civilization was restricted. Women were under a strict discipline throughout their lives and because of rigid social and religious structures, women had very limited roles within society; even in small daily tasks they were excluded from many of the activities of their male counterparts. However, it was common that girls who were part of the *pipiltin*,⁴ the noble social class, be educated. For the most part, women were given very particular social roles and the ruling class often sexually exploited women and girls of all social classes. This gender bifurcation was particularly evident in war, which was always a role reserved for males. This is evidenced even linguistically, since in most of the native languages in this area there was a single word used for "male" and "warrior" (Candelaria 3). This points to a patriarchal and heterosexist society that unifies the ideas of war power with masculine dominance.

Given this historical context, it is evident that La Malinche falls outside of the normative role assigned to women, in both the Amerindian and European models. After being gifted to Cortés in Yucatan, La Malinche became a translator, guide and political mediator. However, her initial role of translator in the conquest was not an unusual one for women of her time. Often times slave girls, usually in their teenage years, were given or sold to men of higher classes. As Cypress points out, sexual relations with slave girls were not deemed immoral since they were regarded as "bought objects" (25). While her role as translator and guide to the Spaniards was

⁴ The *pipiltin* were members of the hereditary nobility and occupied the top position in government.

not particularly unusual because she was regarded as property, the extent to which she was able to execute these obligations was truly remarkable.

La Malinche in the Spanish Letters and Chronicles

The Spanish chronicles⁵ significantly contribute to a greater understanding of La Malinche and her particular role in the Conquest of Mexico. The *conquistadores* wrote several letters to King Charles V during the period of colonization. Of particular importance are the first-hand accounts of Cortés himself, through his letters and Bernal Díaz' chronicles. Hernan Cortés, who was the lead explorer of the land in Mexico, sent reports to the King through the *Cartas de relación* (1519-1526). López de Gómara, who acted as Cortés' secretary, published a version of the conquest that was significantly controversial. Due to this Cortes' soldier, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, was inspired to "set the record straight" (Cypress, 1).

The five letters that make up the *Cartas de relación* by Cortés are an attempt to secure royal favor, and eventually a royal appointment as governor of New Spain. Because they served for this particular purpose, it is not surprising that they are one-sided accounts that often do not relay the extent of La Malinche's role in the conquest. In the second *Carta*, La Malinche is only briefly mentioned twice. In one of these instances she is mentioned not by name but rather as, "the interpreter whom I have, an Indian woman from Putunchan..."(Cortés 73). In the final *Carta*, he states that the interaction between himself and the *cacique* is through the interpreter La Malinche. He states, "The interpreter with whom [the *cacique*] was speaking, Marina [La Malinche]...[has] traveled always in my company after she was given [to] me as a

⁵ The term Spanish chronicles is used here to reference the corpus of letters, personal narratives and memoirs from the time of the Spanish colonization of Mexico.

present with twenty other women” (Cortés 376). These are the only references of La Malinche in the letters to the King during his time in Mexico. However, much of this can be explained by the purpose of his letters, and an understandable interest to hide his personal relationship with a non-Catholic, indigenous woman.

While Cortés does not explicitly offer much information about his intimate relationship with La Malinche and her value as a translator, much can be concluded from what is known about his life. First, Cortés and La Malinche had a son, whom he named Martin after his own father. Even though this son was illegitimate, naming his son after his father was particularly significant given the mores of the Spanish culture at the time. Second, Cortés grants her a significant portion of land following his departure to Spain, in August of 1520. Even though she was not part of the ruling class in Spain, she was deeded land, a privilege granted only to the Spanish nobility in the time following the conquest. Lastly, before returning to the mother country, Cortés arranged for her marriage to Don Juan Jaramillo, one of his right-hand men. After her marriage to Don Juan very little is known about her and there are no further accounts of her life either by the Spanish or the indigenous.

One of the most important renditions of La Malinche is by Bernal Díaz del Castillo. In his chronicles, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, Díaz del Castillo first introduces La Malinche as a great and important figure in the conquest of Mexico. He highlights her knowledge of the different indigenous dialects and languages and her ability to quickly learn Castilian as a valuable asset. Furthermore, her incomparable knowledge of the lands and her loyalty and bravery were described as highly valuable to the *conquistadores*. Bernal Díaz del Castillo writes:

As [La Malinche] proved herself such an excellent woman and good interpreter through the wars in New Spain, Tlaxcala and Mexico, Cortés always took her with him... [La Malinche] was a person of greatest importance and was obeyed without question by the Indians through New Spain... without the help of [La Malinche] we could not have understood the language of New Spain. (Díaz del Castillo 66-67)

It is important to mention that while he wrote this many years after the actual events, historians often cite only a few minor facts as being questionable or inaccurate. It can be concluded from this and from the letters of Cortés that the Spaniards regarded La Malinche as the most important woman, if not figure, in the *conquista*, the key indigenous ally and one who protected the Spaniards.

La Malinche as Represented in the Indigenous Codices

La Malinche is depicted as the “tongue(s)” in the codices⁶ that were recorded at the time of the conquest. It is important to point out that Moctezuma’s Nahuatl title is Tlatoani, which means “He Who May Speak” and which was indicative of him as the “speaker” for his people. This largely augments Malinche’s importance in the conquest as she is depicted as *la lengua de los dioses*. Her exceptional ability to communicate was certainly acknowledged, as she was capable of not only speaking with the various tribes that the Spaniards encountered, but also mediating in the interactions between Cortés and Moctezuma. Her unique capacity is only amplified when we take into consideration that the emperor was regarded as divine and was not even to be looked at directly. It can be conjectured, however, that she was allowed to look at the emperor while she spoke with him.

⁶ “Codices” here refers to pre-Columbian and colonial-era books written by the Aztecs. Most of these are largely pictorial; they were meant to symbolize spoken or written narratives. The ones during the colonial era also contain some Nahuatl, Castilian and occasionally Latin.

The Florentine Codex, which was written around 1578-1579, is thought to be the most complete version of the conquest as experienced by the Aztecs. Chapter 9 of Book 12 makes the first reference to La Malinche stating: "it was told... to Moteucçoma [Moctezuma]... that a woman, one of us people here, came accompanying them as interpreter. Her name was Marina and her homeland was Tepeticpac..." (Lockhart 86).⁷ The depictions of La Malinche throughout the codices are always portrayed with her proximity next to, in front of or above Cortés. Keeping in mind the androcentric nature of both the Aztec and the Spaniard cultures, this is a highly unusual and note-worthy occurrence. In chapter 18 of Book 12 of the codex, she stands above the Mexica in a depiction of the house of Moctezuma, as she gives orders to her people. (See Figure 1.2.) La Malinche holds the power to speak to the indigenous people and to command them. Again, the importance is that her expected social position is not only overcome but reversed by her ability to leave her prescribed gender role and become a seemingly authoritative figure to her people. One of the most important depictions of La Malinche in the codex is an image of her standing in the middle of the meeting, with Moctezuma to her left and the Spaniards to the right. In this depiction there are speech glyphs that are going both to Moctezuma and the Cortés. She is facing Moctezuma, but the speech glyphs appear to be going in both directions, as seen below. Furthermore, the size of her image, larger than Cortés and Moctezuma, her position, in the center, demonstrates her importance (Figure 1.1).

⁷ This is an English translation of the codices by Lockhart. The name Marina is the name given to La Malinche upon her baptism by the Spaniards.



Figure 1.1 Malinche the Translator: La Malinche stands between the two leaders shortly before the destruction of Moctezuma's temple.

After the Spaniards are settled in the palace, La Malinche asks the servants to bring food and water to the Spaniards. The translation reads:

[W]hen the collection of all the gold was completed, thereupon Marina [La Malinche] summoned to her... all the noblemen. She stood on a flat roof, on a roof parapet, and said, "Mexica, come here, for the Spaniards are suffering greatly. Bring food, fresh water, and all that is needed, for they are suffering travail, are tired" [...](Lockhart 124)

Following her command, they reluctantly acceded but were afraid to go near the Spaniards since they had witnessed the ravaging of both the palace and the private home of Moctezuma in their search for gold. It is mentioned that she is the one who summons the *tecuitles*, lords, and the *piles*, nobles, to give the Spaniards supplies (Lockhart 125). She is seen in this same moment speaking to the people who bring the food to the Spaniards. Her ability to

command the Aztecs shows that she was not a victim but a powerful ally of the Spaniards.



Figure 1.2. Malinche the Interpreter: La Malinche communicates with a person from Teocalhueyacan likely as translator for Cortés.

In the *Codex* she does not appear again until Chapter 25 of Book 12, after many battles have occurred in which she is not portrayed. When she appears again, she is the translator for Cortés as they communicate with the people from Teocalhueyacan. They appear to be grateful and honored of Cortés' desire to spend the night at their settlement. In this depiction, she is seen standing next to Cortés in a robe that is much more elaborate than what the rest of the indigenous people are wearing. She is standing while Cortés remains seated next to her.



Figure 1.3. Malinche's Role Expands: La Malinche speaks with the indigenous that bring gift offerings to them.

The placement of the two figures is interesting, as she is the one who speaks to the indigenous people, who are also standing. They bring food to Cortés and La Malinche, they place it before them as they speak with La Malinche. It appears that she ceases to be merely a translator and becomes a pivotal character in Cortés' campaigns.

While there are two more depictions of her in later chapters of the Book, there is no mention of her until Chapter 41. This chapter depicts the meeting of the rulers of Mexico, Tetzcoco and Tacuba, probably in 1525. In this meeting of male rulers, La Malinche stands next to Cortés. It reads: "The Indian woman who was interpreter, called Marina [La Malinche], placed herself close to the captain [Cortés], and on the other side was the lord of Mexico, Quauhtemochtzin (Cauhtémoc)⁸; he was covered with a cloak called *quetzalichpetzli*" (Lockhart 251). This encounter occurs after the return of Cortés to Tenochtitlan and he asks,

⁸ Cauhtémoc was the last emperor of the Aztec empire. He was the ruler of Tenochtitlan from 1520 to 1521 AD and was successor to Moctezuma, who fell to the Spanish conquest lead by Hernán Cortés.

through La Malinche, for the location of their gold. This interaction ended with the sacking of the empire and the capture of Cuauhtémoc. La Malinche's role, in this final destruction of the empire, was recorded as being that of translator and intermediary as the leaders spoke to her and not directly to Córtes.

It is important to note that in much of the contemporary literary criticism that mentions La Malinche, the codices are largely ignored. Instead, the criticism and new renditions of the conquest narrative departs from the Spanish Chronicles. This highlights the preference for Eurocentric narratives over that of indigenous pictorial depictions.

Historical Overview of La Malinche

The Spanish chronicles, as shown above, concur in that La Malinche was an indigenous woman who was gifted to Hernan Cortés and his soldiers, along with twenty other women. Because of her ability to learn the Castilian language, along with her extensive knowledge of both the Nahuatl and Mayan dialects, she became a translator and mistress to Cortés.

Because of her knowledge of history and so many diverse cultures and languages, she must have attended one of the schools for noble women. It is also generally agreed that she was sold into slavery only after the death of her father, a *cacique* and member of the noble class. After his death, her mother remarried and had a son. She may have sold Malinali into slavery as a way to safeguard the inheritance and right to rule of the son (Díaz del Castillo 66-67). The historian William Weber Johnson notes, "[Her mother, Cimatl] sold the girl to some travelling traders, who later resold her as a slave in Tabasco. To conceal this act... the body of a slave's daughter, deliberately killed for the purpose, was displayed as proof that Malinali had

died” (43). It is noted that the practice of trading or exchanging slave girls was common at the time, and so La Malinche was one of twenty girls presented to Cortés and his men. It is likely that when she joined Cortés, La Malinche had been thoroughly conditioned to serve her masters with obedience.

