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My/Mi Lengua Franca: Language Manipulation and Cultural Heritage in Chicana Art and Literature

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**MY/MI LENGUA FRANCA: “LANGUAGE,” MANIPULATION AND
CULTURAL HERITAGE IN CHICANA ART AND LITERATURE**

BY

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DISSERTATION

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DEDICATION

Para mis padres, Esther Reyes Ramos Avilés y José Severo Avilés Saavedra Martínez. Gracias por su amor, esfuerzo e infinito apoyo. Que este estudio agrade sus deseos de conservar nuestra cultura. Gracias a todas las mujeres cuyo sentido de herencia me ha dado la fuerza para seguir avanzando—especialmente a mi abuela Elena y Trinidad, y mis tías Ramona, Ana y Margarita.

¡Adelante!, mamá, sí ¡adelante! . . .

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ABSTRACT

Chicana feminist literary and artistic cultural production since the second half of the twentieth century is characterized with a critical sensibility commissioning the arts to actively interrogate how cultural mores misconstrue female identity. By questioning the “miss”-representation of cultural myths and images, Chicanas expose the patriarchal language and hegemonic discourse that code and sign cultural icons. Chicana feminist interrogations of traditional representations of La Malinche illustrate how signs are a construction, and thus, indefinite and plastic, like language. By combining various methodologies such as semiotics, visual analysis, cultural and feminist studies, this study underscores the significance of the development of feminist critical, poetic and visual language to Chicana revisionist representations of the figure of La Malinche.

The theme of language use in Chicana reinterpretations of La Malinche offers an innovative conceptualization to the advancement of Chicana language practices as a strategy to critically examine the gendered and cultural aesthetics of identity. This dissertation examines how Chicanas manipulate heritage through a “thick description” of the interpretation of culture in the signification of “language” (La Malinche) and in their own language use in order to alter interpretations of Chicana identity. The analysis of Chicana feminist representations of La Malinche is a study of how women traverse the borderlands of literary and artistic practices to gain visibility and voice.

I evaluate the interrelationships between Chicana critics, artists and writers, drawing from art historians and literary critics to show how literature and art empowered women to work toward a metalinguistic awareness of self. The relationships and intersections between the textual and visual representation on La Malinche demonstrate an often-unrecognized dialectical relationship among writers and artists and literary critics and art historians. Ongoing representations of La Malinche reflect the continuance of innovative, original and imaginative forms of speaking about Chicana identity that reveals the dialogic and heteroglot nature of Chicana voices, as Chicana *placas*, a concept I call the development of a Chicana *lengua franca*.

Key Words: Chicana, Art, Literature, Representation, Language, La Malinche, Placas

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A NOTE TO THE READER

To understand the Chicano experience is to reckon with a linguistic pluralism that exists in names and in naming. I have respected how artists and writers elect to write their name in English or Spanish (accented or not). In the case where writers and artists have themselves vacillated in their own use of Spanish accents, I wrote names according to their latest name practice or what is most frequently reproduced. I also have respected the spelling of titles in the work of artists and writers to honor their own linguistic expression.

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Introduction

The Mexican American civil rights movement not only was political and social but also artistic.¹ Commencing in the 1960s and 1970s, the Chicano movement was a political and social struggle for Mexican American civil rights (Griswold del Castillo et al 1991).² Similar to other national and international social struggles,³ the Chicano movement initiated a period that encouraged the development of a new political consciousness of justice and equality for Mexican Americans and Chicanos living in the United States. It became a moment in history where, for the first time, previously silenced and invisible minoritized populations publicly voiced their social discontent toward historical oppression and discrimination. Through such efforts, Mexican Americans affirmed a new sense of cultural, social, historical and political reality that came to be known as the Chicano experience.

Mexican Americans coming of age in the mid-twentieth century developed a new consciousness that positioned them to challenge the hegemony of thought attributed to the

¹ The reference to the Mexican American civil rights movement, or a more common term, the Chicano movement, includes both women and men. Because of the diversity of labels that exists in the use of identity labels for Chicano and Mexican American peoples and their experiences, the use Chicana or Chicano to refer to people will be used if it is after the Chicano movement, unless otherwise noted. Terms such as Hispanic, Spanish, America, or Mexican will be used according to the history and situation. For example, it was common to use Hispanic or Mexican American before the Chicano movement, respect for individual use of labels will be maintained.

² In *Chicano Art Resistance and Affirmation*, 1965-1985 the Chicano civil rights movement is defined as: "A social, cultural and political movement begun by social activists from within the Mexican American community in order to assert and regain the civil rights of that community. Also known as La Causa. Although the movement had several phases, by the late 1970s, large-scale public protests had stopped. Thus, in the 1990s the movement no longer has the high visibility it once had, even though it continues to inspire Chicano and Mexican American individuals and groups to speak out against unjust situations at all levels of US society" (362).

³ In United States history, the 1960s and 70s large-scale protests responded to the Vietnam War and other complex interrelated cultural and social events driving the struggle for civil rights. Within the United States, the African America civil rights movement, American Indian civil rights movement, Feminist movement and Gay and Lesbian civil rights movement, to name a few, reflect those complex social renegotiations starting in the 1960s and continuing to the 1970s. International events such as Africa's fight for independence and decolonization, the rise of third world movement struggles, and specifically the civil rights movement in Mexico as a result of the 1968 student massacre at Tlatelolco, are some of the political trends across the globe that inspired Chicano liberation.

negative portrayal of themselves as subaltern and minoritized peoples. Chicanos questioned the reasons for the subjugation of their traditions and roots or of the need to sacrifice them. Ideal notions of citizenship and belonging to a nation also were scrutinized because despite the fact that the United States was home, they often were treated as foreign elements. Those aware of their rights as Mexican Americans became interested in elucidating the complex factors that shaped their current realities as U.S. citizens of Mexican descent. Furthermore, many believed their lives reflected the true image of U.S citizenship by reason of their long historical roots to U.S. soil and a cultural background that mirrored the historical reality of multiculturalism in U.S. society too often suppressed by U.S. imperialist projects.

The Chicano movement set the stage for the advent of new modes of thought about all aspects of Mexican American identity. Explorations of the state of Mexican Americans fostered novel conceptualizations of subjectivity that remapped Mexican American identity. An unstudied topic central to the success of the Chicano movement is the interaction and collaboration between artists and writers that made these new perspectives possible but which also set the foundations for the emergence of Chicano consciousness. The desire to rethink one's identity created a new synergy between artists and authors who mutually were inspired to provide textual and visual snapshots of a new generation's world vision. Through their works, artists and authors responded to a new politically determined call to action centered on the celebration and exaltation of what it meant to be Mexican American. Works of art and literature helped to crystalize new modes of thinking about the self as Mexican Americans that made cultural production a creative, cultural, and political act.

Life in East Los Angeles taught me much about the complexity of Chicana/o cultural heritage. While I grew-up seeing Chicano murals, listened to Chicano music, participated in

the grape boycotts of the early 1980s, and protested Proposition 187 in the 1990s, it was not until my doctoral studies that those latent memories of my childhood and adolescent years emerged in my consciousness and made a connection with my understanding of self in the present. I came to appreciate how public legacies of oral, visual, and literary representation formed my individual and collective worldview. Moreover, I was curious to understand the way the literary and visual arts express a language of empowerment through the reformation and ratification of cultural symbols.

The cultural expressions of East Los Angeles taught me how the Chicana/o imagination is guided by visual and oral traditions and how people use coded symbols to shape their understanding of traditions in the present. The 1975 mural by David Botello, *Read between the Lines* profoundly typifies this idea. Botello's work exemplifies how public art has the potential to function as an intellectual tool to communicate issues relevant to the



Figure 1 David Botello *Read between the Lines* (1975)

community. Walking by this mural every day of my elementary school days, I stared at the mural absorbing consciously and unconsciously the ideologies of Chicano public and home life. Botello's piece focused on the domestic state of Chicano peoples within the context of home life. It depicted intimate life in a very public way. From my kindergarten classroom the mural framed my daily sense of urban life. The graphic representation tapped into my collective unconscious and taught my developing psyche to 'read between the lines.'

This mural, like additional artistic representation in my community, planted in me a curiosity for understanding how the folk, visual, and language arts transmit messages about personalized visions of Chicana/o identity. It was not until decades later that I came to understand how Botello's image taught me about Chicana/o art's ability to serve as a form of political and social activism, and the role of public art to assist in the expression of alternative perspectives of the Chicana/o experience. I became interested in researching creative expression as forms of non-verbal/verbal intellectual transactions at the intersection of public and private life.

Empowered by the spirit of Quetzalcoatl the young boy discovers as he reads about Mexican history in Botello's mural, my recollection of this celebration and critique of Chicano/a domestic life inspired me to explore the relations between artists, writers and critics and how they use words and images as texts to transmit ideas about Chicano/a identity. This led me to ask: What were the processes from which creativity enabled women to reclaim their past? How did Chicanas participate in the transmission of identity in relation to domestic and public spaces? How did women develop powerful icons to construct new notions of Chicana identity in public spaces from private understandings of self? How did women encode cultural texts and images? Why did they code their images differently? Did this mean women had a different language than men? Why did women find empowerment in the image and folk tale of La Malinche?

This dissertation project perhaps reflects the succession of that initial influence of *Reading between the Lines*, and serves simultaneously as my contemporary response to that kindergartner fascination with the relationship between the image and text of Botello's mural. Because I also wanted to see images of girls empowered by knowledge, by memories and

spirits of the past, I too learned to read between the lines of Botello's own mural and became interested in the examination of gender roles in the historical, social context and aesthetic perspective of Chicana feminist understanding of cultural models.

When I first began this project, my intent was to examine Chicana cultural production from gendered and feminist approaches to demonstrate the existence of Chicana styles of 'reading between the lines.' I set on a quest to study how Chicanas achieved new visions of self through renewed interpretations of cultural icons. As I studied Chicana feminist representations of female cultural archetypes such as La Llorona, Sor Juana and La Malinche, the study of the figure of La Malinche drew me to think more about the complex negotiation of Chicana identity at the interstices of signification, meaning making, and interpretation.

Because of La Malinche's contested significance in Chicana/o cultural production, I explored how Chicana feminist perspectives revised the sign-system related to the figure of La Malinche. This led me to ask: How did Chicana feminists utilize the literary and visual arts to generate new action through meaning making that assisted them to respond to the conditions and role of women in social movements? How were revisionist narratives about La Malinche reflective of the Chicana desire to manifest a political action by creating new systems of interpretation that connected a Chicana sense of cultural memory and a feminist imaginary to the languages and knowledge of home and of public life?

As I thought about what it meant for women to have a voice, my study focused on the complex ways women used their own linguistic landscapes as they simultaneously expanded their vocabularies to tag feminist visions of what female icons meant across public and private spheres. As they too read in between the lines of history, myths, legends and lore about cultural archetypes, it dawned on me that Chicana feminists contested the language of

patriarchy structuring the legacies of Chicana and Chicano culture by deconstructing the languages used to think about, perceive, and represent women. As women struggled to introduce alternative readings of female archetypes, the multiple fronts Chicana feminists took to deconstruct the dominant language wrapped around representations of La Malinche showed how Chicanas reclaimed La Malinche as a powerful sign that envisaged new understanding of female identity.

As women labored to debunk negative interpretations of female figures in public venues and in private spaces (by contesting the way female cultural archetypes were interpreted), I came to appreciate how feminists examined the variables of past and contemporary coloniality influencing the way we understand gender and minoritized identity. This study examines the written and visual expressions of La Malinche by Chicana feminist writers, artists, and activists through an interdisciplinary lens to analyze how women utilize their cultural heritage to negotiate new understandings on issues of language, gender, and identity through a decolonization of tongue.

This study draws from interdisciplinary methods used in postmodernism, feminism, subaltern studies, and semiotics to analyze how women patterned their own codes of knowledge as they reclaimed cultural icons associated with language. As I focused on how Chicana feminists used the languages of home and domesticity to generate positive representations of speaking women, I analyzed representations of the figure of La Malinche as a heteroglot sign to elucidate how Chicanas were able to flip the switch on the meaning and interpretation of La Malinche. In this process they generated new codices of empowerment that brought authority to the ways women use language to frame and describe their world.

In tracing the development of Chicana expression on La Malinche I came to understand how women reclaimed a right to a public and visible voice within Chicano communities by empowering themselves through feminine and feminist languages of home and domesticity that drew strength from the ways a legacy of domestic reform on La Malinche gave women the linguistic power to influence the current state of U.S. domestic affairs across private and public sectors. The main thematic of this project traces the making of La Malinche into a positive image through the thick descriptions of feminist approaches to the analysis of this multimodal figure. A gendered approach that privileges Chicana feminist ways of seeing illustrates how changes to modes of thought about domestic life allowed women to have honest conversations about what actually occurs in domestic circles and how women see themselves and their gendered cultural icons in private contexts. As a representation of language and tongue, Chicanas too became interested in articulating images of La Malinche in public settings as a way to discuss issues of representation, subjectivity, and voice for women in society.

La Malinche became a way to signal the importance of making oneself visible, breaking silences and having a voice. As women learned about the historical figure, her representation offered women a way to envisage female empowerment from the standpoint of language and tongue. Critics of the early Chicana feminist movement focused on breaking the cycle of female stereotyping by exposing how language was programmed and encoded with meaning that led to the negative stereotyping of women as seen in Elvira Saragoza's essay, "La mujer in the Chicano Movement" which first appearing in *Bronce Magazine* (1969). Meanwhile, Enriqueta Longeaux Vázquez's essay "¡Despierten Hermanas!" in the 1969 publication of *El Grito del Norte* exposed how colonialism stripped "the Indian

woman's freedom" (García, *Chicana* 110). She urged Chicanas, as modern-day Indian women, to break the silences of the conditions that oppressed them. In "Macho Attitudes," (1971) Nancy Nieto voiced the ironic contradictions Chicanas encountered during the development of multiple civil rights movements in the United States with a critique of sexism and the patriarchal assumptions that privilege male interpretations of the movement.

Speaking out was a major feat for women. Because of the strong tradition of silence imposed on women, women often felt as if their tongues had been cut off, while in other cases, the violence exerted on women who spoke out reminded women about the imperative need to define a new politics of language. Access to education fueled feminist critics to understand the history of their oppression with the goal of gaining the tools to alter reality. The 1974 publication of "Malintzin Tenepal: A Preliminary Look into a New Perspective" by Adelaila R. Del Castillo is a case in point. Published in *Encuentro Femenil*, Del Castillo's work developed dynamic strategies to address oppression by retracing the history of La Malinche to show how male-ascribed ideological constructions unjustly represented depictions of native women. Two years after Del Castillo's essay, the publication of *Diosa y hembra: The History and Heritage of Chicanas in the U.S.* by Martha Cotera exemplified the intertextual advent of Chicana feminist creativity and criticism. As one of the first authors to present the roots of a feminist interpretation of Chicana history, Cotera made known the contributions and involvement of women shaping Chicana heritage.

In Cotera's text we observe one of the important themes shaping the scholarship of the late 1970s: the articulation of a desire to break stereotypes in the interpretation of *Chicana* by manipulating language to incorporate new feminist values used to code female images as archetypes. One of the most important works coming out of this period of early

feminist activism in visual culture is the film *LA CHICANA* (1979) by Silvia Morales. This film was instrumental in showing the links between word and image and how early activists used language to create a new word and image of La Malinche in visual culture. The filmmaker offered a visual critique of the colonized subjectivity ascribed to women as outlined in *La Chicana: The Mexican American Woman* (1979).

Whether explorations of mythical, folkloric, mystical, spiritual, or personal, the writings during the 1980s demonstrated the ways women created new extensions about identity labels and cultural markers that spoke to their sense of self. Noting how “Over the years La Malinche has been the subject of biographical, fictional, and symbolic interpretation written in many different languages,” Cordelia Chávez Candelaria’s essay “*La Malinche, Feminist Prototype*” (1980) demonstrated the transfer of La Malinche as a historical/cultural figure into a cultural symbol of Chicana/o popular culture (1). Alarcón’s essay “Chicana’s Feminist Literature: A Re-vision Through Malintzin/or Malintzin: Putting the Flesh Back on the Object,” to quote Anzaldúa, “plants the seed which germinates a feminist criticism involving the history, mythology, and writing of La Chicana. Adding to the growing body of literature by Chicana feminists, this article confronted the drama behind La Malinche’s tale “now being played out also in Aztlán” (182). To add, her 1982 *Feminist Studies* publication, “We’ve Never Been Women, We’ve Never Been Nobodies,” illustrated how Chicanas spoke about their native and brown bodies as a way to reclaim their bodies that paralleled the contributions of the publication *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981).

The interest to show La Malinche’s polyglot persona aided Chicanas to explore voice as a site of political praxis. Emerging Chicana voices of the 1980s demystified cultural narratives and images as seen in *Beyond Stereotypes: The Critical Analysis of Chicana*

Literature (1985). The 1982 conference on Chicana literature and its corresponding 1985 publication *Beyond Stereotypes* illustrated the evolution of literary criticism on La Malinche. The body of essays reflected not only “the clever manipulation of language” but also how women turned to creativity to deal with the “cultural clashes and conflicts [of what Chicano] heritage entails” (13, 14).⁴ This publication underscored the importance of La Malinche in Chicana letters as did the publications: *Chicana Voices* (1986), *Chicana (W)riters on Word and Film* (1995) and *Creativity and Criticism* (1996).

Parallel to the strides in literature and artistic expression, criticism of the late 1980s and early 1990s expressed a Chicana dialogism and intimate awareness of scholarship between Chicana critics focused on the recovery and rewriting of history through the examination of self as a hybrid subject. Norma Alarcón provided a similar approach to intellectualizing the paradigms of the male establishment’s effects on female representation through a postmodern feminist critique. In “Traduttora, Tradittora: A Paradigmatic Figure of Chicana Feminism,” (1989) she reformulated what the image of La Malinche represented for Chicana feminists stating, “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” (64). She used a historical approach to identify how Chicanas have created heroines from their cultural traditions.

⁴ For instance, a noteworthy essay in this collection of criticism is Tey Diana Rebolledo’s “Walking and Thin Line: Humor in Chicana Literature.” She made known how Chicanas used language and linguistic strategies to talk about pressing issues through humor and irony. In addition, she noted how writers play with language in order to discuss harsh realities and taboo subjects. Perhaps one of the most important ideas coming out of *Beyond Stereotypes* is “how the image of Malinche as betrayer of her people to the Spaniards and Hernán Cortés is one that the Chicana struggles against, since if she is too assimilated into American culture she is considered a sellout (and, as stated before, feminism, is one way of selling out)” (101). The writers of this anthology affirmed the need to cross language borders to produce a new reality for the contemporary study of Chicanas in society.

The interpretation of La Malinche as a Chicana cultural archetype invigorated a cross-disciplinary relation between artists, writers and critics. The early 1990's is marked with a critical dialogism between women that channeled new perspectives of the representation of La Malinche whereby Chicanas used the figure of La Malinche to synthesize inter subjectivity through a metalinguistic awareness of self. The publication of *Soldaderas in the Mexican Military: Myth and History* by Elizabeth Salas (1990) interrelated La Malinche as a *soldadera*. The recoding of cultural images, such as the view of La Malinche as a *soldadera*, illustrated the creation of other systems coming out of feminist criticism and creativity. In fact, the promotion of a "specialized language" by women of color in *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminist of Color* (1990) showed the strength developing in the critical expression associated with La Malinche (xxiii). For example, Rebolledo's essay "The Politics of Poetics: Or, What Am I, a Critic Doing in This Text Anyhow?" lobbied for the importance of texts to 'speak for themselves,' and upheld the specific ways Chicanas construct a critical and theoretical voice. Similarly, *Between Borders: Essays on Mexicana/Chicana History* (1990) demonstrated how women rewrote the history of women from new conceptual frameworks and approaches for the study of Chicanas. The publication of *La Chicana and the Intersection of Race, Class, and Gender* (1992) used New Historicism scholarship "to outline the academic examination and social reality of La Chicana and to update the social sciences on the intersection of race (or ethnicity), class and gender," through an "analysis of the use of language and labels" (Blea xi).

Edited by Tey Diana Rebolledo and Eliana S. Rivero, *Infinite Divisions: An Anthology of Chicana Literature* (1993) synthesized how Chicanas interpreted La Malinche

as a “cultural foremother.” They underscored the breadth of Chicana creativity and writing, and featured the power of female poetic language to traverse multiple borders of identity and lived experience. This paralleled the work of Chicana historians such as Antonia Castañeda, Vicki Ruiz, Deena J. González and Emma Pérez, who re-historicize La Malinche. Similarly, the publication “Yo Soy La Malinche”: Chicana Writers and the Poetics of Ethnonationalism,” (1993) by Mary L. Pratt, Sandra Messinger Cypess’ *La Malinche in Mexican Literature: From History to Myth* (1991), and Alarcón’s “Anzaldúa’s Fronteras: Inscribing Gynetics” in *Displacement, Diasporas and Geographies of Identity* (1993) explored the impact of La Malinche’s figure in relation to nation-building discourse and history.

Chicana scholars focused on understanding the operatives connecting Chicanas and La Malinche because women who expressed their political views were labeled and referred to as *malinchistas* or *vendidas*. In particular, lesbians reclaimed and redefined the Chicana movement by speaking about their experiences being labeled *malinchistas*. Edited by two Chicana feminists, Cherrie Moraga, and Gloria Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back, Radical Writings by Women of Color* (1981), synthesized a feminist cultural aesthetics that used language to transform Chicana history and challenged social and literary mores by using La Malinche’s symbol as a Chicana *placa* to interpret what having a ‘native’ language means for Chicanas. In adopting the label *malinches* they created new personal cultural spaces through dialectical engagements. Like Malinche, they put into words what they were dealing with in their own quest for social and political equality. The publication of *Borderlands: The New Mestiza/La Frontera* (1987) by Gloria Anzaldúa best captures this complexity.⁵

⁵ The radical empowerment of lesbianism helped Chicanas to end separatist relations toward lesbians as their work critically explored the pitfalls of self-oppression and advised against contributing to such system. They also addressed the intersections of power between oppressors/oppressed in the context of creating equality and breaking the barriers of race, class, gender, sex and sexuality. Due to the popularity of the term *malinchista* and

The critical inquiry of *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls our Mothers Warned Us About* (1991) edited by Carla Trujillo and *The Sexuality of Latinas* (1993) edited by Alarcón, Ana Castillo and Moraga, marked additional contributions of queer Chicana feminists assimilating the history and representation of La Malinche into their identity formation and cultural production expression. The lesbian desire to explain how they too related to La Malinche assisted women to work toward an understanding of queer subaltern subjectivity by examining cultural representation in postnational, postmodern and decolonial contexts. Cross-discipline collaborations fostered a multidiscipline and multifaceted networking among lesbian critics, writers and artists identifying as *hijas* de La Malinche.

Contextualizing La Malinche as the linguistic recourse to shape new spaces and places of Chicana identity, Emma Pérez showed how La Malinche's and La Chicana's tongue is a "*sitio y lengua*" in "Sexuality and Discourse: Notes from a Chicana Survivor" Aida Hurtado's borrowing of Pérez's visions about La Malinche and her connection to Chicana identity in the 1998 publication of, "Sitios y Lenguas: Chicanas Theorize Feminism" illustrated how Pérez established a new mode of theorizing Chicana feminism from the analysis of cultural icons.⁶

its use within the Chicano movement to discredit women-focused struggles within the fight for liberation criticism analyzed the history, representation, and interpretation of the image of La Malinche as a historical figure turned cultural icon to demonstrate how cultural understandings, mores, attitudes, and discourse were adapted into the rhetoric of the Chicano movement.

⁶ Similarly, Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano's essay, "De-constructing the Lesbian Body: Cherrie Moraga's Loving in the War Years" demonstrated the importance of critical work to make visible what has always been invisible. Yarbro-Bejarano analyzed how Moraga's writing showed an embattlement in the public eye and in the field of representation (143). She promoted a new method of understanding Moraga's use and function of tongue to her lesbian expression by commenting, "She delights in her tongue and its multiple possibilities, linguistic, sexual and visionary: 'the power of communication through speech...to give tongue...to speak in tongues'" (147-48). According to Yarbro-Bejarano, Moraga also expressed how the tongue as an organ connected to the head is characteristic of a "mestiza physiognomy" which she read as signifying the "bridge" among women of color (148). In Carla Trujillo's, "Chicana Lesbians: Fearing and Loathing in the Chicano Community" additional queer analysis revealed the roots of homophobia in Chicano/a culture and how male-visions of the world lead

The close cultural encounters Chicanas manifested through speech and writing on La Malinche continued to be a focus of literary criticism through the late 1990s and 2000s. Rebolledo illuminated the interdisciplinary connections between Chicana feminists' works and the dialogue that emerged from the struggle with language in the publication of *Women Singing in the Snow* (1995) and *The Chronicles of Panchita Villa and Other Guerrilleras Essays on Chicana/Latina Literature and Criticism* (2005). The growth of critical Chicana feminist perspective such as Alarcón's "Chicana Feminism: In the Tracks of "The" Native Woman" published in *Living Chicana Theory* (1998) affirmed how Chicanas continued to inscribe a new language politics about Chicana subjectivity. Acting as cultural mediators and translators, critical works that analyzed the writing practices of Chicanas showed a changing consciousness at the intersections between language and subjectivity that by the turn of the century unveiled the legacy of understanding La Malinche as *la lengua*. While there are too many publications to name here, some twenty-first century examples of this continued dialogue in criticism about La Malinche is seen in the publications of *Feminism on the Border: Chicana Gender Politics and Literature* (2000), *Chicana Traditions: Continuity and Change* (2002), and *Chicana Feminisms: A Critical Reader* (2003).

Although writings about La Malinche in art criticism does not compare to those of literary criticism, women in Chicana art theory and criticism also broke ground in their visual analysis of representations of La Malinche. Critical works representing the significance of La Malinche as a cultural sign also reflected the development of Chicana home language practices, what Rebolledo in literature and Holly Barnet-Sanchez in art have defined as the creation of a "Chicana critical discourse from within" (Rebolledo, "The Politics of Poetics,"

women to compete and betray each other (188). She critiqued how *machista* attitudes denigrated and pinned Chicana against another (denunciations voiced by early feminist in the 1970s).

354; Barnet-Sanchez “Tomás Ybarra-Frausto” 91). The contributions of Amalia Mesa-Bains, Alicia Gaspar de Alba, Tere Romo, Holly Barnet-Sanchez and Laura E. Pérez, to name a few, show how Chicana art criticism on La Malinche is still in development. Amalia Mesa-Bains is among one of the early Chicana art critics to carve a space for Chicanas in art by explaining the significance of female cultural icons. The critic’s greatest contribution to date has been her explanation of Chicana *domesticana*.

In *Chicano Art Inside/Outside the Master’s House: Cultural Politics and the CARA Exhibition* (1998), Gaspar de Alba contributes a lesbian interpretation that deconstructs *malinchismo* in visual and popular culture. Tere Romo’s essay “Malinche as a Metaphor,” (2005) signaled a feminist desire to understand why La Malinche, like the Chicana, represented *malas lenguas* if, in the domestic space of the home, La Malinche was at times regarded as a positive and powerful female image. Laura E. Pérez’s text, *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities* (2007), explores La Malinche to shed light on how the indigenous and spiritual aspects of La Malinche expressed across visual production illustrates how she signals Chicana spiritualism. Building from a long legacy of critical writing about La Malinche since the start of the Chicano movement, critical works such as *Blood Lines: Myth, Indigenism and Chicana/o Literature* (2008) by Sheila Marie Contreras, *Chicana Sexuality and Gender: Cultural Refiguring in Literature, Oral History and Art* by Debra J. Blake (2008), and *Transforming Borders: Chicana/o Popular Culture and Pedagogy* (2011) by C. Alejandra Elenes speaks to the importance of La Malinche today.

Because of the ebbs and flows of how La Malinche is consistently represented and amplified among Chicana feminist imaginaries, this study traces how feminist cultural producers—artists, writers or scholars—create subjectivity for themselves by designing radical

and positive interpretations of La Malinche. Clifford Geertz's ethnographic writings on the importance of analyzing culture through "thick description" acknowledge that the interpretation of culture is a powerful and public meaning making process. This provides a method to understand the multiple meanings of representation on La Malinche. A thick description approach offers a way to read La Malinche that bridges the gap between semiotics, cultural interpretations and language use in Chicana creativity, which I analyze through a metalinguistic framework. Such interdisciplinary approach demonstrates how La Malinche is a text that reflects Chicana scholarship and practices related to the reclamation and revitalization of women's tongues and languages—modes of expressions that not only authenticate the domestic voices of Chicanas in the United States but also the visions women have of themselves in domestic spaces. Because in "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," Geertz views culture in semiotic terms, this study demonstrates how Chicana feminists' use of the figure of La Malinche to articulate the arrival of a Chicana consciousness makes clear how women are active participants in the creation of culturally specific meanings of women. Thus, Chicana feminist 'texts' on La Malinche—a semiotic position in relation to what is a text reminds us that texts can be visual as much as they can be written, spoken or performed—show how women manipulated old perspectives on La Malinche to reframe her as a text, a sign of linguistic empowerment as much as a role model of voice and authority that reciprocated the contemporary acts of Chicana feminists crossing domestic/public lines and traversing domestic borderlands of their linguistic landscape.

This dissertation is organized into an introduction, chapters and a conclusion. The chapters of this study are a storytelling of two interwoven processes. The first line of

storytelling concentrates on what it means for women to be empowered by art and literature. Then it traces the complex interwoven relations between Chicana feminist—the interactions and dialogues between artists and writers on one hand, and on the other hand, that of scholarly work. Art historians, cultural and literary critics, historians, and theorists and intellectuals fostered additional lines that entwined the Chicana visual and textual language of Chicana cultural production. Parallel to the way Tey Diana Rebolledo “found that interesting dialogues emerged among the texts,” when she organized *Infinite Divisions* thematically, and noted that “the perspectives on mothers or on La Malinche seemed to talk to one another,” in the initial stages of writing, I noticed a dialogic relationship emerge among Chicana artists, scholars and authors as I too concentrated my research on La Malinche. She empowered women to speak by showing women their strength as women and in their roles of mothers, daughters, and sisters (xx).

The introduction to this study offers a narrative account of Chicana/o history that contextualized the historical conditions and positions that fostered the development of Chicana/o politics. Out of this era of civil rights struggle, emerges the story of the development of Chicana feminisms, the focus of chapter one. Chapter one traces the development of Chicana feminism from the 1960s and 1970s during the civil rights era until the turn of the twenty-first century. This story of breaking undesired stereotypes about women in both in-group and dominant social contexts placed Chicana feminisms at the vanguard of subaltern language practices. The reclamation of female archetypal figures initiated a change that helped to define the dominant society and cultural conceptualization of female ethnic bodies that emerged since the sixteenth century at the time of colonization and conquest of the Americans. The change in the representation and image of the figure of La

Malinche in Chicana feminist circles shows the struggle subaltern women of color undertook to make a negative image into a positive image. Decoding La Malinche required a true revolution of the mind and the will to use creativity as the ultimate political act to undo colonialist and imperialist social order that contributed to the continued oppression of minority, ethnic, and disenfranchised women across history.

Chapter two traces Chicana acts in decoding language to redesign the image and representation of the figure of La Malinche. However, how Chicanas cooperated across interdisciplinary fields to interpret La Malinche from a new linguistic matrix tells the story of the relationship between a feminist use of language to convert and change cultural heritage and the empowerment women find in cultural celebration. For feminists to doctor a new language of self that continues to pay homage to heritage in positive and healing forms speaks to the development of a particular kind of feminist kinship, and to the strength and success of Chicana feminism. A focus on language shows how women manifested cultural heritage by manipulating the negative representations of La Malinche (the symbol and representation of language and tongue) into a Chicana symbol that nurtured progressive female relations and love of self. Whether they painted scenes with language or devised new visual landscapes with words, to trace the story of Chicana feminisms is to examine how women utilized their cultural heritage to negotiate new understandings on issues of language, gender and identity by fostering a decolonial tongue.

Chapter three outlines how Chicanas altered the idea of space through renegotiations of the tongue. Building from Amalia Mesa-Bains' concept of Chicana *domesticana*, this chapter traces how the development of altered domestic spheres generated a particular type of Chicana glossing that gave women the agency to use their tongues to produce decolonial

translations of their experiences of women. Extending Geertz's idea of "thick description," this study argues that Chicana articulations, as seen in visual and written language, show the scope of what interpreting culture means for Chicanas. This chapter provides a framework from which to analyze the metalinguistic characteristics of Chicana cultural expression shifting through time through the concept of Chicana *placas*.

Chapter four analyzes the narrative strategies Chicana authors used to retell the story of La Malinche. From Margarita Cota-Cárdenas' Chicana argots, to Alicia Gaspar de Alba's border vernacular, to Erlinda Gonzales-Berry's code switching, this chapter analyzes the written language of Chicana texts about the discourse of La Malinche to demonstrate how Chicanas invoked the image of La Malinche to discuss gender issues and female subjectivity by deconstructing taboo languages and voices. These writers reveal how they possess an awareness of the metalanguage design of their cultural heritage that empowers them to traverse the structures of languages in order to allow for their voices to emerge. Thus, through their own sensibility of language use, their texts transform into signs that express the flux of identity. The assertion of an identity imbued with multiple and complex meanings that makes us think about the power of language, as La Malinche's actions did, exhibits Chicana *placas*.

Chapter five examines the visual articulation of La Malinche in the art of Pola López Jaramillo and Delilah Montoya. Because images are also texts that sign meaning, the transformation of La Malinche into a figure of Chicana empowerment in the works of Montoya and López expand traditional senses of what La Malinche signifies. Representations of La Malinche in Chicana feminist cultural production show a history of women nurturing the weight of La Malinche symbol as *la lengua* to speak about the right language and tongue.

Chapter six examines the art of Viviana (Viva) Paredes⁷ and Maya Christina Gonzalez on La Malinche and how they frame *la lengua* in new visual contexts demonstrating that visual culture is a vibrant language. In these artist's representations of La Malinche as a 'speaking glyph' intertextual references to *la lengua*'s role as a speaking subject in historical codices shows the ways women continue to reclaim heritage. While chapter five reveals the visual expression of La Malinche as a cultural image of female strength that begins to incorporate Chicana *placas* to channel decolonial messages of Chicana identity, chapter six shows the evolution of portraying La Malinche as a 'speaking glyph,' and the use of the glyph as a *placa* that references the idea of women as speaking subjects. The expression of La Malinche as a 'speaking glyph' illustrates the integration of Chicana *placas* into art.

The conclusion outlines how as women engaged in the creative expression of what La Malinche meant, women revealed a metalinguistic awareness of culture and heritage in relation to self and customs that shows the advent of Chicana *placas*. The consistent desire by women to reclaim images, symbols and icons by reworking the link between women and language rooted in hybridity shows the commitment by Chicanas to create new identities reflective of the visions of each beholder. In tracing the development of representations of La Malinche across time this study also shows how women amplified what La Malinche means by manipulating what *la lengua* signifies for Chicanas.⁸ What also surfaces is the development of Chicana linguistic practices centered on the celebration of feminist and feminine knowledge. In the manipulation of patriarchal language, this study demonstrates

⁷ Paredes often goes by the name Viva.

⁸ As a translator and interpreter for Hernán Cortés, La Malinche also known as *la lengua*, a Spanish word that means both language and tongue.

how Chicana revisions to the tale of La Malinche reflect language practices that have led to the development of a Chicana *lingua franca*.

Chapter 1: La Chicana and La Malinche in the Chicano movement

In the initial years of the Chicano movement, Chicanos sought new cultural experiences and situations to end civil rights violations of ethnic and racial minorities in the United States. Often understudied in the history of the Chicano movement is how artists and writers represented and impacted the movement through their work. In many instances, the arts had a social and political role: to define the conceptual frameworks that ensued as the Chicano movement gained momentum. Creative expressions concretized the politics of the movement as the arts illuminated visions of Chicana/o experiences previously unseen and unarticulated.

In dually prescient ways, artists and writers helped bring the visions of the movement to life. The practice of creative production became a form of agency. The arts became a tool of activism and empowerment welcomed by artists and writers who saw literary and art production as a way to exercise political activism. Because one manifests one's sense of values through language practices, the language Chicanos used to represent their reality was fundamental in understanding the development of a creative imagination that built consciousness. Therefore, the specific language choices of artists and writers showcased a new beginning as well as a new spirit in the creation of Chicano culture.

While social and political at heart, the written and artistic articulations that came to be known as the Chicano cultural renaissance (also included here, is a Chicana rebirth) attest to the centrality the arts played in making the Chicano movement a vibrant period of revolutionary artistic and literary genesis. In point of fact, this period of creative symbiotic artistry marked a watershed in the history of Chicanos that came to be known as *El Movimiento*—a Chicano renaissance. Through verbal utterances and non-verbal expression,

Chicanos reframed language into new dimensions that allowed them to speak about culture from new imaginaries.

To postulate the Chicano movement as the actual journey of locating and naming a multilexical voice is to acknowledge how Chicanas/os recognized that their heritage was an all too familiar sentiment and exertion of what now is documented as *el grito* (to cry or yell). By tapping into their own grammar, and revaluing the vocabularies that powered their culture across centuries, Chicanas/os acknowledged the power of language. Finding a homeland in language transformed language production into a site of building knowledge such as in the development of *Chicanismo*. Through literal and symbolic *gritos*, Chicanas/os communicated a call to action centered on celebrating the many ways to say things and convey ideas, whether it was through educated forms of speech, the oral traditions learned at home or from family, friends, and community members. As Chicanas/os validated their hybrid tongues visual and written modes of communication celebrated the varying levels of multilingualism and metalanguages that empowered a new form of activism in the celebration of cultural nationalism, self-determination and self-affirmation.

Female artists and writers also responded to the call-to-action fervor of the Chicano movement. While women initially provided full support for *la causa*, women quickly recognized the Chicano movement was becoming simply that, the Chicanoo movement. Fighting for their vision of liberty and civil rights, pioneer Chicana feminists of the 1960s and 1970s struggled to shape and expand the meaning of *Chicanismo* and *Chicano* to be inclusive of female and feminist interpretations. Early feminist voices critiqued *Chicanismo* as a political project for the freedom of men but not inclusive of women's liberation as equal, or as urgent, to that of men. Women too wanted to envisage what cultural nationalism, self-

determination, and cultural affirmation movement meant through *Chicanisma* and *Chicana* interpretive visions.

As women rediscovered and represented their own history and culture, “Chicana artists began to write and produce works in which Chicanas were given a proper name, voice, and image. Soon, *Chicanisma*, a sense of sisterhood and feminist discourse, emerged to confront the triple oppression of race, class, and gender,” stated Jennifer W. Dean. in the 2007 publication of *Latina Filmmakers and Writers: The Notion of Chicanisma Through Films and Novellas*. Her work demonstrated how feminism and Chicano politics provided the context for women to work toward a Chicana feminist critical perspective. As women dedicated themselves to offer new ethnographic accounts on the intersection between ethnicity and gender, for example in reading history and culture through women of color perspectives, new ethnographic accounts emerged that challenged and contested the limitations placed on women through *Chicanismo*.⁹ As a result of the new ways women were transforming culture, traditionalist were threatened by what they perceived as sabotage to movement’s goals. Women perceived as jeopardizing the movement were considered traitors and labeled as *malinches*.

In the struggle to understand why men defined female activism as suspicious, a particular interest in the presence and use of the term *malinche* or *malinchista* emerged. The label *malinche* or *malinchista* became a point of query for women for its particular application to denigrate women. If they displayed women-centered forms of activism, Chicanas asked, why certain actions were seen with such cultural disdain that they merited

⁹ Dean also states, “During the Chicano Movement in the 1960s and 1970s, Chicanas helped Chicanos achieve equal rights, while at the same time suffered oppression as women within their own race. In the 1970s, the Chicana Feminist Movement was founded to address the specific needs of Chicanas as women of color in the United States” (n.pag.).

the name *malinche*. What was it about the system of signification of the label *malinche* or *malinchista* that had so much power and weight that it was deliberately employed to culturally mark difference? Why was the concept of *malinche* or *malinchista* used as conceptual borderlands to delineate the impermissible behavior or the limits of Chicana/o culture?

From a historical viewpoint, the forms of questioning that sparked men and women to rethink what *Chicano* meant served as an inspiration for Chicanas feminists to wonder what was meant by the term *malinche* or *malinchista*. Out of their own emerging conceptual definitions of *Chicana*, women strove to comprehend the relations between defining themselves as Chicana feminists and the image of La Malinche. This chapter explores the emergence of Chicana feminisms in association with the image of La Malinche, the interest taken by women in the reinterpretation of La Malinche as *la lengua*, and its connection to the budding of Chicana tongues.

La Malinche (A Case of Manipulation)

Historically speaking, La Malinche was an indigenous woman who served as an interpreter to Hernán Cortés during the discovery of the Americas. She also was known as Malinali, her indigenous birth name, and Doña Marina, the name she adopted after converting to Catholicism. Seldom emphasized in the life of La Malinche was that the Tlaxcaltecan people gift her to Cortés as a slave after her mother faked her death to bequeath power over inheritances and the right to govern to her younger stepbrother.

La Malinche's role in the conquest of the Aztec empire was significant. She appeared in oral and narrative accounts during the period of discovery and exploration and thereafter. Because we seldom see women who make it onto the pages of world history, the sheer

presence of La Malinche defined her importance. At the same time, the little that was said about her makes her into an enigmatic figure. What we do know about La Malinche, however, is confounded by representations of men, which implicated her role from their point of view and graphic domain: how they wrote, spoke, and illustrated her unexpected presence in matters dealing with conquest showed operatives of male visions that speak to gender attitudes and cultural norms of their time.

While Cortés recognized La Malinche's presence in the discovery of the Americas, it took the writings of fellow Spanish conquistador Bernal Díaz del Castillo and others present in the unraveling of events known today as the conquest of the Aztec empire to clarify the level of activism and role she played in the transactions of the conquest of Mexico. In *La segunda carta de relación*, one of five letters sent to King Ferdinand of Spain, Cortés made La Malinche a modicum of historical presence. In fact, he downplayed her role in the conquest. Twice he mentioned her in his canonical epistolary. Historian Nancy Fitch observed, "In the first case, he simply refers to her as his translator, "an Indian woman." In the second case, he called her Marina without the Doña normally used by Spanish men when discussing honorable, upper-class women (Fitch 1). The conquistador wrote that she was of use as a translator but did not elaborate on the duties she executed during the conquest.

Because it was commonplace to not credit the contributions of native cultures to the success of conquistadors in the Americas, or to recognize the influence of indigenous people to recount how the conquistadors singlehandedly managed to conquer and colonize numerous civilizations, the historical remnants of La Malinche added a layer of marvel to her figure. We know more about La Malinche through the written accounts of Cortés' foot soldier. Díaz del Castillo's work was written in 1576 but not published until 1632.

