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Silence Through Representation: La Malinche as Christian, Mistress and *Conquistadora*

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By

Colleen A. Sweet

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Silence Through Representation: La Malinche as Christian, Mistress and *Conquistadora*

Colleen A. Sweet, Ph.D.

Director: Mario A. Ortiz, Ph.D.

La Malinche played a major role in the Mexican Conquest. She is known as both mistress and translator of Hernán Cortés. In Mexican history, her name is associated with betrayal. The year 1992 was pivotal in the discourse concerning the encounter between Europe and the Americas. Postcolonial studies stressed the need to recover the long-silenced voice of the subaltern characters of the Conquest. This search for an indigenous perspective inspired a new body of artistic works concerning Malinche. In this dissertation I examine the film *La otra conquista* (Salvador Carrasco, 1998), the novel *Malinche* (Laura Esquivel, 2006), and the play *La Malinche* (V́ctor Hugo Rascón Banda, 2000). These works address three major roles associated with the representation of Malinche: as convert to Christianity, as mistress to Cortés, and as collaborator in the events of the Conquest. The works under study posit new explorations into the role of both female and indigenous figures in the discourse of the Conquest of Mexico. In *La otra conquista*, Carrasco removes Malinche from the historical record and replaces her with a revisionist figure. The character of Isabel Moctezuma subverts the traditional representation of Amerindian female women as passive victims of Mexico's colonial past. In her novel *Malinche*, by turning Malinche into a romance heroine not only does Esquivel silence her, she also perpetuates a model of passivity for Amerindian women. In *La Malinche*, Rascón Banda fragments Malinche into many different characters in order to parallel the

political divisiveness plaguing Mexico after the crisis of 1994. Malinche is an ever-changing palimpsest that serves to broach the issues of Mexican, Latin American, feminine, and indigenous identity that each author wishes to revisit. The representations of Malinche in these works remind us that the relationships of domination and subordination from our historical past still echo today. Thus, Malinche's silence underscores the impossibility of rescuing the subaltern from historical obscurity.

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Mario A. Ortiz, Ph.D., Director

Juanita Christina Aristizabal, Ph.D., Reader

Bruno M. Damiani, Ph.D., Reader

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Introduction

On April 26, 2011, the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City opened a new exhibit, entitled “The Flight of Images.” This exhibit features pieces that represent the symbolism of birds and flight in the works of contemporary Mexican indigenous artists. Yet, one piece of the exhibit immediately grabs the attention: a traditional woman’s blouse or *huipil* from the 18th century. This *huipil*, resembling the one worn by the female translator for Hernán Cortés in the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* and the *Florentine Codex*, was dubbed “Malinche’s *huipil*.”¹ Although the piece is of a much later date to have been worn by the historical figure, the fact that an official institution would exhibit it under that name indicates the saturation that Malinche’s legend has in the collective memory of Mexico. Just as the *huipil*’s name owes more to popular myth than to historical facts, the same can be said of Malinche herself. Because she is a figure shrouded in obscurity, most of what we know of her today is based on the tellings and retellings of historical myths. It is both fascinating and ironic that a figure about whom we know so little has achieved such status in the popular imagination.

The paradoxical relationship between the impact of Malinche’s mythology, and the paucity of historical documentation about her, serves as the starting point for this study. Malinche has become a palimpsest. The authors who revisit her mythology transform her according to whatever message they wish to convey. The year 1992 marked the quincentenary of Christopher Columbus’ arrival in the Americas. It also inspired historians, writers, and others to reexamine the events of the Conquest and write about them anew. As we approach the 500-year mark since Malinche’s appearance on the

¹ An article describing the new exhibit ran with the headline “Exhibirán huipil de la Malinche en Antropología” on April 7, 2011 in *El Universal*.

historical stage, how have recent representations of Malinche transformed and shaped the mythology? What new directions can be found in these recent representations? A figure cast into silence for hundreds of years, Malinche, also known as Malintzin, Malinalli Tenepal or Doña Marina, is a paradoxical one. Since the *conquistador* Hernán Cortés referred to her as his *lengua* or tongue, her symbolism has been associated with the act of speech. Yet she also stands for silence, because her role as interpreter requires her to repeat the words of others, rather than use her own voice. Though she began as a real-life woman referenced in the chronicles of the *conquistadores*, most of her construction as a symbol comes from non-historical texts. Very little, in fact, is known about the life of Malinche.²

A look at recent representations of Malinche needs to start with a summary of what is known of her biography. A great deal of what is accepted about her comes from representations in historical texts³ concerning the Conquest of Mexico. In indigenous

² This issue is significant because the lack of historical documentation about Malinche highlights her ironic status as an icon. The paucity of information has contributed to the mythology surrounding her figure and allows authors to create representations of her adapted according to their own purposes.

³ The term “historical texts” is used here to denote texts written by Spanish chroniclers (Hernán Cortés, López de Gómara, Díaz del Castillo, etc.) as well as accounts created by non-Spanish authors (*Lienzo de Tlaxcala*, *Florentine Codex*, etc.). However, the denotation “historical” is used with caution, as these can be considered hybrid texts comprising both historical and literary elements. In his introduction to *La imaginación novelasca: Bernal Díaz entre géneros y épocas*, Oswaldo Estrada uses the term “artefacto histórico-literario” to refer to these types of texts. He indicates that this hybridity can be applied in particular to Bernal Díaz’s *Historia verdadera*: “Que Bernal Díaz no haya tenido el propósito explícito de escribir literatura no nos incapacita para notar a posteriori que su crónica está llena de elementos que hoy consideramos literarios. Que no haya compuesto una novela, porque el género como lo entendemos hoy no existía en tal momento histórico--a excepción de las *novellas* picarescas, pastoriles, sentimentales – no significa que no podamos encontrar mecanismos novelescos en su crónica” (21-22).

accounts, she is presented in disparate ways, but often shown as a valiant and respectable woman. In Spanish narratives, her representation ranges from merely *la lengua* in Cortés' account to an idealized Christian convert in the writings of Bernal Díaz del Castillo.

Scholars conjecture⁴ that she was born either in 1502 or 1505, in the region of Paynalla. She was given away, kidnapped, or sold into slavery as a child. This took her from a Nahuatl-speaking region of Mexico to the region of the Chontal Mayans, where Cortés's expedition landed in Xicalango in 1519. She was later given away a second time, along with twenty other women, to appease the invading Spaniards and broker a truce between them and the reigning Chontal *cacique*. Although primary interpretation duties were taken on by Jerónimo de Aguilar, a Spaniard who had been taken hostage and survived with a group of Mayans on the Yucatán coast, once the *conquistadores* approached Nahuatl-speaking areas, it became apparent that they needed another interpreter. Malinche was discovered as being able to speak both Mayan and Nahuatl languages (including the formal dialect of Nahuatl) and became part of the chain of interpreters. Eventually, she learned enough Spanish that Jerónimo de Aguilar became obsolete.

Not only was she responsible for interpreting for Cortés, but Malinche performed her duties as interpreter in situations that would have called for her to break with commonly-held notions of the role of women in state affairs. According to Anna Lanyon, Malinche would have been aware of this notion:

⁴ Two major studies that provide up to date biographical information about Malinche are Frances Karttunen's "Rethinking Malinche"(1997) and Anna Lanyon's *Malinche's Conquest* (1999).

It would have taken extraordinary courage to speak in the presence of the noblemen from Tenochtitlan, but courage is a quality she must have possessed in abundance. How else could she have survived her turbulent life to this point? (73)

Malinche was willing to break social taboos in order to carry out her functions as interpreter for Cortés, a sign of her remarkable courage, but perhaps also a sign of desperation. She may have felt that she had no other choice.

Malinche's role as interpreter is remarkable, but it is only one of the aspects of her story that have contributed to the mythology. Afterwards, Malinche bore a son to Cortés, Martín, who became the symbolic "first *mestizo*"⁵ of Mexico. Taken away from his mother at an early age, Martín spent most of his life in Spain. Given her roles as Cortés mistress and mother of the first *mestizo*, it is impossible for any representation of her to not consider her as a sexualized being. Although Malinche later gave birth to a daughter, María Jaramillo, after being given away in marriage to one of Cortés' lieutenants (Juan Jaramillo), the daughter is rarely mentioned in historical sources and, until recently, has not been a crucial part of the Malinche mythology. Some representations of Malinche

⁵ In her article "Arquetipos viejos, madres nuevas" Cypess mentions the fact that Gonzalo Guerrero, a soldier who was shipwrecked along with the friar Jerónimo de Aguilar (who later became one of the members of the chain of interpretation for Cortés) chose to stay with his indigenous wife and children rather than accompany the Spaniards on their journey. Guerrero's children would have been the first *mestizos*, not Martín Cortés. Yet Guerrero's story and the story of his children has been portrayed very differently from that of Malinche. Cypess indicates, "Al estudiar cómo el discurso oficial y el popular han tratado a las dos parejas, nos damos cuenta que las interacciones entre la Malinche y Cortés llegaron a ser emblemáticas para indicar cómo deben ser las relaciones entre europeo e indígena. Es la mujer la que debe portarse como subalterna y aceptar la lengua, la cultura, las estructuras políticas y económicas del hombre, no viceversa" (202).

focus more on her role as mistress to Cortés than any other aspect of her part in the history of the Conquest. Just as the exact year of her birth is unknown, so, too are the circumstances of her death. Most accounts suggest that she died around March 1528, after a plague swept through Mexico (Lanyon 168).

Given the lack of historical documentation about Malinche, her role as the mouthpiece for the ideas of others, and her representation as the traitorous sexual partner to the captain of the invading Spanish *conquistadores*, Malinche is the ultimate subaltern. The term “malinchista”--derived from her name--connotes the Mexican national who aspires to imitate foreigners and denies his own heritage, a form of self-imposed silence. Malinche’s status as a subaltern, however, did not afford her any sense of peace or anonymity. Instead, she is dragged out of obscurity to serve as an ever-evolving symbol, subject to the needs of the authors or artists who invokes her for their own purposes.

From the portrayal of Malinche in indigenous accounts to her portrayal in the texts included in this study, she is used to represent what authors mean to convey about their understanding of the Conquest and the relationships of power and dominance that continue to shape the fate of Mexican society today. Given that she serves this purpose, there is no representation of Malinche that allows her to break her silence. An examination of this ironic situation allows us to further explore issues of agency and the subaltern voice. Malinche’s silence highlights the impossibility of speech for those who have been forgotten by history or, those whose point of view is not considered as one that matters.

In order to further demonstrate how Malinche has been silenced throughout history, this introduction will trace her evolution from actor on the historical stage (in the events of the Conquest) to myth. The existing documentation in historical accounts ranges from brief passages to entire chapters. Sandra Messinger Cypess' book presents her evolution in Mexican Literature from the 19th century to today. Other representations of Malinche show how she is regarded and how her myth has pervaded in popular culture today. Finally, there are two critical texts that reflect on Malinche's symbolism for Mexican national identity. These texts, the seminal essay "Los hijos de la Malinche" by Octavio Paz (*El laberinto de la soledad*, 1950), and the collection of essays edited by Margo Glantz (*La Malinche: Sus padres y sus hijos*, 1994) have shaped the way she has been perceived in the 20th century and beyond.

Subaltern studies provides the primary theoretical framework used for this dissertation. In order to better understand Malinche's historical obscurity and her evolution from translator to maligned figure, this study will use Gayatri Spivak's theory on the silence of the subaltern, specifically the subaltern and female subject, and John Beverley's theory on the problem of representing the subaltern. Additionally, Gustavo Verdesio and Álvaro Félix Bolaños' co-edited book, *Colonialism Past and Present*, brings to light the issues of representing the Amerindian subject in today's climate, particularly as this concerns academic writings. The premise that the subaltern is found in the Amerindian, and not the *mestizo*, subject of Latin America, causes us to question the mythology of Malinche as the mother of *mestizaje* in Mexico. The common misrepresentation of Malinche as a founding, albeit repudiated, mother of the Mexican

nation goes to the heart of the major themes discussed in the primary texts of this study. The fact that this misrepresentation is so prevalent makes it impossible for any writing about Malinche to ignore it completely, but acknowledging her role as the repudiated mother also limits the writer.

In order to further define the field of subaltern studies referred to in this study, it is useful to cite John Beverley's succinct explanation:

Subaltern studies is about power, who has it and who doesn't, who is gaining and who is losing it. Power is related to representation: which representations have cognitive authority or can secure hegemony, which do not have authority or are not hegemonic. Gayatri Spivak formulated the problem concisely: If the subaltern could speak--that is, speak in a way that really *mattered* to us--then it wouldn't be subaltern. (1)

As a subaltern subject, Malinche's words cannot be recovered to us. More myth than reality, she functions as a spokesperson, a vehicle for the words of others. Nonetheless, in the case of Salvador Carrasco's film *La otra conquista*, Malinche is taken out of the picture in order to introduce the revisionist figure of Isabel Moctezuma, also known by her indigenous name Tecuichpo. Based on the real-life daughter of Moctezuma, Carrasco's fictionalized version acts as a woman of strength and guile who attempts to conserve her own Aztec culture while assimilating enough to the invading Spanish one in order to survive. Meanwhile, Laura Esquivel's version of Malinche rejects her role as interpreter for Cortés and returns to the domestic sphere, ending her days as a doting mother and faithful wife. As a romance heroine, Malinalli is unable to break the trappings

of the genre. By trying to use her protagonist as a symbol of both the power of feminine discourse as well as the ideal epic romance, Esquivel keeps Malinalli from breaking her silence. Finally, Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda presents a fractionalized version of the figure in his play *La Malinche*. His main character is split into various representations, a fragmentation that serves as a metaphor for the divisiveness and economic disparity that defines the Mexican crisis of 1994 and its aftermath. All three of these transformations underscore Malinche's status as subaltern. Additionally, they recur to the theme of Malinche as the mother of the Mexican nation. This theme reinforces the idea that discussion of Mexican national identity must also include a discussion on *mestizaje*.

For writers concerned with the issues of *mestizaje*, the voice of the *mestizo* subject has long been considered one of subaltern status. This is for example, the foundation for Lipi Biswas Sen's argument that proposes the writings of Inca Garcilaso de Vega and Guamán Poma can be considered examples where the subaltern does speak. In the case of the Inca Garcilaso de Vega in particular, because he was a *mestizo*, unrecognized by both Spanish and Andean cultures, his voice represents that of the outsider (484-85). Along a similar vein, the issue of *mestizo* identity is key to all of the works presented in this study. Salvador Carrasco, Laura Esquivel, and Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda explore the semantic meaning of Malinche as a symbolic mother of the Mexican nation. They also represent the hybridity of Mexican identity, the mixing of both European and indigenous cultures. Yet, at the end of the 21st century, the voice of the *mestizo* can no longer claim to be that of the subaltern. As Jorge Klor de Alva indicates:

It cannot be said that in colonial Latin America the *mestizo*'s status was similar to the Amerindian's and the African's. Many of the former were able to successfully participate in the rules that organized social life in the continent, whereas the latter remained in an abject oppression that continues in the present. It is in the ranks of the latter that we can find the Latin American colonial subject then. (Quoted in Verdesio 6)

In their representation of the Latin American colonial subject, all of the works included in this study recur to utilizing indigenous characters in order to question commonly held perspectives of the Conquest. Furthermore, they use the indigenous subject as a symbol of resistance to Conquest and colonization. Rascón Banda's play takes this process even further by alluding to the violent conflicts in Chiapas in 1994, reminding us of the struggles that indigenous peoples still face in obtaining their political rights. Yet, the use of an indigenous character as a symbol of authentic Latin Americanism can be problematic. It reduces the Amerindian subject rather than building her up as a three-dimensional character.

Here, it is useful to recall Jorge Rabasa's notion of a "Culture of Conquest" (50). This "Culture" he argues, imposes ideas of our present in the past, focusing on monumental moments in history and presenting the Amerindian as a type of cultural artifact. The monumental moments are only monumental to us, readers in the present day, because we can look back on those events and trace their impact throughout history. The "Culture of Conquest", Rabasa adds, also perpetuates the view of the indigenous subject

as a thing of the past, “confining Indian cultures to the museum and the curio shop” (52).

Rabasa continues:

Those discourses represent the Indian as a pretext for a discursive practice of resistance, but deny him / her the status of subject in the elaboration and conceptualization of the collective enterprise of promoting a national identity. (52)

Texts that reinforce the “Culture of Conquest” use that time period in order to address political and social contexts in the present day. For example, in *La Malinche* by Rascón Banda, the aftermath of the Mexican Crisis plays a role in how the main character is portrayed. The act of using colonial pasts in order to decry postcolonial presents denies agency to the conquered by decontextualizing the relationships of power that relegated them to a place of silence in the first place.

The authors of the texts presented in this study cannot be considered subaltern. They all have access to the means of production of literary texts and have shown that their writing does matter. However, it is important to acknowledge that, on a larger scale, their writing does serve as a means to highlight another form of colonization. While they may not be subaltern in their own local contexts, in a global context, they demonstrate the issue of power struggles in the relationships between Latin American countries and the First World (in particular, the US). As Álvaro Félix Bolaños explains:

The Latin American territory has been, and still is, a place of pervasive and extreme violence in the everyday contact among people divided by social class, ethnic backgrounds, political views and access to privileges,

all inside an immense cultural diversity very difficult to define under one single linguistic, cultural, political mantle. And the pervasiveness of such violent relations pertains to our modern times as to the times of the colonial struggles for those same reasons mentioned above. Assessments about textual productions, in order to be responsible, have to take into account such cultural and political complexity, and have to have sensitivity, or simply a sense of plain consideration for yesterday's and today's others. (28)

The subaltern cannot speak in a way that matters to us unless the relationships that create difference of class, race, gender, etc., are challenged. The term "us" refers to the field of academia, and specifically, Latin American cultural and literary studies. However, the "us" also refers to an educated, literate public that has prior knowledge of the history of the Mexican Conquest and the intellectual debates that circulate around these events. For the primary works selected in this study, the implied reader or viewer is not only familiar with the historical Malinche, but also with what she has come to symbolize for generations of Mexican writers, artists, and intellectuals. Though her role in popular culture is also addressed on some occasions in these works, it is only from the point of view of a relatively privileged discourse that uses her representations in popular culture as a way to portray the common view of Malinche. As Beverley explains:

We do not claim to represent ("Cognitively map," "let speak," "speak for," "excavate") the subaltern. Subaltern studies registers rather how the

knowledge we construct and impart as academics is structured by the absence, difficulty, or impossibility of representation of the subaltern. (40)

The primary works in this study attempt to present a more multicultural view of identities, be they Mexican, Latin American, or even female. Yet in their attempt to challenge traditional notions of identity, they also show how difficult it is to really be inclusive. Perhaps a scene in Salvador Carrasco's film *La otra conquista* (discussed in Chapter 1) illustrates this best: Malinche is notably absent, and other characters in the film are left to ask, "What happened to la Malinche?"

While subaltern studies is the crucial theoretical framework that addresses Malinche's symbolism, Seymour Menton's contribution to the theory of the New Historical Novel, Kimberle López's writing on the subgenre of the Latin American novel of the Conquest, and Linda Hutcheon's theory of paratextuality in historiographic metafiction bring to light the approaches that the writers of the primary texts in this study used. Salvador Carrasco, Laura Esquivel, and Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda use elements of the New Historical Novel in order to question official historiography and present their own versions of the history of the Conquest. They also rely heavily on paratexts to discuss their own experiences in revisiting the Malinche myth, their intentions as creators, and to prepare the reader's reception of the text. The texts build on or reference the earliest textual accounts of Malinche, but they do not only recur to the texts of the *cronistas*, the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*, and the *Florentine Codex*. They also rely on non-historical textual sources, such as Octavio Paz's essay.

The status of the colonial subject, and the representation of historical events that produced relationships of colonizer and colonized, are the common starting point for all of the texts included in this study. While they are from different genres – film, novel and theatre--they can all be identified as texts that behave similarly to New Historical Novels. Seymour Menton defines these novels as part of a tendency that emerges after 1979. The first characteristic that he identifies is a critical re-reading of history, which includes three philosophical ideas: “(a) the impossibility of ascertaining the true nature of history; (b) the cyclical nature of history; and (c) the unpredictability of history” (23). The New Historical Novel also consciously distorts history through anachronisms and omissions and uses famous historical characters as protagonists. Other characteristics include the use of metafiction and intertextuality, the Bakhtinian concepts of the dialogic, the carnivalesque, heteroglossia, and parody. In her study on new Latin American novels of the Conquest, Kimberle López identifies this group as a subgenre of the New Historical Novel that revisits the moment of contact between the European and the Amerindian. Unlike the literary indigenism of the nineteenth century novel, these texts reexamine the history of the Conquest from the point of view of the conquerer, but with a critical eye that indirectly subverts the colonizing discourses:

This subcorpus constitutes a new way for the empire to write back, as Latin American authors rewrite the moment of crisis that originated transculturation from the perspective of the conqueror but, through the representation of colonial desire and the anxiety of identification, make manifest the gaps in the rhetoric of conquest. Bracketing off the question

of whether the subaltern can speak, the authors revisit the scene of the Old World-New World encounter in order to examine their own dual cultural heritage from the imagined perspective of the European invader. (López 26)

Carrasco's film, Esquivel's novel, and Rascón Banda's play all rewrite the Conquest as a way to examine their heritage. All three of these works use elements of the New Historical Novel and the Latin American novel of the Conquest. Unlike those works described by López however, they attempt to rewrite the Conquest from the point of view of an Amerindian female subject, Malinche. What results are narratives that question the rhetoric of Conquest and colonization, but that silence their protagonist in the process.

The texts discussed here use either historical figures or characters who interact with historical figures in order to recreate events from the time period of the Mexican Conquest. While it is important to acknowledge that these events created structures of power and domination that still impact Latin American societies today, there is a grave risk in using the Amerindian subject in this manner. López points out the difficulty in broaching the events of the Conquest from the point of view of an Amerindian character. All three of the works addressed in this study also demonstrate the overwhelming influence of the culture and language of the conquerors. Given the impact that this influence has on their writing, and their own perspective as *mestizo* and not Amerindian members of Mexican society, using the narrative device of situating the point of view of their works from that of an Amerindian character is a daunting challenge that the two writers and the film director address with varying levels of success.

In addition to employing characteristics associated with the New Historical Novel, the primary texts in this study can also be described as what Linda Hutcheon defines as postmodern historiographic metafiction; that is, “They all raise the question of how history, its documents and traces, get incorporated into an avowedly fictive context, while still somehow retaining their historical documentary status,” (302).

According to Hutcheon, the modes of this paradoxical incorporation are frequently those of paratextuality (303).

In the case of the film, this use of paratextuality can be noted through the use of the director’s commentary on the DVD. It is in this context that Salvador Carrasco addresses the viewer directly, often inserting comments that highlight not only the artistic intentions of the film but also aspects of its production. For example we learn from this paratext that the first scene was filmed at the ruins of the Templo Mayor itself, and was not initially meant to be the first scene of the film. The use of this and other geographic locations of key historical events allow Carrasco to incorporate traces of prevailing historical discourses both visually in addition to the narrative techniques he employs in order to deconstruct these dominant discourses.

While Salvador Carrasco’s paratext enriches the viewer’s reception of his film, the paratexts used in Laura Esquivel’s *Malinche* undermine the text itself. Esquivel’s use of paratexts in her novel includes a bibliography, a “Nota de la autora” and a “codex” of Malinche. The simulated codex is split into fragments to accompany the text of each chapter. However the images of the codex are switched in two editions (Spanish / English), indicating an attempt to appeal to one readership or the other based on language

preference. Additionally, the way the images are used resembles more closely the genre of the comic book or graphic novel. Although the codex is meant to allude to existing indigenous texts, such as the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* and the *Florentine Codex*, it unintentionally parodies them in such a way as to belittle their value as cultural and historical documents.

As in the case of all dramatic texts, the play *La Malinche* has two aspects: the written text created by Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda, and the staging of that text for performance under the direction of Austrian choreographer Johann Kresnik. While the text of the play is the focus for this study, the *Bitácora* (daily log) that Rascón Banda created to accompany the script for its publication allows the playwright to express his own opinions on the staging and performance aspect. It also gives the reader insight into the process of the writing of the play and the politics surrounding its funding and swift closing due to institutional pressures. In the *Bitácora*, Rascón Banda acknowledges that he was first urged by the director and then by the principal actress to construct a play using many texts. Rascón Banda draws from historical sources, like Laura Esquivel does in her novel. However, because his goal is to remind us of Malinche's mythology in the context of the Mexico of the mid 1990s, he also incorporates contemporary texts, ranging from the writings of Carlos Fuentes and García Canclini to those of Subcomandante Marcos, the leader of the Zapatista rebellion, and song "Maldición de la Malinche" by Gabino Palomares. In sum, Rascón Banda's use of intertextuality does not just rely on what we would consider "official" historical texts. By explaining the construction of the play and using the *Bitácora* to inform the reader, or express criticism, concerning the

staging of *La Malinche*, Rascón Banda calls on us to question how the representation of history has been shaped by official discourse.

All three of the texts used in this study fit into the time period of the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century. In order to better understand the representations of Malinche presented in these works, it is useful to trace her journey from a minor figure in historical documentation to the symbol that she has become. There are two types of historical documents: those written by the chroniclers and *conquistadores*, and those that are meant to represent an indigenous perspective on the Conquest.

Doña Marina and Malintzin: The Earliest Textual Accounts of Malinche

In his *Cartas de relación*, Hernán Cortés portrays himself as a heroic leader while justifying why he disobeyed orders from expedition leader Juan de Grijalba. Cortés wrote a total of five letters between 1519 and 1526. The mentions he includes of Malinche are brief. The first appears in the second letter, where he writes of how Malinche warns him of a possible trap planned by the Cholulans:

Y estando algo perplejo en esto, a la lengua que yo tengo, que es una india de esta tierra, que hube en Pontonchán, [...] le dijo otra natural de esta ciudad cómo muy cerquita de allí estaban mucha gente de Mutuzuma junta, y que los de la ciudad tenían fuera sus mujeres e hijos y toda su ropa, y que había de dar sobre nosotros para matarnos a todos. (36)

Cortés goes on to explain that Malinche told him this through the interpreter Jerónimo de Aguilar, a captive who the Spaniards rescued while in the Yucatan. He later refers to her by name, in his fifth letter. He refers to her as his interpreter or *lengua*, “que es Marina, la que siempre conmigo he traído, porque allí me la habían dado con otras veinte mujeres” (203). No other mention is made in Cortés letters of Marina or Malinche, although she later bore him a son.

In his account of the history of the Conquest of Mexico, Francisco López de Gómara also focuses on Marina’s role as Cortés’ interpreter. He also uses the opportunity to indirectly criticize Cortés. As Cypess explains, “He will refer to her in his text as ‘our Indian woman interpreter’ or as Marina, but never with the same affection and esteem displayed by Bernal Díaz [del Castillo]” (*La Malinche* 32). In his *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*, Bernal Díaz del Castillo gives us much more information about Malinche. Díaz writes his version twenty one years later as a response to the history written by Gómara. A possible motive for his narrative is to demonstrate the service that other soldiers like himself had given to the Crown, since other accounts only focused on the main characters of the Conquest and ignored the contributions of others (105). He describes Malinche in glowing terms, and even sets aside a brief chapter to relate her story. He characterizes her as an excellent woman and good interpreter. In an episode where he relates Malinche’s reunion with the family who, according to his account, gave her away as a young girl to become a slave, he portrays her as a forgiving woman who has fully embraced hispanization, including the Christian religion. Like

Cortés, he also credits Malinche with discovering the conspiracy in Cholula and saving the *conquistadores* from certain demise.

The story of Malinche's role in the massacre at Cholula is a key issue for later representations of her. In the Spaniards' accounts, Malinche is depicted as an astute woman who uses the trust that another Indian woman places in her in order to warn the Spaniards. Later characterizations of Malinche would use this moment as the foundation for her representation as a traitor to her own people and a colluder with the Spaniards. However, it is important to remember that Malinche, just like other indigenous people, did not think of herself as Indian. She most likely thought of herself as a member of a specific tribe in Paynalla. In other words, her characterization as traitor to the Indian people imposes a view of racial identity that did not exist at the time.

Meanwhile, the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* and the *Florentine Codex*, both created in the sixteenth century, present very disparate images of Malinche. It is important to note that the *Florentine Codex* represents what has been called the point of view of a people who had no stake in the Spanish victory, while the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* was drawn by the Tlaxcalans in order to highlight their role in the Conquest. As such, in the *Lienzo*, there seems to be more of an appeal to a Spanish sensibility. In the following passage Angela Marie Herren elaborates on the differences in how each text represents her, "Disparities exist in the number of times Marina is recorded in each, in her appearance, in the context in which she occurs, and in her positioning. These disparities suggest different interpretations of her identity" (162). She appears in only seven out of 161 images in the *Florentine Codex*. In addition, she is not depicted consistently. At times she seems

massive, at other times she is depicted as being much smaller. There are some aspects of her appearance that are consistent among the different artists; for example, her hair is always shown as being worn above her head with two small knots on top. Also, she is usually depicted as being barefoot. Sometimes she is shown with the curved 'volute' a native sign for speech.

On the other hand, in the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*, Marina is shown with her hair loose and wearing European-style shoes. In addition, in images where she and other indigenous women are depicted in the same scene, her face is the same as those of the other women. Herren suggests that this common facial appearance may just have been a way to depict youth and beauty in general. The twenty appearances of Marina in the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* appear more consistent, but it is not known whether the *Lienzo* was drawn by one artist or a group of several artists. According to Marina's position, size and location in the images, she is a woman of high rank.

Another major difference between the *Florentine Codex* and the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* is the fact that in the former, Marina is generally portrayed as translating in non-violent situations. On the other hand, in the *Lienzo* she plays a more integral role in the conflicts that occurred during the Conquest. For example, in one scene she is shown sleeping alongside the Tlaxcalan soldiers with her shield and knapsack. In this instance she is shown acting independently from Cortés, working as a valuable member of the troops as opposed to Cortés' personal servant. The visual depictions of Marina in the *Florentine Codex* and the *Lienzo* show her role as translator and assistant to Cortés. However, there are no visual indications of a sexual or romantic relationship with Cortés (Herren 177).

This would seem to dispute the common portrayal of Malinche as Cortés mistress and personal confidant.

Herren concludes that the disparities in the way she is portrayed in the two texts indicate how the authors manipulated her representation to fit their own needs (177). Her role as valuable member of the troops in the *Lienzo* seems to indicate the artists' desire to emphasize the contribution of the Tlaxcalans (and other indigenous fighters) in the Conquest.

Malinche disappears from historical and literary texts for a while. Largely ignored during the Colonial period, she does not reappear on the literary stage until the nineteenth century, after the War of Independence. The political and social changes brought about by these events led to a paradigm shift that focused on a new identity for an independent Mexican nation. In her book *La Malinche in Mexican Literature: From History to Myth*, Sandra Messinger Cypess points out that Malinche has been transformed into a sign whose meaning changes with each subsequent generation. Cypess indicates, "When La Malinche was transformed into a sign she became part of her culture's myth system" (6). In the period after the war, Mexicans reevaluated the symbols of the *conquistador*. As a result, many of the qualities that were deemed positive in the accounts of the Spanish conquerors became negative. Cypess continues:

From the feminine version of the biblical Joseph, then, La Malinche becomes in the works of the post-independence period both the snake and the Mexican Eve, the traitor and temptress, the rationalization for the Amerindian failure to overcome the Europeans. (9)

In romance novels of the nineteenth century, Malinche is portrayed as a woman who was willing to collude with the Spaniards, betray her own people, accept the Catholic religion, and even prefer the Spanish male as a partner (Cypess 10). One important variation on this representation of Malinche can be found in two romantic novels by Ireneo Paz, *Amor y suplicio* (1873) and *Doña Marina* (1883). In these novels, Paz portrays Malinche as a romanticized figure who was predestined to become an interpreter for the Spaniards. According to Cypess, he “offers a positive interpretation of Mexican *mestizaje*, providing his readers with a positive conception of themselves and their history” (*La Malinche* 10). Years later, Ireneo Paz’s grandson, Octavio, would write a seminal essay on Malinche that marks the modern conceptualization of her as a symbol for Mexican identity.

In his essay “Los hijos de la Malinche”, from *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950), Octavio Paz addresses the status of the Mexican worker, and how an internalized sense of inferiority impacts Mexican male identity. He argues that Malinche has come to symbolize the repudiated mother, the victim of sexual violence. Paz indicates the impact that industrialized society has on the common Mexican worker or *obrero*, a term he rejects given that most people who perform these types of jobs do not have the opportunity to produce any great works or see their final product. The country’s experience as a colony, and later, the turbulent fight for independence and subsequent political corruption, have a significant impact on relations of class within the country and between Mexico and other nations.

Paz also describes an internalized enemy that comes from within, which is none other than a sense of inferiority that comes from the knowledge of being the “son of la

Chingada” (the woman who was violently raped by the conquering Spaniard). Paz sees the Conquest as a violation and Malinche as the violated mother, ridiculed by force. He defines her as “la atroz encarnación de la condición femenina” (77). The Mexican, as the son of the Chingada, is thus the incarnation of rape, kidnapping and humiliation. In Paz’s essay, Malinche is also characterized as the counterpart for the benevolent Virgin of Guadalupe, spiritual mother and champion of the poor. It is impossible for Paz to discuss Malinche without sexualizing her. Here, Frances Karttunen’s comparison of Malinche with the sexual survivor who suffers from the “blame the victim” (311) syndrome is apt.

Cypess points out that the negative portrayal of Malinche in Paz’s essay finds echoes in other texts of the same time period, such as *Corona de fuego* (1960) by Rudolfo Usigli and *Cuauhtémoc* (1962) by Salvador Novo (Cypess *La Malinche* 11). Later theatrical representations of Malinche by Celestino Gorostiza (*La leña está verde* 1958) and Carlos Fuentes (*Todos los gatos son pardos* 1970) attempt to portray her in a more positive light. But Malinche undergoes a further revision under the pen of feminist writers like Rosario Castellanos and Marisol Martín del Campo⁶. Many Chicana writers, such as Gloria Anzaldúa, see Malinche as part of their cultural heritage, and have adopted her as a symbolic mother. For these writers, continues Cypess, “the use of La Malinche as a scapegoat figure can be interpreted as an effort to sustain male power by treating women as sexual objects and inferior moral identities” (*La Malinche* 13). In *Borderlands / La frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa likens the repudiation of Malinche to a betrayal of all Chicana women:

⁶ For more information on this revision, see Cypess’ article “Re-visión de la figura de la Malinche en la dramaturgia mexicana contemporánea”.