Even though she was gifted to the Spaniards upon their arrival, she did not immediately become Cortés’ translator, but was presented first to Alonso Hernández de Puertocarrero, one of the captains whom Cortés often favored. In fact, it was not until they discovered that she was able to speak both the Mayan and the Nahuatl dialects that she became of particular interest to Cortés (Johnson 44). In contemporary works, her role in the different battles has left many to speculate about her role as a possible betrayer of her people. It is important to note two things: first, as a slave woman, and even as a mistress to Cortés, her obedience and loyalty was necessarily to her master, and second, she was not uniquely alone in her role as slave-property of the Spaniards, or even in her seeming loyalty to the Spaniards. Because of this, it seems unlikely that La Malinche would have acted as a sole ally of the Spaniards. She was also not exceptional in her engendering of a *mestizo* child. In fact, it is noted by Weber Johnson that Cortés had several *mestizo* children with slave-mistresses; some of these were women in Cuba whom he later had baptized and given Castilian names (40).

The importance of her role in the Conquest is undeniable, as she was important to both the Spaniards and the native peoples as an interpreter. From the *Codices* we see that she not only translated for the Spaniards, but also for the natives in speaking to the Spaniards. While there is little criticism that points this out, it was nonetheless important for the leaders of the Aztec world and the surrounding cities for her to act as interpreter. Furthermore, according to

Bernal Díaz's chronicle, we find that Malinche's role in the conquest is often referred to as *faraute*. This is an archaic word meaning "busybody" but as Margo Glantz concludes, the word advances the notion of La Malinche as liaison between the two cultures. Her role in the conquest, then, is multifaceted because "in part her role is that of spy, but more importantly [it is] that of interpreter of both cultures, in addition to being the molder of the drama"(173). She had to communicate beyond the linguistic translations, she had to communicate cultural differences and had to have had an understanding of both cultures in order to accurately decipher the message.

As previously mentioned, La Malinche gave birth to Cortés' son. Historians believe that La Malinche was approximately thirty years of age when she gave birth to Martín. He was born in approximately 1522 and he seems to have been the favorite child, as he was legitimized by Pope Clement VII in 1529, and was left a thousand gold ducats a year for life according to his father's will (Cortés 465). Cortés had a second illegitimate male child, Don Luis with a different mistress (Miralles 224). Due to this, many historians have concluded that in Cortés and La Malinche's relationship there was not a romantic connection. Given this, the romantic relationship between Cortés and La Malinche seems to be of little importance to her role as translator and aid in the conquest.

After she bore the child of Cortés, La Malinche was married off to one of Cortés men, Juan Jaramillo. As Miralles mentions, the marriage seems to have not been romantic in nature and Bernal Díaz del Castillo writes that they were married while Juan Jaramillo was intoxicated. While it is not known with certainty if it was Cortés who arranged the marriage, it is known that he had married another mistress with one of his men (236). Since she did not write her own

story, we are left merely with questions about her personal life, her marriage and her happiness in fulfilling the multiple roles she played as translator, mistress, wife and mother.

It is chronicled that La Malinche was indispensable in the spread of Christianity throughout the newly conquered land. Along with Cortés and her husband Juan Jaramillo, La Malinche travelled throughout New Spain spreading Christianity. She was able to translate the long Christian sermons of Cortés to the indigenous people. In 1525, they had taken Cuauhtémoc captive and he had followed them on an expedition in Honduras. Cortés had been warned by a couple of new indigenous converts that the former emperor was plotting to kill him. Díaz del Castillo recounts that he believed Cuauhtémoc to be innocent and yet the order to kill him was carried out. In 1525, his dying words were spoken through La Malinche as, “Now I understand your false promises and the kind of death you have had in store for me. For you are killing me unjustly. May God demand justice from you, as it was taken from me when I entrusted you myself to you in my city” (Díaz del Castillo 262). These last words by Cuauhtémoc show that it was through the evangelical promises of Cortés and La Malinche that they were entrusted with the city and thus the city became susceptible to being conquered by the Spaniards.

In April of 1526, she took sail with her husband Juan Jaramillo who decided to join Cortés on another journey. Because of the strong winds, they landed in La Habana, Cuba. Before arriving, the very pregnant La Malinche gave birth to her first daughter, María. She had spent two years at this point without seeing her son whom she had left in Tenochtitlan. Upon her return to New Spain, it is said that her son ran away from her and took refuge in the arms of his *nodriza* [caregiver]. It was only after several days that they became accustomed to one

another. Cortés and La Malinche parted ways upon their return to Mexico, and little else is known about her life. It is assumed that she lived with her husband Juan Jaramillo, who became the mayor of a small town in Mexico. Cortés on the other hand, returned to Spain. The exact date of his departure is not known. There is very little known about her after this time and even her death is mentioned only as a secondary thought (Miralles 264). It can be concluded that, as her separation from Cortés grew, the writers of the Chronicles noticed her less and less. This appears to be particularly important, as it is her relation to Cortés that seems to be of significance, not La Malinche alone as a historical figure.

There are seemingly three stages of the creation of La Malinche as myth. The first is the forming of a mythologized account, through diverse cultural lenses and interests, of the woman who was a translator for the conquest, a mate to Cortés and a pivotal figure in the development of Mexico, as discussed above. The second is the development of the scapegoat myth, which comes to fruition in the nineteenth century amidst the Mexican independence movement and through the work of Octavio Paz. The latest is the contemporary vindication of her image through appropriations by Chicano and Mexican writers to posit a new rendition of La Malinche.

Cypress notes in *La Malinche in Mexican Literature* that the image of this woman has been transformed from a historical figure to a major Mexican and Latin American archetype of mythic appeal. The most important event in the mythification of La Malinche is undoubtedly the period following Mexican independence. Octavio Paz notes, in the foreword to *Quetzalcoatl and Guadalupe*, that for “the majority of Mexicans, Independence was a restoration, that is, an event which closed the interregnum established by the Conquest” (xii). This is a direct contrast

to the aftermath of the Conquest in which the newly established viceroyalty exalted the European customs, religion and civilized manners. It is not until Mexico gained independence from Spain and is influenced by the ideas of the Enlightenment that the Mexican people began to reflect upon the events of the Conquest. The treatment of the indigenous people was questioned as is evident in the novel *Xicoténcatl*, published in 1826, which significantly contributed to the need for a scapegoat in the formation of the new national identity (Cypress 44). The author of this novel is unknown, but it is the first novel published as a narrative of the Conquest in the time following colonization. It is here that La Malinche begins to be described as the negative foil in Mexican historical narrative. The novel depicts a fictional young girl, Teutila, who becomes the love interest of both Cortés and Xicoténcatl, which instigates jealousy in La Malinche. Teutila refuses the opportunity to be Europeanized several times, while La Malinche is held guilty of the torture and misfortune of the Amerindians (Cypress 44-56). The representation of La Malinche in the novel points to a clear denouncement of her as evil and treacherous. Her only redeeming quality in the novel is that of motherhood. As this is a reflection and a first attempt to understand just what happened during the time of the conquest, it seems sensible that she is depicted as the villainous character.

A different view of La Malinche is presented in Ireneo Paz's novel *Doña Marina* (1883). The narrative emphasizes both her physical beauty and extraordinary physical strength. More importantly, he mitigates the guilt that is placed upon the sole figure of La Malinche as the indigenous capitulation to the Europeans. She takes on supernatural strength, especially in her ability to speak different languages, an occurrence that has almost divine implications. He

credits her with the creation of a new race and the symbolic engendering of the entire Mexican people (Cypress 74-78).

In the time following the Mexican Revolution, the country endowed poets, artists, and philosophers with the task of creating a unified national identity. There are many portrayals of La Malinche and Hernán Cortés, both positive and negative. One of the most famous renditions of the myth is that of Octavio Paz. While it was only one imaging of the archetypal mother, “The Sons of Malinche” in *The Labyrinth of Solitude* served to solidify her image as *la chingada*, the namely the raped/violated one. He writes as a Mexican who identifies the woman as the “Other” of man and whose cosmovision is plagued by the dichotomous Virgin/ Malinche figures. This is situated within a history of *mestizaje* and a combination of Hispanic and Amerindian attitudes. He sees La Malinche as the “mother” whose role is dual in the formation of a national identity. She is a reminder of the cruel encounter of the indigenous and European people, which resulted in the creation of a new race through violation and colonization of the people, culture and land. Secondly, Paz also sees La Malinche as *la chingada* who is responsible for the personal origin of the individual Mexican.

The full extent of the proposed rendition of La Malinche by Octavio Paz is the basis of the second chapter of this thesis. It is situated in a very particular time in the history of Mexico, and as such it proposes a different vision of the world and explores the role of La Malinche in the formation of a new national identity following the Mexican Revolution. The conclusions drawn by Paz are important not only for its insight into the role of women, but because it defines La Malinche as *la chingada* [the raped/violated one].

From the establishment of La Malinche as *la chingada*, several contemporary writers have rejected this notion and have re-cast this image in their own renditions of the narrative. For example, Laura Esquivel's novel *Malinche*, published in 2006, is a re-interpretation that presents a heavily contrasted view of the archetypal image of La Malinche. Esquivel writes as a woman of transnational appeal, and a mediator of cultures in her own right. Critics have been keen to point out that Esquivel presents a cosmopolitan socio-political perspective that reflects the author's own time and space. As Vivancos Pérez points out, "[in] *Malinche*, Esquivel presents herself as a messenger, a cultural mediator, a strategist and re-inventor of the drama" (117). Esquivel's La Malinche regains a type of agency through her ability to mediate, by use of the tongue, which is denied in the heterosexist hegemonic version of the archetypal mother. As a translator and mediator, La Malinche is not a traitor of her people but rather is objectified and betrayed by both the indigenous and the European. Not only does her mother sell her into slavery but also Cortés himself gifts her to Juan Jaramillo to be wed. The traitor, then, is not La Malinche, but the Mexican people, the *mestizos* whom she engendered. Esquivel's understanding of La Malinche as portrayed in her novel, is one that empowers the woman by giving her a voice and that establishes that she was not the treacherous one. The rejection of Paz's archetype is the basis of the third chapter of this thesis.

Not only have other Mexican writers accomplished a re-envisioning of La Malinche, but also the revamping of this image is particularly important to the Chicano literary movement. The Chicano identity has formed a different and autochthonous self-identity that is not particularly Mexican nor American but rather some fusion and yet distinct from either. Along this process of self-identification, it has decisively circumvented the historical formation of the

Mexican national identity. Writers such as Gloria Anzaldúa have focused on a glorification of the indigenous roots as an affirmation of a past that is permeated by *mestizaje*. As Chicana writers form a new kind of cultural and political environment in the twentieth and twenty-first century, the image of La Malinche is questioned and recreated. She participates in a triadic mother-figure role in Chicano culture, along with La Virgen de Guadalupe and La Llorona. Each of these images becomes a mediating feminine figure that participates in different ways in the Chicana psyche. Of particular importance is the writing of Cherríe Moraga, who rejects La Malinche's stigmatization as a sell-out in the traditional sense and embraces the notions of betrayal. Her essay, "A Long Line of Vendidás [A Long Line of Sell-outs]" in *Loving in the War Years: lo que nunca pasó por sus labios [what never passed through her lips]* (1983), insists that Chicana women have often betrayed other women in attempting to fulfill their subjugated role to Chicano men. In doing so, it is mothers who betray their daughters; and it is traitors who beget traitors. Moraga then proposes that if women are to be traitors, it is not each other that they should betray but their cultural roles as mother/servant and wife. La Malinche becomes the mother of Chicana lesbians who are *chingones*, actively forging their own identity outside of or beyond the one prescribed by men. A full analysis of the Chicana world-view and its appropriation of La Malinche will be the focus of the fourth chapter.

