

Reinterpreting Malinche

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Several conquistadors and indigenous participants have written about the conquest of Mexico, which commenced in 1519 and ended with the capitulation of Tenochtitlán on 21 August, 1521. They described how Mexico was conquered with fewer than 600 conquistadors who took advantage of an antiquated Aztec system of rule, as well as of their own superior technology. However, throughout most of their descriptions and interpretations, one voice by intent has been noticeably absent: that of Malinalli Tenepal, Malintzin, Doña Marina, or La Malinche.^[1] She was the only woman to figure prominently in the conquest, serving as translator, guide, strategic advisor, mistress, and confidante to Hernán Cortés. What happened to her voice? Why has it been carefully muted? Notwithstanding her mention in the original accounts of the conquest by Francisco López de Gómara and Bernal Díaz, and besides both her prominent illustrations in the Florentine Codex by native artists and writers and the heroic role attributed to her in the seventeenth and eighteenth century accounts, she still remains too distant, as if she was couched in a veil of ambiguity.^[2] The untenable position for the historian trying to find the “real” Malinche is further exacerbated by the spurious accusations against her of the last two centuries. Not only has her voice been comfortably eschewed from the historical record, but also a mythical component has been added to the mix. As a result, a fictional Malinche was constructed. The opprobrium that her name evokes is only one of several obstacles, however, that have to be overcome in order to achieve a more lucid understanding of her.

The best way to achieve a sane and discernable interpretation of Malinche is to attempt to evaluate her role after separating her from the myths and mistaken identities that have slandered her image. This places Malinche in her proper context, a sixteenth century woman. By doing this we can give Malinche a voice, an active role in the narrative, where she is less a result of posthumous revision and more a product of her own actions.

Through analysis of the primary sources and of the current debates among historians, I will argue that the myths surrounding Malinche are scurrilous accusations begun by the nationalists after independence, and that the images surrounding her, whether real or imaginary, are due to the patriarchal system and its definitions of women and gender roles. To do this, it is important to understand how Malinche’s image has changed over time. Therefore, I will begin by looking at what is written about Malinche in the primary sources, especially in Gómara’s and Díaz’s accounts; then I will examine the myths the nationalists created and how they were supported and ingrained into the general population; finally, I will attempt to debunk these fictional accusations, while framing Malinche as the victim that she was, and attempting to restore the “true” or “real” Malinche to history.

Not much is known about Malinche’s life, especially prior to 1519 and after 1524. What historians know is based largely on the accounts of Díaz and Gómara, which are sometimes contradictory. Díaz, a soldier during the conquest, makes Malinche into a true heroine in *The Conquest of New Spain*, and praises her with affection at every opportunity. He called her a “most excellent” woman, but his book was written more than forty years after the events and largely in reaction to Gómara’s account.^[3] Gómara’s description of Malinche, on the other hand, was heavily influenced by Cortés, since he never knew her personally. Cortés does not give Malinche much credit for her role in the conquest, mentioning her only twice in his letters to Charles V. In the second letter he called her “my interpreter, who is an Indian woman,” and it was not until the fifth letter that he even mentioned her name.^[4] Obviously, since Cortés de-emphasized her role, Gómara, who was not a part of the expedition, does the same. In his 1552 *Historia de las Indias*, he praised Cortés’ role in the conquest and had little time to deal with Malinche. Gómara’s work, however, is inaccurate, an example of patriarchal history, where the author focussed on the male as hero and the female was relegated to a subordinate role. Even when he does deal with Malinche, he treats her impersonally,

calling her “slave girl” or “our Indian woman interpreter.”^[5] The historian Sandra Messinger Cypess wrote that, “Gómara never sees La Malinche as anything more than an objectified extension of the will of Cortés.”^[6] Therefore, Gómara’s and Diaz’s histories of the conquest come from notably different perspectives, which leaves the historian questioning which source can be trusted and whether or not an accurate depiction of Malinche’s life can be written. Despite a multitude of questions, nevertheless, historians agree that enough is known to portray what type of woman she was as well as how important she was to the Spaniards.

Although both her birth date and city of birth are unknown, it is believed that Malinche was born in 1502 or 1505 on the day called Malinal (or Malinalli), hence her Indian name.^[7] It is believed that she was the first daughter of a *cacique* and so a member of the privileged, educated class. Gómara wrote that she was “the daughter of wealthy parents, who were related to the lord of that country,” while Diaz wrote that her “father and mother were lords and *Caciques*.”^[8] Although some historians do not believe that she was of noble birth, her knowledge and cultured ways at the time of her transfer to the Spanish conquistadors should convince them otherwise, since only noble women could attend school and have access to more than one language.

