Traddutora, Traditora: A Paradigmatic Figure of Chicana Feminism

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When the Spanish conquistador appears, this woman [a Mayan] is no more than the site where the desires and wills of two men meet. To kill men to rape women: these are at once proof that a man wields power and his reward. The wife chooses (sic) to obey her husband and the rules of her own society, she puts all that remains of her personal will into defending the violence [of her own society] of which she has been the object. . . . Her husband of whom she is the “internal other,” . . . leaves her no possibility of asserting herself as a free subject.

—Tzvetan Todorov, The Conquest of America

In his splendid book Quetzalcóatl and Guadalupe, Jacques Lafaye gives a fascinating account of the roles those two divine and mythic figures played in the formation of the Mexican national consciousness. Quetzalcóatl was an Aztec god whose name, so the missionaries argued, was the natives’ own name for the true Mes-
siah. Guadalupe, on the other hand, was the emerging Mexican people's native version of the Virgin Mary and, in a sense, substituted for the Aztec goddess Tonantzin. By the time of Mexican independence from Spain in 1821, Guadalupe had emerged triumphant as the national patroness of Mexico, and her banner was often carried into battle. In a well-known article which may have inspired Lafaye, Eric R. Wolf comments that

the Mexican War of Independence marks the final realization of the apocalyptic promise . . . [T]he promise of life held out by the supernatural mother has become the promise of an independent Mexico, liberated from the irrational authority of the Spanish father-oppressors and restored to the chosen nation whose election had been manifest in the apparition of the Virgin at Tepeyac. . . . Mother, food, hope, health, life; supernatural salvation from oppression; chosen people and national independence—all find expression in a single symbol.²

There is sufficient folklore, as well as documentary evidence of a historical and literary nature, to suggest that the indigenous female slave Malintzin Tenepal was transformed into Guadalupe's monstrous double and that her "banner" also aided and abetted in the nation-making process or, at least, in the creation of nationalistic perspectives. On Independence Day of 1861, for example, Ignacio "El Nigromante" Ramírez, politician and man of letters, reminded the celebrants that Mexicans owed their defeat to Malintzin—Cortés's whore.³ Moreover, Malintzin may be compared to Eve, especially when she is viewed as the originator of the Mexican people's fall from grace and the procreator of a "fallen" people. Thus, Mexico's own binary pair, Guadalupe and Malintzin, reenact within this dualistic system of thought the biblical stories of our human creation and condition. In effect, as a political compromise between conquerors and conquered, Guadalupe is the neorepresentative of the Virgin Mary and the native god-

dess Tonantzin, while Malintzin stands in the periphery of the new patriarchal order and its sociosymbolic contract.  

Indeed, Malintzin and the “false god” and conqueror Hernán Cortés are the countercouple, “the monstrous doubles,” to Lafaye’s Quetzalcóatl and Guadalupe. These two monstrous figures become, in the eyes of the later generations of “natives,” symbols of unbridled conquering power and treachery, respectively. Malintzin comes to be known as la lengua, literally meaning the tongue. La lengua was the metaphor used, by Cortés and the chroniclers of the conquest, to refer to Malintzin the translator. However, she not only translated for Cortés and his men, she also bore his children. Thus, a combination of Malintzin-translator and Malintzin-procreator becomes the main feature of her subsequently ascribed treacherous nature.

In the eyes of the conquered (oppressed), anyone who approximates la lengua or Cortés (oppressor), in word or deed, is held suspect and liable to become a sacrificial “monstrous double.” Those who use the oppressor’s language are viewed as outside of the community, thus rationalizing their expulsion, but,

4. I borrow the notion of “sociosymbolic contract” from Julia Kristeva. She uses the notion in the essay “Women’s Time,” trans. Alice Jardine and Harry Blake, *Signs* 7, no. 1 (Autumn 1981): 13–35. I take it to mean a kind of contract within which the social life of women (and some men) is expected to conform or live up to a metaphysical (essential) configuration of who we ought to become in the socialization process. These metaphysical configurations are accompanied by culture-specific “semantic charters.” Pierre Maranda suggests that “[s]emantic charters condition our thoughts and emotions. They are culture specific networks that we internalize as we undergo the process of socialization.” Moreover, these charters or signifying systems “have an inertia and momentum of their own. There are semantic domains whose inertia is high: kinship terminologies, the dogmas of authoritarian churches, the conception of sex roles.” See his essay “The Dialectic of Metaphor: An Anthropological Essay on Hermeneutics,” in *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation*, ed. Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 184–85.

5. The “natives” that came to hate Cortés and Malintzin are the mestizos—the mixed blood offspring—since the indigenous people at the time of the conquest often welcomed them as liberators. It is of interest to note that throughout the Mexican colonial period the missionaries staged secular plays for the indigenous population in which Cortés and Malintzin were represented as their liberators. Some parishes, even today, continue to reenact these plays in dispersed communities. I draw the preceding comments from Norma Cantú’s work in progress, “Secular and Liturgical Folk Drama,” presented at the National Association of Chicano Studies, Los Angeles, March 29–April 1, 1989.
paradoxically, they also help to constitute the community. In *Violence and the Sacred*, René Girard has observed that the religious mind “strives to procure, and if need be to invent, a sacrificial victim as similar as possible to its ambiguous vision of the original victim. The model it imitates is not the true double, but a model transfigured by the mechanism of the “monstrous double.”6 If in the beginning Cortés and Malintzin are welcomed as saviors from, and avengers of, Aztec imperialism, soon each is unmasked and “sacrificed,” that is, expelled so that the authentic gods may be recovered, awaited, and/or invented. While Quetzalcoatl could continue to be awaited, Guadalupe was envisioned, and her invention was under way as the national Virgin Mother and goddess only twelve years after Cortés’s arrival. Guadalupe, as Lafaye himself suggests, is a metaphor that has never wholly taken the place of Tonantzin. As such, Guadalupe is capable of alternately evoking the Catholic and meek Virgin Mother and the prepatriarchal and powerful earth goddess. In any case, within a decade of the invasion, both Cortés and Malintzin begin to accrue their dimensions as scapegoats who become the receptacle of human rage and passion, of the very real hostilities that “all the members of the community feel for one another.”7 In the context of a religiously organized society, one can observe in the scapegoating of Cortés and Malintzin “the very real metamorphosis of reciprocal violence into restraining violence through the agency of unanimity.”8 The unanimity is elicited by the chosen scapegoats, and violence is displaced onto them. That mechanism then structures many cultural values, rituals, customs, and myths. Among people of Mexican descent, from this perspective, anyone who has transgressed the boundaries of perceived group interests and values often has been called a *malinche* or *malinchista*. Thus, the contemporary recuperation and positive redefinitions of her name bespeak an effort to go beyond religiously organized Manichaean thought. There is nothing more fascinating or intriguing, as Lafaye demonstrates, than to trace the transformation of legends into myths.