Finally, the analysis of each of the proposed image of La Malinche by these different authors will render a multifaceted and more complete image of the archetypal mother. I will analyze each of the works by first, understanding the particular context from which the writers present their vision of La Malinche. Octavio Paz writes during the time of Reconstruction following the end of the Mexican Revolution. Laura Esquivel writes as a contemporary Mexican

woman who mediates between the Mexican and American worlds. Cherríe Moraga writes during the height of the Chicano Civil Rights movement as a feminist lesbian Chicana. The time and space of the authors undoubtedly contribute to creating their image of La Malinche. In sum, this thesis examines the heterosexual and patriarchal image of La Malinche, which Paz propagated, and studies how the image has been challenged and rejected by the feminist renditions of Laura Esquivel and Cherríe Moraga. Laura Esquivel understands her as a powerful feminine force whose power is through her tongue, and Cherríe Moraga highlights her as the Chicana lesbian mother who encourages a space for autonomous definition of women of color. For both Laura Esquivel and Cherríe Moraga, La Malinche is free from the heterosexist and hegemonic implications of *la chingada*. Instead they shift their focus on an understanding of La Malinche, and in turn of Mexican and Chicana women, as beyond the dichotomous labels of *chingada* and *chingón*.

CHAPTER 2

OCTAVIO PAZ' MALINCHE: LA CHINGADA

Octavio Paz in *The Labyrinth of Solitude* presents one of the most controversial images of La Malinche. His particular world-view is a result of the time and space from which he writes. Paz's interpretation of La Malinche is undoubtedly one that expresses the dominant discourse of power.⁹ The purpose of this chapter is to critically analyze the resurgence of the image of La Malinche amidst the quest for an autonomous Mexican national identity. La Malinche was, as part of the formation of the Mexican identity, vilified as the betrayer of the Mexican people. She therefore came to be known as la *chingada*. Furthermore, the term *malinchista* became synonymous with anyone and everyone who has ever allied themselves with foreigners. The perpetuation of this patriarchal, heterosexual and hegemonic image of La Malinche is largely indebted to Paz. This chapter begins by presenting the analysis of the context in which Paz presents La Malinche as the colonized/raped mother. Secondly, it analyzes the image of La Malinche presented in the chapter "The Sons of La Malinche" in *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950). Finally, it analyzes the implications of such a portrayal and how subsequent authors have either embraced or rejected the heterosexist and hegemonic interpretation.

In order to understand the challenges that Octavio Paz faced, as a Mexican intellectual, it is important to understand the political climate in the time directly following the end of the

⁹ I borrow 'discourse of power' from Michel Foucault. The term discourse refers to the means of communication, as Foucault proposed that those who control communication are agents that shape meaning and truth of those who are subjects in a society. Any agent who controls the discourse that shapes the reality of the subjects has power. For further reading regarding this topic see Michel Foucault, *Archeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972) and Foucault's "Two Lectures," *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980). pp. 78-108.

Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). This period is considered the transitional period into democracy that propelled Mexico into self-reflection about its identity. The question that permeated intellectual conversation was “What does it mean to be Mexican?” This question was one that Octavio Paz answers in the *Labyrinth of Solitude* as he psychoanalyses the roots of Mexican national identity. For Paz Mexican identity lies in a rejection of both the ancestral indigenous history and the European past of colonization.

The causes of the Mexican Revolution were plethoric. Luis Cabrera, a former Minister of Finance of Mexico, in “The Mexican Revolution- Its Causes, Purposes and Results,” describes the causes of the Mexican Revolution as follows:

[1] revolt against social and political bosses and their despotic methods, [2] conflict in feudal relations in the countryside, [3] rebellion against conditions in factories that resembled servitude, [4] rejection of social and political control by a small group of financial and business magnates, and [5] ambivalence towards the privileged positions of foreigners in Mexican society. (10)

These causes are summed up as revolt against the dominant and powerful elite of Mexico that controlled both the territory and the economy. The natural target of opposition was General Porfirio Díaz, who ruled Mexico for 35 years, from 1876 to 1911. After eight terms he promised to stay in power. During his final election, Díaz imprisoned his electoral rival and the Revolution broke out in 1910. Those who opposed Díaz were typically indigenous people, and lower classes, or *mestizos*. It is important to point out, however, that the indigenous people and lower classes were not the only ones involved in the revolution against the *porfiriato*. As Paz points out, “[a] new generation had arisen, a restless generation that desired a change. The quarrel of the generations became a part of the general discord” (137). The new generation was revolted

against the large social and economic disparity. The fight was more than against Díaz, it rejected the entire system: social, political and economic.

The Mexican Revolution was bloody and cruel and the armed conflict lasted from 1910 to 1921. After the Revolution, the image of La Malinche reappears as a scapegoat because she is a way to perpetuate the “Manichean myth of noble Aztec warriors victimized by the ruthless Spanish rulers, a myth that proved useful to Mexican nationalism” (Pratt 861). While this myth was used in the reconstruction of the Mexican nation following the civil war, it nevertheless left Mexicans with more questions than answers. Were Mexicans to hate both the Spanish father and the indigenous mother? Were the Spanish ruler and his descendants the true villains of the story, or could the Aztec woman become the object of repudiation? Not surprisingly, this created an internalized conflict of identity. After all, the rejection of the European side of the Mexican is a rejection of his personal history. Furthermore, there is a repudiation of maternal figure of La Malinche. Indeed, vilifying La Malinche was concomitant with the development of a strong nationalistic self-image for the Mexican people, one in keeping with the myth that Paz outlines.

In *The Background of Contemporary Mexican Thought* Patrick Romanell postulates, “the characteristic mark of Mexican philosophy since 1910 is its quest for autonomy. The new philosophy in Mexico no longer cares to be handmaiden to an extraneous master, be it church, state or industry” (256). This is markedly a rejection of those in power and serves to further highlight the importance of looking within Mexico’s own history for answers. A look at the past in Mexico reveals a strong control by foreign powers. It then seems important to reject all

things associated with alien domination over the Mexican people. La Malinche becomes a treasonous character as she is seen as a key ally of the Spanish conquest.

The image of La Malinche as betrayer is critical in Paz's work. His most renowned work, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, is highly lyrical and poetic. It is full of imagery, symbolism and metaphor that at times vanishes and at others is distorted as he wanders through the labyrinth of Mexican identity. The title directly points to the most prevalent and important of the reoccurring themes: solitude. This is quite a literary journey that is taken by the individual Mexican, a look at the past and a struggle with these ghost that continue to haunt the Mexican. These phantoms are a constant reminder of a war, discrimination and foreign domination. Amidst this journey, appears the image of La Malinche.

Paz begins by making the case that Mexico is in its adolescent stage, and much like people reach a stage of existential inquiry, so has Mexico come to a time of intrinsic self - reflection and a search for grounded identity. This critical moment causes the country to ask: "What are we, and how can we fulfill our obligation to ourselves as we are?" (13-14). Part of this search involves an intricately psychological inquiry into the Mexican historical past as a product of colonization. As Paz transports the reader to the time of colonization, he carefully displays and analyzes each of the main characters. At the forefront appears the image of the archetypal mother.

In the fourth chapter, Paz establishes the image of La Malinche as the figure and body of the raped mother. He infamously calls her *la chingada*, literally the raped one or the 'fucked one.' In this portrayal, he finds in her the perfect scapegoat for the inferiority complex of the Mexican nation. He also feeds, seemingly inadvertently, the dichotomous categories of Mexican

women as virginal/divine or temptress/sell-out. La Malinche becomes the mother who constantly 'sells-out' her children to the foreign man. "The Mexican has many phantoms that he must continue to deal with," but as Paz indicates, "History can clarify the origins of many of our phantoms, but it cannot dissipate them. We must confront them ourselves" (73). The confrontation psychoanalyzes Mexican people. As he portrays each of the historical figures, the heterosexist, patriarchal society that normalizes and propagates machismo, racism, and sexism undoubtedly influences the author.

Paz speaks of the exclusivity in which language is used in Mexico. Of particular interest to this discussion is the word *chingar*¹⁰ as it can be meaningful, elucidating, and at once obfuscating. It has the power to shed light on some deep cultural traditions and to reflect the particular space and time of the people who use the language. Paz proposes that all curse words in Mexico form part of cultural imaginary in that words have a "double life, at once luminous and obscure, that reveals and hides [meaning]" (74). *Chingar* can be used as an insult but it is empowered by the emotion of the speaker. While often times it has sexual implications, other times it refers to someone's superiority in something not sexual. In México it has varying shades of meaning and emotion, "but in the plurality of meaning the ultimate meaning always contains the idea of aggression, whether it is the simple act of molesting, pricking or censuring, or the violent act of wounding or killing" (76). Paz argues that this word is directly associated with La Malinche. The word *chingar* has sexual connotations but it is not always a synonym with the sexual act, as a man might *chingar* a woman without actually possessing her. La Malinche is *la chingada* not because she appears to have been passive and

¹⁰ The word "*chingar*" is probably derived from the Aztecs: *chingaste*- meaning lees, residues, sediment comes from the words *xnachtli*, garden seed, or *xinaxtli*, fermented maguey juice.

inert in the conquest. The fact that she gave birth to a new mixed-blood people is placed as a distant meta-narrative within the larger account of colonization. According to Paz, she is the reason for the conquest of the Aztec people and due to this she embodies rape, conquest, and brutality. In instances where the word *chingar* refers to the sexual act, there is always an allure of violence or deception. The one who is *chingada* is never a consenting woman. “The verb is masculine, active, cruel: it stings, wounds, gashes, stains. And it provokes a bitter resentful satisfaction.” (76). Furthermore, the person who receives the action is passive, inert and open. The cruelty of the act is paralleled with the penetrating force that the word entails. The speaker, to hurt and pierce the object of his insults, uses the word. Every time this word is spoken with the intent to injure, it is a reminder of the weakness of the mother, La Malinche, and her inability to protect her people from the cruel and penetrating colonial force.

However, *chingar* can also be used among friends who strip it of its power, to injure, and instead deprive it of its semantic value. Of the emotional permanence of the word, Paz indicated that “All of our anxious tensions express themselves in a phrase we use when anger, joy or enthusiasm causes us to exalt our condition as Mexicans: ‘¡Viva México, hijos de la *chingada*!’ [Long live Mexico, Sons of the *Chingada*!] it is a battle cry, a challenge and affirmation” (74). While it is an affirmation of life, “Long live Mexico,” is juxtaposed with the bitter resentment against the maternal figure, La Malinche. As this is the case, the battle cry is used on the fifteenth of September to remember the anniversary of independence from Spain. This is an affirmation of Mexicans in front of, against and in spite of the ‘others,’ the foreigners and their descendants. The relationship with the ancestral past is then an ambivalent one at best, and one that is ingrained into the national family dynamics. There is both a rejection of La

Malinche as mother and betrayer, and yet a coming together of the Mexican people against the foreigners. There is an appropriation of the word among Mexicans that makes it impossible for the enemy, the rival, the stranger to use it because he lacks understanding and legitimacy.

Furthermore, the word *chingar* in Mexico refers quite literally to the mother, who is “opened, violated or deceived. The *hijo de la chingada* is the offspring [literally the product] of violation, abduction or deceit” (79). Spaniards have a similar expression that utilizes the mother as a tool for offense. The phrase used in Spain is *hijo de puta*. The offense, and therefore the dishonor, is completely different. The word *puta* literally means whore and is used interchangeably to describe a prostitute. In this case, for a Spaniard the offense stems from being the product of a “voluntary surrender” (Paz 80). The cultural differences between Mexico and Spain give insight into the nature of their differing ideologies. The Mexican acknowledges that as woman is always open to violation, she is never to choose sexually for herself. In the Mexican paradigm, La Malinche is a reminder of woman’s inability to choose for herself. She becomes the mother who is violated and is used to remind her progeny of the weakness and subservience of the mother. The transgression is two-fold: first, being reminded of the rape of the ancestral/mythical mother, and secondly that as a product of colonization Mexicans are always open to conquest by those with more power.