When Malinche was very young, it is believed her father died and that her mother remarried another *cacique*, whom she bore a son. According to Diaz, in order to protect this boy’s inheritance and right to rule, his parents sold Malinche into slavery “to some Indians from Xicalango.”^[9] Gómara’s account was somewhat different. He wrote, “that, when she was a child, she had been stolen by certain merchants during a war and sold in the market place of Xicalanco.”^[10] In any case, these Mayan traders who owned her were just the first step in a long life of thralldom. Soon she was sold to the Tabascans, who eventually gave her to Cortés and the Spanish along with nineteen other women in Potonchán in order to stave off war, avoid being conquered themselves, and to encourage Cortés to move on.

This practice of exchanging women was common for Amerindian societies. And Malinche’s case was no different since she was sold into slavery twice prior to being given to the Spaniards. Neither the Spanish nor the Indians saw this as an unusual custom. These women were “trained” to be submissive at all times to whoever their masters or owners were. For the role of women in Amerindian society was, as in Europe, a submissive one. Maria Rodriguez-Valdés wrote:

Women were not encouraged to do anything more than cook, spin, and weave, and noble women in particular were not supposed to be engaged in any activity to earn a living. Women, including those of the nobility, had limited political rights, and noble women were just as subject to the authority of father or husband as were commoners. Women were excluded from succession and were not permitted to exercise any official governmental role.^[11]

It was no different when they were under Spanish control. Cypess wrote that, “it would be expected, then, that Malinche would already have been conditioned by her socialization as a slave among the Amerindians to obey the commands of her new masters.”^[12] This is important because, ironically, her Indian culture, having taught her how to be a second class citizen, made her transfer to European culture that much easier.

Immediately upon receiving these twenty women, Cortés had them baptized and then handed them out among his favored soldiers.^[13] Malinche, baptized Marina, was given to Alonso Hernández de Puertocarrero, a prominent conquistador, for his use. After realizing she had the ability to speak Nahuatl, the Aztec language, Cortés soon claimed her for himself.^[14] He was in dire need of a new translator, since Jerónimo de Aguilar had been rendered useless once the Spaniards reached the Nahuatl-speaking region of Mexico.^[15] Gómara wrote that Malinche was “promised by Cortés more than her liberty if she would

establish a friendship between him and the men of her country, and he told her he would like to have her for his interpreter and secretary.”^[16] Hence, she became Cortés’ primary translator for the remainder of the Spanish journey to Tenochtitlán, the Aztec capital. Throughout, she and Aguilar were his only trustworthy interpreters.^[17]

After her loyal service to Cortés during the campaign, she bore him a son, Don Martín, who was taken away from her and raised in Spain. At first glance, this seems like cruel treatment from a man who depended on this woman so much during the conquest, but it fits the treatment of woman as “bought property.” Besides, it is directly in line with the restrictive and intractable culture of a patriarchal society. It has also been argued that Cortés used this woman only to serve as his mistress and give birth to his child. But, this can be dismissed by the fact that Cortés called upon her again during the 1524 Honduran campaign. She would serve once more as his guide, translator, and strategist. Then after the campaign he no longer had use for her, so she once again disappeared from history. This demonstrates further her importance to him as a strategist.

During the Honduran episode, several events took place regarding Malinche that deserve mention. Although Gómara and Diaz differ on how it occurred, Malinche and Juan Jaramillo, one of Cortés’ trusted soldiers, were married. Gómara only briefly mentioned this event when he wrote, “Juan Jaramillo married Marina while drunk,” while Diaz wrote that, “she married a gentleman.”^[18] Why would Cortés have her married off if she had only been of importance to him as a mistress? Wouldn’t he have wanted to keep her for himself if that were really the case? Instead, this demonstrates her significance was more than that of a mistress to him. In fact, by entering her into a marriage with a conquistador, Cortés gave her a sense of legitimacy and honor. It indicated “the respect she enjoyed among the Spaniards.”^[19] Malinche also encountered her mother and her step-brother along the campaign. Diaz wrote that they “feared that she had sent for them to put them to death, and they wept.”^[20] But instead she forgave her mother for selling her and spoke to them of her pride in herself and her “satisfaction” with her position.

Yet after the campaign, she disappeared again and where and when she died still remains a mystery. However, she is believed to have died very young, most likely around 1530. For almost three centuries, she enjoyed a mostly positive role in the history books. After the accounts of Gómara and Diaz, nothing new was added about her life. The typical seventeenth and eighteenth century colonial interpretation was that Malinche was “the valuable and faithful interpreter of Cortés.”^[21] So, how did this apparently simple woman who seems to have had everything chosen for her, and who had been viewed for nearly three centuries in a favorable light, become such an anathematized and vilified historical figure?

Mexico’s independence from Spain marked a watershed in Malinche interpretation. Elizabeth Salas wrote, that, “her status as a great *conquistadora* declined at exactly the same time that the Mexican’s threw out the Spaniards in 1821. From that time onward, her reputation dwindled to that of a traitor.”^[22] The reasons for this change were numerous. The nationalists, who began to infiltrate the Mexican government, set out to forge a new national identity, which began with the rejection of Spain and everything it represented, including the common signs and symbols of society, while glorifying the pre-Hispanic Amerindians. These measures, by which they reinterpreted the conquest, muted Malinche’s voice in history.