Completed near the end of his life, *La historia verdadera de la conquista de Nueva España* claimed to present an honest and unbiased account of the conquest by the Spanish crown over the Aztec empire. In contrast to Cortés, who produced an immediate written account, Díaz del Castillo's work reviewed the truth of history in its aftermath. In this work, Díaz del Castillo credited La Malinche's work in the conquest of Tenochtitlan. In fact, chapter 16 titled, "Capítulo XVI. Cómo Doña Marina era cacica e hija de grandes señores de pueblos y vasallos, y de la manera que la dicha Doña Marina fue traída a Tabasco,"¹⁰ documented the significance of La Malinche's figure in pre-Columbian culture and in diplomatic relations amidst the encounter of two worlds:

Antes que más meta la mano en lo del gran Montezuma y su gran México y mexicanos, quiero decir lo de doña Marina. Cómo desde su niñez fue gran señora y cacica de pueblos y vasallos; y es de esta manera: Que su padre y madre eran señores y caciques de un pueblo que se dice Painala, y tenía otros pueblos sujetos a él [. . .] dieron de noche a niña doña Marina [. . .] y echaron fama que se había muerto. [. . .] y como doña Marina en todas las guerras de la Nueva España y Tlaxcala y México fue tan excelente mujer y buena lengua, como adelante diré, a esta causa la traía tan siempre Cortés consigo.¹¹ (74-75)

¹⁰ "Chapter XVI: How Doña Marina was a woman chief and daughter of great lords of towns and vassals, and the way in which the fortunated Doña Marina was brought to Tabasco" (My translation).

¹¹ Before telling about the great Montezuma and his famous City of Mexico and the Mexicans, I wish to give some account of Doña Marina, who from her childhood had been the mistress and Cacica of towns and vassals. It happened in this way:

Her father and mother were chiefs and Caciques of a town called Paynala, which had other towns subject to it [. . .] they gave the little girl, Doña Marina [. . .] and then they spread the report that she had died. As Doña Marina proved herself such an excellent woman and good interpreter throughout the wars in New Spain, Tlascala and Mexico (as I shall show later on) Cortés always took her with him [. . .] (Bernal Díaz and Génaro Padilla 116-117)

The fact that Cortés seldom was unaccompanied by La Malinche is ironic because Cortés reduced La Malinche to an almost insignificant detail in his letter to the king relating how he conquered the Aztec civilization. The fact that Díaz del Castillo makes reference to La Malinche as *doña*, a name of respect and social standing and simultaneously as *la lengua*, documented the agency Malinche exerted as a result of her linguistic range as communicator between the conquistadors and indigenous peoples.

Díaz del Castillo's account illustrated the importance of her function as translator and because of this, her name as *la lengua*, 'the tongue' is known. In the following three statements La Malinche is represented as the literal embodiment of language and symbolically as the tongue: "Y Cortés respondió con sus dos lenguas Aguilar y doña Marina [. . .]; Y luego Cortés con la lengua doña Marina le dijo [. . .] ; and Moctezuma vio a nuestros capitanes como enojados, preguntó a doña Marina que qué decían con aquellas palabras altas y como doña Marina era muy entendida, le dijo [. . .]" (Díaz del Castillo 76, 151, 182).¹²

This parallels the visual records of La Malinche sketched in the early colonial period of New Spain. The sixteenth century *Florentine Codex* (1590) by Bernardino de Sahagún recorded textual as well as visual indigenous traditions, with the specific interpretation and perception of the figure of La Malinche.¹³ Because the codex is a hybrid historical document—it is text and image, as well as multilexical—the characterization of La Malinche as *la lengua* takes on oral, visual and textual dimensions. And like Díaz del Castillo's depiction, a standing and speaking La Malinche came to symbolize *la lengua*—the representation of

¹² "Our Cortés thanked them through the two interpreters, Aguilar and Doña Marina [. . .] ; Cortés replied through Doña Marina [. . .] ; and "Moctezuma noted the angry captains, asked Doña Marina what they were saying with those elevated words and Doña Marina who understood, responded [. . .]" (Bernal Díaz and Génaro Padilla 118, 224, 273).

¹³ See León-Portilla.

tongue and language. These recurring descriptions of La Malinche demonstrated that she was an important graphic symbol. Sahagún's works authenticated La Malinche symbolically in textual and artistic fields. To add, from a semiotics perspective, the textual and visual representation of her figure as symbol of language and tongue, which continued after her life, inscribed a memory that indeed converted her into a powerful emblematic figure of a speaking subject.

Since the seventeenth century, literal and visual representations have manipulated the symbolic representation of La Malinche to perpetuate dominant perspectives aligned with colonialist perspectives. Dominant views did not recognize her role as translator and mediator or to her facility for languages. On the contrary, La Malinche often was blamed for the fall of the Aztec empire. With the rise of colonial power in Mexico portrayals of La Malinche as a sexualized indigenous woman that Cortés conquered with his Spanish charm circulated that demonstrated the colonial projects intent in romanticizing, and thus, justifying colonization. As a public image defining the cultural heritage of *mestizo* people, and as a historical, cultural, and mythical figure, she was represented as the Eve of the Americas. Over time, in official discourse she was viewed as an Eve, the female sellout, who used her language skills to aid and abet the *conquistador*.

Chicanas, who had long been told this version of the myth of La Malinche, challenged perceptions about La Malinche in both Mexican and Chicano cultural heritage with the advent of new forms of knowledge that the feminist and Chicano movement afforded. They argued that the dominant view on La Malinche was not established by nature; instead it reflected hemispheric examples of wild misinterpretations about women during the colonial period that led to equivocal understandings of her role in contemporary history. To

curb widespread misinformation about La Malinche, Chicana feminists abandoned old ideas and retraced history to the misogyny thickly disguised as cultural heritage in the portrayal of Chicanas and of La Malinche.

Representations of La Malinche in the Twentieth Century

The development of La Malinche as the symbolic mother of Mexico demonstrates how narratives by men of letters collaboratively framed the mother of Mexico in the negative. The writings of Octavio Paz and Carlos Fuentes, for example, scapegoated La Malinche into an image signifying treason and treachery. The writings by Paz defamed La Malinche to the point of objectification. His essay, “Los hijos de la chingada,” in *El laberinto de la soledad* (1959) painted a representation of La Malinche as *la chingada*. His text described the symbolic mother of Mexico as a whore, a traitor, reflecting a loathsome sentiment that incited a conflictive relationship between mother and son on one level and among men and women on another. The influence of emerging psychological perspectives of mother-son relationships taking shape in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, such as the Sigmund Freud’s Oedipal Complex within the emerging field of psychoanalysis accounted for some of the perspectives offered in Paz’s works. Freud developed the Oedipal Complex from Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*. Using the story of Oedipus, who unknowingly kills his father and marries his mother, Freud’s theory of the psychosexual stages of development describe a boy’s feelings of desire for his mother and jealousy and anger toward his father first published in *Interpretation of Dreams* (1899). Because the son wishes to possess his mother but cannot be with the mother, he learns to identify with the father after realizing that he cannot eliminate the father. Paz writings show how he was shaped by trending ideologies that reflected the kinds of fears dominating the end of the century. His writings perpetuated a

“fin de siècle” anxiety over national identity witnessed in Mexico at the end of the nineteenth century. This was a view initially channeled by his father Ignacio Paz. This disquiet sentiment on society is expressed when Paz wrote:

Toda la angustiosa tensión que nos habita se expresa en una frase que nos viene a la boca cuando la cólera, la alegría o el entusiasmo nos lleva a exaltar a nuestra condición de mexicanos: ¡Viva México, hijos de la Chingada! Verdadero grito de guerra, cargado de una electricidad particular, esta frase es un reto y una afirmación, un disparo, dirigido contra un enemigo imaginario y una explosión en el aire... (68)¹⁴

Therefore, continuing the legacy of his father, Paz’s words mirrored a sentiment and degree of anxiety men experienced during the shifting times of Mexico’s own quest to define itself in the aftermath of independence from Spain and after civil war parallel to what Bhabha described as the “unhomely.”

Paz’s essay provided a framed narrative of what men really thought about women in society. In the thematic exploration of how women in Mexican history shaped contemporary Mexican identity, Paz reflected the inheritance of man’s notion of ‘horror’ at the turn of the century described in the 1899 publication of *The Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad. While, Conrad described the horror of binary relations created under colonialism modernizing into the imperialism in Europe between Great Britain and Africa, Paz provided the Mexican version of this struggle between civilization and barbarism in the Americas. Paz’s words offered the shifting colonial powers modernizing into a new social reality of imperialisms

¹⁴ “All of our anxious tensions express themselves in a phrase we use when anger, joy or enthusiasm cause us to exalt our condition as Mexicans: “¡Viva México, hijos de la Chingada!” This phrase is a true battle cry, charged with a peculiar electricity; it is a challenge and an affirmation, a shot fired against an imaginary enemy, and an explosion in the air.” (74)

and globalism but also to the evolution of one of colonialism's best kept secret in the Americas: the success of internalized colonialism among mixed-raced people.

Nonetheless, the hatred toward the indigenous female body in "Los hijos de la chingada" was cleverly shadowed by an elevated use of language. Because Paz wrote such a convoluted narrative, the reader is left to trust the discourse and argumentation channeled in his account as being historically true because he was a lettered/educated person. In particular the scholarship of Jean Franco in *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico* (1989), helps us to understand how patriarchy disempowered women. Thus, Paz's use of language reflected the extent to which the active manipulation of discursive structures and devices governed the conceptualization of issues of identity (race, class, gender, etc.) of women.¹⁵ Take for example the following words:

Después de esta digresión sí se puede contestar a la pregunta ¿qué es la Chingada? La Chingada es la Madre abierta, violada o burlada por la fuerza. El 'hijo de la Chingada' es el engendro de la violación, del rapto o de la burla. Si se compara esta expresión con la española, 'hijo de puta', se advierte inmediatamente la diferencia. Para el español la deshonor consiste en ser hijo de una mujer que voluntariamente se entrega, una prostituta; para el mexicano, en ser un fruto de una violación. (Paz, 72)¹⁶

¹⁵ Jean Franco, professor of Latin American literature is acclaimed as a literary critic known for her pioneering work on Latin American cultural studies. From her publication of *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico* (1989) to her recent publication of *Cruel Modernity* (2013), Franco's incessant attention to gender in Latin American has advanced our understanding of the role and social conditions of women.

¹⁶ "After this digression, it is possible to answer the question, "What is the Chingada?" The Chingada is the Mother forcibly opened, violated or deceived. The hijo de la Chingada is the offspring of violation, abduction or deceit. If we compare this expression with the Spanish hijo de puta (son of a whore), the difference is immediately obvious. To the Spaniard, dishonor consists in being the son of a woman who voluntarily surrenders herself: a prostitute. To the Mexican it consists in being the fruit of a violation" (79-80).

Paz showed his dilemmas and fixations about the long-lasting effects of the caste system. He reflects an unhomely perspective over the origin of Mexican identity, through the characterization of La Malinche as the symbolic representation of the violated and shamed woman.

With this in mind, we can discern how Paz's libelous words toward La Malinche revealed his dysfunctional interpretation of a mother-son relation into polar relations between mother and son along sexual, racial, ethnic, and cultural lines. Paz made the female indigenous body into the violated, unwanted, and undesired, an "*otredad*," 'an other,' that had no value in the modern Mexico. Because La Malinche symbolized what colonialism wanted to obliterate she signified the Mexican prototype of Eve. Through the symbolic manipulation of language, Paz was able to define women with subjectivity and voice such as La Malinche as a traitor to her culture and nation. For this, Paz gained cultural and national fame and was acclaimed for summarizing the imagination of Mexico's notion of modernity. His own unresolved dilemma on the shifting power of females in society and of female figures in Mexican lore, a growing worry among men, was transmitted in the following text:

Por contraposición a Guadalupe, que es la Madre virgen, la Chingada es la Madre violada. Ni en ella ni en la Virgen se encuentran rastros de los atributos negros de la Gran Diosa: lasciva en Amaterasu y Afrodita, crueldad en Artemisa y Astarté, magia funesta de Circe, amor por la sangre de Kali. Se trata de figuras pasivas. Guadalupe es la receptividad pura y los beneficios que produce son del mismo orden: consuela, serena, aquieta, enjuga las lágrimas, calma las pasiones. La Chingada es aún más pasiva. Su pasividad es abyecta: no ofrece resistencia a la violencia, es un montón inerte de sangre,

huesos y polvo. Su mancha es constitucional y reside, según se ha dicho más arriba, en su sexo. Esta pasividad abierta al exterior la lleva a perder su identidad: es la Chingada. Pierde su nombre, no es nadie ya, se confunde con la nada, es la Nada. Y sin embargo, es la atroz encarnación de la condición femenina. (77)¹⁷

Paz made La Malinche into the antithesis of La Virgen de Guadalupe, the representation of a good mother and epitome of a woman's gender role. In tandem, La Malinche and La Virgen de Guadalupe produced a binary oppositional contrast between the two most salient and outstanding female figures in Mexican and Chicano culture. La Virgen the Guadalupe came to represent the respected and venerated representation of proper female conduct. This conviction transfixed pioneer Chicana feminists and lead to new explorations that chipped away at the extreme binarism in gendered roles.

Acting on a dichotomous conjunction in this binary relationship, La Malinche was inscribed with values opposite to those of La Virgen the Guadalupe. Therefore, by structuring a dual and yet binary system of Mexico's symbolic mothers of *la raza*, a contemptuous portrayal of La Malinche as an Eve-like cultural figure dominated Mexican culture. In this construct, La Malinche was an image of repudiation, and she was a threat to the ideological values of nationalism that drove contemporary discursive interactions of national and cultural identity in modern Mexico.

¹⁷ "In contrast to Guadalupe, who is the Virgin Mother, the Chingada is the violated mother. Neither in her nor in the Virgin do we find traces of the darker attributes of the great goddesses: the lasciviousness of Amaterasu and Aphrodite, the cruelty of Artemis and Astarte, the sinister magic of Circe or the bloodlust of Kali. Both of them are passive figures. Guadalupe is pure receptivity, and the benefits she bestows are of the same order: she consoles, quiets, dries tears, calms passions. The Chingada is even more passive. Her passivity is abject: she does not resist violence, but is an inept heap of bones, blood and dust. Her taint is constitutional and resides, as we said earlier, in her sex. This passivity, open to the outside world, causes her to lose her identity: she is the Chingada. She loses her name; she is no one; she disappears into nothingness; she is Nothingness. And yet she is the cruel incarnation of the feminine condition" (85).

Unfortunately, the ideological mold carved by men such as Paz that framed La Malinche into a negative symbolic mother of *mestizaje* in literature also was complemented in the arts. As a part of a larger nationalist project, the artistic representation of La Malinche by muralists such as Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco supported the denigrating language found in narratives about La Malinche. The mural panels dealing with the arrival of Cortés by Diego Rivera (1951) in the Palacio Nacional de

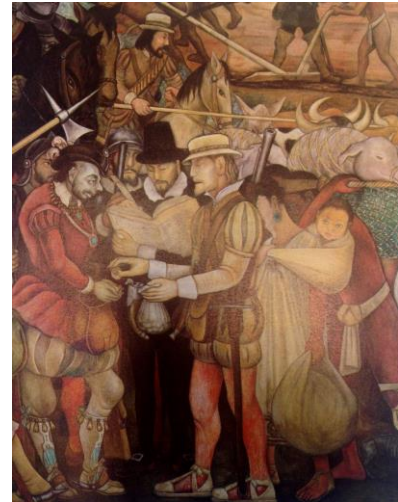


Figure 2 Diego Rivera *El desembarco de los españoles en Veracruz* (1951)

Bellas Artes critiques the ills brought by Cortés and the almost invisible role of La Malinche in conquest matters. In one panel Cortés and Moctezuma stand in front of a burning fire speaking to one another while La Malinche stands inactive by Cortés side shielding her son from the horrors of colonization with her *huipil*. At a time when Mexico was ardently manufacturing and developing a new self-image that stressed the idealism of indigenism, public art proved to visually complement the written word.¹⁸

La Malinche in Chicano Cultural Heritage

Entrenched in Chicano thought, discourse, and representation, the unquestioned negative portrayal of La Malinche attested to the historical and contemporary cultural landscape that Chicanos and Mexicanos share. The early voices of the Chicano civil rights movement publicized a cultural heritage and historical legacy deeply rooted in Mexican patriarchal mores. Representations of La Malinche during the early 1960s and 1970s demonstrated the same negative stereotyping found in the portrayal of unfavorable women in

¹⁸ See Shifra Goldman.

traditional Mexican culture. Juxtaposed with La Virgen de Guadalupe, whose figure represented a positive cultural hero and served as an exemplary model of gender expectations and expected cultural roles, the image of La Malinche operated to define the undesired *raza* body. La Malinche described with disdain women who were seen as threats to the ideologies and ideal progression of the Chicano movement.¹⁹

A clear example of the Chicano male-centered depiction of the figure of La Malinche as a symbol of the untrustworthy mother-other appears in the chapter, “Who is The Enemy?” in Armando B. Rendón’s *Chicano Manifesto: The History of the Second Largest Minority in America* (1972). While the book chronicled the revolutionary actions and manifestos of Chicanos at the start of the Chicano movement, chapter seven concentrated on describing Anglo standards and institutions as the Chicano enemy. Yet, for Rendón, the Chicano enemy also included peoples of color who exhibited Anglo/*gringo* behavior. The chapter stemmed from a 1967 roundtable discussion with, “some of the veteran [male] articulations of Chicano thought,” which reminisced over identifying the enemy/enemies of Chicanos within government (78). The author’s exposition revealed an internalized colonialist mentality and patriarchal attitude stemming from colonial legacies and histories that also used “color, language, and customs” to discriminate against the figure and representation of La Malinche (89).

¹⁹ In many respects, perceptions about La Malinche in Chicano culture reinforced the artistic and literary visions expounded in Mexico, so pungently detailed in Octavio Paz’s essay “*Los hijos de la chingada*,” which libeled the symbolic mother of Mexico. As a result, the dissemination and acceptance of Paz’s interpretation of La Malinche as the *chingada* and *vendida* in the social consciousness of Mexicans and Chicanos flourished. Cultural values did not cease to exist upon the sudden imposition of a national border in 1848: this can be seen in late nineteenth century and early twentieth century works, which traverse borders such as *Malinche (Dona Marina)* (1939) by Haniel Long, the art piece by Alfredo Ramos Martínez’s *La Malinche* (1940), and the unfinished play by Josefina Niggli, *The Fair God: Malinche* (1936), a work that speaks to the precursors of Chicana/o literature included in *The Plays of Josefina Niggli* (2007) edited by William Orchard and Yolanda Padilla.

Especially noteworthy is how the term *malinches* was synonymous with the word enemy (88). In describing his acute awareness of all enemies of the state by Chicanos, Rendón demonstrated how the Chicano lens viewed La Malinche as a threat and menace. Moreover, his reference of La Malinche as a historical foe and the active intent to duplicate a negative value of her portrayal on U.S. borderlands showed his intent to reinforce certain aspects of popular culture. Rendón associated La Malinche with negative representations of Anglos, through the use of the term *gringo/s*.²⁰



Figure 3 José Clemente Orozco *Cortés y La Malinche* (1926)

In his interpretation of La Malinche, the term *malinchista* referred to traitors or enemies within one's culture and La Malinche as the historical model, which should not be followed. In Rendón's writing, the white man as the conquistador was presented in partnership with La Malinche—both were enemies of the Chicano, a threat to the Chicano state of mind. To validate his attitude, the author directly referenced a popular Mexican mural that connected the Mexican and Chicano visual imagery to narrative expressions, the popular depiction of Hernán Cortés and La Malinche as a conjugal couple in the Mexican mural by José Clement Orozco titled *Cortés y La Malinche* (1926) located in the Antiguo Colegio de San Idelfonso in Mexico City, Mexico portrays.

²⁰ *Gringo/s* is a term usually used by Spanish speaking people to refer to a white person from an English-speaking country.

A similar representation of La Malinche at the Galería de Arte Mexicano also in Mexico City, titled *El sueño de La Malinche* (1939) by Antonio Ruiz, visually confirmed what Ángel Rama described in *La ciudad letrada* (1984) as the literary relations between the letter as a sign in writing a body for the nation and of the relation of lettered men to structures of power in establishing Latin American history. Rama's scholarship traced the representation and role of Latin American intellectuals from the conquest to the early years of the twentieth century to demonstrate the professionalization and political use of the writer in the making of Latin American. With Rama in mind, the noted parallelism between the use of the written word and of the visual arts to order society illustrated the close relation between text and image. These textual and visual relations also shaped the cultural landscapes in transnational and hemispheric contexts.



Figure 4 Antonio Ruiz *El sueño de La Malinche* (1939)

The social frameworks of Mexican and Chicano culture that perpetuated a cultural continuity of the image of La Malinche as an enemy, however, perplexed emerging Chicana feminist activists. Chicana feminists identified the conundrum of the celebration of *mestizos* at the same time that paradigmatic structures of *machismo* (patriarchy) upheld a descriptive narrative of La Malinche where women birthing *mestizos* were traitors during the Chicano movement as a site in need of revision and decolonization.

Rendón's characterization of La Malinche and of the Anglo or *gringo* as two analogous evils was indeed problematic for women; and especially for light-skinned Chicanas who already felt ostracized by the Chicano movement. Lighter skinned women

have critiqued the ways internalized colonialism also oppress women by referring to women as *vendidas* and stereotyped as *agringadas* as expressed in the art of Barbara Carrasco's *Milk the Pass* (1990) and *Names Can Hurt* (1991), in the writings of Cherrié Moraga "La Güera" in *Loving in the War Years* (2000), Michelle Serro's *Chicana Falsa and Other Stories of Death, Identity, and Oxnard* (1998) and Patricia Zavella in "Reflections on Diversity among Chicanas" (1991). Through their feminist perspectives, Chicanas showed how patriarchal and misogynistic interpretation of La Malinche oppressed women across color lines, gender orientations and socio-economic contexts.

Rendón demonstrated the degree to which Chicano male discourses colonized and manipulated males of color. In the following passage he described La Malinche as signifying what is 'Eurocentric':

We Chicanos have our share of malinches, which is what we call traitor to la raza, after the example of an Aztec woman of that name who became Cortez' concubine under the name of Doña Marina, and served him as an interpreter and informer against her own people. The malinches are worse characters and more dangerous than the Tio Tacos, the Chicanismo euphemism for an Uncle Tom. The Tio Taco may stand in the way of progress only out of fear or misplaced self-importance. In the service of the gringo, malinches attack their own brothers, betray our dignity and manhood, cause jealousies and misunderstandings among us, and actually seek to retard the advancement of the Chicanos, if it benefits themselves—while the gringo watches. . . Once a Mexican American begins to speak the Anglo line, or show concern first for the Anglo and perhaps as an afterthought for the Chicano, or seek personal

gain at the expense of la raza, then that individual has made a travesty of our people and played into the gringo's hands. We cannot as an aspiring Chicano nation ignore [ignore] the internal problems that exist within the community. We have malinches in our midst. Some have exposed themselves by their own action; among true Chicanos, they are well known, and their names need not be mentioned here. It is enough to describe by example how malinches harm our raza.... More and more the Chicano understands that basically he has two enemies, one within himself, and the other outside. Ideally, he will conquer both enemies, but he can never progress toward mastering the outside forces unless he strengthens and broadens the concepts of raza, of Chicanismo, of Aztlán among his own. (88-89)

This commonplace practice of using the terms *malinche* or *malinches* to associate a person as a sellout or traitor reflected a particular Chicano male understanding of the historical figure of La Malinche, which in turn became a cultural figure at the commencement of the Chicano movement. It becomes clear how a vibrant historical-cultural legacy and awareness of one's cultural heritage, steeped in Mexican culture, had to be present for Chicano males, such as Armando B. Rendón, to want to revolutionize identity while failing to recognize the standing binarism of insiders and outsiders and friends and foes in Chicano culture.

The popular use and interpretation of the figure of La Malinche in Eve-like contexts appeared in seminal Chicano movement era publications. The references to and descriptions of La Malinche served as historical evidence of the political and literary expression of this early generation of Chicano activism. The early collection of Chicano publications are especially important because such periodical literature showed the rich oral traditions and

customs that culturally defined Chicanos, proving that Chicano literary and artistic expression relied on a cultural heritage and historical legacy in the Spanish language already structured in hybrid forms. Also, important in this early Chicano literary history was the expression of the Chicano community drawing from a long tradition of Spanish-language periodicals and publications of personal narratives highlighting the presence of Spanish in the U.S. southwestern territories.

Representations of La Malinche in early Chicano periodicals such as the Los Angeles, CA-based Chicano periodical *Regeneración*²¹ (1970) demarcated early movement struggles and political debates. For example, the third edition of Vol. 1 one of *Regeneración* opened with an article by Jose Castorena entitled, “LA NUEVA RAZA: The Fire That Does Not Consume Itself.” The essay began with a 1914 quote referencing the original publication of *Regeneración* (1900-1918), a Mexican anarchist newspaper in the early twentieth century published by Mexican intellectuals, revolutionaries, and rebels.²² Castorena’s essay focused on the development of *la nueva raza* and what it meant for Chicanos given a nascent social consciousness of political activism defining the Chicano movement. In the opening paragraph, Castorena gave presence to La Malinche by portraying her in the following manner:

As termed by Jose Vasconcelos, La Raza Cosmica in reality is La Raza

Nueva: el mestizaje of the Indian and the Spaniard of Bartolome de las Casas

²¹ *Regeneración* was also a Mexican anarchist newspaper published at the turn of the twentieth century by the Flores Magón brothers, who were Mexican revolutionaries. Ricardo and Enrique supported the Mexican Liberal Party. They were forced to move the publication of *Regeneración* to the United States in 1905. *Regeneración* circulated until 1918. The publication of the magazine, *Regeneración* by Chicano political activists demonstrates how they were influenced by Mexican revolutionary thought and ideas in trans-temporal articulations.

²² It first was published in Mexico and later in Los Angeles when those fighting for equality and justice in the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920, notably the Flores Magón brothers, had to flee from persecution.

and Cuahtecmoc. It rejects Cortes and Malinche. It does not confuse pride with arrogance. (sic) (1)

Here La Malinche is clearly seen as a symbolic representation of threat, opposition, and competition.

The most appalling element about the opening words of this essay was the outright exclusion of women's participation in the synthesis of *la nueva raza*. Castorena imposed a male-only vision of what was to be a new race without giving much importance, respect, or care to the role of women. Absent from his description was the female symbolic and real presence in the cultural makeup of *la raza* and even less visible was the inclusion or participation of any women, even in strictly biological terms, in the creation of *raza*.²³ While "brothers and sisters in every corner of the earth, of every race and creed" was the movements call that defined La Raza Nueva, a patriarchal perspective of who was able and worthy of creating *raza* was described (1). In Castorena's narrative, women were subjects of repudiation but were useful to labor and to promote the struggles of Chicano nationalist agenda.²⁴

²³ In Castorena's vision, *la raza cósmica* as articulated by José Vasconcelos in the 1925 novel with the same title, is a Mexican male vision of racial, ethnic, and cultural relations in Mexico at the start of the twentieth century.

²⁴ In writing about the image of La Malinche, he records on ink and paper how La Malinche is the "conquered" without giving it further thought (1). Moreover, La Malinche is textually shunned and officially excluded in the dialogue regarding the symbolic origins of Chicano as *raza*. This reflects the same discursive styles and traditions as outlined by Octavio Paz. Moreover, Castorena reflects a patriarchal reading of the history of La Malinche in relation to the conquest by again making her a sellout and *vendida*, a *gringa* who must be loathed like Cortés. Contextualizing her as an equal to Cortés makes her worthy of loathing for her 'alliance' to the conqueror without taking into consideration that the Aztecs were not her people, because despite being Aztec by birth, she was sold into slavery by her own family. Despite this historical fact, males continued to conceive of her as someone who is not true to her people. Neither he nor other male authors paid attention to the fact that the Cortés-Malinche relationship was not based on gender equality nor did they share the same types of social power and agency at the time of the discovery and conquest of the Americas. Even less attention is given to the ways early Chicano male expression of the figure of La Malinche inadvertently exposed their bias vision of liberation and justice because of their inability to reckon with their own patriarchal and colonized minds that contributed to their own self-hatred and conflict about having the enemy within.

Early movement publications showed the acceptance of Mexican patriarchal cultural attitudes and norms among Chicano men and women. Given that men wrote and published in numbers far exceeding that of women during these early years, representations of La Malinche maintained traditional perceptions, as notes scholar Tey Diana Rebolledo.²⁵ The double expression of the history of La Malinche as a historical figure on the one hand, and the history of La Malinche as a cultural figure on the other hand demonstrated that she was an emblematic figure that transcends time and space, context and content, form and style. In this sense she can be interpreted as a border-crosser who continued to exist in the Chicano landscape and who lived in the cultural memory of Chicanas/os. As a result, the figure of La Malinche provided asylum and sanctuary for Chicana feminists who radically altered *la lengua* and the idea of *mestizaje* to bring change in the experiences of women.

Questioning History: Mal-in –chismo/es

Because Chicanas with a feminist sensibility challenged the ideology of Chicano thought, an ideology deeply rooted in patriarchy, they posed a threat to the cultural mores that organized Chicano contemporary movements. As a result, women seeking liberation as women and as ethnic women outside the frameworks of the tradition of a Mexican-Chicano male framework were quickly labeled *malinchistas*, sellouts or *vendidas* for behaving in what men interpreted as assimilated Mexican Americans or non-politicized *raza*. Chicanas voicing objection to the rhetoric of *Chicanismo* were referenced as modern-day *malinchistas*. Chicanas were ousted and made to feel unwelcomed in the Chicano struggle toward liberation and justice for exposing the unjust structural and ideological frameworks of Chicano nationalism which kept women oppressed and in a state of internalized colonization.

²⁵ See “Foreword” by Tey Diana Rebolledo in *Puppet* by Margarita Cota-Cárdenas.

However, politically active Chicanas argued that Chicano militant ideologies denied liberation for women and promoted the liberation of the Chicano male over the woman. They also voiced objections to the ways cultural nationalism and cultural affirmation stifled their own progress toward self-determination and actualization.

Mexican feminists such as Rosario Castellanos and Elena Garro, who worked against the defamatory actions of Mexican intellectuals in scapegoating La Malinche, influenced Chicanas to challenge austere *machista* tendencies. The influence of Castellanos' view of La Malinche on Chicana scholars is noted in scholarship of Tey Diana Rebolledo who wrote her dissertation on Castellanos titled, *The Wind and the Tree: A Structural Analysis of the Poetry of Rosario Castellanos* (1979), while Norma Alarcón's own dissertation on Castellanos titled, *Ninfomanía: El discurso feminista en la obra de Rosario Castellanos* (1992?) was later published. Feminist production that emerged in Mexico showed efforts to reverse the damage inflicted by modern-day male intellectuals on the image of La Malinche. This served as a model for Chicanas, who tooled a cultural feminist approach to make visible the way cultural production and representation worked to oppress and discriminate women. While responding to attitudes shaped by Octavio Paz and Carlos Fuentes and other intellectual work on La Malinche, such as that of Salvador Novo, Celestino Gorostiza and Rodolfo Usigli,²⁶ the particular emergence of a Chicana visual imaginary also stressed the relationship between arts and letters.²⁷

²⁶ See Magaña-Esquivel.

²⁷ The coming into consciousness and witness to the growing efforts by Mexican feminists such as Rosario Castellanos and Elena Garro, who challenged the ill judgments of La Malinche in Mexican contemporary culture, assisted Chicanas to think of creativity and criticism as languages of empowerment and as a space/place to attend to identity politics. These early examinations of the cultural legacies of conquest developed into what we now conceptualize as Third World and Transnational Feminism during the last quarter of the twentieth century. Again, I trace the line among the literary criticism dealing with *la lengua* and La Malinche as a representation of radical self-transformation and self-proclamation through one's use of tongue. Continuing to

While Chicanas struggled to give presence to their experience as female ethnic subjects during the first two decades of the Chicano movement, early female artists and writers used the arts as a visual and textual locus where the exploration of social inquiries led to a new consciousness about the implications of language use for women and about its effect on the conceptualization of female identity. Women who elected to be active contributors to *la causa* were perplexed that their activism was unwelcomed. They questioned why, within Chicano circles, active women were regarded as *malinches* or *las malas lenguas*, the bad tongues of the movement. Women wanted to understand why their female-defined visual and literary utterances were so different and foreign that it was classified as negative activity. They also wanted to comprehend why, when they did speak, they were vilified and ostracized. Most of all they wanted to comprehend how their self-affirmations were assessed as cultural practices that resonated with acts associated with traitors and sellouts.

Though women first turned to family and cultural icons as cultural role models, feminists organized women to collectively interrogate why certain images and icons about women served as positive cultural role models while others were negatively promoted. In both cases Chicanas argued that such extreme visions did not reflect their contemporary realities or economic situations. The 1977 publication of *Essays on La Mujer* (but not printed until 1978), edited by Rosaura Sánchez, recorded the emerging voices of feminist concerns

examine intersections of race, class and gender, Chicana works of the 1980s laid the foundations for the growing interdisciplinary and intersecting work of the 1990s to the present. Works from the 1980s surveyed the image of La Malinche and presented revisions about the true power of a Chicana cultural heritage. These initial visions looked at the border-crossing issues and intersecting realities that constructed Chicana identity and from which they spoke. In addition, the 1996 publication of Elena Poniatowska's "Mexicanas and Chicanas" illustrated the emerging dialogues established among Mexicans and Chicanas laboring to revise images of women. For further information on this topic see *In Other Words: Literature by Latinas of the United States* (1994).

with the socio-historical and economic contributions of Chicanas. She further expounded on the relationship between societal factors to linguistic interaction with the publication of *Chicano Discourse: A Socio-historical perspective* (1983). In this groundbreaking scholarship, Sánchez provided a Marxist theoretical framework to expound on issues of language found in Southwest.

Chicana feminists exerted agency toward issues that called attention to the struggles of women, and consequently were seen as selfish traitors to the ideals and politics of *la raza*. These incipient, politicized Chicanas argued against the ills of internalized colonization and patriarchy and turned to gender myths and stereotypes to unveil how such representations curtailed the advancement of all *raza*. Chicana feminists challenged the image of La Malinche in texts like Luis Valdez's *La Conquista de México* (1971). In this play La Malinche functioned as the scapegoat for the cultural baggage of *mestizo* Chicano males. In this early movement work, the character of La Malinche was blamed for the entire conquest of the Americas.

Also by Valdez, *Los Vendidos* referenced the historical and cultural interpretations of La Malinche, or a woman of *la raza* as traitor, through the figure of Miss Jimenez.²⁸ Jimenez was a sellout for being an assimilated Mexican American woman. Throughout the play, her self-representation as an assimilated Mexican American mimicked Anglo speech acts and customs expressed through her accent, ignorance of culture, and acceptance of cultural stereotypes about Chicanos. Drawing from the traditions outlined in early movement cultural expression, the notion that women were *malinches* if in speech act or in behavior they

²⁸ In 1972, *Teatro Campesino* made a televised adaptation of *Los Vendidos*, publicly broadcasting the ethnic identity and exploring social stereotypes that were conscious as well as subconscious.

differed from Chicano male discourse was an attitude communicated in popular culture. They were presumed to be *agringadas*, the untrustworthy resonances of La Malinche.

By analyzing both plays' handling of La Malinche, the hidden discourse of La Malinche's use among Chicano males turned intelligible. Unfortunately, the paternalistic ordering of society did not embrace gender equality, and the use of the term *malinches* made a public confession, independent of conscious or unconscious awareness, of a man's distaste of a woman being able to speak in linguistically complex ways. Perhaps what militant Chicanos feared in women, such as La Malinche and Chicana feminists, was that a woman's tongue could put into question the limit of a man's own linguistic capacity. The creation of a female-specific voice and subjectivity that Chicana feminists strove to attain, therefore, threatened men because Chicanas were willing to publicly display their cognitive explorations without reservation, question ideas of superiority, and the nature of patriarchy itself. Feminists understood La Malinche as a representation of linguistic superiority.

Due to their experience of being ostracized, silenced, and stereotyped within the Chicano movement, Chicanas who were labeled as *malinchistas* turned to the feminist movement for civil and equal rights. However, involvement with feminist causes led to another form of Chicana ousting that deepened the cultural stereotyping and identification of Chicanas with La Malinche. Participation within the women's civil rights movement became more grounds for being termed non-traditionalists and *agringadas*. Aligning oneself with the U.S. feminist movement was seen as aligning with the colonizer. Feminists were seen as carriers of an outsider/foreign mentality that threatened the ideologies and structure of Chicano culture, and thus Chicanas aligning themselves with them were reconfigured to represent lovers of foreigners or of foreign ideologies. The work of early Chicana feminists

showed how they centered on exposing the racist, sexist, and misogynistic legacies of *raza* politics that damaged the progress and integration of the movement across gender and ethnic lines.

Ultimately, what Chicano males communicated with works such as those of Rendón, Castorena, and Valdez was that a good, indigenous woman under the unity of *la raza cósmica* was unlike anything that mirrored the actions and behaviors of La Malinche. Anything that strayed from the symbolic positive and mother of *la patria*, or La Virgen de Guadalupe, committed *Malinche* acts because they underperformed expected social roles. Perhaps the referencing to La Malinche in the written words by Chicanos reflected on one hand a deep internalization of Mexican culture, hinting to the link connecting Mexican and Chicano culture and the exchange of ideas. On the other hand, it expressed how the border synthesized a division between the two, a contextual chasm—which Anzaldúa referenced as the open wound—reflective of the real geopolitical landscapes and imagined landscapes of Chicana/o hybrid space.²⁹ To be more specific, the presence of La Malinche in the Chicana imaginary reflected how the image of La Malinche reflected cultural dexterity, the politics of Anzaldúa's *las atravesadas*, 'the crossed.' She not only represented the long line and history linking Chicanos to Mexicans, she linked a particular *machista* legacy defining the Mexican

²⁹ In the chapter, "The Homeland, Aztlán/El otro México" of *Borderlands/La frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa responds to a series of priming influences that undervalued Chicanos, and specifically Chicanas, for living in the borderlands. Awareness of her inhabitation of these in-between spaces is expressed in the lamentation, "Ay ay ay, soy mexicana de este lado" (25). She gives voice to the banishment of Chicanos that the imposition of a border established when she said, "The U.S.-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture. Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. Los *atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the 'normal.' Gringos in the U.S. Southwest consider the inhabitants of the borderlands transgressors, aliens—whether they possess documents or not, whether they're Chicanos, Indians or Blacks" (25).

male to the Chicano male, and a developing feminist link among Mexican and Chicana women. In this way, the presence of La Malinche in representations by Chicanos and Mexicans depicted an internal struggle of a Chicano and Mexican identity attempting to break free from its colonial states of mind.

¿Y yo qué? Chicana Feminism and the movement

Resistance by men prompted women to demand that their voices and visions also were valid voices of the Chicano community. Uncovering the invisible patriarchal roots of the movement, Chicanas launched new explorations of identity by questioning the objectification of women and of the discourse of *marianismo* and *machismo*, which defined women through a binary relationship of the good/bad, mother/whore. Essays by Cordelia Chávez Candelaria and Adelaila R. Del Castillo documented in Alma García's *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings* (1997), summarized the sense of urgency among Chicana feminists to critically analyze and question historical, patriarchal, and *machista* structures governing Chicana and Chicano culture. This brought forth a feminist dialogue that related issues of agency, visibility, and voice to the experiences of women.

Male-centered interpretations of *Chicanismo*, in essence, communicated to Chicanas a disregard for their own desires for freedom and liberation, subjectivity or agency as women. It denied Chicanas the right to their cultural heritage and the expression of their own woman-defined tongue. Vocal Chicana activists who spoke about the oppression of women and desires for change were seen as bad women who did not respect the foundations of Chicano heritage. Women described the ways traditional understandings of gender, sex, and sexuality intersected with color, language and custom to oppress women. This led to a Chicana

struggle within Chicano culture to bring about consciousness concerning the way internalized colonialism oppressed women along issues related to gender.

Women's interest in the Chicano movement, after all, entailed a different range of practices because feminists wanted to incite political agency to what it meant to be a conscious Chicana. Women engaged cultural memory to rework contributions of women in history and in the contemporary. They recognized that while men had a prism of revolutionary heroes, women had few role models who directed women to challenge the norm, to be audacious in actions, or to speak with a sense of independence. The turn to political history was a struggle to recover a past that differed from the world order of men; as a Chicana's struggle was first and foremost, a fight for equality and representation in a cultural tradition that did not want her to change.

Women interrogated the value placed on female cultural role models, asking why some figures were popular and accepted within dominant Chicano discourse while others were regarded with such disdain they were contextualized in the negative. Asking what significant and outstanding women defined Chicana cultural heritage, Chicanas feminists embarked on a quest to interpret and recuperate culture from their subject positions due to the absence of salient, powerful, independent cultural models. To bring forth new kind of visions, women looked at themselves in relation to others to generate a politics of their own when they criticized the failure and lack of recognition that powerful cultural models in Chicano history did exist.

The post-1960s work of Chicana visual artists, writers, political historians, and scholars, such as Judy Baca, Antonia Castañeda, Ana Nieto Gómez, Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, and Adaljiza Sosa-Riddell envisaged social change that set the foundations for a

legacy of Chicana feminist activism that continues today. Without their initial work as cultural brokers to bring forth new interpretations about what it meant to be Chicana, feminist scholarship would not be at the stages of vanguard we see today. Women generated visual and textual illustrations in contexts that stressed the ability of telling their own stories about cultural heritage as a method of cultural advancement, and in particular, the reclamation of female figures across history to metaphorically transform cultural concepts of Chicanas.

In the search to understand how *Chicanismo* framed particular female perspectives, cultural critic Tey Diana Rebolledo noted how early Chicana feminists looked to popular and archetypal images of women as role models and foremothers (Rebolledo and Rivero). Early Chicana artists and writers did not simply translate and represent images and narratives of popular female figures in the Chicano community; they transformed the representation of these images and narratives by translating these figures, not from a Chicano point of view but from a Chicana lens. Women garnered images of their own to dignify their *causa*. And in this quest to reclaim and practice a woman's sense of cultural heritage, they contested historical, social, and cultural boundaries that redefined gender relations in both the private spaces of the home and the domestic space, as well as in public spaces of the community. Through creative acts, women explored idealized representations shaping the cultural production of *la causa*. Feminist contested imposed definitions of women as mothers, virgins, and daughters or in roles duplicating the image of La Virgen de Guadalupe as the roles women should abide by. Yolanda M. López's art production is exemplary of the shift in redefining Chicana identity among pioneering Chicana feminists. The artist's early artwork reflected a desire to break free from traditional sex roles at the same time that it redefined the perception of

women in their social roles by experimenting with visual language to create more feminist-proficient vocabularies.³⁰ In her exploration of what she considered powerful images of women in her life she created agency for all female subjects through a comparisons of the image of La Virgen de Guadalupe vis-à-vis what she viewed as the ingrained power of ordinary Chicanas in her life: grandmother, mother and herself. The messages in the Virgen de Guadalupe series (1978): *Guadalupe: Victoria F. Franco* (Virgen Grandmother); *Margaret F. Stewart: Our Lady of Guadalupe* (Virgen Seamstress); and *Portrait of the Artists: Our Virgen de Guadalupe* (Virgen Running), offered the spectator an array of representations about Chicanas that, for López, visually articulated a cultural power, which should be venerated to the level of La Virgen de Guadalupe. The Virgen de Guadalupe series questioned the separation between the divine and the secular in the conceptualization of women. In her representation of women in domestic roles the social, cultural, political and religious boundaries that contributed to the bifurcated understandings of women as cultural models is blurred.