Not me sold out my people but they me. *Malinali Tenepal*, or *Malintzin*, has become known as *la Chingada* – the fucked one. She has become the bad word that passes a dozen times a day from the lips of Chicanos.

Whore, prostitute, the woman who sold out her people to the Spaniards are epithets Chicanos spit out with contempt. The worst kind of betrayal lies in making us believe that the Indian woman in us is the betrayer. We, *indias y mestizas*, police the Indian in us, brutalize and condemn her. Male culture has done a good job on us. (44)

The fact that so much of her reputation is based on her role as the female victim underscores Malinche's double subalternity. As Gayatri Spivak points out, "If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (287). Since historical discourse has traditionally been one of male domination, any representation of Malinche that would attempt to vindicate her of the charge as traitor to the Mexican people has to take into account her role as a woman.

While Octavio Paz's essay is concerned primarily with the Mexican male and his Malinche complex, the collection of essays edited by Margo Glantz, *La Malinche: Sus padres y sus hijos*, tries to reevaluate this situation. Written shortly after the 500-year anniversary of the clash between Old and New Worlds, the book reexamines Malinche from a postmodern perspective.

Margo Glantz explains in her introduction the paradoxical nature of Malinche's representation. Although she is condemned to silence, she is lauded on the one hand as a

key figure for Spanish triumph, on the other hand criticized as responsible for condemning the Indians to defeat. This disparity highlights the paradoxical nature of Malinche:

No importa, ya sea como heroína o como traidora, Malinche es sujeto de la historia y objeto de una mitificación. Hemos querido por ello revisitarla, indagar en nuestras raíces, esas raíces estrechamente vinculadas con el *mestizaje* y replantear muchas de sus andanzas actuales y pasadas y aclarar su significado, en tanto generadora de malinchismos, para muchos, o como antecesora de los movimientos feministas, o hasta como bandera de las chicanas que ven en ella y en Frida Kahlo un símbolo perfecto de su propia identidad. (13)

It is important to point out that Chicana writers have flipped Octavio Paz's portrayal of Malinche as a passive rape victim by using her as a symbol of feminist identity. The collection of essays is separated into three parts: First, a revision of Malinche as historical figure; secondly, a discussion of the female contemporaries of Malinche, Spanish as well as indigenous and *mestiza*; and finally, an examination of the role of the children of Malinche--symbolically contemporary Mexican men and women, as well as Chicanas. In the final essay, "Las hijas de la Malinche", Glantz elaborates on the increased production of texts that reproduce a feminine point of view in Mexican literature, citing the works of Carmen Boullosa and Elena Poniatowska. She indicates that Malinche disappears as an explicit character in the works of these authors, but the perspectives presented in these texts challenge the traditional representation of the Mexican woman as subject. It would

appear that these texts attempt to carve out a space for women to speak, and in turn, in the future lead to a more balanced representation of La Malinche.

This idea of a more balanced representation of Latin American women in the context of the Conquest is a central theme for the Chilean playwright Inés Margarita Stranger. In her play, *Malinche* (1993), she removes the figure from a national context and instead presents history as a cycle of gendered conflicts: male vs. female. Stranger's play portrays a family of women who all reenact different aspects of the mythology of Malinche. There is the mother, who clings to her indigenous way of life and belief system, and who tries to protect her daughters from the threats of the invasion. Then, there are the three older sisters: the mistress to the Army captain, the convert, and the girl who provides refuge for a Spanish deserter. This last role corresponds to the myth of Malinche as traitor. By colluding with the Spanish soldier and harboring him in her family's home, this daughter risks a great deal of danger to her own family in order to save a foreigner. The youngest member of the family is the only one who remains at the end of the play. She is also the only one of the women in the family who has learned how to read and write. She concludes the play by telling us of her intentions to re-write her mother's history, so it is not forgotten.

The play is set in the home of these five women, who protect each other but are also torn apart by the impact of the Spanish invasion. Stranger's transformation of the Malinche mythology emphasizes the impact of the Conquest on the relationships between men and women. Additionally, she divides Malinche into themes traditionally associated with her symbolism: convert, mistress, and traitor. The mother, who is the only character

that does not survive the invasion, represents a loss of identity, perhaps the silencing of women's voices throughout history. The youngest daughter does not reenact any of the roles associated with Malinche's mythology. Instead, she serves as a representation of the playwright herself, who tries to address the task of recuperating those silenced voices. Furthermore, the youngest daughter can be seen as a spokesperson for other feminist writers who use Malinche as a symbol of the need to redefine relationships between men and women and bring about societal change.

Malinche is a figure that has come to signify transgressive speech, yet ironically remains silenced. In the following chapters, I will examine representations that correspond to the three roles associated with the Malinche mythology that *Stranger* introduces in her play: the convert, the mistress, and the traitor.

The first work, *La otra conquista*, redefines the Conquest as a spiritual, as well as a military defeat. Salvador Carrasco questions the traditional portrayal of Christian conversion by situating the narrative of his film from the point of view of Topiltzin, an Amerindian who tries to maintain his own religious views. Additionally, Carrasco substitutes Malinche with the less controversial (and more obscure) figure of Tecuichpo / Doña Isabel, the daughter of Moctezuma who bore Hernán Cortés a daughter. This notable absence of Malinche parallels the traditional practice of scorning her or relegating her to the sidelines in nationalistic representations of the Conquest. Yet the portrayal of Isabel Moctezuma attempts to subvert traditional portrayals of Amerindian women in Mexican cinema and create a stronger, more positive role for them.

In sharp contrast to Carrasco's approach, Laura Esquivel, in her romantic novel *Malinche*, tries (to borrow a term from Jean Franco) "to plot" the icon into the historical narrative by casting her as the protagonist (146). Unfortunately, in doing so, the novelist repeats many of the versions of Malinche's story that led to her repudiation in the first place. By romanticizing the relationship between her heroine and Cortés, she reinforces patriarchal representations of Malinche. Also, she presents the relationship between Cortés and Malinche in a way that underscores the figure's portrayal as a sex object, rather than attempting to correct it. Finally, Esquivel's novel romanticizes indigenous cultures and fails to avoid letting her novel become a colonizing narrative.

The play *La Malinche*, by Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda, recontextualizes Malinche by portraying her within the time period of the aftermath of the Mexican Crisis, NAFTA, and the Zapatista uprisings in Chiapas. His version of the figure revisits the theme of political betrayal. Rascón Banda associates Malinche with the divisiveness in Mexican society and the threat of interventionism from the United States. He splits Malinche into many different characters, an effect that is similar to the one used in Stranger's play but on a much larger and more expanded scale. This results in a contradictory representation of the character. Throughout the play she transforms from defender of indigenous interests to mouthpiece for the conservative political party, from mother to whore, and from journalist to congresswoman. Rascón Banda draws parallels between the time period of the Conquest and the crisis of Mexico in the mid 1990s in order to emphasize the influence those events have on the country in the present day.

All three of the works mold their portrayal of Malinche according to the paradigmatic elements of Mexican identity and cultural mythology that they choose to address. Just as Cortés used her as his *lengua*, they use Malinche to translate and present their own concerns and interests. These works also elaborate further on the questions presented by Inés Margarita Stranger in her open-ended play. There is no representation of Malinche that does not silence her. However, can the symbol of Malinche be used to inspire new writings that give the power of speech to other, previously silenced voices?

Chapter 1

What Happened to Malinche? Conversion and Absence in Salvador Carrasco's *La otra conquista*.

*Templo Mayor, Mayo de 1520.*⁷ The only sound is rain. We are looking down onto the exterior of a temple, washed in shades of sepia and brown. Corpses of slaughtered Amerindian men and women lie scattered. We are witnessing the aftermath of a slaughter, an act of religious intolerance. This scene serves as a recreation of the massacre of Aztec dancers at the *Templo Mayor* carried out by Hernán Cortés' soldiers. In historical context, the event marks a momentum shift, serving as the catalyst for the uprising and eventual takeover of the Spanish invading forces. Suddenly, a survivor crawls out from beneath the corpse of another soldier, staggers to his feet, and arduously climbs up the side of the slanted temple wall. The survivor, Topiltzin, is a Nahuatl codex-writer. The fact that our first meeting with Topiltzin takes place at the scene of a massacre that later becomes a catalyst for resistance against the Conquest is very fitting. Throughout the film, Topiltzin is synonymous with resistance.

It is the conquest of hearts and minds, not lands or armies, that serves as the focus of Salvador Carrasco's *La otra conquista*. Starting with the aftermath of the massacre at the *Templo Mayor*, the film portrays a Mexica codex-writer who manages to escape from Spanish forces, is later betrayed by a sibling, and finally ends up in the hands of Hernán

⁷ The staging of this scene recalls the Massacre at the *Templo Mayor*, or the *Matanza de Toxcatl* that occurred in 1520, prior to the Spanish defeat known as the *Noche Triste*. This event precedes the falling of Tenochtitlan in May 1521.

Cortés and his men. Thanks to the intervention of Moctezuma's daughter Isabel (who replaces Malinche as interpreter for Cortés in the film), his life is spared. Entrusted to the tutelage of a naïve Friar Diego who has recently arrived from Spain, Topiltzin spends the rest of his journey in a monastery. His reaction to the forced catechism and the bombardment of the Other's images eventually lead to his demise. Though Topiltzin does not survive, neither does he assimilate to Spanish culture. Rather, his journey represents a process of resistance to acculturation.

The title of the film can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, it refers to the religious conquest carried out by the invading Spaniards in Mexico, addressing the theme of Conquest on a regional level. On the other hand, the title also refers to smaller, personal acts of resistance committed by the native peoples of Mexico that become in their own way a reverse conquest. The structure of the film itself emphasizes this duality, with a dynamic first act that presents an ensemble of characters representing both sides of the struggle, followed by the more introspective and deliberately paced second act that focuses on Topiltzin's internal conflict.

Through acts that lead to the creation of images, the preservation of his own cultural heritage, and acts of violence committed against the images of the *conquistador*, Topiltzin manages to have a lasting impact on others around him. Thus we see the effects of the Conquest on a smaller level, affecting individuals and the relationships between them. Furthermore, the second act emphasizes the anxiety of identification with the Other suffered by Topiltzin's spiritual mentor, Friar Diego. Through his interactions with Topiltzin, the priest begins to understand the impossibility of the task of converting the

Mexica people. The conflicts between the forces of acculturation and resistance are played out in the juxtaposition of images from Catholicism and the Aztec religion. Additionally, Salvador Carrasco's re-imagining of historical events and figures brings to light many misconceptions about the Spanish Conquest of Mexico.

Salvador Carrasco's first and, to date, only feature-length film quickly became a commercial success upon its release in Mexico. Almost all of the major players associated with the Conquest are present, with the conspicuous exception of Malinche. Mentioned only briefly in an exchange between second characters, Malinche is absent in this film while also indelibly present. The actions of the other Amerindian characters dismantle the Malinche mythology by choosing different options than the historical figure is supposed to have done. In this manner, they remind us of the way Malinche has been historically characterized and force us to consider other possible scenarios. Malinche's presence can be felt when Topiltzin questions conversion and ultimately re-appropriates the icon of the Virgin Mary as his own. Malinche's presence is also felt in the characterization of Isabel, the daughter of Moctezuma who serves as a counterbalance to Malinche in many ways.

Although she may not be physically present in the film, her influence appears in the actions and characterizations of others. The subaltern is given voice by silencing Malinche and giving the power of speech to the protagonists of the film, Topiltzin and Isabel. Focusing on Topiltzin's forced conversion to Christianity, Carrasco attempts to recreate the voice of the subaltern and questions the oversimplified view of the evangelization of indigenous subjects in New Spain.

La otra conquista predates the rise of the new wave of Mexican cinema. But like many films from the new wave, this film seeks to address the question of Mexican national identity from a different perspective. Salvador Carrasco incorporates history, myth, urban legend, iconography, and a compelling use of associative crosscuts in order to retell the story of Christian conversion. *La otra conquista* tells the story of the spiritual and cultural conquest of Mexico from the point of view of the conquered, giving voice to a point of view that has rarely been shown in Mexican cinema. Ironically, the film's long delay in receiving international distribution, and the fact that it is largely ignored by the same critics who sing the praises of other new wave Mexican films, tell another story.

In this chapter I will explore three main themes that correspond to the overarching idea of silencing Malinche. The principal theme is the story of conversion in the film. While the questioning of Christian conversion is polemical enough in itself, Carrasco goes even further by privileging the point of view of an indigenous character who maintains the validity of his own religious beliefs throughout the film. Additionally, the second main character, the Spanish Friar Diego, also begins to experience a voluntary conversion in his own right. The friar evolves from a man who is rigid in his prejudices against Amerindian religious practices to one who develops a more global understanding of spirituality, has respect for the beliefs of the Other, and even begins to see connections between the Other's beliefs and his own. The second theme of the film is the director's play on history. Most notably, the director rewrites the role of indigenous women in the history of the Conquest by turning Malinche into a figure that is absent yet present. Finally, I will discuss the film within the context of new wave Mexican cinema. While

Salvador Carrasco gives agency to previously silenced points of view in his film, the issues surrounding the film's reception indicate a politics of film distribution that privilege glossier depictions of contemporary Mexico. The paratext of the director's commentary will be used in this chapter to discuss the director's intentions regarding the play on history and the production experience.

La otra conquista first began production in 1992 (500 years after the arrival of Columbus to the New World) and was completed in 1998. It was first released in October of that year, with a wider release in 1999. It was later released twice in the US, in 2000 with a limited distribution, than with a second release in 2007. The film stars Damian Delgado in the role of Topiltzin, with a supporting cast of Elpidia Carrillo as Isabel, Iñaki Arierra as Hernán Cortés, and José Carlos Rodríguez as Friar Diego de la Coruña. At the time, *La otra conquista* was the highest-grossing film in Mexico. While the film divided movie critics, its record-breaking success at the box office indicated a positive reaction from the movie-going public.

After the opening scene in which we see Topiltzin escaping from the aftermath of the massacre in 1520, the film jumps to the year 1539, La Coruña, Spain. We see the character who we later come to know as Friar Diego, Topiltzin's spiritual mentor under Cortés' reign. While the character lies on his deathbed, the film jumps from an external perspective to entering the mind of the friar, a technique the Salvador Carrasco uses often to establish connections between what the characters observe and their internal reactions to the observed scenes. Among the visions that pass through Friar Diego's mind and that we, as viewers, are also allowed to see, are two figures in shadow. The interaction of the

figures recreates a conversion scene: a priest blessing an Indian figure with the sign of the cross. Then Friar Diego's mind jumps to an image of the sun. As he expires, he clutches an old bible in his hands. Later, one of the priests who attended him in his illness finds a fragment of an indigenous codex hidden between the pages of the bible.

The codex fragment serves as a transition, and we jump back in time to 1526, just as Topiltzin is painting the very fragment of codex that Friar Diego had saved in his bible. The scene is that of another battlefield. Initially, the scene that Topiltzin is recreating is presented in great visual detail, with a range of colors dramatically more vibrant than previous scenes in the film. As Topiltzin paints, he uses the colors of the scene in his recreation, and the camera presents the subjects of Topiltzin's painting from different angles, as if to emphasize a need for historical accuracy. Just as with the friar in the previous scene, the perspective shifts from external observation to the character's inner thoughts. Overcome by his emotional reaction to the barbaric nature of the scene he is painting, Topiltzin cries out suddenly.

Later, while at home with his family, Topiltzin announces that he wants to sacrifice his codex to the mother goddess, Tonantzin. While his grandmother approves, his brother questions this idea. He argues instead that they need to learn to adapt if they are to survive. The brother's words become prophetic as the film progresses. The following day, we see two contrasting sequences that trace the actions of the two sides. First we see the slow and painful progress of the Spaniards, led by Captain Quijano. The troops drag cannons, flags, a large wooden cross, and a wrapped bundle through the jungle. We also meet Friar Diego (made up to look much younger) for the first time,

struggling more than others with the terrain. Intercut with the scenes of the Spaniards' journey are scenes of an indigenous religious ceremony in progress and the various stages of preparation for human sacrifice. At the end of the journey, and just as we are about to see the end of the sacrifice ritual, the two sides collide with one another. The Spaniards hear religious music and barge in on Topiltzin and his tribe just as the priest removes the heart from the body of the sacrificed girl. Friar Diego exclaims: "Es que vosotros realmente venís de otro mundo", and fighting ensues. After the Indians have been subdued, Captain Quijano demands information about the whereabouts of their gold. Misunderstanding the captain's gestures, Topiltzin's brother points to the statue of Tonantzin where Topiltzin's codex has been stored for the sacrifice. In a moment that recalls Hernán Cortés' descriptions of the destruction of idols in his letters, the Spaniards topple the statue of Tonantzin, destroying it, and place a statue of the Virgin Mary in its place. The Indians are then taken hostage and the group begins its return to headquarters.

That same evening, while sitting among the other hostages, Topiltzin fakes a sudden spiritual conversion. He approaches the statue of the Virgin Mary (that the Spaniards carry with them everywhere) as if in a trance. When the soldiers move to impede him, Friar Diego orders them to let him go. Topiltzin grabs a rock, throws it at Friar Diego, and escapes. He thus begins living in hiding while his brother is forced to work for the Spaniards in the market. Later, the brother betrays Topiltzin to Captain Quijano, who takes him prisoner for having injured the friar. Topiltzin is taken to be questioned by Hernán Cortés himself, through his interpreter.

The camera at this point is focused as if from Topiltzin's point of view. Through his eyes, we see Hernán Cortés and his female interpreter for the first time. The interpreter, dressed in a huipil with her hair in a traditional braid, could be easily mistaken by most viewers for Malinche, but instead, she is introduced by Hernán as Tecuichpo, or as we later come to know her, Isabel Moctezuma. Just as Cortés contemplates the most appropriate punishment for Topiltzin, Isabel goes beyond serving as an interpreter. Instead she intercedes on Topiltzin's behalf and even gives Cortés political advice. First, she asks Cortés to order his Spanish advisers to leave the room, which he does. She then informs him that Topiltzin is a codex-writer, as well as an illegitimate son of Moctezuma.⁸ She explains that it is in Cortés' best interest to keep Topiltzin alive, as she is the only survivor from the royal family and "la gente tiene reservas por mi condición de mujer."

During this dialogue between Cortés and Isabel, the point of view shifts again, and follows Captain Quijano and Cortés' other adviser to the garden where they have been sent. In this scene that functions as an aside, the secondary characters address the issue of Malinche's absence. The question that initiates the dialogue between the two secondary characters reflects the implied viewers' own reaction to the appearance of Isabel Moctezuma, not Malinche:

ESCRIBANO. ¿Y ésta? ¿Quién es?

⁸ Whether or not Topiltzin is really an illegitimate son of Moctezuma, and thus Isabel's half-brother, is really open to interpretation. Later in the film, Topiltzin and Isabel sleep together, and Isabel becomes pregnant with a child--not a *mestizo* child with Cortés, but an indigenous child with Topiltzin. One could argue that Isabel instead lies to save Topiltzin because of his cultural importance as a codex-writer. At any rate, the director indicates in his commentary that he prefers ambivalence on this question.

QUIJANO. Tecuichpo, hija mayor de Moctezuma.

ESCRIBANO. ¿Qué fue de la Malinche? ¿La ahorcó junto a Cuauhtémoc en las Hibueras?

Here, the director addresses the iconic relevance of Malinche, and calls our attention to his deliberate replacement of her by a lesser-known, and less controversial figure.

Quijano goes on to explain Malinche's absence, and also express his disgust for Cortés' decision to legitimize his son, Martín Cortés:

QUIJANO. Se hartó de ella y se la regaló al capitán Jaramillo.

ESCRIBANO. ¿Regaló a la madre de su primogénito?

QUIJANO. ¿Primogénito? ¡Un *mestizo*!

It is important to note that what Quijano is saying here reflects only part of the whole story. In the year that this scene is supposed to be taking place, Malinche probably would have already given birth to her second child, María Jaramillo. Additionally, though it is difficult to pinpoint the exact age of Isabel, it is commonly accepted that she was about eleven years old at the time of the fall of Tenochtitlan, therefore she could not have been older than nineteen or twenty when this scene supposedly takes place (Socolow 36).

However, Elpidia Carrillo in the role of Isabel Moctezuma plays her as a self-assured, mature woman who could be in her thirties or older--in reality the actress would have been in her mid to late thirties at the time the film was being made. With the character of Isabel Moctezuma, Salvador Carrasco is re-writing history by underscoring the absence of Malinche and replacing her with an alternative female Amerindian figure who also happens to be a member of the Aztec royal family. Furthermore, the Isabel Moctezuma

that we see in the film is a strong woman with the audacity to try to influence Cortés and save Topiltzin's life. By using subterfuge and wit, Isabel subverts many of the myths associated with Malinche, an aspect of the character that will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Topiltzin's life is saved, thanks to Isabel's pleas to Cortés and to Friar Diego. The scene of Topiltzin's torture and forced conversion to Christianity serves as the climax of the film. In this scene, Topiltzin is tied down on a platform in the middle of the main square. Other residents are assembled by various soldiers and forced to watch. The same statue of the Virgen Mary is lowered to the platform, and Topiltzin is placed in such a way that the statue is the only object in his gaze. When Quijano begins torturing Topiltzin, Topiltzin's older brother arrives and tries to intervene, only to be decapitated by Quijano. Just as Topiltzin is about to pass out from the pain of his torture, we see a tear drip from the eye of the statue. There is a fade, and we cut to the second half of the film.

This second half, approximately thirty minutes longer than the first, progresses at a much slower pace. The focus of the second part is to show the aftermath of Topiltzin's conversion and adaptation to Spanish rule. Set five years later at the Monastery of Our Lady of Light, the act opens with a series of images of conversion, including a brief scene of a mass. We meet Topiltzin, now baptized as Tomás by Friar Friar Diego, very changed.⁹ With the hairstyle of a monk, Tomás now wears the cloth of a recent convert.

⁹ To clarify the use of names here- I use Tomás when referring to the character's actions during the second half of the film, after his forced assimilation to Spanish culture. I refer to the character as Topiltzin when referring to the first half, to indicate that he has

When we first meet Tomás again, he is taking Spanish lessons with Isabel. Or, at least that is the pretext for their meeting. What seems like a dictation in Spanish turns out to be an inflammatory letter to Emperor Carlos V, as we soon learn when Isabel code-switches to Nahuatl and hands Tomás the signature plate that Cortés uses on all of his letters. Their subterfuge is observed by Friar Diego, however, who interrupts them by commenting that he hears “el ladrar de perros” instead of the Spanish language. Ultimately, Friar Diego betrays Isabel to Cortés, informing him of the counterfeit letter and her affair with Tomás. On the other hand, he manages to keep Cortés from executing Tomás for the same crime, because he has taken it upon himself to be responsible for Tomás’ “conversión profunda y genuina.”

The arrest and execution of Isabel coincide with Tomás’ decline into insanity. A catalyst for the decline could be the arrival of the statue that we have now become so familiar with and that Cortés used during Topiltzin’s torture. Cortés sends it to the monastery as a “gift” after learning of Topiltzin’s betrayal with Isabel. Tomás’ downfall begins with a fever, than several hallucinations, including one of Quijano trying to firebrand him with the sign of the cross. After a confrontation with Friar Diego in which he accuses the friar of turning (his) people into smoke, Tomás is imprisoned in his cell at the monastery. What follows are a series of escape attempts that become more and more intense. Each attempt brings Tomás closer to his ultimate goal of grabbing the statue.

In the final action sequence of the film, Tomás removes his monk’s habit, dresses in indigenous style clothing, and in an impressive display of acrobatics manages to climb

not undergone this transformation yet and is still free to maintain his Amerindian identity openly.

out of his locked cell. From there, he crosses over the rooftops of the buildings of the monastery until he is able to reach the sacristy where the statue of the Virgin Mary is stored. Again, the statue is the very same as the one we have seen throughout the film: first used to replace the destroyed statue of Tonantzin in the initial meeting between the Spaniards and the Mexicas, later used during Topiltzin's torture and forced conversion, and finally, as a key element of the conclusion to the film. Tomás takes ownership of the statue, hoisting it with a rope through a window of the chapel, and later carrying it on his back to his cell. Just as he arrives at his cell, and looks out the window, with the statue in hand, he sees the sunrise. At this moment, Tomás collapses in such a way that the statue itself crushes him. Later, when Friar Diego and the other monks return to the cell to check on their prisoner, we see that Tomás has died. There are three possible interpretations for the manner in which Tomás dies. One interpretation is that he simply collapses under the weight of the statue. Another interpretation is that the emotional context of the situation, finding himself having successfully re-appropriated the god of the conquerors at the same time as he is reminded of the image of his own mother goddess, Tonantzin, is too much for the character to handle. A further interpretation could be that Tomás can finally rest because he has accomplished his mission. By taking the statue of the Virgin Mary, he proves that the deities of the Other are just as vulnerable as his own.

While facing the corpse of Tomás crushed under the weight of the statue, Friar Diego decides to re-stage the scene of the protagonist's death. He removes the statue from on top of Tomás and places it beside him. Finally, Friar Diego kneels, offers up a

prayer and finishes in Latin with the phrase “*uno Dei*” (one God). Here, the friar is not referring only to the Christian god here, but to both his god and that of Topiltzin / Tomás, implying that they are one in the same. While Friar Diego misinterprets Tomás’ act of taking the statue as a sign of his conversion, in reality, he is the one who has experienced a more obvious transformation. The final words of the scene thus shed more light on the opening sequence, and in particular, our first meeting with Friar Diego in La Coruña on his deathbed. The reasons why he kept the codex all that time, even after his return to Spain, become much clearer. This transformation in Friar Diego also suggests the impact that indigenous religious beliefs have in present-day Roman Catholicism in Mexico. Through his resistance, the protagonist of the film ensures that his own culture and spirituality have as much of an impact on the conqueror (in this case, Friar Diego) as they do on himself (the conquered).

The Story of Malinche’s Conversion

Conversion and resistance are essential to discussing Malinche’s evolution as an icon in Mexican culture and history. There are several reasons why the theme of conversion is an important aspect of the mythology of Malinche. The story of her own conversion and her role in the conversions of others play a large part in the meanings assigned to her today. Of the three roles associated with Malinche: Cortés’ mistress, translator/traitor to her people, and Christian convert, the last one depicts Malinche in the most passive, acquiescent light.

The myth of Christian conversion also heavily impacted the evolution of Malinche as an icon. Her apparently rapid and unquestioning acceptance of European spiritual beliefs became particularly relevant for her portrayal in Spanish sources. The source that gives us the most information about her conversion is Bernal Díaz del Castillo's *Historia verdadera de la conquista de Nueva España*. Here, he presents the most detailed account of Malinche's life and circumstances, and characterizes her as a singular figure. It is not only Malinche's ability to translate that singles her out, however. According to Díaz's account, "Doña Marina" appears to have assimilated successfully into Spanish culture and become a model example of the converted and subservient subject of New Spain. In chapter thirty-seven, Díaz recounts Malinche's history and describes an episode where she reunites with the family that had given her away as a slave. In his account, Díaz compares the reunion between Malinche and her family to the story of the biblical figure of Joseph:

[Y] entonces vino la madre de doña Marina y su hermano de madre, Lázaro [...]. Tuvieron miedo de ella, que creyeron que los enviaba a hallar para matarlos, y lloraban. Y como así los vio llorar la doña Marina, les consoló y dijo que no hubiesen miedo, que cuando la traspusieron con los de Xicalango que no supieron lo que hacían, y se los perdonaba, y les dio muchas joyas de oro y ropa, y que se volviesen a su pueblo; y *que Dios la había hecho mucha merced en quitarla de adorar ídolos ahora y ser cristiana*, y tener un hijo de su amo y señor Cortés, y ser casada con un caballero como era su marido Juan Jaramillo; que aunque la hicieran

cacica de todas cuantas provincias había en la Nueva España, no lo sería, que en más tenía servir a su marido y a Cortés que cuanto en el mundo hay. (My emphasis 57)

The presentation of this description of Malinche is an ironic one (Cypess *La Malinche* 31). Díaz chooses to include this scene of reconciliation between Malinche and her family within the context of her initial meeting with the Spaniards. Although the readers are being presented to Malinche for the first time, Díaz includes a reunion scene that actually does not take place historically until much later, after she has fulfilled her function as translator for the Spaniards during the voyage to Honduras. After the trip to Honduras, she disappears from historical record.

The depiction of Malinche as a grateful and accepting convert has persisted over the years, taken up by various authors who use the figure and her mythology as a symbol with a myriad of meanings. Malinche's seemingly facile conversion to Christianity can be interpreted as an example of her singularity among Amerindian women, but it can also be contested by new interpretations.

One such interpretation is the baptism scene in Laura Esquivel's novel *La Malinche*. In this novel, the protagonist finds herself looking forward to the baptism ceremony, with the expectation that the arrival of the Spaniards heralds also the return of the god Quetzalcoatl. It is not until later that the protagonist Malinalli determines that the Spaniards are quite human and rejects this idea. The narrator describes in detail the *huipil* that Malinalli has made for this very occasion, and the mix of emotions felt by the character, including a sense of belonging, vindication, and relief (because the new

religion prohibits human sacrifice). However, the baptism to a new religion is also closely tied to language, and Malinalli's desire to master the sounds of the Spanish tongue. For example, she is pleased to discover that the name of the Spaniard's god does not contain an "r":

Le pidió al fraile que le enseñara a pronunciar el nombre de su dios.

Aguilar amablemente lo hizo y Malinalli, llena de emoción descubrió que esa palabra, al no tener ninguna erre por medio, no se le dificultaba en absoluto. Malinalli aplaudió como niña chiquita. Se sentía encantada.

[...] Enseguida, Malinalli le preguntó al fraile sobre el nombre de la esposa de Dios. Aguilar le dijo que no tenía esposa.

- Entonces, ¿quién es esa mujer con el niño en brazos que pusieron en el templo?

- Es la madre de Cristo, de Jesucristo, quien vino a salvarnos.

¡Era una madre! La madre de todos, debía entonces ser la señora

Tonantzin. (44-45)

In stark contrast to the intense conflict suffered by Topiltzin in the film, Esquivel's protagonist adapts easily to the new religion, just as she quickly learns to master a new language. Yet, her apparent acceptance of a new religion belies a process of adaptation in which she applies the new terms and images to a pre-existing worldview. Malinalli does not abandon her old beliefs so easily, despite the impression that her seemingly quick conversion may have given to figures like Friar Aguilar. Instead, she comes away with a

different meaning than the friar intends. The irony of this situation underscores the impossibility of complete conversion to Christianity for the Amerindians in New Spain.

The issue of Malinche's conversion becomes even more relevant when one considers her role in baptism ceremonies. As the interpreter for Cortés, she would have been expected to understand the concepts of Christianity well enough to translate the ideas effectively; not only in the words of another language, but in a way that made these concepts more accessible to indigenous groups with an entirely different cosmological view. As Angela Marie Herren points out, scenes of Malinche as interpreter in baptismal ceremonies only occur in the *Lienzo*, and are noticeably absent in the *Florentine Codex*. Commissioned in 1552 as part of an appeal to the Spanish crown, the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* seeks to remind the crown of the Tlaxcalan's role as allies in the Conquest. As Herren indicates, the *Lienzo* is written with a "Spanish audience in mind" (161). Thus, certain scenes in the *Lienzo* may be "largely fictitious" as they reflect the motive of its authors (162). Besides, continues Herren, the peaceful countenances and overall positive portrayal of these baptisms in these images "obscure the fact that Christianity was not accepted without conflict and many Tlaxcalan lords and principal nobles resisted conversion" (172). An interesting depiction of this positive portrayal can be seen in Figure 9 from the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* entitled *Yemoquayateq que tlatloque*, or "When the Lords were Baptized".¹⁰

In this image, Malinche is depicted with her hair loose and in traditional garb. Although she is positioned behind Cortés, she seems to be actively involved in translating

¹⁰ See Figure 9 in Herren's article (172).

as indicated by the hand gestures. Just as in the film *La otra conquista* and the dialogue in Esquivel's novel, the image of the Virgin Mary takes center stage in this scene. Malinche is placed to the side, as so are the wives of the noble lords who are being baptized. Also, Cortés is shown dressed in civilian garb, adding to the overall peaceful mood of the scene. The pictorial representation of Malinche and of the four lords baptized in the scene would seem to indicate a peaceful acceptance of conversion. Also, it is important to note that Malinche is portrayed as being able to assimilate and translate the concepts effectively. However, as Herren reminds us, this representation of Malinche and the four lords reflects the motives of the *Lienzo's* creator (173).

Other Amerindian sources portray conversion scenes differently. For example, the story of the baptism of Yacotzin, the mother of Ixtilxúchitl, presents an account of indigenous resistance to conversion. This scene, from the *Codex Ramírez*, presents a son who as leader appears determined to accommodate the *conquistadores*, even to the extent of converting to their religion. Also, according to the account, Cortés' words are translated here by Aguilar, not by Malinche. Ixtilxúchitl's response to the Spaniards discussion of Christianity appears incredibly enthusiastic and emotional, accompanied even by tears as he "begged to receive the sacrament at once because he now hated all idolatry and revered the mysteries of the true faith" (León-Portilla 59). After this response, Cortés decides to baptize Ixtilxúchitl immediately, even though "a few of the Spaniards objected" (León-Portilla 59). This last detail would apparently subvert the official justification of the *conquistadores'* mission, to bring Christianity and salvation to the native peoples. One is left wondering if some of Cortés' men thought that it might be

wiser to move on than to spend so much time in Tezcoco. On the other hand, this also brings up the question of Ixtilxúchitl's motives. How much of the enthusiastic response to conversion is genuine? How much of it is part of a political ploy, perhaps to learn more about the invading Spaniard's religious beliefs? Or was he merely trying to keep them in Tezcoco for a longer amount of time in order to delay their progress? Whatever Ixtilxúchitl's motives may have been, they do not seem to have convinced his mother Yacotzin to follow his example:

Ixtilxochitl went to his mother, Yacotzin, to tell her what had happened and to bring her out to be baptized. She replied that he must have lost his mind to let himself be won over so easily by that handful of barbarians, the *Conquistadores*. Don Hernando said that if she were not his mother, he would answer her by cutting off her head. He told her that she would receive the sacrament, even against her will, because nothing was important except the life of the soul. (60)

Yacotzin asks her son for some time to consider, but he orders that her rooms be set on fire. Promptly she is baptized, and becomes the first Christian woman in Tezcoco.