The nationalists purpose was to indoctrinate women into accepting a subordinate position to men, making them socially, physically, and psychologically dependent, and transforming them “into invisible, lifeless, worthless, devalued objects.”^[23] Thus, the nationalists created a paradigm for Mexico with polarized perspectives of women: Malinche represented pure evil, the ‘Mexican Eve,’ on one side, and Mary the mother of Jesus represented supreme good, *La Virgen*, on the other. Virginity and fidelity were the highest womanly virtues; Malinche, therefore, was used as an example of a woman who deviated from expected female behavior. She was wrapped in negative symbolism and imagery, and associated with the negative aspects of national identity and sexuality. Her name became synonymous with “treason,” “betrayal,” and “sell-out.” Malinche was suddenly portrayed as the beautiful temptress who conquered and destroyed her own people. She was objectified and “sexualized as the Indian woman who could not get enough of the white

man.”^[24] They effectively built this language and imagery around her in a deliberate campaign, with purely political objectives: to promote the Indian heritage of the Mexican people, while making Malinche into an “anti-heroine, a national Judas,” and the scapegoat for three centuries of colonial rule.^[25]

The role historians have taken in the campaign to slander Malinche has been prominent. Ignacio Paz rewrote the military and political exploits of the conquest, in the 1870s and 1880s, in terms of a “sexual encounter,” which fit into the social and political ideologies of his time. His son, Octavio Paz, continued this trend when he wrote in 1950 that Malinche was a representative of the “cruel incarnation of the feminine condition” as the violated mother, the passive figure in the conquest, and the original *La Chingada* (a term which is still used today in reference to her, and which literally means she’s “fucked”). Yet she was characterized as the mother of the nation, who sold Mexico out to the white man.^[26] This was the typical line on Malinche, that she betrayed Mexico sexually, and if only she would have been loyal to her own people the conquest would have never happened. The historian Frans Blom wrote in 1936, that “had it not been for her devotion to Cortés and his various and sundry captains, she could well have caused the total destruction of the small Spanish army by inciting the Indians to united resistance and attack.”^[27] All three historians, although writing at different times, saw her break with the ideals of *Marianismo*, which called for women to follow the model of the Virgin Mary through suffering and submissiveness to men. Their works contributed to the image of Malinche as the “Mexican Eve,” by further characterizing her betrayal. From her name the term *malinchismo* was coined. The historian Fernando Horcasitas wrote that, “a *Malinchista* is a person who disdains the native ways of life and always favors the foreigner for profit or because of a feeling of inferiority.”^[28] Thus, Mexican historians played a large role in the nationalists’ indoctrination program, creating the language and building the negative image that still scathes her name today.

These images of Malinche as *la chingada*, the “Mexican Eve,” and *malinchista* all have contributed to the substandard, mangled history that the nationalists created. Due to this heavy indoctrination since independence, Mexicans have despised Malinche as a symbol of betrayal to Indian values and of servile submission to Spanish culture. Hence, they will not forgive her for her “sexual betrayal.” Karttunen wrote that, “in a wink she was demoted [after independence] from crucial interpreter and counselor to lover and wily mistress of Cortés, traitor to her race, mother of mestizos.”^[29] It is this type of interpretation, which for two centuries has been hammered into the Mexican psyche, that historians must rid themselves of in order to establish a more authentic picture of Malinche and reestablish her as a role model for all of Mexico.

The nature of Malinche’s role as mistress to Puertocarrero and Cortés, and later as wife to Jaramillo, seems to make this so-called “sexual betrayal” plausible. But what choice did she have? Being handed from man to man was not her choice, but her fate. She was the victim of the patriarchal view of the time, that women were objects for man’s exploitation. Her story was surely one of rape and misuse, first by the indigenous people and later by the Spanish. What could she have done? What would she have accomplished by resisting? So, she used her ability as a translator to remain visible, and stood strong as a woman in a man’s world. Therefore, to accuse her of “sexual betrayal” is to misrepresent the evidence.

Not only did the nationalists encourage the image of sexual betrayal, but they also characterized Malinche as a sell-out and a traitor to all of Mexico. They accused her of abandoning her ethnicity, especially during the Cholulan affair, which occurred along the road to Tenochtitlán (the Aztec capital). From various first-hand accounts, including those of Diaz and Gómara, it is plainly evident that Malinche saved the Spaniards from the Cholulan plot to massacre them. A Cholulan noblewoman, wife of one of the generals who knew of the clandestine plan, attempted to save Malinche by offering her son in marriage if she left the city with her immediately. Instead of sneaking away with this woman, she adeptly extracted the plan from her and then rushed to tell Cortés about it, proving her loyalty to the Spanish.^[30] Her quick actions saved the Spanish, but fueled Cortés’ unrelenting and merciless retaliation in which hundreds of Cholulans were massacred. The nationalists saw this as a clear and unequivocal example of Malinche’s treachery and used it to exploit their political agenda.