The appropriation of this word by Mexican society ultimately means a division between the *chingones* and the *chingadas*. Men are left with only two options: to be the dominant and active force that is constantly trying to *chingar* people or to be the passive one who is dominated and *chingada*. The *chingón* is deceitful and *machista*; he gets ahead in business or politics through any means, through corruption and nepotism. Those in politics mix business

with private matters and take full advantage of their position of power. They are indisputably wealthy and influential which allows them to maintain a flock of supporters, *lambiscones*, those who desire to reach the top. This cultural understanding of the corrupt political animal is still prevalent in contemporary Mexican politics and business. Furthermore, while he has people constantly surrounding him, his life is solitary. He is constantly fighting for the ability to be dominant and keenly watching those who may be greater than he. On the other hand, the term *la chingada*, and all women, came to be associated with La Malinche. It is women who are the passive and inert ones, the ones who are taken advantage of and it is the macho/*chingón* who has to constantly prove he does not belong to the category of *chingadas*/Malinchistas. The term *malinchistas* was used to categorize those who were open to foreign domination and allied themselves with foreigners. The implications of this are multi-fold. First, it disseminates the idea that Mexicans are associated with domination by extraneous forces. Furthermore, the Mexican indigenous population, by extension is perceived as further marginalized and associated with weakness and passivity.

Women are categorized within the binaries of Virgin/Malinche; if a woman is not the virginal mother/wife then she must be a *malinchista*, a *chingada*. Because these binaries are formed from the use of the term *malinche*/*malinchista*, it perpetuated racism, machismo and misogyny. This done in an effort to distance themselves from those marginalized, namely the indigenous, Mexican and women.

Many critics have argued that this solitude and feeling of inferiority gives rise to machismo. The term machismo was originally a European creation, one that was transported to

the Americas through Spanish caciques.¹¹ As Paz reminds us, the macho is the model for men in power: caciques, feudal lords, generals, industrialists and politicians (87). As such, the macho is always associated with power as he rises through the use of violence. However, this superiority can be further explored through a psychological analysis of constructed masculinity. As man is the product of colonization and rape, he is torn between the role of violator and violated, as pointed out by Marvin Goldwert in *Mexican Machismo: The Flight from Femininity*. Goldwert names this condition “metaphysical bisexuality,” which leads to a “polarized view of gender, where masculinity is synonymous with the active/dominant personality of the conquistadors, and femininity [...] with the passive submissive personality of the indigenous people” (165). In this view, the Mexican man is limited to two sexual identities. Hence, in order to avoid being the *chingada*, man becomes a hyper- masculine version of himself in what Paz calls, “the *gran chingón*” (81). In Paz’s rendition of the macho there are two types of heroes, the positive is “the rebel” and the negative is “the dictator.” While Paz does not further elucidate these labels, one can infer that the rebel would be associated with the great heroes of the Revolution, Villa and Zapata, and the authoritarian dictator with Porfirio Díaz. Women were at best auxiliary handmaidens who followed the leaders of the Revolution, *soldaderas*. All of these images further supports the image of La Malinche as a passive indian woman who allowed her land to be taken, her people to be enslaved and raped. For Paz, La Malinche was incapable of becoming a *chingón* because she could not be a hero or a dictator. For Paz La Malinche had an auxiliary role in the Conquest that could never have been an active role.

¹¹ For further information regarding the origins of machismo refer to “Identity, Difference, Otherness” in *Multicultural Dilemmas*.” According to Katarzyna Wantoch-Rehowska, the origins of this masculine ideal should be traced back to the Islamic traditions of North Africa, which exerted its influence on the Iberian Peninsula, the cradle of machismo (169).

The Mexican man then sees femininity, and everything associated with the feminine condition, as something repugnant. As such, man must avoid becoming La Malinche/*chingada*, and therein we can find the deeply ingrained implications of homophobia. That is, man is never to appear weaker or feminine. The macho, the hyper-masculine male is then to separate and fear, those who appear to be closer to the image of woman. These notions ultimately, continue to promote homophobia.

Additionally, La Malinche is portrayed as the counter personage of the macho. Paz indicated that in openness there is weakness; La Malinche's acceptance of the Spaniards in Mexico signaled her cowardice. Therefore, Mexican people can never back down and cannot open themselves up because in opening because they are then perceived as cowards. While he might bend or stoop, the Mexican man "cannot allow the outside world to penetrate his privacy." Further, "The man who backs down cannot be trusted, is a traitor or a person of doubtful loyalty" (30). On the other hand according to Paz, Mexican men often perceive women "inferior beings because [...] they open themselves up. Their inferiority is constitutional and resides in their sex, their submissiveness, which is a wound that never heals" (30).

However, as Paz acknowledges that La Malinche's primary role is that of mother, the role of mother must be explored. While La Malinche is the mother who has suffered, metaphorically and literally, the corrosive and defaming action implicit in the verb, *chingar*, she is also the maternal figure. Paz's view of La Malinche is that of a raped mother who has caused the suffering of her posterity through the passivity shown at the Conquest. She has left the Mexican nation with a psychological trauma that makes her sons forever reject her as their mother and yet always connects them to the conquest. While the son rejects his indigenous

mother who is portrayed by La Malinche, he embraces the image of the virginal mother. Salvation from the despotic and foreign domination is found in the arms of the indigenous population's mother, La Virgen de Guadalupe, who appeared to Juan Diego in 1531, coincidentally, on the altar of Tonantzin, the Aztec goddess. The Virgen de Guadalupe was declared in 1960 as the Patron Saint of Mexico; to date, she is the only feminine figure that has been honored as the patron saint of any country. As the Mexican rejects his ancestral roots of colonization, he symbolically becomes an orphan. Guadalupe is the mother of those orphaned, of the poor and weak. She counter-poses what some scholars have called the Mexican Eve, La Malinche.

Of the ancestral father, Paz has much to say as well. The macho/father is always distant, foreign and never belonging to the son's culture. The father is "pure incommunication, a solitude that devours itself and everything it touches" (82). Even though the father is always distant, he is at once omnipresent, with his suppression clearly integral in the psyche of the Mexican. The abject relationship between the Mexican son and his European father is one where the father is distant, yet ever-present and always oppressive. The son both rejects him because of his continuing domination and presence and exalts him for his hyper-masculinity, his macho domination of the indigenous people. Ultimately, he rejects it all; he rejects La Malinche as his ancestral mother for her passivity, and he rejects the ancestral father, Cortés, who is a foreign dominator, thus he is left alone, in solitude. This is undoubtedly the state in which Octavio Paz finds the Mexican people after 300 years of colonization, one hundred years of independence from the crown and 50 years of internal instability.

Octavio Paz writes in a time in Mexico that requires a look into the past for answers and he finds in La Malinche a perfect scapegoat. Given that he writes in the period following the end of the Mexican Revolution when the need to transition into democracy is crucial, it is no surprise that the image of the indigenous woman resurfaces. She never completely disappeared but not all of Paz's contemporaries agreed that she was a betrayer or a woman who passively allowed the rape, murder and enslavement of her people. Paz's position is both controversial and yet becomes the established view of La Malinche. The implications of this stance unquestionably serve to further promulgate machismo. Moreover, it encapsulates women in one of two tropes, virgin or whore. Women have to then also avoid being la *chingada* and have to prove that they are not culpable of duplicity because of their gender. What Paz observed about the Mexican and the image of La Malinche in the Mexican imaginary is contentious. This is particularly true for women authors who have to combat patriarchy to redeem themselves and the image of La Malinche. As will be explored in the following chapters, Mexican and Chicana women have taken on the task of vindicating her image and in doing so present us with a particular vision of the world; one that most often falls outside of or against the patriarchal and heterosexist narrative.

CHAPTER 3

LAURA ESQUIVEL'S MALINCHE: THE POWER OF THE TONGUE

Since Octavio Paz's infamous rendition of La Malinche, many Mexican writers have recreated the image of the mythical mother from their own ideological need. This chapter will focus on the portrayal of La Malinche as a strong feminine figure. Laura Esquivel's novel *Malinche*, is a challenge of the patriarchal, heterosexist and dominant discourse of power presented by Paz. In many ways Esquivel deconstructs the view of La Malinche established in the 1950s. The author imagines the life of La Malinche, that is open to interpretation because of the few historical/biographical facts. As Esquivel puts flesh back on the body of the archetypal mother, she questions the national myth. In doing so, La Malinche regains power through her tongue, that is, her ability to communicate. La Malinche is no longer ancient and foreign, but appears instead as a living reminder of woman's ability to speak for herself and to mediate between two worlds, ultimately leading to the birth of an entirely new race. Esquivel's understanding of La Malinche highlights the archetypal mother's agency. She is in fact not the epithet understood by Paz as *la chingada* but a strong, power and central redeeming figure in the Conquest. .

Malinche serves as a reminder of the mother who has not abandoned her people. Additionally, Esquivel disestablishes the national myth understood by Paz. As it appears that Mexicans have predominantly adopted the patriarchal view, they have rejected La Malinche. As Esquivel explores La Malinche's role of mother, it becomes clear that she was the powerful creator and mediator. While Malinche is the heroine, Cortés' role in the novel is secondary at best and is inconsequential, at worst.

Esquivel, a Mexican-born author, won the praise of critics for her first novel *Like Water for Chocolate* (1989) and became known as “The princess of Latin American literature.” Her mixture of fantasy and realism coupled with her ability to make traditional Mexican culture accessible to contemporary audiences earned her a spot on the *New York Times*’ bestseller list for over a year.

Malinche was published in three editions; two were published in the United States, in English and Spanish, and one was aimed at Spanish-speaking audiences in Latin America. In the former two editions it was published as *Malinche: Novel/ Novela*, respectively, while the latter was entitled simply *Malinche*. These different editions show slight variations in which the note from the editor explains the use of the codices. This note is only included in the editions made for the United States, in both English and Spanish. Esquivel contracted her nephew, Jordan Castelli, make a series of codices that accompanied the novel and narrate the story. As Esquivel explains, it is a way of imagining how La Malinche might have told the story to her children. These codices accompany the written novel as a way of relaying two visions, the written and the symbolic.

The novel is the literary genre in which the myth of La Malinche is first developed following the Conquest. For this reason, Vivancos Pérez concludes that Esquivel chooses the novel to question the veracity of the myth. Though Esquivel claims that the myth of La Malinche is perfect for a novel because of the lack of information provided about her life, Vivancos Pérez argues that it is ideal precisely because of the “profusion [and variety] of artistic and literary representations that continually reinvent the myth [of La Malinche]” (113). The incessant

emergence of the image of La Malinche does not always provide greater insight into the historical facts surrounding her life, but rather she is part of myths used to elucidate the worldview of the people, the time and space in which a new image of La Malinche emerges. The novel itself is written in what some critics have called the 'Esquivelian' style, which combines the world of fantasy and the world of reality, also referred to as 'magical realism.' She highlights the traditional aspects of culinary indigenous delights and exquisitely describes La Malinche's daily tasks such as sewing her beautiful *huipil*.¹² Following previous pictorial depictions of La Malinche, first in the *Florentine Codex*, *Codex of Tizatlán* and later in the works of Diego Rivera and Clemente Orozco, Laura Esquivel includes a visual narrative that accompanies the written one. Castelli follows the written narration with large codices at the beginning of each chapter and with five to eight codices throughout each chapter. This parallel storytelling is essential to the development of Esquivel's novel. As the author herself tells us in the introduction, "It is the way in which I attempt to fuse two visions, two forms of narration, the written and the symbolic- two breathes, two hopes, two times, two heats in one" (viii). These two visions are historically grounded and serve to further fuse the two interpretations of La Malinche. At the end of novel, Esquivel validates the historicity of the narrative by providing a bibliography of the work, a move that is not necessary but contributes to the reminder that La Malinche was far more than a mythical character, she was a historical character. The bibliography also validates the authority with which Esquivel recounts the tale.

¹² A *huipil* is the traditional garment wore by the women of indigenous groups in various parts of Mexico and Latin America. They usually tell a story through different symbols used to describe the woman's condition in life that year, i.e. if she had a good year in cultivation, her marital status and how numerous her family is.