Though in the end she agrees to be converted, her initial display of resistance along with her son's threat of violence subvert the commonly held myth of a peaceful and complete evangelization of the indigenous subjects of the conquest.

A “Profunda” and “Genuina” Conversion

A “profound and genuine” conversion becomes Friar Diego’s sincerest hope for the film’s protagonist, Topiltzin. Another phrase that is repeated often in the film is “complete conversion.” Friar Diego uses the phrase to describe what he sees as his duty to achieve in New Spain. His point of view contrasts with that of the military captain, however. The more cynical Captain Quijano ridicules the friar and emphasizes that this idea is impossible to achieve. He says to the friar, “The crusades only ended with the consequence of Muslim ideas invading Spain, and the same story will repeat itself in New Spain...a conversion that will never be complete” (Carrasco). “Complete conversion” is portrayed as a myth, one that is addressed throughout the film, through the dynamic between Topiltzin and Friar Diego. The film deconstructs this myth by focusing on the small acts of personal resistance that Topiltzin uses in order to maintain his identity. There is a clear back and forth between the Spanish attempts to change Topiltzin and his community, and the protagonists fight against that change.

The myth of indigenous acceptance of the European religion during the Conquest of not only Mexico but of Latin America in general consists of the idea that, in spite of certain maintained superstitious beliefs, most native groups were quickly converted to Catholicism. As Matthew Restall points out, “Amidst the complex sixteenth-century debates among Spanish priests and friars regarding the efficacy of different conversion methods and the spiritual state of native peoples, there emerged a myth regarding their Christianization” (74). This myth not only held that indigenous populations accepted European ideas of spirituality and religion quickly, but also rather easily. In addition,

evangelization was held as a justification for the conquest and became for the Spaniards a central issue, while very little effort was applied to the hispanization of native populations in other areas, such as language or dress. Further evidence to support the myth of Christianization is the common practice of *encomiendas*. The *encomiendas* consisted of a practice by which *conquistadores* and their descendents were assigned a population of Indians that would pay annual tribute- including goods for subsistence such as food, cotton, cloth as well as labor for industries of profit (mining, wine-making, etc). In exchange, the *encomendero* needed to supply the Indian population with a priest who would evangelize them (Powers 63).

Another myth that the film deconstructs is what Matthew Restall refers to as the “myth of completion” (65). This myth holds that the fall of Tenochtitlan meant the defeat of the Mexica people, while in reality it signified the collapse of the central political structure, not the nation as a whole. For several centuries after that event in 1521, military resistance by native groups continued to resist colonization, particularly in periphery areas. Additionally, non-military acts of resistance persisted long after the colonization of New Spain. Indeed, some historians would argue that this resistance persists even today. Non-violent yet symbolically charged acts like the preservation of language, cultural and religious practices, and even the maintenance of a certain level of autonomy among indigenous groups all indicate the incompleteness of the *conquistadores*’ mission. Thus the discourse of personal resistance, presented in Topiltzin’s attempts to preserve his cultural heritage, emerges as a dominant aspect of the film. The questioning of the Conquest as a completed mission appears in the first scene of the film, described above.

By starting the film with a massacre in 1520, the director highlights to viewers that we are about to see an account of events concerning a Nahua character whose Conquest story in fact begins, rather than ends, at this point.

Through Salvador Carrasco's lens, we see the conquest not as a quick and astonishing military defeat, but as a slow, gradual attempt to dismantle the spiritual identity of the Nahua people. Salvador Carrasco also subverts this myth by structuring the events of his film around the lives and perspectives of his protagonist Topiltzin and the man entrusted with his catechism: Friar Diego. Ironically, it is actually the friar who receives an education on Aztec religion and, due to his relationship with Topiltzin, begins to question his own religious beliefs. Additionally, Friar Diego serves as a mirror for the film's implied audience, observing Topiltzin's struggle while at the same time formulating his own doubts about the project of conversion that he has been entrusted to carry out.

While there are many plot points and examples of dialogue that correspond to this back and forth between the two main characters, one compelling way that Carrasco represents this tension is through the use of the camera. The director takes advantage of the visual elements of the medium in order to emphasize cultural difference and the character's thoughts and feelings regarding the clash between cultures. Throughout the film, the focus of the camera lens presents us either with the view that Topiltzin himself observes, or the composition of each frame is designed to reflect the internal conflict that he suffers. For example, there is the frequent use of POV (point-of-view, also known as first person camera) shots that present us with Topiltzin's view of the events narrated.

With POV shots , “the camera records what (and how) a character sees” (Giannetti 13). One of the principle methods by which Carrasco portrays the perspectives of Topiltzin and Friar Diego is through what Louis Giannetti defines as the associative technique of cross cutting (455). The use of crosscuts, a technique by which the director cuts rapidly from one scene to the next in such a manner as to establish two actions happening simultaneously, can also indicate a relationship of comparison between the two shots. This allows the viewer to experience the juxtaposition of images as well. Serge Gruzinski describes the impact of images of Western cultures in the Conquest of the Americas thus:

Because the image, along with written language, constitutes one of the major tools of European culture, the gigantic enterprise of Westernization that swooped down upon the American continent became in part a war of images that perpetuated itself for centuries and, according to all indications, may not even be over today. (2)

Gruzinski uses the phrase “war of images” to denote the fanaticism with which Cortés and other *conquistadores* destroyed the images of the colonized Other. In their belief that the Amerindians worshipped idols, the process of tearing down the idols and replacing them with their own images was seen by the Spaniards as an essential part of the mission to spread Christianity. This attack on the imagery of Amerindian belief systems led to the destruction of various artifacts and temples. However, the war of images in *La otra conquista* is not a case of one dominating group forcing acculturation on another. The images of the Amerindians have a way of surviving and even having a lasting impact on the colonizers.

A key example of the impact of images from both groups can be seen in the associative crosscuts used in the first encounter between the Spaniards and the Amerindians in the film. In the previous sequence, we see Friar Diego as he accompanies a small band of *conquistadores* through the mountains. This band of motley fighters is hardly the well-organized Spanish army that one typically sees in Hollywood versions of the Conquest.¹¹ Rather, the group is fairly small, they seem to be barely able to handle the weight of the canon, and are made up of soldiers of different ethnic backgrounds. Judging from the body language and gestures of the actors, the journey is arduous.

Meanwhile, the director cuts between this scene of their journey and the preparations of a religious ceremony enacted by Topiltzin, his family and other tribe members. Although it is apparent from the beginning that the ceremony involves a human sacrifice, the participants display a sense of acceptance and calm. The perspective of these scenes seems more objective, reminiscent of a documentarian style of filmmaking, as the camera is held at a straight, eye level. Suddenly the band of Spaniards interrupts the ceremony and a fight ensues. Upon viewing the statue of Tonantzin, the mother goddess of the Aztec religion, Friar Diego tells the soldiers to tear it down and destroy it. He refers to Tonantzin as “Un puñado de piedras.” During this act, the soldiers find various codexes or *amoxтли* that had been hidden underneath the statue. Once Topiltzin and other members of his tribe have been captured, the codexes are burned during a ceremony to consecrate the indigenous temple to the Virgin Mary. Both acts, the destruction of the statue of Tonantzin and the burning of the codex, can be considered

¹¹ One example is the impressive group of forces shown in the last scene of *Captain from Castille* (1947).

what Gruzinski refers to as acts of idoloclasy, the deconstruction of idols belonging to the indigenous peoples (52). However, idoloclasy did not have the impact that the *conquistadores* hoped for. Instead, for the indigenous, worshipping took on a more discreet, personal aspect. This process of a more personal, discreet worship becomes central to Topiltzin's activities after this initial encounter with Friar Diego and the soldiers.

Perhaps the most significant form of preservation that Topiltzin performs is the creation of a codex. This act of continuing to record his people's history, in spite of the Spanish invasion, could be classified as one of the forms of "everyday resistance" (73) that Restall describes as the indigenous inhabitants way of reacting to the evangelization efforts of the Spaniards (73). In the first scene subsequent to the massacre, we see Topiltzin engrossed in the act of painting the aftermath of a battle. The manipulation of camera angles and colors in the scene allow the viewer to become a witness to Topiltzin's creative process. The scene takes on the dimensions and color palate of a codex fragment, thanks to lighting and makeup that bring out the vibrant, primary colors. The focus of the camera jumps from Topiltzin's page to the scene itself, where the staging of the people and objects in both are so similar that the borders between painted codex and living history become blurred. While Topiltzin's attention remains entirely focused on the task at hand, the soundtrack (a plaintive woodwind solo) emphasizes the mood of solitude and sadness that prevails. The importance of Topiltzin's role as codex-maker is mentioned again in conversations with his grandmother and in Isabel Moctezuma's argument to save him from execution.

This leitmotif of codex-writing questions official historiography by allowing the director to draw our attention to another form of historical documentation (in contrast to the textual documentation of the Spaniards). Notably, the codex that Topiltzin is creating in the film is not commissioned by another. Without any defined audience for his creation, Topiltzin persists in preparing codexes for motives that are not apparent to the viewer. Due to his talent as a codex maker, Topiltzin has a unique point of view that allows him to serve as a metaphor for the Nahua spiritual conscience. As Salvador Velazco points out:

A pesar de que la oralidad desempeñaba un papel central en la transmisión del conocimiento indígena, la escritura pictográfica le permitía preservar al amerindio sus mitos, su historia, la genealogía de sus reyes, sus rituales, sus ceremonias y su memoria colectiva. (129-30)

In spite of the fact that oral story-telling played a central role in the transmission of indigenous knowledge, pictographic writing allowed the Amerindians to preserve their myths, royal genealogy, rituals, ceremonies, and collective memory.

Another form of personal resistance demonstrated by the protagonist is his escape from Spanish forces. Rather than submit along with the rest of his family members, Topiltzin sequesters himself in the jungle to avoid capture and to continue practicing his own religious beliefs. He is found by his brother, who informs him that he was unable to escape “the barbarians” and now works for them in the market. He asks Topiltzin to turn himself in, as he can continue to practice their religion in secret. He informs Topiltzin (in Nahuatl), “We must adapt in order to survive.” Topiltzin responds, “I don’t adapt. I know

who I am!”¹² The dialogue thus presents two varying discourses concerning the indigenous response to the Spanish invasion. Rather than presenting the two indigenous characters as a monolithic group, the discussion emphasizes the plurality of opinions and ideas among Amerindians themselves, and also questions the stereotypical representation of Amerindian subjects as passive victims. As his older brother goes on to inform Topiltzin that he will have to turn him in to the *conquistadores*, we see Topiltzin holding the body of a sacrificed Mexican dog. This creates a parallel between the image on screen, the ritual performed by Topiltzin, and the subtext of the dialogue that we hear (i.e., the betrayal of the older brother).

The second half of the film begins with several images of conversion. These images indicate a gradual process of assimilation to Spanish culture, although it later becomes apparent that this adaptation is superficial. We see Friar Diego leading a Mass, with parishioners that range from Spanish monks to newly converted Mexicas. Also, the physical change that we see in the character of Topiltzin (now called Tomás) indicates a transformation. When the viewer sees the protagonist for the first time in the second half of the film, he has adopted the hairstyle and dress of a newly converted monk. It is important to note that in this scene, we also see Isabel in dressed in Spanish costume for the first time. The new name, Tomás, has a great deal of spiritual and political history. As Jacques Lafaye indicates in *Quetzalcoatl and Guadalupe*, the connection between the names Topiltzin and Tomás recalls the story of Saint Thomas the Apostle, a saint who

¹² When quoting dialogue from the film, I have used quotes in English to indicate dialogue in Nahuatl. The English translations come from the subtitles from the DVD version of the film. Dialogue in Spanish has been quoted in the original language in this chapter.

was closely identified with Ce Acatl Quetzalcoatl-Topiltzin. Originally associated with the evangelization of the Indies, the legend of Saint Thomas gradually became associated with the Americas. He then evolved into a syncretic figure. For the indigenous, Quetzalcoatl-Saint Thomas resembled a sign from their previous belief system. Yet he also served as an important symbol for the invading Spaniards:

[T]heir world system, founded on revelation, and their very religion would collapse if the Bible had lied or simply omitted mention of America; ignorance, forgetfulness, and injustice on the part of God were all equally untenable. [...] Quetzalcoatl-Saint Thomas is thus the most outstanding example of syncretism between the cosmological myths of ancient America and Christianity, the extreme point of contact reached by the two worlds in their advance toward each other. (186)

Thus, the names assigned to the protagonist, Topiltzin and Tomás, underscore the process of cultural syncretism that he could represent. Yet, Topiltzin resists assimilation, appropriating the figures of the colonizers for his own war against their images.

The final sequence of the film presents the last and most complicated act of personal resistance. Topiltzin's act of stealing the statue of the Virgin Mary from the sacristy and transporting it to his cell in the monastery represents an act of violence committed against one of the images of the *conquistador*. By committing this act, Topiltzin literally takes possession of the Other's image. Significantly, in the context of the film the statue of the Virgin Mary is the most important image used by the *conquistadores* to attempt to convert the indigenous characters. In many cases the statue

is used exclusively, in spite of historical documentation that would indicate that Cortés and his forces used various examples of Christian icons (Gruzinski 33). The same statue is placed on top of the ruins of the goddess Tonantzin just minutes after being destroyed by the Spaniards. It is also used during Topiltzin's forced conversion to Christianity. However, the events leading up to this act are also presented from the perspective of Friar Diego, who believes in the possibility of some sort of spiritual transformation in Topiltzin. Friar Diego misreads Topiltzin's reaction to the statue several times throughout the film, thus proposing the question of the effectiveness of this act as an expression of resistance. The interplay between the perspectives of both characters establishes a cycle of repeated reading and misreading of the Other's images.

Unlike Friar Diego, Topiltzin seems to have a privileged understanding of the *conquistadores'* intentions with the use of new images. He effectively manipulates the Spaniards' own presupposition of indigenous inferiority and susceptibility to Christian images. This is seen most effectively in Topiltzin's first escape (already described above), and also in the second half of the film. Once the statue of the Virgin Mary arrives at the monastery, Topiltzin seems to become obsessed with it. On the first day, he is found outside the sacristy looking in on the statue. The friar misinterprets this as a sudden religious inspiration and uses the moment to lecture Topiltzin. The fact that Topiltzin continues to escape from his cell and eventually steals the statue in his final escape attempt indicates that Friar Diego does not quite grasp Topiltzin's motivations.

The concluding events of the film thus include Topiltzin's obsession with the image belonging to the Other's religion, his appropriation of the image, and his death. In

“La guerra de las imágenes en *La otra conquista* de Salvador Carrasco,” Salvador Velasco proposes that Topiltzin needs to find something to replace the mother goddess that he has lost. The fact that Topiltzin steals the statue indicates, according to Velasco, a process of syncretism that results in the creation of the iconic Virgin of Guadalupe (132). In the paratext of the film, the director does mention the symbol of the rose that he includes in the film to foreshadow the appearance of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico. During Topiltzin’s illness in the monastery we see roses blooming in the monastery garden. Also, during Isabel’s imprisonment, she gazes at roses outside her prison cell just before dying at Cortés’ hand. However, whether or not Topiltzin converts to the new religion or accepts the Virgin Mary as a replacement for Tonantzin is ambiguous.

After a fever, Topiltzin falls into a delirious state where he dreams of both the Aztec goddess Tonantzin and the Virgin. A sequence of associative crosscuts between the two images indicates a fusion in Topiltzin’s mind of these two icons into one. When Topiltzin’s delirium becomes so serious that Friar Diego feels it necessary to lock him in his cell, Topiltzin escapes, steals the statue from the sacristy, carries it back into his cell while scaling the monastery wall and is killed when the weight of the statue crushes his skull. As mentioned earlier, this act could be considered an expression of personal resistance. Additionally, stealing the statue of the Virgin Mary from the sacristy closes the circle of events that were initiated by Friar Diego and the soldiers at the scene in the temple. In this instance, it is Tomás performing an act of violence against the Christian image in order express his spiritual loss. Tomás’ act also falls under the category of acts of iconoclasm as described by Gruzinski; it does not necessarily represent a rejection of

the image, but rather a rejection of the cultural and spiritual impact of the Spanish evangelization project that the image represents:

No matter its real import, aggression against a divine figure was coupled with an equally sudden erasure of all the social and institutional links of the image: Church, local traditions, family, or community. This was why iconoclasm took on a subversive aspect, and how it so easily lent itself to all kinds of manipulations. (169)

In other words, by committing this act of transporting the icon from its official place of the sacristy to his own cell, Tomás is able to take personal possession of the image, thus re-appropriating it for himself.

According to the director, one should assume that Topiltzin dies of his own free will; once he is able to re-appropriate the icon of the Virgin Mary and make her his own mother goddess, he lets go. Upon finding Topiltzin's body, Friar Diego says in Nahuatl, "Our venerable mother"--a phrase that does not apply to either Mary or Tonantzin, but rather both. This reinforces the argument that the only character who truthfully undergoes a process of transculturation is, in fact, Friar Diego.

In the beginning of the film, as a prolepsis, we see the friar decades later in Spain. The fact that he is still saving the fragment of Topiltzin's codex inside the pages of his bible indicates that his encounter with Topiltzin has had a significant and enduring impact. Also the director chooses to intercut to a shot of the sun just as the friar dies. This shot is the exact same image that Topiltzin sees when he passes away later in the film. Because Friar Diego survives Topiltzin and returns to the home country, we are able to

observe how his experiences in New Spain impacted him later in life. Reflecting on Friar Diego's own spiritual journey, one is reminded again of the remarks made by his military counterpart, Captain Quijano. What seems, at the moment it is shown in the film, as a cynical remark enunciated by a man who has become jaded with war becomes a pithy summary of the film itself. Comparing the results of the evangelism project in New Spain to the time period of the Crusades, Quijano comments: "la misma historia se repetirá en la Nueva España [...] una conversión que nunca acabará de darse."

Historical Revision in *La otra conquista*

In this discussion of two main (male) characters, the Mexica codex writer and the Spanish friar, one is left wondering, where is Malinche in all of this? Indeed, a notable aspect of this film is a nearly complete reliance on male characters, with the exception of Isabel¹³. This historical figure, the daughter of Moctezuma and widow of Cuauhtemoc, stands in direct contrast to the myth of Malinche that Carrasco's implied audience would already be familiar with and most likely expecting in the film.

While the protagonist of the film, Topiltzin, is purely an invention of Carrasco, we see him interact with primary and secondary historical characters re-imagined from the director's point of view. This tendency of re-imagining historical figures has two precedents: both in literature and in cinema. To explore further this theme of re-

¹³ Both the characters of Topiltzin and Tecuichpo have been given Spanish names in the film (Tomás and Isabel, respectively). Yet, while Topiltzin is introduced to us with this name, and seems to identify with his indigenous name throughout the film, the character of Isabel is based on Isabel Moctezuma. Here, Salvador Carrasco assigns her a Nahuatl name, but in historical record she is always referred to as Isabel Moctezuma. From this point on, I will use the name Isabel for this character.

imagining historical figures, we will revisit the New Historical Novel and its characteristics, as they apply to *La otra conquistada*.

As a subgenre of the New Historical Novel, Latin American novels of the Conquest question official accounts of the clash between Old World and New. According to Kimberle López, these novels do not present the Amerindian perspective on the subject, but rather focus on the European characters. The novels retain the presentation of the *conquistadores* as “great men” and are often narrated from first-person point of view, usually the point of view of a fictional secondary character. The narrative discourse used in these novels yields a certain irony, as López explains: “Several of the novels are narrated from the first-person voices of the *conquistadores* themselves, while subtle irony within these voices challenges the ostensibly univocal rhetoric of empire” (2). The authors of these novels revisit critical historical moments through the eyes of the *conquistador* while at the same time employing irony, “to point to gaps in that imagined perspective” (2).

Simultaneously with the production of Latin American novels of the Conquest, the quincentenary of Columbus’ arrival in the New World also saw a greater focus on the conquest in film. Two examples of films that focus on the conquest of the Americas are *Cabeza de Vaca* (Nicolás Echeverría, 1991) and *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* (Werner Herzog, 1972). Like the novels, these films revisit the events of the conquest from the point of view of the *conquistador* or other fictional characters who accompany them. Herzog’s *Aguirre* also uses irony by deconstructing the myth of superiority of the *conquistadores*. His protagonist ultimately fails in his quest to conquer. Unlike these

films, *La otra conquista* creates a fictional character who serves in opposition to the *conquistador* Cortés. Topiltzin refuses to convert to Christianity, aids Isabel Moctezuma in undermining Cortés authority, and even has a child with Isabel, a child that Cortés assumes to be his own. While certain characteristics of the Latin American novels of the Conquest can be applied to this film, it also presents certain revisions to the subgenre.

Topiltzin is not the only fictional character whose life is intertwined with those of characters based on historical figures like Hernán Cortés and Isabel Moctezuma.

Although the name of the character does not correspond to the name of a historical figure, I would argue that Captain Quijano is probably a stand-in for Pedro de Alvarado, or some amalgamation of that historical figure and other infamous military captains from Cortés' forces. Also, Friar Diego bears some resemblance to the historical Bartolomé de Las Casas. In the case of Isabel Moctezuma, the director plays with the character's historical role, her age, and her symbolism in Mexican history.

In his commentary of the film, Salvador Carrasco indicates that his decision to focus on Isabel Moctezuma, rather than Malinche, allowed him to explore the characterization of a historical figure that for most Mexicans still remains in obscurity. Yet, given their drastically different circumstances, in historical reality Isabel Moctezuma could have never served as a replacement for Malinche or vice versa. In Salvador Carrasco's version of history, the character of Isabel addresses the roles associated with Malinche mythology, interpreter, mistress, and Christian. In addition, Isabel also addresses another role associated with Malinche, as the mother of *mestizaje*.

La otra conquista includes a host of contrasting archetypes of mothers; from the absent and neglectful Malinche to the benevolent and protective Guadalupe, from the subjugated Tonantzin to the ubiquitous Virgin Mary, from mothers who have been victims of rape to mothers by choice. In addition, other female characters in the film may not be mothers per se, but enact roles as maternal figures for the protagonist Topiltzin. These include women from Topiltzin's own biological and spiritual family (his grandmother and the other women in his village), and strangers who he encounters after falling into the hands of the Spaniards, such as the *beata conversa* who assists him in the Franciscan monastery. It is also during the scene of Topiltzín's forced conversion where the theme of the Virgin Guadalupe as spiritual mother is introduced.

At one point, as Topiltzin looks up at this statue we see a moment where, with the use of camera angles, the Virgin connects with Topiltzin and returns his gaze. As if to further demonstrate the statue's empathy for Topiltzin, the camera frames a single teardrop released from one of the Virgin's eyes. This display of empathy alludes to one of the main functions of Guadalupe as a protector and mediator for Mexico's oppressed. In addition, the director juxtaposes a scene of torture, brutality, and forced conversion with a scene of tenderness, as he cuts to a spectator of the conversion scene, an Amerindian mother, who is shown comforting her *mestizo* baby. We hear her tell her child, "This is my blood. Though your skin is white, I will never abandon you." The placement of this mother alongside the other spectators of Topiltzin's conversion, and the juxtaposition of her and the statue of the blond, blue-eyed Virgin, could be interpreted as a visual metaphor for Guadalupe. It also serves as a commentary on the prevalence of this kind of

situation in New Spain, underscoring the implication that Malinche's characterization as the mother of *mestizaje* is politically motivated. In Octavio Paz's "Los hijos de la Malinche", he posits that the Mexican nation is, in effect, a nation of orphans, with Malinche as its negated mother. On one hand, the presentation of various positive maternal figures questions Paz's statement concerning identity. On the other, the film also presents a rejection of *mestizaje* as evidenced by Isabel and Topiltzin's decision to have a child together.

Traditionally, the Virgin of Guadalupe serves as an important counterpoint to Malinche. As an icon, she is the benevolent spiritual mother, the *Ave* to Malinche's Mexican *Eva*, who mediates on behalf of the Amerindian converts and protects them. Though both figures are considered mediating mothers, in Malinche's case she is mediating on behalf of the foreign invaders. Yet another perspective on the role of women in colonial-area Mexico would suggest a more positive relationship between the two. As Electa Arenal and Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel explain, Malinche and Guadalupe, along with Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, are "three female figures [that] traditionally exemplified the different productive (and reproductive) roles open to women in the constitution of a conformist patriarchal national identity. Today, they are linked to the foundational discourses of a contemporary Mexican and even Chicana identity" (120). It is important to note that the contemporary shift in interpretation of Malinche as a figure also influences Carrasco's film, specifically the creation of the character of Isabel.

While Guadalupe represents a spiritual counterpoint to Malinche in the film, the character of Isabel is used in order to physically replace her. As one of Moctezuma's 150

children (Socolow 36), Isabel was recognized as his legitimate heir. During her lifetime, Isabel was married to six different men (Atlixcatl, Cuitlahuac, Cuauhtemoc, Alonso de Grado, Pedro Gallego, Juan Cano). Isabel could be considered a mother of *mestizaje* in her own right. Like Malinche, she also gave birth to a child by Hernán Cortés, a daughter named Leonor Cortés. However, unlike Malinche, Isabel Moctezuma had the benefit of her noble heritage to protect her and ensure her future after the fall of Tenochtitlan. Despite her position as a member of Aztec royalty, with the arrival of the Spaniards and the colonization of Mexico she fell into subalternity as well, finding herself in a position where adapting to the new social order became a necessity for survival.

Susan Socolow refers to Isabel Moctezuma as “perhaps the most famous Indian woman of her time” (36), yet, as Salvador Carrasco points out in his commentary to the film, she is less infamous than Malinche and, for that reason, less often associated with Cortés. Perhaps her legend was overshadowed by the infamy and mythology surrounding the figure of Malinche. However, like Malinche, Isabel Moctezuma was baptized and had her name changed from Techichopotzin. In the film, other characters variably refer to her as Tecuichpo or Isabel depending on the context. Isabel Moctezuma eventually became a wealthy *encomendera*. She also became a “symbol of the Hispanization and Christianization of Mexico” (Socolow 36).

As Karen Vieira Powers mentions in *Women in the Crucible of the Conquest*, the conquest of the Americas can also be noted as a gendered conflict. The events of the conquest had a significant impact on the relationships between men and women and caused several changes after the arrival of the Spaniards. One example of this is a

disparate view on intertribal unions. Some of the first Amerindian women to participate in interracial unions with Spaniards were Aztec and Inca noblewomen. For the Amerindian royalty this was a common political practice that helped to establish ties between the two groups. However, the Spaniards saw their relationships with these royal women in a very different manner. As Powers explains:

It was hoped [by Amerindian rulers] that the progeny of these unions would function to absorb the powerful Spaniards into royal lineages and cement political alliances just as in pre-Hispanic times. Little did the Aztec and Inca know that they were dealing with a culture that sought to limit legitimate marriages and offspring to individual couples in order to restrict access to power, not to expand it. Neither did they realize that in many cases the Spaniards [...] would interpret these unions as concubinage at best and illicit affairs at worst, thus denigrating instead of raising the status of the indigenous noblewomen who partnered with them. (58)

Both sides had very different understandings of the purpose of creating marital ties. This translated into loss for noblewomen, of power, status, and economic independence. In addition to the need to adjust to changes in the status of women in the colonies, Isabel also had to balance the pressure of being used as an intermediary between the two cultures. In his book *Aztec Royalty under Spanish Rule 1520-1700*, Donald Chipman describes the pressures that Isabel Moctezuma faced to assimilate to Spanish culture while representing her people at the same time:

Doña Isabel, of course, fared much better than Indian women of lesser birth, but her position as an Aztec princess also meant people held higher expectations of her. To adapt and survive in the totally unprecedented context of a dominant European society, it was necessary for her to undergo rapid Hispanization and learn from the Spanish consorts who were thrust upon her. (58)

In Carrasco's film, Isabel assumes many roles. We first meet her during the scene of Topiltzin's questioning for the attack on Friar Diego. From the corner of the room a Nahuatl woman appears, in traditional dress. It is apparent that her role is as interpreter for Hernán Cortés. Her first words (in Nahuatl) for Topiltzin contain both a warning and a plea for sympathy, "Don't say anything. Don't do anything...Don't judge me for being here." Rather than the figure of Malinche, who would be expected in this scene by most viewers familiar with the history of the Mexican Conquest, it is Isabel Moctezuma, who takes over this role in the film. Yet with the words "Don't judge me for being here," she could be speaking for either one of the female figures.

Though Isabel Moctezuma is a lesser-known figure, it is Malinche who has been harshly judged in the annals of history. Historians who have described Malinche as a traitor to her people ignore the fact that she herself was not an Aztec, and in fact came from a community who had been conquered by the Aztec empire. The charge as traitor also ignores her lack of options, as a slave, and her age (she may have been as young as fourteen at the time of Cortés expedition to Tenochtitlan). Furthermore, historians' inability to comprehend that Malinche did not identify with the Aztec people belies a

racist attitude towards the indigenous civilizations of Mexico, ignoring completely the multiplicity of ethnicities and the complicated political situation that existed long before the arrival of Europeans.

In addition to her role as interpreter, Isabel also functions as a mistress to Hernán Cortés. The director makes it clear, however, that Isabel has been forced into, rather than choosing, this situation. In one scene the character sits alone in the palace facing her father Moctezuma's headdress. As she approaches the headdress and runs her fingers over the feathers, the camera slowly focuses more on her facial expression, emphasizing her psychological state. Just as we see her begin to smile, Cortés interrupts the scene, wrapping a thick European necklace around her neck and rudely removing her original one.¹⁴ Although Isabel is unable to physically resist Cortés, she refuses to allow herself to be seduced by him, and even accuses Cortés of murdering her husband.

This scene revisits the victim / whore paradigm so often associated with the role of women during the conquest. In fact, modern historians continue to argue that the Conquest of the New World amounted to the conquest of women (Powers). This is a disturbing assertion for various reasons. On one hand, this attitude contributes to the objectification of women by analogizing the female body to land. On the other hand it ignores the psychological trauma of the rape and dehumanizes the victims. Finally, this assertion does not take into consideration the parallel gender role structures prevalent in indigenous cultures and examines the relationships between men and women from a Western perspective. In this scene, Salvador Carrasco rejects the whore / victim

¹⁴ In this scene Carrasco alludes to another popular legend concerning Cortés: the strangling of his wife in 1523. See Lanyon.

paradigm, as Cortés “conquest” of Isabel is an unsatisfactory one. In her rejection of Cortés, Isabel subverts the most controversial theme of the Malinche myth, that of mistress / lover of Cortés. The dialogue of the scene, along with the body language and facial expressions of the actors who portray Isabel and Cortés, portray the rape of the female protagonist in a matter-of-fact way; with a victim who is intently focused on survival. Additionally, the scene highlights the insecurities of the victimizer.

By refusing to be seduced by Cortés and becoming the mother of an indigenous, not *mestizo* child, Isabel subverts another Malinche myth. As she confronts Cortés with this information she repeats the following phrase twice, once in Nahuatl, and once in Spanish: “This is my body, this is my blood. Este es mi cuerpo; ésta es mi sangre.” These words are directly lifted from the previous scene of Topiltzin’s public torture. She shocks the *conquistador* when she informs him that the child she is carrying is not his. Rather than bear Cortés another child, she is bearing the child of Topiltzin.¹⁵ Her character comes to an end in the film on her own terms and destroys any preconceived notions of the passive female victim. Rather than representing the conquered woman, I would argue that it is she who wins the battle in this instance, by destroying Cortés false sense of honor and superiority.

A final role played by Isabel in the film explores the notion of the participation of indigenous members of Mexican society in the project of colonization. The instances where she participates in these activities represent more accurately her historical role in Mexico’s history. In addition to interpreter, mistress, and mother, Isabel is a politician.

¹⁵ Isabel Moctezuma did in fact bear Cortés a daughter, Leonor Cortés, whom she rejected. See Chipman.

Though she uses her influence and political savvy to convince Cortés to allow Topiltzin to live, she also is concerned with taking care of herself. We see a gradual process of Hispanization in the character. For example, she changes her dress from a traditional *huipil* in the first scenes to European dress in later scenes. Additionally, she is placed in charge of teaching Topiltzin Spanish. She acknowledges her limited political role as a woman when she persuades Cortés to let Topiltzin live, while on the other hand secretly conspires, with Topiltzin's help, to threaten Cortés' financial future by forging Cortés' signature on a letter that would create trouble for him with the king. Though it is apparent that the characterization of Isabel addresses many myths associated with Malinche, she does not serve as a mere replacement for Malinche. Isabel becomes, instead, a catalyst for debate concerning the representation of historical female figures in Mexican cinema. Salvador Carrasco's writing, combined with the vitality that the actress Elpidia Carrillo brings to the role, make Isabel Moctezuma the most compelling character of the film. With this character, Carrasco's attempt to give voice to traditionally silenced voices (Amerindian, female) is most successful.

The revision of historical figures like Isabel is only one aspect of the New Historical Novel in this film. Carrasco also employs the use of anachronisms and imposes different time periods. The opening scene is set in 1520 (the *Matanza del Templo Mayor*), however, the year noted as the downfall of Tenochtitlan is actually 1521, in other words, a year later. Also, the film jumps from one time period to another frequently. We begin with the massacre of 1520, then, we have Topiltzin's codex created in 1526. After

Topiltzin's capture in 1526, we are reunited with him five years later at the monastery.

Finally, there is the scene of Friar Diego's passing in 1539.

The fact that the film uses anachronisms and jumps from one year to another could be because, as Salvador Carrasco himself has pointed out, that the film attempts to address what he views as a gap in Mexican history. As the director explains in an interview:

In all of my research I found quite a bit of literature until August 13th, 1521, when Cuauhtémoc surrendered. Then suddenly there's a black hole of ten years. There's very little written on what happened in the following ten years. I thought [...] what happened the morning after? We all know how it ended when Cuauhtémoc surrendered, but imagine the psychological and emotional scars. (Quoted in Haddu 165)

Thus, according to Carrasco, the film explores the decade of time between the fall of Tenochtitlan, symbolically considered the defeat of the Aztec empire, and the appearance of the Virgin of Guadalupe to Juan Diego in 1531. By exploring this gap in history, the focus is placed not only on the military events of the Conquest, but the national myths of transculturation and *mestizaje* that play an important factor in cultural products addressing the issue of Mexican identity. However, as we have already seen, the film also spans beyond this ten-year period: beginning with the massacre in 1520 and ending with Friar Diego's death in 1539. This distortion leads the viewer to question even further the notion of historical truth.