However, Malinche was not the only one to warn Cortés of the possibility of an ambush. According

to Diaz, the Tlaxcalan chiefs, bitter and sworn enemies of the Cholulans, had warned Cortés, “to beware of the Cholulans and of the might of Mexico.”^[31] Gómara wrote that the Tlaxcalans told Cortés that, “Cholula was a friend of Moctezuma, although a disloyal one, and it might happen that the Cholulans would attack Cortés when they had him in their city.”^[32] Both Gómara and Diaz noted that several of the Tlaxcalan slave women reported suspicious activities to Cortés **prior** to Malinche. Gómara said “the women who had been given to the Spaniards upon their entrance into Tlaxcala heard of a plot to kill them [the Spanish] in Cholula.”^[33] Diaz wrote that they told him:

Be careful, Malinche, for this city is hostile. We know that they sacrificed last night to their god of war. They offered him seven persons, five of them children, so that he should give them victory over you. And we have seen them moving all their baggage and women out of the city.^[34]

Yet the nationalists deliberately did not portray these women or the Tlaxcalan chiefs as traitors to Mexico, only Malinche.

Fiction and art, like history, also played an important role in reinforcing the nationalist’s aims. An anonymously written 1826 novel, *Xicoténcatl*, made evident the Malinche paradigm. Malinche was compared with the heroine Teutila, a fictional character who rejected European attempts to seduce her and remained true to her Indian roots. Meanwhile, Malinche was portrayed as *La Chingada*, who rejected her Indianness and betrayed a “united” Mexico, by informing Cortés of the Cholulan plot. Thus, she was depicted as choosing the white man over the Indian (whom she rejected when she refused the Cholulan woman’s proposal to marry her son). These negative images were placed upon her using fiction, and by no means represented the truth. The artist José Clemente Orozco’s continued this trend in his crude 1926 painting, which portrayed Malinche and Cortés embracing in the nude on top of the corpses of the massacred natives. This painting hangs in the stairwell at the Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso in Mexico City, and thus, to this day, continues to indoctrinate Mexicans with the nationalists image of her. These fictional representations of betrayal are even present in children’s stories, starting the brainwashing at an early age. Anita Brenner, who wrote *The Boy Who Could Do Anything*, accused Malinche of falling in love with Cortés and “persuading the Mexican kings to give him everything. Everything. Gold and jewels, and fine feathers, and chocolate, and all the best things in the land.”^[35] By labeling and portraying Malinche as a traitor and a sell-out to Mexico, the nationalists, supported by artists and writers, were able to place the blame for the collapse of the great Aztec empire solely on Malinche, while defining gender roles and the symbols they wished to enforce on Mexicans.

These mythical views of Malinche can easily be debunked. First of all, it is important to remember that at that time the idea of nationhood was non-existent. Even if most of what is now modern-day Central Mexico was dominated by the Aztecs, Mexico was not united, and it certainly was not a nation. There were several tribes who despised the Aztecs and grew tired of their tributary system, including the Cempeolans and the Tlaxcalans, who provided Cortés and the Spaniards with a large army to accompany them to Tenochtitlán. Yet they are not seen as traitors or sell-outs, even though it is apparent that they played a much larger role than Malinche in the military defeat of the Aztecs. (The explanation for this is simple; to the nationalists, Malinche represented both political and sexual betrayal, where as Tlaxcala only represented the political side.) Yet the Spanish had taken advantage of their hostility and resentment of the Aztecs. Secondly, the people of Mexico did not identify themselves as one entity. They had no sense of themselves as Indians united in a common cause against Europeans. Instead, they identified themselves as Mexica’s (as the Aztecs were known), Tlaxcalteca’s, Choloteca’s, etc. Since Malinche was none of these, how could she be seen as a traitor to all or any of them?^[36] She definitely would not have considered herself Mexica, for her “people were not the Mexicas and her homeland was outside the jurisdiction of the Mexica tributary system.”^[37] And how was she to know that the Cholulan woman was not trying to deceive her and separate

her from the Spanish? Malinche was not one of them either. Thus, ethnic and national loyalty cannot be legitimately raised here either. To accuse her of betrayal, we have to view the Indians as one people, and that simply was not the case. The Amerindian peoples were separate and distinct; to lump them all together is yet another misrepresentation of the evidence.