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7. Ibid., 99.
8. Ibid., 96.
that contribute to the formation of national consciousness. However, by only tracing the figures of transcendence—the recovered or displaced victims of the impersonators—we are left without a knowledge of the creation process of the scapegoats—whether it be through folklore, polemics, or literature. An exploration of Cortés’s role as monstrous double shall be left for another occasion. It is clear that often his role is that of the conqueror, usurper, foreigner, and/or invader. In the course of almost five centuries Malintzin has alternately retained one of her three names—Malintzin (the name given her by her parents), Marina (the name given her by the Spaniards), or Malinche (the name given her by the natives in the midst of the conquest). The epithet La Chingada has surfaced most emphatically in our century to refer to her alleged ill-fated experience at the hands of the Spaniards. The epithet also emphasizes the sexual implications of having been conquered—the rape of women and the emasculation of men.

Guadalupe and Malintzin almost always have been viewed as oppositional mediating figures, though the precise moment of inception may well elude us. Guadalupe has come to symbolize transformative powers and sublime transcendence and is the standard carried into battle in utopically inspired movements. Always viewed by believers as capable of transforming the petitioner’s status and promising sublime deliverance, she transports us beyond or before time. On the other hand, Malintzin represents feminine subversion and treacherous victimization of her people because she was a translator in Cortés’s army. Guadalupe and Malintzin have become a function of each other. Be that as it may, quite often one or the other figure is recalled as being present at

9. Cortés’s misfortunes with the Spanish Crown may be linked to the need of the successor colonizers and the colonized to extirpate him from their relations with Spain. Certainly, he has been expelled from public life in Mexico where no monuments or mementos to his role in the conquest may be seen. Ironically, he is very much in everyone’s mind.

10. La Chingada is used to refer, literally, to a woman who is “fucked” or “fucked over.” Thus, Paz and others suggest a metonymic relation to rape. When used in the past participle, passivity on her part is implied. The verb and its derivatives imply violent action, and much depends on context and the speaker’s inflection. To refer to a masculine actor, the term chingón is used.
the "origins" of the Mexican community, thereby emphasizing its divine and sacred constitution or, alternately, its damned and secular fall. The religiously rooted community, as Girard notes, "is both attracted and repelled by its own origins. It feels the constant need to re-experience them, albeit in veiled and transfigured form . . . by exercising its memory of the collective expulsion or carefully designated objects."\footnote{11} Though Guadalupe is thought to assuage the community's pain due to its fall from grace, Malintzin elicits a fascination entangled with loathing, suspicion, and sorrow. As translator she mediates between antagonistic cultural and historical domains. If we assume that language is always in some sense metaphorical, then, any discourse, oral or written, is liable to be implicated in treachery when perceived to be going beyond repetition of what the community perceives as the "true" and/or "authentic" concept, image, or narrative. The act of translating, which often introduces different concepts and perceptions, displaces and may even do violence to local knowledge through language. In the process, these may be assessed as false or inauthentic.

Traditional nonsecular societies, be they oral or print cultures, tend to be very orthodox and conservative, interpreting the lifeworld in highly Manichaean terms. It is common in large oral cultures to organize knowledge, values, and beliefs around symbolic icons, figures, or even persons, which is a characteristic of both the Spanish and the natives at the time of the conquest, and one that in surprising numbers continues to our day in Mexican/Chicano culture.\footnote{12} In such a binary, Manichaean system of thought, Guadalupe's transcendentalizing power, silence, and maternal self-sacrifice are the positive, contrasting attributes to those of a woman who speaks as a sexual being and independently of her maternal role. To speak independently of her maternal role, as Malintzin did, is viewed in such a society as a sign of catastrophe, for if she is allowed to articulate her needs and

\footnote{12} I draw on the work of Walter J. Ong for parts of this discussion, especially \textit{The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967) and \textit{Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word} (New York: Methuen, 1982).
desires she must do so as a mother on behalf of her children and not of herself. Because Malintzin the translator is perceived as speaking for herself and not the community, however it defines itself, she is a woman who has betrayed her primary cultural function—maternity. The figure of the mother is bound to a double reproduction, *strictu sensu*—that of her people and her culture. In a traditional society organized along metaphysical or cosmological figurations of good and evil, cultural deviation from the norm is not easily tolerated nor valued in the name of inventiveness or "originality." In such a setting, to speak or translate in one's behalf rather than the perceived group interests and values is tantamount to betrayal. Thus, the assumption of an individualized nonmaternal voice, such as that of Chicanas during and after the Chicano movement (1965–75), has been cause to label them *malinches* or *vendidás* (sellouts) by some, consequently prompting Chicanas to vindicate Malinche in a variety of ways, as we shall see. Thus, within a culture such as ours, if one should not want to merely break with it, acquiring a "voice of one's own" requires revision and appropriation of cherished metaphysical beliefs.

The Mexican poet and cultural critic Octavio Paz was one of the first to note—in his book *The Labyrinth of Solitude*—a metonymic link between Malintzin and the epithet *La Chingada*, which is derived from the Hispanicized Nahuatl verb *chingar*. Today *La Chingada* is often used as a synonym for Malintzin. Paz himself reiterates the latter in his introduction to Lafaye's book by remarking that "entre la Chingada y Tonantzin/Guadalupe oscila

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13. These dates are highly arbitrary, especially the closing date. There is consensus among Chicano critics that the production of contemporary Chicano literature began in conjunction with César Chávez's National Farm Workers' Association strike of 1965, noting the fact that Luis Valdez's Teatro Campesino was inaugurated on the picket lines. See Marta Sánchez's *Contemporary Chicana Poetry: Critical Approaches to an Emerging Literature* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 2–6. For the recuperation of the term vendida (sellout), see Cherrie Moraga's essay "A Long Line of Vendidas," in her *Loving in the War Years: Lo que nunca pasó por sus labios* (Boston: South End Press, 1983), 90–117.

la vida secreta del mestizo” (The secret life of the mestizo oscillates between La Chingada and Tonantzín/Guadalupe).15

Although Paz’s views are often the contemporary point of departure for current revisions of the legend and myth of Malintzin, there are two previous stages in its almost five hundred year trajectory. The first corresponds to the chroniclers and inventors of the legends; the second corresponds to the development of the traitor myth and scapegoat mechanism which apparently comes to fruition in the nineteenth century during the Mexican independence movement.16 In this study I would like to focus on the third, modernistic stage which some twentieth-century women and men of letters have felt compelled to initiate in order to revise and vindicate Malintzin.