Three years earlier, Judy Baca's *Las Tres Marías* (1976) referenced the changing social, political, and sexual roles of Chicanas. In *Las Tres Marías*, Baca encapsulated the emerging



Figure 5 Yolanda M. López
Guadalupe Series 1. Portrait of the Artist as the Virgen of Guadalupe; 2. Victoria F. Franco; 3. Margaret F. Stewart: Our Lady of Guadalupe (1978)

³⁰ For a detailed study on this artist, see Mary Karen Dávalos' *Yolanda M. López* (2008).

image of a new Chicana when she envisaged the Chicana looking at herself as she is prompted to define her notion of self in relation to other Chicanas, one of which is of Judy Baca herself. A mirror situated in the middle of this sculpture, adjacent to two common representations of Chicanas, presented the multidimensionality of female identity. From one image to the next, the visual language the eye captures when reading these images alongside each other moves through a myriad chain of signification that converts the mirrored reflection of self into a dialogue of identity politics where the viewer also is the participant and receptor.



Figure 6 Judy Francisca Baca *Las Tres Marías* (1976)

In this work, Baca asked the viewer to relate one's sense of identity in relation to other Chicanas, which expanded the meaning of *Chicano* to include the idea of *Chicana*. All images of women validate Chicana identity in this artwork. Feminist works such as Baca's validated how feminism assisted Chicanas to expand the concept of *Chicano* into the *Chicana* imagination by focusing on the system of signification related to gender, sex and sexuality based on the collective performance and fashioning of female identity in public contexts.

Sacando sus lenguitas: Chicana Feminist Voices Emerge

The arrival of Chicana feminist consciousness called attention to the fact that the social, racial, and economic oppression men experienced was not exclusive to one gender. Women such as Ana Nieto Gómez protested the limitations of activism and political

inclusion of women due to sexism, racism, and sexual racism. Further, she denounced the cultural consensus about sex roles and gender attitudes that viewed women as subordinate, submissive, and unintelligent (García, *Chicana* 86-92).

The influence of the feminist movement nationally and globally provided an impetus for Chicanas to question sex roles, as well as issues of sex and sexual identity. Feminism assisted Chicanas to voice how traditional sex roles hindered a woman's full potential to contribute to the movement as recalled Marta Cotera retrospectively in the film by Sylvia Morales titled *A Crushing Love: Chicanas, Motherhood, and Activism* (2009). Feminism provided an ideological platform where women enumerated the perpetuation of oppression tied to the idea of tradition—and of tradition to maintain the preservation of culture. Amalia Mesa-Bains' examination of ten Chicana artists on the development of "identity focused specifically on the integration of the occupational, sexual, and ethnic roles as influenced by Chicano culture" demonstrated how Chicanas in a male-dominated art world chartered new artistic frontiers as subaltern artists and the revolutionary roles their works generated in the depiction of real experience post-1960s (2).

Mesa-Bains' research, *A Study of the Influence of Culture on the Development of Identity among a Group of Chicana Artist* (1983), brought awareness to the shifting sex roles and struggle of early Chicana artists. "I can make other things besides babies. I think to be a mater or creator is important," said a Chicana artist (209). Mesa-Bains illuminated how female artists strove to promote the perspective that women had the intelligence and talent analogous to that of men to create something valuable to culture through creativity. The voices of these Chicana feminist artists debunked sexist attitudes about the bodies of women as strictly reproductive vessels or aesthetic objects. Within the area of identity research, her

study elucidated how the development of women as artists depended on a number of intricate factors and processes of a shared worldview (209).

To add, the psycho-cultural angle of analysis of Chicana artists proved how women believed their art production was a contribution equal to that of birthing: They brought to life and light what previously had been unseen. She offered a glimpse into the real experiences of artists working outside traditionally ascribed social roles and the survival mechanisms they developed in order to participate in circles where traditionally male labor predominated. This showed the shifting social roles of women in contemporary society, as women often worked outside the home.

As social and gender roles shifted, women argued that cultural concepts such as *marianismo* and *machismo*³¹ were not axioms of the natural world, but instead socially constructed ideas passed as cultural traditions. Because of this, Chicana feminists positioned themselves as cultural mediators and cultural brokers in an era of social unrest and change.³² Analogous to the art world, women who penned blank pages with words challenged the romanticized and singular front that the Chicano movement promoted. For example, the critical writings of Lucha Corpi and Ana Castillo concerted critiques of *la raza unida* and *la familia*. These women critiqued the limited definition of unity or family when initially ostracized for what they had penned. In the following quote, the anonymous author of “El

³¹ Ana Nieto Gómez’s essay, “La Chicana—Legacy of Suffering and Self-Denial” defines *machismo* and *marianismo* as a tool of colonization to define the social-sexual roles of men as in a master/slave dichotomy and create inequalities along sexual racial lines to justify the rape and oppression of women. (García, *Chicana* 48-50) The imposition of colonial rule defined men as *machos*, free and strong, while women were expected to follow the religious model of the Virgin Mary, “defined the woman’s identity as a virgin, as a saintly mother, as a wife-sex object, as a martyr” (49). Sylvia Morales’ 1979 film titled LA CHICANA visually illustrated how *machismo* and *marianismo* defined the history of Chicanas through the use of stills of historical footage, engravings and murals.

³² Domino Perez’s book, *There was a Woman: La Llorona from Folklore to Popular Culture*, compiles a diversity of material that proves how women performed as cultural workers in the understanding of the figure of La Llorona.

movimiento and La Chicana” proclaimed a global-local connection to the state of women’s oppression that affected all Chicanas:

The political and economical struggle of the Chicana is the universal question of women. The difference between the liberation of Chicana women and other Third World women is cultural. The Chicano culture has very positive effects and very bad ones. We have to fight a lot of Catholic ideas in our homes and in the movement. For example, the idea of large families is very Catholic. The Pope says no birth control, abortions, lots of kids (and make me richer). So what do the guys say in the movement, have lots of kids, keep up the traditional Chicano family. (García, *Chicana* 81-83)

On another front, feminists also confronted the oppression of women imposed by women. It must be noted that some women who stressed the importance of supporting Chicano causes unanimously and collectively believed feminism diluted the momentum of the movement. At the 1969 National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference the facilitator of the women’s workshop reported to the general assembly, “it was the consensus of the group that the Chicana woman does not want to be liberated” (Ruiz 108). This proved to be a false perception of the needs and desires of women and assumed all women were the same.

Francisca Flores objected to this and argued that as members of the Chicano community their desires and will to express themselves in their own right was as important as those of men.

Politically active Chicanas spoke out against a collision of desires and imaginings of *la causa* because major concerns for equal rights for non-feminists did not consider issues of sex, sexuality, and gender as important as issues of race and class. As an editor and publisher,

Francisca Flores' involvement with the Chicano periodical *Regeneración* is a prime example of a feminist laboring to insert women's issues into the schemata of the Chicano movement:

The issue of birth control, abortions, information on sex and the pill are considered 'white' women's lib issues and should be rejected by Chicanas according to the Chicano philosophy which believes that the Chicana woman's place is in the home and that her role is that of a mother with a large family. Women who do not accept this philosophy are charged with betrayal of "our culture and heritage." OUR CULTURE HELL! (*Regeneración* 1)

Because the attainment of knowledge empowered Chicanas to critically interrogate past assumptions about social tradition, education equipped women with new lenses from which to synthesize new visions about the experiences particular to Chicanas.

Answers to the need for a space specific to voice women's needs untainted by patriarchal pressures seen in 1969, occurred two years later, in May 1971, when The First National Conference of Raza Women was held in Houston, Texas. The conference aimed to highlight the special sets of oppression experienced by women, to which end a number of resolutions were outlined. Mirta Vidal recorded later in a publication titled, "New Voice of La Raza: Chicanas Speak Out," how:

While these resolutions articulated the most pressing needs of Chicanas today, the conference as a whole reflected a rising consciousness of the Chicana about her special oppression in this society.

With their growing involvement in the struggle for Chicano liberation and the emergence of the feminist movement, Chicanas began to challenge every social institution, which contributed to their oppression, from inequality

on the job to their role in the home. They are questioning “machismo,” discrimination in education, the double standard, the role of the Catholic Church, and all the backward ideology designed to keep women subjugated. (García, *Chicana* 21)

As Chicanas organized, an emerging feminist thought searched for methods and approaches that would help end oppressive or discriminatory interpretations of women as *malinches* or *vendidas* for speaking out.

A Mother’s Voice Still Rings

Because of all these concerns, women wanted to understand the influence of La Malinche in Chicano cultural heritage. Since given references to La Malinche as a noun and adjective were readily utilized to mark cultural difference, feminists were eager to explain how La Malinche (and her story—historical, cultural and folkloric) was involved in this mix of defining and marking parameters of Chicano cultural heritage. Most of all, feminists labeled as a *malinche* or as being a *malinchista* wanted to understand the connection others saw between the historical and folkloric image and representation of La Malinche to the acts and behaviors of emerging Chicana feminist thought. Why had *malinchismo* specifically developed to represent a female traitor within the Chicano community? How was a historical figure from the age of exploration and discovery connected to the Chicana experience in the contemporary?

To illustrate briefly, framing feminists as antithetical to the advancement of Chicanos was commonplace. The anthology *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mother Warned Us About* (1991) by Carla Trujillo concentrated on how lesbians were not only ostracized from the Chicano movement but also how they received some of the harshest forms of deprecation

and disregard out of fear and loathing due to homophobia. In the essay “Chicana Lesbians: Fear and Loathing in the Chicano Community,” Trujillo wrote:

The vast majority of Chicano heterosexuals perceive Chicana lesbians as a threat to the community. Homophobia, that is, irrational fear of gay or lesbian people and/or behaviors, accounts in part, for the heterosexist response to the lesbian community. However, I argue that Chicana lesbians are perceived as a greater threat to the Chicano community because their existence disrupts the established order of male dominance, and raises the consciousness of many Chicana women regarding their own independence and control. (186)

An essay about the “. . . underlying basis of the fears which, the very act of the lesbian existence, disrupt the established norm of patriarchal oppression,” it named how patriarchal-abiding dogma, which powers homophobia, also portrayed women speaking out as *vendidas* (186). By calling attention to the patriarchal steadfastness of how women thought about issues such as sexuality, identification, and motherhood, Trujillo condemned historical processes evolving into modern-day forms of gender control that condition women to think of themselves as sellouts if they strayed from social order as defined by patriarchs. She, like others, held the opinion that the advancement of the community depended on emancipation of all forms of discrimination against women. She verbalized:

We are taught to undervalue our needs and voice. Our opinions, viewpoints and expertise are considered secondary to those males—even if we are more highly trained. Time and again, I have seen otherwise sensible men insult the character of a woman when they are unable to belittle her intellectual

capacities.¹⁹ Character assassinations are commonly disguised in the familiar ‘*vendida* to the race’ format. (192)

Consequently, dubbed as both *vendidas* and *malinches* the social consensus to repudiate feminists were acts carried out by both men and women.

The fact that a certain consensus circulated about what the word *vendida* meant and how it described unfavorable images of women points to the circulation of a historical consciousness about the figure of La Malinche. The mention of *malinche* and *vendida* made cognizant the intelligibility of La Malinche in transhistorical contexts of the figure of La Malinche as belonging to Chicano cultural heritage because representations of La Malinche reflected her image as an encoded sign. Trujillo’s intertextual reference to *Loving in the War Years: lo que nunca pasó por sus labios* (1983) by Cherrié Moraga too is significant: Moraga published the book as an out Chicana lesbian. But the inclusion of Moraga’s words in Trujillo’s text also discloses a feminist’s intricate sensibility of the social operative of employing the word *vendida* to insult, subjugate, and disempower.

But feminists refused abasement. In its place, Chicana feminists yearned to fully understand the image of La Malinche as an enigma of Chicana/o cultural heritage. They too wanted to historicize and theorize women-defined perspectives on cultural heritage and apply new specificities related to a new sign system developing among a new generation of women.

Chapter 2: Birthing a New Creative Act and Spirit of Integration in Language: From Symbolic to the Semiotic Meaning of La Malinche

Chicano/a artists and writers practiced the most radical forms of political activism through creative language use. As they characterized Chicana/o ideology—and the language used to describe it—creativity became a principle forum from which Chicanas/os explained new belief systems. With the passing of time, these organic vocabularies manifested into a Chicana/o aesthetic that framed the spirit of Chicana power.

Language itself served as a bridge that brought the imagined into the real. Visual as well as textual illustrations showed a new linguistic palate that sketched never before seen representations from creative discoveries and epiphanies. A politics and discourse soon followed. From ballpoints and brushstrokes, Chicana/o cultural production demonstrated the enactments of Chicanas/os reclaiming the power of language across multiple fronts, which drew from the ancestral strength encoded in the collective history of their *gente*, their people, as well as from contemporary approaches to poststructuralist and deconstructive readings of language and discourse.

From the initial cries of feminist *gritos* to revisionist myth making, new language acts enabled women to set on a semiological quest to reclaim language. Women entered into the spaces of language production in an effort to participate in answering what it meant to be Chicana. Drawing inspiration from the symbolic meaning of La Malinche, the presentation of complex negotiations that brought legitimacy of language to La Malinche at the same time authenticated Chicana voices. This showed how glossing with new and radical language

empowered them to define themselves. This chapter focuses on how women created a revolutionary language that redefined the spaces women inhabit.

Creative Play with Language: The Subaltern Call to Action

As linguistic artifacts, artistic and literary expressions are considered the referents of political activism governing the movements of Chicana/o language practices. The remarkable contribution of artists and writers and their impact on the Chicano movement should not be minimized: their creativity and innovation at the level of cultural production (witnessed in posters or poems) signaled the processes of Chicana/o speech. Creative acts transferred the ideologies of Chicana/o consciousness into a language of reinvention that Chicana/o artists and writers translated into powerful and positive signs and signifiers. In other words, fostering Chicana/o language practices gave life to the art and literature of the movement. The linguistic renaissance of the Chicano movement ignited a shift in the types of representations.

Luis Dávila's "Pura Literatura" is a case in point. Featured in the second publication of *Revista Chicano-Riqueña* (1974), Dávila initiated this volume with a literary meditation by asking, "¿Quién que es chicano no se habrá sentido alguna vez tristemente alejado?"³³ only to answer with, "Algo distanciado de aquella cultura que una vez creyó ser suya. La verdad es que ya nos encontramos muy lejos del México que creíamos ser tan puro"³⁴ (1). As his words expressed a coming into consciousness of the reality of internalized racism of Mexican culture that fostered the rejection of the Chicano's experience, Dávila indicated a

³³ "Who that is Chicano has not once ever felt sadly estranged?" (My translation).

³⁴ "Somewhat distanced from that culture that one once believed to be his. The truth is that we already find ourselves very far from the Mexico that we thought was so pure" (My translation).

developing Chicano consciousness that complicated cultural heritage. He brought about a new truth about this reality, “Inventamos a ese México puro”³⁵ (1). But as a new Chicana/o consciousness analyzed the intercultural and transcultural ties connecting and separating Chicanas/os and Mexicans, Dávila also showed how language use created a shift in thought that directed Chicanas/os to rethink the vocabulary materializing their identity. Dávila’s reflection and position on Mexico elucidated an awareness of new modes of thinking, as his words alleged:

Surgieron más y más mentiras. Pero ¿cómo? Ese México ya no existía. Consumido por el afán de encontrarlo, seguimos inventando más y más méxicos, sin concierto ni orden. Pasaron años y quedamos sólo con nuestras ilusiones contrariadas.

Esos méxicos intercalados no nos duraban demasiado. Pero, es sí, nos impregnaron de mentiras literarias. Por ello tuvimos que irrumpir como chicanos. Era algo que sentíamos. Era necesario extender nuestras almas maltratadas. Hicimos el intento de recordar todo el revoltijo de costumbres, palabras, y suspiros. Es que sumergido en el fondo del barrio estaba lo hispánico y lo mexicano. Siempre entrelazado con eso que algunos llaman lo americano. Confesarlo fue redimirnos. (sic) (1)³⁶

³⁵ “We invent that pure Mexico” (My translation).

³⁶ “More and more lies emerged. But how? That Mexico no longer existed. Consumed by the desire to find that Mexico, we keep inventing more and more Mexicos, without concert or order. Years passed and we remain only with our contradictory illusions. Those interspersed Mexicos did not last us too long. But, yes they did impregnate us with literary lies. Because of them we had to break as Chicanos. It was something we felt. It was necessary to break with our mistreated souls. We made the attempt to remember all the jumble of customs, words, and sighs. It’s because submerged in the depths of the neighborhood was what is Hispanic and Mexican. Always intertwined with that which some call the American. To confess was to redeem ourselves” (My translation).

As Dávila so eloquently expressed in his piece, the turn to language was often the only outlet artists and writers had to articulate who they were. This inward turn to examine the composition of one's sensibilities displayed the Chicana/o turn to language as an act of social subversion, the emergence of an oppositional identity navigating new realms in the name of justice and equality.

The exploration and experimentation between past and present understandings of self manifested through language, as expressed in Dávila's writing above, allowed Chicanas/os to articulate unforeseen definitions of cultural, racial, and ethnic identity. Dávila concluded his text with a powerful acknowledgement of the potential of language and of the written word. He ended, by saying "Cierto, todo esto es pura literatura. Pero de estas mentiras puras puede surgir algún alivio. Pues, queremos retornar a casa sin dejar el camino. Somos y seremos lugareños caminantes. Somos chicanos. Somos, en fin, pura literatura" (1).³⁷

Left with the task to enact new semantic road maps that would encode what *Chicano* meant for Chicano communities and for the world, Dávila's concluding words provided an intimate glimpse of what Rubén Salazar described as the Chicano soul. Dávila showed how literary expression had the ability to rework language to hone in on the Chicano soul. Chicano articulations illustrated the oppositional identity of "an act defiant" and "badge of honor" that Salazar described as *Chicano*.

³⁷ "True, this is all pure literature. But from these pure lies can arise some sort of healing. For what we wish is to return home without losing our way. We are and will be always be nomadic natives. We are Chicanos. We are, after all, pure literature" (My Translation).

To further illustrate this point, “Imploración a mi lengua”³⁸ by S. Rodríguez del Pino in the 1977 publication by El Centro Cultural de La Raza, *Maize: Cuaderno de arte y literatura xicana*,³⁹ showed how creative approaches to language practices fostered shifts that made language use acts of linguistic subversion.

¿por ké miaprisionas en tus dogmas
kwando kiero kontigo kantar?

déjame ekspresarme komo pweda
para yegar a todos loske me kieran oyir
así nwabrá naide ke nwentienda
mis deseos- -mis sweños i miangustia

todos podrán oyirte i entender
la dulsura de tu kanto
los ritmos de tu ser
la simpleza dekspresión
ke warda tu korasón

no dejes ke pedantes y puristas
agan leyes i te pongan
fwera del alkanse
del pweblo ke tekrió. (52)

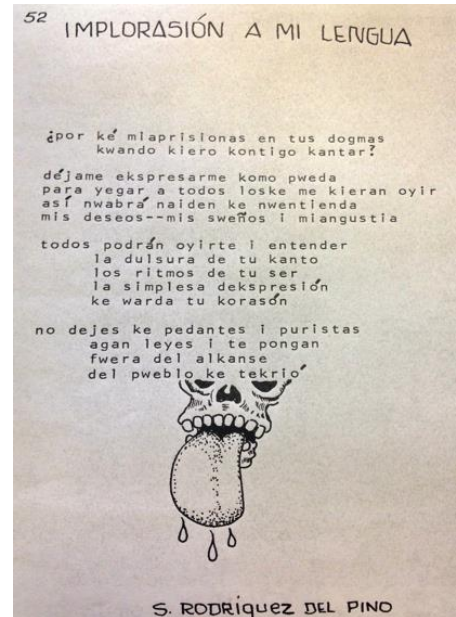


Figure 7 S. Rodriguez Del Pino
Imploración a mi lengua (1977)

Through his management of language, the poet subverted the negative stereotyped speech of Chicanos. He achieved this by writing phonologically. He inserted the unique oral traditions of Chicano communities into textual domains as he wrote words based on how they sound.

³⁸ “Entreaty to my tongue” (My translation).

³⁹ *Maize: Cuaderno de arte y literatura xicana* is also known as, *Maize: Xicano Arts and Literature Notebooks*.

Blurring the boundaries between oral and written conventions of language, he wrote as he spoke that demonstrated a writing strategy at play with language.

A second example of his playful subversion of language is witnessed in using English sounding letters and approximating them (or transferring them) to Spanish sounding letters as in the case of /w/ for the diphthong /ue/ in the Spanish word of ‘pueblo’ and /ua/ in the word ‘cuando.’ His suspensions of orthographic conventions are seen in his use of /k/ for /qu/ and /c/. A third example of the author’s play with the writing and the conventions of language are seen in the oral transcription of the verb ‘hacer’ expressed as ‘agan’ instead of ‘hagan,’ marking the lack of the /h/, a form commonly seen in heritage language learners of Spanish. And last, he writes words based on the unique intonational markers of speech reminiscent of a Chicano dialect that defies word diction and syntax as evidenced in the first verse, “por ké miaprisionas en tus dogmas” which would be written as “¿Por qué me aprisionas en tus dogmas.”⁴⁰

In this way, the writer responded to how language itself was invisibly managed and manipulated to oppress people. Presented as an expression of Chicano dialect was Pino’s response to the stereotype of Chicano speak as uneducated. His poem is a linguistic rebellion. His defiant use of language fashioned new speech acts geared to generate honor in Chicano forms of communication. His use of non-normative forms of speech reflected his heightened understanding of the importance of language. Because Pino’s poem is written phonetically, he transcended the limits of language standards while putting into question the conceived notion of linguistic inferiority attributed to Chicanos who speak Spanish and/or English or

⁴⁰ “Why do you imprison me in your dogmas?” (My Translation).

who code switch.⁴¹ The poet transcended the guarded prescriptivism of language through literary devices that produced a rhythm, almost a musical dimension, to his words. Through such approaches and methods, Pino celebrated language variation. At the same time the notion of language variation transforms into a metaphor of Chicano language. These acts functioned as a call to action. Language and tongue took on a symbolic power, signifying the gateways to one's own liberation—a Chicana/o *ars poetica* quest.

Akin to that, the visual representation accompanying the poetic expression of Pino fortified his point on language. The sketch drawing of a skull with its tongue out brought to the forefront the importance of visualizing language matters through the depiction of tongues. The three drops of water below the tongue represent a saturated and salivating tongue. This expressed the author's desire to speak. At the semiotic level, the tongue is alive in the confines of cultural memory even in death. If we consider the reference to *calaveras* and the art of José Guadalupe Posada, a satirical and political image manifests of the concerns of the day. The drawing served as a visual clue that, in company with the text, provided a collectivity of semiological elements that demarcated the importance of speaking through textual and graphic linguistic gestures. Textually, orally, and artistically his work personified the subaltern's creative play with language.

Like other early Chicano works, text and image collaborated to embody a homed Chicano discourse through tongue. At the same time, the missing accent in the author's name shows not the lack of knowledge about the rules of accentuation in Spanish, since accent marks were clearly included manually in the poem, but rather the election to write one's

⁴¹ Unfortunately, this stereotype was reinforced on both sides of the border. Chicano code switching was called Caló. Caló is also known as Chicano dialect.

name as one pleases. This shows another dynamic of the Chicano relationship to the thematic of language as a result of language shifts, loss and trauma.

A Struggle to Exist in Language

Chicanas/os addressed the multiple workings of imperialist-centered ideologies reflected in terms such as *pochos* and *Chicano* that contributed to the degrading of Chicanas/os as a racial and ethnic group in transnational contexts. Many Chicanas/os questioned the contradictions expounded by Mexico's modern intellectuals by challenging the cultural memory that portrayed Chicanas/os as *vendidos/as*: that expendable land and people that Mexico sold to the United States. Perpetuated stereotypes of Chicanas/os as *pochos* and as substandard bodies, as linguistically cut-off from Mexico, made Chicanas/os cognizant of rampant forms of internalized colonialism built into lingual attitudes. But Chicanos were determined to define their own culture, not as how others saw it fit or how they fit into some colonial mold, but from their own subject positions.

Despite these disjunctions between Mexicans and Chicanos, Chicanos continued to regard revolutionary figures from the pre-Columbian era to Mexican struggles for independence as history also belonging to them. By rejecting to solely identify with U.S. mainstream representations of American heroes—George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson—Chicanas/os demonstrated their trans-American roots. The use of one country's cultural and historical figures in another also revealed how Chicanas/os contested the limitations of nations and cultures as witness in their inclusion of diverse images. In this

sense, their unique cultural expressions demonstrated the rise of new hybrid space, a *nepantla*, a third space where the past aided in the fabrication of the present.⁴²

The publication of Tomás Rivera's *...y no se lo tragó la tierra* (1971) and Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me Ultima* (1972), aside from being among the first Chicano published works, illustrated the importance of a past in the search for a Chicano identity that celebrated heritage. While Rivera's text is written in Spanish and Anaya's in English, the active exposition and celebration of Chicano cultural heritage remains unquestioned. This multilingual aspect of the Chicano movement must not be dismissed. Rivera and Anaya confirmed the diversity engrained in the Chicano linguistic repertoire that came out of the 1960s and 1970s. The fact that both texts eventually were translated into the other language or had been published in bilingual versions by the 1980s and 1990s, also pointed to the metalinguistic scale of Chicano speak. Without a doubt, a major theme in early cultural production was the presentation of Chicano protagonists as cultural subjects coming into consciousness about their cultural identity—works a la Chicano *bildungsroman*. The poetry of Alurista⁴³ and of Tino Villanueva also revealed how the literary arts transmitted a call to action intended to awaken the Chicana/o consciousness. Regrettably, female representations were limited during the beginning years of the movement, although this did not inhibit women from thinking about bringing Chicana works to light.

Due to the complex language issues defining Chicana/o customs, writers and artists were left to bring perspicacity into the diversity of languages of Chicana/o heritage and to illustrate the multifarious modes of Chicana/o thought coming into reality through artistic

⁴² To provide a brief example, Corky Gonzales' *Yo soy Joaquín* exemplified existing links between Mexican and Chicano heritages as well as between text and image. The visual and dramatic interpretation of this poem by Luis Valdez's *El Treto Campesino* in 1969 further fortified the shared oral and literary traditions of Chicanos and Mexicans.

⁴³ Alberto Baltazar Urista Heredia

and literary production. The literary writings of Sabine Ulibarrí reflected this fundamental essence of the struggle to exist in language. Ulibarrí captured the Chicano spirit of chasing the sign in his originally unpublished work, “Language and Culture:”

The language, The Word carries within it the history, the culture, the traditions, the very life of a people, the flesh. Language is people. We cannot even conceive of a people without a language, or a language without a people. The two are one and the same. To know one is to know the other. To love one is to love the other. . . . Each one of his languages is the mold of the thinking, the very being of a people. Each language has its own and peculiar way of interpreting phenomena. Each language is a unique vision of the world. All of the history of a people is synthesized in its language. (Duke dos Santos and De la Fuente 243-44)

On that same note, art offered a visual narrative and referent to the emerging Chicano politics scouting for a place in which to express the language that carried the meaning of a people in symbolic forms and metaphoric representations.

Thus, visual representations complemented the written word in illustrating the new vocabulary of Chicano politics. By visually representing the discourses of the politics of the movement, art proved an ideal method to express the ideological pillars of *Chicanismo*. Text and image worked interchangeably. Visual representations inspired literary scriptures as much as lettered imageries invoked the visual realm. The late José Montoya, an early movement artist and member of the Royal Chicano Air Force, perhaps best expressed the call to action to artists to service the ideals of the movement. His artistic use of language

expressed the struggle for representation in art. His language captured the new concept of *Chicano* operating in the visual field when he declared:

Chicano art is art done by Chicanas and Chicanos who at some crucial, historical juncture in time and space embraced the commitment to develop as Chicanas and Chicanos. Offspring in the origin of Mexican parents and their progenitors, Indios y Españoles—but since extended to include the rainbow and with only one thing in common for certain: we have roots in this continent, from way before! So that, and the being from this country, the U.S.A., not Mexico, is what makes us adamantly Chicanas y Chicanos who never forget we are Mexicans. What too often trips our liberating impulses is that since we do have choices we opt to go the other way! But you can't be producing Chicano art if you stop being Chicana/Chicano. Chicano art was born out of struggle—the struggle goes on! (Griswold del Castillo et al. 19)

The art of Rupert García, Frank Hinojosa, Daniel Desiga, Carmen Lomas Garza, and Judy Baca, like Montoya, proffered visual representations of the Chicano arts' call-to-action philosophy.⁴⁴ Of primary example, the collective *Mujeres Muralistas*, which responded to the absence of female muralists in the Mexican Muralist movement, directly influenced Chicano art and worked toward the recognition of Chicano artwork as American art.

Women saw art production as a call to action to address, through visual measures, storylines of women who were often excluded and overlooked in forms of storytelling and absent as valid subject matter in the study of the art history of minority cultures. With this in mind, silkscreen prints, etchings, poster art, photography, and additional graphic mediums

⁴⁴ Expression of family life, cultural tradition, and unity through solidarity prevailed as the major tenets in early Chicano works.

within Chicana/o visual arts used a visual lexicon that paralleled the emerging languages of the Chicano movement in literature.

¡Pega el grito! The Burst of Voice

By the early 1960s, Mexican Americans had reevaluated the attitudes and practices that prevailed through 1945 within their culture. Among younger Mexican Americans, a new consciousness emerged with a belief that a resurgence of cultural pride would change their living conditions. As a symbol of this new pride, they adopted as labels of identification the word Chicano instead of Mexican American, Latino, or Hispanic. This initiated the transformation of *Chicano* into a sign that symbolically reframed the historical, social, and cultural heritage of Chicanos as positive. However, the choice of the word Chicano over Mexican American scandalized parents and grandparents, who had used Chicano as a disparaging term for lower-class Mexicans who moved into rural areas of the United States after emigrating from Mexico. For older Mexican Americans, Chicano had the same connotation words such as Okie, cracker, and hick had for urban Anglos.⁴⁵

But this generation had been changed by war. The young people questioned their parents' drive to assimilate to Anglo lifestyles and questioned the constant need to ascribe to the language of a Spanish fantasy heritage where Spanish ancestry was above that of Mexican ancestry and indigenous lifestyles. This hidden operative of imperialist and colonialist mentalities circulating in the heritage of southwestern culture was documented by historian Carey McWilliams in 1948 with the publication of *North from Mexico: The Spanish-speaking People of the United States*. Breaking with dominant social expectations,

⁴⁵ For a more detailed account of terms used to loosely define Dust Bowl migrants from Oklahoma or the Plains as Okies see the writings of John Steinbeck, such as, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). A visual parallel is the iconic image of Great Depression is *Migrant Mother* (1936) by Dorothea Lange.

politically aware Chicanos started placing value on speaking Spanish and studying the history of their communities in the mid-1960s. The desire to erase negative taxonomies set Chicanos toward radical activism: the urgency to make public and visible decolonial and subaltern perspectives in order to enact positive reconceptualization of heritage. Their identification with the term *Chicano* acknowledged a new public acceptance—the embracing of the Mexican Indian roots of their heritage (Tatum 12). *Chicano*, therefore, signified the survival of subaltern lived experiences and a commitment to change through language.

The Chicano *grito* inscribed the first activities of Chicano language use. During the incipient years of the Chicano movement, creative and public cries, which were metaphorically understood as *el grito*, baptized the arrival of the subaltern's self-image of subjectivity.⁴⁶ Through creative works, *el grito* signified the coming into being of a new voice. *El grito* cemented the arrival of subjectivity, the moment where those on the margins expressed their perception and interpretation of *Chicano* as sign and code. The interactive construction of identity, both artistic and visual, witnessed in Chicana/o articulations showed the passing of symbolic thought into authentic reality through language. Accordingly, Chicana/o textual and visual utterances tell of the coming of subaltern empowerment—the arrival of a Chicano consciousness and agency.

To explain new phenomena of Chicano identity coming into fruition through text and image, new behaviors and attitudes sensitive to the influence of language incited new terminology, expressions and styles that bridged the visual with the literal, the fantastic with the real, and the earthly with the spiritual. Symbolic announcements of the entry of

⁴⁶ There is also an intertextual reference to *el grito* related to the cry for independence among colonies of New Spain. The most common reference to *el grito* related to Chicano history is *el grito de Dolores* on near Guanajuato, México, on September 16, 1810 by Don Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, a Jesuit priest who is considered the leader of the Mexican War of Independence (1810-1821).

Chicanas/os into new language domains were illustrated in visual etchings representing a cry. This corresponded to cathartic hollers described in texts. *El grito* signified the process of a voice radicalized and altered as a result of the acquisition of a new Chicano tongue.⁴⁷

The words of Father B.G. Figueroa, S.D.B., in the 1968 publication *El Grito: A Journal of Contemporary Mexican-American Thought*, showed the advent of Chicano identity through call-to-action utterances.⁴⁸ In his short essay titled “El Grito,” Father Figueroa expressed a liberation theology à la Chicano attitude in his message:

Para sacar sus ideas al sol y darle permanencia al aliento de su voz el hombre recurre a la palabra escrita. Por su medio las teorías se esclarecen; se denuncian abusos; se excita a la acción y aun la rebelión; la autoridad se promueve o se ataca.

En el mundo moderno, la palabra escrita se une a la imagen llevada por la televisión y la onda radiodifusora para crear la opinión pública. Hoy en día por ejemplo, el hombre común y corriente se halla dudoso ante el problema de Vietnam. Y no sabe si la guerra es moral y justa o inmoral y por tanto, algo que debe rechazarse.

Cosa parecida pasa con el México-americano que no ha estudiado su historia, el origen de su cultura y al desarrollo de la sociedad estadounidense; cree porque se lo han dicho y repetido, aunque se rebelde al sambenito, que es un retardado, que su cultura no sirve, que pertenece a una raza inferior . . .

⁴⁷ Many times, this meant the acceptance of one’s home languages or the revitalization of languages as a result of linguistic shifts rather than of language loss. The mainstreaming of children into English in schools is a primary example of a language shift.

⁴⁸ S.D.B. is The Salesians of Don Bosco.

En este agobiante miasma, llega—refrescante y vivificadora como un ráfaga de aire puro —la voz articulada, joven y rebelde que se llama “El Grito.” . . .

La corrección de esta teoría [que los México-americanos son simples, inferiores y atrasados a causa de su tradición cultural], solo podrá provenir del mismo México-americano. Se ha fundado este periódico precisamente para proveerle de un foro para su pensamiento. Si se siente torero, que clave la banderilla donde cuenta; si se siente profeta o víctima que cristalice su angustia o su rabia en la palabra vertida en prosa o en verso, en inglés o en español; y si habla por imágenes, si el lápiz o la acuarela es su medio de expresión, que dibuje o pinte para “El Grito.” Unica condición: que tenga su mensaje claridad y relieve. (sic) (8-9)⁴⁹

That said, the three dominant concepts coming to fruition during the Chicano movement—cultural nationalism, cultural affirmation, self-determination—showcased how Chicana/o creativity reflected the development of new linguistic imaginaries of visual and textual landscapes.

⁴⁹ “In order to bring his ideas to light and give permanence to the breath of his voice, man turns to the written word. By this medium, theories are clarified; abuses are denounced; there is a call to action and also rebellion; authority is either promoted or it is attacked. In the modern world, the written word is united with the image carried across television and radio wave to create public opinion. Today, for example, the everyday man finds himself doubtful about the problem in Vietnam. And he doesn’t know whether the war is moral and just or immoral and as such, something that should be condemned. A similar thing happens with the Mexican-American who has not studied his history, the origin of his culture and the development of American society; he believes because it has been told and repeated to him, whether he rebels against the stigma, that he is a retard, that his culture is worthless, that he belongs to an inferior race... In this agonizing miasma, comes-refreshing and exhilarating like a gust of pure air- the articulated voice, young and rebellious that is called “El Grito” (The Cry). The reversal of this theory [that Mexican-Americans are simple, inferior and backwards due to their cultural tradition], can only come from Mexican-American himself. This newspaper has been founded precisely to provide a forum for his thoughts. If he is like a bullfighter, let him stab the banderilla where it counts; if he is a prophet or a victim let him crystalize his anguish or his rage spilling through prose or verse, in English or in Spanish; and if he speaks by means of images, if pencil or watercolor is his mode of expression, let him draw or paint for “El Grito.” Only condition: that his message has clarity and importance” (My Translation).

Eager to explore the hidden histories of colonial and pre-Columbian civilization denied to Chicanas/os in formal U.S. schooling, the politics of *la causa* motivated Chicanas/os to reclaim the languages that gave them a sense of origin lacking in dominant nation-state traditions or in post-war, post-revolution modernities.⁵⁰ Pre-Columbian culture retooled Chicana/o origins and incited a new mode of subjectivity where the past informed the present. Language functioned as an apparatus to reclaim conditions of invisibility attributed to historical erasure or cultural amnesia of the presence of Chicanos in borderlands.

Perhaps this is why the notion of *el grito* defined one of the major philosophical tenets of the movement. *El grito* symbolically marked the moment where Chicanas/os reclaimed their voices and tongues while offering a new approach to language that showed the inner semiological workings of subaltern peoples to solidify identities. But calls for independence and liberation encapsulated in the metaphor of *el grito* came to signify different goals when refracted through gender, ethnicity, class, race, sex and sexuality. The set of struggles for justice and equity for men and women under *Chicanismo* targeted its focus on racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic concerns whereas individuals identifying as feminists considered gender, sex and sexuality based oppressions as equally important concerns. As Chicana feminists bridged the politics of the movement with feminist efforts, their engendered lenses feminized the politics of *Chicanismo*.

As women weaved their Chicana and feminist identities, the concept of *Chicano*, the label Chicano, and the idea of *Chicanismo* evolved and transformed into the concept *Chicana/Xicana*, the label Chicana/Xicana and the idea of *Chicanisma*, more commonly

⁵⁰ The use of historic, legendary, and folkloric figures important in pre-Columbian, Spanish colonial, and modern Mexican history, with representations of Montezuma, Emiliano Zapata, José María Morelos, and Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, fomented Chicano cultural nationalism, while promoting ethnic pride with new linguistic implorations.

known as *Xicanism* or *Xicanisma*.⁵¹ Chicana feminists initially argued that improvements to the conditions of women would create a trickle-down effect that would improve the lives of all peoples. Their declarations showed that the concerns of women varied to the same degree as individual and regional distinctions among Chicanas/os across the Southwest. Nonetheless, women soon learned that their visions were not favored or welcome.

Labeled *vendidas* and *malinchista* for speaking out, women became cognizant of the ways language, power, and discourse affected the perception of Chicana feminists' objectives and cultural visions. Their concerns illustrated the shifting power dynamics of women across all social contexts. As women pressed for an ideological reorientation of the politics of the movement, the symbolic power of their critical articulations showed women's visionary outlook. The awakening of a Chicana consciousness seen in the expression of Chicana feminist thought illustrates how the Chicana *grito* marked the arrival of a Chicana language—a Chicana tongue.

⁵¹ The /x/ *Xicana*, instead of Chicana, signifies a close relation to the indigenous roots. Chicana and *Xicana* are interchangeable terms. However, these changes to words by Chicana feminists show how women reclaimed language by using language a way to raise consciousness on feminism and architect a new language on the experience of what it meant to be Chicana. Another example of women reclaiming language by redefining terms is seen in the fluid exchange of the word "muxer" for *mujer*, which is similar to the use of "womyn" for women in feminist circles. The use of "feminista" for feminist is another example that accentuates the individual connection to Spanish language, culture and thought. Ana Castillo is credited as being one of the first Chicanas to use the term *Xicana* to signify Chicana Feminism. In *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays of Xicanisma* (1994) Castillo advocated, "It is our task as Xicanistas, to not only reclaim our indigenismo-but also to reinsert the forsaken feminine into our consciousness." *Xicana* politics engaged with history in order to change the language of history and the conceptualization of cultural understanding. Thus, women understood that in order to change their worlds (public/private) they needed to reclaim labels and terminology. Castillo captured this sense when she proclaimed, "A crucial distinction between labels we have been given by officials of the state and our own self-naming process is that only doing the latter serves us. The very act of self-definition is a rejection of colonization." Castillo's *Xicanisma*, gave voice to a Chicana feminism grounded in reclaiming derogatory terms as a decolonizing process and called for the advancement of women through the process of self-naming. In this way we see how *Xicana* politics signed the ideas of the second-wave feminist causes while simultaneously articulating how the Chicana feminism was a unique experience of women of color.

In breaking silences, Chicanas found in language a spirit of integration, a way to become visible, and a voice from which to declare ownership of their Chicana subjectivity previously unseen. The struggle to bring the imaginings and desires of a new Chicana consciousness into reality is an important area of study because it demonstrates the revolutionary positions of writers and artists' acts in crossing the threshold of a new era related to Chicana identity, language, and power.

The arrival of a Chicana consciousness developed into a system of language attitudes, awareness, and behaviors that envisaged Chicana feminist languages as a common mother tongue between women. This approach stemmed from feminists' reforms to the relationship between the linguistic legacies from which we imagine women today in relation to the way we interpret female figures and images of the past. Chicanas appropriated postmodern and feminist methods to study patriarchy as a multidimensional concept to end the hegemonic, dichotomous and singular inclines of thinking about women. This corroborates with Homi Bhabha's notion that:

The move away from the singularities of 'class' or 'gender' as primary conceptual and organizational categories has resulted in an awareness of the subject position—of race, gender, generation, institutional location, geopolitical locale, sexual orientation—that inhabit any claim to identity in the modern world. What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. The 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood-singular or communal—that unite new signs of identity,

and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (Bhabha 2)

Metahistory, heteroglossia, hybridity and revisionist myth-making were concepts that assisted early activists to debunk negative projections encoded in cultural practices. The emerging field of semiotics and its connections to cultural studies and language matters among multicultural, subaltern and minoritized populations assisted women to unite under “new signs of identity.” By thinking “beyond” customs, feminists used concepts such as gender, sex and sexuality to envisage a new sign-system to express “the in-between spaces of cultural difference.”