The historical novel follows the master narrative of the Malinche story. The account is told through an omniscient narrator. Her birth is significant because it emphasizes the maternal lineage. Her grandmother aids her mother to bring La Malinche into the world; the father is not present. During her childhood she gains knowledge through her wise grandmother and is then sold into slavery. La Malinche soon meets Hernán Cortés. The love story culminates with the first love scene. They continue from that point forward as a power-couple conquering many people and lands. Through it all, La Malinche constantly is at the right-hand side of Cortés, and she is depicted looking over the newly conquered land with Cortés by her side in admiration of the work they have done together.

Following the birth of their son, she is married off to Don Juan Jaramillo. She returns to Mexico and lives out her days in the company of her husband and children. Finally, she rejoins the eternal forces feminine forces through a conversation with Tonantzin.

Esquivel's La Malinche is undoubtedly a powerful political force that goes between the two great patriarchal societies and male leaders. La Malinche, in Esquivel's reading, is also one who desires her children to be in touch with both cultures and languages. Her strength and power comes from her role as mediator between two worlds and mother of a new race of people. For this reason, Esquivel's understanding of La Malinche is a challenge of the patriarchy's understanding. She is always in control of these masculine worlds. As she is the one who has the power to speak, the Aztec leader and Spanish conquistador are unable to translate and to understand each other's worlds. Because they lack the power of communication, they stand in the periphery of power and conquest. In this novel La Malinche is the heroine and she is the single most important and powerful character in the conquest.

When compared to Paz, Esquivel provides a redemptive view of La Malinche that combats the notions of machismo, racism, and misogyny that were upheld and promulgated by Paz. In *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, Paz concludes that “the Mexican repudiates La Malinche [...], he breaks his ties with the past, he denies his origin and he becomes solitary in his historical life” (78). He reminds us that La Malinche and Cortés belong to a part of our imagination that remains conflicted. This conflict arises from a rejection of both the Spanish father and indigenous mother. While these two cultures contributed and continue to influence the life of the contemporary Mexican, often times there is a sense of rejection of both. It seems that the relationship the Mexican has with his past is one that is always questioned and re-examined. For Esquivel, however, it seems that conflict has become even more multifaceted as some of the Mexican people have also joined, physically and culturally, with that of the United States. As Mexican authors, in particular, deconstruct and recreate the meaning of identity, there seems to be a constant return to the myths that continue to form part of their consciousness.

Pérez indicates that, “As [Esquivel] reinvents the life of La Malinche, she explores the role that gender plays and gives priority to feminist perspectives and voices” (116). The vision presented is undoubtedly feminist. It is one that empowers women, as it reinforces her role as intermediary and powerful translator. While Esquivel’s perspective can be analyzed through her novel, more importance lies in what is experienced by the character of La Malinche. Esquivel opens a window onto the indigenous Aztec world. The reader enters the world of La Malinche and is enraptured by the sights and sounds that make up her world. While the omniscient narrator gives insight into La Malinche’s internalized reflections, the novel presents La Malinche’s words throughout the narrative. It is not told through a first person narration as it is

a historical novel and the omniscient narrator contributes to establishing authority. La Malinche uses her words carefully because, as her grandmother reminds her, words and the act of speaking are holy, a gift of the gods; she says, “Saliva is the sacred water that the heart creates. Saliva must not be wasted on futile words because then, you are wasting the sacred water of the gods” (17). Her strength and power come from her choice of words and from her ability to speak for herself. Furthermore, her role as mediator is always one that is active and purposeful. This is, of course, a stark contrast to the image presented by Paz because the latter sees La Malinche as a passive subject who accepts the penetrating force of conquest.

It is La Malinche who speaks and who has the power to unite two worlds by interpreting them and allowing the conquest to take place or divide them by refusing to use her tongue as the source of *mestizaje*. This appears to be in stark opposition to another of Paz’s assertion that La Malinche was a passive and inert force in colonization. Esquivel’s La Malinche is powerful and always an active agent, a subject, not an object that passively accepts conquest but rather, who is herself the very reason for the blending of the two worlds. Even in fulfilling her obligations as a wife to Juan Jaramillo, La Malinche reminds Cortés of his secondary role calling him “Señor Malinche.” There is evidence for this name in the chronicles of Bernal Díaz as Montezuma himself, referred to Cortés in this way.¹³

Esquivel’s novel sets out to experience the conquest through the world-vision of La Malinche. As the author notes, in the introduction to the novel, it is an attempt to “better

¹³ Montezuma refers to Cortés as Señor Malinche on several occasions. For example, upon the arrival of La Malinche and Cortés in Tenochtitlan, “Montezuma replied: ‘Señor Malinche, I have understood your words and arguments very well before now, from what you said to my servants [...]’ (163). Later when he is taken captive Montezuma pleads “Señor Malinche, if this is what you desire, I have a son and two legitimate daughters, take them as hostages [...]” (189).

understand the process of conquest and why [the Mexican people] have been unable to overcome it. As a nation we have a knot in our throats that has to do with the integration of that paradigm which accepts the cosmic order” (ix). This is reminiscent of what Paz argued, namely that the Mexican is a solitary man because he rejects both his indigenous and his European ancestry. The indigenous people’s paradigm is a foreign concept that fails to fit into the consciousness of the Mexican people. The indigenous have a particular connection with pantheon gods, and with the elements of earth. This is a large part of what the novel does; it forces the reader to come to a place that is both foreign and an integral part of Mexicans’ past. It forces the reader to either remember or learn the ways of reconnecting with the past, and ultimately to reconnect with the strong matriarchal line, with La Malinche.

The importance of this look at the past is clear: Mexicans continue to struggle as solitary beings, as orphans. Esquivel proposes that the ideas inherited by the Spanish empire have left the Mexican people with an entitlement to the land. The “the land stops being mother earth and turns into something appropriable, exportable, along with the aerospace, telecommunications, land and petroleum” (Esquivel, “*Malinche*, de Laura Esquivel, se enfila para ser un éxito editorial” web). While restoring the power of communication between two worlds to La Malinche, Esquivel restores her image as a mother. It is only when the Mexican can reconnect with the maternal and ultimately with the indigenous side of the mestizo that respect will be given to the way of life of the marginalized indigenous people.

As Esquivel’s La Malinche bears children, she desires for them to be inter-cultural and to live in the liminal space between indigenous and European cultures. She does not abandon indigenous culture but rather becomes a mediator of the two paradigms. This greatly contrasts

with Paz's view of La Malinche as a betrayer of her people and as one who abandons her own culture in favor of a foreign one. Esquivel's understanding, however, shows that La Malinche was an intermediary and not one who favored the Europeans to her own native culture.

In the novel La Malinche craves for her children to be *mestizos* and to remember and be proud of their bicultural reality. The narrator tells us that, "She liked that [her children] spoke both Náhuatl and Spanish; that they ate bread and tortillas" (173). It is important that they learn their history and that along with knowing how to read and write Spanish that they maintain the ability to decipher the codices. There is a self-reference as La Malinche creates codices in order for her children to know their history. The codices that she creates are part of the book that the reader is interpreting. Even in the act of depicting the codex, she is able to narrate her own story in accordance with her traditions. The codex is yet another way to reject the patriarchy and accept the feminist world-vision where it is La Malinche who is *el chingón*, free of the epithet *la chingada*. The act of speaking for oneself legitimizes the power to interpret and define one's own life. The focus of the narrator further indicates the intrinsic legitimacy of La Malinche's words. The narrator's insistence on revealing La Malinche's inner thoughts and words further legitimizes the importance of her role in the Conquest. As such, La Malinche has the power to speak for herself by transcribing her experiences into codices that reflect her particular way of seeing the world. The fact that Esquivel desires for her heroine to be the writer of her own history, by creating a codex, is a way to re-affirm her feminine power. La Malinche becomes a type of cultural preserver and historian.

Her most important role, besides that of mother, is of course that of translator which gives her power through her tongue. This is important because her tongue is used as an

equalizing tool and makes her just as powerful, if not more so than, her partner Cortés. Throughout the novel La Malinche is referred to as *la lengua*, the tongue. The reference to her as the tongue has certain gender implications. In many respects, the tongue is where the power stems from. In a patriarchal and heterosexist society, power always belongs to man as his power derives from his phallus; he exerts dominance over woman through the act of penetration. However, in Esquivel's narrative it is not through the penis that power is granted. If Cortés has any power it is not by virtue of his gender but because La Malinche shares it with him. One such example is given as the narrator describes a sexual encounter between Cortés and Malinche. They are in a bathhouse and the room fills with silence as they gaze into each other's eyes. In that moment, "the gaze of one penetrated the other..."(89). There is a mutual penetration here as La Malinche is given a symbolic phallus without depriving Cortés of his ability to equally penetrate her. In an earlier sexual scene it describes their naked bodies as "penetrating the *temascal*¹⁴ together" (83). Here it is obvious that they are both sexually powerful and of equal ability. Malinche is not intimidated by Cortés; she dares to look into his eyes. Their sexual conquest is mutual, restoring a penetrating power to La Malinche that is denied to her through the patriarchal narrative.

¹⁴ A *temascal* a type of sweat lodge used for therapeutic purposes in MesoAmerica. The term derives from the Nahuatl words *temas* meaning bath and *calli* meaning house.

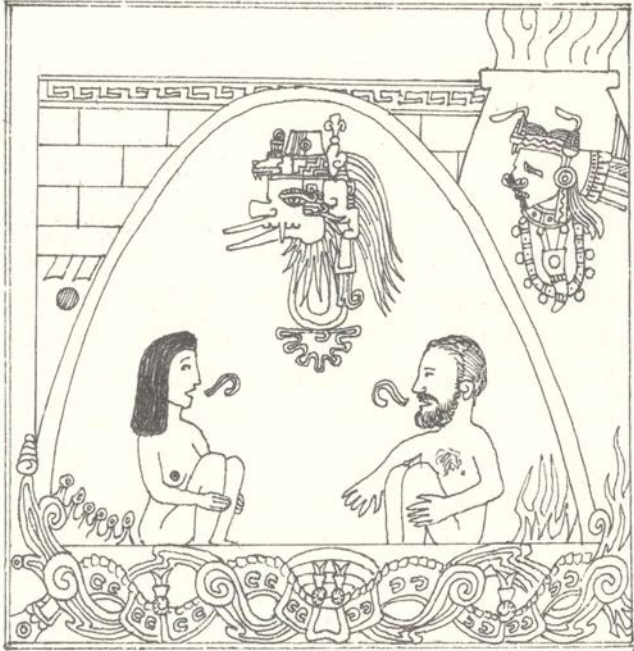


Figure 2.1. Malinche and Cortés in the *Temascal*: La Malinche and Cortés enter the *temascal* while Quetzalcoatl watches ominously.

Above is the depiction of the scene formerly described in which La Malinche and Cortés enter the *temascal*. This is used to portray their sharing of power, as they both have speech glyphs and they are both able to penetrate through these phalluses/signs of power- namely their tongues. Even though this moment depicts one of the many sexual encounters between La Malinche and Cortés, it is important to note that the sexual act is decentralized. It is not a central theme in the novel, thus further breaking from the patriarchal understanding of La Malinche, which is contingent upon sexual conquest. For Esquivel, La Malinche is never *la chingada*, the violated one/raped one, but instead holds phallic power equivalent to that of Cortés. Their first meeting is described romantically with Cortés approaching La Malinche as she is washing clothes in the river. They find each other sexually attractive and make love in the water. While it is full of symbolism, the scene is reminiscent of a soap opera. This move to

entertain seems to be a translation into the contemporary world. Esquivel centralizes the sexual act in order to give La Malinche authority over her own body. She is not raped in the colonial act, but rather gives herself freely to a man that she sexually desires. This is a move that rejects the notions of sexuality imposed by the patriarchy of colonization as always involving sexual domination. Again, mutual penetration grants both La Malinche and Cortés a phallus.