In writing The Labyrinth of Solitude to explicate Mexican people and culture, Octavio Paz was also paying homage to Alfonso Reyes’s call to explore and discover our links to the past as put forth in Visión de Anáhuac (1519).17 In that work Reyes suggested that Doña Marina, as he calls her, was the metaphor par excellence of Mexico and its conquest, oppression, and victimization, all of which are very much a part of Mexican life and “historical emotion.”18 Though Reyes’s vision was somewhat muted by the decorous language of the beginning of the century, Paz exploits the modernistic break with the sacred in order to expand and clarify Reyes’s Doña Marina by transfiguring her into La Chingada. In the now-famous chapter “The Sons of La Malinche,” Paz argues, as Reyes did before him, that “our living attitude . . . is history also”19 and concludes that La Malinche is the key to our Mexican origins. In his view Malintzin is more properly our historically grounded originator and accounts for our contemporary

15. Lafaye, Quetzalcóatl y Guadalupe, 22.
17. Though the work was originally published in 1915, I use Alfonso Reyes, Visión the Anáhuac (1519) (México: El Colegio de Mexico, 1953).
“living attitude.” However, Paz is not interested in history per se but in the affective and imaginary ways in which that history is/has been experienced and the ways in which we have responded to it. Paz explores the connections between Malintzin and La Chingada, that is, the sexual victim, the raped mother. He argues that as taboo verb (and noun), chingar lacks etymological documentation, yet it is part of contemporary speech. Independent of any historical record, the word’s existence and significance seem phantasmagorical, illusory. In Terry Eagleton’s terms, then, Paz goes to work on the apparently illusory, “the ordinary ideological experience of men,”20 and tries to demonstrate its connection to historical events and, by implication, men’s attitudes towards the feminine. In doing so, however, he transforms Malintzin into the Mexican people’s primeval mother, albeit the raped one. To repudiate her, he argues, is to break with the past, to renounce the “origins.” Paz believes that he is struggling against “a will to eradicate all that has gone before.”21 He concludes by saying that Cortés’s and Malintzin’s permanence in the Mexican’s imagination and sensibilities reveals that they are more than historical figures: they are symbols of a secret conflict that we have still not resolved. Through the examination of taboo phrases, Paz makes Malintzin the Muse/Mother, albeit raped and vilified—hence, also La Chingada. In calling attention to the fact that Malintzin and Cortés are more than historical figures, Paz in effect is implying that they are part and parcel of Mexican ideology—our living attitude; thus they have been abducted from their historical moment and are continuing to haunt us through the workings of that ideology. In a sense, by making Malintzin the founding mother of Mexicans, Paz has unwittingly strengthened the ideological ground that was there before him while simultaneously desacralizing our supposed origins by shifting the founding moment from Guadalupe to Malintzin. Paradoxically, Paz has displaced the myth of Guadalupe, not with history, but with a neomyth, a reversal properly secularized yet unaware of its misogynistic residue. Indeed, Paz’s implied audience is male—the so-called “il-

legitimate mestizo” who may well bristle at the thought that he is outside the legitimate patriarchal order, like women! In Paz’s figurations illegitimacy predicated the Mexican founding order. It is a countersuggestion to the belief that Guadalupe legitimized the Mexican founding order. The primary strategy in Paz’s modern (secular) position is to wrest contemporary consciousness away from religious cosmologies.

Unlike Reyes, Paz mentions that “the Mexican people have not forgiven Malinche for her betrayal.”22 As such, he emphasizes the ambivalent attitude towards the origins despite the need for acceptance and a change of consciousness. Carlos Fuentes, too, pleads for acceptance of the “murky” and knotted beginnings of the Mexican people in Todos los gatos son pardos.23 However, if Paz implicitly acknowledges the asymmetrical relationship between that of slave (Malintzin) and master (Cortés) by saying that our neosymbolic mother was raped, Fuentes privileges Malintzin’s attributed desire for vengeance against her people—hence her alliance with Cortés. Subsequently, Fuentes has Malintzin reveal herself as a misguided fool, thus becoming the ill-fated Mother-Goddess/Muse/Whore, a tripartite figure who possesses the gift of speech. The gift, in the end, makes her a traitor. She self-consciously declares herself la lengua, “Yo sólo soy la lengua,” adding that objects ultimately act out the destiny that the logos proposes.24 In this instance, Fuentes, along with such contemporaries as Rosario Castellanos, Elena Poniatowska, José Emilio Pacheco, and Octavio Paz, is portraying through Malintzin the belief that literature is the intention, through the power of language, to recover memory by recovering the word and to project a future by possessing the word.25 The underlying assumption is that history, insofar as it obeys ideological and metaphysical constraints, does not truly recover human events and experience, nor is it capable of projecting change—thus literature is allocated those functions. Simultaneously, however, and perhaps un-

22. Ibid., 86.
24. Ibid., 64, 99.
25. Ibid., 5–6.
knowingly, this point of view ironically suggests that literature (language) also narrates ideological positions that construct readers. In suggesting that their literary production is a theory of history, these Mexican writers also appear to suggest that it is capable of effecting historical changes. It is clear that both Paz and Fuentes view themselves as catalysts, as movers and shakers of the “academic” historians of their time and country. From a secular perspective Paz and Fuentes see themselves as more radical and as providing a cultural critique. They explode myths with countermyths, or narrative with counternarrative.\(^2^6\)

In Fuentes’s play, Malintzin is the narrator who is in possession of speech. She is, as a result, given the task of recovering the experience of the conquest by spanning the confrontation between powers—that of Cortés and Moctezuma. Thus, for Fuentes, narration is a feminine art in opposition to the masculine “arts of power,” a bridge for disparate power brokers, who thus make use of Malintzin’s mediating image. One can observe here a romantic artifice—woman the Mother-Goddess/Muse/Whore who is knowledge itself—if only the male artists can decipher it; in this Fuentes falls in line with many other writers from Goethe to Paz. It is, of course, ironic that the narrative should be viewed even symbolically as a feminine art, or an art embedded in the feminine, since few women have practiced it throughout history. But as the fallen goddess in Fuentes, Malintzin recalls patriarchy’s Eve, the first linguistic mediator and the primeval biblical mother and traitor, who, of course, is later replaced by the Virgin Mary, alias Guadalupe—the “go-between” mediating two cultural spaces that are viewed as antithetical to each other.

To suggest that language itself, as mediator, is our first betrayal, the Mexican novelist and poet José Emilio Pacheco writes a deceptively simple yet significant poem entitled “Traddutore, Traditora” (“Translator, Traitor”). In the poem, Pacheco names the three known translators involved during the time of the conquest—Jerónimo Aguilar, Gonzalo Guerrero, and Malintzin. Pacheco claims that we are indebted to this trio for the knot called

Mexico ("el enredo llamado México"). For Pacheco, what might have been "authentic" to each cultural discourse before the collision has now been transformed by language's creative and transformative powers. The translators, who use language as their mediating agent, have the ability, consciously or unconsciously, to distort or to convert the "original" event, utterance, text, or experience, thus rendering them false, "impure." The Mexican cultural and biological entanglement is due to the metaphoric property of language and the language traders. By translating, by converting, by transforming one thing into another, by interpreting (all meanings suggested by the dictionary), the "original," supposedly clear connection between words and objects, is disrupted and corrupted. The "corruption" that takes place through linguistic mediation may make the speaker a traitor in the view of others—not just simply a traitor, but a traitor to tradition which is represented and expressed in the "original" event, utterance, text, or experience. In Pacheco's poem the treacherous acts are rooted in language as mediator, language as substitution, that is, as metaphor.