For example, the advent of revisionist myth-making initiatives led women to question stereotypes and misrepresentations in implicit and explicit forms in order to shed light on the active forms that language and thought played in the promotion of negative images of women. Through an active engagement with how negative stereotyping operated under binary relations such as good/bad, rational/irrational, man/women, and black/white, feminists brought attention to what Walter Mignolo has termed as “the world system powers of coloniality” to understand the ways sexism operated before and after the conquest of the Americas (Mignolo, 1).

As education allowed women to gain awareness about the history of La Malinche, they reckoned that the figure of La Malinche was a mental image inherited from their ancestors, an image present in their collective unconscious that spoke to female resistance and strength as it did to oppression and discrimination. As Chicanas revised myths about women, the figure of La Malinche came to signify a powerful and empowering Chicana cultural archetype. La Malinche transformed into a positive symbol of language and voice

because she was a metaphor of language and tongue—a cultural code that mapped the concrete complexities of shifting female culturescapes—which inspired women to use her image as a sign to articulate female sensibilities, experiences and realities.

With this in mind, the way in which women created a new verbal and symbolic exchange of ideas about identity illustrates how women experienced the Chicano movement differently. Women turned to crafting new bodies of work after becoming increasingly unsatisfied with the ways men told women how to think and regard their own sense of identity, how to relate to other women, and how to think about female cultural images. For example, in *La Chicana: Her Role in the Past and Her Search for a New Future Role in the Future* (1971), Bernice Rincón described the struggles of women to address their needs in the movement:

Woman's struggle to become a person in her own right takes on a peculiar note for the Latina woman. If she happens to

be of Mexican descent, her battle seems almost insurmountable, and yet today the sisters are working to develop a strategy that will enable us to be women people, rather than chattels or pets; and, at the same time, not to so radically disrupt the balance of man–woman relationship that we become neuters.

Positive	Negative
1. Bravery, loyalty	1. Absolute power
2. Pride in self as an individual	a. Exploitation
3. Responsibility of leadership in the family	b. Self centeredness
4. Sacredness of the family (La Raza)	c. Violence used to maintain power through fear
5. Human values: Love of fellows: compassion, suffering, liberty for all	d. Closed aloofness
6. Lack of concern for money	2. Women seen as a subordinate creature created to make man's lot more comfortable and pleasurable
7. Love of music, dancing (joy of life)	3. Too much pride
8. Love of children	4. Absolute power-inclination to strong man politics; Hero worship-dictatorships
9. Respect for religion	5. There is a sharing of the joys of life only as man sees fit. Woman's place is home.
10. Respect for elders	6. Large families (here the church has also contributed)
11. Modesty and reserve	7. Too much responsibility placed on the male to maintain his "position"
12. Liberal political orientation	8. Drinking, wenching, etc., seen as a sign of manhood
13. Good manners	9. Fighting seen as a proof of masculinity
14. Willingness to fight when needed	10. Too modest and reserved for survival in today's society

Figure 8 Bernice Rincón List of Positive/Negative Role of Chicanas (1971)

Many of the more enlightened Latino men in the movement are also recognizing that the status quo cannot be allowed to remain unchanged. If we speak of freedom, it must encompass all people equally, regardless of sex. These ideas are being expressed more frequently by the enlightened male leadership in the movement. The ideas are worded differently or perhaps presented in a different way, but the inevitability of change in order to establish a better society is there. [. . .] The status quo must go! It is a new time and we need to make use of everybody's talent and energy. (García, *Chicana* 24-25)

As her essay delineated the difference in gender roles among men and women, she showed how culturally defined social roles relegated women to subordination and inferiority. Through her critique of the ideal of Mexican womanhood, Rincón stressed that an end to *machismo* was imperative if the movement was serious about achieving social justice.

Speaking out in support of changes women needed to achieve, Rincón offered dichotomous social roles ascribed to women as problematic. The list is meant to incite women to think about who has defined the values and roles that women perform. Her essay evidences the types of Chicana *gritos* women made. Showing an understanding of the power of speaking women, Rincón used writing to record a new activism emerging among women. Toward the end of her essay, when she asks women to think about the changes they would like to see, she stated, "La Chicana has the best of two cultures at her fingertips. Don't push her to assimilate. We have something good. Take it easy, play it cool and we will come up with something better" (28). Concluding with examples of cultural models of "bravery and spirit" ranging from Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz to Dolores Huerta, and ending with an

anonymous poem she read titled “India es mi mujer,” Rincón illustrated how women were initiating social changes through new language practices that encouraged women to use semiotic techniques to analyze contemporary culture in order to give women power to represent themselves. In directing her words to women, she also encourages women to find the courage to initiate their own *grito* (28).

From the vantage point of artistic expression, visual media also show how Chicanas envisaged a different narrative of *Chicanismo* than did their male counterparts. In documenting the efforts of the Brown Beret, the image of a Chicana *grito* is seen in this image of former Brown Beret Hilda Solis. Now an American politician—she served as the 25th United States Secretary of Labor from 2009 to 2013—the representation of women leading protests in the name

of social reform demonstrated how women were visually speaking out in defense of their own causes. Similar to Solis’ image, the depiction of women in the first publication of *La Raza* (1970) gestured the arrival of Chicana power and her call for revolution.

In reference to artistic expression where women exhibit their own arrival of Chicana power through graphic representations signifying a *grito*, *La Reina del Barrio* (1974) by Judithe Hernández dramatized the centrality of what it meant for women to resist



Figure 9 Brown Berets Hilda Solis (n.d.)

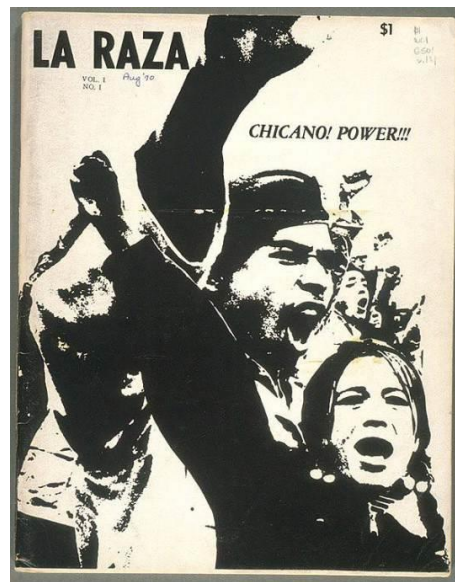


Figure 10 Magazine Cover of *La Raza Chicano! Power!!!* (1970)

assimilation or ascribe to the language of patriarchy.

She offered a reconfiguration of how female language practices were giving shape to the multilingual aspects of emerging Chicana feminist thought. With a mouth wide open, the Chicana *grito* is represented in a cloud like emanation of language—the materialization of her voice, the arrival of her own language signified through the release of a breath. This queen of the *barrio*

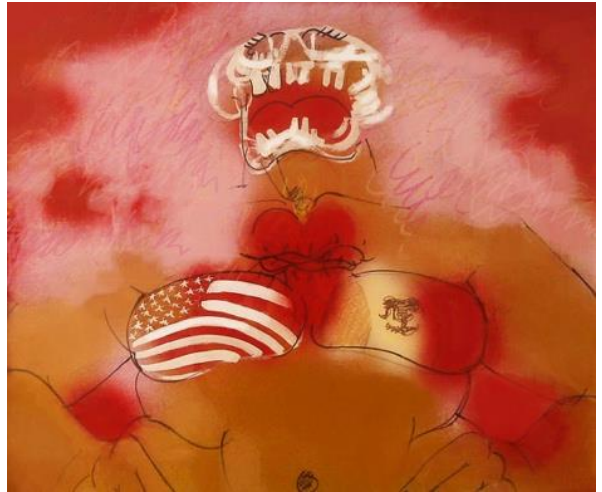


Figure 11 Judith Hernández *La Reina del Barrio* (1974)

dominates the medium in a stance of confidence, as she not only shows a pride for her brown body, but a love of self as a Mexican American. Through her bikini attire, Hernández advances the idea of a Chicana language rooted in the heart of emerging Chicana identity where feminist critical perspectives validated a metalinguistic awareness of self.

Entering into a Space

Throughout history, people have used art and literature to describe and explain their beliefs, thoughts and cosmic visions. Many times people who have no political representation in society find in creativity a way to express their frustrations and experiences with discrimination and oppression. In an effort to let their truth be known, Chicana artists and writers turn to the creative arts, so to speak, to present their world visions. As storytellers they interpret, translate, and imagine the experiences of the community to which they belong.

The development of “the language of a revolutionary awareness,” as suggested by Walter Benjamin, enabled Chicanas to carve spaces from nascent Chicana/o sensibilities (Bhabha and Eagleton). The Chicano movement demonstrated that the subaltern did speak,

and even more, that Chicanas as gendered subalterns had much to say. The call-to-action fervor of the 1960s and 1970s invoked the arts to record the unfolding actions and happenings of contemporary history that shifted creative practices into spaces where “the language of revolutionary awareness” of Chicana power took root. However, because women used different forms of communications to circulate their messages, an interdisciplinary semiotics approach to the study of Chicana cultural production elucidates the types of meaning-making processes enacted in the structure and meaning of Chicana language.

Experimentations with language use at the level of signification motivated women to work within the realm of sign-systems in order to produce modes of meaning that pointed to complex and multilayered thought processes of feminist thought. Chicanas used creative spaces to deconstruct, decolonize, translate and transgress languages. From altering the meanings of signs to playing with language,

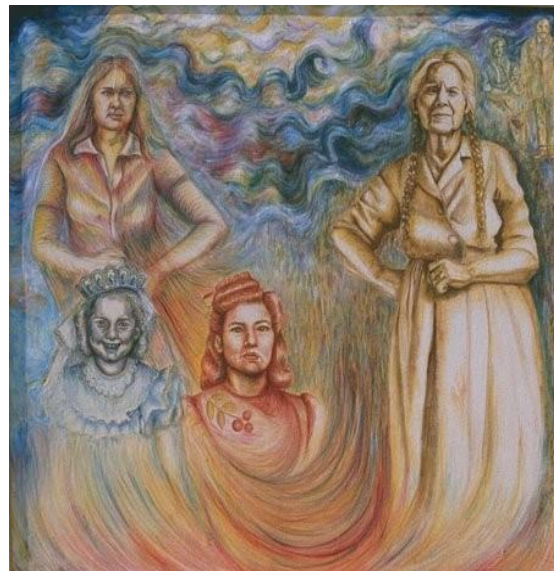


Figure 12 Judy Baca *Tres Generaciones* (1975)

Chicanas carried out the principles of the Chicano movement by mapping cultural codes as evidenced in their representations of La Malinche. The advent of a feminist vocabulary allowed women to bring to the table new understandings of knowledge and language circulating among women. For one, women placed positive value on what they knew and demonstrated this by listing ordinary objects from the past, honoring women’s work in and out of domestic spaces and giving more attention to the cultural memory of objects in quotidian life, as seen in Judy Baca’s *Tres Generaciones* (1975). This 6x8ft oil on canvas

painting inserted the image of Chicanas into visual mediums. Through positive representations of women, she shows the diversity of lived experiences of Chicanas and validated the culture contributions of women across generations. Her grandmother represents the wisdom of women and their survival. She also paints a positive representation of indigenous traditions signified in Baca's representation of her grandmother's braids. Furthermore, she brings attention to domestic realities by reinforcing how women were reframing femininity and home life as a space of activism and a site where women offered their own versions of cultural affirmation.



Figure 13 Ester Hernández *California Special* (2013)

This parallels the intent of Esther E. Hernández in *California Special* (1988) to create an archive of women's lives and experiences that showed the labor of women's work inside and outside the home and the ecological and sustainable talents of women to turn flour sacks into beautiful dresses. Hernández explains:

This painting is a way of honoring my familia because while we had very little materially, we were rich with familia, comunidad, and cultura. As my mother, who was a skilled gardener, would always say: 'we may not be rich, mi'ja, but we have many beautiful flowers.' So, although it may have been a humble flour sack dress, it was useful, beautiful and filled with love and magic—a rich legacy that I am proud to be a part of today. (Hernández, *California* n. pag.)

She created a new language about women honoring their domestic labor and philosophies in public spaces. By creating a second image titled *California Special – Our Legacy*” in 2013 to honor her history, Hernández proved the importance of celebrating familial values as part of one’s heritage. It also showed how visual storytelling empowered women.

During the early 1960s it was commonly thought that women should support visions of culture as defined by tradition and by men. Visual and textual acts by Chicana feminists of the late 1960s and 1970s labored to create a feminist space where women could have a voice of their own. When feminists were often denied a space or a place from which to speak in public, women often organized at home. Patricia Rodríguez of Mujeres Muralistas described how she and other women organized to carry-out the mural project *Latinoamérica* (1974) during a time when it was uncommon to consider Chicanos as artists and even less, Chicanas as muralists:



Figure 14 Mujeres Muralistas *Latinoamérica* (1974)

The four of us [Consuelo, Graciela, Irene, and I] met at our home in Balmy Alley and brainstormed a design. Our house became the central headquarters of the Mujeres Muralistas. Each of the women had a key to the house and could come by at any time of the day. There was a large table in the laundry room ready with all the drawing tools necessary to work on the design. We worked as a collaborative group, sharing information, research, and discussing what kind of mural we wanted. (Rodríguez, *Mujeres* n.pag.)

Private settings afforded Chicanas the opportunity to judge the basis of negative images and words that misrepresented their identity. Given that tradition had authorized women with full jurisdiction over domestic affairs, women showed how the languages of the domestic sphere were revised through feminist theories. Homes transformed into a site of dialogue that was welcoming to women's concerns. Women redefined what home signified as their feminist politics took shape in the confines of the home. As women mused, a new language about domesticity emerged.

By the late 1970s, the metamorphoses of domestic engagements were transferred in such a fashion that domesticity created a pathway for the idea of home to become a positive site of female empowerment. The development of a new Chicana-defined identity sprouting from home spaces operated as a site from which to contest gendered notions of public and private space. Creativity and language were tools as much as weapons, as women used language as a weapon of defiance and honor, of liberty, of self-expression. Language, like an intellectual and visionary machete, was a tool used with the deliberate intent of creating a culture and style of art that was bio-pictorial. Chicana art shows that metalinguistic forms of communication also occur in non-verbal forms.

In this regard, women showed that they had the right to be involved in domestic affairs—domestic affairs being issues relating to or happening in your own country, region or group. With a new approach to home politics, they validated their opinions and perspectives in public and private contexts. In the decade to come, women visually and textually contested the notion of inside and outside the home and of the era of the “Hispanic” and of multiculturalism by welcoming politics into their real and imaginary sense of homeland. For example, the publication of Carmen Lomas Garza's *A Piece of My Heart/ Pedacito de mi*

corazón: The Art of Carmen Lomas Garza (1991) illustrated the positive values of home, culture and the work of women such as the *curandera*, the mother, and cultural archetypes.

Through the use of irony and humor, and in telling secrets or violating taboos in the traditional cultural contexts such as talking about puberty, divorce, sex or women's relationships to other women, women altered forms of thinking about home life and defined the language of *Xicanisma*. However, in literature, Sandra Cisneros, in a way, debunks the meaning of home as she tries to show how home can have a negative influence on women in *Women Hollering Creek and Other Stories* (1991) while in *Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera* (1995) Norma Cantú integrates text and image through stories and photographs about home life along the U.S.-Texan border. The convergence of both private and public explorations of life, of what it meant to be part of a Chicano community (inside as much as outside of the home), made the practice of creative expression for activists a form of theorizing at the intersections and in-betweens. These elements of in-between and of shifting forces of cultural difference influenced the construction of Chicana identity and experience. The analysis of artistic language, literary language, and the language of criticism of Chicana feminists connoted and denoted the radical praxis of female empowerment.

Because dominant tradition excluded women from the powers of language and discourse, the transformation of the Chicana imaginary through restructured and repurposed language practices signaled the gendered subaltern's entry into the powers of inventive-creative space. Pérez's 1991 essay, "Sexuality and Discourse: Notes from a Chicana Survivor" described and theorized the Chicana associative link between site, space, and language that

she termed “*sitio y lengua*.”⁵² Pérez’s “*sitio y lengua*” best illustrated the creative undertakings with language use to create a “woman” space that nurtured Chicana tongues. In her account of Chicana cultural heritage, Pérez exposed the manipulation of the powers of dominant language. In this woman space, what she defined as third space feminism, Pérez showcased how women anointed themselves as authorized discourse interpreters. Pérez answers “yes” to the question of subaltern studies critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the subaltern speak?” by employing a metalinguistic tongue to speak about female identity and by using a shifting force nestled in the interstices of the in-betweens of cultural differences.

In “the articulation of cultural differences,” Chicanas had to come to terms with a language difference used against them in public and private spaces (Bhabha 2). As Chicanas/os quarreled with the ways language, ideologies and attitudes had been manipulated to impose a sense of difference, Chicanas responded with articulations centered on cultural differences that repacked notions of difference. Calling attention to the differences inherent in the “hybridization of languages” of cultural heritage validated public-society discourse as well as private-home knowledge of the Chicana (Bhabha 85). It was necessary to re-manipulate or to re-address language to change understandings of language difference to challenge binarism and to break with stereotypes through strategies that subverted dominant forms of storytelling “to define the space of the inscription or writing of identity—beyond the visual depths of Barthes’ symbolic sign” (Bhabha 70).

⁵² Pérez’s essay first appeared in Carla Trujillo’s *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About* (1991) by Third Woman Press and later published in *Lesbian Postmodern* (1994), a volume edited by Laura Doan.

I Too Have a Language, Man

The development and evolution of Chicana visual and written works concerning the representation of La Malinche marked a distinct way Chicanas interpreted and experienced the world. The interests and concerns expressed in the recreation of cultural narratives and images pertaining to female cultural archetypes illustrated how Chicanas saw the language of their own cultural heritage as a site of knowledge from which to produce new conceptualizations of self. Michel Foucault, in *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1969), postulated that discursive fields are spaces where the interplay of relations that structure discourse has the potential to transform our mental processes. The reexamination of discourse, he points out, can be interpreted into and expressed in materiality since discourse is a construct. Foucault's scholarship assists in looking at cultural objects as artifacts to examine the role of women and female-identified protagonists in Chicana cultural production such as La Malinche. In construing cultural iconography as symbols and glyphs that can be rewritten or illustrated, Chicanas turned to La Malinche to critically examine the potential between "words and things," as described by Foucault, and the relation this icon had to discourse formation in Chicano culture.

In the chapter "Discursive Formation," Foucault considered discourse as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (96). He stated, "Of course, discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is this *more* that renders them irreducible to language (*langue*) and to speech. It is this 'more' that we must reveal and describe" (96). Foucault also described how the analysis of discursive formations allows us to examine how discourse itself is formed and synthesized in auditory and visual experiences. The theorist demonstrated how we could examine the

workings of discourse aside from groups of signs, and more as a system of practice, where groups of rules, beliefs and thoughts coalesce to give meaning to discourse. This is important because it pinpoints to what Chicana feminists did in their work. Chicana art and literature express the linguistic practice of their own discourse.

Storytelling from a feminist's sense of language transformed the contents and representations of Chicana discursive practices. As a result, a Chicana discursive culture developed to challenge the signifying elements that group, signed and coded what Foucault would deem "words and things." Through the interrogation of foundational narratives in Chicano cultural legacy and heritage, and particularly those fundamentally structured to undo certain statements about women, Chicana feminists demonstrated the potential of creativity and criticism to enact intellectual collisions. Like creative endeavors, criticism showed how Chicana positions at the intersections and interstices of discourse formation where the Foucauldian "ordering of things occur" were deliberate acts aimed to renew the discursive circuits and networks of language and its operation in describing female archetypes (96). In this way, language was a practice, a strategy that confirmed how images narrated discursive understandings of cultural artifacts through representation. For Chicanas, the cultural icons of La Malinche meant so much more and thus must be analyzed from the history and experience of being a Chicana, a history that engaged directly with the politics of colonization and de-colonization.

While it is important to highlight the shared legacies between Chicano and Mexican communities, I caution against the use of a traditional Mexican understanding and ordering of things to assess what La Malinche means to Chicanas because the presentation and description of cultural icons by Chicanas displays Chicana discursive modes that recounted

how Chicanas envision their cultural and individual identity. With this said, the Mexican-defined discursive elements structuring the narratives of La Malinche must be regarded with caution because such representations proffered a narrative that reflected how Mexican culture expresses its own imaginings of Mexican culture and national community. While such statements are grounds for another study, the frameworks of this study's focus engages the way that Chicanas have used language to expose, challenge, and debunk those Mexican metanarratives about La Malinche which negatively stereotype women under the principles of colonialism, patriarchy (*machismo*), and euro-centrism.

What this study does entertain, and even remedy, is the ensuing inquiry of Mexican nationals who question why Chicano or Mexican-American “use” or “borrow” from Mexican culture if, according to their judgment, they are not Mexican. One of the primary goals of this dissertation is to challenge the erroneous speculation that Chicana usage of cultural images such as La Malinche is “using” or “borrowing” Mexican images. Such thought relegates defining one's culture through very rigid nationalistic perspectives without an acknowledgement of hybrid history, as Homi Bhabha terms it. Such narrow perspectives ignore the deep and rich cultural legacies that Chicanos and Mexicanos share, and refuses to acknowledge the deep cultural ties, even uncomfortable realities, between these two groups prior to 1848 when the U.S.-Mexican border marked new national boundaries.

How Chicana feminist authors and artists have elected to speak about or “deal” with the image of La Malinche in their work illustrated cultural realities in their present understanding of self as well as the self that is rooted in historical and cultural legacies across linguistic fields. It shows that women have language, too. The representation of female archetypes in Chicana feminist expressions is significant because it presents a transnational

reality that calls into question the workings of hegemonic structures, attitudes and institutions of power that police and regulate female bodies artistically and literally. Chicana feminist creativity and criticism unearthed the way we use language to construct our sense of self and the formation of worlds into public and private spaces. Their expressions reveal a grander case of how marginalized cultures and subaltern worlds and bodies have presented alternative and differential modes of thought. Art and literature thus are fundamental tools in aiding a colonized, discriminated and oppressed community to put the pieces of their scarred, traumatized and fragmented selves together by subscribing to counter-narrative and decolonial modes of storytelling.

Hence, early-movement expression in art and literature are two fields that seize the plasticity of language. The capacity to alter language defined the subaltern radical engagement with images and texts that guided the remolding of *Chicano* as sign. In the process of turning to the past to instill a new sense of self that would revive contemporary notions of self, Chicanas demonstrated the functionality and usefulness of language to create culture through the experimentation and innovativeness of language practices.

Feminists used La Malinche as a way to voice a woman's right to her individuality. Tey Diana Rebolledo explained in *Women Singing in the Snow* (1995) how "Chicana writers, with the self-realization of their emerging consciousness, have managed to make themselves the subjects of their own discourses" (x). By reclaiming the history and story of the figure of La Malinche, women showed how people are all a product of a collectivity of life stories. Stressing this important quality among Chicana writers, Rebolledo stressed the linguistic revolutions Chicanas writers' initiated as they took on the role of storytellers:

For women growing up in a culture that taught them that to survive, you should not speak out, and that your loyalty was to your family and the collectivity, not to yourself as an individual, writing is a subversive act. Many Chicana writers, although not all, are from working-class families. They may be the first in their families to be educated. Yet the phenomena that seems to silence women at the same time enabled them to speak out—for and with the collectivity, as well as for themselves. In the writer's memories, in their witnessing, are many references to the chain of women who came before them, evidence of the bonding with other women through which Chicana writers find their sustenance and their strength. (x)

That said, early Chicana cultural production illustrated the struggle by women to speak, to stick out their tongues without shame or reprimand. The break with historical and contemporary silences led women to explore the idea of “speaking woman” and to better understand how negative stereotypes about speaking women were linked to the very essence of cultural pride.

The quest by early activists to reverse the custom of negative depictions of ‘speaking women’ showed women in a semiotic engagement with language. As women meditated on what signs meant and how sign-systems functioned, the semiological turn in thinking about a “speaking woman” became a way to rethink a cultural vision inclusive of women's perspectives. It motivated women to research the relationships they have to language by examining how representations of women as speaking subjects function as a ‘language’ (method to read things) as well as a metaphor of language. La Malinche's tale served as a

cultural exemplum that gave women “the idea of seizing subjectivity or becoming the subject of your own discourse,” (Rebolledo, *Women Singing* x).

But feminists in particular showed how they used the image and symbolic power of La Malinche to inscribe new forms of feminist languages that changed the way women told stories about women. The strategic use of La Malinche as a tool of empowerment showed the approaches women took to stop the victimization of women in all contexts. Rebolledo, who has been a central critic giving light to the importance of language in Chicana writing, explained the importance of this concept:

For many years, Chicanas have been unable to write or to publish their writing if they did write. They were also working within a system in which language denied them. Thus to be able to write meant they had to “seize the language” (Ostriker) and become the subjects of their own narrations, and not the objects. This implies an extraordinary measure of empowerment for those women who were supposed to stay at home, be good wives and mothers, and be caregivers: active within the domestic sphere but not the public one. To find language, then voice, then consciousness of self and to be able to insert themselves as subjects has been very difficult, particularly for women writers. There is of course, a strong oral tradition in our culture, an oral tradition in which women were active participants. (x)

Stressing that it both took courage and creativity to speak out in public and private issues, Rebolledo’s scholarly work offered a way to read Chicana expression as moments of empowerment that gave women the agency to revert negative interpretations of women into positive ones (x). Women created action through the reclamation of language by becoming

responsible for overseeing the languages used to define their identity and the identities of female representations in Chicana lore dealing with language as in the case of La Malinche.

While in *Chicana Creativity and Criticism: New Frontiers in American Literature* (1996) María Herrera-Sobek and Helena María Viramontes showed how writers inscribe a new Lacanian Symbolic Order, “which seeks to make present that which is absent,” by telling new tales about their lives, this study places attention on the complexities in practicing Chicana feminist ideologies that cross the borders of ‘the symbolic order of language’ to ‘seize language’ in the semiological process of interpreting meaning. The emergence of shifting linguistic approaches and methods in Chicana cultural production reflected the development of a metalinguistic awareness of tongue and of the hybrid natures of Chicana languages. Aware that native languages, situations, and experiences varied highly among women, the language practices articulated in Chicana feminist creativity in relation to La Malinche points to the development of a subaltern *lingua franca*, a Chicana *lingua franca*—the emergence of a Chicana hybrid tongue. The many tales on La Malinche that have developed since the Chicano movement illustrate Chicana politics coming into speech, but the art and literature that engages with stories about La Malinche in hybrid contexts, authored from Spanish or addressed visually in the context of Spanish as a heritage language, illustrates the enormous changes in language women have had to accomplish to make a historical subject into a political subject, and to this end make their voices heard.

Gloria Anzaldúa is exemplum of the Chicana feminist’ manipulation of heritage through the retreatment of language as a *lingua franca* to forge new redefinitions of home, domesticity, body, and landscape as it intersected with notions of female bodies, feminine identities, feminist voices and lesbian desires. In many respects, Anzaldúa’s writings

predated what Bhabha stressed as going beyond Barthes' symbolic sign with a publication that showed how a Chicana cultural heritage had to manipulate "las culturas que traicionan" with "movimientos de rebeldía" in order to combat the linguistic terrorism that governed women's tongues (*Borderlands* 37). Her use of language to hone in on her sense of self is first described in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981). In her essay, "La Prietita," Anzaldúa delved into the intimate spaces of home to provide the reader with a powerful explanation of her lived experiences as a brown woman. Her testimony is a strong voice that embodies a queer consciousness on multiple planes.

By 1987, Anzaldúa had gathered the different strings of a metalinguistic awareness brewing her Chicana feminist's imaginary with the publication of *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. This publication alone revolutionized Chicano studies and emphasized the importance of the study of language. In her essay, "How to Tame a Wild Tongue," Anzaldúa hones in on the language debate, exposing the violence and abuse structured in language practices and attitudes to control subaltern and minority peoples. She deconstructed language with the following words, "There are no subtle ways that we internalize identification, especially in the forms of images and emotions. For me food and certain smells are tied to my identity, my homeland. . . . My mouth salivated at the thought of the hot steaming *tamales* I would be eating if I were home" (*Borderlands* 83). Anzaldúa showed how the domestic space granted her the strength to be honest and open about how language use in traditions inscribes the oppression of women.

The layout of her book demonstrated succinctly her chapter-to-chapter engagement with cultural heritage in exposing the manipulation of patriarchal language. She uses the space of writing to enact a sense of cultural heritage that led to a sense of home and of

homeland. As a consequence, a new past and present sense of feminized customs showed the importance of Chicana artistic and literary expression as a vehicle to manipulate a Chicana cultural heritage that she called “the path of red and black ink” (*Borderlands* 87). But here her use of red and black ink refers back to the pre-colonial heritage of the Aztecs—the glyphs of their writing (art and history) were done in red and black. This path can be thought of as her explanation of the acquisition of a Chicana tongue that inked “the red images and black letters” of the Chicana soul through the visual and language arts (*Borderlands* 87). By reframing the language of the oppressor, Anzaldúa reweaves a new linguistic tapestry of female empowerment, what she called la *conciencia de la mestiza* (*Borderlands* 99).

The semiological engagement of women symbolically and metaphorically recognizing a shared experience of living what it means to be speaking women has enabled women to cultivate hybrid and decolonial imaginations as a past-present negotiation of the elements that produce sign-system of language. The interpretative power of art and literature to offer narratives of resistance indicates the development of Chicana *placas*—forms of expression genuine to an art form that links the linguistic heritage of Chicana feminist traditions and of oral traditions to Chicana/o aesthetics. Chicana *placas* refers to the spirit of embedded meaning reflective in the expression of extraordinary power; beauty and richness coded into women’s languages and tongues that across time has evolved into a Chicana *lengua franca*. In many respects, the development of a Chicana’s *lengua franca*—a language that a feminist could call her own—reflects the acceptance of a homed language. From the initial Chicana *gritos* that defined *Xicana* power, what also surfaces in the analysis of Chicana modes of communication is the use of a Chicana’s *lengua franca* that uses creativity as *placas* in order to express themselves.

Chapter 3: Chasing the Sign: Chicana *Placas*, Home(l)y Revolutions, and *Domesticana*

By the late 1970s, the linguistic expressions women exhibited across different mediums demonstrated how a Chicana tongue expressed thoughts that were not homologous. Experimentation with linguistic sensibilities liberated the Chicana mind toward new imaginative frontiers. To this end, the Chicana conception of language strategies stemming from the domestic space exposed the plasticity and ambivalence of language that women identified as an advantageous source to help their causes.

Chicanas acted on the social component of language—the notion that language was a vehicle to orchestrate conventions of a given community, which define culture—to politically participate in the action of the movement. In textual or visual formats, Chicana language acts show the development of counter-narrative strategies. Subversive acts of feminist storytelling responded to oppression within and outside of Chicano culture. This elucidated the extent of the force of objective practice and panoramic range to recognize language as a resource that, through radical storytelling, defined the politics of *Xicanisma*.

This chapter focuses on how Chicana feminists addressed the psychology of language to showcase how approaches related to the patterning of language directly impacted the perceptions and understanding of cultural expression. Chicana cultural practices displayed how women understood that, if language defined culture and tradition, then alterations to the bionetwork and handling of language had the potential to change conventions. Through varied vocalizations of their own imaginations, a Chicana feminist enactment of language relinked associations between woman, home, and domesticity to those of public activism as political practice. The practice of art sustained a play on language that had vast political

ramifications for women. These forms of creative-political acts posited decolonial translations that altered notions of subaltern subjectivity for women of color. Shared visions of transfiguring language practices characterized the dimensions of artistic play and interaction. Open engagements with language positioned women in new situations within the sites of meaning making that granted them the power to manifest decolonial acts through articulations. In their metalinguistic locus, they fulfilled the goals of the movement by establishing positive associations between *Xicana* politics and the objective of the artist and writer as activist, or *artivism*.⁵³

Chicana Imaginations: Glossing Spaces

For female artists and writers, the arts acted as helpful gloss, a projecting point where literary and visual language detailed emerging identities and voices. Glossing allowed artists and writers to label and transcribe the movement by cultivating spaces where a feminist consciousness could take shape. In these unvarnished, un-subjected, non-heteronomous places, women wrote and visualized themselves into existence, combatting invisibility.⁵⁴ In the spirit of the Chicano movement, Chicana feminists contested cultural

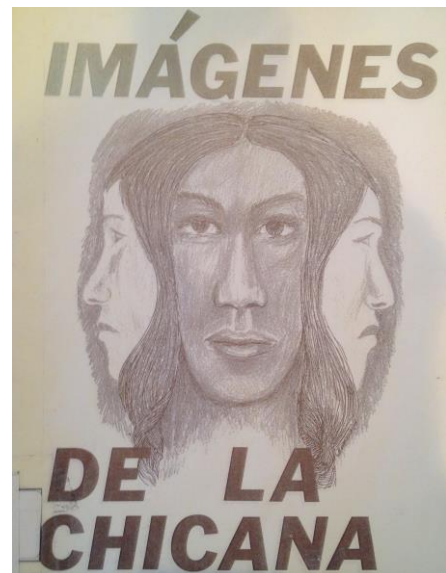


Figure 15 Magazine Cover of *Imágenes de la Chicana* (1974)

⁵³ Chela Sandoval and Guisela Latorre recently have written about Judy Baca's "artivism" in reference to the contributions and legacy of her life work as a Chicana feminist. Sandoval and Latorre's essay describes the *artivism* of Judy Baca. The term *artivism* is a hybrid neologism that signifies work created by individuals who see an organic relationship between art and activism (Sandoval and Latorre 82).

⁵⁴ As art critic Holly Barnet-Sanchez wrote, "Presence and absence can refer to a number of things: the presence of a women as printmakers, and the relative absence of their work in exhibitions or *tallers* (workshops); the enormity of the impact of many of their works, some of which have become iconic for the *Movimiento*, and the

assumptions that promoted sexual and social violence toward ethnic women and the very language of the ideology hidden in the transcripts of cultural nationalism that continued to devalue women despite its rhetoric of liberation.

The 1974 publication titled *Imágenes de la Chicana* from Stanford University recorded initial visual and textual expositions of women entering new frontiers of linguistic proficiency. Presented as a collective voice, the introduction of *Imágenes de la Chicana* established the need for the existence of images of Chicanas. They accentuated how *Imágenes* “was born . . . out of the need for Chicanas to share our needs, concerns, struggles, pains and joys with a broader community” (3). The exploration of real or imagined representations of women inserted a woman’s right to self-representation into dominant perspectives.

The Chicanas who organized *Imágenes de la Chicana* achieved these images of women by using language as a political site to analyze the conditions of contemporary women as they challenged the languages of Chicano traditions. To expel and jolt misrepresentations of women, they manipulated unfavorable elements in culture by debunking and demystifying notions of thinking about women that relegated women to silence. Women saw in their own value sets a new way to communicate—one in which women could officiate their own destiny, be it in the present, in visionary outlooks toward the future or in redesigning the past. This new order is transmitted in the logic of *Imágenes*:

lack of acknowledgement of their contributions; the depiction of certain themes which are undervalued because they are not seen as representative of certain cultural nationalisms; the reconfiguration of women in contract to the kind of female imagery created by Chicano artists. What is excluded from Chicana art is often as telling as what is present (“Where are the Chicana Printmakers?” 119).

A group of Chicanas had the opportunity to get together and communicate intensively with one another about what being a Chicana was all about. That experience benefited the women involved and so sharing that dialogue with others became a priority. Communication at that level showed us that there was a lot we could learn from one another and somehow we had to establish the means to do it. This magazine has become the tool we can use to reach out and touch not only Chicanas but all women and men that struggle to define their own reality. (3)

This publication exclusively featured the voices of women, the acknowledgement that “Chicanas and Chicanos have always struggled alongside one another, and that unity adds to our strength,” reflected the intent by women to redefine the politics of Chicana/o speak through dialogue and communication (3). Noting that “we [Chicanas] are by no means claiming to understand every aspect of being Chicana,” the magazine pushed for new social interaction among women and between women and men (3).

Portraits of Chicanas bordering the pages of the publication framed a new existence for Chicanas in a public act of self-identification and recognition. In this sense, creativity operated as a central tool of resistance, affirmation, and self-determination where written and visual language allocated a new power that bolstered women into action. But within this context, it also inspired female



Figure 16 Page Border Collages of Images of Chicanas (1974)

artists and writers to use artistic expression as an apparatus to kindle social change about gender: about the complexity of being Chicana.

The assemblage of different faces of women, the picture collage of *Imágenes* showed how women cut a new identity in visual culture. More than a decoupage, it was a photomontage that paralleled the technique of collage making, here showing the *rasquache* tradition of Chicana/o art practices. Furthermore, the fact that the cover of this magazine featured a Chicana rendition of the *Mestizo* face demonstrated how women experimented with Chicano aesthetics and inserted a new visual vocabulary into the art world. The annexation of mestiza faces reinterpreted Chicano archetypes. This signaled the types of feminist and feminine transformation to visual language. The self-referential and autobiographic content of this publication emphasized how women used creativity as a space for constructive dialogue about women's rights to visually show women as speaking subjects.



Figure 17 *Mestizo Face* (n.d.)

By extension, women reconfigured the paradigms of imaginative expression in parallel practices to praise womanhood. Poetic expressions dramatized graphic representations (and vice versa). Texts and images recorded the analogous forms in which Chicanas designed a communal metalinguistic awareness of language to program new realities across a variety of mediums. The comparison between texts and images, when framed as testimonial artifacts, offers a way to analyze how women chronicled the processes of engaging with language in

semiological fashions to recreate a space receptive of their diverse concerns. Through creative spaces women communicated with one another, dialogued, and shared experiences that allowed them to build solidarity in hybrid contexts. Operating as instruments to provoke and agitate, the arts acted as a conduit for the Chicana imaginary to flourish.

In this way, art and literature licensed the perspective of each individual. Hybrid modes of thinking led Chicanas to acknowledge their metalinguistic traditions. Barbara Carrasco's lithograph, *Pregnant Woman in a Ball of Yarn* (1978) expresses the type of languages developing within feminist critiques of societal conventions. Carrasco concentrates on portraying real experiences of home life because homes were the spaces where female concentrations were the highest. Her symbolic language captures the sense of confinement women experienced at home. The

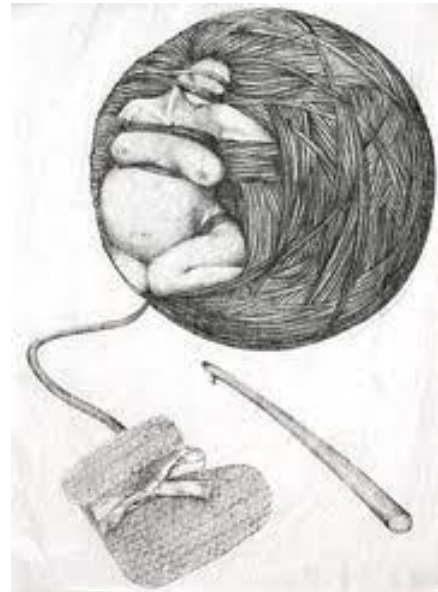


Figure 18 Barbara Carrasco *Pregnant Woman in a Ball of Yarn* (1978)

depiction of a nude pregnant woman silenced and blinded by a ball of yarn denounced the diverse forms of abuse women experience in domestic spaces. She portrays the hegemonic social conventions characterizing the gendered interactions and relations between men and women as an entanglement where the skeins of her long hair morph into the skein of the yarn to signify the complicated situation of domestic life that contribute to the oppression of women.

The artist denounced *machismo* through the representation of a woman in arrested development as a result of her pregnancy. The state and situation in which the expecting

mother is depicted also eludes to a figurative skein of lies that pregnancy and motherhood is all bliss. In this representation, pregnancy is a form of entrapment and can be read as a cultural and religious critique to the lack of jurisdiction of a woman's right to her own body and her reproductive rights. In this lithograph, Carrasco offers a complex entanglement that breaks the silence of domestic abuse at the same time it sends a message for women to knit new relationships with themselves, with men and in the education of their children in order to break with cycles of violence.

In "A Brush with Life" (1991), an art article on Chicanas featured in *Ms. Magazine*, art critic Sybil Venegas described the power of visual language to show how the artist "powerfully mixes art with race, class, and gender politics [and how she] produced a number of respuestas (replies) to the double standards found in her religion, family and community" (1). Venegas explained how Carrasco "tackles the issue of unwanted pregnancy and the inevitable invisibility, entrapment and social isolation of young unwed mothers" in her analysis of *Pregnant Woman in a Ball of Yarn*. In a reflective interpretation of the significance of her work some 20 years later, Venegas acknowledged specifically how this artwork was "one of her most renowned and haunting images [because] it captures the economic immobilization experienced by young, poor women of color who find themselves pregnant with no, or very little, emotional support. At the same time, it flies in the face of the sanctification of motherhood by Mexican and Chicana/o culture" (n. pag.).

Pregnant Woman enabled Carrasco to critique her brother's treatment of women, turning to art to transmit multiple messages about the social conditions of women and their bodies. For example, Shifra Goldman in "'Portraying Ourselves': Contemporary Chicana Artists" noted how Carrasco's work "portrayed an oppressed pregnant woman trapped by the

fear of fighting her oppressors” as well as transmitting “the unconscious message of forced sterilization” (206). A contemporary analysis of this work in *The Woman in the Zoot Suit: Gender, Nationalism, and the Cultural Politics of Memory* (2009) by Catherine Sue Ramírez reads Carrasco’s work as Chicana resistance. Ramírez views the lithograph as a critique of Chicano “family ideology,” while it also brings voice to women who are not mothers and wives, which Ramírez explores through the figure of the *pachuca* (114).



Figure 19 Barbara Carrasco *Names Can Hurt* (1991)

In *Names Can Hurt* (1991), Carrasco continued to show the types of abuses women endure at a semiotic level, in how words are embedded with codes meant to hurt women. Specifically, she targets utterances circulating within Chicano culture that operated to debase women. In this work, “Carrasco deals with her experience of being a lighter-skinned Chicana,” noted Venegas (n. pag.). But the self-portrait tells how words have damaged and marred her identity. Standing in front of a mirror, reflecting on her identity, a self-referential Carrasco offers an intense gaze that can be read as a women standing in front of a mirror looking at her own image or staring at her reflection in the looking glass. In this auto-referential state she questions why people have regarded her as being opposite of what is normal or expected—why being a lighter-skinned Chicana was problematic, or read as the mark of a traitor, *vendida*, and a *malinchista*.