One aspect of the New Historical Novel that does not apply to *La otra conquista* is that of point of view. According to López, with the exception of a few innovations such as Ignacio Solares' *Nen, la inútil* (1994), the majority of the New Historical Novels feature European male protagonists, either characters based on *conquistadores* themselves or fictional foot soldiers:¹⁶

Notwithstanding a few notable exceptions, then, both women and Amerindians remain invisible, silent, and nameless Others within the majority of Latin American historical novels set in the period of the conquest, despite the corpus's marked emphasis on the representation of marginality. (12)

Salvador Carrasco's choice to situate the perspective of the film from that of an indigenous character emphasizes his goal to question history and to suggest the self-serving context of historical documents written from the *conquistador's* perspective. By focusing the point of view on Topiltzin and Isabel, Carrasco attempts to address the silenced voice of the subaltern, that is, the voice of the indigenous subject.

La otra conquista and Mexican New Wave Cinema

As both Miriam Haddu and Carl Mora indicate, the historical period of the conquest emerged as one of the major thematic explorations for filmmakers during the

¹⁶ An interesting play on this tendency can be observed in the Jane Lewis Brandt's *La Chingada* (1979). In her novel, the protagonist is a young Havana-born *criollo* named Arturo who serves as a foot soldier to Cortés and eventually falls in love with Malinche. However, Lewis Brandt also divides the novel into chapters narrated by the soldier and Malinche, creating a space for both perspectives to be voiced.

end of the 20th century. At this time, various factors in Mexico's political system had an impact on its filmmaking industry. One example of this connection between politics and cinema is the creation of the Mexican Film Institute (IMCINE) in the late 1980s, which established more autonomy for filmmakers and took on the task of fundraising on their behalf. Between this period and 1994, several policies were changed that had an impact on cinematic production and distribution. Rather than function as sole producer of film projects, IMCINE would fund over half of the amount of the budget, while directors were traditionally expected to supply the rest (Mora 138). Other policies embraced by this restructuring of IMCINE included a push to attract more international audiences to Mexican films, thus transforming Mexican national cinema into a more globalized and commercially successful operation. As a result, since the mid-1990s, the commercial and critical success of Mexican films has reached levels only previously attained during the Golden Age period (1935-1955). This effort has also had a significant impact on reception of Mexican films in the United States:

Indeed the audience for Mexican films has changed considerably since the 1980s. The audience for Mexican films in the United States has diversified and is no longer primarily a Spanish-speaking audience. The place of film consumption has also shifted considerably so that now theaters share the viewing space with video/DVD, cable, and television. Film consumption at home has considerably changed the communal experience of film spectatorship. (141)

In addition to its role as an important export, Mexican cinema has also served as a cultural product and practice that plays an important role in the process of nation-building. Since the silent era, it “has portrayed various contradictory relations among the country’s history, Mexico as a national geographic and discursive space, and Mexican identity” (Hersfield 81). Add to the development of the fruitful period between 1989 and 1994 another important factor; the celebrations and protests concerning the 500-year anniversary of Columbus’ arrival to the New World in 1992.

In addition, the time period that precedes the rise of new wave Mexican cinema, from the 1990s to 2000, was a period of political turmoil and upheaval for the country. On January 1, 1994, the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas, led by subcomandante Marcos, overshadowed the signing of NAFTA by president Carlos Salinas de Gortari. The uprising also brought international attention to the economic disparities in the country and the poverty of the indigenous population. Salinas’ administration was also mixed up in several scandals, including charges of corruption, accepting personal payoffs from large companies, and the arrest on murder charges of his brother, Raúl. The election of Vicente Fox, the first non-PRI candidate to the presidency in 2000, and the subsequent partisan struggles between the PAN president and the mostly PRI majority in Congress contributed to general public dissatisfaction (Mora 188-89).

Since the turn of the century, Mexican cinema has received a great deal of international acclaim. The 2000 films *Amores perros* (Alejandro González Iñárritu) and *Y tu mamá también* (Alfonso Cuarón) are often cited as the most well-known examples of the ‘new wave’ of Mexican cinema. This tendency is characterized by the presence of an

internationally famous or crossover star, such as Gabriel García Bernal, who has leading roles in both the movies mentioned above, or Salma Hayek in 2003's *Frida*. The nominations of three Mexican filmmakers at the Oscar Awards in 2006: Alejandro Gonzalez Iñárritu for *Babel*, Alfonso Cuarón for *Children of Men*, and Guillermo del Toro for *Pan's Labyrinth* indicated that Mexican cinema was enjoying a period of notable success. Mexico's most renowned filmmakers have chosen, however, to reside and make films in other parts of the world, rather than remain in Mexico. This indicates the problems that still plague the Mexican film industry.

Although Salvador Carrasco's film pre-dates new wave Mexican Cinema, the story of the film's production and failure to receive international distribution underscores the issues that affected the industry prior to the turn of the century. Carrasco began filming in 1992, and finished in 1998, but despite a successful response from the public, the film was not shown in the United States in limited distribution (Los Angeles) until 2000. Additionally, though it addresses the question of national identity much like other more popular films of the 1990s it remains largely ignored by critics. Given the popularity of new wave Mexican cinema, it seems ironic that *La otra conquista* is still relatively unknown by critics in the US. Mirriam Haddu frames the questions concerning the film's lack of recognition:

T]he case of *La otra conquista* raises interesting questions regarding the role of distribution and its impact in the possible shelf life of a film, regardless of its commercial or artistic value. The polemics of representations witnessed by Carrasco's film both because of its subject

matter (the narrative of which is set against the backdrop of the Spanish conquest of Mexico) alongside the (perceived) challenges the film provides for commercial reception, also opens the debate regarding the boundaries and restrictions governing transnational success. (156)

Haddu's observations underscore a politics of distribution within the Mexican film industry and the impact of these politics on the reception of Mexican films outside of the country. The polemics that Haddu indicates are notable. The first element of controversy-- setting the narrative against the backdrop of the Spanish conquest-- is notable because *La otra conquista* is not the first film to do this, nor is it the only film of the 1990s to be filmed in Nahuatl or to tell history from the point of view of an indigenous protagonist. *Retorno a Aztlán* (1992) by Juan Mora Catlett shares some common characteristics with *La otra conquista*. The film is set during pre-Hispanic times, filmed entirely in Nahuatl and presents a power struggle between the military rulers, led by Moctezuma and the priests.

Another example of a film that explores Mexico's colonial past is *Cabeza de Vaca* (1990) by Nicolás Echeverría. Similarly to *La otra conquista*, Nicolás Echeverría's film is not meant to be an accurate historical reconstruction of the events of the life of the *conquistador* Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca. "It is a symbolic, impressionistic, mythical interpretation--an attempt to uncover the meaning of his experience within the context of the European conquest of the native peoples of the Americas" (Mora 195). Thus, Salvador Carrasco's film is not the first to explore this period of Mexico's past, nor the first to tell the past from an indigenous perspective. The question remains, why did *La*

otra conquista receive less support from official institutions that support film, such as IMCINE, than other films?

The difficulties concerning the lack of economic support for the film parallel one of the themes that *La otra conquista* addresses, the role of the subaltern in Mexican national identity. When compared to other films produced during the same time period, the lack of support indicates the existence today in Mexican cinema production of what John Beverley refers to as the “dividing line that produces domination and subordination not only in the past but also in the present” (7). In other words, the role of the State as fund-raiser, producer and promoter of films has an indelible impact on the image of Mexican identity that is produced by its filmmakers. As critic Sergio de la Mora indicates:

By investing in what circulates as Mexican cultural capital at international film festivals, universities, museums, and art film circuits, the Mexican State showcases a selective national film heritage and selectively fosters national traditions, thereby reinforcing and reproducing its political institutions. (195)

By questioning the euphemistic portrayal of the conversion of Amerindian subjects in Mexico and offering an alternative figure that breaks down the Malinche myth, Salvador Carrasco posits the hybridity of Mexican national identity. Yet, Carrasco’s take on Mexican national identity also won him a fair amount of criticism. For example, his decision to cast Damián Delgado in the role of Topiltzin provoked some criticism. As he indicates in his commentary of the film, Delgado was rejected initially by distributors as

being “too Indian-looking” to portray the leading role. Also, the film received less support in international distribution than films like *Amores Perros* which show a more cosmopolitan, urbanized view of Mexico because the distributors assumed it would be less attractive to an international audience. This preference for a glossy Mexican cinema that privileges Spanish dialogue over Nahuatl and urban settings over rural ones perpetuates the same myths of Mexican history and identity that *La otra conquista* attempts to deconstruct.

What makes the *La otra conquista* innovative, more controversial, and perhaps more difficult for international audiences, is the way in which it narrates the conquest in spiritual terms, rather than telling the story of the military conquest of Mexico. This results in a film that relies on a style of story-telling that is more abstract, psychological, and introverted. While there are several moments of action in the film itself, with each event, we are also presented with the main character’s thoughts and perceptions on the event that he has just observed. The lens of the camera moves from external narrator to internal, entering directly the minds of its protagonist, Topiltzin, and his foil in the film, Friar Diego. In order to convey the conflicts of the film, the director relies on a narrative driven by associative crosscuts- or cuts from one scene or image to another- in order to establish a connection between the action of the film and the psychological impact each action has on the main characters.

Additionally, the film needs an audience that is already familiar with basic background knowledge on the history of the Conquest of Mexico. The fact that the figure of Malinche is not shown, and is intentionally replaced by Isabel Moctezuma, is one

element of the film that would go completely unnoticed by a viewer who has little knowledge of Mexican history. Salvador Carrasco's representation of *lo mexicano* is not for the casual North American moviegoer who wants to see a foreign film for a superficial slice of Latin American culture¹⁷. *La otra conquista* delves more deeply than other films from the New Wave, examining the impact of the destruction of indigenous religious and cultural beliefs on the creation of present-day Mexico. If we are to underestimate the international film-viewing public, this makes the film less marketable. It is not just the fact that Salvador Carrasco sets his narrative during the time period of the Conquest, but the way in which he depicts this narrative, that may have kept the film from receiving the same international success as similar films released during the same time period.

Conclusion

With characters like Isabel and Topiltzin, Salvador Carrasco attempts to revisit the colonial past, question commonly held notions of history, and place an Amerindian character in a central, active role in order to contest the image of the passive, defeated victim of the conquest. *La otra conquista* addresses the issue of Mexican national identity in a film that attempts to subvert the traditional view of the indigenous role in the Conquest and present the viewer with strong agents of resistance like Topiltzin. While the film attempts to address the silenced voice of the subaltern, the characters of the film that

¹⁷ In this author's opinion, Salma Hayek and Julie Taymor's *Frida* (2003) would be a good example of this type of film. *Frida* features mostly North American, European and British actors in the roles of Mexican characters.

are meant to represent the subaltern come to an ultimately tragic demise, with our protagonist killed literally by the crushing weight of the Western icon of the Virgin Mary, and with the heroine Isabel imprisoned and eventually replaced by a Spanish woman.

The representation of indigenous characters has a polemical past in Mexican national cinema. While Indians represent 10% of the nation's population, and *mestizos* the vast majority, the small minority of *criollo* remain Mexico's "phenotypical ideal" (Ramírez Berg 76). This preference for Creole appearance affects the image of Mexican society presented in its films. The question of how to represent Amerindians stems from a national debate that today remains unresolved. As Charles Ramírez Berg mentions:

Truly the Indian question is a hypersensitive national sore. Revered in history, Indians are neglected in fact, relegated to the fringes of Mexican life. The same is true in the movies where, in the main, *los indios* are Mexican cinema's structured absence. (77)

Among the problematic representations of Amerindian characters in Mexican films of the past, there are the passive, servile minor characters; represented as humble and frequently mispronouncing words in Spanish. This type of figure can be seen in Gabriel Soria's *La virgen morena* (1935).

As a film from the Golden Age of Mexican Cinema that tells the origin story of the Virgen of Guadalupe, Soria's film can be seen as a predecessor for Salvador Carrasco's post-1992 take on colonial Mexico. *La virgen morena* retells the legend of the apparition of the Virgen of Guadalupe to Juan Diego in 1531 in a way that supports official historiography. The film centers on a fictional love story between the Creole

daughter of the viceroy Doña Blanca and the last surviving emperor of the Aztecs, Coatl. In the meantime, the mostly Indian residents of the town are being attacked by an overzealous Spanish army captain. The sociopolitical message of the film focuses on the physical harm done to the Indians at the hands of the Spanish colonists. Yet in the discussion between characters from both groups, the issue of race also becomes synonymous with the theme of social justice. As one character, Popoca explains:

Su ley dice no matarás y nos matan, su ley dice no robarás y nos roban; su ley dice no desearás a la mujer de tu projimo y nos llevan a nuestras mujeres y a nuestras hijas, y después de todo esto se van al cielo porque son blancos y nosotros no podemos entrar porque no somos de su color. No, yo no quiero ser blanco; estoy muy contento de ser indio.

In other words, whiteness becomes associated with Christianity (and by extension what the *criollo* elite accept as moral superiority) in this colonial society. It is important to note however that appearance is just one of several factors that influence the debate concerning Mexican identity. In many instances race is also closely tied to socioeconomic status.

While the captain is arrested and punished for murder in the conclusion of *La virgen morena*, the film at no point addresses the issues of exploitation and poverty that plague the Indian characters. The main focus of the film is the successful conversion and assimilation of the indigenous population of Mexican society. However, the opposite approach of glorifying indigenous characters does little to improve their representation. This approach runs the risk of glorifying Amerindian culture and defending arguments of

separatism and cultural exclusion from the *mestizo* majority. The relationship between Topiltzin and Isabel in *La otra conquista* defends this approach as well. By allowing these characters to have a child together in order to preserve their bloodline, the *mestizo* future of the nation is denied.

The death of Topiltzin at the end of the film does serve to affect change, but not in a manner that would improve the lot of his people. Topiltzin serves instead as an example for the Spaniard Friar Diego, leading him to question his own religious beliefs and begin to even accept the legitimacy of the Other's belief system, as indicated in his final words concerning "Nuestra madre". Topiltzin's story of personal resistance is compelling, but his end is tragic, and the impact of his resistance is felt more by Friar Diego than any other character in the film.

Though the film may not successfully give a voice to the subaltern Amerindian subject, it does carve out a space for discussion of women's roles and presents a feminist discourse concerning the representation of women in Mexican national cinema. This discourse incorporates both the visible Isabel and the absent Malinche. As mentioned earlier, Malinche is a paradoxical figure. She is recorded in history for her ability to speak in various languages, yet she remains silent. No words of her own have passed down in historical record. Similarly, Malinche remains a paradoxical figure in Carrasco's film. She is a figure that remains absent yet present. Indeed, the director deliberately calls our attention to her absence. Though the film addresses myths associated with the Conquest and also with the evolution of the icon of Malinche, it does little to vindicate her. We are presented with an idealized figure in Isabel who speaks her own words and

not the words of the *conquistador*, is repulsed rather than entranced by Cortés, and has an indigenous child. Although she subverts the Malinche myths, she also underscores the most salient negative aspects of these myths, drawing further attention to the process of historical representation that has led to Malinche's status as a demonized, polarizing figure.

However, Carrasco also attempts to move towards Malinche by presenting a character who effectively conveys the psychological and spiritual trauma of an indigenous woman who finds herself, due to the political circumstances of her situation, forced to assimilate to a new language and religion, and dealing with the inevitable risk of being judged by others for these acts. Though he does not give Malinche a voice, the director does create a space for critical dialogue concerning her representation, and for that matter, the representation of other indigenous women during the period of the Conquest. The figures of Malinche and Isabel Moctezuma carry the double burden of being both subaltern and female, and are thus "cast even more deeply in shadow" than their male counterparts (Spivak 278). Thus, Carrasco's version of Isabel Moctezuma concedes more agency to the figure of the Aztec woman in the context of colonial Mexico as portrayed in Mexican cinema.

Though the film spends much more time focusing on its male characters, it is in the development of the female character of Isabel that the question of representation, of both Indian and female figures, is portrayed most effectively. Salvador Carrasco draws our attention to his decision to write Malinche out of his version of events. With the revisionist figure of Isabel, the director provokes us to question traditionally held

perceptions concerning the roles of Amerindian women in the events of the conquest and colonization of Mexico. While he leaves Malinche out, he invites us to question how she and other Indian women have been portrayed throughout history. Malinche is silenced, but new opportunities for dialogue concerning the representation of women in Latin America are opened.

Chapter 2

Romancing Malinche: The Role of the Mistress in Laura Esquivel's *Malinche*¹⁸

In her fifth novel, Mexican writer Laura Esquivel addresses the history of the Conquest by exploring the myth of one of its most controversial figures, Malinche. The novelist revisits the literary style she became known for in her debut novel *Como agua para chocolate* (1989). She combines history and elements of romance novels in *La Malinche*, addressing traditional accounts of the life of the figure in order to create a space for a more feminist perspective. Here, the story of Malinche is told from her own perspective, rather than being told second-hand. However, the formulas used in the novel do not really provide Malinche with any agency. The novel walks a tightrope between presenting Malinche as a fictional character while simultaneously treating her as a historical figure. Yet Laura Esquivel can hardly be criticized for “fictionalizing” Malinche. As we have already seen, so much about Malinche’s life, actions and role in the conquest remain in obscurity.

The novelist is certainly not the first to turn Malinche into a fictional character. However, with her protagonist Malinalli, Esquivel converts her into something more: a heroine that seems to be conscientiously aware that she is trapped in a romance novel. *Malinche* is not just another romance novel with historical figures as its main characters,

¹⁸ The title of this chapter is a reference to the Robert Zemeckis film “Romancing the Stone” (1984) which pokes fun at clichés of the romance novel genre, showing, for example, a best-selling novelist is far from romantic. Yet the film’s parody of the romance genre is ultimately subverted by the fact that the main character gets pulled into a typical “romance” plot, complete with anti-heroic male suitor.

nor is it really a New Historical Novel with romance elements. It is a self-conscious, postmodernist text that employs romance techniques while parodying its own clichéd romanticism, references New Historical Novels without adding new perspectives to the historical record, and combines elements of magical realism with new age philosophy.

The representation of Malinche, here dubbed Malinalli¹⁹, in this novel does little to impact the figure's subaltern status or produce more understanding about the historical context of her life and the role she played. As the list of works cited (one of the paratexts of the novel) shows, Esquivel researched many of the historical texts that refer to her. Perhaps out of a desire to stay historically accurate, she often references these traditional representations of Malinalli, especially the writing of Bernal Díaz del Castillo. What results is that Esquivel inserts the same information into her novel, rather than questioning these representations and creating a divergent version of events. Malinalli is confined to the role of a romance heroine. While the novel does not authorize Malinalli to use her own voice, it does convey the need to reexamine the myths of the Conquest and subvert the official, male-dominated narratives that continue to shape society's representations of historical figures from Mexico's past.

One can draw many similarities between the two protagonists of both the first novel and her most recent work. Both Tita, the protagonist of *Como agua para chocolate*, and Malinalli are young, naïve female heroines who fall in love with an unsuitable choice, and both struggle to fight oppression against the backdrop of a period of historical and social turmoil. For Tita, this oppression comes in the form of a dominating, cruel

¹⁹ From this point in the chapter forward, I will use the name Malinalli that Esquivel chooses to give to her version of the historical figure.

mother who silences her by relegating her to a life of servitude. Malinalli struggles with the oppressions of slavery, separation from family members, rape, and the traumas of war. Though Tita, the protagonist of the first novel, may be a purely fictional invention by Esquivel, Malinalli is based on a historical figure that the novelist converts into a romance heroine. In this manner, Esquivel contributes to the mythology surrounding the controversial figure.

Laura Esquivel is an author whose novels attract a mass readership, while also receiving critical attention. Her writing is characterized by the use of vivid descriptions, the incorporation of pop culture elements, and a dose of magical realism. With the publication of her debut novel *Como agua para chocolate*, and the subsequent success of the film based on the novel, Esquivel solidified her place with Isabel Allende as one of the members of the “other Boom”.²⁰ One important aspect of this success is Esquivel’s status as a crossover writer successful on both sides of the border. In examining how the myth of Malinche is transformed by Esquivel’s appropriation of her, it is interesting to note the marketing strategies used in packaging the novel itself. An examination of the first editions published in the US, compared to editions published in Mexico, produce interesting results.

Notably, a parallel between the author and the protagonist of her novel is their role as intermediary figures. Just as Malinche must serve as a bridge between two worlds, Laura Esquivel, in her own right, is a poster child for crossover literary success. The term “crossover” applies to the blurring of genre boundaries in her writings; cookbooks and

²⁰ See Álvaro Salvador’s “El otro boom de la narrativa hispanoamericana.”

romance novels in *Como agua para chocolate*, science fiction, historical novel and multimedia experience in *Tan veloz como el deseo* (2001), to cite just a few examples. In *Como agua para chocolate*, Esquivel argues the case for feminine story-telling by inserting a genre typically associated with the domestic sphere, the recipe book, into the format of the novel. Additionally, her work represents a bridge between the Mexican and US boundaries in a geographical sense –the settings of her debut novel, for instance- and a literary one- her role as the “princess of Latin American literature” both in Mexico and the US. As a best-selling novelist, her works traditionally have mass-market appeal as literature for women from the Latin American post-boom.

In her study of best-selling Chilean author Marcela Serrano, Claudia Femenias discusses the influence of marketing on literary production, particularly as it concerns “Chic Lit” or *literature escrita por mujeres* (Femenias 73). Women, as readers, represent the majority of consumers in the book-selling market, and many find stories about female characters written by women authors appealing as, in theory, they more accurately reflect the feminine condition. “Por lo tanto, al enfocarse en temas considerados como femeninos se garantiza un éxito de ventas” (73). Focusing on “feminine topics” thus becomes a guarantor of bestseller status. This predominance of “Conquistad para mujeres, por mujeres” (74) as a product of mass consumption, can also potentially lead to the predominance of clichéd roles for women that do little to further a feminist project.

Suzana Reisz has argued that many of these bestsellers are very accessible to the reader, with uncomplicated plots and characters that could almost be stereotypes. They have a great potential to serve as instruments with a pedagogical or indoctrinating

function (339). Women readers who consider themselves to be stable, or self-actualized, may not identify with the characters presented, who often are as much victims of their own self-sabotage as any external force. In the case of Marcella Serrano's novels, for example, the reader is left with a passive woman in a world where the established order has been restored (Femenias 77). How different would the reception of *Como agua para chocolate* have been if its main character were the once prostitute turned army general Gertrudis, as opposed to the *abnegada* Tita? In other words, it is not feminism that sells, but rather femininity.

In her article "Post-Boom Magical Realism: Appropriations and Transformations of a Genre", Molly Monet-Viera argues that the novelists Isabel Allende, Paulo Coelho and Laura Esquivel have appropriated the magical realism of the Latin American Boom and have transformed it into something more widely read and more commercially successful. She points out that Esquivel's first novel *Como agua para chocolate* uses many elements that are typical of magical realism: "hyperbole, the presence of spirits that communicate with the living, and the coexistence of the supernatural and natural realms" (102). These elements overshadow the historical background of the novel. While Esquivel does contribute the innovation of bringing magical realism into the realm of the kitchen, her protagonist Tita does not actively control her powers of culinary influence. She is a passive victim who only aspires to marry and become a mother, reiterating traditional female roles. The fact that Tita's wishes are fulfilled though no action of her own, "gives the impression that women can miraculously transcend oppression without action, agency or struggle" (104). Furthermore, Esquivel turns the magical realist

discourse into a Cinderella-like fantasy. Tita's wishes are fulfilled without any subversion of traditional patriarchal values and with no need for the protagonist to act:

Thus Esquivel's contribution to the magical realist tradition is her conversion of the genre into a fairy-tale: a gorgeous, sepia-toned, candlelight-drenched, manna-filled big screen representation of a woman who, despite her mother's oppression, gets her handsome prince. (104)

This glossy, fairy-tale like version of the magical realist novel makes it seductive to the reader, as the popularity of the novel and its film adaptation indicate. By turning the magical realist genre into a romantic fairy-tale, Esquivel makes it more marketable, more successful, and less socially relevant. Therefore, her novels are meant for a readership that finds the passivity of the fairy-tale genre appealing, not a readership that is looking for feminist discourse that posits action and self-actualization.

In his study of texts by Latin American women writers from the 1980s on, Álvaro Salvador indicates that literature by authors such as Laura Esquivel and Isabel Allende reach out to an audience that is neither elite nor feminist (171). Rather, this literature can be characterized as one that presents a dialogue between two traditionally separate worlds, those of the feminine and the masculine. This structure points out the rigid division between these two worlds. Additionally, it establishes an exchange of voices that belong, on the one hand, to patriarchal and authoritarian discourse, and on the other hand, the language that this discourse assigns to women- the language of sentiments, popular songs, and recipes (Salvador, 173). This exchange of voices also leads to an argument in favor of the legitimacy of feminine discourse. It is, after all, the recipe book that survives

the fire and is kept by Tita's descendants. While Salvador posits that Esquivel writes from a place of difference, this difference is not strong enough to break the mold of the romanticized fairy-tale. Certainly, both *Como agua para chocolate* and *Malinche* privilege a feminine discourse, but not a feminist one.

In *Malinche* the feminine world concerns all things domestic--the growing of corn, the embroidering of a *huipil*--as well as non-written forms of story-telling, mainly the creation of *códices*. The masculine world, which we associate with the character of Cortés, deals in war and politics, the language of diplomacy, and the written text. For a time, in her role as translator and mediator, Malinalli inhabits the masculine world and in her mastery of this language is able to dominate. Malinche is transformed into a mediator between cultures and boundaries, a representation of the liminal space between different worlds.²¹

Thus, in Laura Esquivel's appropriation of her, Malinche becomes a liminal figure- the center of this exchange between feminine and masculine discourse. This dialogue is even represented visually in the presentation of written text and codex images in the novel itself. Yet Malinalli's role as a liminal figure still denies her the possibility of writing and voicing her own discourse. The focus is not on Malinalli herself, but what she represents, as she becomes an empty space used for the discourse of cultural exchange. As the novel progresses, Malinalli eventually rejects her role as mediator and fades back into the world of the feminine- the domestic sphere, the painting of *codices* with her

²¹ As explained by Homi K. Bhabha, liminal space represents the space between the cultures of the colonizers and the colonized subjects, where subjects undergo a process of revisiting their sense of identity (*The Location of Culture 2*).

children, and the tranquility of a happy marriage to Jaramillo. Finally, the character's demise at the end of the novel re-emphasizes this idea of emptiness, as she eventually fades out of existence.

The question is, how does *Malinche* fall into the scope of literature for women writers of *el otro Boom*? Does the novel correspond to a type of literature that enunciates from a place of difference, or does it try too hard to address existing representations of Malinche? Given the manner in which the novel engages with the chronicler's portrayals of Malinche (Estrada 180), it often spends more time addressing uncontested aspects of the Malinche myth rather than exploring new territory. Just as the character finds herself doing in the novel, the author makes many compromises, as dictated by her role as a mediator between different worlds, on the one hand worlds on either side of the border, and on the other, the worlds of the feminine and the masculine. She is also serving as a mediator between different time periods- addressing simultaneously the history of the conquest as well as the various representations of Malinche that have evolved since that time period.

As Oswaldo Estrada points out, in her attempt to address patriarchal representations of Malinche, Esquivel's protagonist Malinalli retraces the same footsteps as the chronicler's Doña Marina (181). The plot of the novel borrows heavily from *Historia verdadera*, and in many instances seems to address aspects of Bernal Díaz's characterization of Malinche:

En su afán explícito por reescribir la historia de la Malinche desde una perspectiva como mujer e indígena, en contra de la versión bernaldina que

destaca su ejemplaridad épica y / o bíblica, Esquivel nos interna en un ambiente doméstico, donde es posible darle voz a un punto de vista en gran parte silenciado por la historia. Incluso cuando la narración se ajusta a la secuencia temporal que utiliza el viejo cronista--como cuando comparte con nosotros el chisme inmejorable de la vieja celestinesca que quiere a Malinalli para nuera, y por ende, la previene sobre la emboscada que los indios les han preparado a los españoles en Cholula-- en otros momentos la autora sitúa a sus lectores en la conciencia de su protagonista.

(183)

Unfortunately, in her attempt to re-write history from an indigenous perspective, Laura Esquivel presents a clichéd, romanticized vision of the Amerindian other.

In this chapter, I will study further how Malinche undergoes this process of being built up as a liminal figure only to later be relegated to obscurity. Several aspects of the novel contribute to this process, including its mimetic use of the forms of the romance novel²² and the New Historical Novel. While the character of Malinalli tries to provide some agency for the voice of the subaltern- occasionally inserting feminine and or indigenous discourse into the retelling of the life of this figure, ultimately she is relegated to obscurity. Not only does the novel romanticize the indigenous Other, but it also presents us with an overly romanticized version of the feminine Other. Thus, depending

²² I do not wish to argue that referencing the romance novel genre, in itself, is detrimental to the feminist discourse that Esquivel purports to promote in the novel. Rather, it is the way in which aspects of the romance novel are used, that denies the protagonist her own discourse.

on the context, Malinalli speaks to us in clichés of both the marginalized Amerindian and the subjugated female victim.

Esquivel transforms Malinalli into a clichéd version of the subjugated Amerindian woman in three ways. First, she utilizes a deceptive protagonist-centered narrative that ironically denies Malinalli the agency that is meant to represent “her” story. Secondly, the codex that was created by Esquivel’s nephew Jordi Castells for the publication of the novel is a paratext that adds to the simulation. Thirdly, the incorporation of elements of the romance novel holds the protagonist back. Because she is forced to play the role of the heroine in an epic love tale between mistress and *conquistador*, Malinalli is trapped into repeating clichés of that genre.

The Irony of Malinalli’s Narrative

In Esquivel’s novelization of the historical figure’s life, Malinche undergoes a process of transformation from a historical figure always referred to and characterized in the third person, to a protagonist of her own narrative. While the narrative is told in the third person, it is usually focused from Malinalli’s point of view (with a few exceptions where it jumps to Cortés or Juan Jaramillo). This type of focalization in the narrative addresses a common concern for authors who rewrite Malinche’s story. As Margo Glantz points out, “En las crónicas españolas, Malinche carece de voz. Todo lo que ella interpreta, todos sus propósitos se manejan por discurso indirecto” (“Doña Marina” 104). For example in Bernal Díaz’s *Historia verdadera*, the Doña Marina of the chronicles never has the opportunity to speak for herself. She becomes a *lengua* that only repeats the

words of others, so she does not own her discourse. Also, the words she enunciates are later replaced by a discourse that has more permanency, the written word of the chronicler.

It would seem that Esquivel attempts to correct this in her novel. However, the protagonist's point of view does not really convey Malinche's voice, but rather that of an Amerindian female heroine imagined by Esquivel who can play the role of a foundational Mexican mother. In other words, Malinalli, while based on the historical figure of Malinche, is a fictional creation of the novelist. Esquivel uses a narrative style that would seem to give Malinalli more authority. In reality, Esquivel uses Malinche in order to address issues of Mexican female identity, turning her into another spokeswoman, rather than giving her the space to tell her own story. The irony of framing Malinalli's story in this manner is that the protagonist does not really have the opportunity to use her own voice.

In an interview with Adriana Lopez, Esquivel shares her desire to portray Malinche in a way that addresses a larger social context. In response to the question of whether or not modern Latinas should consider Malinche a role model, or a feminist before her time, the novelist remarks:

Before falling into Cortés's hands, Malinche had already been "given away" twice as a slave. What vision of femininity did she have? I wondered. What did she think it meant to be a woman in that empire? And what did she think about a government that allowed that type of oppression? These questions were the basis for developing her character. I

would love it if my Malinche became a role model for those women today who must “conquer.” Women living in two worlds who must leave their land and belongings to cross the borders of places where they are not well received, where human rights are not respected. Women who wish to overcome their condition of “slaves” in an economy that annuls them, that ignores them. That would be beautiful... that a character that doesn’t exist helps women—and even men—exist.

In other words, in her re-telling of Malinche’s story, Esquivel hopes to create a character that can become an empowering figure for other marginalized women.

Paula Moya discusses the tendency of Chicana and Mexican writers to reevaluate the Malinche myth in order to change the way the figure is perceived. She indicates that from the 1970s to today, these writers have attempted to vindicate Malinche of her characterization as a traitor or passive victim, instead characterizing her as a “figure of empowering or empowered womanhood” (130). She continues, “Such recuperations are generally problematic, inasmuch as attempts to absolve or empower the historical figure can result in reductive interpretations of what is a very complex situation” (130).

The complexity resides in the idea of a historically acknowledged inferiority complex surrounding the figure of Malinche, as a woman, as an *indígena*, as an instrument of *mestizaje*, and most notably as translator / traitor. Indeed, we can trace a spectrum of appropriations of Malinche throughout history, appropriations that serve various discursive and ideological functions (Leitner 242). The appropriations of the Malinche myth studied in other works that I address in this thesis, from her notable absence in

Salvador Carreño's film *La otra conquista* to her rebirth as a left-wing congresswoman in Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda's play, demonstrate how malleable the figure of Malinche has become.

In her 2006 novel, Laura Esquivel presents her own appropriation of Malinche. In the "Nota de la autora" included in the U.S. (Spanish and English) editions, as well as interviews concerning the novel, Esquivel indicates her intention to carry on the process initiated by other Mexicana and Chicana feminists, to recast Malinche as an empowering figure. She addresses many of the questions posed in Margo Glantz' writings, such as Malinche's lack of voice, the need for feminist discourse of the body, and an emphasis on presenting Malinche as the first in a long line of Mexicana and Chicana feminists.

Ricardo Vicancos Pérez, indicates that Laura Esquivel employs a "conciliatory feminism" (120) in this novel that also leads to envisioning Mexican authoresses (like herself) as present-day "hijas de la Malinche" (121). By appropriating her in this manner, Esquivel obscures the historical reality that corresponded to Malinche's experiences. Proposing a spiritual connection between herself and Malinche, she also reduces her to an abstract notion of Mexican motherhood.