It is through metaphor and metonymy that Reyes, Paz, Fuentes, and Pacheco have been working to revise, reinterpret, or reverse Malintzin's significations. In the twentieth century, they are the first appropriators "rescuing" her from "living attitudes." To cast her in the role of scapegoat, monstrous double, and traitor as other men have done is to deny our own monstrous beginnings, that is, the monstrous beginnings of the mestizo (mixed blood) people in the face of an ethic of purity and authenticity as absolute value. By recalling the initial translators and stressing the role of linguistic mediation, Pacheco's revisions are the most novel and diffuse the emphasis on gender and sexuality that the others rely on for their interpretive visions. Paz and Fuentes have patently sexualized Malintzin more than any other writers before them. In so doing they lay claim to a recovery of the (maternal) female body as a secular, sexual, and signifying entity. Sometimes, however, their perspective hovers between attraction and repulsion, revealing their attitudes towards the feminine and their "origins." For Fuentes, Malintzin's sexuality is devouring, certainly

the monstrous double of Guadalupe, the asexual and virginal feminine.

Chicano writers have been particularly influenced by Paz's and Fuentes's revisions of Malintzin. The overall influence can be traced not only to the fascination that their writings exert but to the fact that their work was included in early texts used for Chicano Studies. Two such texts were *Introduction to Chicano Studies* and *Literatura Chicana: Texto y Contexto.* 28 The Chicanos, like the Mexicans, wanted to recover the origins. However, many Chicanos emphasized the earlier nationalistic interpretations of Malintzin as the traitorous mediator who should be expelled from the community rather than accepted, as Paz and Fuentes had suggested. In their quest for "authenticity" Chicanos often desired the silent mediator—Guadalupe, the unquestioning transmitter of tradition and deliverer from oppression. Thus, it should not have come as a surprise that the banner of Guadalupe was one of those carried by the Chicano farm workers in their strike march of 1965. 29


29. For a perspective on men's implicit or explicit use of oppositional female figures whose outlines may be rooted in Guadalupe-Malintzin, see Juan Bruce-Novoa, "One More Rosary for Doña Marina," *Confluencia* 1, no. 22 (Spring 1986): 73–84. In the eighties some Chicana visual artists have begun experimenting with the image of Guadalupe. Ester Hernández, for example, depicts the Virgin executing a karate kick. Santa Barraza depicts a newly unearthed Coatlicue (Mesoamerican fertility goddess) pushing Guadalupe upward and overpowering her. The contrastive images tell the story of the difference between them—the one small, the other huge. See reproductions of these works in *Third Woman* 4 (1989): 42, 153, respectively. Yolanda M. López has portrayed "Guadalupe Walking" in high-heel sandals. The reproduction that *Fem* 8, no. 34 (Júnio-Júlio 1984) carried on its cover provoked a large number of hate mail, accusing the editors of being "Zionists." According to Hernández's personal communication, the exhibit of her Guadalupe ink drawing caused a minor scandal in a small California town. She had to leave the exhibit to avoid violent attack. Community leaders had to schedule workshops to discuss the work and the artist's rights. Modern revisions of Guadalupe are fraught with difficulty and may well be the reason why Chicana writers have bypassed her. She still retains a large, devoted following.
In discussing woman's role in traditional cultures, anthropologist Sherry Ortner has stated,

Insofar as woman is universally the primary agent of early socialization and is seen as virtually the embodiment of the functions of the domestic group, she will tend to come under the heavier restrictions and circumscriptions surrounding the unit. Her (culturally defined) intermediate position between nature and culture, here having the significance of her mediation (i.e. performing conversion functions) between nature and culture, would account not only for her lower status but for the greater restrictions placed upon her activities. . . . Socially engendered conservatism and traditionalism of woman's thinking is another—perhaps the worst, certainly the most insidious—mode of social restriction, and would clearly be related to her traditional function of producing well-socialized members of the group.  

The woman who fulfills this expectation is more akin to the feminine figure of transcendence, that is, Guadalupe. In a binary, Manichaean society, which a religious society is almost by definition, the one who does not fulfill this expectation is viewed as subversive or evil and is vilified through epithets the community understands. If one agrees with Adrienne Rich, not to speak of others since Coleridge, that the imagination's power is potentially subversive, then, for many Chicanas, "to be a female human being trying to fulfill traditional female functions in a traditional way [is] in direct conflict" 31 with their creativity and inventiveness, as well as with their desire to transform their cultural roles and redefine themselves in accordance with their experience and vision. If literature's intention is, in some sense, the recovery or projection of human experience, as the Mexican writers discussed also suggest, then linguistic representation of it could well imply a "betrayal" of tradition, of family, of what is ethically viewed as "pure and authentic," since it involves a conversion into inter-

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pretive language rather than ritualized repetition. It is not surprising, then, that some of the most talented writers and intellectuals of contemporary Chicana culture should be fascinated with the figure most perceived as the transgressor of a previous culture believed to be “authentic.” It is through a revision of tradition that self and culture can be radically reenvisioned and reinvented. Thus, in order to break with tradition, Chicanas, as writers and political activists, simultaneously legitimate their discourse by grounding it in the Mexican/Chicano community and by creating a “speaking subject” in their reappropriation of Malintzin from Mexican writers and Chicano oral tradition—through her they begin a recovery of aspects of their experience as well as of their language. In this way, the traditional view of femininity invested in Guadalupe is avoided and indirectly denied and reinvested in a less intractable object. Guadalupe’s political history represents a community’s expectations and utopic desires through divine mediation. Malintzin, however, as a secularly established “speaking subject,” unconstrained by religious beliefs, lends herself more readily to articulation and representation, both as subject and object. In a sense, Malintzin must be led to represent herself, to become the subject of representation, and the closest she can come to this is by sympathizing with latter-day speaking female subjects. Language, as Mikhail Bakhtin has noted,

becomes “one’s own” only when the speaker populates it with her own intention, her own accent, when she appropriates the word, adapting it to her own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets her words!), but rather it exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s contexts, serving other people’s intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one’s own. . . . Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and

easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated—over populated with the intentions of others. Expropriating, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process.33

Expropriating Malintzin from the texts of others and filling her with the intentions, significances, and desires of Chicanas has taken years. Mexican men had already effected the operation for their own ends; it was now women's turn. (Though in this essay I only deal with the efforts of Chicanas, some Mexican women writers such as Juana Alegría and Rosario Castellanos have also worked with this figure and have contested male representations.)