As she looks at herself, the question of “what do you see when you look at the mirror?” prompts the spectator to think about how Carrasco defines herself. At the same time, it invites the viewer to assess the validity of labels ascribed to her. She initiates a dialogue

between her self-portrait and the labels assigned to her and she offers a list of names to show how labels are coded with a language to mark identity: “Mexican, Cat-eyes, Latina, Mexican, Huera [Güera], Chicana, Pocha, White Girl, Hispanic, Green-eyes, and Chicana.” Which of these best describes Carrasco? And which of these would the spectator ascribe to, associate with or impose on Carrasco? In other words, does her light skin exclude her from belonging to *la causa*? As the adage “if you are told enough times that you don’t belong, you then begin to believe you really don’t belong” suggests, Carrasco responds to the experience of feeling like an outcast with a painting that showed the power of words to damage and inflict sentiments of crisis and chaos and the Chicana feminist reversal of the negative stereotyping of women.

Chicana Placas

As women found in language a way to articulate the arrival of a new Chicana consciousness, they found authorization in the languages that had evolved among women in domestic settings. It just so happened that the very settings that women were relegated to when ostracized from public inclusion—domestic settings—became the very sites where women made a new type of communication possible. Women created a language focused on debunking the idea that women’s work was not important because it was seen as occasional and casual. Instead, the very idea of what was ordinary and common allowed women to create points of convergence and commonality (even in difference) based on the diversity of identity.

For instance, Carrasco created a discussion on the relationship between the sign, the signifier and the signified by the active engagement between text and image through the reframing of new Chicana vocabularies. The identity codes enabled her to establish a mode

of communication about her identity through interrogation. By contesting what these labels mean individually and collectively she creates ambivalence about what images and words signify while also creating Chicana understanding meaning making through dialogue. In this sense, a postmodern cultural expression developed from a Chicana feminist presentation of the labels. In Carrasco's work she is the collective sum of all the labels and the sum of each label while at the same time she contests the male-infused sense of these labels that offers a representation where she subverted images and words which were meant to belittle.

This strategy of imaginative practice showed how Chicanas created a form of expression from a hybrid language by pointing to how structures in language can be changed or mixed. While writers painted visual pictures through textual description, Carrasco demonstrated how artists work toward new expressive forms in their works through visual narratives. But Carrasco's work also manifested how Chicanas envisaged a woman's movement across new linguistic frontiers that explored taboo issues with taboo language. Through the incorporation of minority language practices, the language meant to weaken her identity becomes a fountain of pride and empowerment that cuts across private and public sectors.

Because Chicanas regarded their tongues as hybrid, women utilized two language banks (and at times more) to promote the emerging metalinguistic awareness of self. This is clearly visible in the use of Spanish, English and *caló* to signal identity in Carrasco's work. The unleashing of a Chicana tongue marked the arrival of a metalinguistic awareness that artists, writers, and scholars termed Chicana consciousness and feminist political awareness. Author, theorist, and critic Gloria Anzaldúa best transcribed this as the way of the mestiza consciousness, "a radical, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollination, an "alien"

consciousness [. . .] a new *mestiza* consciousness, *una conciencia de mujer*. It is the consciousness of the Borderlands” (*Borderlands* 99). The creative explosion of the Chicana imagination marked the arrival of Chicanas’ traversing the linguistic fields, marking Chicana *placas* to the structures of language, in a revolutionary dissemination of Chicana utterances that today are known as the Chicana feminist voices.

By embracing the reality of their *mestizaje*, the concept of code switching as a mode of feminist and feminine communicative approaches enabled women to develop their own *lengua francas*. In a “my experience, my history, my language” frame of thought, Chicana utterances broke silences that allowed women to cross the linguistic field to become storytellers. Like La Malinche, they used their language to respond to and to affirm. In an effort to alter the field of meaning making, the moments where we witness women inserting a subaltern and woman of color consciousness within the matrix of language shows their aptitude to use code switching methods to deconstruct patriarchal and dominant language practices while inserting into language feminist and feminine sensibilities. Women empowered aspects in their mother tongue, which had encoded a language of survival to create a “bridge” between the diverse languages coming into fruition since the Chicano Movement. New representations of La Malinche show the types of epistemologies women patterned into codes of knowledge across time.

Because women understood that the languages they cultivated differed from patriarchal language, Chicana feminist’s semiotic engagement with the idea of ‘communication’ made communication possible between divisions set by colonialist traditions. In this way they showed how the power structures that created disadvantages were a result of the language we use and the sign we encode with language to construct the world—

in speaking and thinking about how we understand the idea of order and our relationship to the world. Knowing that language could be changed or mixed through semiotic measures, Chicanas capitalized on code switching strategies and the unique mode of expression among minority languages to reprogram reality. Chicana feminist art and literature express the moments where the encodation of feminist and feminine ways of seeing occur and where we witness the production of Chicana *placas*, the insignia of language empowerment.

The idea of *placas* has had a long and yet hazy meaning in Chicano culture. In traditional understandings of the word, *placas* means a plaque, a shield, or license plate. During the mid- twentieth century, a *placa* was defined as public acts of wall writing. Take for example the way Dictionary.com currently defines *placas*: “(especially in the southwestern U.S.) graffiti, as of initials or slogans, spray-painted on an outdoor wall, especially in the lettering style and colors identified with an individual or a street gang” (“Placas” Def. n.pag.). The gist of a *placa* is to label and define and often operates as a symbol, insignia, emblem, crest and badge. But in the Chicano sense, it transforms into an act of licensing the self by signaling or writing the self into existence.

In *Chicano Timespace: The Poetry and Politics of Ricardo Sánchez* (2001), Miguel R. López discussed *placas* as “a language of and for Chicanos, and for those non-Chicanos who are immersed in the culture and share the Chicano experience and the *pachuco* pinto argot” (32). In López’s analysis of Sánchez’s poetic language he discussed how:

Sánchez uses these languages as a tribute to specific neighboring cultures of mestizo heritage. He opens his verse to a polyglot polyphony that can appear any time. The interaction and flow of words and idioms as they become poetic language recalls Jaques Lacan’s concept of “signifying chain. [. . .] Yet

despite these chains of apparently hermetic nonsignification, in *Canto y grito mi liberación* Sánchez emphasizes in Spanish, English and *caló*, how important it is that Chicanos understand their poetry, and one another, in ‘our language.’ Indeed he chastises the Chicanos of Denver for losing part of their linguistic heritage [. . .]. (31)

While his focus is on the linguistic expression of Ricardo Sánchez, López draws from Chicana critics to bring perspicacity to what Sánchez is doing with language. By using Chicana critical scholarship López signals the sophisticated inroads women made to the study of languages in Chicana/o expression. The incorporation of Cordelia Candelaria’s position on language that “argues that Chicano speech is not ‘bilingual’ but is characterized by ‘its *multilingualism*, its polyphonic codes of sounds and sense,” illustrates the complex engagements between language and semiotic within the Chicano/a imaginary (30). In addition, López’s integration of Gloria Anzaldúa’s promotion of Chicana/o linguistic expression that is bilingual and which code-switches to Tey Diana Rebolledo’s documentation that, “[w]hen asked why they [two Chicana novelists: Erlinda Gonzales-Berry and Margarita Cota-Cárdenas] wrote the texts in Spanish, both authors said that it was they way it came out, that the text chooses what language it wants to be in” (32) underscores the activism of Chicanas with the ‘signifying chains’ of meaning-making, signs and codes.

However, López is unable to fully capture the significance of the development and presence of Chicana *placas* of Chicana writers like Margarita-Cota Cárdenas and Erlinda Gonzales-Berry when he states, “For these Chicana novelists, as for Ricardo Sánchez, writing in their own intimate language rather than in a pure English becomes a transgression that is punishable” (32). López sees expressions outside the use of English as forms of

transgressions that are punishable because they go against the status quo in the same way that graffiti references a ‘signifying chain’ of codes that surprise the reader because it offers complex codes. However, he fails to recognize the gender interventions women made at a semiotic level in order to acquire a language of their own. He also does not see that women manipulated the types of chastising linked to pure forms of linguistic heritage among Chicano perceptive fields by revising language to cultivate a Chicana heritage that embraced heteroglossia. López understands the threat of punishment Chicana writers faced as ‘speaking women,’ and in this way references the tale of La Malinche, but falls short of acknowledging the significance of women brewing their own *placas* in response to that idea of poetic language uttered by women as “punishable.”

Meanwhile, Raúl Villa clarifies how *placas* referenced place markers as much as it helped to define an identity for Chicanos in urban spaces that structured minority peoples invisible. In *Barrio-Logos: Space and Place in Urban Chicano Literature and Culture*, he wrote how *placas* functioned as a public response to “identity within marginal spaces they [Chicanos] inhabited” (64). “The spatiality of gang and club culture was literally signaled through the popular expressive practice of marking specific turf boundaries with their *placas* (“tagging,” in contemporary usage),” stated Villa (64).

But in order to demonstrate “the morphology of barrio spaces and the genesis of tagging” and the relations they have to *placas*, Villa turns to the work of Marcos Sanchez-Tranquilino whose scholarship underscored the centrality of *placas* as “a system of signification” in his 1990 Master’s thesis titled *Mi Casa No Es Su Casa: Chicano Murals and Barrio Calligraphy as Systems of Signification at Estrada Courts, 1972-1978* (64). By framing *placas* as “barrio calligraphy” and not graffiti, Sanchez-Tranquilino showed the

centrality of *placas* to express a unique Chicano code in art making practices. He brings attention to the already hybrid presence of *placas* in public sphere and the significance of *placas*' textual and visual expression.

Furthermore, the idea of *placas* extended beyond the scope of writing on walls. A *placa* is known as “a tattoo, something that is ink in your body that is until you burn it off.” (“Placas” Def. n.pag.). This brings attention to the hybrid nature of Chicano textual and visual forms of expressing the language of “pinto argot” since a tattoo is a text and image, in the same way that wall writing is textual and graphic. If we think of *placas* as the moments of inscriptions where Chicanos carve a space and establish boundaries in public spheres, then *placas* refers to a “system of signification” about defining oneself openly. *Placas* define boundaries and create new spaces.

While men “wrote or inked” *placas*, women too engaged in the making of their own argot by shifting the way women ‘tagged’ the world and their bodies. By radicalizing and translating the practice of *placas* into feminist and feminine contexts, Chicanas’ multilingual approach to understanding the “systems of signification” of Chicano culture led them to develop Chicana *placas*. The continual engagement with teasing apart concepts in order to question colonial traditions refers to the process by which women incorporated themselves into Chicano sign-systems of language.

Thus, Chicana *placas* can be understood as the vehicular language women developed to initiate a decolonial processes of their mind and of the world. I consider the development of Chicana feminist notions of expression as exhibiting Chicana *placas*, because in order for women to be recognized, in order for women to author representations and achieve visibility in the movement, they had to transgress language by “tagging” and “tattooing” language with

their own logos. Chicana *placas* are meant to represent the types of coding women carried out and how women inscribed a legacy of Chicana culture by manipulating the modes of interpreting culture. Women reconceptualized the notion of *placas* by feminizing the idea of inking an identity and a language of women. In doing so they created a new sign-system where women translated *placas* in another language, the language of the *mestiza* consciousness. They moved beyond the typical understanding of language by transcending the limits of the expected linguistic ability of women.

In her analysis of Chaz Bojórquez's *Placa/Roll Call* (1980), Alicia Gaspar de Alba showed how "spider writing" "is a stylized calligraphy [. . .] that resists interpretation except by those who can read the language" (*Chicano Art*, 1998 71). Gaspar de Alba shows how women too understood the language politics of *placas* by analyzing Bojórquez's linguistic expression through "the solar of Chicano/a Popular culture" (32). By bringing *placas* into the landscapes of her feminist analysis she illustrates how within the confines of home, Chicanas had crafted a language to read *barrio placas* as calligraphy rather than graffiti. As a result of this shift in perceptive reading of texts, Gaspar illustrated how home-based approaches to interpreting Chicano popular culture reflected how women had created a *lengua franca* and how they announced new thought through Chicana *placas*. She stated:

Indeed, memory or the act of remembering/forgetting one's cultural heritage—is like dancing, "spider-writing," cruising and tattooing of Pachucos and Cholos—another popular ritual of la Raza, all vividly enacted out on the patio, in which the values, beliefs, mythologies, heroes, icons and debunked stereotypes of all the previous spaces come together and manifest themselves ritualistically. (71)

Gaspar de Alba organized her study on Chicano/a popular culture by using the architecture of the home as a model. She redrafts Chicano consciousness and cultural values through the insertion of home politics with the idea of the “solar: a sequence of rooms or apartments built around a central patio” (36). Her approach illustrated how women domesticized and engendered language by feminizing *placas* to reflect Chicana ways of thinking about culture.

Chicana *placas* reflects engendered language—the unique ways language provides a structure for women in the struggle to create a voice. Hybridity of thought and expression allowed women to unite even when they did not literally share the same mother tongue. In this sense, the image of La Malinche served as cultural code, a Chicana *placa*, which allowed women to use her image as a representation of hybrid notions of language and tongue. By recoding La Malinche to signify a positive representation of ‘speaking woman,’ her representation since the Chicano movement references a shared experience of the fight women endure as ‘speaking women.’

Some examples of these early articulations are visible in the literature of Alma Villanueva and Lorna Dee Cervantes and in the artwork of Patssi Valdez of the collective ASCO and the role women played in the Royal Chicano Air Force. Therefore, the language used to redefine *Chicana* and Chicana—the signifier and signified in a sign system—did not originate from a singular base of knowledge, or from a singular body of knowledge. Rather, the structures of the sign system identifying Chicana politics emphasized the diverse forms, structures, and contexts of discourse coming into play in the Chicana imagination through the reactivation of cultural memory that required embracing the historical characteristics of a mother tongue in tandem with the activation of one’s tongue in the present.

The plural cultural and linguistic shifts seen in the art and literature of Chicanas post-1960s recorded the strategic practice of language to orchestrate the survival, resistance, and affirmation of the legacy of hybridity of tongue inscribed in the cultural image of La Malinche. The Chicana sensibility toward language use and its quest to recapture the heterogeneity of La Malinche as *la lengua* as Chicana heritage was truly a revolutionary act of feminist artists and writers. Women who subverted the negative portrayal of La Malinche in Chicano heritage showed, first, how women at play with language manipulated cultural heritage in order to reprogram or bend the figure of La Malinche into a positive image. Second, feminist engagements with representations of La Malinche generated new language matrixes from hybridity, which liberated women from invisibility and speechlessness under colonialism and imperialism.

While dormant, perhaps even invisible, recoveries of lost or misunderstood practices of the female tongue resurfacing during the Chicano movement were the insignia of hybridity. The specific expression of hybridity by Chicanas must not be overlooked. Expressions of hybridity by Chicanas signaled the “theoretically innovative, and politically crucial . . . need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences,” as posited by Homi Bhabha (2). Speech acts by Chicana feminists manifested a metatongue, a tongue that, as it articulated meaning through visual and literary language, unveiled the manipulation of female subjectivity, which made new inroads to comprehending the condition of women of color within the Chicano community.

Evangelina Vigil-Piñon's collection of poems, *Thirty an' Seen a Lot* (1985) illustrated this point well. Through poetry, Vigil-Piñon expressed the language of a Chicana coming out of her home and learning about life in the streets. As a result of her entry into the public sphere, by the time she was thirty, Vigil-Piñon had witnessed much she wished to tell and narrated an array of life experiences that illuminated the bilingual sensibility of Chicana speak that showed Chicana *placas* in the making.



Figure 20 Book Cover of *Thirty an' Seen a Lot* (1985)

Parallel to the cover of her book, Vigil-Piñon focused on bringing a Chicana reading a *la pachuca* on civic life. The cover of her poetry book features the poet standing in front of a bar window with a sign that read “welcome ladies” and a hand gesturing to join her to go inside. Vigil-Piñon plays with text and image to create a work that visually serves as a call to action. She invites women to break boundaries by entering public spaces and also invites women into the spaces of her book. Her words are meant to provoke women to awaken their consciousness. In this way, like Viramontes and other writers, Vigil-Piñon becomes the writer/artist-activist who uses language to break barriers limiting Chicana voices.

Like Vigil-Piñon, *Comiendo Lumbre: Eating Fire* (1986) by Gina Valdés offers a bilingual text in Spanish and English about life in Los Angeles. Her metalinguistic awareness of language transforms into a tool that brings a female narrator into existence. In this second collection of poems, the works “Creative Oppression,” “Working Women,” and “And I Want to Write a Love Poem” showed the different angles of Chicana glossing. Aside from the hybridity of cultural representations, the bilingual offerings of each poetic position details the

extent of the author's linguistic proficiency. The titles of the poems are telling of the topics and concerns of the day. In her poem "When They Came to Our House," Valdés presented an alternative operative of home she celebrated and wished to represent in writing. An elaboration of what people thought of her home, and in particular of her mother at home, Valdés wrote:

When they came to our house,
boyfriends, girlfriends, teachers,
social workers, they expected to
find my mother molded into a fading
armchair, her brown skin, gray braids
shrinking under a black shawl.

How I loved the widening of their eyes
when a tall blonde woman in a red dress
leaped at them, her skin and eyes soft,
offering enchiladas sonorenses, tequila
1800. One, two, three copitas.
Ajúa! She yelped. Soy Yaqui! De mero
Sonora. We're nice people. But if
you're not kind to a Yaqui, watch out! (18)

Through her writing, Valdés presented an altered representation of home culture and of her mother's identity. She described the stereotypical representation of a Chicana mother to sharply contrast this to her mother's actual way at home. Valdés' play with words in both English and Spanish added a humorous dimension to the poem while simultaneously using puns to caution the reader to not take her mother lightly. The author challenged the image and role of the mother, and presented a depiction of a mother from a daughter's point of view

when she demystified the divisions of blonde, *mestiza*, and indigenous female bodies by showing how her mother was the embodiment of all these forms.

Home(l)y Revolutions

In this context, through the act of glossing, artists and writers labeled and transcribed the emerging frameworks of their time. While art and texts gave color, body, and language to a Chicana movement, feminist perspectives reframed what domestic spaces signified. Because women discovered how the public as well as private oppression of women worked hand in hand, they were motivated to explain how one thing related to another as a social construction rather than as a given. An organic network among women fortified women-to-women relations.

The development of feminist relations and networks directly implicated the heteroglot forms of communications and features of heteroglossia that appeared in texts and images. Hence, Chicana artistic and literary works exposed the common relations in social structures that confined women to the home. But because it was common to think of the woman's place as being in the private space of the home and not in the public space of society, women first organized in the spaces of the home.

In addition, Chicanas at play with language gave women the agency to examine critically core issues, values, and principles of home. The reconstitution of home as a public space and the insertion of domestic spaces into public spaces echoed the Chicana belief that women should have the choice to occupy all spaces. They made the home public while home turned civic. That said Chicana art and literature remodeled creative space into a site that housed languages of female cosmologies whereby tongues outlined new imaginaries to emancipate the mind from the polarity of thought about the binarism of public-private.

Several years later after the appearance of Gaspar de Alba's home-based interpretation of Chicana/o artistic expression, Debra A. Castillo and María Socorro Tabuenca Córdoba's publication, *Border Women: Writing from la frontera* (2002), made new inroads to the use of home-based lenses in the interpretation of Chicana literary production. Castillo and Tabuenca Córdoba "homely" approach to the analysis of Helena María Viramontes' literature showed the types of Chicana *placas* exhibited in Chicana/o linguistic expression. In their analysis of Viramontes' characterization of the figure of Spider (George) in "Paris Rats in East Los Angeles" (1993), they trace how the author constructs her own notion of Chicana *placas* in the act of writing about Spider's *placas*. Viramontes offers a metalinguistic reading of Spider's *placas*: first is the "spider-writing" or graffiti George inscribes on public spaces, second is his tattoo that is both a *placa* and a Spider, and third through the unique expression of Chicano pachuco code in George's *placa* name "Spider." Castillo and Tabuenca draw parallels between the subversive use of *placas* by the character and the writer noting, "Spider writes his *placa* on the walls, taking measure of his world and bringing it within his control; Viramontes' homely telling takes cognizance of that writing and, while noting its power, bends her talents to unwriting Spider, the warrior, writing Gregory the boy" (160).

Castillo and Tabuenca Córdoba consider Viramontes' linguistic expression as the creation of a new homely reality by "spiking language." Thus, Castillo and Tabuenca offered the idea of "spiking language" to understand how Viramontes "bends" language to achieve a new linguistic framework where feminist and feminine forms of interpreting the world become the norm. Viramontes' incorporation of *placas* into the Chicana imaginary space and home illustrated how in "Viramontes' imaginary, as her characters are well aware, language

is thorny; it has spikes, and it stabs the incautious or weak. [It is] a muted dialogue with the dominant class in speech, in musical tastes, and in the graphisms of their bodies and bodily adornments [. . . .] At any rate, they/we celebrate the homely richness in this spiki/spiky language (165).

Take, for example, the 1980 poetic series “Tres Mujeres” in the spring/summer issue of *Metamorfosis*. The poetic words of Marina Rivera, Cleo Gold, and Mercedes Fernández De León presented new Chicana visions—Chicana feminist politics. Meanwhile, the artistic designs that architecturally structure the poems added visual dimensionality to the poem. Text and image worked in tandem to construct new points of departures from Chicana identity. In, “Putting Down the No,” Rivera’s alphabet warns the reader that the Chicana is developing a new language that will not tolerate subordination or oppression. Her writing expressed the seriousness of her feminist proclamations, when she jotted:

I have put three steps
into a glide, have tried
the dash at least.
You keep offering the
bowl of nuts again
I start the sign language
that cannot be mistaken.
I am so full of spaces
you stop trying to splice me,
Hear the period.
It is small but none mistake it
when it is the last one. (25)

Rivera's words seized the feminist's spirit of strength. Her use of glide can be interpreted as the movement of a new language emerging; a type of dance that detailed the smooth movements of Chicanas moving toward the celebration of a feminist consciousness and owning it. The use of the word glide is significant as

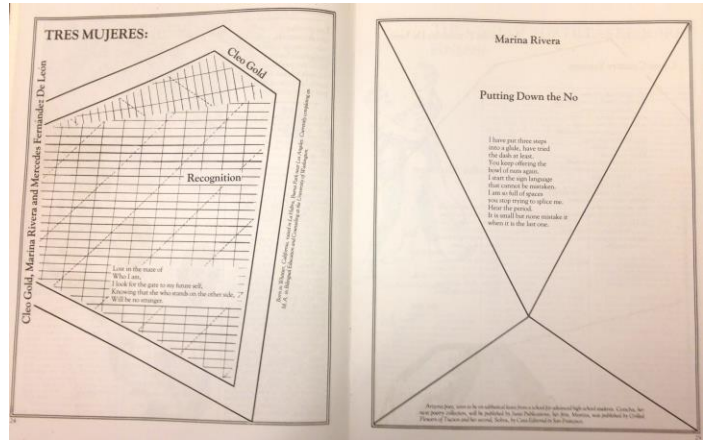


Figure 21 Marina Rivera Image of Poem “Putting Down the No” (1980)

glide means, “a sound produced as the vocal organs move toward or away from articulation of a vowel or consonant” (“Glide.” Def. n. pag.).

Symbolically, then a linguistic glide moved the speaker into a new space as well as a new practice of language. Language transformed into a weapon that warned those who offered nuts and tried to splice Rivera's arrival at a new reality that she was ready to put up a fight using her signs and spaces.

Extending Notions of Domestic into Domesticity

A landscape in which inner and outer vision were reconciled, Chicana home languages provided the registers that made possible new descriptions on domesticity. Because home languages survived in transfixed forms at home, the hybrid element of Chicanas ways of reading enabled them to reconstitute the associative relations between home-domestic-domesticity. Chicana interpretations of domestic crosscut the private notion of domesticity with the public notion of domestic. Women lobbied for their right to be involved in all forms of domestic matters through the hybridization of the concept of domestic that advanced new characterizations to the idea of domestic.

Women extended their dominion from private matters of the domestic-home realm into the public realm of civic engagement. Through what Mesa-Bains referred to as “memory as a device of emancipation,” or “the ceremony of memory,” feminists presented linguistic inheritances that made public how their identities cultivated at home, largely from the memory of women, were already transnational and transcultural (Arredondo 308, Ybarra-Frausto, 1988, 19). Such strategies enabled Chicanas to display a new politics where women healed public wounds—in the form of fragmented or denied histories; cultural amnesia; or violence against women by examining how domestic affairs related to national concerns and transnational relations. As a result, Chicanas envisaged their own forms of cultural nationalism through their hybrid forms of communication fueled by woman’s collective memory.

For example, by rebuking the continued reference of women as *malinchistas*, women contested colonialist and imperialist powers of language that negatively stereotyped women. In the same vein, women also challenged the *ni de aquí ni de allá*, ‘neither from here nor there,’ syndrome that fed the idea that Chicanos did not have a homeland. Women used their hybrid languages to show the transnational ties of Chicana/o culture that validated the Southwest as their homeland. Thus, redefinitions of what domestic meant sanctioned the fluid expression of self across public and private contexts. Emma Pérez solidified this by calling attention to how the decolonization of Chicana bodies depended on a “*sitio y lengua*” as place/space and tongue. Thinking of space as a site in which to enact the layering of self,

space extended beyond the notion of surface and into the notion of materiality, expression and even performance.⁵⁵

As women explored different layers of their sense of self in the private space of the home, home became a fluid space of endless possibilities— this space was a site where different aspects or things materialized into different expressions. The most salient portrayal of this flexibility of the domestic space vis-à-vis a fluidity of what is domestic is seen in the art of Diane Gamboa and the literature of Sandra Cisneros. Sandra Cisneros' *My Wicked Wicked Ways* (1987) invited readers to sip the authors' uncensored and intimate offerings of love and life that spoke to the reader with the calmness and finesse of sitting in an armchair in the house of a close friend discussing matters of love and of the dirty little things that nice girls are not supposed to talk about. In her preface Cisneros positioned her adulterated voice:

...

My first felony—I took up with poetry.
For this penalty, the rice burned.
Mother warned I'd never wife.
Wife? A woman like me
whose choice was rolling pin or factory.
An absurd vice, this wicked wanton
writer's life.

...

I took the crooked route and liked my badness.
Played at mistress.
Tattooed an ass.
Lapped up my happiness from a glass.
It was something, at least.

⁵⁵ This study focused on the manifestation, expression, and materiality of language; the issue of performance is a study for the future.

...

What does a women
willing to invent herself
at twenty-two or twenty-nine
do? A woman with no who or how.
And how was I to know what was unwise.
I wanted to be a writer. I wanted to be happy.
... (xi)

A similar case of a feminist expression of a female's budding of sexuality and the discovery of one's sexuality common during one's early adult life is observed in the art world of Gamboa. Her refinement of language in relation to interior spaces is most lucid in *The Pin Up* (1990s) series

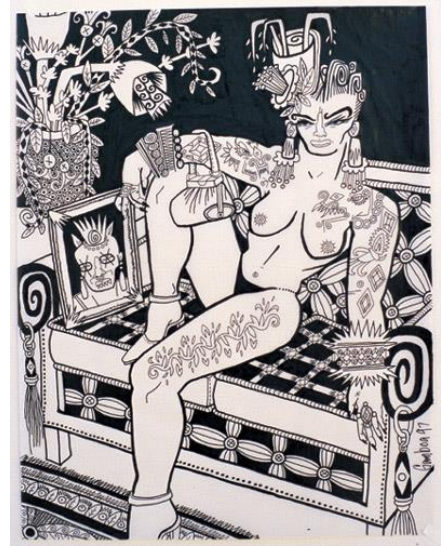


Figure 22 Diane Gamboa Image from the *Pin Up Series* (1990)

where she uses contrasting colors to draw the viewer into sexual scenes that explore sexuality across gender lines. "The Pin Up and Pin Down images take place in interior settings with a strong personal touch of pattern and design. The subjects are no slaves of fashion but are devotees of high style," explains Gamboa.⁵⁶ Thus, in her representations she alters the idea of pinup art by decolonizing the language of style, desire and gender. Since a pinup is usually a poster representation showing a famous person or sex symbol, she debunks mainstream ideas on sex by showing a Chicana rendition of what is a sex symbol. Her work is a conversation about the self-fashioning of female sexuality. Gamboa subverts the idea that sex and sexuality are outlawed subjects for Chicanas by positioning a new language about home living that brings sexuality to the forefront in Chicana households.

⁵⁶ See Gamboa, Diane.

Her pinup illustrations also offered new modes of thinking about desires designed for display on a wall and for public consumption. This can be read as a response to the tradition of fetishizing La Malinche in traditional Chicano calendar art and additional visual media. She transgresses the traditional imaginaries of pin up visual

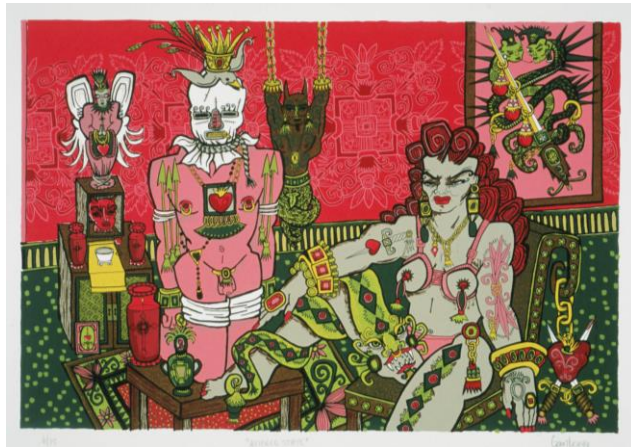


Figure 23 Diane Gamboa *Pinch Me* (1990)

vocabularies by moving beyond male-fetishes. Her work speaks about what is defined as sexy within the Chicana imaginary; showing that discourses about sex can stem out of home environments. She illustrates that women do think about sex, acknowledge sex and sexuality as natural topics among humans. She breaks the silence about sexual acts and women by publicly recognizing that sex happens at home.

An example from this series titled *Pinch Me* (1990s) reflects the visual language of Gamboa that, like Cisneros, served as a call to action to motivate women toward sexual liberation. Gamboa demonstrated the development of a *lengua franca* through her use of Chicana *placas* that decorated the “interior settings” as well as through the tattooed subjects. She best explains the development of her own artistic language when she explains:

The evolution of the work has involved various transformations in medium, approach, and scale. In the 1990s, I found myself using the tension and stress involved in the urban [East Los Angeles] environment to create new works. The decade was used for refinement in concept and artistic skills.

In 1997, I started the Pin Up series of 366 ink drawings on vellum. The images are of the male as subject. The ongoing series is an in-depth study of interpersonal relationships between women and men. [. . .] The Pin Up works have inspired the most recent Endangered Species series. Unlike the disposable paper fashions, the current work is intended to be very permanent. In plans to create/recreate some of the Pin Up drawings in a three-dimensional form, the development of additional skills are needed. Many of the figures in the drawings are covered in tattoos. I am currently working in the medium of tattooing (ink on flesh). Other mediums include glass (stained glass windows), metal, concrete, etc. to create my visions. (n. pag.)

Continuing to polish her own language, *Altered Spaces* (1999) intimately peeked into the visual realities of sexual desires and fetishes altered under the new visions of home by Chicanas. This work perhaps best illustrates Gamboa's interest to incite home(l)y revolutions. In Gamboa's representation of altered spaces of home, her use of color describes the fullness of the language of altered realities. In Gamboa's visual expression, an altered space is one surrounded by color, high design and a *rasquache* sensibility in relation to sexual gratification—the more decorated, the more one makes do with what one has, the more erotic. She manifests a sensual home environment that converts the home into a space welcoming of what Cisneros has expressed as “one's wicked ways.” Both Gamboa and Cisneros pushed the boundaries of the politics of identity and the types of languages at their disposal to frame characterizations, portrayals and personification of the self and of what really happens at home.

In this context, a characteristic defining the literary and artistic production of Chicana feminist expressions is the presentation of complex negotiations and ratifications to our thought process regarding the concept *Chicana*. In Chicana feminist cultural production, Chicana as a concept emerged out of complex engagement with domesticity in which female practices in the home defined a bilingual and feminine definition of domestic space that woman translated into the public sphere as laborers. Gamboa affirms a Chicana sense that “Femininity is a lived position and spatial ambiguities and metaphors,” which Mesa-Bains adopts from Griselda Pollack (Mesa-Bains, *Domesticana* 162). As a result, the thematization of domesticity gave agency to the schematization of selfhood. Chicana feminists “elaborated strategies of selfhood” out of domesticity through linguistic mechanisms ingrained in female subalterns’ collective consciousness (Bhabha 2). To this end, the study of the feminine realm or home is imperative because a Chicana glossing of home living showed the process of women decolonizing domesticity to challenge the gamut of imposed cultural boundaries learned at home.

While dominant perceptions of domesticity relegated women to family relations and matters related to running the home, Chicana glossing decolonized domestic space, which transformed affairs occurring inside a home, or within a community, as important as matters existing inside a particular country. Mesa-Bains captured these shifting realities in the early 1980s when she stated, “The Chicana then must forge her identity from a living past that is inconsistent with her anticipated future” (*A study*, 7). This perhaps influenced Mesa-Bains to later declare, “As the Chicana reflects the historical period of her cultural group she also faces emerging historical criticality as a woman” (*A study*, 11). Pushing for what domesticity meant for women, Chicana feminists showed how the legacy of domestic spaces that passed

from woman to woman were altered spaces, coded with a hybrid language, which, as a result of prior conditioning, harbored the practice of Chicana feminism.

Domesticana, A Chicana Feminist Aesthetic

Beyond publicizing positive images of the Chicana, a new Chicana aesthetic presented feminist visions and approaches to home life that placed the metalinguistic awareness of language at center stage. A shift in the mode of mental thought from the cultivation of a new embroidering of language transformed cultural production into a site that referenced as it created culture. A term coined by Mesa-Bains, *domesticana* encapsulated how domestic spaces assisted women to present the languages of home as a strategy of ambivalence that made all forms of space into a Chicana platform that fostered the decolonial character of the Chicana tongue.

The use of the languages of the domestic sphere as a form of self-empowerment and a tool of aesthetic intervention by Chicana feminists is well observed in the body of work by Mesa-Bains. While her dissertation explored the formation of Chicana identity among a group of Chicana artists, her focus on the interpretation of culture demonstrated the importance she gave to the schematization of language and the effects of language on identity and culture. In relation to the perception of ethnic identity on Chicana artists, Mesa-Bains observed that, “the manner in which the individual identifies with the reference group in part relies on ethnic boundaries. Barth’s (1969) concept of group boundaries included social, behavioral, and cultural characteristics that set the group apart” (*A study*, 11). In her discussion of the impact of ethnic identity on the interpretation of Chicana, Mesa-Bains inserted a Chicana metalinguistic awareness of cultural heritage to structure her definition. She stated, “Among Chicanos, the use of Spanish as a dominant language as well as cultural

custom and values help determine these boundaries. The historical base for Chicanos in this respect reflects a country of origin, Mexico, as well as a language, Spanish” (*A study*, 11).

Because collective identity created conflicts in the role identity of Chicanas,⁵⁷ Mesa-Bains urged women to manipulate language in order to reverse the negative stereotyping of Chicanas in their role identity as women:

For Chicanas the understanding of these changing demands requires her to expand her identity to include various roles. Within the development of a personal conscious identity the individual must balance the expectations and perceptions of these various roles. [. . .] . . . the demands and rules reflected in the behaviors and expectations of others are often of a contradictory nature for Chicanas. Within her ethnic role the demands for affiliation, similarity of language and other behaviors is frequently conflictual with the “American” ethnicity of a larger societal participation. In a greater societal role she may be called upon to face changing affiliation, language, and behaviors. (sic) (*A study*, 14-15)

She traced how women transformed culture by creating shifts in the vocabularies Chicana artists used to define their identity, culture, and heritage. Perhaps what Mesa-Bains consciously and unconsciously described as the aptitude of Chicana artists was in fact the requisition of language to reinterpret culture.

⁵⁷ In her discussion of ethnic identity she stated, “The collective identity which is composed of historical past and contemporary manifestations such as language, value systems, and religion can also be seen to be part of ethnic identity. The sympathetic identification with others in the same group (Klein 1977) leads to the issue of overt ethnic identification as a stage in development. The individual moves through the process in which identity rejection is transformed developmentally through phases of overcompensation to a more balanced psychic state. [...] These stages are seen as responses to negative stereotyping experiences with the majority society that can result in an internalized negative appraisal and self-hatred” (13-14).

The two following quotes are given to demonstrate how Mesa-Bains artistic and intellectual take on the interpretation of culture by Chicana artists marked the advent of what in her later work would define the zeitgeist of the emerging sensibility of Chicana feminist *rasquache* sensibility, or *domesticana*. In the Transformation section of her doctoral project, she hinted toward the development of a decolonized Chicana tongue when she categorically specified:

In many respects, the work of the artists is reflective of the emphasis of content within the confines of the Chicano Art Movement. While their work was based on their own antecedant experiences, it was redirected by the tenets of the Movement. Consequently, it was transformed as well, by the contemporary impact of material technology. Lastly it has been expanded by the generative nature of the Subjects creativity as they express cultural values through new symbolic content. Perhaps the current change in the form of their work for many of the subjects (#1, #2, #5, #7 and #8) is a response to the changing group needs. Early works were, by their function, necessary to counter majority societal stereotypes. Many artists gained strength in the collective endeavors of the Movement, but current changing group experiences allow for more distinct heterogenic elaborations. The developmental path from the public to the private, general to specific, collective to personal may not only be expressive of the individual artists path, but a group dialectic as well. In this respect the artist reflects her community and culture while transforming and reintegrating this view. (sic) (257)

Her notice of changing group dialects reads, at some level, as her unconscious recognition of what today we can now trace as the manipulation of a Chicana cultural heritage by shifting language practices.

In her comments about the process of cultural transformation taking place among Chicanas, Mesa-Bains artist-activist role placed her in a position to generate agency and subjectivity. Again, she demonstrated how the reclamation of cultural heritage made language practices for women methods that authenticated female subjectivity. She declared:

In the larger sense particular cultural elements have been consistently expressed in artistic productions by the Subjects. Belief systems, family ritual, customs, celebrations as well as cosmological and historical depictions have been the basis for artistic content among the Subjects. Despite the rhetoric of the Movement, it appears that cultural reaffirmation did not depend on randomly selected cultural elements. Rather that these elements actually selected themselves by their persistent, irrepressable qualities. Their consistency over time despite their lack of articulation suggests that their wholesale impact was due in fact to their resonance with the Subjects lived reality. Hence, culture persists through artistic expression only when it accurately reflects experience. (sic) (257-58)

While her study focused on the interpretation of culture by Chicana artists, the conclusion related the transformation she detected in these artists' sense of identity to the cultural transformation that generated subjectivity for women. Cultural expression recorded how women reframed heritage to show their reality in art and literature. That said, Chicana visual and textual languages showed the practice of what Alarcón described as those moments of

accurately representing nascent experiences as female subjectivity as “subjects-in-process” because it accounts for the “complex and multiple ways in which the subject and object of possible experience are constituted” (“Theoretical Subject(s)” 34). Paula Moya extended Alarcón’s theoretical positions in Chicana feminist subjectivity through a post positivist realist stance to the interpretation of Chicana identity in *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism* (2000). When she stated, “in my quest to find the best available language for theorizing feminist—and particularly, Chicana feminist—subjectivity and identity, I have examined two influential Chicana theorists whose work has been significantly shaped by, and has contributed to the shaping of, the “postmodern turn”: Norma Alarcón and Chela Sandoval,” Moya affirmed shifts coming into fruition in the Chicana reclamation of voice and subjectivity.

However, it is in “*Domesticana: The Sensibility of Chicana Rasquache*” (1995) where Mesa-Bains concretized the significance of a metalinguistic awareness of the Chicana feminist tongue and how women empowered themselves into subjectivity and visibility by manipulating the meanings connected to the language of heritage. This critical commentary delineated the creative expressions of Chicana artists to showcase how “glossing” developed the expression of Chicana identity through new symbolic codes. Through her explanation of *domesticana*, Mesa-Bains summarized how Chicana artists transfigured the material culture of the private, inner spaces of the home, and sacredness of home into new material expression for the public eye.

She authenticated what Ybarra-Frausto described as *rasquachismo*, the bilingual sensibility of Chicano aesthetic practices that functioned as “tool of artists-activist.” Mesa-Bains points out how, “the intention [*of rasquachismo*] was to provoke the accepted

“superior” norms of Anglo-Americans with the everyday reality of Chicano practice” but argued that because women were confined to family life or linked to domesticity, *rasquachismo* had yet to develop in women’s spheres. Unfortunately, these descriptions were unable to fully explain *rasquachismo* from a woman’s bilingual sensibility (165). She illustrated how the interrogation of social and public values as a working-class Chicana, and the expectation by society to maintain her domestic role were incongruent, conflicting, and contradictory. But women capitalized on these discrepancies by altering traditions to mend divisions and extremities of life experiences.

In her essay, the cultural critic delineated how the expression of *domesticana* had strength because it developed from strategies of resistance and counter-narrative discourse at home. A space ignored in the rhetoric of the movements, she commented:

Chicana *rasquache* (*domesticana*) like its male counterpart, has grown not only out of resistance to majority culture and affirmation of cultural values, but from women’s restrictions within the culture. A defiance of an imposed Anglo-American cultural identity, and the defiance of restrictive gender identity within *Chicano* culture has inspired female *rasquacheism*. (161)

Mesa-Bains argued that art production for women differed from that of men because women deconstructed and transculturated the idea of gender outside traditional views. Termed as *domesticana*, this new philosophy declared how the private operatives of home, the values and systems of beliefs of women’s home-life, transformed into public spaces as women entered public realms. She articulated this sense when she expressed:

Domesticana comes as a spirit of *Chicana* emancipation grounded in advanced education, and to some degree, Anglo-American expectations in a

more open society. With new experiences of opportunity, *Chicanas* challenged existing community restrictions regarding the role of women. Techniques of subversion through play with traditional imagery and cultural material are characteristic of *domesticana*. (161)

Her analysis of altar installations, home altars, and the ornamentation of personal female spaces that reflected both sacred spaces and sites where healing practices are performed, made clear how Chicana artists subverted ideas about public and private spaces and blurred the boundaries between beauty, aesthetic, and femininity. Her application of feminist lenses to reinterpret new perceptions of Chicana living is summarized when she proclaimed:

Within this body of work, we can begin to apply critical viewpoints of feminist theory . . . that places art production as more than reflective of ideology, but rather an art production that is constructive of ideology. Art then becomes a social reality through which essential worldviews and identities, individually lived, are constructed, reproduced and even redefined. The construction of the feminine through patriarchy relies on a network of psycho-socio relationships that produce meaning. Such meanings are created by the ways in which patriarchy positions us as wives, daughters, sisters and mothers. (161-62)

Mesa-Bains counterpointed this type of vision imposed on Chicanas by showing how female practices in the home had defined a bilingual and feminine definition of domestic space that women were translating into the public sphere as laborers.⁵⁸ By grounding herself in feminist

⁵⁸ They were also interested in bringing liberties afforded to women in public domains into the home such as the freedom of speech and the right to fair working conditions.

theory, this critic and artist traced the process of the reclamation of gender politics through a redefinition of domesticity.