Throughout the centuries Malinche has also been accused of being one of the perpetrators of Spanish cruelties after the conquest. She has been “denounced by nationalistic Mexican writers not only for being a mistress to Cortés and traitor to the Mexican nation, but also for being a Spanish accomplice in the death, torture, and enslavement of her own people” on an *encomienda* that she received from the Spanish crown for her services.^[38] Although not much is known about her life after the Honduran campaign of 1524, it is evident that she was not a slave owner and that she has been falsely accused. Joanne Danaher Chaison clearly illustrated this as a case of mistaken identity, writing that over the years Malinche has been confused with Mariá de la Caballeria (also known as Doña Marina), the wife of New Spain’s treasurer Alonso de Estrada.^[39] After the conquest, Estrada and Doña Marina left Spain and settled in New Spain. They owned a very large *encomienda* and many Indian slaves. She ruled with an iron hand, committing numerous atrocities even after her husband’s death.^[40] This blatant act of mistaken identity has proven detrimental to the image of Malinche, while the guilty Doña Marina has been erased from Mexico’s memory. Clearly, if more were known and said about Malinche’s life after the conquest and the date of her death, these issues would have been avoided. Yet, they still can be understood if the facts are separated from the fiction; this is necessary, in order to give Malinche a just and unbiased representation.

These interpretations, made since the independence of Mexico, have altered the image of Malinche. She has become muddled and lost in these brutal, slanderous accusations and descriptions. Yet, they can be easily refuted. Unfortunately, we are still left with a murky view of the real Malinche. We know little about her life outside of the conquest itself, but her presence and functions during this time are well-documented. Although her voice itself is missing, we can, from the available primary sources, reconstruct a well-rounded picture of a strong woman living and excelling in a man’s world. Even though much about her is debated, we know that Malinche was well-respected, loyal, brave, and that her language skills were an integral and valuable part of the conquest. All of these characteristics pierced the constraints placed upon her by her society, and are attributes of someone that deserves some amount of respect and honor.

Both the Spaniards and the Mexicas who knew Malinche held her in the highest esteem. The Nahuatl writers of the Florentine Codex, which was written after the conquest, accord her name the honorific “-tzin” every time they mention her.^[41] They also gave Montezuma, the Aztec king in 1519, this same status. Thus, it is clear that neither resistance to the Spaniards nor ultimate surrender deprived an individual of honor in their eyes. Malinche also appears in pictorial documents and maps from the sixteenth century, which portray Malinche as powerful, not evil or immoral, clearly demonstrating that she never lost the respect of the natives even after the conquest. Diaz wrote about her using the respectful title Doña prior to her name, and was very aware of how the indigenous felt about her. He stated that, “Doña Marina was a person of great importance, and she was obeyed without question by all the Indians of New Spain.”^[42] He also wrote that she was so well-respected by the Indians that they called Cortés “Malinche,” testifying to the impact of her personality and presence.^[43] But Diaz also realized her importance to the Spaniards and wrote after the Tlaxcalan campaign, on the way to Tenochtitlán, of her unrelenting loyalty and courage:

But let me say that Doña Marina, although a native woman, possessed such manly valour that though she heard every day that the Indians were going to kill us and eat our flesh with *chillis*, and though she had seen us surrounded in recent battles and knew that we were all wounded and sick, yet she betrayed no weakness but a courage greater than that of a woman.^[44]

Not only was she brave and courageous in the face of sheer terror, but she showed a total commitment

to the Spaniards. She saved them on at least two occasions from destruction due to her perceptiveness, alertness, decisiveness, and loyalty. At Tlaxcala, she warned Cortés of the danger of spies among them, and then later helped him negotiate the alliance with the Tlaxcalans, which ultimately sealed the Aztec's fate. She also saved the Spaniards at Cholulu by uncovering the treacherous plot against them. Diaz wrote that he had heard her say during the Honduran campaign that she would "rather serve her husband and Cortés than anybody else in the world."^[45] He respected this unwavering service and loyalty to the Spanish. Thus, as Karttunen argued,

rather than the embodiment of treachery [as the nationalists portrayed her], 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.^[46]

But since she was no more a Mexica than she was a conquistador, she cannot be seen as a traitor at all.

Malinche was not merely a translator, but played many vital roles in the campaign, which should not be underestimated. As Cortés' guide and strategic advisor, she provided him with important information on the geography along the road to Tenochtitlán, as well as intelligence on the strengths and weaknesses of the Aztec state, and facts about their religion and customs.^[47] She also procured food, supplies, and shelter for the Spaniards, which made her very popular with the soldiers. Gómara wrote of Malinche's usefulness and strategic importance and her ability to communicate with prisoners and interrogate spies. He credited her with informing Cortés of the several vassal Aztec states who grew weary of Montezuma's tyranny and were ripe for rebellion. This included the Cempoalan's, who only obeyed and recognized him "because they were forced."^[48] It was this type of information that was vital to Cortés and allowed him to take advantage of situations he would have otherwise been unaware of; this made Malinche invaluable to him. Diaz wrote that she was so important to Cortés that he called for her to come along on the 1524 Honduran campaign. "As Doña Marina had proved such an excellent person, and a good interpreter in all the wars of New Spain, Tlascalala, and Mexico ... Cortés always took her with him."^[49] Cortés himself indicated her importance to him when he wrote, in a letter to Charles V, that she "traveled always in my company after she had been given me as a present."^[50] Put rather plainly, without her it would have been very difficult for Cortés and the Spanish to have done so well in the New World.