One of the first to feel the blow of the masculine denigration of Malintzin was Adelaida R. del Castillo. It was a blow that she apparently felt personally on behalf of all Chicanas, thus provoking her to say that the denigration of Malintzin was tantamount to a defamation of "the character of the Mexican/Chicana female."34 For Chicanas, as del Castillo implies, Malintzin was more than a metaphor or foundation/neomyth as Paz would have it; she represented a specific female experience that was being misrepresented and trivialized. By extension, Chicanas/ Mexicanas were implicated: del Castillo's attempt to appropriate Malintzin for herself and Chicanas in general involved her in vindication and revision. It is not only Malintzin's appropriation and revision that is at stake, but Chicanas' own cultural self-exploration, self-definition, and self-invention through and beyond the community's sociosymbolic system and contract. The process, however, is complicated by Chicanas' awareness that underlying their words there is also a second (if not secondary) sociosymbolic order—the Anglo-American. She leaves herself open to the accusation of "anglicizing" the community, just as Malinche


“hispanicized” it, because her attempts at self-invention are “inappropriate” to her culture and her efforts are viewed as alien to the tradition. In other words, changes wreak havoc with the perceived “authenticity.” Each writer, as we shall see, privileges a different aspect of Malintzin’s “lives”—that is, the alleged historical experience and/or the inherited imaginary or ideological one.

Adaljiza Sosa Riddell, in “Chicanas in El Movimiento,” an essay written in the heat of the Chicano movement of the early seventies, views Malintzin as a cultural paradigm of the situation of contemporary Chicanas. She thinks that the relationship of Chicanas to Chicanos in the United States has paralleled Malintzin’s relationship to the indigenous people in the light of the Spanish conquest. Riddell concludes that Chicanas, like Malintzin before, them have been doubly victimized—by dominant Anglo society and by Mexicano/Chicano communities. In turn, these factors account for some Chicanas’ ambiguous and ambivalent position in the face of an unexamined nationalism. Riddell’s passionate attempt at revision and appropriation is both a plea for understanding some women’s “mediating” position and an apology—an apologia full of irony, for it is the victim’s apologia!

Victimization in the context of colonization and of patriarchal suppression of women is a view shared by Carmen Tafolla in her poem “La Malinche.” Tafolla’s Malintzin claims that she has been misnamed and misjudged by men who had ulterior motives. In Tafolla’s poem Malintzin goes on to assert that she submitted to the Spaniard Cortés because she envisioned a new race; she wanted to be the founder of a people. There are echoes of Paz and Fuentes in Tafolla’s view, yet she differs by making Malintzin a woman possessed of clear-sighted intentionality, thus avoiding attributions of vengeance.

As Tafolla transforms Malintzin into the founder of a new race through visionary poetry, Adelaida R. del Castillo effects a similar result through a biography which is reconstructed with the few “facts” left us by the chroniclers. In her essay del Castillo

claims that Malintzin “embodies effective, decisive action. . . . Her actions syncretized two conflicting worlds causing the emergence of a new one, our own. . . . [W]oman acts not as a goddess in some mythology”37 but as a producer of history. She goes on to say that Malintzin should be “perceived as a woman who was able to act beyond her prescribed societal function (i.e., servant and concubine) and perform as one who was willing to make great sacrifices for what she believed to be a philanthropic conviction.”38 Del Castillo wants to avoid the mythmaking trap by evading “poetic language” and by appealing to “historical facts.” In a sense, unlike the male Mexican writers reviewed, she privileges history as a more truthful account than literature. (This may spell the difference between del Castillo’s Anglo-American education and experience and that of Mexican nationals for whom history often is reconstructed anew with each new regime, thereby encouraging a cynical attitude. Perspectives on the disciplines of history and literature differ according to our location, experience, and education.) However, notwithstanding her famed translating abilities, Malintzin has left us no recorded voice because she was illiterate; that is, she could not leave us a sense of herself and of her experience. Thus our disquisitions truly take place over her corpse and have no clue as to her own words, but instead refer to the words of the chroniclers who themselves were not free of self-interest, motive, and intention. Thus, all interpreters of her figure are prey to subjectivized mythmaking once they begin to attribute motives, qualities, and desires to her regardless of the fact that they have recourse to historical motifs regarding her role, a role seen through the eyes of Cortés, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, Tlaxcaltecas, and many others present at the time. For Adelaida R. del Castillo, then, Malintzin should be viewed as a woman who made a variety of choices (sic) due to a “philanthropic conviction,” that is, her conviction that Cortés was Quetzalcóatl and, subsequently, that Christ was the true Quetzalcóatl, or that the true Quetzalcóatl was Christ—hence Malintzin’s role in converting the indigenous population and her “sense of deliverance when she recognized that the Spaniards resembled Quetzalcóatl.”39 In other words, Mal-

37. del Castillo, “Malintzin Tenepal,” 125.
38. Ibid., 126.
39. Ibid., 130.
intzin initially fell victim to a mistaken identity but subsequently recognized Quetzalcoatl in Christ and displaced her devotion onto Cortés, onto Christ, and, subsequently, onto the child who would represent the new race. I think there is as much a revision of Paz and Fuentes as of history (i.e., the chroniclers) in del Castillo's interpretation, as well as a repudiation of Paz's views of woman's passive sexuality. In short, as del Castillo revises a "mythology" (as she names it in opposition to history) with which she feels implicated, she appears to be reading two texts at once, the purported "original" one (the chroniclers) and the "mythology of the original" (Paz and Fuentes). These texts are separated by almost five centuries; however, del Castillo wants to appropriate Malintzin for herself, as one whose face reflects her vision—Malintzin as agent, choice-maker, and producer of history. Actually, the whole notion of choice, an existentialist notion of twentieth-century Anglo-European philosophy, needs to be problematized in order to understand the constraints under which women of other cultures, times, and places live. In trying to make Malintzin a motivated "producer of history," del Castillo is not so much reconstructing Malintzin's own historical moment as she is using her both to counter contemporary masculine discourse and to project a newer sense of a female self, a speaking subject with a thoroughly modern view of historical consciousness.

A similar strategy is used by Cordelia Candelaria in the essay "La Malinche, Feminist Prototype." For Candelaria, Malintzin is the feminist prototype because she "defied traditional social expectations of woman's role." Candelaria enumerates a variety of roles that she enacted: "liaison, guide to region, advisor on native customs, and beliefs, and strategist . . . [T]he least significant role was that of mistress." Though the roles described by the chroniclers may fit within such a description, the verb "defied" does not. It is difficult to know to what extent it was possible to defy either native or Spanish cultures since both adhered to the trinitarian worldview of Authority, Religion, and Tradition. The defiance Candelaria speaks of is rooted in contemporary existen-

41. Ibid., 6.
42. Ibid., 3.
tialist philosophy, which has been as yet an unfinished revolt against the former worldview. In revising the image of Malintzin, Candelaria privileges a self capable of making choices and of intellectual acumen over a self-manifesting sexuality and polyglotism, thus avoiding in effect the two most significant charges against her. Since sexuality, especially as ascribed to the maternal, and language are such powerful aspects of culture, it is in my opinion inadvisable to avoid them; they must be kept in view by the newer sense of a self who challenges traditions.