This focus on “the spaces of femininity” placed emphasis on the reclamation of culture that read *domesticana* as a counterpoint of Chicano art ideologies (161). She declared:

The spaces of femininity operate not only at the level of what is represented in the drawing room or sewing room. The spaces of femininity are those from which femininity is lived as positionality in discourse and social practice. They are a product of a lived sense of social relatedness, mobility and visibility in the social relation of seen and being seen. (162).

As Mesa-Bains focused on the centrality of family life, a *domesticana* approach shed light on patriarchy’s hold of family life in the “perceived” feminine domain of the domestic. In her regard to “the social relation of seen and “being seen” she elaborated quoting from Griselda Pollack:

Shaped with sexual politics of looking they [feminine spaces] demarcate a particular social organization of gaze which itself works back to secure a particular ordering of sexual difference. Femininity is both the condition and the effect. This condition and effect remain in place unless the representation, like language, relocates or repositions the feminine. Spatial ambiguities and metaphors can function to shake the foundational patriarchy in art through challenging works. Domesticana begins to reposition the Chicana through the workings of feminine space. (162-63)

Her recognition of how feminist discourses generated new dialogues that brought to the table the issues of who had the power to speak regionally, nationally, and internationally about issues related to Chicanas broke new ground in the visual arts. Mesa-Bains established how feminist visual utterances symbolically showed the arrival of a Chicana *lengua franca*.

Domesticana: The Chicana Feminist Politics of Home Languages

Feminizing *rasquachismo* as an artist-activist tool gave women access to devise female-authored symbols that illustrated the power of language coming from the Chicana imaginary, not in a form of a written or spoken utterance, but in visual forms. While my intent is not to undermine the work of Tomás Ybarra-Frausto on the formal and aesthetic discussion contributing to the understanding of Chicana and Chicano art in “Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility” in *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965-1985* (1991), my goal is to focus on how Mesa-Bains extended his concept of *rasquachismo* into the feminine-feminist domain in her 1995 essay “‘Domesticana’: The Sensibility of Chicana.” Her theoretical observations elaborated how the *rasquache* aesthetic (while dominant across many forms of Chicano popular culture) conjured a unique dimension in women’s art and feminist markers.

The expansion of Ybarra-Frausto’s definition of *rasquachismo* as a Chicano bilingual sensibility into the feminine realm gave Mesa-Bains agency to underscore the revolutionary acts of what Chicana artists and critics were doing to the term *Chicana*.⁵⁹ Her essay concluded with the following words, “The redefining of the feminine must come from the representational vocabularies of women if we are to undo the wounds of patriarchy and

⁵⁹ Visually, this is the same as what Esther Hernández did to the Statue of Liberty in *Libertad* (1976) when she protested the idea of liberty and women during the American Bi-centennial. She critiqued what liberty meant for Chicanas by shaping and forming a new visual image of liberty as a Mayan sculpture and adding the word Aztlán to project the idea that American is also brown and *mestizo*.

colonization. That is the challenge of new views of space, of the new *domesticana* defiance” (166). To forge a new vision, Mesa-Bains explained how calculated doses of defiance were necessary for women to achieve self-determination—what this study analyses as the semiotic process of feminist’ signing of a new symbolic language honed in the manipulation of cultural heritage to set free a personalized *lengua franca* of Chicana feminism.

In her internal exploration of meaning, Mesa-Bains’ attention to language issues and practices located the labor-intensive work women had accomplished in the alteration of the meanings of language at home. Mesa-Bains posited *domesticana* as a “rasquache stance” to reveal how, for women, “their work takes on a deeper meaning of domestic tension, as the signs of making do are both affirmation of the domestic life and resistance to the subjugation of women in the domestic sphere” (Arredondo, *Chicana Feminism* 306). Women handled the contradiction of patriarchal designs of homes by transfiguring the sphere of the domestic as a new feminist terrain.

Mesa-Bains coded her work with a Chicana *lengua franca*, installing into language a way in which we could read the manipulations of language, something she called attention to using Griselda Pollack’s own elaboration on the idea of woman. In reference to feminine space in representation, Mesa-Bains quoted the following, “The meaning of the term woman is effectively installed in social and economic positions and it is constantly produced in language, in representation made to those people in those social and economic positions—fixing an identity, social place and sexual position and disallowing others” (162).

The emergence of Chicana *domesticana* evidenced what Holly Barnet-Sanchez in “Chicano/a Critical Practices: Reflections on Tomás Ybarra-Frausto’s Concept of *Rasquachismo*” viewed as the complexities of Chicano art and culture and the element of

difference that generated from feminine and feminist creativity (Mercer, 2007). I draw from Barnet-Sanchez's study to highlight how Mesa-Bains conscious and unconscious awareness of the new schematization of languages to the new imaginings of heritage showed how feminism assisted women alter cultural lore that responded to essentialist and negative portrayals of women.

The critical role of language in shaping a vocabulary of Chicana domesticity with the metalinguistic awareness that gave artist-activists a tool to rethink boundaries founded by blurring the lines between the feminine-feminist converted the reproduction of feminism into coded images of a new feminine divine. The "visceral response to lived experience", as Barnet-Sanchez noted in "Chicano/a Critical Practices" assisted the critic to demonstrate how "Chicanos "establish a different artistic vocabulary that reflected who they were and what they wanted to say about the times and places in which they were living" (68). In "Tomás Ybarra-Frausto and Amalia Mesa-Bains: A Critical Discourse from Within" Barnet-Sanchez stressed how "Historically, these writings on *rasquachismo* and *domesticana* are unique in the small but expanding bibliography of Chicano art, art criticism, and art history. They are unique because—although written as recently as 1988 and 1995—they provide the first analytical mechanisms by which to interrogate the specificities of what one *sees* when one looks at certain types of Chicana/o works of art from an expressly formal perspective" (Mercer, *Art Journal* 92). The interrogation of what one sees, now that time has passed, is the development of a "critical practice" as Barnet-Sanchez remarked. The new phenomena among Chicana feminists' use of language as a practice observed by Mesa-Bains have contributed to the reclamation of Chicana cultural heritage as a redemptive act of the *la lengua*; the symbolic recuperation of the meaning of womanhood.

Mesa-Bain's reprinted essay in the journal *Aztlán* in 1999 and in *Chicana Feminisms: A Critical Reader* (2003), further cemented how Chicanas restructured legacies by challenging the boundaries of cultural traditions and the terrains of administration that governs beliefs on cultural heritage. A shift from reproducing culture to creating culture, the transfiguration of culture in conceptualizing the role of the women anew pointed to those pivotal moments where Mesa-Bains saw a new language emerging. In her 2003 essay, she pinpointed a Chicana's use of a *lengua franca*, *Chicana placas*, through the work of artist Patssi Valdez, when she declared, "Chicanas create a mimetic worldview that retells the feminine past from a new position [in a] redemptive enunciation in the language of domesticana" (307). These pivotal moments marked the subversive act by women to "shattered glamour" that manifested shifts in Chicana modes of imaginations (307). She best illustrated this when she said:

The rasquache works by Rodríguez, Valdez, and myself posit an approach to feminine space in the contemporary that reconstructs aspects of the domestic, the sacred, and the personal. In response to what is sometimes called the master narrative, we enunciate on our own voice a domesticana that, unlike kitsch, seeks not an appropriation of low over high but in fact a state from within Chicano/a culture. Moving past the fixation of a domineering patriarchal language, our domesticana is an emancipatory gesture of representational space and pose. (307)

In this intercultural negotiation Mesa-Bains described Chicano *rasquachismo* as a bilingual sensibility but from a woman's and feminist point of view, it was now *domesticana*.

To evade confusion among constructs and terminology in the art world, Mesa-Bains encoded the term *domesticana* as a Chicana feminist practice that used language to disclose the new potential of the Chicana feminist's tongue. Her closing words to "*Domesticana: The Chicana Sensibility to Rasquachismo*" (1995) showed how her essay affirmed a self-determination of what had been previously unarticulated or what had been absent in the public recognition of Chicana cultural practices. She summarized:

The expansion of a feminine *rasquachismo* as *domesticana* has been an attempt to elaborate both intercultural differences between Cuban kitsch and Chicano rasquache as well as intracultural differences between Chicana *domesticana*. Like all explorations, terminologies must remain porous, sensibilities never completely named, and categories shattered. As Victor Zamudio-Taylor reminds us, Chicano art and *domesticana* 'shatters the reified universe and breaks the monopoly of the established discourse to define what is real and true.'⁶ (166)

Chicana feminist artists spoke about Chicana culture with as much dignity as they could muster through the symbolic and metaphoric languages inscribed in the cultural heritage of their home language. Decolonial domestic acts positioned counter-narratives as tool of empowerment; the language variation that structured those new imaginings exhibited the reinvention and renovation of metalinguistic embrace of a mother's tongue. Under those circumstances, literary and artistic works can be read and viewed as incipient sites that framed Chicana identity. At the same time, it also reflected a growing awareness by women that they had a responsibility, and likewise a freedom, to declare perspectives of feminine and feminist nature that revolutionized the Chicano movement.

This reflected Mesa-Bains' decolonial working with notions of language, women, and representation as a ceremony and as a healing practice—two themes that root the trajectory of all her work. *Domesticana*, embodied the feminist entry into the language domain, into a bilingual sensibility as a decolonialist feminist. Therefore, *domesticana* called attention to emerging dynamics among Chicana feminist languages—languages rooted at home and in the domestic space—as well as the keen observation of the decolonization of patriarchal inscriptions of the tongue—while, at the same time, fostering the feminine, feminist and mother languages of a *domesticana* tongue in visual culture.

And to extend Mesa-Bains' idea, *domesticana* referenced the incipient states of a feminist tongue unfolding—a tongue not only characterized by its bilingual sensibility but also was coded with a metalinguistic dimension that granted women agency to enact the imagination to practice cultural, which transformed culture. The public articulation of the Chicana tongue showed how the home-rooted language of *domesticana* devised a series of stratagems that redefined domesticity inside out. In this way, language functioned as a device, a weapon, employed by women to proffer a multilingual-translation of culture. In the internal exploration of self, the turn inward and into the domestic and then outward showed the domestic state of flux in Chicana cultural production.

A tool of the artist-activist, Mesa-Bains demonstrates with profound clarity the complex ways texts and images interact in Chicano imaginary. Mesa-Bains offered a critical practice of how Chicanas celebrate cultural heritage and how the use of a *lengua franca* expressed the contemporary positionality of *domesticana*. *Domesticana* is the Chicana feminist tool of the artist-activist, signing Chicana with a language geared to undo the wounds inflicted on women.

In this way, *domesticana* is the tool of the artist-activists who used art to express the thick layers of a ‘home altered’—from the alteration of Mexico’s cultural heritage to the constant intersection of the United States with that of Mexico in an reciprocal exchange of two cultures in dialogue, one dealing with the reality of being U.S. citizen or a permanent reality of living in the U.S and the other a deep understanding that the cultural traditions that remained post-1848—the domestic handling of *Chicano* and Chicano speaks of a sign-system that is not an empty or dead signifier, but rather a lively expression of a cultural adaptation that changes through the celebration of culture. These shifts and shifting signifiers have transformed Greater Mexico’s culture into an expression of hybridity resulting from the experience of being between borders, in the borderlands of real and imagined spaces. As a result, individuals engaged in creative practices served and will continue to serve the dual role of artist and scholar.

Chicana Voice as a Tool of the Artist-Activist, Or *Artivist*

The fluctuation of what La Malinche signifies among men and women and between inside and outside the home, however, underscores how women continue to manifest new visual forms, artistic strategies, and non-verbal language traditions of home and about home. Artist, activist and scholar Mesa Bains best documented the significance the advent of Chicana feminist forms of analysis rooted at home, while Laura E. Pérez research traces the signifying practices of Chicana artistic and scholarly expression in connection to spiritualism that makes female cultural images in Chicana heritage into “spirit glyphs”.

In the 2007 publication of *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities*, Pérez proved how La Malinche was a figure of ancestral strength, and therefore, a protagonist in history (in the Spanish sense of the word: *una protagonista*) because her

activism in history and her continued presence over time and across borders demonstrated how Chicanas regard her as a “spirit glyph” (22). Pérez explains how her image came to represent a blueprint for radical feminist politics and a symbolic example that female independence and women’s liberation is a right that had been denied in the implementation of a colonial society on indigenous ways of life in the Americas. In essence, she became a role model that showed women how to stand up for themselves amidst full-fledged attack and attempts of total domination of their bodies that pointed to the “spirit tongues” characterizing Chicana linguistic legacies (25).

Extending the dialogic nature of Chicana scholarship into a new imaginative frontier, this study traces the evolution of Chicana literary and artistic expression of La Malinche from a symbolic icon of female cultural archetype to a more radical interpretation of her image “speaking glyph.” As a “speaking glyph” La Malinche reflects the semiotic working of Chicana *placas* to signal new inroads of what Chicana cultural heritage means. In showing how Chicana *glyphs* are also *placas*, this study aims to explain how Chicana activism in connection to the affirmation of their hybrid tongues and languages cultivated at home continues to provoke and agitate the cultural assumptions in relation to identity debates taking place in the twenty-first century.

Recently, Chela Sandoval and Guisela Latorre’s use of *artivista* (the artist-activist) showed the power of Chicana voices in the evolution of the rasquache bilingual sensibility that makes the Chicana artist into an activist. In *Chicana/o Artivism: Judy Baca’s Digital Work with Youth of Color* (2008) Chela Sandoval and Guisela Latorre elaborated on the importance of feminist artists and writers’ contributions to the Chicano movement at the same time they also show how artistic, literary, and scholarly relations display a strong

network and dialogue among feminists that must not be underestimated. Tracing the development of the concept of *artivism* in the life-long work of Baca, the turn to art to create bodies of knowledge that would give rise to critical perspectives on Chicana studies demonstrates how the arts served to create relations among feminists that flourished into a dialogue characterized by a verbal and symbolic feminist language that transformed thoughts, dreams and desires into realities. The period of immense experimentation during the Chicano movement, which fostered the role of artists as activists, is important because it demonstrates the power of language to sustain and forge new forms of thinking, new models of existence. The synchronic study of representations of La Malinche, and of artistic production that made Chicanas into ‘speaking subjects’ elucidates how adapting an *activist* identity enabled women to foster their own languages and tongues.

Though their academic writing critics also were *artists*. The presence of the critic is central in tracing the development of Chicana literary and artistic expression because critics created scholarship that helped explain the transcript system of language seen in Chicana literature or visual representations. Critics made clear stories that would guide people to recognize the importance of recuperating the images of a cultural legacy for the Chicano movement; they advanced the field of Chicana and Chicanos studies by considering more profoundly texts and images.

Feminist critics took it upon themselves to create new bodies of knowledge that would explain, define, represent and promote not only women’s art and literature. They too revolutionized the field of criticism through empowerments with *la lengua*. Where would we be without the works of Norma Alarcón, Tey Diana Rebolledo, Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, Alicia Gaspar de Alba, Tere Romo, Holly Barnet-Sanchez, Amalia Mesa-Bains, or Laura E.

Pérez to name a few. They provided examinations of La Malinche's prominence and survival in Chicano cultural heritage in greater depth, and through their words provided vanguard interpretations and representations of La Malinche that placed feminist causes at the forefront.

Chapter 4: Transforming *la lengua*: La Malinche in Chicana Literatures

In the publication of *The Feminist Mystique* (1963) Betty Friedan wrote that the condition and role of women as housewives was “the problem that had no name” (15). Friedan’s middle class concern over the social roles of women as wives, mothers, and housewives influenced Chicana feminists to question the myths about home and domesticity. As largely working-class women, Chicanas were inspired to define what home culture meant contingent on Chicana/o social values. Because mainstream social movements did not reflect the experiences of Chicanas, they used writing to advance perspectives about the world of domestic affairs from a Chicana lived experience.⁶⁰

Chicana feminist literary production details how feminists initiated new conversations from the cultural universal of the home. The development of Chicana politics in home spaces radicalized a woman’s relationship to home, which impacted the types of identities women elected to cultivate from home.⁶¹ To this end, reformations to notions of domesticity led to the development of a new language of self that structured Chicana thought from the tradition

⁶⁰ Friedan’s “Is this all?” question initiated the second wave of feminism. Her published work served to drastically rethink idealized images imposed on women, which endorsed conformity and discouraged women-defined forms of fulfillment of which she called the “feminine mystique.” The changing role of women in the twentieth century—from gaining the right to vote in the early 1920s; to entering the labor force as a result of agricultural demands; to urbanization, industrialization, and wartime labor demands in the United States; and the woman’s rights struggles of the 1960s and 1970s—created a new atmosphere to present in detail the abilities and qualifications of women. Modern feminists advocated for public recognition of their labor in and out of the domestic sphere. This extended what Simone de Beauvoir discussed in “Woman as Other” in the introduction of *The Second Sex* (1949).

⁶¹ They fought for acceptance, equity, and inclusion of their feminist perspectives within the feminist movement at the same time they strove for acknowledgement of how their work as homemakers and working-class women helped to maintain and advance the Chicano movement on multiple fronts. Because women had grown unsettled with continued experiences of invisibility and ostracism in mainstream feminists struggles at the same time that dominant Chicano discourse shunned women for extending Chicana identity into feminist realms, emerging Chicana feminist thought stirred women to validate a Chicana identity coming into consciousness as a feminist. Ostracized by both movements, Chicana feminists turned to writing to advocate for the admission of public perspectives about women.

of female-specific creativity. Reframing the home space as a cultural nexus helped women to derive vocabularies and styles of writing from domestic resources because the home was a homeland for Chicanas.

Through writing, Chicana authors reversed the diverse social structures and ideological paradigms that contributed to their state of social and cultural invisibility by bridging the politics of the Chicano movement and of the feminist movement. By such efforts, Chicana feminists incited a new revolutionary process that made writing into a practice and agent of change, presenting experiences previously muted or excluded from official discourse through writing. Some authors broke silences and gave voice to aspects of a woman's intimate or dark imaginings in texts. For other writers, writing was a delight, a way to inform and collaborate in the celebration of being Chicana. When publishing houses refused to publish their works, Chicanas self-published.

Women turned to writing to revise narratives of female figures in Chicano cultural heritage and to transform stereotyped images of women, such as that of La Malinche, into powerful cultural foremothers signifying female empowerment. Chicana feminists saw in writing the potential to inscribe their own Chicana *placas* by nurturing their female-centered voices and tongues. The works of Margarita Cota-Cárdenas, Alicia Gaspar de Alba, and Erlinda Gonzales-Berry demonstrate how feminist authors created a Chicana literary body by reframing the language used to narrate the tale of La Malinche. As Chicana feminists transgressed language to decolonize the image of La Malinche, they demonstrated that Chicana expression was hybrid—composed of a large number of things and fragments that mirrored the *rasquache* sensibility of Chicana collective memory and diversity of perspective. Chicana writing on the figure of La Malinche recast interpretations of cultural heritage that

acknowledged the role and contributions of women past and present: from La Malinche, to their grandmothers, to themselves.

Moreover, Chicanas like Cota-Cárdenas, Gaspar de Alba, and Gonzales-Berry who elect to write in Spanish or who publicly acknowledge code switching illustrate the diversity of language use in Chicana interpretations of culture. In the works of these authors, the counter narrative language that frames La Malinche and Chicanas as positive cultural models shows how women incorporate feminist *placas* to not only demystify negative stereotypes of women but also to illustrate how the character of their hybrid tongues allowed them to present visions and discourses sensible to female causes.

Like Chicana writers who write in English, the authors analyzed in this chapter initiate a new dialogue that celebrates the languages and language use of all women. Through the power of written languages, the authors reverse the underrepresentation of women's voices, bodies and perspectives in literature. However, a unique characteristic related to the use of Spanish and of code switching in Chicana writers is how they use language to shatter the myth that Chicanos only write in English and null preconceived notions of what women can and cannot do with language. The writings of Cota-Cárdenas, Gaspar de Alba, and Gonzales-Berry offer a written expression that reflects the complexity of linguistic realities defining Chicano communities inside and outside the home.⁶²

As women came into a new awareness of self as Chicana feminists, they recognized that their tongues were coded with multiple languages capable of offering an interpretation of

⁶² Women used writing to reverse negative inscriptions of La Malinche because from the Chicana feminist imaginary La Malinche symbolized female empowerment. Chicanas learned through the tale of La Malinche that they too could change the world by taking history into their own hands. Chicanas literary production underscored La Malinche's giftedness with language and her affirmation of self through language to bring justice to the history of La Malinche and in effect to all women.

culture that Clifford Geertz described as “thick description.” In *Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture* (1973) Geertz argued that ethnographic research was more than an objective observation and recording of culture. For Geertz, one of the key roles of the ethnographer was to interpret signs (content and behavior) because, “culture is public because meaning is” (12).⁶³ Geertz argued that an ethnographer studying a culture gains a better sense of the meaning of something by interpreting culture through a “thick description” of a sign because he or she would be able to note and understand all the possible meanings of what is being studied or observed. Geertz’s infusion of a semiotic approach to the study of the concept of culture as part of “thick description” emphasizes the importance of understanding the operatives of symbols in culture when he argues:

We are reduced to insinuating theories because we lack the power to state them. At the same time, it must be admitted that there are a number of characteristics of cultural interpretation, which make the theoretical development of it more than usually difficult. The first is the need for theory to stay rather closer to the ground than tends to be the case in sciences more able to give themselves over to imaginative abstraction. (. . .) The whole point of a semiological approach to culture is, as I have said, to aid us in gaining access to the conceptual world in which our subjects live so that we can, in some extended sense of the term, converse with them. The tension between

⁶³ Geertz validates his approach to the interpretation of culture through the idea of winking. He states, “You can’t wink (or burlesque one) without knowing what counts as a wink or how, physically, to contract your eyelids, and you can’t conduct a sheep raid (or mimic one) without knowing what it is to steal a sheep and how practically to go about it. But to draw from such truths the conclusion that knowing how to wink is winking and knowing how to steal a sheep is sheep raiding is to betray as deep a confusion as, taking thin descriptions for thick, to identify winking with eyelid contractions or sheep raiding with chasing woolly animals out of pastures” (12). Thin descriptions sees the wink as a wink, while thick descriptions examine the context and behavior of the wink.

the pull of this need to penetrate an unfamiliar universe of symbolic action, and the requirements of technical advance in the theory of culture, between the need to grasp and the need to analyze, is, as a result, both necessarily great and essentially irremovable. (24)

The thematic exploration of La Malinche in Chicana writing is testimony to the cultivation of a deeper understanding of the ways La Malinche functioned as a multivalent sign of resistance, affirmation and cultural pride. As women traversed the cultural landscapes of writing, cultural dialogues and communications among Chicanas reflected what M.M. Bakhtin in “Discourse of the Novel” called a “language consciousness” (Bakhtin, 274). While Bakhtin wrote that “real ideologically saturated ‘language consciousness,’ one that participates in actual heteroglossia and multi-languedness, has remained outside of vision,” Chicana feminist writings on La Malinche prove otherwise. Chicana revisions of La Malinche point to engagements with the “dialogic aspects of discourse.” Their utterances showed the extent of Chicana heteroglossia (274, 273). Bakhtin defined the blending of worldviews through hybridity as heteroglossia—the dialogization of languages and pure dialogue, which is a major device for creating language (429).

When Bakhtin’s stance to textual analysis are applied to Chicana literature, the complex cosmos of the blending of languages as well as the hybridity of utterances found in the literary expression of women make clear the sophistication of “thick descriptions” Chicanas construct as they position culture under hybridity (273). Chicana feminist literary production can be read as the exposition of “dialogized heteroglossia” for the myriad ways Chicanas played, transgressed, crossed borders and struggled with language to create in

literary contexts a space where the interpretation of La Malinche could be accented through the new content of Chicana feminist thought.

I argue that the revisionist stories of La Malinche by authors, Cota-Cárdenas, Gaspar de Alba and Gonzales-Berry, encode a language of Chicana *placas* onto literary writing to gain “access to the conceptual world in which [their] subjects live so that [they] can, in some extended sense of the term, converse with them” (Geertz, 24). Chicana *placas* are the distinctive expressions and vocabularies of Chicana feminists that describe, represent, and portray the many languages women have sustained in their communities to bring subjectivity and voice to themselves. Building from forms of communication Chicanas inherit from female approximations to heritage, the Chicano and feminist movement empowered Chicanas to consider the “dialogized heteroglossia” of their language as a linguistic source. As Chicana feminists developed their own consciousness, alternative views surfaced that took into account the multimodal factors in the Chicana environment that contributed to her oppression. Women countered multiple forms of oppression by inscribing their own *placas* into literature, which, when read by other women, motivated them to dream and attain self-determination.

The texts analyzed in this chapter show how, as a result of the heteroglot interpretations of La Malinche in Chicana literary production across time, in the process of reframing the ideological discourse that negatively portrayed women as traitors and foreigners, a “verbal-ideological evolution” emerges where Chicana feminists, “comprised the theoretical expressions of actualizing forces that were in the process of creating a life for language” (Bakhtin 271). La Malinche was instrumental in the reimagining of Chicana identity, as she was known as *la lengua*—a literal and symbolic representation of tongue,

which morphed into a powerful linguistic tool and code. Thus, La Malinche is a Chicana *placa* that emblematically references the Chicana sense of pride of one's linguistic background from the Spanish and *mestiza* understanding of La Malinche as language and tongue.

The use of *la lengua* reflects what Julia Kristeva discussed in *The Desire of Language* (1980), as the process of semiological signification where the semiotic is the signifying process—the movement, tones, etc. construct the symbolic. We can read Chicana writings on La Malinche as the semiological practice of the bodily drive to express a Chicana language in texts and images. The use of La Malinche as *la lengua* defined the symbolic act of Chicana writing on cultural archetypes. Like Rebolledo's reference to the importance of the symbolic border in women's writing, the use of *la lengua* illuminates how the use of La Malinche as a metaphor for tongue in the Spanish sense of the word transformed into a powerful tool that inspired women to search for their tongue and place in language (*Infinite Divisions* 193).

Kristeva's thoughts on language help contextualize the revolutionary acts of women because Kristeva not only spoke about third space feminism, a concept also embraced by Chicana feminists, but because she embraces the maternal that was often relegated to the domestic space. Kristeva states that the "real female innovation (in whatever field) will only come about when maternity, female creation, and the link between them are better understood" (298). This chapter focuses on Chicana writers who use code switching and the Spanish language to challenge the negative forms in which Chicano language has systematically objectified La Malinche as *la chingada* and *la vendida*. By using Spanish to contest negative representations of La Malinche in relation to maternity and female creation,

the Spanish language becomes a tool from which to reverse negative representations of La Malinche as a traitor and as the symbolic mother of *mestizaje*.

By writing about La Malinche in Spanish Chicanas also showcased the development of their own vocabularies and modes of expressions in Spanish that imparted new storylines onto Hispanic literary traditions. Positive storylines of La Malinche told in Spanish and through the use of code-switching allowed Chicanas to contest the language of male-defined stories about La Malinche that denied women a positive connection with her. At the same time, the creative uses of the colonizer's language enabled *mestiza* writers to unlock indigenous languages stored in cultural memories and home practices. As Rebolledo noted, "For many years Chicanas have been unable to write or to publish their writing if they did write. They were also working with a system in which language denied them. Thus, to be able to write meant they had to "seize the language" (Ostriker) and become the subjects of their own narrations, not the objects" (*Women Singing* x). By writing in Spanish, the authors analyzed in this chapter illustrate the power of the Chicana tongue, their *lengua*, to offer new readings of La Malinche by decolonizing or 'seizing' language.

In developing their own Chicana *placas*, codes and writing systems to interpret La Malinche, they offer a positive view of the maternal world and of female creation that as Rebolledo stated is a "sociopolitical sexual expression that represents for all of us" (*Women Singing* 180). Through a language that innovates and experiments with what cultural artifacts and symbols mean for women, a language that expresses rage toward violence, colonial conditions and oppression, a language that transgresses taboo issues, and a language that brings new sensibilities to the connection women have to their indigenous past, the writers

analyzed in this chapter make visible the different ways creative endeavors in language expression exhibit Chicana *placas*.

For these reasons, this chapter concentrates on the following questions: How did women, vested in making the images and representations of La Malinche and other iconic figures the center of political concern, revise representations of women through a politicized language of words and images? How did Chicanas structure the image and representation of La Malinche who, by tradition, was defined as a negative cultural figure? This chapter analyzes how Cota-Cárdenas, Gaspar de Alba, and Gonzales-Berry transform the representations of the figure of La Malinche by bridging the significance of La Malinche in domestic spaces to public spaces to respond to postmodernism and to modernity, consequently creating conditions of decolonial engagements. An interdisciplinary semiotic approach to the analysis of literary representations of La Malinche shows how Chicana linguistic practices alter understandings of La Malinche as a sign and symbol to show how Chicana feminists use language to celebrate the complexity and flux of identity at the same time it serves to honor the diversity of women's lived realities.

Women Are More than Someone's Puppet

Margarita Cota-Cárdenas is a Chicana writer of poetry and prose. She was born in 1941 in Heber, California to a New Mexican mother and Mexican father. Spanish was their home language. Despite their work in the agricultural fields as farmworkers, Cota-Cárdenas' father was adamant about schooling his children. Perhaps he recognized her talent for the arts from the early accolades she received at school for writing. The rural Imperial Valley experience shaped her world vision, as did the oral traditions of storytelling absorbed at home, school, and throughout life. Cota-Cárdenas is one of the first Chicanas authors to

publish in Spanish and to continue to write in Spanish since the beginning of the Chicano movement.

Early on, Cota-Cárdenas' prolific talent with language showcased the metalinguistic awareness of Chicana voices. Her writing served as a testament of the hybrid linguistic expression that characterized the cultural renaissance of the early Chicana/o literary genre and the dynamics of its heritage across time. She is the author of two collections of poetry *Noches despertando inConciencias* (1976) and *Marchitas de Mayo* (1981). Her narrative works include *Puppet: A Chicano Novella* (1985) and *Sanctuaries of the Heart/Sanctuarios del corazón* (2005). One of her first published works is a short story titled in Spanish "El velorio de Wimpy" (1975). This story reads as a prequel to the figure of Puppet as a leitmotif in her work. She is currently working on a book titled *La gente del corazón* that focuses on another central figure in the author's work, the character of Petra Leyva. In addition, Cota-Cárdenas' dedication to promote the literary arts is unquestionable. In 1975 she co-founded Scorpion Press with Cuban poet Eliana Rivero.⁶⁴ Cota-Cárdenas demonstrated a true commitment to the ideas of the Chicano movement by carving a space for the cultural and artistic expression of Chicana voices through creativity and criticism. She received her

⁶⁴ Cota-Cárdenas' impetus for the conceptualization of Scorpion Press came out of asking, "Why can't I self-publish?" Scorpion Press responded to the lack of female representations and voices in the Chicano cultural renaissance. Established in 1967, El Quinto Sol Press was one of the first Chicano editorials dedicated to foster the literary, artistic and critical development of Chicano cultural production. However, female representation was limited. The first publication of dedicated to the voices of women, edited by Estella Portillo Trambley titled "*Chicanas en la literatura y el arte*," was published in 1973. By 1975, Cota-Cárdenas and Eliana Rivero had already established Scorpion Press to support and develop Chicana creativity and criticism. After the initial years of the movement, women who felt their voices were not being adequately represented in print responded by establishing their own presses. Women across the Southwest spoke back to the devaluing of female voices that kept women experiences in the dark by publishing their own works. In *Chicano Renaissance: Contemporary Cultural Trends* edited by David Maciel, Isidro D. Ortiz, and María Herrera-Sobek, the chapter titled, "Breaking the Silence: Developments in the Publication and Politics of Chicana Creative Writing, 1973-1998," Edwina Barvosa-Carter traced how women broke silences of their untold stories in the publishing world. Her chapter showed the political and social impact of Chicana creative writing and publication and the response to limited opportunities to publish as significant.

doctorate degree in 1980 from the University of Arizona and now is Professor Emerita of Spanish at Arizona State University.

Margarita Cota-Cárdenas is one of the first Chicana authors to publish in Spanish and to continue to write in Spanish since the beginning of the Chicano Movement. Cota-Cárdenas' prolific talent with language showcases her metalinguistic awareness of voice.⁶⁵ But the most salient characteristic of her work is how she builds on key issues in feminist knowledge and scholarship. Her work is a testament of how early Chicana feminists actively worked to deconstruct the notion of Chicanas/os as *vendidos* in Chicana/o culture. In particular, most saliently represented in *Puppet* is the exploration of the politics of difference and solidarity among women's rights activists rooted in grassroots efforts that defined the Chicano civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s. In this work, Cota-Cárdenas offers a complex narrative focused on the connections between the protagonist Petra Leyva, to the life of Puppet a young boy killed by police, and to the symbol of La Malinche against the backdrop of *la voz del pueblo chicano*.⁶⁶ She achieves this by taking a graffiti or taggers approach to literary writing. She tags and inserts a feminist language and a female urban perspective onto the early literary expressions of the Chicano Renaissance by talking about the *barrio* life from the positionality of a Chicana traversing public and private spaces.

Puppet's story is autobiographical in nature and based on a series of real-life events, including the tragic life of a nineteen-year-old Chicano, the Puppet of the title, who is

⁶⁵ In the essay, "The Problematics of Writing in Spanish," Rebolledo wrote that for Margarita Cota-Cárdenas and Erlinda Gonzales-Berry, "[. . .]writing in Spanish is a self-conscious political act that offers another dialects to the language question; even more so because in addition to the basic Spanish texts in both novels, we have the additional enriching (and subverting) caló, bilingual, and English language levels. And to add an overlay, we have female-language subjects and thoughts" (*Women Singing* 172). Rebolledo is one of the first critics to note the significance of Chicanas writing in Spanish and metalinguistic awareness of self and of subjectivity that emerged from women reclaiming the language of Chicana oral and popular culture.

⁶⁶ "The voice of Chicano peoples" (My translation).

mistakenly killed in the *barrio* by police. Writing the novel to vindicate his death, Petra Leyva, a Spanish professor and protagonist in the novel, becomes the professor of “inconsciencia” who experiences a social and political awakening that leads to the examination of her own life and values. Experimental in form and narration, the novel deviates from linear plot structures and forces readers to piece together a fragmented and frenzied presentation of information (Amparano García 194). While the novella seeks to solve the shooting of a young Chicano laborer named Puppet (which is actually a cover-up by the police), *Puppet* also can be read as a Spanish-language novella about Petra. Petra “Pat” is a single mother of two, instructor of Chicano/a literature and Spanish at a community college and a part-time secretary at a construction company. Because she is struggling to find and define her Chicana identity, the book’s postmodern narration unearths the multiple stories and voices flourishing during the Chicano Movement that dialogue with Petra as she journeys through her own path of activism as a Chicana heading to her *concientización*.

From a feminist lens, *Puppet* has a second story line that uses multilingual aesthetics to dialectically deconstruct the traditional narrative of La Malinche as traitor, sell-out, or *vendida*⁶⁷ in order to reconstruct the history of both La Malinche and Petra. Chapter 11 titled, “El discurso de La Malinche” (Malinche’s Discourse) gives voice to the figure of La Malinche. In fact, La Malinche transforms into a cross spacio-temporal figure whose life experience and voice directs Pat to find her idea of “self” and to birth herself as a Chicana. Cota-Cárdenas interrogates and challenges the dominant perspectives of La Malinche by playing with “different registers” (xvii). The use of different registers, from old English, Latin, to medieval Spanish, to Chicano urban street jargon, shows how she manipulates

⁶⁷ In *Naranjo* Carlos Fuentes writes about La Malinche in his narratives as a *vendida*, like Octavio Paz.

language to create linguistic gaps that she then fills with feminist critiques. She transitions from one language register to another as an act of defiance that some consider inappropriate because she defies the rules of language (which others find offensive) because she fails to respect the standards of language. However, as the author moves from one linguistic register to another she creates a space for the hybridity of Chicana/o languages to have voice within literary texts.

The ability to incorporate diverse registers by meshing intimate, formal, static and casual modes of communication exhibits the different ways the author marks the text with Chicana *placas*. It is in fact a layering of codes, like graffiti art, that allows Cota-Cárdenas to use *placas* to address the sense of chaos and rage facing early feminists as she questions the inappropriate language of *vendidas* and *chingadas* that continues to negatively stereotype La Malinche and Chicanas. Rebolledo defines Cota-Cárdenas' narrative structure as "strategically post-modern and ideologically modernist—that is, that in the exploration of subjectivity using experimental techniques, [Cota-Cárdenas and other writers of her generation] still believe in a notion of progress: progress toward justice, equality and education/learning" (xvi-xvii). Together, the rupture of voice (from 1st to 2nd to 3rd persona narration) to the fragmentation of time, space, and action fosters a stream of consciousness and fluid narration where the author is able to empower the Chicana imagination by capitalizing on the symbolic representation of La Malinche as *la lengua* to utter female-centered interpretations of La Malinche.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Rebolledo also discusses the postmodern qualities of Cota-Cárdenas' and Gonzales-Berry's work when she asserted, "One characteristic of postmodern text that does not fit within the context of ethnic female literature is what has been called the death of absence of the speaking subject. The speaking subject within these texts is not dead. On the contrary, Chicana writers are just beginning to seize their voices, to articulate their identities. If we could characterize the postmodern as a stance that looks back on tradition while simultaneously referencing on

In this respect, narrative manipulations become the author's technique that gives authority to female experiences and the voice of women by reinterpreting myths about women in the past as much as in the present. Petra learns how to purge the guilt and feeling of betrayal she carries for not feeling Chicana enough by listening to La Malinche's voice, which in time, also becomes her own. As she interrogates the sense of rejection from the Chicano community, she initiates an exploration of herself in connection to La Malinche. In her writings, she ponders why, despite her many roles as a teacher, mother, worker and organic-detective *a lo rasquache*,⁶⁹ her actions continue to define her as a *malinchista* and *vendida*. Her interrogations transform into strings of a new Chicana consciousness, which begin to weave a new reality informed by the past. When she realizes the stark parallels between her life and that of La Malinche's, she turns to that figure to understand the world she lives in. She asks:

Eres tú Malinche malinali? Quién eres tú (quién soy YO malinchi?)/vendedor o compador? vendido o comprador y a qué precio? Qué es ser lo que tantos gritan dicen vendido – a malinchi – e qué es qué son/somos qué? a qué precio sin haber estado allí nombrar poner labels etiquetas qué quiénes han comprado vendido malinchismo qué otros -ismos inventados gritados con odio reaccionando saltando como víboras como víboras SUS OJOS como víboras qué quién qué

one's positionality in reference to that tradition, then both these novels are vigorously postmodern" (*Women Singing* 178).

⁶⁹ in a *rasquache* style

-Les voy a contar unos cuentitos, hijos míos, unos cuentitos muy breves,
entrecortados a veces parecerán lo serán tal vez confusos pero es que hay que
seguir este hilo este hilo de. (87)⁷⁰

This marks the moment where Petra interrogates the meaning of being a woman in the Chicano Movement by calling upon La Malinche for answers. She wonders if women will ever win in the game of being true speaking subjects. Through this action, Petra denounces the negative impact of the dominant interpretations of La Malinche in society on Chicana identity by changing discursive fields to bring a new significance to La Malinche.

Also, as a Spanish instructor, Petra is aware of the many story lines about La Malinche stemming from the Discovery of the Americas. In the search for truth, Puppet's death triggers a new awakening in Petra to rethink the language of her world history if she is to bring justice to her world. The underlying message is: How can you bring justice to others, if you do not bring justice to your own sense of self? As she passes through an existential crisis of what justice is and how it works, she deconstructs the history of La Malinche, connecting the historical figure to the folkloric and literary figure in order to revise the cultural interpretations of women.

In her consciousness raising process, she draws parallels to how the oppression of women is tied to Puppet's death and the Chicano community through the idea of how

⁷⁰ "Are you Malinche a malinchi? Who are you (who am I malinchi)? seller or buyer? sold or bought and at what price? What is it to be what so many shout say sold-out malinchi who is who are/are we what? at what price without having been there naming putting labels tags what who have bought sold malinchismo what other -ismos invented shouted with hate reacting striking like vipers like snakes THEIR EYES like snakes what who what

I'm going to tell you some stories, my children, some very short stories, interspersed sometimes they may appear they may be perhaps confusing but it's that one must go on with this thread this thread of" (93).

dominant social discourse “others” individuals. And yet she only achieves this through the guiding voice of La Malinche, which pushes her to examine “LOS CORDONES DE LOS MITOS”⁷¹ and which motivates her to explore the metalinguistic awareness of Chicana feminist language in the interpretation of culture from a Xicana position (87). In rethinking the “cordones de los mitos” La Malinche teaches Petra to understand the invisible workings of the metanarrative voices of hegemonic discourse such as, “A BUEN ENTENDOR POCAS PALABRAS (ja, ja nomás que empujes los botoncitos, verdá, verdá y facilito ha ha ha jálele nomás las cuerdas apropiadas y mora cómo baila cómo baila como como marioneta como títere)”⁷² that constantly challenge revolutionary actions to maintain the status quo (87).

Because La Malinche’s presence is a guiding voice that speaks to counter-narrate hegemonic discourse, La Malinche transforms into a Chicana feminist counselor, a cultural foremother showing women how to take pride in their mother tongue through feminist dialogism. Thus, La Malinche as storyteller assists Petra to tell her own story. At this point, La Malinche teaches Petra to exercise her language giftedness to reverse language trauma, to revise her own history, and reverse the effects of colonization. La Malinche encourages Petra to articulate her own Chicana *placas*, to use language to label herself into existence. La Malinche shows Petra how to find empowerment by storytelling, by using one’s voice to define one’s identity when she testifies:

-Usando la terminología tan de moda y **tan útil** hoy día, les voy a contar de mis años formativos: a edad de cinco, más o menos, dejé de ser la hija

⁷¹ “The cords of myths” (My Translation).