Although the primary sources characterize her courage, loyalty, linguistic skills, and importance to the merging of two worlds, the language and symbols used by Mexican nationalists have altered these traits to fill their own agenda. Instead of being seen as a model of female strength and inspiration in a misogynist world, Malinche has been labeled "*la chingada*" and the "Mexican Eve." She has also been used to keep the definitions of gender roles and the patriarchal system that oppresses women in place, rather than being used to challenge it. Only in the last three decades have Chicana writers and some historians attempted to alter this oppressive and denigrating stereotype.^[51] These writers, like myself, wish to re-evaluate Malinche's interpretation in order to make known that Malinche was the victim, the one who was betrayed, deceived, enslaved, and raped during life, and then betrayed again and slandered after death. It has been my aim to challenge the myths surrounding her and begin to restore her true history and identity.

Carmen Tafolla argued along these lines in a recent poem about Malinche. She attempted to give Malinche a voice, allowing her to tell her own story in order to question the credibility of the dominant discourse and challenge the authority of the patriarchal system.

Yo soy la Malinche.
My people called Malintzin Tenepal
The Spaniards called me Doña Marina

I came to be known as Malinche
And Malinche came to mean traitor.

They called me –chingada
¡Chingada!
Ha –Chingada! Screwed!

Of noble ancestry, for whatever that means, I was sold into slavery
by **MY ROYAL FAMILY** –so that my brother could get my
inheritance

...And then the omens began –a god, a new civilization, the downfall of our
empire.

And you came.

My dear Hernán Cortés, to share your “civilization” –to play god,
...and I began to **dream**...

I saw,

And I acted!

I saw our world

And I saw –
another.

And yes –I helped you –against Emperor Moctezuma Xocoyotzin himself!

I became Interpreter, Advisor, and lover.

they could not imagine me dealing on a level with you- so they said I was
raped, used,

chingada

¡Chingada!

But I saw our world
and your world
and another.

No one else could see!

Beyond one world, none existed.

And you yourself cried the night the city burned,
and burned at your orders.

The most beautiful city on earth in flames.

You cried broken tears the night you saw your destruction

My homeland ached within me

(but I saw **another**!)

Another world –

a world yet to be born

And our child was born ...

and I was immortalized **Chingada!**

Years later, you took away my child (my sweet mestizo new world child)

to raise him in your world

You still didn't see.

You still didn't see.

And history would call **me**
chingada.

But Chingada I was not.
 Not tricked, not screwed, not traitor.
 For I was not traitor to myself-
 I saw a dream
 and I **reached it.**
 Another world.....
 la raza.
 La raaaaaaa-zaaaa..... [52]

In this poem, we see an active Malinche, an agent with a voice, who challenged the society she lived in and the roles she was supposed to play as a woman. Although this is fictional, Tafolla only highlights Malinche's many strengths, which are visible in the primary sources. In doing so, her message is simple: Malinche was clearly a strong woman and should be seen, not as a traitor, but as a role model for future generations.

In overcoming the oppressive nature of her situation as a slave, a sex object and a woman in sixteenth century Mexico, Malinche "rejected the passivity of her sex, grasped her own destiny, and transformed herself from a slave to a history maker." [53] She did what survivalists today would advise: exploit her only assets, her loyalty and her 'multilingualism,' to survive. As a victim of the patriarchal system of her time, the labels previously thrust upon her are unfair. She is a model for challenging the patriarchy and the definition of gender roles. Malinche deserves to be looked at through new eyes, to be seen as the strong, gifted woman that she was, and for surviving under impossible circumstances. The slanderous language and writings that further denigrate women need to be kept in check and her real identity needs to be restored. Since the Mexican Government led the original slanderous campaign, they ought to be at the forefront of this one as well. However, this is unlikely and thus it is up to historians, who have also played an integral part in denigrating Malinche, to follow the lead of many Chicana writers and begin the task anew.

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[1] At birth, she was given the name Malinali, or Malinalli, one of the twenty days in the Mexica calendar. The name Tenepal was added afterward, according to the prevailing custom of adding a second name later in life. Tenepal is derived from the root *tene*, which means in a figurative sense one who has a facility with words, a person who speaks with animation, which perfectly describes her role. The Spanish baptized her Marina. The Aztecs had no letter "r" in their alphabet, so they substituted the letter "l" for it, and added "tzin" as a sign of respect. Thus, Malintzin was equivalent to Doña Marina, but became Malinche when the Spaniards mispronounced it. I will refer to her throughout as Malinche, only because it is what she has been commonly referred to throughout history, and so as not to confuse the reader by switching back and forth with her name from quote to text.