It is as a redeeming Mother/Goddess that Sylvia Gonzáles awaits Malintzin’s return in her poem “Chicana Evolution.” In this poem Gonzáles views the self as a “Chicana/Daughter of Malinche.” Gonzáles claims to await Malinche’s return so that she may deny her traitorous guilt, cleanse her flesh, and “sacrifice herself” in “redemption of all her forsaken daughters”—the New World’s Demeter, perhaps, who shall rescue all Chicana Persephones. Whereas Fuentes will have Malintzin redeem the latter-day sons/Quetzalcóatl, Gonzáles will have her redeem the daughters. This redemptory return will empower Gonzáles’s creativity, who admires those women who have stripped themselves of passivity with their “pens.” At present, however, she feels overwhelmed by her definitions—“a creation of actions/as well as words.” For Gonzáles, writing itself is empowering, yet she postpones the daughters’ actual enablement, as if the appropriation of language were still to take place. As a result, her revision is gloomy—we still await. Our deliverance is viewed in apocalyptic terms, but Malinche has been substituted for Guadalupe.

The intertextual debate between women and men raises the following question implicitly: does Malintzin belong to the sons or the daughters? Each answers for him- or herself, narrowing the
quarrel to a struggle for the possession of the neomaternal figure. Malintzin's procreative role is privileged in one way or another by most of these writers. Who shall speak for her, represent her? Is she now the procreator of the new founding order? Who will define that order?

In the face of patriarchal tradition, Malintzin as Mother-Goddess/Muse/Whore is viewed by some as the daughters' own redemptress. In the recently published three-part poem called *La Chingada*, Alma Villanueva envisions Malintzin as the displaced and desecrated prepatriarchal goddess who has returned to redeem and empower her daughters and to transform the sons. Villanueva states in a short preface to the poem: “This poem is a furious response centuries later to masculine culture, that is, a patriarchal destructive power that threatens all existence...”; the destructiveness emanates from “a strange, disembodied, masculine God” through whom men first “discredited, the first raped woman, when the feminine was forced to abdicate its sacred power.”49 In the previsionary section, Villanueva suggests that the Mexican/Chicana Malintzin, also known as *La Chingada*, is a recent reenactment and parody of the more ancient routing of the Goddess, one of whose names was Demeter.

Within the poem itself, the goddess Malintzin/Demeter calls upon the sons to transform themselves into “loving men capable of reinventing love.” That feat can only be achieved by evoking the “girlchild inside” of them, by healing all the nameless wild animals that they killed and watched die due to some masculine quest or ritual.50 In Part II, titled “The Dead,” in opposition to Part I which was titled “The Living,” the Goddess, who is now conflated with *La Llorona/Mater Dolorosa*,51 mourns her dead

50. Ibid., 153.
daughter. The daughters were prepared for their defeat through socialization. The malediction "Hijos de La Chingada" is reserved for the sons, who in profound irony have been birthed to kill the mourned daughters. Subsequently, the Goddess calls upon the daughters to give birth to themselves, to renew their being. Both sons and daughters are forbidden to look back to old religious models and are urged to recreate themselves with her help. She is willing to sacrifice herself so that "You are born, at last, unto/yourself!"52 In her representation of Malintzin, Villanueva tries to fulfill Adrienne Rich's view of the daughter's desire for a mother "whose love and whose power were so great as to undo rape and bring her back from death."53

Villanueva's interpretation of Malintzin draws on elements from Paz who, along with Rich in Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution,54 is one of the epigrammatic voices preceding the poem. She also borrows elements from Fuentes; however, she replaces his view of a vengeful Malintzin with a redeeming one, who will not be still until she is recognized as patriarchy's suppressed woman, the one upon whose body Western civilization has been built—hence, the call for erasing religious models which hold daughters and sons back from newer senses of self. In her feminist revision Villanueva differs from Paz and Fuentes in that she does not "plead" for acceptance of Malintzin as Goddess/Raped Mother. On the contrary, Malintzin speaks on her own behalf and is enraged over her suppression, desecration, and rape, all of which have disenabled the female line. A crime has been committed against the Mother/Goddess, and she demands retribution and justice. Villanueva addresses directly the sexual and linguistic aspects of Malintzin's so-called betrayal, precisely what Candelaria avoids in her representation. In reading Vil-

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53. Ibid., 142.
lanueva's poem, one is made aware of the powerful charge effected when the speaking subject appropriates language and expresses her rage at the suppression of maternal self-representation.

Lucha Corpi refers to Malintzin by her Spanish name, Marina. This factor is significant because Corpi inscribes Marina into biblical discourses rather than pre-patriarchal ones. Thus, it follows that she should be called Marina as the Spaniards baptized her. For Corpi, Marina is a parody and reenactment of Eve and Mary, a woman who has sacrificed herself for the latter-day daughter and who, because of her experience, presages a renewing and enabling cycle. In four poems, or one poem consisting of four parts, which are in turn titled “Marina Mother,” “Marina Virgin,” “The Devil’s Daughter,” and “She (Distant Marina),” Corpi revises the story of Marina/Malintzin. Marta Sánchez, in Contemporary Chicana Poetry: A Critical Approach to an Emerging Literature, views Corpi’s cycle of poems accurately, I think, when she observes that “Corpi’s cultural paradigm leaves readers no alternative but to accept a passive Marina who can do nothing about her situation.” “Marina Madre” is perceived as victim of her own feminine condition. That is, insofar as women are women and mothers, they are incommensurably vulnerable. Using images that allude to the Old and New testaments, Corpi imagines a Marina made of the “softest clay” by the Patriarchs (“los viejos”): in biblical inscription and creation as either Eve (“her name written on the patriarchal tree”) or as Mary (“the fruit of her womb stolen”) and, nearer to us in time, the Marina abandoned and vilified by father, husband, and son. The latter three may be seen as an allusion to the male triad in one God—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—as the Catholic tradition holds. By planting her soul in the earth, Corpi’s latter-day Marina reinscribes herself and awaits her own renewal. The “she” in the fourth poem—“She (Distant Marina)—is that contemporary daughter who is imag-

56. Sánchez, Contemporary Chicana Poetry, 190.
ined as a "mourning shadow of an ancestral figure" crossing a bridge leading to a new time and space, a reconstructed self. The passive, victimized Marina of the first two poems is left behind. Marta Sánchez has also suggested that the bridge is the boundary crossed "between Mexico and the United States." Both Corpi's reinscription and Sánchez's interpretation of it continue to emphasize the mediating function assigned to Marina, though from a Chicano point of view in which the Spaniards, harbingers of a different existence, are now replaced by Anglo-Americans. It is important to reiterate the value placed by many Chicanas on a primary identification with the indigenous people or recuperations of that identity and the rejection of a Spanish one, despite the use of the language. However, these rhetorical strategies are now often undertaken to underscore our differences from Anglo-Americans.