⁷² “FEW WORDS ARE NECESSARY TO HE/SHE THAT UNDERSTANDS WELL (ha ha you only have to push the buttons right right and it’s easy ha ha ha pull pull the right strings and you’ll see how he/she dances how they dance like a marionette like a puppet)” (93).

predilecta de mi tribu, cuando **me vendieron** algunos parientes muy próximos, a unos compadres más lejanos, que **me compraron** . . . a qué precio? no sé, yo solamente recuerdo que me fui pataleando que quería a mi mamá que por qué me había abandonado mi papi sí sí yo gritando fuerte por qué y ellos amárrenla es algo adelantada algo volada se cree princesa se cree hija de su padre se cree mucho eso es no sé su lugar es una amenaza a la tribu llévensela llévensela es una amenaza a nuestra causa eso es sólo aprendió a decir disparates a decir acusar con LOS OJOS y no querían pues troublemakers in su país. (88)⁷³

Petra realizes that being a *malinchista* or a *vendida* is not the nature of her culture but a social construction perpetuated by the political project of the dominant class. However, significant in Petra's identity crisis voyage is how female voices offer alternative ways to think about Chicana heritage that helps her to achieve new world visions. Again, La Malinche pushes Petra to renovate her thoughts by using her heteroglot tongue to kindle a metalinguistic awareness in Petra from cultural memory. This is witnessed in the next series of quotes:

-El país, pues México, Aztlán . . . ? Bueno, podría haber sido un poco más al norte o al sur, lo mismo da ahora, lo que les decía era mi versión eso es, mi versión como . . . como mujer, ajá, y que se establezca la famosa dialéctica

⁷³ "Using the latest terminology and it's **so useful** nowadays, I'm going to tell you about my formative years: at the age of five, more or less, I left off being the favorite eldest daughter of my tribe, when some very immediate relatives **sold me**, to some more distant buddies, who **bought me**... at what price? I don't know, I only remember that I went kicking that I wanted my mama that why had my papa abandoned me yes yes I went yelling loud too why why and they said tie her up she's too forward too flighty she thinks she's a princess thinks she's her father's daughter thinks she's hot stuff that's it doesn't know her place a real threat to the tribe take her away haul her off she's a menace to our cause that's it only learned to say crazy things to say accuse with HER EYES and they didn't want then troublemakers in their country" (94).

con las otras versiones que ustedes ya rete bien conocen . . . Oh no se hagan
ya los desentendí'os, no se hagan ya...

Y A MAL ENTENDEDOR MUCHAS CON DIBUJOS CAUSE YOU
BOUGHT IT LIKE

[. . .]

Traicionera . . . ? Por el idioma, que yo les ayudé que yo **vendí a mi**
pueblo . . . ? Saben qué ustedes saben mucho de –ismos y –acias pero les
aconsejo, mis hijos, que busquen las respuestas adentro y más allá de las
etiquetas implantadas y echadas al espacio en reacción odio violencia . . .

[. . .]

-Y lo que YO Malinche malinchi les digo, es: SHOW ME. Porque lo que he
visto, no en todos los casos es cierto, que siguen siendo, en nombre de todas
las causas, **chingones y chingadas** . . . para variar . . . (88-89)⁷⁴

Through an examination of the discourse of La Malinche, Petra arrives at a new
consciousness, what Gloria Anzaldúa defined as “la conciencia de *la mujer*” (*Borderlands*
99). Petra is empowered through Malinche’s voice as well as her modeling of how to use
language to make history. She gains a nascent sense of agency, her voice transgresses

⁷⁴ “The country, well I suppose Mexico, Aztlán...? Well, it could have been a little more to the north or a little more to the south, it makes no difference now, what I was telling you was my version that’s it, **my version** as... as a woman, that’s right, and they can establish the famous dialectic with the other versions that you already know very well... Of don’t act as if you don’t understand, don’t put me on now...”

AND TO HE/SHE WHO DOESN’T UNDERSTAND WELL A LOT OF WORDS WITH DRAWINGS
‘CAUSE YOU BOUGHT IT LIKE (95)

[...]

A traitress...? Because of our language, that I helped them that I sold my people...? You know what, you know a lot about –isms and –acies but I advise you, my children, to look for the answers **inside** and to look further than the labels implanted and thrown out in reaction hate violence... (95)

[...]

“And what I Malinche malinchi am telling you, is: SHOW ME. Because from what I’ve seen, not in every case that’s true, is that we go on being, in name of every cause, *chingones y chingadas*... those who fuck you and those who are fucked... for a change of subject...” (95)

linguistic divisions of English and Spanish, and her subjectivity and identity is articulated through written language that responds to coloniality while using the language of the colonizer.

In addition, as the chapter progresses, Malinche's discourse weaves the voices of Petra's mother Lorenza and her sister Belita in order to help Petra gain the language and awareness to denounce the multiple forms in which women are victims of violence in society. As Petra reaches new levels of consciousness, she breaks the silence of the oppression of women's voices, debunks the idea that all women are *chingadas* and *vendidas*, objects to the domestic abuse of Belita, and denounces the mind games men play on women that victimize women. She ends the "chinga tu madre"⁷⁵ ideology that makes La Malinche into the mark of denigration for women by initiating a new conversation about women's relationships to other women and self as a positive and creative force.

At the end of the chapter we come to understand how La Malinche is a proto-feminist voice that assists Petra to achieve a dialogue with her sense of "I" in her interpretation of Chicana/o culture. The chapter's concluding line, "ERES TÚ MALINCHE MALINCHI? QUIÉN ERES TÚ? QUIÉN SOY **YO** MALINCHI"⁷⁶ marks the point where Petra utters a new reality of self in connection to La Malinche (98). In asking, "QUIÉN SOY **YO** MALINCHI"⁷⁷ Petra articulates her emerging identity that make her interrogations examples of Chicana *placas* (98). Cota-Cárdenas blurs the lines between La Malinche and Petra to connect the two women as positive representations of females who gain subjectivity because

⁷⁵ "Go fuck your mother." (My translation)

⁷⁶ "ARE YOU MALINCHE MALINCHI? WHO ARE YOU? WHO AM I MALINCHI?" (105).

⁷⁷ "WHO AM I MALINCHI?" (105).

they use their voices to make themselves visible. As a result, Petra arrives at a new subjectivity and from that point on, proudly embraces her hybrid identity as “Profe Malinchi,” “Profe Tenepall” and “Profe Marina.” While early uses of these terms were meant to disempower Petra, after La Malinche speaks to Petra, her code names transform into codes of self-empowerment (91).

Similar to her many names Pat, Petra, Petrita, Petrina, Profe; Petra also extends her feminist identity by naming the self as a Malinche, Profe Malinchi, Profe Tenepall, and Profe Marina. By inscribing her own Chicana *placas* she seizes, provokes, and agitates the standards of language to break with the historical interconnection of colonial familiarities. Petra’s multiple names, just like La Malinche’s multiple names shows Cota-Cárdenas’ interest in displaying the multifaceted realities of Chicana identity and how Chicanas elect to mark their realities in texts and images.

Cota-Cárdenas also exhibits the use of Chicana *placas* by incorporating diverse forms of linguistic expression of Chicano speak to self-authenticate all forms of speech by Chicanos as the languages inhabiting the real and imagined borderlands of Chicano identity. Through such techniques, she introduces the history of La Malinche through the emerging discourse of Chicana feminisms as “complexities that are infinite,” observed Rebolledo (“The Politics of Poetics” 352). In chapter 14 titled *Uno y uno son tres* (one and one are three) the use of irony and humor in Petra’s dialogue not only deconstructs the narrative of La Malinche but passes new knowledge to her daughter, a heritage speaker of Spanish entering into her own Chicana identity. The author offers a perspective that captures moments in history worth telling because they are universally inspiring. She pulls from the cords of history—those universal ideas that fuel history—to make the multiple storylines of the

cosmos she presents in *Puppet* as a story of a collective community worth telling. For this reason, the last chapter, *Uno y uno son tres*, presents subjects where one plus one equals three—where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Through this manipulation of language, Cota-Cárdenas is able to transcend the limits of linguistic structures that enable her to present a new a form of storytelling that is a *mestizaje* of genre: from documentary, to mystery, to chronicle. The author presents a work where multiple realities are created to reveal how one story impacts another. In this way, she pieces together the interconnectedness of peoples lived realities with the stories of the past in order to foment a new vision—again one and one equals three. From a feminist stance, the story of La Malinche plus the experience of Chicanas equals a new consciousness. The hybridization of her perspective is seen in the following quote where a revision to the interpretation of La Malinche by Petra reframes Malinche’s life and connects her to the Chicano Movement and to her daughter María. The protagonist Petra asks:

- You know who Malinchi was, María? Very interesting case, actually...She fell in love with this white man, see...Pues era español, yeah, Cortés, whatever...Y se enamoró, y por eso le han dado y dado por siglos... Well, la usaron, como quien dice, pero primero, well...**she** was sold, para no decir **sold-out**, primero por su gente...entonces, pos el rete machote aquél, **he** sold her out... pos a un teniente de él, o sargento, no sé, da igual... Sí, sí así nomás, take her, she’s yours...Pos era hombre casado aquél y así nomás...Bueno, es una lección de interés, lección cultural, histórica...Ja, ja, ja... y que ella los vendió a ellos! Todavía ni existían...! Like a piece of used-up paper, wham, bam, thank-you-ma’am, a la basura...! Tell me about what the movimiento

wants, *mija*, just tell me about it... First, they can clean up their act, *y entonces*
si veremos... (122-123)⁷⁸

The articulation of feminist consciousness rooted in multiplicity and hybridity breaks moments of silence and the silence of tradition. Questioning and critiquing the goals of the Movement in an unapologetic fashion, Petra responds to the ills of the movement's limits on women as she incorporates the discourse of La Malinche to shift the negative interpretation of women into the positive. A narrative about how Petra Leyva discovers her Chicana consciousness by writing, this publication reveals how Cota-Cárdenas constructs subjectivity for real and imagined Chicanas by showing how exploring what it means to be Chicana in the Spanish-speaking imaginary connects women to something bigger than themselves: La Malinche.

Parallel to the idea of one and one is three, the Chicana/o heritage experience results from the metalinguistic engagement of English plus Spanish, whether it is from the perspective of a heritage speaker of Spanish or a proficient bilingual. The play with language, witnessed in Cota-Cárdenas style of writing and most commonly known as code switching or *caló* establishes Chicana/o heritage language practices as sites of empowerment because the whole (the collective Chicana heritage) is greater than the sum of its parts (only English or only Spanish).

⁷⁸ “You know who Malinchi was, Maria? Very interesting case, actually... She fell in love with this white man, see. Pues era español, yeah, Cortés, whatever... And she fell in love and for that, they gave her shit for centuries... Well, they used her, *la usaron como quien dice*, but first, well... **she** was sold, instead of saying **sold out**, first by her own people... *entonces, pos el rete machote aquél*, **he** sold her out... *pos to his lieutenant or sergeant, I don't know, da igual it doesn't make a difference...* Si así así nomás, take her, she's yours... Pos he was a married man and just like that... Bueno, it's an interesting cultural historical lesson... Ha, ha, ha... and then sold them out! They didn't even exist yet...! Like a piece of used up paper, wham, bam, thank you ma'am, a la basura into the garbage...! Tell me about what the Movimiento wants, *mija*, just tell me about it... First they can clean up their act, *y entonces si veremos then we'll see...*” (130).

The use of “novella,” is a case in point: it is a play of words meant to activate the schemata over the different possible meanings of a word, such as in the author’s own play with the idea of “novella” as “una nueva ella (a new her) or “una novella de ella” (a new novel about her)—which through rhetorical devise of synaloepha⁷⁹ reads as a novel about her—is a condensed obscure phrase that signs a novel about her (Interview 2014). But who does ‘a new her’ refer to? Who does she signify? By obscuring language, Cota-Cárdenas uses language and all its devices to doctor a Chicana cultural heritage about the gamut of ideas that applies to the sign “her”: woman, feminine, Chicana, and La Malinche.

Thus, the author incorporates women’s histories in fiction through name choice. Chicana feminist definitions of labels and names also are Chicana *placas*. For example, Cota-Cárdenas weaves elements of her Chicana domestic world with the name Petra. “The protagonist narradora is named for my Nana Petra, who is described as a ‘strong-willed mujer fuerte mexicana from Sonora’” explains the writer (Interview, 1998 1). Furthermore, name selection and the use of specific nomenclature testify to Cota-Cárdenas’ awareness of wanting to manifest public discourse from the power of her domestic and home-rooted languages. In an interview with Monique Rodríguez (1998) the author provides evidence of her keen awareness of her own use of language when she states that in addition to Petra, “other variations are play-on-words and associations in the languages” (Interview, 1998 1).

In *Puppet*, Cota-Cárdenas uses two names for the narrator Pat and Petra, while in her second book *Sanctuaries of the heart/Santuarios del corazón* (2005), Petra also is Pat, Patricia, and Petrina. The play on words of the main protagonist’s name signs the narrator’s

⁷⁹ According to the Merriam Webster dictionary synaloepha is defined as “the blending into one syllable of two vowels of adjacent syllables (as by crasis, synaeresis, synizesis, elision); especially a contraction of syllables by obscuring or suppressing a vowel or diphthong at the end of a word before another vowel or diphthong (as in th’ army, for the army)”

many identities, the many roles she must perform in society. In this way, the author creates visibility for the complex identity that is Chicana. Petra's varying names also contextualized the diverse types of experiences she comes across as she crosses private/public social boundaries. The author creates a character that is multifaceted, who wears many hats and has many masks as a strategy of survival. This type of adaptation through name choice parallels and references La Malinche. La Malinche also had many names: the Nahua woman was known as Malinali, Malintzín, Doña Marina, and of course the conquistador's insider descriptive title for her was *la lengua*. Cota-Cárdenas uses language as a tool to reference the legacy of La Malinche by recoding the interpretation of culture and of women through deliberate plays on words and language.

Cota-Cárdenas also inscribes Chicana *placas* through her use of the name and characterization of Puppet. In Chicano popular culture, Puppet is a common Chicano *placa*, a linguistic code given to *pachucos* and gang members. The author uses Puppet as a *barrio* code to speak about violence and the patriarchal paradigms that structure *barrio* life. She narrates Puppet's tragic death to discuss the historical, cultural and socioeconomic forces that contribute to high levels of violence among males as well as to illustrate how such power structures lead to misogyny and violence against women. The author appropriates and manipulates the popular understanding of the code *Puppet* to denounce the oppressive conditions of *barrio* life as well as to condemn the negative stereotyping of Chicanos and Chicanas in public and private spaces as puppets of dominant society.

Cota-Cárdenas transforms the code puppet into a Chicana *placa* to describe the complexity of *barrio* life through a feminist gaze and the distinct challenges women face as a result of a male-dominated social order. By making the word "puppet" into a Chicana *placa*,

Cota-Cárdenas spikes Chicano male-dominated language and amplifies its cultural significance and meaning also to include the visions and testimonies of women. In fact, through a play on language, the author links the life of Petra with Puppet, which allows Petra to tell, to denounce, and solve the mystery of Puppet's death in the *barrio* at the same time her emerging consciousness allows her to critique the established gender roles that oppress women. Like in Helena María Viramontes' story "Paris Rats in East Los Angeles," Cota-Cárdenas' deconstructs knowledge and discourse by 'spiking language' to produce home(l)y revolutions in Petra's life through the incorporation of Chicana *placas*.

The author is able to claim a right to tell stories about *barrio* and public life by using language to create visibility for the complex identities of Chicana/o lived experiences that affect all community members, whether inside or outside the home space. As Petra develops a Chicana feminist consciousness, her language acts become as powerful and as visible as the urban *placas* of Chicano wall writing; her utterances write into visibility a new reality in which she speaks out against her own silence and oppression and it's institutional and structural link to the death of Puppet.

In her attempt to bring justice to Puppet's life, Petra finds that she first has to bring visibility and justice to her own experience. She achieves liberation by decolonizing language and articulating her own Chicana *placas* that mark how she views and experiences her life in *mestizaje* and as a Chicana. The use of words common in caló such as *zizguaendo* (to zigzag), and *chota* (the police) as well as the innovation of words such as "romanticaca," that merge the word "romantica" (romantic) with "caca" (fecal matter or crap), "chicana ½" (the idea that one is only half Chicana), and "argo" (a play on the word of *algo* meaning in something in Spanish or argot meaning a dialect in English) are examples of Chicana *placas*

(17, 90, 8, 60). In addition, the incorporation of hybrid and meshed forms of speech such as “vites” which means did you see, and “. . . vivil o no vivil, ésa es la plegunta,”⁸⁰ which gives voice to the issues of language acquisition in Chicano communities and at the same time it shows that Chicanos have an understanding of great literary works like those of Shakespeare evidences Chicana *placas* (48, 60). And last, the use of brash language such as *verga*, which means cock or penis and which is repeated multiple times in the novel, to the use of intimate language when describing sexual act meant for use in private settings also captures the use of Chicana *placas*. Through the multiple ways the author codes Chicana *placas* in writing, the novel itself becomes a space where the use of language becomes a text and an image that announces to the world that Chicanas are alive and that their tongues are like a taggers sharp spray can tip capable of leaving their mark on the world. Through Petra’s concern over Puppet, Petra becomes a storyteller, a speaking woman that learns to bring voice to her experience and others as an act of political praxis.

Drawing from Emma Pérez’s work, Petra needed to find her “*sitio y lengua*” (a space and a language) in order to be able to express how Puppet’s name is more than just letters to be inscribed on a memorial stone. In this way, Petra’s conviction to show women’s awareness of public life through Puppet’s account reveals how, individually, as a group, and in their state as Chicanos, Petra and Puppet’s reality might appear independent, but are in fact, controlled by someone else. In this context, puppet is a code term for the ways that social paradigms make puppets out of people of color and the way patriarchy makes puppets out of women in sexual contexts.⁸¹ Petra’s encounter with the life of Puppet initiates a series of

⁸⁰ “To be or not to be that is the question” (My Translation).

⁸¹ See the song “I’m your puppet.”

transformations related to Petra's identity because, through her developing Chicana consciousness, she notes how people and communities are manipulated by the state, and how puppet governments have led to the oppression of minority groups. Thus, Petra develops a faculty that enables her to interconnect the secret operatives of coloniality at work in historical and contemporary contexts. Puppet signals a change for Petra because he awakens her consciousness, while she brings a new consciousness to the public with her *placas*. As Petra attempts to vindicate Puppet's life by telling his story, she learns that, in order to tell other's stories, she has to first be able to tell her story.

The election to write in multiple codes is a political act that Chicana writers use to mark their Chicana *placas*. In this context, blank pages serve as a public wall for asserting a feminist identity that brings the feminine elements of Chicana to public domains. Common among *barrio* culture is the notion that *placas* refers to a sign, logo or name of a person or group, usually associated with gang culture. Chicana *placas* thus refers to how women tag words and images with new meaning in literature. Their feminist *placas* reorder the "insignia of an order" in traditional understandings of *placas* in Chicano folklore to make La Malinche an emblem of feminist voice. The complexity of Chicana *placas*, how Chicanas etch feminist meanings into language, is often interpreted as the postmodernist style of Chicana writing.

However, the argument that Cota-Cárdenas manipulates language to re-sign the figure of La Malinche, and of Chicanas, demonstrates how Chicanas reject the idea of what M. M. Bakhtin wrote as unitary language as a project of nationalism to singularize reality (*The Dialogic Imagination* 273). By deconstructing the languages of communication, of official and not official discourse, of public and private speech, of standard and informal registers of

language and of oral and written forms of communications, Cota-Cárdenas chronicles the power of Chicana *placas* and the arrival of a Chicana feminist dialogic imagination.

For example, by combining the use of first, second, and third person narrations, Cota-Cárdenas transgresses language standards and written conventions that insist on a unitary language. In the first chapter, “Ella siempre fue inclinada al romanticismo,”⁸² the narration reads:

TU NUNCA QUISISTE OIR. TE ACUERDAS? TE ACUERDAS? Pues te va a pasar algo. ALGO MALO, ya verás, ya verás. Just because you are paranoid doesn't mean they're out to get you, te acuerdas que lo dijo esa maestra y escritora negra? Pues sí, por todas partes las regaste. Like when you made your Holy Blessed CONFIRMATION COMO SOLDADA DE CRISTO De la Santa Fe oh sí muy bonita en tu vestido blanco con velo y muy amante de mea culpa por aquí mea culpa por allá . . . pa'lo que nos sirve ahora, mensa VENDIDA . . . Oh Seguro, era muy católicos en aquel pueblito donde naciste en el Valle Imperial, muy santos eran todos. . . (7)⁸³

As a result, the first chapter which introduced La Malinche in an encoded Chicana feminist language begins to decolonize the history of La Malinche as the main protagonist Petra Leyva uses writing herself to solve the mystery of Puppet's death. Writing in the intimate

⁸² “She Was Always Inclined to Romanticism” (3).

⁸³ TU NUNCA QUISISTE OIR, YOU NEVER WANTED TO HEAR, TE ACUERDAS? YOU REMEMBER? pues something bad is going to happen to you, SOMETHING BAD, ya verás, you'll see. Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they're not out to get you, you remember what the black writer teacher said? Pues sí, yep you screwed the whole thing up. Like when you made the Holy Blessed CONFIRMATION LIKE ONE OF CHRIST'S SOLDIERS De La Santa Fe oh sí, you sooo pretty in your white dress with a white veil sooo fond of mea culpa here, mea culpa there... for whatever it's worth now, dumb VENDIDA, SELLOUT... Oh, sure, you were sooo Catholic in the little town where you were born in Imperial Valley, such saints every one of you... (7-8).

spaces of home also was meant as a call to action to Chicanas to activate their own feminist language of home and domesticity.

Equally, Cota-Cárdenas' text reveals the dialectical influence of The Latin American Boom generation in the contemporary literary expression of the 1960s and 1970s to Chicano letters. Cota-Cárdenas blurs the lines on the idea of unitary language, to question the idea of sin, the sin of La Malinche and other suppressed voices through the technique of stream of consciousness that asked, “-What is the meaning of original sin? Yes . . . Petrita Leyva? . . . Well? . . . Well, I see that Petrita is having trouble speaking up... (8).” Repetition of this same quote in chapter 6 titled “Sangre, Como Si Fuera Ayer,”⁸⁴ shows the need to revise and revisit the meaning making of original sin. During the second appearance of the same quote, Cota-Cárdenas alters and changes the quote to read, “What is the meaning of original sin? Yes . . . Petrita Leyva? . . . Well? . . . (Sí, muy bien quedaste, tartamuda meona)...,”⁸⁵ to mark the ways she claims authority in narrating voices through stream of consciousness, self-talk, and a fragmented narration where there is a plural first-person, second person and singular third person voice (41).

Javier Villarreal's scholarship explores how “la palabra chicana se examina para señalar las repercusiones socioculturales y lingüísticos en la novela de *Puppet* de Margarita Cota-Cárdenas donde desempeñan un rol vital en las vivencias de los personajes” (24).⁸⁶ Villarreal argues that Cota-Cárdenas' linguistic decisions exhibit an aesthetic level of

⁸⁴ “Blood, Like It Was Just Yesterday” (41)

⁸⁵ “What is the meaning of original sin? Yes, Petrita Leyva? Well?... (Sí, quedaste muy bien you always did the right thing, tartamuda meona stuttering pissant...)” (44).

⁸⁶ “The Chicano word is examined to identify the sociocultural and linguistic repercussions in the novel *Puppet* by Margarita Cota-Cárdenas, which plays a vital role in the experiences of the characters” (My translation).

tensions and ruptures that validates Rafael Pérez-Torres' notion that "code-switching" transforms into a stratagem of cultural resistance and alteration of the processes of social order in which the word represents a discourse in opposition to the established norm (25). Villarreal shows how the author's "pluridialectical" expressions, "se transforma en un grito de esperanza" (25).⁸⁷ As Villarreal summarizes, Cota-Cárdenas' linguistic moves provide an internal space that assisted the protagonist Pat Leyva to break free (in a positive way) from established cultural norms in the same way that the author's linguistic moves redeemed Chicanos from the linguistic and familiar cultural identity as *vendidos* (29).

The manipulation of language is itself a call to action to further the creative production of Chicana feminists. By interpreting a culture's web of symbols based on the concept of the word *vendido/a* and *malinche*, Cota-Cárdenas' demonstrates how Chicana feminists reclaimed and created Chicana female cultural archetypes through a semiological rewriting and retelling of stories about women. The author introduces a new version of La Malinche's discourse based on Chicana feminist preserved at home and rooted in domesticity. From the multiplicity of voices to the collective inclusion of "*la voz de pueblo*" (the voice of the people) working in harmony to do and undo, the author unveils a way to decolonize knowledge to break with silences. As she decolonizes the written accounts of La Malinche she also decolonizes Chicana/o identity. Communicative and written codes work to help construct the text as intertextual, transhistorical and translinguistic, which are also examples of how the author textually and visually inscribes Chicana *placas*.

In *Puppet* Cota-Cárdenas radicalized the tale of La Malinche to generate a dialogue that would lead to the deconstruction of the myth of La Malinche as a negative metaphor of

⁸⁷ "Transforms into a cry of hope" (My translation).

language. In rethinking the discourse on La Malinche, Rebolledo notes how Cota-Cárdenas not only redefined Chicana archetypal female figures as feminist foremothers, she also advances new revelations on the cultural limits placed on women and the problematics of writing in Spanish (*Women Singing* 171-182).

In conclusion, through a reinterpretation of La Malinche as a metaphor of tongue, the analysis of the figure and representation of La Malinche in *Puppet* demonstrates how Cota-Cárdenas' reinterpretation of La Malinche marked the arrival of Chicana feminist politics. Her revision of La Malinche as a positive female cultural archetype shows how women use written language to transform their identity. While some people find the text hard to read, and others easy to read, the difference rests in the often-invisible reality that a Chicana feminist programmed and textually coded a story to promote Chicana feminism. That said through, Cota-Cárdenas synthesized a new call to action that test the limits of solidarity between men and women in order to forge a new connection among individuals at a basic human level-language. And she recodes the tale of women, playing with what names and symbols mean in her own expression of *placas*.

Prickly Pears Mi'ja, Prickly Pears . . .

Alicia Gaspar de Alba is a Chicana writer by heart and an academic by profession. She is a writer of novels, short stories, poems, and essays. A founding faculty member of the UCLA César E. Chávez Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies since 1994, Gaspar de Alba is a scholar and critic of Chicana and Chicano popular culture, Chicana and Chicano art, border studies, and gender and sexuality. She was born July 29, 1958 in El Paso, Texas. Like Margarita Cota-Cárdenas, Spanish was the language spoken at home. Gaspar de Alba knew she would be a writer of English but the Loretto Academy (her high school in El Paso,

Texas) ensured her bilingual sensibility through continued instruction in Spanish. As a result, Cristelia Pérez and Nicolás Kanellos describe Gaspar de Alba as “the quintessential bilingual/ bicultural writer, penning poetry, essays, and narrative with equal facility in English and Spanish” (Pérez & Kanellos, n. pag.).

Gaspar de Alba began to write at the age of nine when she wrote and performed her first play. By the eighth grade she published her first nonfiction work in *New America Speaks*. She continued an active record of creative writing and editing in high school. She studied English at the University of Texas at El Paso and earned an MFA in creative writing, later studying at the University of Iowa for one year on a fellowship then left to work for the Braille Press in Boston. A few years later, she resumed her graduate program at the University of New Mexico, where she graduated with distinction in American Studies in 1994. The publication *Chicano Art Inside/Outside the Master's House: Cultural Politics and the CARA Exhibition* (1998) was originally her dissertation project. Her first collection of stories is *The Mystery of Survival and Other Stories* (1993). As a writer dedicated to the empowerment of women, she has published works that revised and altered the image and representation of women: *Sor Juana's Second Dream* (1999), *La Llorona on the Longfellow Bridge: Poetry y otras movidas, 1985-2001* (2003); *Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders* (2005) and *Calligraphy of the Witch* (2012). She also co-authored *Three Times a Woman: Chicana Poetry* (1989) with María Herrera-Sobek and Demetria Martínez. Her edited books include *Velvet Barrios: Popular Culture & Chicana/o Sexualities* (2002); *Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and La Frontera* with Georgina Guzmán (2010) and *Our Lady of Controversy: Alma Lopez's "Irreverent Apparition"* (2011) with artist Alma López.

Gaspar de Alba became aware of her Chicana identity as an adult. She belongs to a generation of writers who were children during the initial years of Chicano movement. In her case, she had little exposure to new developments in Chicana feminisms and shifts in the Chicano movement. The Mexican, patriarchal, and Spanish-centric attitudes of her home culture created a myth about *la causa* that paralleled the attitudes of Octavio Paz.⁸⁸ But perhaps it was a matter of timing and fate. Her life changed as a graduate student in Iowa when she attended Gloria Anzaldúa's reading of *Borderlands/La Frontera: the New Mestiza* (1987).

This reading rang bells for Gaspar de Alba because it defined the waking moment of her Chicana consciousness. She compared the reading to a discovery tantamount to the recent finding of Coyolxauhqui at the foot of El Templo Mayor in Mexico City in 1978 (Interview 2013). The discovery of the stone of Coyolxauhqui altered the role and presence of women in pre-Columbian civilization and symbolically represented how the earth had not swallowed women's history. The physical discovery of Coyolxauhqui in Mexico and the rediscovery of Coyolxauhqui in Chicana/o culture as reinterpreted by Anzaldúa activated Gaspar de Alba's own imaginary toward a double consciousness (Interview 2013). Because Gaspar de Alba was drawn to female images in Mexican culture, the use of these images in contemporary Chicana feminist writing motivated her to reconcile acquired knowledge of Chicana and Chicano cultural production in her graduate studies with that of her upbringing and formal education.

The lack of interest for women of color issues during her formative years as a creative writer led her to believe that people did not find the significance in the study of female

⁸⁸ See Octavio Paz's essay "Los pachucos y otros extremos," in *El laberinto de la soledad* (1959).

cultural images. Even less welcome would be the reinterpretation of these images to bring awareness to Chicana queerness. Gaspar found her niche when she discovered the new imaginative inroads of writers as they explored what female cultural icons meant *for la causa*. The author's interest in offering a Chicana reading of Mexican female cultural figures paralleled the development in Chicana feminist perspectives and a welcoming space among Chicana writer's collectives.

Due to the second and third wave feminist movements, the explosion of Chicana feminist publications awakened Gaspar de Alba's imaginary to journey toward a breakthrough of the self. Despite categorizing herself as a latecomer to the Chicano movement, the early self-doubt and question of whether or not Chicanas could write motivated her to use written language to address how censorship, marginalization, discrimination, and oppression were linked to the sentiments of chaos and cultural schizophrenia in Chicano literary production.⁸⁹ Gaspar de Alba's interpretations of border culture and of her borderlands experience brought a new perspective that fueled Chicana feminist cultural heritage.

The sentiment of culture clash and chaos that drove Gaspar de Alba to reinterpret the figure of La Malinche responded to the emergence of an inner queer feminist voice that needed a home, a position from which to voice and affirm a Chicana lesbian identity. From her 1985 reading of "Narrativa personal del desarrollo de una escritora fronteriza"⁹⁰ to the 1989 presentation of "Literary Wetback," and subsequently the 1989 reading of "Los derechos de La Malinche"⁹¹ written in Spanish, Gaspar de Alba used written language to

⁸⁹ In fact, this is the topic of her Master's thesis.

⁹⁰ "Personal Narrative of the development of a border writer" (My translation).

⁹¹ "Malinche's Rights"

question the reasons why, despite being a *fronteriza*—a border inhabitant of a hybrid culture, she ascribed to the Spanish/Mexican fantasy heritage that oppressed her.

“Los derechos de La Malinche” is one of two Spanish language stories the author included for publication in *The Mystery of Survival*. Retelling the tale of Malinche from the perspective and experience of a Chicana with a border consciousness demonstrates how Gaspar de Alba uses written language to shatter the collective memories that suppresses the identities of queer *mestizas* in the same way that La Malinche’s multiple identities are subjugated and denied. Through figurative language use, Gaspar de Alba offers a tale about a young woman who breaks with the language of patriarchy by transgressing and seizing the language of the colonizer to bring authority and voice to the experiences of women.

“Los derechos de La Malinche” is a tale about young woman who redeems herself from the memories of abuse as a child through a cathartic release of rage as a result of years of violation when she confronts the tomb of her dead father. By empowering the snapshots of childhood memories as well as those of her adult life, the young protagonist voices to her father how she has reached a new level of consciousness by reconnecting with her heritage as she travels to Mexico. As she learns about her cultural past she learns to love herself as she gains a deep understanding of the historical oppression of women. As the protagonist reaches a heightened awareness of what her heritage means, she comes to understand the ways La Malinche’s life parallels her own. When the protagonist’s cultural memory is activated by a green pyramid she purchases from an indigenous woman, she begins to understand how the suppression of her own notion of sex, gender, sexuality and right to the freedom of sexual orientation is historically tied to La Malinche.

Because her trip to Mexico activates her cultural memory, the protagonist learns how to re-interpret the past to attain the power to speak out against historical, sexual and mental abuse. She uses the language of her cultural heritage to condemn how she was made to feel as a traitor to her culture in the same way that La Malinche was incriminated. By understanding the hidden operatives of social discourses that castigate women who think and act for themselves, the protagonist finds that, by understanding the language used to define female icons in her culture, she is able to use that same language to subvert misrepresentations. By seizing language, the protagonist finds in linguistic expression a way to honor and celebrate her identity as a lesbian. Gaspar de Alba equates to the celebratory act of breaking into language like the festive act of breaking a piñata.

The recurring symbols of the piñata in Gaspar de Alba's short stories represents her Chicana *placas* waiting to be unleashed publicly. Breaking the piñata is a form of release that allows for candy and other items to escape from confinement. The piñata is the symbolic representation of the conglomeration of languages of home and domesticity of female empowerment that, once released, gift the protagonist with a tongue. The piñata is a coded symbol of the author's Chicana feminist voice. Cordelia Candelaria in the introduction to *The Mystery of Survival and Other Stories* (1993) notes that in "'Los derechos de La Malinche,' the piñata figure that holds the remembered past is the 'amuleto de cristal en forma de pirámide'," ⁹² while in the second story, titled "Estrella González" the critic notes that "the piñata emblem is the old man Joaquín's recollection of the curandera, Estrella, which he shared with his curious grandchildren when he finally 'felt brave enough to tell the tale.'" (2) Candelaria notices how Gaspar de Alba weaves the arrival of a queer language by embracing

⁹² "Crystal amulet in the form of a pyramid" (My translation).

the hybrid languages of home to affirm her identity. Thus, the critic details how la *piñata* can be read as symbol of words. The scholar summarizes:

Ultimately, the book resembles a piñata of words, adorned with parrots, *pavos*, and other symbols from nature and filled with compelling characters, intricately drawn plots, and memories steeped in experience and confronted by a mature writer's startling understanding. From this perspective, "the bat" that opens up the narrative piñata is the reader's engaged sensibility. (2)

As a "piñata of words" Gaspar de Alba's short stories are a collective of feminist articulations and of the unique ways the author introduces her own Chicana *placas*. Gaspar de Alba's alternative representation of La Malinche affirms how the Chicana's linguistic hybridity is the subaltern's strength against erasure and also a "narrative piñata" that helps raise consciousness about the experiences of contemporary queer Chicanas from the borderlands.

By manipulating what cultural symbols and memories meant the author uses the power of symbolic interpretation to break secrets about the dark side of Chicano culture. She learns that the "mystery of survival" is grouping together a number of different things to form a whole (but which remain distinct entities because they are a hybridity). Gaspar de Alba hints at this idea when she says, "Perhaps the most difficult thing about fiction for me, the "mystery of survival," in the art of fiction, is the continuity, the daily discipline, but also the equanimity that is necessary to probe and decipher, to connect and forgive. What I love about stories is the flow, the movement of words over the pages that is the closest a writer can get to walking on water." (Preface, *Mystery*, 1). Reactivating the female languages of

home and domesticity, Gaspar de Alba affiliated her mother tongues with feminist sensibilities.

A determining force in Gaspar de Alba's role as a writer has been her desire to expound a Chicana queer feminist voice from the borderlands that denied her existence. "Los derechos de La Malinche" is a powerful literary work that reimagines the life of La Malinche drawing parallels between the subordination and second-class status of women in the past as much as in the present in Mexican and Chicano traditions⁹³ "The short story gives voice to the complex layers of these experiences by using Spanish as a medium of communication to demonstrate how women have been able to read between the lines of the roots of colonization and how writing offered a way to deconstruct old worlds to make new realities. Like Cota-Cárdenas' work, the modern use of writing techniques dealing with fragmented and non-chronological storylines, such as the manipulation of point of view, the varying modes of communication and the blurring of facts and historical understandings with dreams and folk tales related to the protagonist and La Malinche demonstrates Gaspar de Alba's use of literary techniques to incorporate her own Chicana *placas*.

Gaspar de Alba's queer women of color identity enabled her to unite La Malinche with the protagonist by using her lived experience as a lesbian to denounce thematically the patterns of traditions that suppress women across multiple contexts by referring to women as *malinchistas* and *vendidas*. The art of creating fiction in Spanish that focuses on the image of

⁹³ "Los derechos de La Malinche" was first published in *The Mystery of Survival and Other Stories*. It has been published in two other anthologies, *Currents from the Dancing River: Contemporary Latino Fiction, Nonfiction, and Poetry* (1994) edited by Ray González in translation and in the Spanish language publication of *Cuento chicano del siglo XX* by Ricardo Aguilar Melantón. I would like to clarify a point made by Julián Olivares in the review of Melantón's anthology for *Hispania*, when he stated, "It merits noting that the selections of seven authors have been translated into Spanish; however, those of Chávez ('Willow Game,' from her novel *The Last of the Menu Girls*) and Gaspar de Alba ('Los derechos de La Malinche') were written in English and there is no indication given that they appear in translation" (Olivares, 80). The short story was originally written in Spanish.

La Malinche as it deconstructs *malinchismo* enables the author to voice issues related to queer identity formation, and issues of gender, sex and sexuality in Chicano culture. She manipulates the symbolic meaning of La Malinche as a negative cultural archetype to gain access to the colonizer's language in order to retell the story of La Malinche with a set of characters reflective of queer and feminist ways of reading culture.

Through this lens, "Los derechos de la Malinche" demonstrates how Gaspar de Alba brings attention to the moments of inscription in historical events, cultural memory, and lived experiences where meaning is manufactured. She uses her feminist voice to deconstruct, and therefore, recontextualize the very interpretation of meaning making in women's experiences. Through direct language and a language that contests misogyny, the author speaks out against historical and contemporary violations against female bodies. The author's Chicana *placas* offers a language of dialogue that stresses the need to discuss the roots of gender oppression at the same time it creates a space for queer languages to have visibility in Chicana/o literature.

By writing a story that paralleled the physical abuse of a Chicana to the rape of La Malinche, Gaspar de Alba's released a cornucopia of advice coded in Chicana feminist sensibilities that advocates the need for the victims of violence to break with the cycle of violence upheld through silence. The writer exposes the use of symbols and images coded from a Chicana feminist perspective, which remedies the violated female body. The speech acts in the short story denounce the subordination of women by challenging the tradition of silence in the name of family honor and patriarchal tradition. The most powerful lines in this short story initiate a new story:

No me voy a disculpar. Después de tantos años, hasta nuestra lengua ha cambiado. Es posible que ni me entiendas. Es posible que mis palabras todavía estén coaguladas. Pero no me puedo flaquear. Nunca es tarde cuando la dicha es buena. He venido a traerte tunas. Míralas. Qué frescas. Qué rojas. Su jugo se desliza sobre las letras de tu nombre. Le hacía falta este toque de sangre a tu lápida. Ahora tu apodo—EL PAPACITO—se puede apreciar mejor.
(261)⁹⁴

The opening lines of the story break with tradition as they simultaneously utter a new one. The unapologetic voice reverses the silence caused by shame from the trauma of abuse by confronting the perpetrator. “Los derechos of La Malinche,” shows how Chicana feminists’ languages converted the space of literature into a site for female restorative projects where women reattached their tongues to bring voice to their experiences and learned the power of healing.

In the case of this short story, the writer targeted the relation between text and image to show how, in reworking symbols, the symbolic meaning attributed to La Malinche as *la lengua* in the Chicana imaginary has the power to restore positive meanings in images to the representation of women in culture. The re-programming of symbolic language to reflect the perspectives of women illustrates how Gaspar de Alba designates new information to the reader through the use of Chicana *placas*. From the use of popular songs to idiomatic expressions that define Chicano popular culture to the use of code-switching and words that

⁹⁴ “I’m not here to apologize. After so many years, even our language has changed. This is what is possible: you won’t understand me; or, my words may still be clotted in my throat. But I can’t lose heart. As my grandmother used to say: *nunca es tarde cuando la dicha es buena*, it’s never too late to say something good. I’ve come to bring you prickly pears. Look at them. So fresh. So red. Their juice slides over the letters of your name. Your tombstone needed this touch of blood. Now your nickname, *el papacito*, is more visible” (261).

infuse literature with Chicano folklore, Gaspar de Alba's uses the languages of home as well as that of the public sphere to license her own lesbian interpretation of queer *mestizaje* that celebrates the feminist languages of home and domesticity.

For example, the indigenous fruit of cactus plants, *tunas* (prickly pears), is reworked as a *placa* to utter a language of redemption and liberation and a language that celebrates the survival of indigenous wisdom among women. In this story, *tunas* symbolize blood and reference rape. The protagonist smears the red *tunas* on her father's tomb to express the long-lasting trauma of his rape of her. After coloring the tombstone with the red color—the color of blood, the color of violation—the protagonist voices how image and text, the red and the Spanish word “EL PAPACITO,” are fittingly paired. ‘Red’ and ‘el *papacito*’ transform into the symbolic language of violence and rape.

Because the protagonist uses the *tunas* as a retribution for her father's physical encroachment, the *tunas* become a native tool that helps the protagonist speak about the emotional baggage she has kept bottled up over many years. This example also shows how Gaspar de Alba draws from the language of signs and symbols to construct new Chicana narratives where images and text coalesce into a new language to break silences. By using symbols and image with a language of indigenous and Pre-Columbian world visions, Gaspar de Alba infuses signs with new meaning in the sign-system of dominant language.

Furthermore, the author introduces a Chicana home-based and indigenous understanding of *tunas*. *Tunas* become an insignia of her cultural affirmation and show how she incorporates Chicana *placas* since the cactus and its fruit, known as *Opuntia ficus-indica*, also are symbolically depicted in the Mexican flag, which represents Tenochtitlan. Since Chicana *placas* are the distinctive expressions and vocabularies of Chicana feminists that

describe, represent, and portray the many languages women have sustained in their communities to bring subjectivity and voice to themselves, Gaspar de Alba also uses *tunas* as would a *curandera*. In traditional folk medicine, *tunas* cure an array of ailments and help the body to digest. Thus, Gaspar de Alba incorporates a diversity of indigenous interpretations in her use of *tunas* that encode messages on how to heal the queer body and how to digest indigenous knowledge to nourish Chicana tongues.