[2] Malinche's case demonstrates the immense problem in tackling this subject: sources. What sources are used? How can they be trusted? How can an accurate history be written when historians must rely on European sources written in a colonial context? It forces the historian to think differently, considering time and place. There are very few sources depicting Malinche available to scholars, but those that are available need to be looked at from a new perspective, not one blinded by patriarchal stigmatizations. There are also several inconsistencies in these sources, which means that historians must be very careful with what they trust. See Amanda Angel, *La Malinche: The Conquistadora of Mexico* Thesis (San Francisco: San Francisco State University, 1991), 6. She argued that in order to find out more about Malinche, the "historian must search through scattered fragments of information, and take an interpretive approach." This is because Diaz and Gómara, the most used primary sources, differ on so much, that it is hard to know which story is accurate. See Bernal Diaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, J. M. Cohen trans. (London: Penguin Books, 1963), and Francisco López de Gómara, *The Life of the Conqueror by His Secretary* Lesley Byrd Simpson trans., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964). See also Frances Karttunen, "Rethinking Malinche," *Indian Women of Early Mexico* Susan Schroeder, Stephanie Wood, and Robert Haskett, eds., (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), who writes that "most of what we think we know about doña Marina we owe to Diaz," 299. But we still must be very careful of trusting Diaz wholeheartedly because his account may be blinded by his desire to praise her. For example, he wrote that she told her mother and brother when they met in 1524

of her supposed “heartfelt satisfaction with her situation.” Karttunen questioned how he could have known what she was telling them since her words were most likely “addressed to her kin, and they would have been uttered in Nahuatl,” which clearly Diaz did not understand. Although Diaz did make some errors such as this, we can not throw out all of what he writes, for he proves to be very useful in other areas. He still is the most reliable, even if he wrote forty years after the fact.

[3] Diaz, 80. Diaz was the only colonial writer to make a woman a major figure in historical events in the Spanish Americas. He also was the only eyewitness to write of Malinche’s role. Angel wrote that “it is Gómara’s many errors and distortions, his glorification of Cortés, and his neglect of the other participants, which drove Bernal Diaz to complete his work despite advancing age,” 7.

[4] Anthony Pagden, trans., *Hernan Cortes: Letters from Mexico* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 73, 376.

[5] Gómara, 57, 62. Gómara was Cortés’ private secretary and chaplain from 1541-47, and afterwards his biographer. However, he never set foot in the New World, and therefore never knew Malinche personally.

[6] Sandra Messinger Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature: From History to Myth* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), 32f.

[7] Gómara, Diaz, and Cortés all wrote that she was from a different village. Gómara wrote that she was “from a village called Viluta {Olutla};” (Gómara, 56) Diaz wrote that she was from “a town called Paynala;” (Diaz, 85) and Cortés wrote to Charles V that she was “an Indian woman from Putunchan.” (Pagden, 73) Although the exact location is uncertain, all of these villages were near the town of Coatzacoalcos, as Karttunen wrote, “between Nahua central Mexico and Maya Yucatan,” 299.

[8] Gómara, 56f. Diaz, 85. See also Hilde Krueger, *Malinche or Farewell to Myths* (New York: Storm Publishers, 1948), who wrote that “it seems her parents were nobles, caciques of their village; yet even this is not certain,” 20. Krueger is extremely pro-Malinche and dismisses many of the negative stereotypes surrounding her.

[9] Diaz, 85.

[10] Gómara, 57.

[11] As quoted in Elba D. Birmingham-Pokorny, “La Malinche: A Feminist Perspective on Otherness in Mexican and Chicano Literature,” *Confluencia* II, 2 (Spring 1996), 131. See Maria Rodríguez-Valdés, *La Mujer Azteca* (Mexico D.F.: UNAM, 1988), 62.

[12] Cypess, 33.

[13] Diaz and Gómara both say these women were the first in all of New Spain to be baptized.

[14] In a footnote in Cortés’ letters to Charles, Pagden wrote that Malinche “was given to Cortés with some Indian women after the battle of Cintla, and given by him to Puertocarrero. She returned to Cortés when Puertocarrero was sent to Spain, and acted as his mistress and translator during the conquest,” 464.

[15] Aguilar, according to Gómara, had been shipwrecked in an earlier Spanish attempt to reach New Spain, and had lived among the Mayan for several years eventually learning their language, 32f.

[16] *Ibid.*, 56.

[17] It is argued by historians that Aguilar was kept on with Malinche because he was Spanish and a man, and so as not to offend him by replacing him with an Indian woman. He remained with Cortés for the rest of the conquest.

[18] Gómara, 346, and Diaz, 86. Gómara also wrote that “Cortés was criticized for allowing it, because he had children by her.” How did he know if she was criticized? Is this statement a reflection of the author’s opinion, since we can find no mention of this elsewhere, including in Diaz?

[19] Cypess, 37. He also argued that this was what later came “to be condemned as her capitulation to the foreign culture,” but that she had no choice.

[20] Diaz, 86.

[21] See Angel, 10. See Antonio de Solis, *History of the Conquest of Mexico by the Spaniards* I, 3 Thomas Townsend, trans., (New York: AMS Press Inc., 1993), and Antonio de Herrera, *The General History of the Vast Continent and Islands of America, commonly called the West Indies, from the first Discovery Thereof: With the Best Accounts the People could give of their Antiquities* II John Stevens, trans., (London: Wood and Woodward, 1740). They were the most respected historians of this time on New Spain and the conquest.