For González, Villanueva, and Corpi the forced disappearance of the Mother/Goddess leads to the daughter's own abjction. The daughter is doomed to repeat the cycle until the ancient powers of the goddess are restored. Of the three, however, Villanueva is the only one who, in appropriating Malintzin, makes her a speaking subject on her own behalf and in behalf of the daughters in a truly powerful way. González and Corpi objectify her and leave us with a promise of vindication.

Cherríe Moraga also explores the significations of Malintzin in her recent book *Loving in the War Years: lo que nunca pasó por sus labios*. Moraga feels, on the one hand, a need to recover the race of the biographical mother so that she may recover her ethnossexual identity and, on the other, a need to appropriate her political and literary voice. Simultaneously, however, a search for the identity of, and relation between, self and mother also requires an exploration of the myth of Malintzin who is our "sexual legacy."

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57. Ibid., 194.
58. Cherríe Moraga, *Loving in the War Years*.
59. For a complementary essay on the way Chicana writers have reconstructed the relationship between self and mothers in order to redefine their feminine/feminist identity, see Norma Alarcón, "What Kind of Lover Have You Made Me, Mother?," in *Women of Color: Perspectives on Feminism and Identity*, ed. Audrey T. McCluskey (Bloomington, In.: Women's Studies Monograph Series, no. 1, 1985), 85–110.
That legacy is inscribed in cruel epithets such as “La Chingada,” “La Vendida,” “Traitor.” These epithets are in turn used on women to stigmatize, to limit the quest for autonomy, and to limit “The Chicana imagination . . . before it has a chance to consider some of the most difficult questions.” Moraga points to the double bind of the Chicana who defies tradition; she is viewed either as a traitor to her race or a lesbian. As such, not only is the lesbian in the Chicano imagination una Malinchista, but vice versa. Feminism, which questions patriarchal tradition by representing women’s subjectivity and/or interjecting it into extant discursive modes, thereby revising them, may be equated with malinchismo or lesbianism. Even as she recognizes the double bind, Moraga proceeds to identify herself as a lesbian who, as such, represents the “most visible manifestation of a woman taking control of her own sexual identity and destiny, who severely challenges the anti-feminist Chicano/a.” Moraga thinks that if she were not a lesbian she would still be viewed as one by a culture that does not understand the pursuit of a sexual identity beyond heterosexism. In a sense, for Moraga, lesbianism in our culture is the ultimate trope for the pursuit of newer gender identities, for anything that smacks of difference in the face of traditional gender values. Rather than try to revise the myths of Malintzin, Moraga accepts them and labels them male myths whose purpose is to exercise social control over women. To escape the double bind, Moraga has no choice but to declare that, indeed, she comes “from a long line of vendidas.” One could, however, opt for Lorna D. Cervantes’s sarcastic view of the usual male perception of Malintzin’s figure by stating ambiguously, as does the title of her poem, “Baby, you cramp my style.” Baby is, of course, a double allusion—to him who would impose his notions on her

61. Ibid., 112.
62. Ibid., 113.
64. Moraga, Loving in the War Years, 117.
and to Malinche, whose historical existence and subsequent interpretations are a burden. Moraga and Cervantes, in a sense, become the heroines of their own individualized vision and revision, for it is through their appropriations that we proceed beyond Malinche. However, have they truly integrated the “treacherous” Malintzin whose ascribed attributes are the source of contention—the speaking subject and procreator? Cervantes’s sarcasm is a dismissal of the subject in favor of her own future self-creation. On the other hand, if one follows Moraga’s reasoning and takes it one step further, then one would have to say that the ultimate trope for the pursuit of new gender identities is not so much lesbianism as it is the speaking subject who is also a lesbian mother, or perhaps one who articulates and visualizes herself and procreation beyond heterosexism. If newer racial and gendered identities are to be forged, the insight arrived at in writing needs to be communicated to millions of women who still live under such metaphoric controls. How are they to be persuaded to accept these insights if they still exist under the ideology “Guadalupe-Malintzin”?

If for the Mexican male writers the originating rape is of paramount importance because it places in question their legitimacy as sons, Chicanas—with the exception of Villanueva, who accepts Paz’s view—do not even mention rape in connection with Malintzin. Paz, as far as I can discern, was the first writer to advance forcefully the metonymic relations between three terms—Malintzin, La Chingada, and rape. Though pillage and rape are almost by definition factors of conquest and colonization, there is no trace of evidence that Malintzin suffered the violent fate of other indigenous women, strictly speaking—though her disappearance from the record is troublesome and puzzling. One may even argue that she performed as she did to avoid rape and violence upon her body, to “choose” negatively between lesser evils. Clearly, in patriarchal and patrilineal societies—which these were—sons stand to lose a great deal more if they are the illegitimate offspring of rapes. Daughters, like their mothers, would still have to struggle to protect themselves from rapists. “Legitimacy” under these circumstances at best grants a female protection from rape; it does not make a woman her father’s heir nor even give her a sure claim to her offspring. For the men, the so-called rape
is largely figurative, a sign of their "emasculating" loss; for the women, it is literal. There is irony in Paz's insistence that Malintzin should also serve as the figure for "our" rape since it may well be that she saved herself from such a fate through diligent service. There are no choices for slaves, only options between lesser evils.