However, as the storyline progresses, Cortés is stripped of his phallus and emasculated as the indigenous people begin to refer to him as “Señor Malinche.” He is secondary because of his lack of power that comes as a result of his incommunication. As Margo Glantz, observes:

[t]o the indigenous she was definitely the owner of discourse, and he, Cortés, was Captain Malinche, head of the Spaniards, a man who was divested of his virility as he lacks the tongue [i.e. speech] because his words are weak, that is to say, they are unintelligible. Only the words of that woman who fulfills her obligation as translator are able to reach her audience: that act of speaking encroaches upon and disestablishes that categorical ideal of the masculine. (172)

Furthermore, an example of her primary role in the conquest is depicted in the codex that portrays La Malinche and Cortés as they enter Tenochtitlan. It is she who leads the expedition.

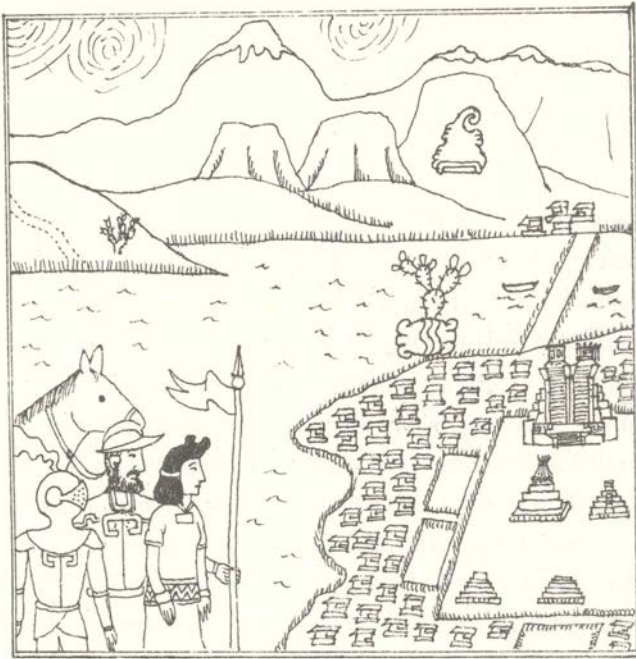


Figure 2.2. Malinche in Tenochtitlan: La Malinche and Cortés enter the city of Tenochtitlan.

In a final act of domination, she completes emasculation by depriving Cortés of further conquest. As the scene takes us to La Malinche reminiscing about Cortés, shortly after marrying Juan Jaramillo, she remembers vividly how they had shared a single vision of Conquest. There was a time in which they had joined in “one single idea” and thought of a single “new universe” (158). But then, she remembers that it was she alone who conquered the empire through her phallus, that is, her ability to speak. She reflects upon her own power and how it had destroyed the empire for the promise of a new people, time and space. She recollects that “[t]he tongue was the cause of everything. [La Malinche] had destroyed Moctezuma’s empire with her tongue”(157). And just as she had caused the destruction of the Aztec empire, in a symbolic castration, she bifurcates her tongue and with it she guarantees the failure of Cortés’ further expeditions. As she castrates herself, by cutting off her symbolic phallus, she does so without

returning the phallus to Cortés. Instead Cortés's defeat is "buried in silence" (159). There is no redemption for the man, as he is forever silenced, and he leaves her story as a man forgotten and weak. In a moment of reflection, Cortés recognizes that the power of words has been the most pivotal factor in the Conquest. He thinks, "Without words, without tongue, without discourse, there would be no enterprise and without enterprise, there would be no conquest" (33). It is not Cortés who has this power but La Malinche who has built the enterprise and has conquered through the power of her tongue. Here again, the tongue becomes a phallic symbol, a symbol of power and domination. It is La Malinche who has the power and who has emasculated both the male leaders, Cortés and Moctezuma. While there is no redemption for Cortés, there is a final redemption for La Malinche before her death as she returns to the eternal feminine force that holds the wisdom passed down from a long line of women.

As not much is known about her life after her separation from Cortés and her marriage with Jaramillo Aguilar, Esquivel imagines her final years as happy ones filled with the joys of motherhood and companionship. Her final return is to the eternal forces of nature and a reconnection with the maternal deities and powers of the earth. As her grandmother bestowed the extensive knowledge upon her of the land and love for the Earth, it seems only appropriate that happiness and deliverance is from the female mother-protector deity, Tonantzin. In fact it is in the very mountaintop where Juan Diego, later historically, encounters the Virgen de Guadalupe on the altar of Tonantzin that Esquivel's La Malinche is entrusted with the progeny.

Tonantzin tells Malinche:

I entrust you with what I love, I entrust you with my progeny, that were conceived from the love that does not have flesh, that were born from love that has no beginning... I leave you, that you are on their mind, so that you direct their steps, that you reside in their words... they, who do not belong either to my world nor to the Spaniards'. They,

who are the mixture of all the bloods... that they never fear you! That they are never alone! (179)

La Malinche is finally entrusted with those who are mestizos, those who are neither of Indian or Spanish blood alone. This is in stark contrast with Paz's vision. Esquivel's portrayal does not leave Mexicans orphaned but rather provides a redemption of the Mexican Eve, La Malinche. Esquivel rejects the models of patriarchy offered by Paz. She breaks the dichotomous vision of Virgin/Whore and Guadalupe/Malinche by bridging the images of the two archetypal mothers in this final revelation. As Tonantzin speaks to La Malinche, she clears her of culpability.

La Malinche is then to be regarded as a guardian of tradition and the protector of posterity. This is the closing of a line of mothers who are the gatekeepers of the Mexican culture. In the opening scene, there appears an image of La Malinche's mother giving birth to her as her grandmother stands by and watches. To be noted is also the appearance of the tongue that stems from the grandmother. It is of women who give birth to women and women who speak for themselves. La Malinche is deprived of her ability to speak as she is only a child and the umbilical cord, that connects her to the loins of her mother, appears to block her mouth. Meanwhile, the image of Quetzalcoatl is present and hovers over the women in a symbolic gesture of protection and blessing over the birth of La Malinche's life. This image is not as much a refutation of patriarchy, as the image of the male god is present as a witness to the event, but further shows women as powerful, life-givers. This image shows three generations of women who are all connected and whose power is passed on through the ability to speak. The grandmother is portrayed as the most powerful figure here as she is the only one

speaking, seemingly guiding the entire event, and it is the grandmother who later on passes on all of her knowledge to her granddaughter, La Malinche.



Figure 2.3. Malinche 's Birth: Three generations of women are depicted, La Malinche, her mother and grandmother; the birth is observed by the god Quetzalcoatl.

The final return to mother-nature is the closing scene of *Malinche*. Its significance is a tie with the ancestral matriarchal line. It is a return to Tonantzin, to mother Earth and to her grandmother. Completing a full circle is essential, as it argues that it is from a long line of women that Mexican and Chicana women come. As the narrator indicates at the beginning of the novel, La Malinche, and her grandmother who rears her, come from a long chain of women who give birth to one another and who connect to the elements of Earth. Midwifery is in and of itself a feminist act. As one critic cites, "Truly, what could be more feminist than the practice of midwifery? The most potent lesson of childbirth is the revelation of essential feminine force. Giving birth calls on a woman to shed her social skin and discover her ability to cooperate with

and surrender to elemental forces” (Davis, 86). Because Cortés is distant and foreign, he lacks the power to communicate and is silenced amidst the Conquest. La Malinche’s role as translator invites her progeny to speak in the space that is in between two worlds, not fully belonging to either but as a separate people who are positively diverse and multicultural. This absolution of La Malinche as betrayer allows Mexican women to also speak for themselves. This rendition of La Malinche ultimately forges a path for other multicultural and feminist perspectives to be active participants in the discourse of power.

CHAPTER 4

CHERRIE MORAGA'S MALINCHE: THE CHICANA LESBIAN MOTHER

The legacy of La Malinche is explored, questioned and ultimately re-envisioned through a feminist Chicana understanding. Cherríe Moraga, in the chapter "From A Long Line of Vendedas" in *Loving in the War Years: lo que nunca pasó por sus labios* (1983), challenges the notions of cultural betrayal by understanding La Malinche as a strong feminine force and an example for Chicanas to follow. *Loving* is a collection of essays, short stories and poems that tell Moraga's own coming-of-age narrative as she struggles with her ethnic and sexual identity. As she explores the various tropes that surround her heritage and the meaning of family, sexual relations and the role of women in the Hispanic and Chicano culture, she embraces the image of La Malinche as a power feminine force.

La Malinche becomes a perfect icon for Chicana writers since the historical aspects of her life are vague at best and can be used to convey a multitude of narratives. For the most part, Chicana writers focus on different aspects of the La Malinche account. Some focus on the historical depiction, others on the inherited mythological one and still others on the ideological one, each revealing more about their particular cosmovision and about their autonomous and self-written cultural history, while still continuing to add to the complexity of the La Malinche narrative. Of these Chicana writers, Moraga is one of the most prominent figures in the literary movement who seeks to include the voices of often marginalized, Chicana lesbian women.

In order to understand Moraga's position, it is important to examine the particular time and space within which she writes. Moraga explains that at first, in the Chicano Movement she did not participate in the marches in East Los Angeles as she was not *tonta*, dumb. She believed

that she would have been murdered in the movement because she was at the time, “light skinned, unable to speak Spanish well enough to hang; miserably attracted to women and fighting it; and constantly questioned all authority, including men’s” (105). However, this changed, as she embraced her own Chicana identity and understood that it was different from the mainstream Chicano movement. This uniqueness was undeniably intertwined with her sexual orientation as gay men and women were further marginalized from the heterosexist, and homogenized white, male society. Along with Gloria Anzaldúa, she was one of the first Chicanas to publish work that reflected a particular Chicana feminist vision, seen extensively in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. With the publication of *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings of Radical Women of Color* (1981), edited by Moraga and Anzaldúa, Chicana lesbians created a space in which to voice their particular cosmovisions as women of color. This opened the door for other women writers such as Norma Alarcón, Adelaida Del Castillo and Lorna Dee Cervantes. As Norma Alarcón points out, the vindication of La Malinche could only be a response to patriarchal forces, as “It is not only Malintzin’s appropriation and revision that is at stake, but Chicana’s own cultural self-exploration, self-definition and self-invention through and beyond the community’s socio-symbolic system and contract” (Alarcón 72). This contract seems to be two-fold for the Chicana. As the Chicana is part of two cultures, Mexican and American, she is outcast because both patriarchies at times seem in odds with each other in claims over which one should be favored. Often times, however, they both reject the Chicana for not belonging completely to one culture or the other. This marginalization is at the epicenter of Chicana identity and it creates a space for Chicanas to gain a voice within the dialogue of power. This is accomplished in ways that are “sometimes ambivalent, and at other times

attempt to topple the traditional patriarchal mythology through revision and re-vision” (203). This is what Alarcón undertakes in “Chicana’s Feminist Literature: A Re-vision Through Malintzin/ or Malintzin Putting Flesh Back on the Object.” Here, Alarcón voices the Chicana feminist perspective that encompasses both national and sexual identity. As the male myth of La Malinche is analyzed, the theme of sexual betrayal is questioned. It appears that this duplicity is realized as one that is primarily sexual. The consequence of such an interpretation is that “it makes it nearly impossible at any given moment to go beyond the vagina as the supreme site of evil until proven innocent by way of virginity or virtue, the most pawnable commodities around” (203). The male myth of La Malinche allows for only the possibility of woman as deviant through her sexuality because she is always open to conquest or rape. Because of this notion, if men for domestic, romantic or purely physical purposes do not interculturally utilize women, they are then open to being used by men in other cultures. From this fear of foreign domination, most often the Anglo, Mexican and Chicano men commodify women in their culture. It appears that to be used or conquered by a foreign culture is always a major transgression. Of course, in this view woman is always passive, so the transgression is greater to the ego of the Mexican and Chicano men.