In *The Antiheroine's Voice: Narrative Discourse and Transformations of the Picaresque*, Edward Friedman discusses the narrative tension that exists between the narrator of the picaresque novel and the implied author: "The picaresque novel fashions a dialectical interplay between the created voice (and persona) and the creator who undermines the search for freedom of expression" (222). The distance between implied author and narrator is even more notable in the Spanish feminine picaresque. In

attempting to recreate a female voice, the authors of these texts (men) create an inauthentic female voice, leading to an ironic distance between author and narrator that allows the author to satirize the protagonist just as he seem to give her the power of self-expression.

According to Friedman, with later novels (post Renaissance) that center on a female protagonist, writers attempt to convert her into a heroine, but this also becomes problematic (226). The representation of the female protagonist's life does not present women or their inner lives as they are in the real world, "but as they are in aristocratic romance" (226). This leads to a paradoxical situation in which the protagonist becomes both a representation of a person as well as the representation of an ideal. As Friedman indicates, "Whether narrative views her as inferior or superior to male society--whether she is an antiheroine or a heroine--the female protagonist tends to lose her battles" (227). This same paradox can be applied to Laura Esquivel's *Malinalli*. While attempting to re-imagine Malinche as a person, Esquivel also transforms her into the image of the ideal. When the novel delves into Malinalli's experiences in the domestic sphere (planting a garden, embroidering a *huipil*, or tutoring her children in Nahuatl at home), it privileges a feminine discourse that encourages exclusion from the (male) sphere of politics and words. Malinalli's last two actions in the novel-- piercing her own tongue with a *maguay* thorn and secluding herself from public life-- reinforce a separation between the male (external) and female (domestic) realms. Laura Esquivel equates Malinche with the ideal of a fictional "Mother of Mexico" and her protagonist, Malinalli, is forced to concentrate on her tasks as wife and mother at the end of her journey with Cortés.

With the use of a protagonist-centered narrative, Esquivel simulates Malinalli's point of view, asking the reader to believe that the protagonist is re-telling her story in her own words. But her presentation of Malinalli as an ideal of female domesticity and motherhood denies the protagonist such freedom. The narrative strategies used in the text of the novel are not the only simulated act of story-telling. The paratext of the codex is meant to represent Malinalli's own voice as well and, like the narrative discourse of the novel, presents a representation of an Amerindian and feminine ideal.

Malinalli's Codex

A salient aspect of Laura Esquivel's writing is the use of visuals. This can be evidenced by how successfully *Como agua para chocolate* lent itself to film adaptation, becoming the highest-grossing films produced in Latin America at the time of its release. Also, Laura Esquivel has a tendency to create texts with marketing ploys--the CD in *Tan veloz como el deseo*, the recipes in *Como agua para chocolate*, and in with this book, we have Malinalli's Codex²³. While she uses the same technique in the novel *Malinche*, the visual presentation of the book itself is significant and adds new layers to the meanings that readers can glean from the text itself.

In *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Gérard Genette indicates that the productions that accompany the text, such as the book jacket, play a large role in the book's reception and consumption:

²³ See Natalia Ferro Sardi.

For us, accordingly, the paratext is what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public. More than a boundary or a sealed border the paratext is, rather, a *threshold*, or--a word Borges used apropos of a preface--a “vestibule” that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back. (1-2)

The paratexts are complements to the text of the book that inform our perceptions and our reading of the text. Thus, they influence the reader’s reception. They also indicate how the author, and his / her editor, etc. want to the book to be received. There are several paratexts, including the bibliography where Esquivel cites historical texts, other novels about Malinche, and even another primary text used in this study, Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda’s play, *La Malinche*. Other paratexts include the “Nota de la autora” mentioned above, and the inside of the book jacket that describes the novel as, “el extraordinario recuento del trágico y apasionado amor entre el *conquistador* Hernán Cortés y la india Malinalli, su intérprete durante la conquista del imperio Azteca.” However the paratexts that correspond to the visual presentation of the novel are the most intriguing.

When discussing paratexts, it seems fitting to start with the one that we, as readers (and consumers) notice first: the outside book jacket²⁴. Before opening the book, as published in its first hard-copy edition, the reader is set up for the expectation of a love story. The book jacket depicts a portrait of Hernán Cortés and Malinche. The illustration recalls the mural “Cortés y la Malinche” by José Clemente Orozco but in an ironic way.

²⁴ The book jacket discussed in this chapter is found on the two hardcover editions released in the United States, both in English and in Spanish. A copy of the codex in the inner book jacket can be found in both.

We are presented with a much more whitewashed depiction of the two figures. They are clothed in traditional dress; Cortés is shown with the ruffled collar, feathered hat, Malinche with her hair loose. When we open the book to spread out the book jacket illustration we notice that Cortés appears to be standing in front of Malinche, and though Malinche's gaze seems to be focused on Cortés, the *conquistador* does not return her glance, and instead seems to be gazing at another unspecified point in space. The illustration also recreates the positioning of Cortés and Malinche as José Clemente Orozco's mural: Malinche appears to be standing slightly behind the *conquistador*.

In stark contrast, the inside of the book jacket reveals a very different style of illustration. The original artwork, done by Laura Esquivel's nephew Jordi Castells (incidentally, after the text of the novel had already been written) references the techniques of the codexes created by indigenous artists during the period of early Spanish colonization. The illustrations serve as a pictographic historical account of the life of Malinalli. Jordi Castells employs visual symbols not dissimilar to those used by indigenous artists in the 16th century: speech-scrolls, the flowing of water, and thought patterns. Yet the use of these symbols also evokes traditional techniques used by comic illustrators (dialogue bubbles, etc.), and so the illustrations straddle a line between the art forms of the Codex and the modern comic. As the author further indicates to her reader in the "Nota", we are meant to view the codex as something that complements the text. She indicates, "Es la forma en que intento conciliar dos visiones, dos formas de narrar--la escrita y la simbólica--dos respiraciones, dos anhelos, dos tiempos, dos corazones en uno" (viii). The novel thus takes on a hybrid form, part text and part pictograph.

The codex follows the timeline of Malinalli's life and her involvement in the events of the conquest, serving as a summary of the narrative produced in the text of the novel. Furthermore, one has to consider the implication of the relationship between the outer book jacket and the version on the inside: the Westernized image visible to possible buyers of the book, the imitation codex lying underneath. Does the Western imagery sublimate the indigenous? Or is Laura Esquivel simply proposing the need for the inclusion of other forms of historical narratives, i.e. pictographic story-telling.

By simulating a codex, the illustration recalls an important tradition of recording Pre-Colombian history. Though many books were burned in the 1520s and 1530s, pictographic writing continued to be used during the process of colonization in order to help the *extripadores* in further understanding indigenous beliefs and practices. As Jorge Rabasa explains, the *tlacuilos*, or codex-writers, became part of the project of recovering and maintaining pre-Columbian history:

After the conquest *tlacuilos* became indispensable to the information retrieval project of re-constructing the pre-Columbian past in such documents as the pictorial sections of Sahagun's *Florentine Codex*, the tribute records in the *Codex Osuma* and the account of the Tlaxcalan participation in the conquest in the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*. Iconic script, moreover, recorded information from within the indigenous cultures that a purely alphabetical text could not contain. (Rabasa 55)

As if to underscore the validity of different forms of recording history in Malinalli's codex, many of the images from the codex are later reproduced and

interspersed within the text of the novel itself. The tension between the pictographic form, which often seems more like a comic strip than a codex, and the text, a fictionalized re-telling of Malinche's role in the Conquest, produces a plurality of discourses.

The codex images are often presented at the beginning of the chapters. However, the incorporation of the codex images varies from editions produced in the U.S. and those produced in Mexico. For example, in first edition published in the US, the larger images that initiate every one of the 8 vinettes in the codex is presented at the beginning of a chapter, with the exception however of Chapters 1 and 5 (Vivancos Pérez 124). Here, an image showing female nudity--Malinalli's mother giving birth, Cortés and Malinalli in the temple--is replaced with another image from the series. This switching of images does not take place, however in the English translation of the same edition. Also, in contrast to the edition in Mexico, the first editions published in the US do not have images dispersed throughout the narrative, only at the beginning and end of certain chapters. Whereas the intercalation of images in the Mexican edition lends a sense of graphic novel to the text, the impact is less significant in the editions published in the US.

In most cases, the illustrations create a visual reference for what is being described in the text itself, adding a pictographic element that parallels the narrative. This technique recalls that of the graphic novel, as the pictures are taken out of the context of the original codex and reproduced alongside parts of the text related to the events depicted in the illustrations. In addition, the codex recalls the traditional structure of the novel. For each chapter of the text, there is a larger, more detailed illustration that serves

as the heading for each section. Each larger image is followed by a series of smaller illustrations that serves as an outline for the text of each chapter. There are a total of eight large illustrations to correspond with the eight chapters of the text.

The illustrations correspond to two general categories. The first category can be described as pictographic histories that fill in the gaps, depicting unknowable events in Malinche's life that Esquivel discusses in the novel in order to flesh out the character of Malinalli. These include the illustrations of Malinalli's birth, her discussion with Cortés in the temple of Coatlicue, her life at home with Jaramillo and her two children, and her death. In fact, there is little if any solid information about where or how the historical Malinche was born, what kind of life she had once the final battles of the conquest were finished, or how she died. Taken altogether, these re-imaginings of the missing pieces in history allow Esquivel to turn Malinalli into a complete character, at least according to the author. The second category of pictographs represent re-tellings of events of the Conquest already told in historical accounts, both in the accounts of the Spaniards and the Amerindians (*Lienzo de Tlaxcala*, *Florentine Codex*). These include Malinalli translating for Cortés in Tlaxcala, and the massacre at the Templo Mayor in Tenochtitlan in 1520.

In his analysis of the use of the codexes and the translation of the text from Spanish to English, Vivancos Pérez argues that Esquivel serves as the translator for Malinche, supplying us with the written text that retells the story presented in the codexes:

[En] el código mental de Malinche y el texto traducido de Esquivel, la novela nos revela una traición inesperada: la de los editores estadounidenses. Esta traición se muestra asimismo en la deficiente

puntuación, los frecuentes errores tipográficos y diversas inconsistencias como la que ocurre, por ejemplo, con el nombre de la diosa Ciuacoatl (sic.) que en los primeros capítulos del texto no lleva hache, pero sí a partir del sexto. (125)

Because of the errors in the English tradition, I have chosen to use the Spanish edition of the text here. My own comparison of both editions yields a similar impression, that the English edition is significantly marked by errors. Another interesting lost-in-translation moment can be found when comparing the paratexts of the two editions. As mentioned earlier, in the English edition, the images chosen for each chapter correspond accurately with the text presented. In other words, each large illustration corresponds to each chapter number accurately. However, in the Spanish version the illustrations for Chapters 1 and 5 have been switched. The switch removes any images depicting nudity (from the original codex) in the Spanish edition but keeps them in the English one. While the textual translation presents problems, the paratexts from the English edition, that do not change the images from the original codex, may be more faithful to what Esquivel intended.

The use of this paratext, the author's imagining of Malinalli's codex if she had the opportunity to create one, serves as a pictographic complement to the text. Just as the text uses first-person narrative, the codex features illustrations that almost always depict Malinalli and frequently situate her in the center of the frame of each image. Because Malinalli's codex represents "her story" and parallels the text of the novel, we are led to believe that this is the version of events that matters most. It is ironic then that the outer book jacket depicts the protagonist in a drastically different way. While the inner book

jacket and the illustrations from the codex would lead us to see Malinalli as a *tlacuilo*, or story-teller, the outer book jacket depicts her as the primary female character in a romance novel. Thus, the inner book jacket, as a paratext, pays lip-service to Malinalli's Amerindian identity, but the outer book jacket sells romance.

Malinche as Romance Heroine

Given all the components used in the novel as described above (the two paratexts, the ironic use of first-person narrative, etc.), it is no surprise that in a recent review of the U.S. edition on Amazon.com, a frequent comment is that the novel is 'confusing'. What are we supposed to learn about Malinche from Laura Esquivel's representation of her? One is left wondering if the novelist herself ever manages to create a clear vision of this figure in her own mind. On the one hand, *Malinche* represents an attempt to draw the historical figure out of obscurity and build her up as a protagonist. Most of the novel is narrated from Malinalli's point of view, and at a significant turning point she realizes the power of her own voice. This theme of breaking the silence has been used by the novelist before, perhaps most notably in *Como agua para chocolate*. Yet with the protagonist of her debut novel, there has also been considerable debate concerning the issue of breaking the silence. Does Tita actually find her voice, expressing herself through the medium of her cooking, or is she simply a passive vesicle of strange culinary talents, relying on others to speak for her? The debate is further fueled by the recognition that Tita corresponds to the archetype of the romantic heroine.

In her role as romance heroine, Tita uses traditionally feminine forms of expression. These forms, which comprise knitting, cooking and writing a recipe book, are generally considered solitary and mundane acts, yet in Tita's hands they also become a form of critique of the dominant patriarchal order imposed by her mother. While the supernatural powers of her cooking are often cited as Tita's most potent attempt of self-expression, the dishes she created would have little impact on future generations of women in the de la Garza family, if not for her dedication to recording the dishes in a recipe book. This same book survives the fire at the end of the novel and is found in the ashes by Tita's niece Esperanza, who has the opportunity to marry and have children of her own thanks to Tita's influence. The Chicana narrator of the novel Tita's grandniece, inherits from her mother Esperanza the recipe book that was left behind in the ashes. Thus, Tita prevents her niece, Esperanza, from suffering the same fate that she has endured, and leaves behind the recipe book, a symbol of creative expression for future generations of women. Compared to works by Mexican women authors that demonstrate a more radical feminism, *Como agua para chocolate* gives us a female protagonist that does find self-expression, but only while still expressing herself through media that are deemed as appropriate feminine forms. In other words, Tita is only allowed to speak for herself within the parameters of traditional female expression. Furthermore, she sacrifices her own happiness for the benefit of future generations:

At first glance, *Like Water for Chocolate* appears to perpetuate stereotypes of women and Mexico. Its positive reception in the United States could reflect an acceptance based on the inclusion of stereotypes that confirm

certain biases: the hot-blooded Latin lover; the domestic Mexican woman; the obedient indigenous servant; the wicked mother; the jealous macho male; the impassioned mulatta; the Mexican revolutionary; and the white rapist settlers. On further consideration, however, it is evident that Esquivel is also parodying the stereotypes she presents. The wicked mother becomes the representation of patriarchy. Tita's lover, who marries her sister, instead of being the strong-willed macho who will rescue her from her fate to never marry and bear children, is weak and indecisive. The indigenous servant, Nacha, although she dies early in the novel, possesses celebrated supernatural powers. (Sandoval 58)

Just as Esquivel uses elements of stereotypical representations of men and women in *Como agua para chocolate*, the characters of her fifth novel undergo a similar process. Cortés, Jaramillo and Malinalli all correspond to stereotypes of the modern romance narrative. Hernán Cortés is portrayed as an egotistical and self-doubting womanizer (the "alpha" male), Juan Jaramillo, a supportive and accepting husband (the "beta" male), and Malinalli, the woman trapped between the seductive power of the first man and the promise of domestic tranquility offered by the second. All three also correspond to archetypes of the romance novel, which will be explored further below.

Concerning Laura Esquivel's debut novel, which has already been mentioned above for its similarities to the novel *Malinche*, there is a good deal of discrepancy among critics regarding its status as a romance novel. Following Genette's theory of palimpsests, the genre of a text is dependent upon reader reception. A text does not

declare its own genre. This may explain the discrepancy among critics, some of whom interpret Esquivel's debut novel as a mere replication of the romance novel clichés, with an insertion of the traditional feminine discourse represented by the recipe book. In the case of *Malinche*, the replication of romance novel clichés has two purposes: to address the myth of Malinche as Cortés' mistress, and also to provide a vehicle for the protagonist to undergo some form of transformation. However, there is no denying that the formula used here: simple and accessible plot, stereotypical characters, etc. also places *Malinche* firmly in the camp of "historia escrita por mujeres, para mujeres". In other words, it is designed to be a best-seller. As such, the novel romanticizes the portrayal of Malinalli and in the process commodifies her.

It is clear that the paratexts of the novel might appeal to a reader's general perception of the book as part of this "Chick Lit" genre. In general, there are three principal aspects of the paratextual elements of Laura Esquivel's novel that merit discussion here. Some of these paratextual elements, such as the illustration on the outer book jacket and the publisher's notes / reviews, set the reader up for a romance reading. As Rita de Grandis points out, the role of "paratextual modes in functioning as commentaries trigger the text." She continues: "They seduce the reader and advance interpretation" (33). The description of the novel as the retelling of a tragic and passionate love story in the inner corner of the inside book jacket has already been mentioned. In the longer description that follows, the relationship between Cortés and Malinche is described in this manner: "Los dos se enamoraron apasionadamente, pero este amor es destruido por la desmedida sed de conquista, poder y riqueza de Cortés."

Although the novel is meant to tell Malinalli's story, it often breaks with the protagonist-centered narrative in order to allow Hernán Cortés, here our romantic anti-hero, to tell his side of the story. Though stories of male characters' adventures are hardly thought of as romance today, the genre of romance novel was first associated with the masculine heroic quest, or romance-quests. Other variations on the romance plot are the Greek pastorals and the Arthurian tales, stories of courtly love. "Because of its origins in mythic quests, romance is defined even today in standard literary reference books in ways that emphasize its unrealistic, fantastic, or supernatural qualities" (Strehle and Carden xiii). Though the male heroic-quest can still be found in examples such as the Harry Potter book series, films and TV series like Star Trek and Star Wars, the romance novel has become a genre associated primarily with tales that have female protagonists. Some contemporary examples include the Harlequin romance series, novels by writers such as Danielle Steele and Anne Rice, and what is popularly known as Chick-Lit. According to Susan Strehle and Mary Paniccia Carden in their introduction to *Doubled Plots*, the romance "took on special vitality with the rise of the novel" (xi), yet in the 19th century many defined the novel in opposition to the romance:

The impulse to distinguish novel (as realistic history) from romance (as sentimental fantasy) and then to attach the romance derisively to women- and women derisively to romance-has led critics to denigrate the genre of romance and to lose its connection to the novel. (xv)

Yet, recent studies have emphasized the close connection between the romance and the novel, demonstrating that the romance can be a literary genre used to create a space for feminine expression.

Additionally, there is a duality to the portrayal of women in modern-day romance novels. As Strehle and Carden explain, part of the formula of the genre, there is often (though not always) a female protagonist and a love story full of complications caused by the restrictions placed on the characters involved in the love relationship. There is often a third party that acts as an obstacle to the love relationship. Secondary characters can fall into two general categories: those that support the protagonists and those that seek to repress the love relationship. Those in the first category possess the qualities of understanding, sympathy, or other qualities that make them ideal as moral support for the protagonist. Characters in the second category can be allies of the third party that opposes the relationship, or may want to oppose the relationship because of other motives. The typical plot of the romance novel has become such an integrated part of Western cultures that it can be found in many forms, even in modern day films. The narrative can be broken down into the following basic steps: boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy and girl reconcile in the end. The ‘happily ever after’ ending may or may not be present, as tragic endings are an alternative conclusion to the romance plot.

In her article “Parodic Silence: Ritual and Genre in Laura Esquivel”, Helene Carol Weldt-Basson outlines the elements of *Como agua para chocolate* that recall aspects of this genre. To further explore these ideas, we can apply the character types and plot points outlined above to the novel *Malinche* as well. The same elements used by Weldt-

Basson are used below as a way to structure the discussion of the romance novel elements of Esquivel's *Malinche*. The descriptions are in italics, with an explanation of how they can be applied to the novel.

1. *A couple madly in love*

This would be Malinalli and Cortés. The 'mad love' in *Malinche* is, beyond just a passionate love affair, a true 'love-hate' situation. At the conclusion of the scene where Cortés violates Malinalli for the first time, "Parecía que nadie más que Dios fue testigo del arrebato de esa ira lujosa, de esa venganza pasional, de ese odio amoroso, pero no fue así" (77). The repetition of the concept of this mad love in phrases like 'ira lujosa' (luxurious rage), 'venganza pasional' (passionate vengeance), and 'odio amoroso' (loving hatred), overemphasize this idea, to the point of hyperbole.

The use of hyperbole calls to our attention to the absurdity of the situation described. It may also contain a criticism of the romance genre that Esquivel is referencing in the narrative. Significantly, it combines widely known interpretations of the nature of the relationship between Malinche and Cortés. On the one hand, they have traditionally been portrayed as passionate lovers, and in many cases with Malinche in the role of seducing Cortés. On the other hand, more recent interpretations remind us that Malinche, as a female slave, was probably a victim of rape.

As Anne-Marie Sandoval points out in her analysis of the hyperbolic narration in *Like Water for Chocolate*, the technique "comically reconstructs the intensity of the love between the male and female protagonists of the sentimental romance novel in a tone

bordering on the tongue-in-cheek” (178). In the case of *Malinche*, there is a similar tone, but the novelist is not just poking fun at the romance genre here. She is also incorporating commonly-held interpretations of Malinche and Cortés’ relationship and recalling the aspect of the Malinche mythology that portrays her as a sexual object that succumbed to the Spanish *conquistador*.

2. *The heroine: innocent, beautiful, rebellious and even boyish, characterized by special and unusual talents, often not very useful outside of the domestic realm.*

While innocent and beautiful, Esquivel’s Malinalli does not seem rebellious or boyish. The question of being useful outside of the domestic realm is tricky here, as Malinalli seems to pride herself on her service and obedience as a slave. However, two talents of Malinalli’s that are emphasized in the novel are her multilingualism and her ability to “create codexes” in her mind.

The act of creating codexes is principally a male vocation. The fact that Malinalli learns how to write codexes from her grandmother challenges the notion of drawing as an act performed by men:

Desde muy temprana edad, se había encargado de enseñarle a Malinalli a dibujar códigos mentales para que ejercitara el lenguaje y la memoria. «La memoria», le dijo, «es ver desde dentro. Es dar forma y color a las palabras. Sin imágenes no hay memoria». Luego le pedía a la niña que dibujara en un papel un código, o sea, una secuencia de imágenes que narraran algún acontecimiento. (Esquivel 27)

At no point in the novel is the idea that codex creation might fall outside of the female sphere addressed. It remains an activity shared between Malinalli and her grandmother, until Malinalli has children of her own. While she and Jaramillo are raising her children (Martín Cortés and María Jaramillo), they agree to teach the children to speak both Spanish and Nahuatl, and to teach them about the history of the fall of Tenochtitlan:

Así que decidió dibujar para ellos un códice-- su códice familiar-- y enseñarlos a descifrar el lenguaje del mismo. Entender sus signos. Era importante que aparte de aprender a leer el idioma español, supieran leer códices. Decía un poesía maya que «los que están mirando, los que cuentan, los que vuelven ruidosamente las hojas de los libros de pinturas. Los que tienen en su poder la tinta negra y roja: las pinturas. Ellas nos llevan, nos guían, nos dicen el camino. (171)

This last passage refers to Malinalli's family life after the expedition to Hibueras. The descriptions present a picture of familial harmony, happiness- in other words, idyllic. Esquivel's version of Malinalli's home life varies greatly with what we know about the fates of her two children.

If what biographical information that remains about Malinche is scarce, history has left more documentation of the lives of her children. Martín Cortés was raised in Spain, by friends of Cortés' family, and he most likely never returned to Mexico even as a young man. It was a common practice for indigenous women to be separated from their children, who were often sent to Spain (Powers 78).

Meanwhile, María Jaramillo probably barely knew her mother, as she most likely died when María was still a baby. The documentation we have of María is from a lawsuit between the girl and her stepmother when Juan Jaramillo's second wife inherited lands that had originally been granted to Malinche. The court documents present a contentious relationship between *mestiza* stepdaughter and her Spanish stepmother. Thus, the image of family harmony that Esquivel depicts for us in the final chapter of the novel represents a complete revision of the historical record- not just as it concerns Malinche's life, but also the lives of her progeny. The suggestion that Martín and María learned to speak Nahuatl, or how to decipher codexes from their mother, contradicts historical reality.

Laura Esquivel's protagonist is able to perform tasks that are outside of the sphere of what would be considered appropriate for indigenous women. Her work as an interpreter is one example, but her codex- drawing is perhaps the most notable, as it is something she uses to preserve her memories and teach them to her children. There is a metaphorical symbolism to the relationship between Malinalli and the children here. As Esquivel herself has pointed out, Malinche represents the symbolic mother of the Mexican people. By portraying Malinalli as a teacher and a writer of codices, she posits the need to preserve the antecedents- both indigenous and Spanish- of Mexican culture. As she mentions in the interview with Lopez:

In the collective subconscious, Malinche plays the role of the mother and Cortés the father, and if we think that she was a traitor and a whore and that he was a thief and an assassin, what does that make us? I think that it is important to change our perception of the Conquest. We must stop

seeing ourselves as “victims” of the Spanish. [...] It is important to revise history, to see it with different eyes and, hopefully, discover that the blood in our veins is the blood of all bloods; that our skin contains all colors; that our eyes contain all glances; that in Mexico, for the first time, the history of Europe, Asia, Africa, and America came together. If we saw things this way, wouldn't we feel proud of our past?

For Esquivel, the readers take the place of Martín and María. We are the children who must learn to decipher the codexes in order to understand their past and revise our thinking. Unfortunately, Esquivel's description of the “coming together” of different ethnicities glosses over the circumstances that define how those interactions took place. She nullifies the violent reality of the Conquest.

In summary, Malinalli's unique talents single her out as an ideal romance heroine in this novel. The relationship between Malinalli, Cortés, and Juan Jaramillo is also revised by Esquivel in order to fit the structure of the romance novel.

3. *There are often foils and love triangles, or the evil villain who causes a conflict.*

One example of a love triangle in *Malinche* is Cortés – Malinalli – Jaramillo. Juan Jaramillo's interest in the relationship between Malinalli and Cortés, as well as his apparent admiration for Malinalli, increases after Jaramillo is the only witness to Cortés' rape of Malinalli. “Jaramillo, un capitán que luchaba al lado de Cortés, los había mirado, y en su conciencia quedó grabada la figura de Malinalli y se sintió atraído – como nunca por esa mujer que Cortés, su jefe, había poseído” (77). This passage informs us of

Jaramillo's attraction to Malinalli. However, there is a subtle indication of the true feeling of attraction here. Jaramillo feels even more attracted to Malinalli not for any change in her or any act she has committed. She is merely the passive victim of rape in this instance. What attracts Jaramillo "como nunca" is the demonstration of male domination and possession carried out by Cortés (the "alpha" male of the Spaniards). It is when he sees Malinalli as an object being possessed that his feelings for her intensify. The demonstration of power is more moving than the female object of his attraction. Jaramillo's attraction for Malinalli could also be interpreted as an emotional attraction for Cortés, realized through Malinalli as the medium of the physical expression of this attraction. By sharing Malinalli, the two men are able to thus create a physical bond in a way that is still acceptable within the constraints of a hetero-normative social structure.

4. *Two male foils in romantic fiction: "the truly evil, dangerous villain and the sensitive, expressive males who are overtly appreciative of the heroine's qualities"* (Weldt-Basson 173).

Cortés and Jaramillo are our two male foils in *Malinche*. Malinalli considers how different the two men are when she compares her experiences with each of them. "Gracias a Jaramillo ella habia encontrado la paz, el cielo en la tierra. Gracias a Cortés, la violencia, el destierro, el odio." (173) Cortés is ambitious, obsessed with gold, more focused on the success of his adventures than the needs of Malinche. On the other hand, Jaramillo is gentle, considers Malinalli's opinion, and is a good father to both of Malinalli's children. This is obviously a significant distortion of historical reality.

Malinalli's musings on Jaramillo's qualities downplay the fact that she was given to him as an object by Cortés.

5. *A female foil insistent on the self-interested pursuit of social position.*

The female foil that corresponds to this role is none other than Malinalli's mother, who gives Malinalli away after the birth of her brother in order to marry another man. In the moment when the protagonist finds herself face to face with her again, her mother tries to justify her actions:

Fui guida por el deseo, cegada por la vida, atraída hacia lo que respiraba.
No podía seguir casada con la muerte. Tu padre murió, estaba inerte, no salía palabra de su lengua, no había brillo en sus ojos. No podía permanecer atada a su inmovilidad, yo era una joven mujer que quería vivir, quería sentir...Renuncié a ti para ser yo. Perdóname. (149)

This attempt at reconciliation by Malinalli's mother brings us to the last characteristic of the romance genre.

6. *The 'realization of female selfhood' through acceptance and love of the hero, and through reconciliation with the mother figure.*

For Malinalli, the encounter with her mother provides an opportunity for a process of reconciliation. Malinalli's initial reaction to her mother's words is one of scorn and anger, which gives way to forgiveness. After her encounter with the mother figure,

Malinalli is able to find a way to forget about the hurt and resentment she feels from having been abandoned.

Another step in this process of reconciliation with the mother figure is Malinalli's own reflexion on her status as a mother. Upon returning from the expedition to Las Hibueras, Malinalli realizes that she has abandoned her son to work as Cortés' interpreter:

Cuando por fin pudo ir a buscarlo a casa de unos parientes de Cortés con los que el niño se había quedado, tuvo miedo. Miedo del reclamo. Miedo de ver en los ojos de su hijo a la misma indiferencia con la que ella había visto a su propia madre. (161)

While Martín initially rejects Malinalli upon her arrival, they eventually are able to reconcile. The novel concludes with an idyllic portrayal of Malinalli's home life. She creates a home for herself, Martín, Juan Jaramillo, and their daughter María where the two parents work as artists: Jaramillo paints and Malinalli instructs the children on creating codexes. The restoration of domestic happiness serves as the happy resolution to Malinalli's journey.

Thus, we can indicate a set of elements in *Malinche* that correspond to key elements of the romance novel. While the first half of the novel seems to follow a similar structure as that used in *Como agua para chocolate* (a love story set in a specific historical period) the second half of the novel indicates a shift from this type of story. As the novel progresses we can trace Malinalli's initial reaction to the arrival of the Spaniards, her conversion to Christianity, and her first encounters with Cortés.

Malinalli's first interactions with the Spaniards indicate a general curiosity or fascination concerning the *conquistadores*. An interesting example of this is the baptism scene in the third chapter. Malinalli, dressed in a *huipil* that she deems appropriate for the occasion, looks forward to becoming part of this new culture. This idea of belonging also is shown through her willingness to learn the Spanish language. In the passage cited below, we see how Malinalli associates her ability to speak the words taught to her by Jerónimo de Aguilar with this new sense of belonging. The new word she has just learned to pronounce is *Dios*:

La maravillaba la sensación de pertenencia que sentía cuando lograba pronunciar el nombre que un grupo social había asignado a alguna cosa. La convertía de inmediato en cómplice, en amiga, en parte de una familia. Ese sentimiento la llenaba de alegría pues no había nada que la molestara más que sentirse excluida. (44)

In the second half of the novel after the massacre at Cholula, we see a significant shift in Malinalli's attitude towards Cortés, her mission as his interpreter, and her own security. This initial disillusionment transforms into a complete disgust for Cortés and what he represents for Malinalli. With each step of the expedition from Cholula to Tenochtitlan, and later to Las Hibueras, Malinalli seems more capable of criticizing Cortés and questioning his actions. This leads to the obvious question, why does she continue her work as interpreter? The novel addresses this question only minimally, by presenting Malinalli as a victim of circumstances who believes that translating will guarantee her freedom. She also has a strong disgust for the Aztec religion and in

particular the ritual of human sacrifice. So, on the one hand Malinalli translates for Cortés because she believes it will bring her power. On the other hand, she hopes that it will bring down the empire that she regards as her enemies. Despite these motivations, Malinalli's disappointment with Cortés amplifies as the plot progresses. Near the end of the novel, Malinalli confronts Cortés and expresses her sense of disillusionment:

Tú me prometiste libertad y no me la has dado. Para ti, yo no tengo ni alma ni corazón, soy un objeto parlante que usas sin sentimiento alguno para tus conquistas. Soy la bestia de carga de tus deseos, de tus caprichos, de tus locuras. (152)

After this exchange, Cortés marries Malinalli to Jaramillo. There is very little interaction between Malinalli and Cortés after this point. Jaramillo saves the day as the idealized supportive husband, to the point that he resembles more closely a modern-day house husband than a former *conquistador* who has taken an Indian wife. The depiction of the relationship between Malinalli and Jaramillo is troubling, as it evokes an image totally in contrast with what we know about the character of the relationships between Spanish men and indigenous women during this time period.

In *Women in the Crucible of the Conquest*, Karen Viera Powers asserts that the clash between Spanish and Indigenous cultures during the conquest was not only a “cultural collision”, but also a “gendered collision”:

For embedded within that confrontation between two vastly different worlds-European and native American-was an encounter between peoples

who held dissimilar beliefs about what it meant to be a woman and what it meant to be a man. (39)

This clash resulted in significant changes in the societal positions of women. The *conquistadores* from Spain brought to the Americas predominant ideas about gender roles. These included a restrictive patriarchal system in which in some cases women were confined in the home in order to protect their sexuality. In court, three female witnesses were considered enough to be the equivalent of one male witness. Under this system, women shared a similar legal status as minors. In contrast, the gender role system in pre-Conquest America was one of gender-parallel spheres. This meant that men's and women's roles and responsibilities were considered both essential contributions.

Along with contrasting conceptualizations of male and female, another conflicting element was the concept of sexuality. In Spanish society, sex was considered acceptable within a marriage, and the legitimacy of children was an important concept. However, in Andean societies, couple would often have a trial period of cohabitation. In other native American cultures sex was viewed as something natural, and not necessarily to be expressed only within the confines of marriage. These differing concepts of sexuality play a large part in the Malinche mythology. As Frances Karttunen indicates, "To this day it seems that hardly any writer, male or female, can describe her in any terms but sexual" (297). The terms that Karttunen alludes to always correspond to a Westernized concept of sexuality. This is also true of Esquivel's interpretation of Malinche. In spite of the novelist's admitted attempt to vindicate Malinche, the treatment of Malinalli as a sex object, not only by the male characters but also by the novelist herself, represents the

most problematic aspect of the novel. In the following passage, the author clearly indicates that Malinalli has been the victim of rape:

Cortés...en cuanto estuvo instalado en su habitación, mandó llamar a Malinalli y fornicó desenfrenadamente con ella, como una manera de celebrar su triunfo y al mismo tiempo negarlo...casi la partió en dos, la lastimó, las rasgó. Al terminar, Malinalli no quiso mirarlo a los ojos, salió del palacio y se lavó en uno de los canales. (121)

This passage is characteristic of the portrayal of Malinalli in many romantic encounters with Cortés or Jaramillo throughout the novel. She is consistently passive, a stoic rape victim who appears to accept her role as an object for the *conquistador*. Worse even still, she develops an affection and admiration for the men who victimize her. This may be one way of realistically portraying the interactions between Spanish men and Amerindian women during the period of the conquest. However the passage cited above (and similar passages in the novel) also closely recall Octavio Paz's characterization of Malinche as *la Chingada*. Additionally, it oversimplifies the characterization of male characters and only presents us with one model of interactions between male and female characters.