[22] Elizabeth Salas, *Soldaderas in the Mexican Military: Myth and History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 14. Although she makes a mistake in writing that Marina did not accompany Cortés to Honduras, she makes very insightful comments about her role as a conquistadora and model of female strength.

[23] Birmingham-Pokorny, 125f.

[24] Karttunen, 297. She writes that it is time to think about Malinche anew.

[25] Angel, 82.

[26] Cypess, 11. This author writes that Malinche has been treated unfairly. She agrees with the Mexican psychologist Juana

Armanda Alegría who wrote that “La Malinche was the only important woman during the conquest of Mexico, and in that role, she deserves to be reconsidered,” 2.

[27] Frans Blom, *The Conquest of Yucatan* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1936), 41. Blom is obviously out of touch with reality, since many of the Indian groups had a long history of animosity and would not have allied even if they had perceived the threat the Spaniards represented. But Blom is a clear example of the nationalists indoctrination ... He also wrote, that “most great captains in history found their defeat in the arms of a tender morsel – not so Cortés, he conquered Malinche and thus the New World.” Preposterous!

[28] Fernando Horcasitas, *The Aztecs: Then and Now* (Mexico, 1979), 74. He does however describe her as a “remarkably shrewd woman,” although he does not give her much attention other than that.

[29] Karttunen, 297.

[30] See Diaz, 195ff and Gómara 126ff for the accounts of the Cholulan episode. Both praised Malinche for her skill, bravery, and loyalty. We also see in their accounts that Malinche saved the Spaniards at ... due to her language skills.

[31] Diaz, 188.

[32] Gómara, 123f. Moctezuma was the Nahuatl word for Montezuma.

[33] *Ibid.*, 124.

[34] Diaz, 193.

[35] Anita Brenner, *The Boy Who Could Do Anything: and other Mexican Folk Tales* (Hamden: Linnet Books, 1942), 125. This story also labels Malinche “*La Llorona*,” the wailing woman who haunts Mexican nights grieving for her children and leading unwary men to their deaths, 128. See also Karttunen, 295.

[36] See Karttunen, 304.

[37] Salas, 14.

[38] Angel, 72. It is still heavily debated whether or not she even received an *encomienda* from Spain, and when that land was passed on to the other Doña Marina.

[39] See Joanne Danaher Chaison, “Mysterious Malinche: A Case of Mistaken Identity,” *The Americas*, 32, 4 (April, 1976), 519. She examined these mistaken identities and provided significant evidence to certify each myth as fraudulent. Angel also argued that Malinche was falsely accused and that many sources identified the wrong Doña Marina. See 72f.

[40] Chaison argued that this mistake was cleared up by records indicating that these cruelties occurred in the 1530s and 40s, after Malinche’s death. (Although the exact date has not been determined, it is widely believed that she died prior to 1531.) Even if she had lived, there is no record of a divorce from Juan Jamarillo, which would have been necessary before she could have remarried.

[41] See Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex, General History of the Things of New Spain: Book 12 – The Conquest of Mexico*, Arthur Anderson, trans., (Santa Fe: The School of American Research, 1955), 25. This is very important to historians not only because it provides an Aztec perspective on Malinche, but because it corroborates Diaz’s account of the events.

[42] Diaz, 86.

[43] *Ibid.*, 171f. See also Sahagún, 42.

[44] *Ibid.*, 153.

[45] *Ibid.*, 86.

[46] Karttunen, 304.

[47] Angel, 79. She also wrote, that Malinche “interpreted, gave counsel, procured supplies, uncovered plots, helped build alliances, and gave Cortés the upper hand in all his dealings with Nahuatl-speaking tribes,” 80. Salas wrote, “She was a *mociuaquetzque* – an unarmed woman who accompanied a warrior into battle not as a fighter but as a strategist or coach,” 120. Karttunen wrote, “Among the Totonacs, the Tlaxcalans, and the Cholulans, Doña Marina was set the task of assisting Cortés in playing people off against each other, misleading them to keep his potential enemies off-balance and acquiring allies through a mix of sweet talk and intimidation,” 303.

[48] Gómara, 62. See also Gómara 77, 106, and 127 for recognition of her additions to the campaign. Krueger argued that it was her eloquence and persuasion which benefited the Spaniards. (38)

[49] Diaz, 85f. See also Angel, 80.

[50] Cortés, 376.

[51] Chicana writers have taken up issue with the, “on-going cultural revisionism in Mexico and the rest of Latin America in regards to the image of women and their role in society, as well as with the extent to which these images and roles respond to a given political agenda and to the cultural needs of a patriarchal society, and to a set pattern or perspective on race, sex and Otherness in Mexican, Chicano, and Latin American society.” See Birmingham-Pokorny, 134.

[52] *Ibid.*, 128ff.

[53] Angel, 82.

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