Moraga’s Loving in the War Years: lo que nunca pasó por sus labios is an eclectic collection of the author’s personal narrative through prose, poetry and favorite quotes from influential writers. It is a coming of age tale that most emphatically dismembers her story, presenting it in puzzle-like pieces, exposing every part of her narrative in various dictions, dialects and combining verse and prose. The narrative centers on the internalized war that Moraga perceives happening in her society. The battles are against a homophobic mother and

culture, and as she fights to gain the words and confidence to self-identify. Moraga struggles with personal identity, as she is light-skinned and passes for an Anglo woman but unequivocally identifies with her mother's Hispanic heritage. Her Chicana mother and Anglo father play central roles in the story as she comes to understand herself as both the oppressor, and the oppressed and ultimately as someone outside of limiting identity labels.

In the chapter "From A Long Line of Vendidas", Moraga begins by quoting Gloria Anzaldúa:

Sueño: 15 de Julio 1982

During the long difficult night that sent my lover and I to separate beds, I dreamed of church and *chocha*. I put it this way because that is how it came to me. The suffering and the thick musty mysticism of the Catholic church fused with the sensation of entering the vagina- like that of a colored woman's- dark, *rica*, full-bodied. The heavy sensation of complexity. A journey I must unravel, work out for myself. (author's emphasis 82)

The chapter ultimately centers around the journey to unravel an autonomous identity within the pressing knowledge of being lesbian and Chicana. She envisions this journey as contrasting her "light-skinned [brother] in a white world" (84). She focuses on his lack of identity crisis. While she is at ends with what it means to be a Chicana lesbian woman, she relays that her brother never felt culturally deprived. Moraga imagines that her brother's desire to identify with, whom she perceived to be the oppressor, was greater because he could enter the white man's world. She, however, could only ever aspire to be the oppressor's woman. From here she begins to explore the root of her sexual and racial oppression.

At the source of this self-exploration lies the myth of La Malinche because the archetypal mother is Chicanas' "sexual legacy" (99). The title alone suggests that La Malinche is a type of Eve model. That is, the woman "sell-out" from which Chicanas trace their heritage. As

Chicanas look to the historical figure as the first 'sell-out,' they too identify themselves as sell-outs. It is a self-deprecating label that at first appears to be debilitating and limiting. As a fair-skinned Chicana, Moraga feels simultaneously trapped by the Mexican and American cultures and free from the masculine tropes for women. She is able to navigate the labels of racial and sexual oppression, as she at times chooses to identify with her Anglo last name and fair skin and at others uses her Hispanic heritage as a way to enter the Chicano community. While Paz describes treason in sexual epithets, *la chingada* and *la vendida*, Moraga indicates that "these cruel labels are used to limit the search for self-identity, for sexual liberation and for self-definition" (112). They inevitably form part of the "Chicana imagination[...] before it has a chance to consider some of the most difficult questions" (112). Instead of limiting the imagination of the Chicana, Moraga urges women to define themselves. At times, Moraga embodies both the passivity of what Paz calls *la chingada* and at other time she is the oppressive force as she calls herself *el chingón*. She embodies La Malinche, and she becomes 'the tongue.' In many ways she takes on the role of translator and reinterprets Chicana sexual identity as one that is multifaceted, and where women are free to choose for themselves. In this reinterpretation, lesbianism is a way to self-identify, although not the only, and promotes women's ability to choose for herself without the feeling of betrayal to a normative structure of prescribed identity. Moraga identifies most strongly with La Malinche as she is the active agent who demands to be heard and who speaks for herself. This is very similar to the view proposed by Esquivel as they both stand in opposition of the heterosexist, hegemonic view of Paz.

In "A Long Line of *Vendidas*" Moraga explores what treason really means. She acknowledges that she is particularly treacherous because she is both Chicana and lesbian.

Sexually she chooses not to reproduce and therefore is perceived as a betrayer to the defined and confined role of women as procreators. However, she then takes this betrayal and embraces it, affirming that this betrayal is positive. That is, instead of feeling marginalization as a negative, shunning away from society she understands that from the periphery she can also speak for herself. From a position that lies outside the discourse of power, Moraga is able to form her own voice. This voice is independent and challenges the norms proposed by the patriarchy. Secondly, she acknowledges that this betrayal is not a betrayal against women but a rejection of the heterosexist and patriarchal norms established by men dominant view. Furthermore, she makes the case that women can also be *chingones*, the active agents who tell their own story in their own way. Ultimately, however, her point is to break the dichotomous labels of *chingones* y *chingadas* through understanding that people must be able to propose an autonomous self-identity free of either of these labels. In order for this to occur, however, it is important to understand La Malinche as a powerful mother figure, an example for Chicanas to follow as they use their voices as the power to speak for themselves.

Moraga begins by acknowledging that she comes from a line of women who have been perceived as traitors to their culture and traitors to other women. This treachery comes in a plethora of ways: lesbianism, education, acclimation to 'American' society, and preference for a white man seems to be at the root of the trouble. However, Moraga insists that, "What looks like betrayal between women on the basis of race originates, I believe, in sexism/heterosexism. Chicanas begin to turn our backs on each other either to gain male approval or to avoid being sexually stigmatized by men under the name *puta, vendida, jota*" (90). Because men have to prove their masculinity, they promote machismo or hyper-masculinity. This forms a chasm

between the dominant heterosexist patriarchy and everyone else. Furthermore, lesbianism is seen as a betrayal insofar as reproduction does not occur and that the male/macho cannot further his genealogy. Education is also a betrayal because educated women are able to question male authority, a deviance from the prescribed domesticated roles for women. Finally, the preference for either the Anglo culture or an Anglo man is seen as a betrayal, one that is of the highest interest. As Moraga described her adolescent experiences with her 'brown' classmates, she relays a sense of stigmatization for being perceived as 'not brown enough.' She drew comfort in a more open-minded, although certainly not fully acceptable, Anglo culture that seemed more accepting of her lesbianism and where she could easily fit in because of her fair skin and last name. Interestingly it appears that it is the Chicano/ Mexican people who first ostracize her and then place the blame upon her for betraying her culture. This is paralleled to La Malinche narrative in that La Malinche is first sold into slavery, ostracized from her family and people, then blamed for a cultural betrayal from the very people who objectified and bestowed her upon the foreign man.

Further, Moraga takes on the image of La Malinche as she first acknowledges that she is a *vendida*, slang for sell-out, and a betrayer to the Mexican and Chicano patriarchal norms prescribed to her. Specifically she recalls, that she became more 'anglicized' because it appeared to her, at a very young age, to be the only option in light of her sexual orientation. She describes being in the seventh grade and having a crush on a young boy who rejected her, she believed, because she was "Not brown enough. And the wrong last name" (91). So when puberty arrived, she swiftly embraced her Anglo identity because it appeared to be "the only option available to [her] toward gaining autonomy as a person without being sexually

stigmatized” (91). This shift in cultural identification is a common theme among multicultural groups as described by Homi Bhabha, who argues that the subaltern uses different identities conveniently during different times in order to gain a voice within the discourse of power.¹⁵ Moraga ultimately embraces both her lesbianism and Chicana-ness as defining roles that help her break free from the Malinche label while understanding La Malinche as someone who was also free of the stigmatization of *vendida, chingada*.

As Moraga embraces La Malinche as her mother, she simultaneously rejects her father. In the introduction to her personal narrative she states: “I am the daughter of a Chicana and an Anglo. I think most days I am an embarrassment to both groups. I sometimes hate the white in me so viciously that I long to forget the commitment my skin has imposed upon my life” (iv). She negates her Anglo culture as she sees herself as a brown woman who is physically marked by the skin of her white father. She rejects the whiteness that is displayed on her skin and the Anglo identity that is superimposed through her last name. However, what she does embrace is what she perceives to be her father’s queerness. She remembers looking at him and knowing that “he did not know how to love us” and continues, “it is my father who is the queer one not my mother” (8). Because Moraga rejects the father and, in turn, his white ancestry, she embraces the mother in two ways: her heritage as the Chicana, both indigenous groups and Mexican, and her womanhood. The realization that her father was incapable of loving her gives rise to an epiphany about her personal identity, “It is the love of the Chicana, the love of myself as a Chicana I had to embrace, no white man” (94). The rejection of her father and his

¹⁵ This argument is most prominently found in: Homi Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1994.

abandonment of her emotional needs makes her turn with more fervor to Chicana women and to her archetypal mother.

As she comes to terms with her own identity as a queer woman, it becomes clear that queerness is grounds for cultural betrayal within the Chicano paradigm. She observes that in the Chicano culture man tries to control woman's reproductive agency. It equates lesbianism with childlessness, and she is seen as a *Malinchista*. The lesbian woman further betrays through her denial of subjugated wife/daughter/sister. In the chapter "From a Long Line of Vendidas," she explains:

The woman who defies her role as subservient to her husband, father, brother or son by taking control of her own sexual destiny is purported to be a traitor to her race by contributing to her people... she is *una Malinchista*. Like the Malinche of Mexican history, she is corrupted by foreign influences, which threaten to destroy her people. (174-175)

As she recognizes that she is a traitor to the male order, she supersedes the image by never betraying other Chicana women. Her lesbianism is a full embrace of women, without the presence of the dominant man. Moraga embraces the image of La Malinche as a powerful, interpreter mother as she herself identifies with the epithet, *el chingón*. La Malinche in the form of the lesbian mother is now the savior of Chicanas, as she is involved in "the regeneration of race and the creation of new races" (Waiting, 38).

Following the understanding of betrayal through the lack of reproduction, Moraga embraces herself as a procreator in a different sense. She notes:

I say to my friends as I drive down 91 South, 'The Mouth is like a cunt.' [...] My mouth cannot be controlled. It will flap in the wind like legs in sex, not driven by the mind. It's as if *la boca* were centered on *el centro del corazón*, not in the head at all. The same place where the cunt beats. And there is a woman coming out of her mouth. *Hay una mujer que viene de la boca.*" (Author's emphasize 142)

As Moraga equates her mouth with the reproductive organ, she is introducing a new kind of understanding of procreation. Procreation can be through the act of speaking; a woman can actualize a thought into an action this way. Just as La Malinche was able to create a new race of people, the mestizos/Mexicans, so too can women continue to create a space to voice their work and themselves through the act of speaking. In the above statement, Moraga expresses her phallic power, through her ability to speak. As she speaks for herself she creates a space where it is acceptable to be a Chicana lesbian and where she can encourage other women to speak for themselves. Moraga at first rejects La Malinche in so far as she wants to distance herself from the label of malinchista but as she explores who La Malinche was, she encourages a questioning of this myth that she cites, “the inherent unreliability of women, our natural propensity for treachery, has been carved into the very bone of Mexican/Chicano collective psychology.” She continues, “Traitor begets traitor. Little is made of this early betrayal, whether or not it actually occurred, probably because no man was immediately affected” (93). It appears that the myth of La Malinche, then, is a convenient one that justifies the outing of mothers and daughters as treasonous when they deviate from the roles prescribed by the male, who is never immediately affected by the prejudice.

Sexual betrayal appears to be a constant theme in Moraga’s analysis of what it means to be a Chicana lesbian. Because women are always to be the penetrated as the *chingadas* by the male, the desire to penetrate another woman is in itself the worst kind of betrayal. Women in heterosexual relationships, Moraga insists, have to “divorce [themselves] from the conscious recognition of [their] own sexuality” (119). In accepting the myth of La Malinche, women have accepted that “the simple act of sex- the penetration itself-implies the female’s filthiness, non-

humanness [...]”(119). These self-deprecating labels are further exalted if one is a lesbian. As she states, “And if we have lesbian feelings- want not only to be penetrated, but to penetrate- what perverse kind of monstrosities we must indeed be!” (119) In rejecting these cruel labels, Chicana feminist lesbians had to create a space that was different from that of white feminists. She finds that Anglo lesbian feminists differ from her in that

The boundaries white feminists confine themselves to in describing sexuality are based on white-rooted interpretations of dominance, submission, power-exchange, etc. Although they are certainly part of the psychosexual lives of women of color, these boundaries would have to be expanded and translated to fit my people, in particular, the women in my family. (117)

She calls this process an act of translation. In this way, she takes on the role of La Malinche in translating the ideas of white lesbianism or Hispanic heterosexuality into something that synthesizes these concepts and that purports a new concept.