Esquivel's Malinalli is a contradictory figure. As readers we are left with a protagonist who simultaneously realizes that she has the power to shape historical events with her speech, yet in the blink of an eye can be reduced and victimized. Like authors who have come before her, Laura Esquivel can not escape the trap of sexualizing her version of the historical figure. In her retelling of Malinche's story, Esquivel effectively silences her by recasting her as a romance heroine. Furthermore, her retelling of the

history of the Conquest reduces the Amerindian subject to a flat, stereotyped figure. The story of Malinalli's journey presents both a colonial historical narrative as well as a colonizing one.

Malinche and Historical Narrative

In the context of Mexican historical narratives, one has to consider the representation of three important periods: the pre-Columbian past, the conquest of Indian cultures by the Spaniards, and the continuing repercussions of this clash in the present day. These three time periods are referenced in Laura Esquivel's novel. Though set during the period of Cortés arrival and conquest of Mexico, the novel uses flashbacks narrated from the point of view of its protagonist in order to portray the time period preceding his arrival. Additionally, the novel re-writes the relationship between the protagonist and her *mestizo* children, setting the stage for a reference Mexico's future generations. The allusions to current or postmodern realities are also present in the use of the paratextual elements.

Colonial historical narratives have had a significant impact on present conceptualizations of Mexico's historical identity. In addition to what can be referred to as historical narratives from Mexico's colonial past, one also has to consider the role of what Latin American subaltern studies would indicate as colonizing narratives. These are narratives that in their representation of history, either portray the indigenous past of Latin America as long-dead, or portray a complete disconnect between the indigenous cultures of the past (before the arrival of the *conquistadores*) and present day. Such

narratives indicate that Latin America's colonial past was shaped completely by the colonizers, thus diminishing the role of the colonized subject or obliterating them completely. As José Rabasa points out in his article "Pre-Colombian Pasts and Indian Presents", "Colonialist writing practices, then, do not just pertain to the (early) colonial period, but inform contemporary modernization programs that folklorize forms of life and deplore the loss of old- thereby confining Indian cultures to the museum and the curio shop" (58). José Rabasa points out the tendency in colonialist writing to portray the Pre-Columbian past of Mexican history as dead, while also portraying present-day Indian cultures as "shadows of the ancient grandeur" (52). This portrayal indicates serious underestimations of indigenous presents and futures, insinuating that these communities have been irreparably diminished. There is also the need to address history as a constructed narrative. As Susan Strehle points out, "History--a brutal history of the subjugation, use, and murder of a racialized other--emerges with the postmodern recognition that histories are constructed by those who tell the story" (44). This recognition leads to a desire to deconstruct colonizing narratives.

Considering the tendency of the New Historical Novel, Laura Esquivel's use of Malinche as her protagonist, and also the point of focalization for her novel, raises various issues. While she uses historical figures as the main characters of her novel, there are very few other elements of the new historical novel present in the prose of *Malinche*. There is the question of whether any contemporary Latin American author can successfully sustain an indigenous perspective on the events of the conquest, "in light of the overwhelming influence the conquerer's language, culture and history have exercised

over 5 centuries” (25). One also has to consider the protagonist’s status as a female indigenous subject. Considering the impact that Western culture had on the relationships between men and women from the time of the Conquest, can the concept of what it meant to be female in a Pre-Colombian Latin America be successfully re-imagined by a novelist writing in the 21st century? Undoubtedly, current and predominantly Western views of the Conquest will impact the author’s re-telling of the events, in spite of her intention to deconstruct colonizing and patriarchal narratives.

The Silenced *Lengua*

Does *Malinche* successfully bring this woman (in)famous for her use of language out of shadows and silence? Or does the figure referred to as *la lengua* remain silenced? As mentioned earlier, the irony of Malinche’s title refers to her ability to speak, as well as her multilingualism. Yet any words that Malinche speaks would have been the words of others. Other representations of Malinche put words in her mouth, as we can see in Bernal Díaz del Castillo’s *Historia verdadera*, where in one scene he depicts Malinche speaking to her estranged family members. Though the *cronista* mentions that Malinche was speaking in Nahuatl, he gives us a Spanish version of this monologue. This is the only scene where Malinche is portrayed as speaking for herself, and not in the act of translating for someone else. Yet, we know as readers that the *cronista* would have no way of actually understanding what was really said. The inference here is that Bernal Díaz del Castillo is not producing Malinche’s speech itself, but rather his interpretation of her words.

For Laura Esquivel, the project of writing a novel about Malinche also implies a process of interpreting Malinche's life, words, and the society in which she lived for a twenty-first century audience. Again, in the interview with Adriana Lopez, the author describes the task of novelizing Malinche's life and how this process affected her own perceptions regarding the figure:

There is little information on Malinche. What we know about her is based on the chronicles of the Conquest, which usually devote only a couple of pages to her character. So my task was to imagine Malinche's personality, how she thought and how she interpreted what she saw.

Esquivel re-imagines the figure in a manner that would seem to vindicate her of her status as traitor to the Mexican people. However, she also admits that in order to accomplish this task, she has to fill in many gaps due to the lack of historical records about Malinche. In Esquivel's case, writing about what she imagined as Malinche's beliefs involved researching history as well as the religious and cosmological beliefs of the time period.

Unfortunately, this leads the author to make generalizations about the belief systems of the indigenous peoples of Mexico. Ultimately she ascribes known aspects of the cosmological ideologies of these groups to her protagonist, turning her into a spokesperson for pre-Columbian religious and cultural beliefs. The use of the only indigenous protagonist in the novel as a spokesperson for all the Amerindian people problematizes the case of the subaltern here. It does little to subvert the commonly held belief that Malinche betrayed "her people", the Mexicas. It also assumes homogeneity of ideologies and cultures; lumping all Amerindians together in one group. Another problem

is that the character of Malinalli is not allowed to express herself as an individual. A clear example can be found in the following segment of dialogue between Malinalli and Cortés, in which she tries to teach the conquistador:

[CORTÉS]. Y ese Quetzalcóatl, como le dices, ¿qué clase de dios es?

Porque has de saber que nosotros fuimos expulsados del Paraíso a causa de una serpiente.

[MALINALLI]. No sé de qué clase de serpiente hablas. La nuestra es la representación de Quetzal: ave, vuelo, pluma y Coatl: serpiente. La serpiente representa los ríos, el ave, las nubes. Pájaro serpiente, ave reptante es Quetzalcoatl. El cielo abajo, la tierra arriba también lo es. (87)

In both Malinalli and Cortés' speech, one can observe the use of "we" and "our". This implies a lack of diversity of opinions or beliefs for both the Amerindian groups and the Spaniards. In most passages on ideology or philosophy, the novelist relies on generalizations of the belief systems of these groups, as if she were citing an archeological study. While this may be interesting for readers who know little about these cultures to begin with, it offers little insight into the development of the characters. It also leads the reader to see the character of Malinalli as a representative of her people: she is "the Amerindian woman" and Hernán "the Spanish *conquistador*", with all the stereotypes that those titles imply.

The scene cited above is one of several in which Malinalli tries to explain the beliefs of her people to the Spanish *conquistadores*. Yet in the novel, her explanations do little to create more understanding or appreciation of the other culture. Inadvertently,

Malinalli's explanations only serve to aid Cortés, inspiring him to use what he learns about the indigenous cultures against them:

Cortés ya no lo dudó más. Se había dado cuenta de la enorme espiritualidad del pueblo indígena y su instinto guerrero le dijo que era lo correcto. Que si lograba mostrarse ante ellos como su dios Quetzalcoatl no habría poder humano que lo derrotara. (84)

At worst, Malinalli's explanations do little to humanize her people and only serve to give him better strategies to conquer. At best, they distract the reader from the development of the story. Ironically enough, Malinalli is being used here again as a mouthpiece, just as she was used nearly 500 years ago. This exchange between Malinalli and Cortés also seems to accept as historical fact a common myth regarding the conquest: the myth that Moctezuma surrendered to the Spaniards because he believed them to be the representatives of Quetzalcoatl.

This becomes a leitmotif echoed throughout the novel at various points. Both Malinalli and Moctezuma seem to sustain this belief for a good part of the novel. Upon observing the appearance of the Spaniards for the first time, Malinalli reasons that they could be representatives of Quetzalcoatl because of their blond hair:

¿Cuántas veces ellos, en las ceremonias de celebración se habían teñido el pelo de amarillo para ser una perfecta representación del maíz? Si la apariencia del cabello de los extranjeros semejaba la de los cabellos de elote, era porque representaban al maíz, al regalo que Quetzalcóatl había

dado a los hombres para su sustento. Por tanto, el cabello rubio que cubría sus cabezas podía interpretarse como un signo de lo más propicio. (18)

The simplicity of this thought pattern is frustrating, particularly for a reader who wants to sympathize with Esquivel's protagonist. How can we accept that this character can be on the one hand intelligent enough to carry out the task of speaking not just three languages (Mayan, Nahuatl, Spanish), but a high variation of Nahuatl used for monarchs, yet on the other hand come to such a naïve and simplistic characterization of the *conquistadores* based on their hair color? In summary, Malinche is portrayed as being devastatingly incredulous.

As if to justify her protagonist's incredulity, Esquivel emphasizes the cruelty of the Aztecs and their practice of human sacrifices. Furthermore, her protagonist seems to blame the subjugation of her people to the Aztecs as the cause of the most traumatic moments in her life:

Malinalli estaba en total desacuerdo con la manera en que ellos gobernaban, se oponía a un sistema que determinaba lo que una mujer valía, lo que los dioses querían y la cantidad de sangre que reclamaban para subsistir. Estaba convencida de que urgía un cambio social, político y espiritual [...] Infinidad de veces había reflexionado en el hecho de que si el señor Quetzalcóatl no se hubiera ido, su pueblo no habría quedado a expensas de los mexicas, su padre no habría muerto, a ella nunca la habrían regalado y los sacrificios humanos no existirían. (16)

This passage justifies Malinalli's loyalty to the Spaniards. Though the logic of her thought pattern is clumsy, the passage reminds us of the extreme circumstances that Malinche survived before the arrival of the Spaniards, circumstances that- given the lack of historical information available – are all inventions of the novelist or repetitions of previous tales already associated with the figure. The story of the girl given away as a slave, just as the story of the girl from a subjugated tribe who wanted to see the Aztecs fall, are all parts of the Malinche mythology that we have seen before. Furthermore, these stories have been told and retold in short stories and novels that have preceded this work by Esquivel.

One example of such a text is *La Chingada* by Jane Lewis Brandt. Written in the late 1970s by an English teacher living in Mexico, this novel presents the character of la Malinche, as well as that of Hernán Cortés, in a biographical format similar to the style employed by Laura Esquivel. The fact that this novel is written nearly three decades earlier impacts the representation of Spanish and indigenous cultures and the relationships between men and women. In addition, the implied author seems not to necessarily side with the Europeans, but seems more comfortable narrating from a Europeanized point of view. The focalization of the narrative rests with the points of view of two main characters, Malinche herself and a young criollo from Havana who joins with Cortés' forces as a foot soldier, named Arturo Mondragón. The narrative told from Arturo's point of view seems more authentic, more moving, and more realistic.

In both interviews and her preface to the readers, Esquivel claims that she attempts to portray the female protagonist as an active subject, an equal to male

characters in the novel. Yet, as we have already seen, there are many instances where Malinalli plays the role of a sex object. In other instances, she is dishearteningly gullible. The contradictory representations of Malinalli are never reconciled.

In the interview cited above (page 97) Laura Esquivel indicates that her desire to portray Malinche in a new way addresses a larger social context. With her multilingualism, Malinalli attempts to overcome her condition as a slave and assume the role of conqueror. The term *lengua*, and the importance of speech, are present throughout the novel. Perhaps the most notable use of the term is when the protagonist uses it to describe herself. After being named “La Lengua” de Cortés, Malinalli begins to realize the impact that this new position has for her. She undergoes a transformation from a slave to a woman who has a certain amount of power in each situation where she is asked to translate. As the protagonist herself admits, she can choose to either translate word for word what she has been told, or change the words of Cortés in order to secure her own stability:

Ella, la esclava que en silencio recibía ordenes, ella, que no debía ni mirar directo a los ojos de los hombres, ahora tenía voz, y los hombres, mirándola a los ojos esperaban atentos lo que su boca pronunciara. Ella, a quien varias veces se habían deshecho, ahora era necesitada, valorada, igual o más que una cuenta de cacao. (64)

As the protagonist goes on to ruminate, her freedom depends on the success of the Spaniards. So much so, that she affirms that the Spaniards are in fact emissaries of the god Quetzalcoal, and Cortés, his incarnation, even as she suspects these statements to be

false. Though she feels a great deal of fear in this situation, she claims to not see any way out:

Podía evitar este sentimiento traduciendo lo mas apegada posible al significado de las palabras, pero si los mexicas en determinado momento llegaban a dudar – tal como ella – que los españoles eran enviados de Quetzalcóatl, ella sería aniquilada junto con estos en un abrir y cerrar de ojos (65).

Though the protagonist gains a certain measure of power in her speech, she is also aware that, by assuming this role, her fate is tied with that of the Spaniards. This portrayal deconstructs the myth of Malinche as a traitor to her people. It is clear throughout the novel that Malinalli does not claim the Aztecs as her people, and emphasizes her situation as a woman trying to survive extreme circumstances.

This deconstruction of Malinche myths would seem to subvert traditionally-held notions of her. Yet there are many aspects of the novel that hold Esquivel back from fully realizing this goal. *Malinche* combines the trappings of the romance genre with historical reality in such a manner as to render Malinalli irrelevant and ineffective as a female role model or pre-Columbian era ‘feminist’. The first obstacle that Malinalli is unable to overcome is her condition in this novel as a romance heroine who must, as the literary genre demands, fall in love with Cortés and in so doing allow him to exploit and victimize her. Malinalli’s response to being violated by Cortés is particularly devastating to her process of self-actualization. The second obstacle is one that revisits historical reality; as a simple interpreter, there was in fact very little that Malinche could have done

to affect change. By the time the character of Malinalli realizes what the arrival of the Spaniards really means for the Mexicas and her own people, the wheels of historical change have already been set in motion, and it is too late. As a result, Malinche becomes a *lengua silenciada*, relegated to silence and shadows by both her condition as a woman in a man's world (and in particular, an indigenous woman in a world that falls under the control of European men) and her role as a romance heroine stuck in the trappings of a genre that prohibits her self-actualization as a fictional character.

In the following passage from Frances Karttunen's "Rethinking la Malinche", she summarizes many aspects of the Malinche figure that Laura Esquivel revisits in her novel:

With no hope of escape from a group of men, in the face of inevitable rape, dona Marina managed to do what today's women's survival books advise. Exploiting her only asset, her multilingualism, she succeeded in attaching herself to what primatologists would call the alpha male (Cortés), who would not willingly share her with the others (When he did relinquish her to Jaramillo, it was with a legitimate wedding and an income). She worked hard at making herself one of the men, ever-ready day or night to serve, always helpful and outgoing. Bernal Diaz characterized her as cheerful and "without embarrassment." For a woman in her situation, any other strategy would have been suicidal. (311)

Esquivel's Malinalli is portrayed as a character willing to serve, who submits easily to Cortés, and even accepts her sudden marriage to Jaramillo with little complaint. Like the perfect romantic heroine, she rarely complains, does what she is told, and remains good.

However, Esquivel's novel is meant to present to us not just the outward appearance, the attitude that "women's survival books advise" as Kartunnen points out (312). Malinalli's narrative also presents to us the protagonist's inner thoughts and feelings. The ingenuousness of the protagonist's inner monologue contradicts the theory that this is a talented, intelligent woman capable of survival. Malinalli does all those things that Kartunnen mentions in her passage, but there seems to be no real awareness of what she is doing, no strategy considered to help her survive. Again, like Tita in *Como agua para chocolate*, her abilities seem to pass through her, as if she were some passive vessel.

A further contradiction in the novel is Malinalli's own attitude towards language. While early on, the character realizes that her ability to speak Nahuatl and Mayan give her a clear advantage, she sabotages her own chances for survival by damaging her tongue at the end of the novel. There is a desperate moment for Malinalli in which she experiences a moment of doubt and guilt concerning her own involvement in the Conquest. She contemplates her nickname as *la lengua*, and also the role that her *lengua* played in the events that led to the Spanish victory. She thinks to herself, "La lengua era la culpable de todo. Malinalli había destruído el imperio de Moctezuma con su lengua...Decidió entonces, castigar el instrumento que había creado ese universo" (157).

Malinalli finds an agave cactus and uses one of its thorns to pierce and permanently injure her tongue. As a consequence, Malinalli is unable to translate for Cortés, and the expedition to Las Hibueras is a failure. This act falls outside of Kartunnen's list of strategies for survival. Rather, Malinalli renders herself unnecessary and irrelevant for Cortés. Instead of being silenced by others, Malinalli takes the dramatic decision to effectively silence herself.

After this moment, the eighth and final chapter of the novel still remains. Presenting the reader with an idealized depiction of Malinalli's home life with Jaramillo and her children, this final chapter allows Laura Esquivel to end the novel on a positive note. Yet, it is the moment cited above, the piercing of the tongue, that represents the true conclusion to this story.

The figure of Malinche as re-imagined by Laura Esquivel is not a figure silenced by others' accounts. Nor is she silenced by years of obscurity. Rather, she is silenced by her own hand. Like its protagonist, the novel *Malinche* is self-defeating, re-telling many of the myths that it was also attempting to subvert. Laura Esquivel does not manage to bring Malinche out of the shadows of silence. Furthermore in this novel, Malinche's silence is a self-imposed one.

Conclusion

Like Malinche, Esquivel's protagonist is a contradictory figure. By piercing her tongue with the thorn, she reduces her own chances at survival. The paradoxical circumstances of Malinalli the protagonist reflect the contradictions in the myths

surrounding Malinche. Considering this aspect of the novel, Esquivel comes close to provoking us to question those myths.

Unfortunately, by using elements of the romance genre in this novel, she also reproduces cultural myths and stereotypes. The novel oversimplifies the characterizations of the two male characters, Cortés and Jaramillo, to specific types: the dangerous bad-boy type and the sensitive nice-guy type. Those familiar with *Como agua para chocolate* might even be reminded of Tita's love interest, Pedro, and the incredibly understanding, but ultimately rejected John Brown. The female protagonist Malinalli demonstrates unusual abilities, such as her multilingualism and her writing of *códices*, but she decides to stop interpreting for Cortés and chooses to only write codexes within the confines of her home. She ultimately yearns for, and returns to, a peaceful domestic existence. The fact that Esquivel's version of Malinche gets to enjoy such an existence goes against what we know about her life. It also reduces this extraordinary Amerindian woman to a representation of harmonious domesticity.

The structure of the novel and its use of romance elements is not only problematic for representations of Malinche, but also for the representation of Latin American women in general. In her article "Saber, amar, instruir: ingredientes y fórmulas en Laura Esquivel", Natalia Ferro Sardi describes the risks associated with this type of representation. By presenting models of gender types and focusing on the feminine as exclusive to the masculine, Laura Esquivel's work emphasizes essentialism over diversity. Ferro Sardi continues:

Los tipos y los estereotipos que difunden se proponen como representativos de todas las mujeres latinoamericanas sin importar distinciones de origen nacional, ni religión, etnia o clase social, negando a los sujetos concretos. Se habla del otro y por el otro intentando que una voz sea leída y entendida como representativa de otros. La tendencia de esta escritura es claramente reguladora más que emancipadora. (6)

Likewise, her novel *Malinche* forces Malinalli to be a representative of Latin American women. As a resolution to the romance format, the conclusion of the novel exalts Malinalli's role as mother and wife over her role as interpreter and survivor. This results in a representative for women that reinforces cultural norms, rather than questioning them.

Finally, not only does *Malinche* perpetuate traditional values for the feminine other. By turning Malinalli into a spokesperson for all Amerindians, Esquivel's novel also becomes a colonizing historical narrative that reproduces relationships of domination and subordination. While she uses a narrative focalized from the point of view of the protagonist, it is really Laura Esquivel speaking through Malinche, using her as a tool for interpretation much as Cortés does. Her portrayal of Malinalli as a foundational mother and romance heroine denies her protagonist the opportunity to transcend long-held myths. By romancing Malinche, Laura Esquivel relegates her to silence. Even more damaging, her novel reproduces a discourse of feminine passivity that reinforces traditional models for both her heroine and her readers.

Chapter 3

Fragmentation and New Explorations: Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda's *La Malinche*

Written in 1997 by Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda, *La Malinche* was performed in Mexico in 1998. The play later was published with a bibliography and a *Bitácora*, the author's journal on the process of writing *La Malinche*, in 2000. The text revisits the story of Malinche while simultaneously addressing the contemporary political and economic problems of Latin America. As a fragmented protagonist who takes different forms and enacts different functions on stage, Rascón Banda's Malinche begins and ends the play by attempting to write herself into the historical record. There is an attempt to replant the question of Malinche's meaning to Latin American, and Mexican, history by taking her out of her historical context and inserting her into one that the audience can easily recognize. However, this act silences Malinche's voice and does not successfully reintegrate her. Rather than portray her as an individual character, she is converted to a polysemic sign employed by the playwright to provoke debate about serious political and economic issues addressing his country's present, as well as its past.

Rascón Banda's *La Malinche* revisits the mythology of the historical figure as well as the time period of a crisis in Mexico during the mid 1990s. The play uses intertextuality in order to introduce a postmodern approach to the discussion of history. It also addresses both meanings of *la historia* of la Malinche, in the sense that his representations of the character address her role in Mexican and Latin American history,

as well as her personal story of survival. The intertextuality used by the playwright reconfirms Malinche's status as more myth than historical figure. As Georges Baudot writes:

Como si Malintzin hubiese decidido seguir vengando su infancia sacrificada refugiándose en la oscuridad histórica, o como si hubiese concluido que había sido de tal magnitud su trayectoria y su epopeya que ya sólo la ficción, la novela y el teatro, la literatura que retoma las realidades y las transforma con los filtros del imaginar y de la quimera, podían dar cuenta cabal y auténtica de ella. (Quoted in Cano Alcalá 36)

Rascón Banda's *La Malinche* addresses the mythology of Malinche from a nationalistic point of view. Commissioned by the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, the play takes the icon out of the time period of the conquest and inserts her into the specific era of Mexico during and immediately after the signing of NAFTA. Thus, the playwright uses her to address concerns regarding the social and historical context that would directly affect the spectators.

Historical Drama and Representations of Malinche in Contemporary Theater

La Malinche addresses the historiography of a critical time period, that of the Conquest. Thus, it falls into the general category of self-conscious historical drama. As Jacqueline Bixler points out, historical drama calls our attention to the perception of history and the dialogue between theatrical representation and the historical context

recreated on stage.²⁵ She goes on to explain how historical plays incorporate two elements: metahistory and metatheatre. Metahistory, as defined by Hayden White in *Historical Text*, concerns “a critical enterprise wherein the historian addresses reflective questions about the writing of history itself” (quoted. in Bixler, “Recasting” 163). In a similar vein, metatheatre is a self-reflective form of drama, that “looks upon itself and becomes about perception” (163). In other words, “history and drama are both modes of discourse that stem from a dialectical interaction between fiction and reality.” Bixler continues: “Historical drama, the composite of history and theatre, is at once metahistorical and metadramatic in the double vision that it presents the audience” (164). By combining theatre and historiography, plays of this genre self-consciously deal with the question of perception of history, and ultimately, the issue of perception itself²⁶.

Throughout history, key figures of Mexican history have been elevated from men and women that lived during a particular historical event to institutionalized, and

²⁵ In her article “Re-Casting the Past: The Dramatic Debunking of Mexico’s ‘Official’ History”, Jacqueline Bixler discusses the trend initiated by dramatists Willebaldo Lopez, Jorge Ibarguengoitia and Vicente Leñero who “have questioned the veracity and authority of Mexico’s institutionalized history by re-casting certain episodes and hollowed heroes of the past in a less than favorable light. [...] They purposely distort and toy with public perception through the use of self-conscious dramatic forms, which in turn highlight the same distortion that commonly occurs in the interpretation and recording of history” (163).

²⁶ One example of how historical dramas deal with these questions is the character of “Lector” in Vicente Leñero’s *Martirio de Morelos* (1981). This play recreates the trial and capture of the José María Morelos, the parish priest who became one of the insurgent commanders in the struggle for Mexican independence. In his restaging of this history, Leñero creates an intertextual counterpart for the reader / spectator, the character of “Lector”. The transformation suffered by the Lector is meant to parallel the audience’s own process of doubting official history. By portraying theatre and official history as both fictive constructs, historical drama calls our attention to the role of perception in recorded history (Bixler, 170).

sometimes sacred, myths. This is the case with figures like Miguel Hidalgo and Benito Juárez. Often politicians will adopt these historical turned mythical figures as “spiritual mentors” (163). In their representation of such figures, historical plays can also challenge the audience to question national myths. A clear example of this practice can be found in the representation of Benito Juárez in Sabina Berman’s play *Krisis* (1997). In an exchange of dialogue between the protagonist and the former president, Juárez is depicted as a type of fallen angel, inserted into a twentieth-century context to protect the Mexican constitution. Challenging traditional notions of figures like José María Morelos or Benito Juárez, who have a mythical status and are often associated with positive, heroic qualities, can help to question the national narratives in which they play(ed) key roles.

As Sibylle Gfellner indicates, myths correspond to the major themes of origin and identity, to the point that they are often presented as historical reality. “Actualmente muchos de estos mitos cumplen la función de conservación de estructuras de poder patriarcales, por lo cual se los representa como inviolables y se los vende como realidad histórica” (195). Malinche is a key example of a historical figure who has been transformed into myth. There is more information about her in literary texts than in any historical record. Consequently, she is more fictive than real. Yet, the mythology of Malinche is so closely intertwined with historical narratives. By taking her out of the specific historical context of the Conquest, Rascón Banda questions the foundation of the national narratives surrounding this figure. Casting doubt on the role of Malinche, his is

also able to question commonly held perceptions of the roles held by subaltern groups, such as women and indigenous communities, in contemporary Latin American societies.

Rascón Banda's *La Malinche* is the last play about the figure from a 40-year period of works written by Mexican playwrights in the last half of the twentieth century. Alessandra Luiselli traces the transformation and variations of Malinche as a main character in plays from 1958 to 1998. In addition to Rascón Banda's work, the other plays that feature Malinche are: *La Malinche* (1958) by Celestino Gorostiza, *Corona de fuego* (1960) by Rodolfo Usigli, *Cuauhtémoc* (1962) by Salvador Novo, *Todos los gatos son pardos* (1970) by Carlos Fuentes, *El eterno femenino* (1974) by Rosario Castellanos, *Aguila o sol* (1984) by Sabina Berman, *La Malinche* (1986) by Margarita Urueta, and *Aguila real* (1992) by Hugo Argüelles.²⁷ According to Luiselli, the recreation of the figure was heavily influenced by the discussion proposed by Octavio Paz in his seminal essay "Los hijos de la Malinche" (The Labyrinth of Solitude). The "uncomfortable proposal" (204) that Paz creates of Malinche as a traitoress, and as the maximum insult in Mexican lexicon (*la chingada*) left an indelible mark on writers who felt compelled to address the essayist's characterization of both Malintzin and her descendents. In this period, the earlier works of Celestino Gorostiza, Rodolfo Usigli and Carlos Fuentes, present a monolithic vision that reproduces the myth of Malinche as passive object.

The first major break from traditional representation comes with Castellanos' *El eterno femenino*. The play takes place in a beauty salon, typically considered a space for

²⁷ According to Luiselli, Hugo Argüelles replaces Malinche in his play with Tecuixpo / Doña Isabel, which brings to mind Salvador Carrasco's representation of Isabel Moctezuma in *La otra conquista*.

women, and is recognized by Luiselli as the first alteration in the patriarchal discussion on Malinche. The play uses ironic distancing from official sources of history in order to indicate that the playwright adopts a feminist perspective. This feminist perspective is also present in the work of Sabina Berman, who in *Aguila o sol* presents the idea of various incompatible versions of the truth. By resisting traditional perspectives, Castellanos and Berman deconstruct old paradigms and replace them with opportunities to give women a greater role in Mexican national discourse:

El ataque a la historia oficial que vemos en estas obras (Berman, Castellanos) desmitifica a los personajes de la historia oficial; también ayuda a desmitificar el concepto oficial de ‘lo femenino’ que la cultura mantiene. La mujer no es la figura sumisa, pasiva, un objeto manipulado por el hombre, sino un ser con una voluntad independiente. [...] Fue el canon patriarcal el que inventó a la “Malinche traidora, la Chingada”, ahora son las mujeres y la voz polifónica las que la rescatan. (Cypess “Revisión” 221-22)

The technique of dismantling the Mexican cultural myth of Malinche as a metaphor for the passive female figure begins with the works of Rosario Castellanos and Sabina Berman. Both the plays by Rascón Banda and Chilean playwright Inés Margarita Stranger (whose play *Malinche* is discussed further later in this chapter) owe a great deal to this innovation as they build on this trend and finding a space to better represent the female voice. In the case of Rascón Banda, the voice presented by female characters is often one of the repository or archive of collective cultural memory. As Jacqueline Bixler

explains (citing Marvin Carlson), postmodern theatre is a complex mix of cultural memory, quotations and recycling:

[Marvin] Carlson afirma que la asociación del género teatral con la colección y el archivo de la memoria cultural para un público masivo ha hecho que el teatro sea el lugar preferido para recordar y celebrar los mitos, las leyendas y la historia de la a cuyas tradiciones y cultura se dedica. (52).

Such is the case in various works by Rascón Banda, like *Voces en el umbral*, *Contrabando*, *Sazón de mujer* and *La mujer que cayó del cielo*, where Bixler notes a common pattern of a woman, abandoned or widowed, who remains behind as the spokeswoman for collective memory (“La mujer” 53). The playwright indicates in an interview with Bixler “A través de las mujeres voy contando historias, o voy reflexionando sobre el microcosmos de la vida social mexicana” (53). It is appropriate, then, that in *La Malinche* Rascón Banda uses one of Mexico’s most controversial female figures to reflect on identity and social life.

A general concern for issues related to Mexican national reality can be observed in other works by the playwright. Having grown up near the Mexico-US border, and the son of a lawyer and paralegal, Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda also alludes to border issues and the realism of legal cases in his early plays. For example, in works like *Los ilegales* (1978), *Tina Modotti* (1980), and *Cautivas, historia de un secuestro* (2005), his writing shows “a proclivity for tragic or criminal aspects [...] of national reality” (Sander 177). Other characteristics of his plays that are evident in *La Malinche* include: limited place or

action (although, in the case of *La Malinche*, the constant use of anachronisms blurs the delimitations of setting), obscured or ambiguous relationships between characters, and the technique of having one character “invade” or interrupt a scene. This last characteristic applies to one of the last acts of the character Malinche in the play, when she tries to write her own name in red graffiti in the *Unión del Congreso*. Therefore, the subject matter of *La Malinche* allows the playwright to continue exploring ideas associated with collective cultural memory (and women’s role in this issue), as well as the reality of national issues that impacted Mexico at the time.

Rascón Banda writes in his *Bitácora* how the subject matter came to him:

De cómo aparece la Malinche en mi vida. Yo no la busco. Ella viene a mí en voz de Mario Espinosa, coordinador de Teatro de Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, quien me llama por teléfono para invitarme a escribir una obra sobre la Malinche, que será montada por Johann Kresnik. (153)

As the playwright goes on to describe, one of the objectives from the very beginning of the project was to reflect on how the symbolism of La Malinche would fit into the current national situation. Thus, it is useful to reflect on the political and social context that influenced Rascón Banda while he was writing the play.

Mexico in the 1990s: The Sociopolitical Context of *La Malinche*

Two key events that helped to characterize the political and social context are the signing of the NAFTA treaty in January 1994 and the simultaneous Zapatista uprisings in the southern state of Chiapas. The term “crisis” was used to refer to the economic and

political fallout from the effects of NAFTA and the rebellions. In the following passage, Stephen D. Morris and John Passé-Smith describe the consequences of the signing of the free trade agreement and other policies that affected U.S.-Mexico relations at the time:

The Mexican economic crisis that began in 1994 was devastating. Over the following year Mexico's gross domestic product (GDP) shrank 6.9 percent, one of the worst declines since the great depression. An estimated one-third of Mexico's businesses went bankrupt, leaving industry operating at 40 percent of its capacity. Unemployment skyrocketed, with more than 2 million Mexicans losing their jobs. To make matters worse, the purchasing power of the peso tumbled 34 percent between December 1994 and August 1996. (134)

The immediate reaction to these events was to use austerity measures, reducing spending on social programs, for example. Because of these measures, the government response to the economic crisis ultimately widened the gap between the country's elite and its poor. Another element of fractionalization, according to Morris and Passé-Smith, was the existence of vastly different perceptions of the crisis, which resulted in disparate ideas about how to deal with it. To add to the frustration, following the signing of the treaty, other events indicated increasing U.S. influence in Mexico, and the neoliberal Mexican government's desire to reaffirm ties to U.S. backed policies. For example, in April 1996, the Mexican government acquiesced to US requests for extradition of two Mexican citizens and allowed a fact-finding mission from the Organization of American States (OAS) to visit Mexico to investigate its human rights policies. Additionally, the

government of Carlos Salinas allowed the U.S. to “airlift immigrants deep into the interior, and accepted the military training of Mexican soldiers at U. S. bases” (136).

As the economy showed very slow signs of improving, public support for the “neoliberal experiment” declined. However, elite opinion in Mexico (and the US) concerning the situation did not change, thus creating a gap between public perception of US interventionism and the perception of the elite in both countries. The Zapatista uprising and military response in the south further highlighted this gap.