Because Malintzin's neosymbolic existence in the masculine imagination has affected the actual experience of so many Mexicanas and Chicanas, it became necessary for "her daughters" to revise her scanty biography. Through revisions, many undertaken in isolation, contemporary Chicana writers have helped to lay bare Malintzin's double etymology which until recently appeared illusory and hallucinative: one privileges the sociosymbolic possibilities for signification; the second, the existential and historical implications. Some of the writers discussed have actually, as speaking subjects, reemphasized the patriarchal view of the maternal/feminine as mediator, even though they wish to represent her themselves. Others have transformed her into the neomyth of the goddess. Still others have foregrounded qualities such as "choice-maker," "history producer," and "self-aware" speaking subject, all of which are part of modern and contemporary experience and desire. In a sense, they sidestep the image of Malintzin as raped mother and part of the feminine condition. Except for Villanueva, who follows Paz in this respect, no one has explored the full impact—imaginary or not—that such an image may have for us. It emphasizes that our beginnings, which took place barely half a millennium ago, are drenched in violence, not simply symbolic but historically coinciding with European expansionist adventures. It implies that the object of that violence was/has been feminine (or feminized) and that it barely begins to be recovered as subject or even object of our history. Since the European expansionists of the time were Christians, it implies that indeed the ancient putative suppression of the goddess was reenacted; the missionaries did not have a problem assimilating Quetzalcóatl into their discourse but suppressed Tonantzin. However, since Chicanas have begun the appropriation of history, sexuality, and language for themselves, they find themselves situated at the cutting edge of a new historical moment involving a radical though fragile change in consciousness. It is an era in which we live in
simultaneous time zones from the pre-Colombian to the ultra-modern, from the cyclical to the linear. The latter is certainly a theme in the work of Carlos Fuentes, Rosario Castellanos, Octavio Paz, and other contemporary Mexican writers. However, I think that the objectified thematics have now passed onto a more consciously claimed subjectivity in the work of Chicanas such as Gloria Anzaldúa's Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza. Moreover, such subjectivity is capable of shedding light upon Chicanas' present historical situation without necessarily, in this newer key, falling prey to a mediating role but, rather, catching stunning insights into our complex culture by taking hold of the variegated imaginative and historical discourses that have informed the constructions of race, gender, and ethnicities in the last five hundred years and that still vibrate in our time. Issues of "class" and "color" (i.e., race and ethnicity) per se have not entered the appropriation because, I think, the historical person and textual figure of Malintzin (indigenous female slave in her own society as well as in the one taking shape under the Spaniards) implicitly subsume those as part of her condition—hence the possibility of her suppression as feminine/maternal speaking subject. It could very well signify that anyone completely deprived of voice within the Anglo-European and Spanish imperialist projects has by definition been an impoverished and/or enslaved woman of color. Here, then, is a powerful reason why the notion of the "literature of women of color" in the United States is one of the most novel ideas to have arisen in the Anglo-European imperialist context. Such a notion is yet to be part of Mexican or Latin American criticism; we have yet to see how women there begin to resolve their struggle for self-representation. Mexican writers Elena Poniatowska and Rosario Castellanos have many a heroine who is a woman of color. Consciously or unconsciously they have tried, as upper-class Mexican writers, to understand the complexity of the relationship between a woman of color (or native one) and Anglo-European patriarchal history and thought. It is in the vibrations of that distance between them that the appropriation of the many transformations of a woman of color lies.

In a more recent appropriation of Malintzin, Tzvetan Todorov appears to agree with some of the Chicanas discussed, which is an interesting phenomenon since for each the work of the other was unavailable at the time of writing. The agreement appears coincidental for those of us who have been forced for historical, political, and economic reasons to become perennial migrants in search of “home.” For Todorov, Malintzin is the first example, and thereby the symbol, of the cross-breeding of cultures; she thereby heralds the modern state of Mexico and beyond that, the present state of us all, since if we are not invariably bilingual, we are inevitably bi- or tri-cultural. La Malinche glorifies mixture to the detriment of purity . . . and the role of the intermediary. She does not simply submit to the other . . . ; she adopts the other’s ideology and serves it in order to understand her own culture better, as is evidenced by the effectiveness of her conduct (even if “understanding” here means “destroying”).

The reconstruction of ourselves as women or as exiles from “home” due to subjugations is fraught with paradox, contradiction, and unlikely partners, such as Mexican male writers and Todorov. Though Todorov does not mention the role of gender and sexuality in his interpretation, he also readily finds a point of identification for himself.

As historical subject Malintzin remains shrouded in preternatural silence, and as object she continues to be on trial for speaking and bearing the enemy’s children and continues to be a constant source of revision and appropriation—indeed, for articulating our modern and postmodern condition. The “discovery” and colonization of what is presently called the Third World could just as well be said to have started when the Spaniards conquered Mexico as at any other moment—and also at a time when a significant portion of Europe was about to inaugurate the modern epoch, that is, the Reformation, Copernicus, Galileo, Cartesian philosophy, etc. Thus the quarrel over the interpretation of Malintzin serves not only as a heuristic device for the

assumption of feminism in a traditionalist and essentialist setting where men refuse to let women speak for themselves, or women feel constrained from speaking, but also as the measurement of discursive maneuvers in the effort to secularize or appropriate thought for oneself. It is noteworthy that these have to be undertaken under the auspices of a woman—the one who did not remain the “internalized other” of the European’s other. And what about the women who remain the “internalized others,” that is, the ones who submit or are “offerings” to the colonizers? What can we make of such gifts? Do they become like the Mayan woman in the epigram, a woman in the service of violence against herself?

Much of the Chicana feminist work of the seventies, like Anglo-American feminist work, was launched around the assumption of a unified subject organized oppositionally to men from a perspective of gender differences. The assumption that the subject is autonomous, self-determining, and self-defining often has been a critical space shared by many feminists because it opens up vistas of agency for the subject. Often that critical space has generated the notion, especially among Anglo-Americans, that women’s oppression can be described universally from the perspective of gender differences, as if boundaries of race, ethnicities, and class had not existed. The fact that Todorov also shares that critical space makes it possible for him to project onto La Malinche observations similar to those of some Chicanas, ironically even more similar than those of Mexican men. The Mexican men do not forget that she is an Indian and a woman, thus making it possible for them to understand the “betrayal” on the grounds that she would not want to remain “in the service of violence against herself.” However, to the extent that we know it, the story of La Malinche demonstrates that crossing ethnic and racial boundaries does not necessarily free her from “violence against herself”; moreover, once her usefulness is over she is silenced and disappears from the record, precisely because she is an Indian and a woman. She crosses over to a site where there is no “legitimated” place for her in the conqueror’s new order. Crossings over by “choice” or by force become sporadic individual arrangements that do not necessarily change the status of Indian women or women of color, for example. The realization that the “invitation” to cross over, when it is extended, does not ameliorate
the lot of women of color in general has led, in the eighties, to a feminist literature by Chicanas and women of color which demonstrates that, despite some shared critical perspectives, boundaries exist and continue to exist, thus accounting for differential experiences that cannot be contained under the sign of a universal woman or women. Yet for Mexicans, Guadalupe is a symbol that continues to exist for the purpose of "universalizing" and containing women’s lives within a discrete cultural banner that may be similar to those of other cultures. On the other hand, the diverse twentieth-century interpretations of La Malinche rupture the stranglehold of religion by introducing the notion of historical, sexual, and linguistic agency, though not necessarily available to La Malinche herself at the beginning of the Mexican colonial period.

Postmodern feminist theories have arisen to supplant gender standpoint epistemology and to diffuse explanatory binarisms. However, the critical question arises: do they free women of color from the "service of violence against themselves," or do they only rationalize it well? For those of us who simultaneously assume a critical position and a kinship with "native women" and women of color, the "philosophical bases of political criticism" and cognitive practices are as important as the deployment of critical theories: do they also function to help to keep women from doing service against themselves—if not, why not?