Moraga’s writings cite that there are limitations on the autonomous self-definition of sexual and ethnic identity: “The fact of the matter was that all these power struggles of ‘having’ and ‘being had’ were being played out in my own bedroom. And in my psyche, they held a particular Mexican twist” (126). In her exploration of “sex of race” and “race of sex” (125), Moraga provides a space in which women of color can express their desire that is both “twisted and erotically empowered by culturally specific sexual, psychic and social meanings” (125).

Moraga’s seemingly deviant desire for women is played out as she explores the meaning of the *chingón/chingada* binary: “in order not to embody the *chingada*, not the femalized, and therefore perverse, version of the *chingón*, I became pure spirit- bodiless. [...] For what, indeed, must my body look like if I were both the *chingada* and the *chingón*?” (my emphasize 120-121). Her journey to accept herself as free of the dichotomous relationship and to finally

acknowledge her power through freedom of the binaries begins here, with the bodiless. She is neither the dominant sexual actor nor the passive receiver of the sexual act.

Moraga posits that her lesbianism is the “most visible manifestation of a woman taking control of her own sexual identity and destiny, who severely challenges the anti-feminist Chicano/a” (113). The heterosexism that Moraga attempts to combat is then, not remedied with the replacement of lesbianism but rather, beyond lesbianism. It is a call for a self-identification for a move beyond heterosexism as the only grounds for procreation. Moraga becomes, herself the speaker/interpreter/procreator, through her lesbianism.

The tongue is a source of power for Moraga as she states that “*La lengua que necesito para hablar es la misma que uso para acariciar tú sabes....Profundo y sencillo lo que nunca pasó por sus labios* but was utterly heard” (author’s emphasize 149). She uses the tongue as the source of power to become a translator and a voice for other feminist chicana lesbians. By using this tool, she becomes a chingón. She penetrates the discourse of power historically given to the powerful white male.

Furthermore, in the Chicano movement as men rejected the image of a maternal La Malinche because of her association with betrayal and treason, women rejected the Virgin/Whore trope all together because it defined Chicanas as cultural betrayers. Moraga indicates that this betrayal comes about because the Chicana is perceived as “corrupted by foreign influences which threaten to destroy her people” (105). As Chicanas live in the United States, they are influenced by that culture and are perceived to lose or betray their Mexican heritage. Because of this shift in influence, Chicanas choose to vindicate the image of La Malinche, recognizing her as a symbol of power and strength. The stigmas placed upon women

who are perceived as betrayers then is then disestablished. As Moraga indicates, it is women who must “define the parameters of what it means to be female and mestiza” (139). The search for an autonomous definition of who individuals are and the labels with which they choose to identify is central to the interpretation of La Malinche. Moraga continues:

As a Chicana lesbian, I write of the connection my own feminism has had with my sexual desire for women. This is my own story. I can tell no other one than the one I understand. I eagerly await the writings by heterosexual Chicana feminists that can speak of their sexual desire for men and the ways in which their feminism informs that desire. (139)

Moraga bridges her sexual desire with her identity as a Chicana and is able to understand these as self-defining and free of any other cultural or patriarchal understanding and in this way she reconnects with La Malinche.

As with Esquivel’s understanding of La Malinche, strength and power come from women who give birth to women, and women who use their strength to give birth to ideas and to create a space for autonomous identification free of the superimposed and normalized one used by the patriarchy. Moraga uses this image of the strength of woman through her ability to speak, and for autonomous sexual identification. For this reason, La Malinche is the Chicana lesbian mother, who encourages her daughters to use their mouths and their sex as a powerful tool of self-identification that does not always conform to patriarchy. Furthermore, by deconstructing the body and placing the mouth/cunt in the heart, she elucidates the very constructs of body normalized by the hegemonic prescribed roles of gender and sexuality. As she deconstructs these, she allows herself to reconstruct them in any form she desires.

Moraga rejects the notions of normalized sexuality presented by Paz, who makes the polarity of sex as the active, *chingón*, and the passive, *chingada*. Within this paradigm,

lesbianism is even more deviant because it asserts female agency and is a rejection of male penetration. She then vindicates the image of La Malinche, as she rejects the constructs that Paz presents, and that are still present in the Mexican American and Chicano narratives. In sum, La Malinche in Chicano culture becomes a powerful maternal figure that models the liberation and freedom from the patriarchy through the ability to speak for herself. Moraga analyzes her sense of self as sexual through the image of La Malinche. She begins by internalizing the image of La Malinche as *la vendida*, sell-out, as well as *la chingada*. Women must prove their loyalty by serving men first: brothers, fathers, uncles, etc. Moraga's writing suggests that the polarities of male/ female, *chingón/ chingada*, and virgin/ whore are tropes that lead to wounding but also a place of "passion expressed in our own cultural tongue" (136). The Chicana feminist lesbian has been able to self-define and speaks in order to reject or embrace the multiplicity of identities that belong to her. Cherríe Moraga recognizes La Malinche as such a mother, one who is free from the passivity associated with *la chingada*.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

As the life of La Malinche is examined through what is written in the chronicles and in the codices, it is clear that while there are different descriptions of her historical life, she is certainly respected by both the Spaniards and the Aztecs. The Europeans give her the title 'Doña' and the Ameri-Indians refer to her as *Malintzin*, with this ending being a sign of respect. While so little information is known about her historical life, and the extent of her role in the Conquest is uncertain, we can conclude that she actively participated in the Conquest and ascertain that she is the only woman to have been present in the most pivotal moments of the conquest.

In the years of colonization and following the independence from the Spanish crown or Spanish colonial rule, La Malinche takes on mythical attributes. As Mexico looks into its historical past, it finds in the period of colonization a feminine figure that is both mother and ally of the colonizers. This image is solidified in the patriarchal tradition, *la chingada*, as the country enters into a period transition towards the modern period.

While analyzing Paz's position about the role of La Malinche in the conquest, it is clear that his proposed vision of her as scapegoat had a lasting impact upon the Mexican sense of identity. The vision of La Malinche as the passive and conquerable woman ignores the other attributes that are clear in the history that has been recorded about the conquest. It seems unfair that she would be found as the sole culprit in the conquest, or that her image would be tainted by men who find no redeeming quality in the woman who, after all, gave birth to a new nation. Further, Paz's view served only to widen the already existent chasm between the

gender identities in the Hispanic world. It promoted and justified domination of women by men and it also helped rationalize rape and violence towards women, who are seen as inert, passive and always susceptible to the whims of men. Furthermore, it continues to plague the Mexican psyche with notions of machismo as the only acceptable identity for men. Women are then, nothing more than child-bearing subservient objects who need always be reminded of their secondary role to their brothers, fathers, husbands, and *hijos*. Additionally, it created an even greater aversion of the indigenous, promoting racism against dark-skinned Indians. And it justified the way in which the Mexican people, as seen in the actions of its government, treat to this day the indigenous populations. If La Malinche was an indigenous woman who allowed foreigners to take her land, rape her and pillage freely, then it is only she who bears the blame. However, when faced with the threat of colonization, the Aztecs' internal conflicts were exacerbated and contributed to their own demise.

There have been many individuals that have tried to move Mexico and Mexican-American ideologies in progressive directions that dissipate the outdated notions of women and Indigenous people and culture as inferior. As Laura Esquivel writes in her novel *Malinche*, it is not the mother who has betrayed her people, the *mestizos* who she engendered but it is the Mexican and Chicano people who have forgotten her. We have forgotten her historical importance and are often ashamed that we, too, have indigenous blood. Esquivel's desire is to vindicate, to clear mothers, daughters and Mexican women of the blame. She attempts to restore a balance to the corrupted image of La Malinche as she highlights the importance of La Malinche's role as translator and mediator. While Esquivel is a Mexican born author, she writes for both the American and Mexican people and is influenced by her international living. She

writes from a space that is between two worlds that promote sexism in strongly patriarchal nations. Esquivel imagines what La Malinche's life must have been like in the time of colonization and she provides insight into the life of La Malinche. As she presents the role of La Malinche as mother and wife, Esquivel brings a multifaceted complexity to La Malinche that is not offered in historical accounts. Her interpretation is one of a powerful woman who is at times vulnerable to love but who always maintains agency and subjectivity. Upon the death of La Malinche she is able to find a return to the eternal mother, Tonantzin, and with this a return to the cosmos itself, as the cosmos is always feminine and continues to be regenerated. Unfortunately, still Mexicans have deeply imbedded the dichotomies: Man/Woman, White/Indian, Virgin/Whore and Virgen/Malinche. The Mexican people are still not able to close the gaps between these seemingly contradictory and oppositional tropes. However, it does show that Esquivel's observation of the Mexican's forgotten past and forgotten mother continue to be valid. We are unable to see La Malinche beyond the image determined by the strong hegemonic, and patriarchal nation. The feminist rendition of Esquivel offers an alternative understanding of La Malinche in her role of creator of an entire new race. Furthermore, it promotes a space for women to speak for themselves. It encourages Mexican and Chicana women to reject the predetermined roles in family and society and to create their own space, to speak for themselves as the tongue is a sign of strength and power.

In a very similar fashion, Cherríe Moraga embraces the power and autonomy of La Malinche as the Chicana, feminist, lesbian mother. As a woman of color, Moraga finds that Chicanas have to combat many demons that are present by virtue of their sex and skin. This marginalized group of women is subject to discrimination not only from the American-Anglos

who find them to be 'not American enough' and from the Mexican culture who reminds them that they have abandoned the country and therefore have little claim over its culture or tradition. In this, Chicanas find it difficult to speak for themselves as the voice of dissent is always outside of the discourse of power and is often ignored. For that reason, the feminist perspective of Esquivel and Moraga, who are able to write about their experiences and a liminal space, is important. Moraga's portrayal of La Malinche is also of a personal nature. In many ways, she first recognizes that she is a *Malinchista* by virtue of her ethnicity and sexual orientation. Because she is a Chicana she is reminded of her rejection by the culture of her white father and of that of her dark-skinned Chicana mother. She aims only to please her mother and to earn her love, as it is always gifted to her brother but never to her. She moves further away from the prescribed roles of women in Chicano culture by embracing her sexuality. Much like Esquivel's rendition is one of matriarchal strength and power, as wisdom is passed on through women, Moraga rejects the father and instead embraces her mother along with the image of La Malinche. She understands La Malinche free of the epithet *la chingada*, and instead recognizes her as *el chingón*. In doing this, she sees not only La Malinche as such but herself as well. Moraga is the active voice that speaks for herself against the patriarchy and rejects the notions of love existing only between man and woman, and of woman as a subjugated object that is pawns. The importance of these notions lies in the vindication of La Malinche and the return to the powerful notion of her image that is often times forgotten by the Hispanic world.

As we continue to become a more interconnected people around the world with the use of technology and globalization as an ever-present reminder of our interrelatedness, it is

important to examine and re-examine what lies the root of our cultural imaginary. La Malinche was undoubtedly a powerful historic figure that gave birth, even when this is an inconvenient fact, to the *mestizo* race and to the Mexican people. It is only through re-envisioning her image that we can move forward as a culture and pass the racist, sexist and homophobic notions that continue to be a part of our conscious. Mexican and Chicana women must look at La Malinche in a complete way, as a historical figure and as a mythical mother who continues to encourage the feminine voice as the powerful. It continues to be important to accept the historical ancestry and with it a *mestizaje*, that acknowledges the Indigenous and the European people, the masculine and the feminine as part of Mexican and Chicana identity. It is important to continue to reanalyze and revisit archetypal model such as La Malinche in order to freely self-define.

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