As Laurietz Seda astutely observes, the Zapatista rebellion not only indicated the fractionalization in Mexican society, but also underscored how the policies of Salinas’ government did not fit with reality. Though it would seem that, with the signing of NAFTA, Salinas was trying to signal that Mexico would soon become a first-world country, “El EZLN desenmascaraba la hipocresía del gobierno de Salinas y mostraba al mundo la otra cara de México, la de los indígenas marginados, la pobreza y la explotación” (96). In addition to economic fractionalization, the reality of Mexico’s ethnic diversity also contradicts the Salinas administration’s intention to project the image of a more integrated, homogeneous national identity.

Although the presidency of Porfirio Díaz initiated a process of national unification in the nineteenth century, Mexico’s racial and cultural diversity, with more than fifty ethnicities, still problematizes this process at the end of the twentieth century. According to Laurietz Seda, one of the polemical issues raised in Rascón Banda’s *La Malinche* is the lack of integration of indigenous communities in the national project. Seda goes on to point out the major contradiction that these same communities are

presented as the founders of Mesoamerican civilization in textbooks, but outside of the classroom setting are considered inferior or unable to represent “el verdadero México” (Seda 93). In summary, just as the application of neoliberal policies turned out to be inappropriate for the reality of the Mexican economic situation in the 1990s, the same can be said of the myth of an integrative, national identity.

Deconstructing the myth of homogeneous Mexican national identity relates specifically to the figure of Malinche. Many of the meanings associated with the figure are closely tied to the myth of national identity. In popular culture, she is considered on one hand the mother of the Mexican nation, on the other the traitor who sold out her people to the Spaniards. Yet the reality of the “Mexican nation” is much more complex and multifaceted than official discourses have been willing to admit. The symbolism of Malinche as the mother of Mexico is tied to the birth of the *mestizo* Martín Cortés, largely because the topic of *mestizaje* has consistently dominated discussion of Mexican identity, to the point that some might consider it synonymous with Mexico itself.

Yet, as both Enrique Florescano and Néstor García Canclini explain, there is much more to the story.²⁸ An appropriate phrase used by García Canclini to refer to this problem is: “la complejidad estructural de la modernidad latinoamericana” (*La globalización imaginada* 87). Clearly, room should be made for other narratives of identity, beyond just the narrative of *mestizaje*, a reality that contradicts the founding of Malinche’s symbolism as the first Mexican mother (alongside her counterpart, the Virgen of Guadalupe) due to her relationship with Martín Cortés. To address the second part of

²⁸ See Florescano’s book *Etnia, estado y nación* (Quoted in Seda 93-95).

Malinche's symbolism, that of traitor to her own people, it is useful to recall that the "traitorous" acts associated with Malinche occurred long before the modern concepts of nationhood and national identity. As Frances Karttunen points out in her essay "Rethinking Malinche":

It does not appear to me that a question of ethnic loyalty can legitimately be raised here. At this time in Mesoamerica the indigenes had no sense of themselves as "Indians" united in a common cause against Europeans. They identified themselves as Mexicah, Tlaxcaltecah, Chololtecah, and so on. As she was none of these, how could Malintzin be a traitor to all or any of them? By all reports, she saw her best hope of survival in Cortés and served him unwaveringly. Rather than the embodiment of treachery, her consistency could be viewed as an exercise in total loyalty. The problem for Mexican national identity after Independence was that the object of her loyalty had been a *conquistador*. (304)

Karttunen's comments here remind us that the symbolism of Malinche as traitor to her people is based on the misconception that she could at that time, or would even be able to, identify with the peoples conquered by Cortés and those who accompanied him as "her own." Indeed, as we have already seen, the question of constructing one homogenous identity for the "Mexican people" would be an impossible task 500 years later, at the turn of the twentieth century.

Rascón Banda's play incorporates representations of Mexican reality that question the myth of Mexican national identity. Meanwhile, he also incorporates intertexts in the

play that serve as a commentary on the political and economic situation of the country. These intertexts correspond to the reality of present-day Mexico, and not the Mexico of the colonial past. One example is scene 30, titled “La fiesta interrumpida.” In this scene, a group of fighters from Chiapas, armed, interrupt the gala of a disdainful politician. Malinche serves as interpreter. At first the dialogue between politician and fighters is presented in a mix of Spanish and indigenous languages. As a way of pacifying the group, the politician rattles off a list of empty promises that Malinche repeats in her own words:

LICENCIADO. Incorporaremos Chiapas al resto del país, porque así como están, miren nomás, parecen centroamericanos, no mexicanos. Y Chiapas también es México, faltaba más. Basta verlos: flacos, chaparros, desnutridos, descalzos; parecen muertos vivientes.

MALINCHE. Que dice el Licenciado que se vayan tranquilos. Les daremos todo, ropa, escuela, y les enseñaremos español. Que dice que los va a incorporar al progreso nacional y que les va a enseñar a vivir como gente de razón.

INDIO 1. Nosotros no queremos eso.

INDIO 2. Queremos vivir según nuestros usos y costumbres.

MALINCHE. Eso no es posible. Tenemos una Constitución que es igual para todos los mexicanos.

INDIO 3. Dile que sólo queremos que nos dejen en paz.

INDIO 4. Vivir libremente.

INDIO 5. Con municipios nuestros. (120-21)

Malinche's words indicate her support of a nationalist project, one that in theory promotes equality and inclusiveness. This project would deny the Amerindians who confront them in this scene with the opportunity to make decisions about their own lives. Her words, as well as those of the Licenciado, attempt to sublimate any sense of cultural difference. The argument presented by the Indian characters in the scene invalidates this attitude. By rejecting the Licenciado's offer, they are also rejecting the notion of inclusiveness and assimilation. This rejection suggests a plurality of cultural identities within Mexico that subverts the myth of a homogenous Mexican identity. The patronizing tone of the Licenciado is slightly mellowed in Malinche's address to the fighters from Chiapas. However, while she communicates the argument of the dominant group, here represented by the Licenciado, she uses phrases such as "les daremos" and "los va a incorporar"(121). In other words, she does not include herself as a part of the Amerindian community in her discourse.

In scene 32, "Los desacuerdos de San Andrés", both Malinche and the politician return, this time, to sign the agreements from the San Andrés talks into law. When the Licenciado begins to change his mind, Malinche reminds him that he gave his word to the fighters when they interrupted his party. The politician's response indicates a continuing discourse of patronization and attitude of inferiority toward the Amerindian other. He tells Malinche, "No cederé. Aunque no quieran los vamos a incorporar al progreso nacional. Hay que pensar por ellos. Todavía no son mayores de edad" (130). The politician's monologue reinforces Gustavo Verdesio's argument that in present-day Latin

America, the voice of subalternity is found in the Amerindian, and not the *mestizo*, subject.

In both scenes 30 and 32, Rascón Banda alludes to the San Andrés Accords of February 16, 1996. The accords, an agreement between the political leadership of the Zapatista (EZLN) rebels and the Mexican government, ensured, among other legal rights, more autonomy for indigenous communities. Yet during Ernesto Zedilla's presidency the agreements were largely ignored. As a result, the Zapatista leadership would later suspend further talks (Gómez). The historical referent in the two scenes focuses explicitly on the present-day situation in Mexico. By incorporating the day to day realities of tensions between the Mexican government and Amerindian communities, Rascón Banda underscores the persistence of relationships of domination and subordination that have their roots in the time period of the Conquest.

The question of integrative cultural identity is one that Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda presents throughout *La Malinche*. The play successfully represents the divisiveness of the country following the crisis of the 1990s. By highlighting the similarities between the Conquest of the Europeans and the economic policies of liberalism that reflect US interventionism, the play posits the thesis that the relationships of domination and inequality from Mexico's colonial era continue to impact its internal and international affairs. He creates a space for plurality of discourses that reflect present-day realities. In this aspect, Rascón Banda's text succeeds where both Salvador Carrasco's *La otra conquista* and Laura Esquivel's *Malinche* do not: he avoids

representing the Amerindian subject as a relic of the past and recognizes their role in current reality.

However, the playwright struggles to find an appropriate place for Malinche in this complex picture. Her representation is ambiguous at best, as she wears many “hats”, from that of a PRD representative (scene 1), to an abandoned elderly mother (scene 27), to a prostitute (scene 12), and so on. As we have seen in scenes 30 and 32, she is shown in one situation addressing the Zapatista fighters in the third-person plural, excluding herself from their communities. Yet, in a later scene she attempts to defend their interests. One conclusion that we can draw from this, however, is that the varying and, at times contradictory, representations of Malinche contribute to the overall sense of fragmentation in the work, a sense that underscores the complexity of the social context that informs Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda’s writing.

Fragmentation

The fragmentation in *La Malinche* is created in various ways. For example, there is the division of the play into two time periods, the past and the present. Also, the play relies heavily on the device of intertextuality. Finally there is the fragmentation of Malinche herself (as mentioned above). Although there are many different “Malinches” in the work, the play is centered on three main “Malinches”: young Malinche, adult Malinche and old Malinche (with one exception, la “Malinche gorda y morena” who appears in scene 33, “Nuevo cuerpo, nueva piel”). In the appendix, “The Three Malinches in *La Malinche* by Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda” the thirty-seven scenes of the

play are listed. The second column of the table indicates the time period in which each scene takes place. The third column indicates which of the three Malinches takes center stage during the scene.

When comparing the two columns, two interesting observations arise. Firstly, most of the scenes (about twenty) are set in “Present” time (i.e. Mexico City in the 1990s). Secondly, the young and adult Malinches dominate (appearing in thirty-three scenes). By presenting three different phases of Malinche, does Rascón Banda’s play allow Malinche to redeem herself? Or does the reality of the Mexican economic crisis that informs the play make redemption impossible?

There are three subthemes associated with this overarching idea of fragmentation. The playwright uses Malinche as a sign to discuss the following: 1. the juxtaposition of past and present, 2. the use of intertextuality, and 3. internal political tensions in Mexico. These three subthemes converge in Rascon Banda’s warning against further colonization by North American interests in the country. By highlighting fragmentation in the debate about the figure of Malinche, Rascon Banda questions official historiography, emphasizes the complexity of narratives surrounding Malinche in non-historical texts (such as the essay by Octavio Paz), and deconstructs the myth of a unified Mexican identity. There is, however, a certain irony in this project of deconstructing the national myths. At the same time that the play shows the diversity that remains intact (and often leads to internal conflicts) he also presents a pessimistic view of a second colonization—the Americanization of ‘traditional’ Mexican culture.

The play *La Malinche* was commissioned by Mario Espinosa, coordinator of INBA as a coproduction of that organization and three others: the National Council for Culture and the Arts, the Goethe Institute, and the International Cervantes Festival. The play was performed in Guanajuato in Teatro Juárez for the Cervantes Festival from the twentieth to the twenty-third of October. It then moved to Teatro Julio Jiménez Rueda (in Mexico City) from the twenty-ninth to November thirteenth (Seda 93). After thirty performances at the second location, the play was cancelled due to lack of funding. However, the playwright writes of his suspicions concerning the cancellations in the *Bitácora* and recalls a conversation concerning the closing of the show with an officer of INBA:

Lunes 11 de enero (1999). Me entrevisto con Gerardo Estrada en sus oficinas del INBA. Le reclamo la suspensión de la obra con teatro lleno y la falta de promoción durante la temporada. Le digo que es una forma de censura. Me dice que no, que son razones presupuestales y me entrega una carpeta con recortes de prensa donde vienen las pocas inserciones que pagó el INBA. No son suficientes, ni se comparan con las otras producciones teatrales que el INBA tiene en cartelera, le digo. Razones de presupuesto, repite. La obra nos sobrepasó en lo económico. También en lo político, le digo. ¿Para qué contrataste a Kresnik? ¿Para qué me encargaron a la obra? Ustedes sabían la clase de trabajo que hacemos ambos. ¿Para qué se arriesgaron? (277)

Despite the playwright's concerns mentioned above, the official line by INBA and other organizations that sponsored the play was that budgetary concerns caused them to cancel the show. However, this would not be the first time that INBA would indirectly censor a play about Malinche.

In 1984 the same organization commissioned Sabina Berman to write a play about the history of Mexico. This play became the already mentioned feminist *Aguila o sol* whose showings were cancelled after the first dress rehearsal. According to Laurietz Seda, INBA refused to allow the show to continue because, instead of portraying the "real story" it placed the doubt on the foundation of Mexican official history (Seda 93).

Both allegedly victims of indirect censorship (the withholding of funding), both plays, *Aguila o sol* (1984) and *La Malinche* (2000), question official historiography and seek to expose hypocrisies in Mexican politics and society. Additionally, both works attempt to do this through the use of Malinche as a sign associated with contradictory meanings of Mexican culture. One important meaning associated with la Malinche is the ethnic conflict between Europeans and indigenous peoples of Mexico. In the aftermath of the Chiapas rebellions, Rascón Banda uses Malinche to point out the parallels between the history of the early 16th century and that of the end of the 20th century. In other words, the fusion of past and present in the play helps to show how relationships of subordination and domination that originated from colonial times continue to influence the balance of power in present-day.

In "Past and Present in Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda's *La Malinche* and Marisol Martín del Campo's *Amor y conquista*", Maarten van Delden discusses the narrative

device of “backshadowing” and applies it to the representation of history in Rascón Banda’s play. The fusion of the past and the present time periods (Conquest, 16th century / Mexico during and right after the crisis, approximately 1994) can be seen, for example in the respective correspondences in the cast of characters. The conquered Aztecs of the 16th century are thus complemented by contemporary indigenous communities from Chiapas, Martín Cortés (son of Hernán Cortés and Malinche) is replaced with the character an upper-middle class youth from Coyoacán, and Cuauhtémoc, the last leader of the Aztecs, is shown meeting with Zapatista leader Subcomandante Marcos.

Backshadowing is a term that implies reading the past from the perspective of the present.²⁹ In other words, one combines narrative concerning past events with the knowledge of the consequences that those events had or continue to have in our present context. In other words, this device is “a kind of retroactive foreshadowing in which the shared knowledge of the outcome of a series of events by narrator and listener is used to judge the participants in those events as though they too should have known what was to come” (14). The danger that lies in the device of backshadowing is it casts too much guilt on the participants in the historical events and can lead to an oversimplified reading of the past. As Bernstein explains, “to use our knowledge of subsequent events in order to judge people who lived before such events took place amounts to a denial of the complexity and unpredictability of human experience” (Quoted in Delden 14).

Given Bernstein’s explanation, a clear example of the backshadowing device can be found in nineteenth century nationalist writings on the figure of Malinche. The

²⁹ Here I am following Maarten Van Delden’s definition of backshadowing (14).

characterization of Malinche as a traitor to her people and a colluder with the Spaniards relies heavily on knowledge that the writers of later generations had at their fingertips concerning the devastation, and continued marginalization of indigenous communities, caused by the events of the Conquest. Maarten van Delden goes on to argue that Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda's characterization of Malinche in his play is also a variant of the device of backshadowing. Malinche acknowledges her role in the events of the Conquest and even at times attempts to justify her actions. This shows that she understands how her acts carry an impact that reverberates to the present-day. One example of Malinche's attempt to justify her actions appears in a conversation with the psychoanalyst concerning the massacre at Cholula. As Frances Karttunen and others have pointed out, Malinche's reputation as a traitor hinges on the story of the Cholula massacre. In several accounts of the events, (for example in Bernal Díaz del Castillo) she is shown alerting the Spaniards of the surprise attack. This establishes her role as collaborator with the Spanish invaders. However, Rascón Banda's version of the story gives Malinche the opportunity to respond to this representation:

MALINCHE. ¿Mi primera decepción?

ANALISTA. El primer desengaño.

MALINCHE. Fue en Cholula. Me envió a que llamara a los señores de Cholula....Que los trajera al patio del templo de Quetzalcóatl...Yo no sabía. (45)

Later, in the same scene, we see the younger Malinche arguing with Cortés about the deception. In the dialogue with Cortés, Rascón Banda presents a completely different

version of the story. Cortés indicates that he was alerted to the Cholulans' deception by another translator (*otra lengua*) and that the Tlaxcalans came to warn them. In the meantime, Malinche argues in defense of the Cholulans:

MALINCHE. ¡Ya los matan, ya los acuchillan!

CORTÉS. Justo castigo.

MALINCHE. Déjalos salir!

CORTÉS. Conspiraban contra mí.

MALINCHE. ¿Quién lo dijo?

CORTÉS. Los de Tlaxcala vinieron a prevenirnos.

MALINCHE. ¡Yo no lo escuché! ¡Yo no traduje eso!

CORTÉS. Lo supe por otra lengua.

MALINCHE. ¡Los matan ahí metidos, sin haber causa!

CORTÉS. Eran traidores.

MALINCHE. No es cierto. (46)

This passage highlights several key issues. First of all, it shows Malinche defending the Cholulans and asking Cortés to end the massacre. Thus she is transformed from a traitor to a defender of indigenous resistance. Secondly, it points out that she was not the only translator used by the *conquistadores*, a known but widely unacknowledged aspect of the Malinche mythology. By presenting the Cholulan massacre in this way, the playwright frees Malinche from the burden of responsibility associated with this event.

This characterization of Malinche as defender of indigenous interests is echoed in later scenes, such as scene 31 with Subcomandante Marcos and Cuauhtémoc (“Ni el aire

nos pertenece”). Yet, in many other scenes in the play, Malinche is shown in her traditional role as primary translator for Cortés. This is an example of the contradictory way in which Malinche is characterized in the play. Maarten Van Delden explains the contradiction in these terms:

Rascón Banda simultaneously acknowledges what the historical documents at our disposal indicate- that la Malinche chose to help the Spanish *Conquistadores*- and constructs an alternative Malinche who stands as a symbol of resistance to the foreign invasion of one’s land. (15)

The key problem with this contradictory representation of Malinche is that it inserts her actions into the larger narrative of the Mexican nation- a narrative that would have been unfamiliar and probably inconceivable to the figure during the time in which she actually lived. Though I agree with Van Delden’s theory that the playwright presents a contradictory vision of the figure, I would add that the play acknowledges not only this representation of Malinche in official historical narratives, but in many other types of texts. These texts range from essays about neoliberalism, such as *Después del neoliberalismo* by Carlos Fuentes, and a folksong, *La maldición de Malinche* by Gabino Palomares. In other words, Rascón Banda’s version of Malinche is only partially a construction of historical narratives. By including such a variety of texts, Rascón Banda indicates the figure’s pervasiveness in pop culture, essays, and other literary works. In reality, the few historical accounts of Malinche that we have at our disposal pale in comparison to the contributions from other types of texts.

Another issue in the previous quote is Van Delden's comment that Malinche "*chose* to help the Spanish *conquistadores*" (My emphasis; 15), a common idea associated with the figure that Rascón Banda actually goes out of his way to deconstruct. Van Delden's assertion here is problematic because ignores the fact that the "historical documents at our disposal" were written by the conquerors and reflect the biases of their writers.

The re-writing of the Cholula Massacre is not the only instance where Rascón Banda deconstructs the myth of Malinche as traitor to her people. For example in scene 4, "Malinche va al sicoanalista", the character discusses the sexual abuse that she suffered at the hands of the *conquistadores* ("nos usaron" / "They used us") (38) and the fact she feared for her own life. In the subsequent scene, "Traducción simultánea", we see Cortés promising Malinche her freedom if she agrees to cooperate. Both of these scenes portray the character as a survivor of difficult circumstances. This serves to humanize Malinche and to remind us that she was trying to survive amidst difficult circumstances.

In his version, the playwright not only addresses the historical record but also the construction of Malinche in other types of texts: the play by Sabina Berman, the essay by Octavio Paz, the folksong, acknowledging that Malinche is constructed not only by historical memory but fictional narratives (mythology). Just as Malinche is constructed or pieced together, the same can be said of the format of the play itself, cobbled together from different texts selected by the playwright with feedback from the director, Johann Kresnik. Rascón Banda reflects on the process of preparing the text after his initial meetings with the principal actress Liliana Saldaña (who plays the adult Malinche). Since

she was already used to working with Kresnik, she gives the playwright the following advice:

--Dale muchos textos, todos los que puedas--me dice--y él seleccionará los que necesite. Y a los actores danos mucho material, un expediente o sea tu investigación, para proponerle cosas. No te preocupes, paisano--Me preocupo. (157)

What worries Rascón Banda, as he indicates throughout the *Bitácora*, is how his work on *La Malinche* forces him to play a more intermediary role than is typical for a playwright. As opposed to simply writing the text and waiting until the day of the first show to see how the director has adapted the written word to a live performance, in this case he is involved in much more of the process: the writing, rehearsing, and promotion of *La Malinche*.

The *Bitácora* or daily log created by the playwright to describe the process is an important paratext for the play. It exposes the text to new interpretations by outlining how the intertexts for the play itself were chosen, and contrasts the script with the playwright's interpretation of Johan Kresnik's realization of the performance. In addition to including Rascón Banda's recollections of conversations with representatives from the INBA, the director, and the actors, it also include at the end a list of press blurbs regarding the reception of the play. Ironically, while Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda prepares the script for a play about Malinche, he finds himself turning into a variation of the Malinche myth:

Tienen razón los que dicen que hay que estar lo más lejos posible de los ensayos y de los actores y solo asistir el día del estreno y el día de la develación de la placa del final de la temporada. Creo que es lo más sano. Sólo que ahora esto no ha sido posible porque alguien tiene que estar creca de Kresnik explicándole cada palabra, cada frase, cada subtexto, cada problema, cada costumbre, quién es quién, como seguramente lo hizo Malinche con Cortés, para que éste entendiera el mundo en el que estaba penetrando. (210-11)

Due to the fact that the director is an Austrian who needs the script translated from Spanish to German for him, much of the time he and Rascón Banda discuss the play in English, which becomes the intermediary language. It is important to mention that the fact that the play had a foreign director may have affected critical reception- one comment from the press blurbs in the *Bitácora* mentions that the director was a foreigner, another that the work had a Eurocentrist view. More than one criticism includes the term “malinchista.”

Though the *Bitácora* is the most important paratext, the list of works cited also grabs the reader’s attention. A cursory glance at the bibliography reveals that the play is really a cobbling together of various different texts. These “intertexts” can be separated into 2 main categories: nonfiction texts (mostly pieces of journalism) that do not have any direct connection to the time period of the Conquest, but rather refer to the Mexican crisis, and texts that correspond to the Conquest or its representatives (Cortés, Malinche,

Cuauhtémoc).³⁰ The term intertextuality refers to the dynamic, dialogic nature of a text. It proposes that texts do not exist in a vacuum, but rather form part of a wide range of texts that are in communication with each other. In order to better explain this concept, I would like to refer to Carlos Reis' definition:

El concepto de intertextualidad se establece a partir de una concepción dinámica del texto literario, entidad situada en un amplio universo textual (que abarca tanto los textos literarios como los no literarios), universo entendido como espacio de dialogo, cambio e interpretación constants de unos textos en otros textos. (19)

As an example of a dramatic text, *La Malinche* corresponds to a common historical referent, the patriarchal view of Mexican national identity. Thus, Rascón Banda's play, like those that preceded it, adds to the dialogue concerning the Malinche mythology. In other words, the intertextuality used here fall in line with characteristics of other dramatic texts. As Sandra Messinger Cypess explains,

Todos éstos [textos dramáticos] se inscriben en la corriente histórica de los otros textos existents con los que establecen un diálogo. Cada texto, inmerso en la corriente de discursos ajenos, repite las palabras de otros del pasado o es citado en otras obras venideras. ("Revisión" 209)

The frequent use of passages or quotes leads to a segmentation of the play, converting it into a series of independent *cuadros*. This allows the author to underscore the sense of

³⁰ In her essay, "Historia contemporánea teatralizada: las Malinches de Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda y Johann Kresnik", Rowena Sandner observes that every third scene in the play has an example of a quote, passage or reference from another text (178).

fragmentation concerning historiography and the debate over national identity. The use of anachronisms and the lack of continuous dramatic action add to the sense that the play does not have a clear beginning and end, in a chronological sense. This often relegates Malinche from protagonist to secondary character, as the problems of the Mexican crisis become the real main character of the play. This does not mean that all of the conflicts in the work go unresolved, however.

Though the main problem of the Mexican crisis and the possible threat of future colonization remain open-ended, we see an evolution in the character of Malinche as she struggles to gain a better understanding of the negative reputation that has been associated with her. Through dialogues with her son and with the psychoanalyst, she explores these ideas. Also, she attempts to “write herself” into the official record. The play does not necessarily offer a final resolution for the character, but establishes the possibility for future generations to resolve these conflicts.

The theme of Malinche “writing herself” into the historical record is established in the opening scene. The setting, in the middle of the Tribunal of Congressional Representatives, is staged in such a way as to include members of the audience as if they were also congressional representatives. The play opens with a PRD³¹ (perredista) representative speaking to the other representatives (both the actors on stage and the audience members). She makes the claim that for too long, certain groups have been excluded from discussion of the political goals and projects for the country. Thus, she

³¹ Partido de la Revolución Democrática, typically characterized as left-of-center.

argues, it is time that Malinche's name be written alongside those of the "founding fathers" of Mexico in letters of gold:

MALINCHE. Vuelvan su vista hacia esa pared y lean los nombres que están escritos allí en letras de oro. Allí están los hombres y mujeres que nos dieron patria. [...] Pero entre todos esos patriotas falta un nombre. El nombre de una gran mujer... origen de nuestra nacionalidad, madre de todos los mexicanos. [...] He llegado el momento de reconocer sus méritos y su valioso papel en la fundación de este país. Ha llegado el momento de rendirle tributo a la mujer que nació en Painala y de honrar su memoria escribiendo su nombre con letras de oro. [...] ¡Me refiero a Malintzin Tepenal! (15-7)

Her request is at first met with silence, followed by screams and whistles of protest (17). Finally, she is attacked by her colleagues and dragged off stage. She does make a triumphant return later, which will be commented further below.

Just as the work emphasizes fragmentation in Mexican society, there is a good deal of contradiction in the way the Malinches of the play are characterized. Earlier, we have seen that Rascón Banda deconstructs the myth of Malinche as traitor to her people by re-writing the story of the Cholula Massacre. However, in other instances the play re-emphasizes the traditional perception of Malinche as a repudiated mother, drawing on Octavio Paz's essay "Los hijos de la Malinche". Upon hearing a passage from the essay, the character expresses a sense of guilt, acknowledging that she has yet to be forgiven.

At first, while listening to the psychoanalyst's recitation, Malinche indicates several times her disagreement with Octavio Paz's description of her character, at one point interjecting: "¿Eso dice? ¿Y él estuvo allí?" The therapist goes on to read about Malinche's role as a repudiated mother:

ANALISTA. [...] (*Lee*) Doña Marina se ha convertido en una figura que representa a las indias fascinadas por los españoles..."

MALINCHE. ¡Fascinadas! ¿Fascinadas dice?

ANALISTA. (*Lee*) "Fascinadas y seducidas por los españoles. Y del mismo modo que el niño no perdona a su madre que lo abandona para ir en busca de su padre, el pueblo mexicano no perdona su traición a la Malinche."

MALINCHE. O sea que soy traidora. O sea que no me perdonan
¡Chinguen a su madre todos! (112)

Upon being told that she is considered a traitor, and referred to as 'La Chingada,' Malinche uses the command form to turn the insult back onto the Mexican public. Yet, as we have seen earlier, this scene still reiterates the theme of Malinche as traitor to the Mexican people. Although she does not accept the characterization, she also indicates that they don't forgive her. This implies recognition of a certain amount of guilt on Malinche's part, acknowledging that there are acts for which she needs to be forgiven.

The lack of reconciliation between Malinche and her children is also apparent in the scene "Los reclamos del hijo." In this scene, the older Malinche confronts a Martín Cortés dressed in a modern suit. The woman tries to explain how she and Martín were

separated when he was young, how she was killed because of Cortés' fear that she would testify against him in the trial concerning the death of his Spanish wife. Yet Martín is unable to recognize her, and explains that his mother is dead:

MARTÍN. Mi madre está muerta.

MALINCHE. Vive

MARTÍN. ¿Está loca?

MALINCHE. Vive por el rencor de muchos, por el odio de algunos, por el desprecio de tantos. No puede morir, aunque quisiera. Vaga de noche hasta el amanecer. Está escondida en el alma de la madrugada. Sobrevive en el tiempo. Se lamenta por sus hijos. Está en la sombra, en la niebla, en el viento. (109)

Here, Malinche is combined with the myth of la Llorona, the wailing woman who wanders the streets in search of her missing children. Just as in the earlier scene with the therapist, there is no possible reconciliation for Malinche with her son. While the earlier scene cites the major points of Octavio Paz's essay, this one dramatizes the theory in a contemporary setting. Just as, according to Paz, the typical Mexican rejects his indigenous heritage in favor of the European ancestry, so does the young Martín Cortés when confronted by his mother.

The implication here is that Paz's argument continues to be relevant for Mexican society, particularly as it applies to the elite of the country. Along these lines, the fragmentation within Mexican society stems from an inability to reconcile not only with its indigenous past, but also with its present. A clear example of this lack of

reconciliation, and the dangers it holds for individuals, is shown in scene 33, “Nuevo cuerpo, nueva piel”. A fourth Malinche (described as *gorda y morena*) is watching an infomercial for products that, according to the advertising claims, will improve her life. These products, dubbed “NEW BODY” and “CLARITY SKIN” will transform the woman from her natural self (with a rounder figure and darker complexion) to a more westernized image of the standards of beauty: slimmer and with lighter skin. It is open to debate as to whether the image promoted in the commercial constitutes a more Americanized standard (aka the Hollywood Barbie type) or a more Europeanized / Spanish standard of beauty. The products promise to help the woman “become whiter” or *blanquearse*. But this verb has a second meaning, as *blanquearse* can also mean to rise in social mobility or to a higher social class by purchasing material goods (see Seda). In other words, the commercial also advertises the promise of acquiring an elite social status, a reference that could also refer to the gap between the elites and the lower classes after the fallout of the crisis. The Malinche of this scene aspires to imitate a standard of beauty that does not reflect her own identity. She becomes the incarnation of *malinchismo*; desiring to become someone she is not, nor should try to be. Again, with this representation of a *malinchista* woman who rejects her own skin color and body type for a foreign body image, Rascón Banda is referencing Octavio Paz.

The scenes that show Malinche as a repudiated mother or as a *malinchista* contradict the playwright’s earlier attempts to vindicate her. What results is a distorted, fractionalized representation of Malinche. To add to the contradictory nature of Malinche’s presentation in the play, the playwright also ironically argues for more

solidarity among Mexicans while warning of the dangers of foreign influence. A dichotomy of local vs. global emerges.

In the scene “Las nuevas plagas” Rascón Banda’s introduces his warning of the possible “second colonization” of Mexico. Acknowledging that US interventionist policies (as mentioned above) have already had an impact on Mexico’s economic situation, the playwright focuses instead on American influence in cultural life: food, holidays, and music. The stage directions for this scene describe a takeover of Mexican customs by North American practices: “Transformación del Día de Muertos en Halloween; personajes de pastorela en Santa Claus y mercados populares en modernos *malls*; música tradicional de cumpleaños con música estadounidense, etcetera” (139). For Rascón Banda, the new plagues consistute warnings of a dystopic future where, through a process of acculturation, Mexican culture has been wiped out by the invasion of US customs.

This message is inspired by economic and political reality. The reaction to NAFTA is just one example of the concerns of the Mexican public regarding the aftermath of the crisis and the interventionism of the north. As serious as this message is, Rascón Banda’s approach to addressing these realities is problematic at best. The notion of North American cultural hegemony ignores the impact of Mexican cultural practices in the United States. It additionally reduces both Mexican and Anglo cultures by contrasting the two on a superficial level. The play’s representation of North American culture- reduced to hot dogs, blonde Barbies and Cancun tourists - relies more on stereotypes than substance.

In *La globalización imaginada*, Néstor García Canclini discusses the narratives that define what is designated as Latin American identity. Often, this concept has been defined by a binarism (for example, New World vs. Old). García Canclini discusses a new variation of the same narrative as it relates to Latin American countries:

El maniqueísmo no se acabó con las independencias nacionales. Reaparece periódicamente, y en su última resurrección – cuando se descreditaron los partidos políticos, los sindicatos y otras instituciones modernas – asume la forma más extrema de la oposición entre lo propio y lo ajeno: indígenas contra la globalización. (86)

This opposition of local indigenous Mexican culture with the threat of globalization is the foundation for the parallel that Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda tries to establish between the time period of the Conquest and the Mexican nation 500 years later. Yet, as García Canclini explains, globalization can not be defined as simply an opposition between two disparate cultures. Often the lines between one and the other are easily blurred.

Rascón Banda does not offer any solutions to these problems, but simply calls our attention to the connection between a persistent fragmentation within Mexican society that can potentially facilitate the invasion of another intervening force (the U.S.) In this work, reconciling with Malinche serves as a metaphor for allowing historically marginalized communities to participate in the national project. Without this, it will be difficult for Mexico to resist another colonization.

The play does offer a conclusion for at least one of the Malinches, the PRD congresswoman. In scene 35, the representatives have reconvened and the president

speaks to the group. When her proposal is again rejected, she takes matters into her own hands by painting the word Malinche on the walls in red graffiti (138). Though she is removed from the scene, her transgressive act of using the medium of graffiti allows her to not only get what she originally wanted (Malinche's name in a place of honor), but she also does it in a way that defies authority.

In *Hybrid Cultures*, García Canclini writes about graffiti as an example of an impure genre. He describes it as a territorial writing that communicates the possession, for example of a certain neighborhood, but also challenges traditional political slogans:

Its manual, spontaneous design is structurally opposed to “well”-painted and printed political or advertising legends and challenges those institutionalized languages when it alters them (249).

Graffiti has also gone through various stages- for example, in Argentina, anti-authoritarian protests of student movements in 1968 to personal commentary on the economic crisis in 1989 (250). Following along the lines of this explanation of graffiti then, we can interpret the congresswoman's act as a protest as well as a way of taking possession of a piece of official patrimony. Her writing of the name “Malinche” in large red letters challenges the officially-sanctioned design and writing on the wall:

El presidente suena la campanilla.

PRESIDENTE. ¡Señores diputados, ocupen sus lugares! Vamos a iniciar la sesión. Hará uso de la palabra el licenciado...

El presidente se interrumpe al ver a la diputada que, trepada en una silla, pinta con aerosol rojo la palabra MALINCHE con letras enormes.

PRESIDENTE. ¡Seguridad! ¡Seguridad! ¡Saquen a esa loca! (138)

The play concludes with Malinche's last visit to the therapist. She explains that she would like to be forgotten, or left alone. Upon hearing the therapist's question about what she would do if her "children" attempt to reconcile with her, she replies: "Que me busquen, si quieren. Ahí estaré, como siempre, esperando su visita" (144).

Thus, the outcome for Rascón Banda's version of the Malinche story emphasizes that current-day Mexico is still not ready to reconcile with the figure. She will remain in waiting for future generations who may be better able to resolve these issues. The playwright leaves the piece deliberately open-ended. It is up to the audience to decide how to proceed. Though Malinche is a sign for the contradictory meanings associated with history and national identity, it is not really Malinche, but rather present-day Mexico that is his main concern. Malinche is merely a bridge to another road, a means by which Mexico can begin to address those issues that have precipitated so many problems, not the least of which is the disenfranchisement of indigenous communities. Because she is used as a means to an end, the play cannot give Malinche, as a subaltern subject, the opportunity to break her silence.

New Explorations: *Malinche* by Inés Margarita Stranger

While Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda is a well-publicized and recognized playwright and author in Mexico, the Chilean playwright Inés Margarita Stranger is relatively unknown. Also, Rascón Banda's play was commissioned by INBA and performed throughout Mexico, while Stranger's play was performed on a smaller scale at the

Catholic University in Santiago, Chile. Although national identity and history are the focus of Rascón Banda's dramatic text, Inés Maragrita Stranger's version of the Malinche story removes her from the confines of national or Latin American identity. Another contrast between the two is that Rascón Banda uses Malinche to address Mexican cultural myths, but Stranger uses the figure as a means to address a much broader issue. For the Chilean playwright, the story of Malinche represents an opportunity to discuss the relationship between men and women, and bring to light the history of violence that has dominated this relationship.

Although Stranger's play is not as well known, it is useful as a tool to organize the framework of this thesis. That is why it was used initially as a conceit in the introduction, by mentioning the three questions posed in the play that correspond to major themes commonly associated with Malinche's mythology: her role as convert to Christianity, her role as Cortés' mistress, and finally her role as translator / traitor to the Mexican people. We return to Stranger's play here, at the end of this third chapter, in order to return to those three myths. The play serves a useful transition from older, traditionally-held perspectives on Malinche to explorations in new territory.

In "Personajes míticos femeninos en el escenario", Sibylle Gfellner points out examples of feminist authors who deconstruct myths in their dramatic texts in order to question patriarchal discourses. According to Gfellner, dramatists like Stranger, Carmen Boulosa and Jesusa Rodríguez attempt to contradict and question official histories by presenting their own version of history. Since the interpretation of myths is primarily

determined by the canon (and thus, the masculine point of view), these writers are breaking new ground.

An important aspect of this new ground is the project of defining goals for the future. As Sibylle Gfellner explains:

Esto representa un desafío particular para ellas, ya que desde su punto de vista el equilibrio de la cultura, el imperio de la tecnología en el mundo ‘masculino’ han fracasado como visión de futuro. Ellas, en cambio, quieren ver realizado el mundo femenino o también indígena en el presente, y dan cuerpo a esta utopía al crear en sus obras mundos opuestos a la realidad social dominada por hombres. (196)

For Inés Stranger, one important historical myth that needs to be explored further is the role of women. A connecting thread in three of her works: *Cariño malo* (1990), *Malinche* (1993) and *Tálamo* (1994) is to reexamine the relationships between men and women, or the ‘masculine’ and ‘femenine’ worldview. In the case of the play *Malinche*, Stranger presents the general narrative of the Spanish conquest as one that can be included within the broader scope of a cycle of violence, where women find themselves as the victims. Thus, Stranger reexamines the history of the Conquest from the point of view of the symbolic “first” woman in Latin American history, including the contradictory meanings related to this symbol.

The play, written in 1993, was meant to be performed originally in Cadiz, Spain for the Simposio Internacional de Teatro Iberoamericano but was cancelled due to budget constraints. It was later performed in Santiago, Chile, at the Universidad Católica de

Chile, and adapted to reflect Chilean aspects of the Conquest. For example, one review comments that the set incorporates designs that mimic Mapuche dwellings (Luzanto Araya). The play presents a series of dichotomies, not only masculine vs. feminine, but also rejection vs. acceptance, domestic vs. external or outside space, Spanish vs. indigenous languages, violence vs. love. The text is divided into two acts (the first portrays the invasion of the *conquistadores*, the second presents the aftermath and colonization of indigenous territories) that are all set in a domestic space that evokes a sense of home and ritual. The stage directions explain the space in this manner:

En escena se intenta reconstruir un espacio ritual que represente una unidad familiar básica. En este espacio, se realizan las funciones básicas del habitar: alimentarse, dormir, rezar, trabajar, conversar, narrar, sonar, amar y tener hijos. Es, entonces, la abstracción simbólica del hogar.

(Stranger 21)

It is important to note that no specific time period is mentioned. The setting of the play is deliberately timeless, in order to remove Malinche from the context of the Conquest and underscore the cyclical nature of violence throughout Latin American history. Like Rascón Banda's play, also employs the device of intertextuality. In line with the theme of dichotomy, the playwright incorporates fragments from two disparate accounts of Latin American history: the *Popol Vuh* and the account of a Spanish colonist cited in the text *Bartolomé de las Casas, Obra Indigenista* (Luis de Morales, 1541).

Five women inhabit the domestic space where the action takes place: a mother, 3 older sisters, and the youngest daughter. This space is then invaded or intruded upon by

masculine characters; the *Emisario* who represents the invading Spanish, and the deserting soldier who is brought to the family home by the third daughter. The *Emisario* is motivated by greed and the desire for material good or land, while the deserter is motivated by his love for the daughter. Regardless, the intrusion of both masculine characters holds negative consequences for the women. All five characters are nameless, and are simply called by their role in the family: mother, oldest daughter, girl, etc.

The women are more abstractions or variations on the Malinche mythology than solid characters. Additionally, the dialogues that take place among the five female characters jump from one interlocutor to another without a clear indication of who is speaking. Frequently they complete each other's sentences, carrying the same idea from one voice to another. In these instances, they are more polyphonic discourse than separate individuals.

An example of this technique can be found in a sample of the dialogue at the beginning of the second act. In this scene, the oldest daughter, who has given herself over to the captain of the invading army (with her mother's consent) returns after being rejected by the captain and handed off to his lieutenants. The mother and all the other members of the family surround her and try to comfort her, but in this scene it is unclear (in the script) which one of the women answers her.

Mi boca ya no es mi boca. Mis manos no son mis manos. Estoy muda para el dolor y muda para el placer.

Calla.

El cuerpo mío está muerto. Este cuerpo es una idea.

Tranquila. Vas a estar bien.

Este cuerpo es la frontera. Este cuerpo recoge el germen de todos los enemigos, este cuerpo contiene la sangre de todos los que eran míos.

(30)³²

The effect of constructing the dialogue in this manner communicates the idea that all of the women take on the role of comforting the sister who has been abused. The boundaries between the characters are blurred, representing a sisterhood that surround and comforts the woman. It also underscores the fact that the abuse suffered by the oldest daughter is one that all four of the other women can relate to, and possibly, fall victim to themselves.

In an interview with Pedro Bravo-Elizondo the playwright explains how the four daughters were inspired by her reading of Rigoberta Menchú's *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (1983). Stranger talks about four paradigms of women's reactions to violence: desire, religion, resistance, and the written word. She comments, "Yo sentí estas cuatro vertientes como las contradicciones que nos produjo la conquista española, con este ensamblaje cultural" (91).

The oldest daughter, who leaves the family home in order to become the mistress of the Spanish captain, represents the paradigm of desire. She hopes to protect her family in this act, using sexual desire as a strategy to impede more violence. She explains to her mother: "Madre, piénselo usted, si my voy con el capitán las dejarán tranquilas...yo sé que puedo conseguir eso. Por sus ojos me he dado cuenta de que me quiere" (Stranger

³² No character names are noted here in the dialogue. Stranger does not indicate which character speaks each line. This contributes to a sense of collective discourse among the five women in the house.

23). The oldest daughter also symbolizes one of the variations of the Malinche mythology: her role as Cortés' mistress. By having the character go out to meet the Spanish troops, Stranger contradicts the common conceptualization of Malinche as the passive victim, *la Chingada*. She initiates the relationship with the captain, rather than the other way around.

The second daughter represents the discourse of religious conversion. She steals a bible from one of the soldiers and chooses to go to the Catholic mission instead of joining her mother and sisters as they prepare to escape another attack. Here she clashes with the mother, who represents the preservation of the indigenous language and religion. When the second daughter announces her decision to leave, the mother dies suddenly, announcing, "Nosotros ya sabemos a quien invocar, nosotros sabemos a quien agradecer la vida. No necesitabamos otro conocimiento" (34). Though this final speech, and the daughter's decision to go to the mission suggest a religious conquest of Christianity over indigenous religion, the daughter uses rituals from both religions in their mother's burial ceremony. This would suggest instead a fusion of religious practices, rather than an acculturation.

While the second daughter tries to find acceptance in the culture of the invaders through religion, the third daughter finds acceptance through love. Her love for the Spanish deserter motivates her to bring him to the family's home for protection, even though this can be very dangerous for the rest of the family. Both she and the deserter represent the theme of resistance. In the Malinche mythology, she would correspond to the role of collaborator in the events of the Conquest, although it is important to

emphasize here that she is not the one doing the betraying, rather she supports her loved one, a Spanish soldier, in his act of betraying his people. This provides an interesting twist on the traitor variation of the mythology as it demonstrates how members of both sides of the Conquest, invaders and indigenous, were capable of choosing to ally with the other side. In the case of the Deserter, he rejects the violence perpetrated by other soldiers and leaves the army as a sign of protest. He explains this to the third daughter before leaving the family: “Algunos de los nuestros han perdido la razón y yo no he hecho nada para impedirlo. No fue para esto que dejé mi pueblo. No fue para comportarme como un cobarde y perder mi vida y mis ideales” (32).

Finally, the fourth daughter represents the power of the written word. There are two possible interpretations of the fourth daughter’s role, as it relates to Malinche mythology. On the one hand, she could represent linguistic competence, bilingualism, and the power of language that becomes Malinche’s most important tool for survival during the Conquest. There are, however, other important circumstances about this character that could suggest another interpretation- the *mestiza* daughter who serves as a counterbalance for Martín Cortés. It is also this character who has the last word in the play. In her final speech, she describes her plan to write the history of her mother in her father’s language, in order to preserve the memory of both:

Del paisaje de mi infancia ya no queda nada. La Guerra, como el mar,
avanzó sobre los campos y se llevó el arroyo donde me bañaba con mis
hermanas. Mi madre se aleja en el tiempo. Ya no tengo más que el
recuerdo y esta forma de escribir que he heredado de mi padre para

conservar la memoria protegida del olvido. Hablaré la lengua de mi padre para narrar lo que he visto. Escribiré la historia de mi madre para que todos conozcan a la mujer que fue (34).

The goal of the fourth daughter is to write a version of history that preserves the feminine knowledge and perspective transmitted by her mother. In doing so, she recovers the voice of those who have been silenced by violence and the passing of time. Her speech also presents a challenge to future women to question patriarchal narratives and reject silence. In this manner, the fourth daughter becomes a symbolic representation of the author herself.

In the prologue to her book *Cariño malo; Malinche; Tálamo*, which republishes the trilogy of plays related to the theme of feminine discourse, Stranger explains that, in the process of writing *Malinche*, she felt herself becoming a spokesperson for others. “Tuve la experiencia de ser portadora de voces que no eran mías y que exigían ser escuchadas” (10). Additionally, the relationship between the fourth daughter and the mother replaces the mother-son relationship, or Malinche - Martín Cortés relationship with a different one: that of mother and daughter, or Malinche - María Jaramillo.³³

Thus, Stranger’s youngest character reminds us that, while Martín Cortés is considered symbolically the first *mestizo*, in María Jaramillo we find another example of Malinche’s legacy. Replacing the *mestizo* son with the *mestiza* daughter also suggests that the choice of Martín over María is a subjective one that portrays bias for the son, the

³³ This idea of replacing the mother-son relationship and re-inserting María Jaramillo is further explored in Rita Cano Alcalá’s “From Chingada to Chingona: La Malinche Redefined.”

masculine, over the daughter, i.e. the feminine. Finally, the fourth daughter's speech also implies the reconciliation between Malinche as mother and her *mestiza* daughters, an idea that contrasts with the repudiation between mother and son that we have seen in Rascón Banda's play.

Stranger's *Malinche* creates opportunities to view the icon from other perspectives. Her version of the character is not burdened by the responsibility of representing a nation, but rather becomes a symbol of female resistance and survival in a broader sense. Although this representation of Malinche defies national boundaries, it presented complications when the play was performed in Chile.

In the interview with Pedro Bravo-Elisondo (mentioned above), she reflects that it may have been a mistake to use the title "Malinche" when preparing the text for a Chilean audience because the public did not recognize the symbolism of the name: "Yo te mentiría se te dijera que [la puesta en escena] nos fue muy bien [...] Tal vez estamos demasiado al sur para que el nombre de Doña Marina nos traiga la resonancia que tiene para los mexicanos" (Bravo-Elizondo 92). Despite these issues concerning the play's reception, it effectively posits a stronger role for future generations of Latin American women in determining the way their history is written.

Conclusion: Writing and Agency

Both *La Malinche* by Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda and *Malinche* by Inés Margarita Stranger conclude with the act of writing. In the case of Rascón Banda's play, the PRD congresswoman first proposes that the Mexican government write Malinche's name next

to those of other national heroes. Although she is attacked and removed from Congress for this suggestion, the congresswoman ultimately gets what she wants. Using a circular structure to frame his play, Rascón Banda begins and ends his text with the congresswoman's mission of writing Malinche's name alongside those others. However, the woman resorts to writing "Malinche" with red spray paint, much as one would write graffiti in a public place. This informal, transgressive writing of graffiti represents an opportunity for Malinche to protest the way she has been historically represented and, through her writing, take possession of a symbol of Mexican politics.

In Stranger's play, the act of writing is yet to come. The youngest daughter plans to write her mother's history in her father's language, so that all will better know what kind of woman she was. She challenges future writers to set the record straight by including feminine discourse in the historical narratives of Latin America.

Rascón Banda's representation of Malinche silences her in two ways. She is used as a symbol to address the concerns about the impacts of current economic and political policies. She varies from characterizing herself as a supporter of Amerindian rights to a spokesperson aligned with the interests of the dominating power structure in Mexico. The representation of Malinche as "la gorda y morena" is used as a metaphor for the pressures placed on women who do not match certain standards of beauty. Unfortunately, those standards correspond to an unrealistic image that corresponds more to European or North American physical traits, and presents those traits as normative.

In Rascón Banda's play, Malinche is a spokesperson, a symbol, and a metaphor for the fragmentation in contemporary Mexican society. As an interpreter, she is able to

align herself with the interests of the dominant political parties, yet in other instances defends more progressive interests. As a PRD congresswoman, she first attempts to use the official forms of discourse available to her, only to be rejected and punished. She is forced to express her voice through a form of free speech, the graffiti, that challenges the same official discourses. Symbolically, Rascón Banda's Malinche functions as a lightning rod for the tensions of a Mexican nation that found it itself still reeling from crisis. The fragmentation that Rascón Banda's conveys in his text is underscored by the many divisions that the Malinche character suffers; from old, to young, middle-class journalist to prostitute. In the end, she continues to be repudiated by her children and is relegated to waiting in the wings, as present-day Mexico is not ready to reconcile with her yet. This representation silences her for the moment, but conveys the possibility that Malinche may be able to redeem herself in the future.

Meanwhile, Stranger's interpretation of Malinche shifts the debate from discourse of national identity to one of Latin American feminism. In her play, Malinche mythology is addressed strictly in terms of female roles- mother, daughter, sister. This also silences Malinche as it forces her to serve as a tool in Stranger's overarching feminist argument.

One criticism that can be made of Stranger's version of the Malinche story is the lack of any specific geographical or temporal referent. Also, the playwright takes liberties with Malinche's figure, even using intertexts that are not relevant to the Mexican conquest. For example, the speeches given by the mother in indigenous language are not in Nahuatl, but in Mayan, and come from the text *Popol Vuh*, a text about the origins and history of the Maya people of Central America. In other words, the indigenous discourse

used is not really relevant to the conquest of Mexico at all. This draws false connections between one indigenous group's history and another group's completely different, unique history. This commits the sin of presenting all pre-colonial indigenous tribes in Latin America as one monolithic group, rather than recognizing the important differences that played a role in each one's experience and acknowledging important cultural and linguistic differences. Malinche's characterization as a traitor to her people hinges exactly on this presentation of all indigenous peoples as one. Rather than recognizing that she helped the Spaniards translate while dealing with a tribe that was unique to her own, and had conquered her people, this misrepresentation of historical reality makes Malinche responsible for the downfall of a people that, in truth, she would not have considered her own.

There is however, the key element in Inés Margarita Stranger's play of the youngest daughter, a *mestiza* character who serves as a bridge between two cultures. The replacement of the mother-son discourse associated with Malinche's role in history with a new mother-daughter discourse presents the possibility to explore new representations of this icon. While Stranger is not able to really give Malinche a voice in her play, the open ending sets the stage for further explorations into the character's meaning.

Conclusion

Por el camino va Malinche,
Paso de polvo y canela
Mira que voy buscando
Por el camino a mi corazón
Lila Downs, “Malinche”

One day, for a class on the politics of Latin American identity, I played the song quoted above as part of a warm-up activity. The class, made up incidentally of all female students, including heritage learners, and learners of Spanish as a second language, did not have much of a reaction. When asked what they thought of the song, one student stated that it just portrayed Malinche as “una mujer regular.” I was surprised by this reaction. At the moment, I considered that this was a group of undergraduate students, none of whom self-identified as Mexican or Mexican-American (the students who were of Latin American descent were from either Brazil or Bolivia, one as an international student and one who had immigrated to the US in high school), so perhaps there was not much of a context for them to respond to. On the other hand, it caught my attention that their reaction to the song about this historical figure, that has been the center of so much mythmaking, seemed to respond to Malinche’s story on a more human level. At least according to the student’s comment mentioned above, they saw her as a relatable female figure primarily, not as a historical or mythological one.

Recalling my students’ reactions to the song that day reminds me of Frances Karttunen’s call for us to cast off previous modes of thinking about Malinche: “It is time

to set aside the accretion of colonial and postcolonial ideas about her that are, from our point of view, old (although, not nearly old enough to be credible) and to think about her anew” (291). Because any trace of her is so deeply cast in shadow, there is no way to really recover her voice. It is inevitable that any representation of Malinche will also silence her. However, the example of Malinche’s story can be used to emphasize the need to give the power of speech to other survivors of war, colonization, and slavery today. I would echo Kartunnen’s call to action by arguing that it is time to consider not just the silencing of the historical figure herself, but the relationships of power and domination that keep present-day survivors from remaining silent, too. The question is; what approach or new way of thinking could provide the most benefit for the “daughters of Malinche”, as Margo Glantz refers to them, those women who find themselves in situations of subalternity today?

Through the course of this study, I have come to believe that Malinche has not only been mythologized, but also commodified. The best representation of this would be in the novel by Laura Esquivel. The paratexts of this book, as well as the blurb on the inside jacket, emphasize Malinche’s characterization as a romantic heroine. However, traces of this commodification of the Amerindian emerge in Salvador Carrasco’s film and in the play by Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda. As Mabel Moraña indicates, “the subaltern enters the international market as a commodity as well as a category that levels and homogenizes regional differences” (Quoted in Verdesio 8). Like the artifact in the museum shop that Jorge Rabasa mentions in his description of a “Culture of Conquest”

(50): Will Malinche become a new selling point for those of us who want to reconnect with the past?

In Inés Margarita Stranger's play, she is stripped of the burden of mothering a nation and the accusation of betrayal that corresponds to nineteenth-century nationalistic ideas of patriotism that would have been completely foreign to her and to the Spaniards she supposedly colluded with. Furthermore, the play frees Malinche from her role as romantic heroine, the other half of an epic historical couple. This opens the door for a new approach that associates the figure of Malinche with the present-day struggle for equality among Mexican and Chicana writers. To take this idea even further, a new approach could establish Malinche as a symbol not only for the intellectual and political spheres but also as a symbol of every-day resistance.

The goal of this new approach is to view Malinche from the perspectives of daughters and sisters. In Stranger's play, the youngest daughter, who plans to use her father's language in order to re-write the history of her mother, emits a call to action so that the knowledge of the feminine will not be forgotten. Referencing Octavio Paz's "Los hijos de la Malinche," many critics have argued that the writer's focus is on the sons, and not all of Malinche's children. There is no room for women to participate in the discussion of national identity. This leads to an act of omitting the daughter and displacing the sister in favor of the brother, emphasizing the masculine and subjugating the feminine. Therefore, in this conclusion I will explore the connection between the figure of Malinche and the sister goddesses who were displaced by Huitzilopotchli, the Aztec god of war. I will also examine the role of the daughters of Malinche: both the

biological daughter, María Jaramillo, and the symbolic ones, writers who use Malinche as a symbol for transgressive speech.

Just as, according to the legends, Malinche was given away or sold into slavery so that her half-brother would not have to share his inheritance, Rita Cano Alcalá argues that there are two important myths of sister goddesses who were rejected or abandoned following Huitziopochtli's ascension to power as the primary Aztec god. These two sister goddesses were Coyolxauhqui and Malinalxochtil (the similarity between the names of this second goddess and that of Malinche are notable- and explored further by Rita Cano Alcalá and Anna Lanyon in her book *Malinche's Conquest*). The second sister goddess, Malinalxochitl, was abandoned during the pilgrimage from Aztlán to the Valley of Mexico. With her dominion over spiders, snakes and scorpions, she was one of the more powerful goddesses. Suspicious of her powers, Huitzilopochtli left her behind, but there remains a possibility of the goddess' possible return.

According to Cano Alcalá, the prediction of Malinalxochitl's vengeful return suggests that Malintzin represents, "the human embodiment of the goddess Malinalxochtil who has come to reclaim her due" (43). The second sister goddess is punished for an act of speech. Coyolxuahgui, the half-sister of Huitzilopochtli, spoke against their mother's impregnation with her younger brother. Upon Huitzilopochtli's birth, she was punished by execution. The fates of both sister goddesses indicate punishment for those who stand in the brother's way and present examples of female figures who acted outside of the patriarchal norms of Aztec society.

The theme of displacement of the sister can also be found in Chicano nationalist discourse. According to Elba D. Birmingham-Pokorny, writers like Rosario Castellanos, Carmen Tafolla, Lorna Dee Cervantes and Naomi Quiñones present a revisioning of Malinche in their works:

For Chicana writers, the urgency to re-define and/or re-symbolize the figure and the myth of La Malinche responds not only to the need to denounce the long-held traditional patriarchal conception of women's sexuality as the site of evil, patriarchal's definition of gender roles, and the issue of women's inferior status in the world, but to the need to address, react, and question, on the one hand, the subordination of Chicana women, present in the very labels Chicano culture uses to restrict and limit their activity, socially as well as intellectually, and on the other hand, to decry the social, sexual, and cultural oppression from within that is inherently present in the authority, the rhetoric, and in the conception itself of the foundational document of Chicano nationalism, the *Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*. (127)

In a call to male readers that echoes Octavio Paz's discussion of the "sons of Malinche", this document emphasizes the values of brotherhood and urges Chicanos as brothers to unite.³⁴

Along with the goal of re-establishing the sister, there is also the need to reclaim the role of the daughter. Although Martín Cortés is considered the first *mestizo*, his half-

³⁴ Brotherhood unites us, and love for our brothers makes us a people whose time has come (Quoted in Birmingham-Pokorny 127).

sister María Jaramillo often goes unmentioned. In her essay, “From Chingada to Chingona: La Malinche Redefined”, Rita Cano Alcalá argues that Octavio Paz and other writers:

Who enact an erasure of the daughter by nary or scarcely mentioning María Jaramillo in their myths of genesis are part and parcel of a long mythological silencing of the sister, one that betrays the historical subordination and subjugation of indigenous and *mestiza* women. (35)

Ironically, in legal documents pertaining to court cases of María Jaramillo, we find more testimony about who Malinche was. Probably around the age of two when her mother was killed, María Jaramillo, daughter of Malinche and Juan Jaramillo (one of Cortés lieutenants) was married at the age of sixteen and had three sons with Luis de Quesada. Her legal battle against her father for what remained of an inheritance he claimed from Malinche’s death began in 1542 and lasted twenty years. The objectives of her lawsuit were to claim the wealth and lands that Maria felt were owed to her, as they had belonged to her mother. However, the testimony in the trial also indirectly aimed to gain acknowledgement for Malinche’s role in the events of the Conquest. In her research on the legal documents from the court battle, Anna Lanyon cites the testimony of Jaramillo’s widow, Beatriz de Andrade, and one of the house servants, Diego de Atempanecatl. According to Anna Lanyon, Beatriz de Andrade claimed that María Jaramillo was not owed anything because her husband had honor and rank when he married Malinche. Also, “Beatriz de Andrade referred to Malinche as ‘Marina’ without the usual respectful

title “Doña’, and although she had never known Malinche she accused her of affecting Spanish airs and graces in her speech and dress” (214).

The characterization of Malinche as an assimilated woman who “affects Spanish airs in her speech and dress” reminds us of the presentation of Isabel Moctezuma in Salvador Carrasco’s *La otra conquista*. In the film, Isabel assimilates as a strategy for survival in the new colonial order. Malinche’s story demonstrates her ability to adapt and survive in difficult circumstances, so it would not be surprising if she adopted a similar strategy. However, the testimony of the house servant contradicts that of María Jaramillo’s stepmother:

I was a servant of the said doña Marina, Diego de AtempanecatI said, and I was always with her. And I saw that she always went about in the manner of an honest woman, and in the costume of the indigenous people of this land, and this fact was well known among all the people who knew her. (Quoted in Lanyon 215)

In addition to Diego de AtempanecatI, several other witnesses testified about Malinche’s role in the Conquest and her “general superiority as a person and as an Indian” (Quoted in Cano Alcalá 35). María Jaramillo eventually won the court case and passed away in 1569. The testimony provided, in addition to the struggle to reclaim lands and wealth promised to her mother, allow us to see another side of Malinche that has not been shown in other accounts.

By reestablishing, rather than erasing, María Jaramillo as Malinche’s daughter and another important *mestiza*, we are able to gain new knowledge about how Malinche

was perceived by contemporaries. The work of Malinche's symbolic "daughters", women who see Malinche as a symbol of feminine resistance, also indicates a new direction for discussion of the figure's meaning for the future.

The chapbook *Malinche's Daughters* (2006) by Chicana writer Michelle Otero takes this symbolism of Malinche in a new direction. In her collection of essays and short stories about the sexual abuse of young women, Otero tries to give agency to women who felt pressured to remain silent rather than speak out about their experiences. While living in Oaxaca as a Fulbright Fellow, Otero began conducting creative writing workshops for women, particularly survivors of sexual assault. The goal of her work was to create a space for women to create written testimony of their experiences. The act of writing became a catalyst for healing. As Otero explains: "[W]e write to heal our wounds" (27). The text, which is in part a memoir of Otero's experiences, also weaves together the testimony of other survivors, many of whom are speaking or writing about their experiences for the first time. By integrating their testimony, Otero seeks to help women break their silence. Although Michelle Otero inserts their testimony into the text, she also provides the narrative framework and serves as the teacher and counselor who guides them. This puts her in a position where she is mediating between the testimony and our reception of it.

The use of agency in testimonial writing has its critics. One of the most common arguments against the use of testimony as a strategy for subaltern agency is that it implies the need for an "other" an intellectual, a writer, a person who transcribes the account of

the narrator and reproduces it for the reader in a format that is understandable. However, as John Beverley explains, *testimonio* also gives oral storytelling some level of authority:

Testimonio presents itself to us (that is, to the reading public) as a written text, but it also grants a certain authority or epistemic privilege to orality in the context of processes of modernization that privilege literacy and writing in European languages as cultural norms. (71)

Beverley goes on to explain how the issue of subaltern agency and testimonial writing comes up often in discussion of Rigoberta Menchú's book *I, Rigoberta Menchú*. The text was later scrutinized for its lack of veracity (the fact that Menchú uses others' stories and incorporates them into her narrative) and the way in which it was embraced by academic institutions. Beverley argues, however, that Rigoberta Menchú's use of testimony reflects a strategic urgency. It was the best format she could use at the time to advance her project of insurgency. This idea of using testimony as a strategy to gain power, rather than simply represent the subaltern as a victim of history, is difficult to accept. As Beverley points out:

Although we can enter into relations of understanding and solidarity with this project, it is not *ours* in any immediate sense and may in fact imply structurally a contradiction with our own position of relative privilege and authority in the global system. (82)

There is a similar sense of strategic urgency in Michelle Otero's refiguring of Malinche, in *Malinche's Daughters*. Malinche becomes a symbol of resistance not in a text of high literature, but in a series of essays that include testimonial revelations. The

pressure to remain silent, according to Otero, stems from a cultural perception that women should not speak about abuse. In the following interview, Otero describes Malinche as a victim, like the women whose testimony she inserts into her work.

I wanted to call things what they are. The Spaniards didn't *arrive* in the Americas. They *invaded*. Malinches was not Cortés's *lover*. She was his property. He owned her. Their relationship wasn't based on equality but on domination. Where there is domination, there is no love. I wanted Malinche to know across time that someone has her back. (Quoted in Blake 44)

In Otero's re-imagining of Malinche, she is used as a pretext for feminine resistance against violence, rather than as a pretext for nationalistic discourse.

In the work of writers like Otero, a new approach to the Malinche mythology has begun to emerge. By undergoing a transformation from the Mexican Eve to a symbol of resistance, Malinche is associated with ideas of strength and survival. Furthermore, this transformation attempts to humanize Malinche by seeing her as a survivor of extremely difficult circumstances, rather than judging her as the catalyst for a series of historical events whose impact we can understand now with the benefit of hindsight.

Though the texts studied in this thesis do not successfully provide agency to the subaltern, they do highlight the political and social structures that continue to reflect the impact of those historical events. The issues that Salvador Carrasco faced while creating a film that presents a narrative about the Conquest from the point of view of an indigenous protagonist highlight the lack of representation for authentic Amerindian

characters in Mexican cinema. The criticism that the director faced concerning his choice of actor in the leading role also underscores this issue. While Carrasco does at least try to privilege traditionally silenced voices in his film, Laura Esquivel uses first-person narrative to give the illusion that her protagonist Malinalli is speaking to us with her own words, but in reality she becomes a mouthpiece for the author. In her novel *Malinche*, Laura Esquivel romanticizes her, focusing on a love triangle between Malinalli, Cortés and Juan Jaramillo that obscures the reality that Amerindian women faced during the period of the Conquest. Women were treated generally like slaves, and Malinche was no exception. The fact that Esquivel portrays her as a romance heroine only perpetuates the myth of her role as Cortés' willing mistress.

Of the three primary texts discussed in this project, Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda's play *La Malinche* represents the most successful attempt to remind us of the economic disparities and political corruption that impacted Mexico in the mid 1990s, approximately 500 years after the Conquest. The playwright is more concerned with showing us how Malinche's legend remains relevant today, and thus his representation of the figure also effectively silences her. Rascón Banda uses Malinche as a multivalent symbol; part abnegated mother, part translator, and part activist. Like the warnings about "Las nuevas plagas" that he incorporates into his play, the textual representations of these political and social realities call us to think about the relations of domination that still exist today. If these realities did not exist, Malinche's mythology would no longer be relevant. Malinche's silence points to a gap between those who control access to speech and representation, and those who do not. If the future brings greater equality, it is possible

that Malinche will be remembered as “una mujer regular” and no longer be needed, whether as a scapegoat or as a symbol of resistance, to show this gap.

When I think back to that class and my students’ response to Lila Down’s song, I consider what impact Malinche’s silence has on our discussions of subalternity in the classroom. Malinche was an extraordinary young woman who lived during an incredible series of historical events that changed the world. She managed to survive being doubly conquered, as an Amerindian whose tribe lost to the invading Spaniards, and as a woman. The fact that she appears in historical record at all is remarkable in itself, considering the circumstances. But as Michelle Otero’s chapbook *Malinche’s Daughter* reminds us, we do not need to go back in history 500 years in order to find individuals who are surviving difficult circumstances and do not have the opportunity to share their story in their own words. The example of Malinche’s silence and the fact that her voice cannot be recovered today serve as a powerful lesson for those of us (professors, students, etc.) who are fortunate enough to have the power to speak for ourselves.

Appendix: The Three Malinches in *La Malinche* by Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda

Scene ¹	Time ²	Age ³
1: En letras de oro	P	A
2: La maldición de Malinche	P	A
3: El verdadero padre	P	Unspecified
4: Malinche va al sicoanalista	P	A
5: Traducción simultánea	C	Y
6: La avanzada	C	Y
7: La primera decepción	P, C	O, Y
9: Dudas de Moctezuma	C	Unspecified
10: Sobrevivir	C, P	O, Y
11: Moctezuma recibe a Cortés	C	Y
12: Las mujeres de Chalco	Unspecified	A
13: El tesoro de Moctezuma	C	Unspecified
14: Cuauhtémoc reclama a Moctezuma	C	Y
15: La noche triste	C	Y, O, A
17: El camino está abierto	P	Unspecified
18: Cuauhtémoc torturado	P	Y
19: La muerte de Cuauhtémoc	P	A
21: Los adjetivos	Unspecified	A, O, Y
22: La nueva palabra	C	Y
23: Invención de la verdad	P	Unspecified
24: Las siete plagas	Unspecified	A, O
26: Los niños de la calle	P	Y
27: Los reclamos del hijo	P	O
28: Malinche va de Nuevo al sicoanalista	P	Unspecified
30: La fiesta interrumpida	P	Unspecified
31: Ni el aire nos pertenece	Unspecified	Y
32: Los desacuerdos de San Andrés	P	A
33: Nuevo cuerpo, nueva piel	P	Unspecified
34: Después del neoliberalismo	P	Y, A, O
35: Las propuestas	P	Adulta
36: Las nuevas plagas	P	Unspecified
37: La última visita	P	Unspecified

¹ Scenes that do not occur during a discernible time and do not include Malinche as a character have been excluded from this table.

² Conquest / Colonial Era (C), Present or Mexico in the 1990s (P)

³ Adult (A), Old (O), Young (Y)

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