One way the author dissolves the language of *malinchismo* is by contesting the language of the colonizer and of white privilege by characterizing light skin males as abusive. The author achieves this by creating a chain of signification that links the bearded conquistador, to the bearded father, to the patriarchal image of the bearded husband. In showing how the conquistador-abuser has many masks, like the abusive father of the protagonist who also seems to have many faces, Gaspar de Alba demonstrates how multidimensional and ethnographically dense descriptions of history help Chicanas to challenge historical legacies of patriarchy that operate across diverse social structures to oppress women. Through symbolic overhauls of what images signify, Gaspar de Alba connects the rape the protagonist suffers at the hands of her father with the rape of La Malinche at the hands the conquistador. By including left-out facts and language on the history of La Malinche, the writer uses Chicana feminist philosophies to contest history by subverting the system of representations of symbols. This is illustrated when the narrator of the story recounts:

Cuando el barbudo le picó la falda a la Malinche, ella ya sabía qué esperar. Su padre el jefe de los tabasqueños se lo había explicado todo un día antes de que vinieran los recaudadores de Moctezuma por ella. Lo que pasó con el barbudo

no fue más que otro tributo a otro conquistador. Uno lampiño y hereje, y el otro no. (244)⁹⁵

In this manner, the author provided a narrative of how to use the language of symbols and of fragmented memories and histories to deconstruct the binary system of unitary language that oppressed women. By drawing parallels to the abuse of women across history, Gaspar demonstrates how the Aztec civilization was the actual *vendido* in giving La Malinche to Cortés.

Creating a chain of signifying meanings that link the abuse of La Malinche at the hands of Cortés to the abuse of the protagonist at the hands of the father, the author shows how women across history have been victims of sexual transgression as a result of misogyny. The articulation of the systematic ways colonial structures of power have kept women in states of subordination shows how Gaspar de Alba uses Chicana *placas* to offer alternative storylines meant to inspire Chicanas to dream an end to the exploitation of the female body.

Through direct and unapologetic language, the protagonist is able to voice the arrival of a new consciousness about her identity by relating the exploitation of La Malinche to the lived experiences in her own life. This is another example of the author's use of *placas*. As storyteller, Gaspar de Alba recounts the historical moment where La Malinche is gifted to Cortés to speak out on the origins of sexual violence and abuse through the creation of unequal power relations. The protagonist responds to being labeled a *vendida* and deconstructs the notion of La Malinche as a *vendida*, exposing the irony of blaming the

⁹⁵ “When the bearded one poked at the skirts of la Malinche, she already knew what to expect. Her father, the chief of the Tabascans, had explained it to her the night before Moctezuma’s tax collectors came to collect her. What happened with the bearded one was nothing more than another tribute to another conquistador. One hairless and heathen, the other bearded and baptized in the faith” (266).

victim reinforced through the internalized colonialism of Aztec, Mexican and Chicano customs. The protagonist stated:

Mi abuela siempre me acusó de hereje. Decía que me iba a cocer en el infierno porque nunca rezaba el rosario y porque me comía la hostia sin haberme confesado. Lo que ella ignoraba es que tú, padre nuestro que estás en el cielo, me llevabas a la matinée los sábados en la tarde y me alzabas la falda y me dabas el pan de cada día.

A diferencia de ti, mi novio era gringo y tenía barba, pero a él también le gustaba el cine. Lo que pasó con ese barbudo no fue más que otro tributo a otro conquistador. (242)⁹⁶

She reverses the historical oppression of women in history by denouncing the perpetuation of patriarchal values, which are systematically upheld through social order/tradition and religion and through the perpetuation of that system among men and women, like her grandmother. The young Chicana protagonist learns how to acquire a new liberty of self by speaking thus allowing her to heal from the wounds of abuse by naming the crime of rape and incest.

Gaspar de Alba weaves the story of a young Chicana coming to terms with an abusive relationship with her father by recounting the cultural and public memory of the abuse of women of color—when La Malinche is handed over to Cortés as his slave. Framing the tale of La Malinche as a victim of domestic violence, the writer constructs a parallel between La

⁹⁶ “My grandmother always accused me of being a heathen. She used to say I was going to cook in hell because I never prayed the rosary and because I chewed on the host without having gone to confession. What she didn’t know is that you, our father who art in heaven, took me to the matinee every Saturday and lifted my skirt and fed me our daily bread.

Unlike you, my boyfriend was a gringo and had a beard, but he also liked doing it at the movies. What happened with that bearded one was nothing more than another tribute to another conquistador” (266).

Malinche being ‘gifted’ to Cortés as a slave to the way the protagonist was subjugated by patriarchal customs. Linking La Malinche’s story to the protagonist’s story, Gaspar de Alba transgresses the limits and borders of patriarchal language. She uses language as the ultimate tool of social justice. Just as she initiates the story stating, “No me voy a disculpar,”⁹⁷ the protagonist concludes (238):

Ahora ya se acabaron las pleitesías. Estas tunas son los derechos que me violaste, las palabras secretas que me tragué.

Tengo el tuétano empapado. Acaba de caer uno de esos chaparrones que inundan hasta el desierto. La sangre del nopal que pintaba tu nombre se ha lavado con el agua. Tu piedra ha quedado limpiada, El papacito fresco como el pasto del cementerio. Los cascabeles que escucho son mis propios dientes.
(245)⁹⁸

Thus, the protagonist uses her own words to reverse the trauma of violation in the same way that writing empowered the Chicana author to use language to speak about the negative effects of colonialism as a way to heal.

By shattering normative conventions of time and space, the story creates a new world where we see La Malinche exhibiting agency as an indigenous women. Gaspar de Alba incorporates indigenous knowledge and semiology to foster a new approach on women’s

⁹⁷ “I’m not here to apologize” (261).

⁹⁸ “And now, enough of all this homage. These prickly pears are the rights that you violated, the secret words I had to swallow.

I’m soaked to the marrow. A downpour has just flooded the desert. The rain has washed away the blood of the cactus that painted your name. Your stone is clean now. EL PAPACITO fresh as the cemetery grass. The rattles I hear are my own teeth” (266).

resistance in the face of violence. In the ceremony of memory, Gaspar de Alba unlocks secrets from La Malinche's past to teach the protagonist about resiliency and survival. The use of Coatlicue, the goddess of death and creation, is another example Gaspar's use of Chicana *placas*. She inserts a feminist language by showing how La Malinche draws spiritual strength by praying to Coatlicue. Speaking in tongues, La Malinche's incantation to Coatlicue verbalizes how women used their own languages to protect themselves. At the same time, La Malinche's chants to Coatlicue signals the coming of change and references the encoded language of female survival. The narration frames La Malinche's chant as a ritual, a ceremony of the arrival of a new language, "[. . .] le venía un ataque de palabras raras, palabras que no conocía, palabras secretas de la diosa,"⁹⁹ to indicate how La Malinche knew she was going to be raped and was praying for the strength to fight back (243). The narrator states:

Esa noche, Marina se preparó bien. Con la ayuda de Coatlicue y Tonantzín, se irritó las paredes de su sexo con el pellejo espinoso de unas tunas, dejando que el jugo rojo de la fruta le chorreara las piernas. Después, se adornó el cabello con las plumas de pavo real y se acostó en su petate. El barbudo llegó con el primer canto del gallo. [. . .] Cuando él se encontró en aquella hinchazón, en aquel nido de espinas donde su miembro se había atrapado como una culebra,

⁹⁹ "[...] An attack of words was coming on, strange words, words that she didn't know, secret words of the goddesses" (264-265).

sus gritos le salieron a borbotones. Nunca se había sentido Doña Marina tan dueña de su destino (244).¹⁰⁰

Like a ritual ceremony a warrior performs in preparation for war, La Malinche prepares for the violence to come. Because La Malinche's ceremony is one of strategic surrender but not of defeat, the protagonist illustrates indigenous spirituality as a powerful Chicana *placas* because it teaches the protagonist how to gain strength from female cultural images in the same way La Malinche prayed to Coatlicue for power to overcome adversity.

In her story, Gaspar de Alba also inserts the language of female deities that respects female cultural icons in pre-Columbian times by initiating a semantic relation between Coatlicue and La Malinche. In the adaptation of her mother tongue, the languages of home, the languages of domesticity learned at home from the memory of surviving indigenous worldviews allow the writer to record the mystery of survival of women. Gaspar de Alba transforms the image of La Malinche to show that women find strength within their own bodies to heal, to cleanse, and to rebirth by transforming cultural heritage.

Blurring the lines between memories, altered states and reality, between the lived experience of the protagonist and that of La Malinche, the author is able to introduce a feminist language that celebrates the survival and resistance of women as it denounces the victimization of women. From La Malinche's modeling, the protagonist becomes empowered to verbalize a series of "do you remember?" questions that signal the development of a feminist position and language that allows the protagonist to face her father's tomb. "¿Te

¹⁰⁰ "That night, Malinche prepared herself well. With the help of Coatlicue and Tonantzin, she rubbed the walls of her sex with the thorny skin of some prickly pears. She left the skins inside, and the red juice of the fruit spilled down her legs. Afterward, she decorated her hair with peacock plumes and then lay down on her *petate*. The bearded one arrived with the first rooster's crow. [...] When he found himself inside that swollen space, that nest of thorns where his member had gotten trapped like a snake, his screams bubbled with his seed.

Never had doña Marina felt so much in control of her own destiny" (266).

acuerdas, Papá [. . .]?¹⁰¹,” marked the moment where the protagonist *grito* signals a new existence, where she uses her own feminist language to come back from the dead through the teachings of Coatlicue and La Malinche. When she is finally able to verbalize her memories from the unconscious to the unconscious realm by asking, “do you remember?,” the protagonist breaks with silences and uses cultural memory as empowerment.

In fact, the rattle of her tongue like a snake presents the encoded ways Gaspar de Alba integrates an indigenous cultural landscape and Chicana feminist languages into literature. The closing lines of the story present indigenous practices of healing through water and rain. Similar to La Malinche taking a bath to cleanse herself, the rain that falls onto the tomb that washes away the tombstone of the blood illustrates the text’s metalinguistic dimensions. The statement, “Tengo el tuétano empapado. Acaba de caer uno de esos chaparrones que inundan hasta el desierto,”¹⁰² uses synesthesia to refer to how the protagonist is soaked to the skin from the rain or that the tears for the cathartic moment of finally vomiting all the images and memories into a language of liberation has left the protagonist wet to the bones from crying (245). The downpour or shower represents the watershed of the protagonist’s realization that her father was dead, that the trauma no longer exists. Crying is a cathartic release. So too is speaking. Gaspar de Alba also incorporates the indigenous symbolic beliefs that rain is a powerful symbol of birth and rebirth. It is a cleansing that signals the cycles of death and creation, which also parallel Chicana understanding of Coatlicue as the goddess of life and death.

¹⁰¹ “Do you remember?” (My translation).

¹⁰² “I’m soaked to the marrow. A downpour has just flooded the desert. (NOT WHAT YOU HAVE WRITTEN)” (266).

Under these circumstances, from the very beginning of her publication trajectory, Gaspar de Alba's writings have been of struggle and protest for women's liberation, and defiance for breaking through the barriers of homophobia in plural forms. In 1989, the same year she wrote "Los derechos de La Malinche," her poetry was published in *Three Times a Woman: Chicana Poetry*. The metalinguistic awareness and expression of self as a *fronteriza* through creative writing also is seen in the publication of *The Mystery of Survival* (1993), which won the Premio Aztlán. La Malinche was an extremely powerful icon for lesbians who had argued for the right to define their own bodies, their own gender, sex and sexuality as women of color and as Chicanas (*Mystery 2*). Her early publishing record in Spanish and English language chronicles the aesthetic of a bilingual lesbian of the borderlands who provided thick descriptions of La Malinche. She revises the history of women writing a love for the female body that reverses the *chingada* tradition.

Thus, Gaspar de Alba's commitment to write as a political act is an oppositional stance because for her family both terms, Chicana feminist and lesbian meant being a traitor. The Spanish language short story of "Los derechos de La Malinche" chronicles how Gaspar de Alba employs her Chicana *placas* to question "who is a traitor and to whom?" In this way she responds to the experience of abuse, marginalization, and rejection she experienced as a Chicana feminist and as an out lesbian by family and society (Interview 2013). Reclaiming La Malinche's story from the subject position of a Chicana lesbian, Gaspar de Alba unlocks the Pandora's box of the violence women have endured across history from men and outlines a path of liberation by speaking out.

Mexican Guavas Do Not Travel Well, Chicana Guayabas Do

Erlinda Gonzales-Berry is a Chicana scholar and creative writer. She is a poet and novelist, but is best known for her role as an editor and literary critic. She was born August 23, 1942 in Roy, New Mexico. Her father was a rancher and her mother a teacher. Spanish was the language of home and of public life in her Northern New Mexico rural upbringing. She attended and obtained her degrees from the University of New Mexico: B.A. in Education (1964), M.A. in Spanish (1971) and Ph.D. in Romance Languages (1978). She taught one year at Earlham College and another at New Mexico State University, then joined the faculty at University of New Mexico as a Professor of Spanish and Southwest Studies for eighteen years. In 1997, she moved to Oregon State University to chair the Ethnic Studies program until 2007 when she retired.

Gonzales-Berry's scholarship on New Mexico expanded understandings about Hispanic literatures in the U.S. Southwest. She demonstrated how Spanish-language literatures of New Mexico connect to larger historical movements of world literature in Spanish, and how such ties serve as precursors to the Chicano movement. In addition, her scholarship linked Chicano literature to the contemporary multiethnic expressions of American literature. The recovery of Spanish literary texts for the U.S. Latino Literary Heritage Project framed much of her academic outlook. She co-edited the following books: *Las mujeres hablan: An Anthology of Nuevo Mexicana Writers* (1988); *Pasó por aquí: Critical Essays on the New Mexican Literary Tradition* (1989); *Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Tradition Volume II* (1996); *The Contested Homeland: A Chicano History of New*

Mexico (2000); and *Herencia: The Anthology of the Hispanic Literary Heritage* (2001).¹⁰³ In 2010, she co-published a critical examination of the Mexico-United States immigration of Mexican nationals to Oregon titled *Mexicanos in Oregon: Their Lives, Their Stories*. Notwithstanding her academic writing, Gonzales-Berry also exercised the act of creative writing. She is the author of the novella *Paletitas de guayaba* (1991) and two collections of poetry titled *Burque* (1975) and *Queriéndote* (1984).

Her focus on recovering Spanish language writings offered a new line of thought about the historical survival and strength of Chicanos as Spanish speaking peoples. Her scholarship documented the evolution of the oral and popular heritage of Chicana/o literature in the Southwestern region of the United States. Gonzales-Berry brought to the forefront a contemporary discussion of the complex historical formation of women voices. To this end, she made public the activism of pioneer women writers who detailed the unique condition and experience of being New Mexican. Gonzales-Berry and other critics such as Rebolledo and María Teresa Márquez have documented that Hispanic women had a literary legacy prior to Chicano Movement. With that, the scholar revealed a long line of women who turned to writing to make themselves visible.

Paletitas de guayaba is a Spanish-language novella that tells the story of Marina, a young girl from northern New Mexico giving meaning to her Chicana identity in early adult life. As a new college graduate Mari (short for Marina) decides to venture on a self-defined study abroad program tailored to explore her cultural origins after coming to the conclusion that something was lacking in her educational formation. She travels to the heart of Mexico (Mexico City) by train in search for answers to questions about her complex identity as a

¹⁰³ She also served as an editor for the Spanish language version of the *Herencia* anthology titled, *En otra voz: Antología de literatura hispana en los Estados Unidos* (2002).

New Mexican. But in Mexico, Mari's identity is constantly challenged. As a U.S. national of Mexican descent, some Mexican nationals consider her linguistically inferior and label her a *pocha*,¹⁰⁴ while others label her as a *vendida*¹⁰⁵ and therefore culturally subordinate because she comes from New Mexico.

Mistakenly thinking that she would relive nostalgic childhood experiences as an adult in Mexico, Mari is challenged to defend who she is as she journeys across the nation. The trip pushes Mari to alter her own thinking following changes to her own notion of self as she comes in contact with different environments and cultural situations. Upon her return to the United States from Mexico, Mari had initially forgotten about the lessons learned abroad until she came across her travel journal years later. Rereading former entries activates her latent thoughts and cultural memory, which inspires her to consider further interpretations of the significance of living in the borderlands of New Mexico and of her lived experiences crossing borders into "Old" Mexico. When Mari accounts that she had, "[. . .] una leve diversión al descubrir que hubo un momento en que había sido tan ingenua,"¹⁰⁶ the idea of the protagonist which attains heightened awareness by writing shows how she brings validity to their own voice and identity through storytelling (32).

Because Mari has to negotiate the complexity of her identity as a Chicana in Mexico, her travel journey details the moments in which she engages with the politics of identity related to Mexican attitudes that regard Chicanas/os as *vendidos* and *pochos*. She responds to

¹⁰⁴ A term used to describe U.S. born nationals of Mexican descent who have lost fluency in the Spanish language.

¹⁰⁵ sold out

¹⁰⁶ "[. . .] felt slightly amused to discover that there was a time in my life when I had been so ingenious" (136).

the experience of displacement and dispossession tied to the “*ni de aquí ni de allá*”¹⁰⁷ sentiment Chicanos experience in Mexico and the United States as a way to rethink cultural aspects of Mexican history that impact her notion of identity in transnational contexts. The protagonist’s written words track a shifting state of consciousness that details the significance of repudiating false identity labels related to the idea of *Chicana* imposed on her. Through this experience, Mari also learns to rely on home-based values to navigate a definition of self as a *Chicana* despite menaces abroad.

While the text is a *bildungsroman* because it narrates Mari’s formative years, this coming of age novel shows how Mari uses her education and spiritual growth to present a new voice that challenges the notion of morality, formal education and cultural norms that negatively stereotype Chicanas/os. Creating new meanings from past memories, Mari’s own written words transform into the signifiers, signified and referents that respond and break with the historical and contemporary structural powers. Because the collective experiences in Mexico made Mari feel she had to follow fixed and preconceived notions of identities, the trip to Mexico awakens her collective memory, which reminds her how to positively evaluate her collective history. From the recollections of her mother’s lessons to the voice of La Malinche, Mari learns how to empower the language and wisdom of female-centered traditions to affirm her identity.

Chicana placas can be understood as the vehicular language women developed to initiate a decolonial processes of their mind and of the world. I consider the development of *Chicana* feminist notions of expression as exhibiting *Chicana placas*, because in order for women to be recognized, in order for women to author representations and achieve visibility

¹⁰⁷ “Neither from here nor there” (My translation).

in the movement, they had to transgress language by “tagging” and “tattooing” language with their own logos. The Chicana *placas* seen in Gonzales-Berry’s literary expression represent the types of coding women carried out and how women inscribed a legacy of Chicana culture by manipulating the modes of interpreting culture such as the author’s reinterpretation of trains and voyages.

Mari inscribes Chicana *placas* by breaks with silences and speaking out in writing. She deconstructs *malinchismo*, subverting negative representation of mother figures with positive portrayals. She draws from the knowledge and languages nurtured at home to address how language informs reality. This she credits to her mother’s teachings, “Ahora que reflejo sobre la historia de mi familia, veo a mi madre como una roca fuerte y estable que brota de la tierra y se impone imperiosamente sobre el paisaje de mi vida” (61).¹⁰⁸ Mari has a strong, loving, and vocal mother who taught her to have a pride in her heritage. In the midst of hostility and change, Mari’s mother is a guiding spirit of home strength that allows Mari to navigate public life with pride in the same way that La Malinche teaches her to trust her voice in dreams. Mother figures in this story teach Mari to be assertive and to have pride in the languages women use to define their identity across conscious and unconscious states of mind and dimensions of existence.

The semiotic presence of La Malinche as a character in Mari’s dreams captures hidden wisdom anchored in cultural memory that Chicanas were reclaiming and publicly asserting. La Malinche is a speaking voice from the past that helps Mari to reach a new level of awareness of women’s unique home languages. La Malinche’s re-emergence in Mari’s

¹⁰⁸ “Now that I reflect on my family’s life, I see my mother as an imposing and stable rock that emerges from the earth and imposes itself heroically across the landscape of my life” (168).

imaginary assists Mari to recognize that her heritage has already equipped her with a language of survival. Mari learns to trust the voice from within her heart and mind.

La Malinche prompts Mari to trust the development of her own Chicana *placas* that is her emerging Chicana visions and expressions. La Malinche teaches her that language is not absolute in representation, enabling her to transgress the limits of her own representation across time. As a symbol of fluid and multiple female complexities, La Malinche advises Mari:

Mari has tenido buena fortuna en llegar antes de la destrucción eminente de esta hermosa ciudad. De todo lo que has visto hoy, los templos, los mercados, los palacios, este jardín, sólo quedarán escombros. [. . .] Mari, pero escúchame bien [. . .] Mira, los sacerdotes, los príncipes, los mercaderes, los artesanos, los guerreros, todos son varones. Las mujeres somos primero los espejos que reflejan la imagen del varón para que se percate de quién es; después somos sus juguetes en el petate y, en fin, receptáculos e incubadoras de sus granos de maíz. Se nos reliega al mundo de la sombra y del silencio; pero ese silencio engendra la palabra que se revuelca en nuestra misma hiel y se vuelve rencor, injuria y también canto; y a esta palabra se le agrega otra y otra y terminan en fin siendo una larga y fuerte cadena que nos envuelve y nos estrangula. [. . .] Las mujeres, somos fuertes, Mari; nuestra fuerza nos viene del silencio impuesto por manos sociales y legales que nos tapan la boca. (sic) (74-76)¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ “Mari, you have had the good fortune of arriving before the imminent destruction of this magnificent city. Of all that you have seen today—the temples, the marketplaces, the palaces, this garden—only testimonial ashes will remain [. . .] But listen carefully, Mari [. . .] All the important people—the priest, the nobles, the merchants, the artisans, the warriors—are male. We women are first and foremost the mirrors that reflect the male’s image so

La Malinche teaches Mari listen to the Chicana coding of her tongue because it is discursively layered with feminist and feminine indigenous knowledge that will assist her to debunk the notion that Chicanos are *vendidos* (traitors of Mexico) and *pochos* (bad speakers of Spanish because they live outside Mexico). As a cultural mother, La Malinche's encourages Mari to trust her Chicana imaginary by offering her the following advice:

Quiero que comprendas mis acciones para que algún día cuando te hiera la violencia de las palabras, 'hijo de la chingada', entiendas los motivos que me impulsan. Mira las mujeres en esta sociedad, igual que lo serán en la tuya, son meros objetos, son muebles, son la propiedad de sus padres y después de sus esposos. [. . .] Me sirvo de la fuerza de mi voz [. . .] Sin embargo debido a mis acciones, se dará una nueva raza mestiza, en cuyas venas fluirá la fuerza de mi sangre, de mi voluntad y de mi palabra femenina. Tú, Mari, eres el futuro fruto de mi vientre, la flor de mi traición. (75-77)¹¹⁰

Paletitas de guayaba is often regarded as a Chicana *bildungsroman* because it illustrates how a young Chicana learned to live and embody not only the languages learned at home,

that he can know who he is; beyond that we are his plaything in bed, and finally, we are receptacles and incubators for his kernels of maize. We are relegated to the world of shadows and silence; but that silence engenders the world that laps up our bile and becomes rancor, curses and also song; and to this word another is added and another and another and in the end they form one long, sturdy chain that envelopes and strangles us. We women are strong, Mari, but our strength is often hidden, resulting from the silence imposed by social and legal maneuvers that have gagged our mouths" (sic) (181-183).

¹¹⁰ "I want you to understand our situation so that someday, when you feel wounded by the violence of the words, "son of the chingada whore," you will understand the motives that compel my actions. Let me begin with the fact that women in this society, just as they will be in yours, are mere objects, they are chattel, they are the property first of their fathers, then of their spouses. [. . .] I make use of the power of my voice [. . .] Nonetheless, because of my actions, a new mestizo race will be born in whose veins will flow the strength of my blood, my will, my woman's word. You, Mari, are the future fruit of my womb, the flower of my betrayal" (182-185).

but also to invoke language to transcend from object to subject (Rebolledo, *Infinite Divisions*).¹¹¹

Thus, Mari arrives at her own Chicana *grito* by breaking with the language of oppression and subverting dominant language to generate new linguistic codes from which to honor her identity. The use of identity codes in different ways, such as in demystifying dominant understandings of words like *vendidos* and *pochos* while encoding words like *manita*¹¹² with positive meaning shows how the protagonist achieves new communication. From the use of caló and indigenous words, creative endeavors in language use demonstrates how Gonzales-Berry equips the protagonist with Chicana *placas* to make visible the diversity of Chicana feminist thought and voices that honors how “nuestra misma lengua revela ese mestizaje cultural importado” (88).

The complexity of the protagonist’s story reflects a language use that decolonizes misogyny in real and imaginary landscapes—in terms of what is being represented and implied in the negative stereotypes of La Malinche and in the description of Chicanas as *malinches*. Contesting the language of patriarchy encapsulated in the representation and imagining of La Malinche is how Gonzales-Berry inscribes Chicana *placas* to reverse the scapegoating and negative profiling of all women. Challenging the ideas that Chicanas/os are *vendidos* and *pochos*, the author uses writing as an act of resistance against the ideologies

¹¹¹ Because the details inscribed in the story give the novel certain verisimilitude, *Paletitas de guayaba* is often thought of as an autobiographical and postmodern text. The book’s postmodern structure enables Mary to traverse different layers of realities and contexts of what it means to be Chicana as she journeys through her own path to find truth. She crosses the unconscious chaos of her own internal thought process and delves into her own language matrix to manifest an imaginary in which she codes her own identity. The multiple stories and voices that Mari encounters advance her interpretation of what is the cultural heritage of Chicano peoples. Rebolledo’s analysis of the use postmodern techniques in this text shows how Mari achieves an auto referential voice that makes her into a speaking subject (*Women Singing* 178).

¹¹² A cultural code referring to a person from Northern New Mexico.

rooted in *malinchismo*. She turns to writing to interrogate the gamut of negative representations associated with the figure of La Malinche as a *chingada*, *vendida*, and *mala lengua*, questioning why such linguistic codes are often used to describe Chicanas in Mexico and in the United States. The author uses La Malinche as an article of linguistic empowerment and faith to channel a new truth about female subjectivity.

Thus, working beyond perceptions, representations, and memories, *Paletitas de guayaba* is a text about breaking the cords of myths on multiple fronts in order to address the cultural baggage within Chicano cultural and the transnational rifts between Mexicanos and Chicanos. In the following passage, as Mari articulates her Chicana identity, she critiques the discrimination Chicanas/os are subjected to in Mexico by Mexicans:

Venía pensando también que nosotros, los chicanos, representamos una especie de síntesis y de sincretismo. Allá estamos tan constantemente conscientes de nuestra posición marginalizada, de nuestra relación defensiva con ese espacio que nos es extraño, y por lo tanto caótico, que nos vemos forzados a mantenernos en un estado de tensión constante con esa otredad. Nos sentimos permanentemente amenazados; a cada paso anticipamos que alguien nos meta traba, ya sea literal o figurativamente. Es este constante estado de alerta lo que he bautizado la neurosis chicana—en realidad la neurosis, o sea, la doble conciencia, que aflige a todo ser marginado—y fíjate que no utilizo el término en su sentido negativo porque es precisamente esta neurosis, este estado exaltado de autoconciencia lo que nos impulsa a afirmarnos y a superar los obstáculos de esa sociedad que nos rechaza. A esa

otredad amenazante le ofrecemos en forma de contra-fuerza nuestros mitos de mexicanidad. (36)¹¹³

It is in the use of a multiperspective and multi-interrogative voice that Marina is able to question the deep internalized racism that exists in the cultural traditions and heritage shared by modern-day Mexicans and Chicanos. Mari's reflective language offers a Chicana feminist thick description on the shifting landscapes of subaltern subjectivity and the advent *Xicana* politics that called for a reorder to the sentiment of chaos by reclaiming the elements in Mexican/Chicano lore that women had used as a form of survival—their home languages and the culture transmitted in those domestic expressions.

For instance, the incorporation of a fragment from Margarita Cota-Cárdenas poetry reveals the significance of Gonzales-Berry's promotion of *Xicana* politics over dominant discourses found in canonical texts. The author stresses the need to discuss the roots of gender oppression and the struggle for a woman's right to self-identification by revising the representation of women in cultural myths when she quotes from Cota-Cárdenas, "MUJER CHICANA/ y rompe/ en éxtasis furiosa has los/ cordones de los mitos/ tú sola" (4).¹¹⁴ In tandem with the fragments from Mexican songs inserted in the beginning of the novella, "En el tren de la ausencia/ me voy/ Mi boleto no tiene regreso,"¹¹⁵ and "Si has pensado /cambiar

¹¹³ "I was thinking too that we Chicanos (that sounds good, *we Chicanos*) represent some sort of hybridity or syncretism. Over there we are so acutely aware of our marginal position, our defensive stance in relation to a foreign and chaotic space, that we are in a state of constant tension vis à vis that otherness that confronts us every day. We feel permanently threatened with every step we expect someone to trip us, either literally or figuratively. I have baptized this constant state of alertness "Chicano Neurosis"—a neurosis, or a double consciousness, that afflicts all marginalized human beings—and please note that I do not use this term in a negative sense because it is precisely this neurosis, our exalted state of self-consciousness, that compels us to assert ourselves and go beyond the obstacles set up by society that openly rejects us. Faces with that threatening alterity, we offer our myth of Mexicanness as an opposing force" (140).

¹¹⁴ "Chicana Woman/And break/In furious ecstasy make the/Cords of myths/ You alone" (My translation).

¹¹⁵ "In the train of absence/ I go/ My ticket has no return" (My translation).

tu destino/ recuerda un poquito/ quién te hizo mujer,”¹¹⁶ Gonzales-Berry thematically frames the storyline as a text breaking into a new terrain by meshing popular culture with intertextual references to Cota-Cárdenas text to reiterate the importance of La Malinche as a driving force in Chicana literary production. The author hones in on the imagery of the “furious ecstasy” articulated by Cota-Cárdenas to underscore how Chicana language acts have the potential to incite a revolution through a new desire of language.¹¹⁷ Cota-Cárdenas’ words inspire Gonzales-Berry to use writing as a vehicle to “rupture in furious ecstasy” (4).¹¹⁸

Because the author’s text is a critical examination of society and culture, the application of critical race theory enables the reader to understand how Gonzales-Berry uses writing to challenge the ‘structure of legal institutions,’ that systematically convey negative images of women. In a recent talk titled, “Banned in Arizona,” Rebolledo pointed to the usefulness of critical race theory to understand how writers “use [Spanish] as a creative resistance to erasure and denigration” (6). Through the use of stream of consciousness, an omniscient narrator and a multiple subject positions the novel begins to question the ‘legal storytelling’ that have constructed La Malinche into a negative representation of female subjectivity. Mari deconstructs the notion of race and interrogates the cultural memories about race relations across transnational contexts, to posit how, if “racism is part of the

¹¹⁶ “If you have thought/ Changing your destiny/ Just remember a bit/Who made you a woman” (My translation).

¹¹⁷ See Julia Kristeva.

¹¹⁸ In addition, the epigraph is an intertextual reference to the dialogue and relationship of Chicana feminists revisionist practices fostered through literary production on the figure of La Malinche. Gonzales-Berry and Cota-Cárdenas illuminated the heteroglot dialogism of Chicana writers using the language at hand to rethink their subjectivity and lived experiences. In combining songs with poetry, Gonzales-Berry shows how records of Chicana’s experiences enabled women to recount their known world and to document their world visions.

structure of legal institutions” that is often legalized in writing, then writing can be used as an educational tool that speaks to, “the creativity, power, wit, and humanity of the voices speaking about ways to change that structure” (Delgado 20).

Paletitas de guayaba’s postmodern structure capitalized on a multivoice narrative in order to address the myriad ways that both the United States and Mexico constructed negative representations about brown bodies. Mari’s first-person account legalizes the unique hybrid space and borderlands of a Chicana’s *lengua franca*:

Yo sé, por ejemplo que a ustedes [los mexicanos] se les hace chistoso que reclamemos mitos precolombinos para alimentar nuestras ideologías nacientes. Sin embargo, ustedes mismos conjugaron esos mitos en una etapa no muy alejada de su historia, y no lo pueden negar porque eso sería negar a Rivera y a Orozco, a Paz y a Fuentes. Pero todo ese artificio cultural, por lo anacrónico que les pueda parecer a ustedes, es una etapa necesario en nuestro camino hacia la autodeterminación. Hay que nutrarnos de algo, y esos mitos y esos símbolos nos hacen fuertes porque no permiten rescatar nuestra historia. Además son nuestros amuletos contra ese demonio que nos rechaza a la vez que nos amenaza devorarnos. Pero luego venimos aquí, y de pronto es obvio que no somos mexicanos. Nos sentimos desorientados porque la otredad aquí—claro menos hostil—resulta ser precisamente lo que allá nos sirve de amparo (36-37).¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ “I know, for example, that you all find it hilarious that we reclaim Pre-Columbian myths with which we nurture our emerging ideology. Nonetheless, you yourselves conjured up these myths in a not-too-distant past, and you can’t deny it because you’d be denying Rivera, and Orozco, and Paz and Fuentes. But all of that cultural artifice, regardless of how anachronistic it may appear to you, is a necessary stage in our path to self-determination. We must nurture ourselves on something, and those myths and symbols make us strong because

Marina details her experiences as a racialized, oppressed and discriminated subject due to her identity as a brown-skinned, ethnically Chicana, and a woman in both Mexico and the United States. She even complains about it when she says, “esta necesidad obsesiva que tengo darle voz a mis frustraciones, a mis dudas, a mis sueños y a mis rabias, en fin, de ordenar mi mundo y de comunicarme con alguien que me entienda . . .” (15).¹²⁰

Mari’s trip to Mexico enables her to further comprehend the root of negative attitudes about women of color and Chicanas/os when she learns about the history of the country and its people. Mari learns how to use her heteroglot voice, as a weapon of defense against abasement with the assistance and advice of her symbolic mother’s voice:

Nos aferramos en nuestras fiestas mexicanas, en nuestra música, en nuestras quinceañeras, y en símbolos como la Virgen de Guadalupe, símbolos que aun tú [el mexicano] me has dicho van perdiendo significado en el México contemporáneo; y ahora con el movimiento chicano, suscitamos nuevos símbolos, algunos de ellos rescatados de los escombros de momentos que quizá para ustedes [los mexicanos] ya hayan perdido su vigencia. (36)¹²¹

Mari learns a love and respect for the hybrid tongue and voice of her community because she finally understands that it is holds the secrets to her resistance and survival. Writing these

they permit us to rescue our history from oblivion. Furthermore, they are our amulets against the demon that rejects us even as it seeks to devour us. But then we come here, and suddenly it becomes obvious that we are not Mexicans. We feel disoriented because our alterity here—perhaps less hostile—turns out to be precisely what functions as our havens over there” (140-141).

¹²⁰ “This obsessive need I have to vent all my frustrations, my doubts, my outrage, and even my dreams, in short, to create some order in my world and connect with someone that understands me” (119).

¹²¹ “We insist on our Mexican fiestas, our music, our *quinceañeras*, and on symbols like the Virgin of Guadalupe, which you have told me are losing significance in modern Mexico; and now with the Chicano Movement, we conjure up new symbols, some of them recuperated from the ashes of moments that perhaps have lost their vitality for your compatriots” (140).

female-centered and home-based understandings of female identity reflects Gonzales-Berry's use of Chicana *placas*. When the protagonist accepts her hybrid tongue, she accepts herself and her history. She learns to value cultural artifacts as reflections of the heteroglossia of collective memory.

When describing why she wrote *Paletitas de guayaba*, Gonzales-Berry disclosed the impact and power of the voices that informed her identity. She revealed:

But there is something else; the fact that I grew up listening to stories in Spanish. I remember the voices of my grandmothers, great aunts and great uncles, aunts and uncles, my father and my mother, and I wanted to imitate them. I think my writing has a certain oral quality to it that I attribute to having been brought up in an oral lore, *La Llorona*, *brujas* and *bultos*, *apariciones del diablo*, *la muerte*, *los días de antes* [appearances of the Devil, Death, in days past], all that great stuff. Also there is something about freedom. (Hernández-G, Manuel and Michael Nymann 137)

The concern to preserve the dialects and cultural aspects native of Chicanos in the Southwest is a major thematic that bridges her academic and creative work, and, as a result, explains why La Malinche functions as a voice and figure which supports the cultivation of the protagonist's Chicana feminist sense of self whether in New Mexico or Mexico. The autobiographical nature of this text echoes the unrelenting Chicana feminist cry to transform history through the lenses of Chicana traditions.

The text proudly articulates the Chicana feminists' attitude that language defines reality, or as Margarita Cota-Cárdenas stated, "Somos nuestras lenguas"¹²² as did Anzaldúa

¹²² "We are our tongues/languages" (My translation).

(Interview 2013). Thus, the text exhibits Chicana *placas* through the celebration of Chicana incantations, shouts, and chants. The primary way the author presents a Chicana *grito* is by using language to revise the tale of La Malinche. La Malinche's story is incorporated into the narrative as a way to show the universal struggle of women's right to self-representation. In revising La Malinche's story from the subject position of a New Mexican Chicana feminist, *Paletitas de guayaba* is a guide meant to educate women on the need to develop a voice and tongue that celebrates hybridity and multilingualism.¹²³

Reverberating Alarcón's discussion of La Malinche's many designations to reflect her multiple identities, the author demonstrates her use of Chicana *placas* by naming the protagonist with one of the indigenous translator's many name.¹²⁴ Since La Malinche was also known as Doña Marina, Marina is a modern-day Malinche. The protagonist carries in her name the history of La Malinche. But instead of replicating a dominant storyline of La Malinche, Gonzales-Berry redrafts the semiotics of La Malinche-Doña Marina when she subverts the code of La Malinche's Christian name Marina.

By shifting the interpretative meanings associated with the historical Doña Marina, Mari transforms into a Chicana *placa*—a linguistic code that signifies the decolonization of the label Marina and the religious ties associated with the imposed name change of Malintzín

¹²³ Moreover, the fact that the story commences on the 12th of December, the Day of La Virgen de Guadalupe, shows how the author returns to the origins of her cultural past. The Virgen of Guadalupe speaks on the same day that the protagonist also decides to speak her mind. The use of La Virgen de Guadalupe again reaffirms how Chicana feminists reinterpret cultural icons on Mexican and Chicano cultural lore to act as encouraging guides that assist Chicanas to empower themselves by recuperating the languages of resistance and survival shared in the woman-to-woman conversations of home. Also, the date of the Mexican Revolution is significant.

¹²⁴ According to Norma Alarcón in "Traductora, Traditora: A Paradigmatic Figure of Chicana Feminism," (1989) the many names that existed to identify la Malinche—Malinali, Malintzín, Doña Marina, La chingada and most important *la lengua* (meaning both language and tongue)—illustrated how La Malinche functioned as a paradigmatic image that reminded women to think of themselves as subjects-in-process. Gonzales-Berry articulates the same language with Mari's identity.

to Doña Marina as a result of her forced religious conversion into Catholicism. Instead of being a woman “of the sea,” the Latin signification for the name Marina, the Chicana feminist re-signing of the term Marina transforms Marina into Mari—a woman of the desert. The novella is a coming of age novel about Mari who voyages across worlds not through ships and water, but through trains and deserts. Marina’s decision to voyage south defines the action of novel.

For this reason, the central theme of travel (real and imagined) structures the story of Mari. Because the train is a symbol of change, and often a phallic symbol that in literature represents chartering new geographical spaces, a Chicana who takes a train not only disrupts the literary tradition of who takes trains (and for what purpose) but also inscribes new meanings of using the train to alter destiny. The train symbolically represents a method of transportation, which assists Mari to reach new frontiers, to traverse into new geographical, social, and cultural landscapes that awaken her cultural memory. Revitalized memories assist Mari to generate new meaning maps about La Malinche as heroine and cultural mediator that shifts the image of woman past and present.

At the same time, rereading the symbolic significance of trains in texts shows how the author subverts the meaning of trains and makes it into a Chicana *placa*.¹²⁵ Gonzales-Berry inscribes Chicana *placas* when she creates an image of a young Chicana who not only steps out of her physical home, but also changes her social role in public spheres by crossing national borders. Traveling offers Mari a new type of education; one in which Mari has to doctor a new language of home and domesticity in heteroglot forms. The text, like the voyage the protagonist takes in the narrative, is a powerful testament of Chicana feminist

¹²⁵ The idea of a Chicana boarding a train and what it signifies does not become apparent until the publication of the bilingual version of the text subtitled, *Paletitas de guayaba: On a Train Called Absence* (2010).

unwillingness to remain in silent or invisible states.¹²⁶ The train becomes into a culturally significant symbol that fosters the movements of feminist practices of self-discovery when the train transports Mari to new worlds—new “*sitios y lenguas*.” Just as a train ride alters your destiny for its ability to change your mental and physical reality and opens the door to new experiences, reading the train as a symbolic tongue shows how Mari was able to understand and give voice to her collective experience by recuperating her memory.

The novella’s detailed account of Mari’s experience are the thick descriptions that showcase the Chicana feminist desire to interpret and theorize culture from one’s own subjective positionality. The inscriptions of Chicana feminist thought in the text examples a new value-based approach to appraising the presence of women in home and public environments. Placing positive values on women ways of seeing, Gonzales-Berry uses language in innovative and experimental forms and contexts in order to bring voice to emerging notions of consciousness that celebrated Chicana identity. Thus, *Paletitas de guayaba* expresses a thick description of language politics and issues in Chicana heritage that illustrates how women defined new power relations between La Malinche as a linguistic sign and Chicana as a linguistic code.

Mari contests the dominant language that devalues her in Mexico through written entries that respond and protest the silencing of women. As a storyteller, Mari’s declarations

¹²⁶ Travel south to Mexico defines Mari’s psychological journey to explore the interior imagination of her Chicana cultural heritage as she moved from conscious to unconscious realms, from reality to fantasy, from states of awareness to dream states. Mari crossed new terrains, in a reverse immigration, that symbolized the emerging of Chicana feminist thought that argued for the need cross borders as a rite of passage to reclaim a Chicana cultural heritage. In “En la lengua materna: Las escritoras chicanas y la novela en español,” Manuel Martín-Rodríguez reads Mari’s trip south as return to the “motherland,” which acquired significant power as the journey south itself unravels a series crossings that lead Marina to question whether Mexico is her motherland. For example, the geopolitical border between the United States and Mexico is a physical type of crossing, while her departure by train from outside to inside “the motherland” and her experiences there clearly mark additional voyages, passages and crossroad. Through Mari’s experiences abroad, the multifaceted borders she crosses help her mold her identity.

reflect the language of an emerging Chicana consciousness. While writing becomes a tool of revelation and liberation at the same time the act of writing thickens and complicates the significance of her recorded thoughts by rewriting new values to the meaning, purpose, and goal of her journey. In the text, the protagonist as writer recognizes the empowering act of telling stories. When revising her own written memories of her trip Mari confesses:

Cuando hice los apuntes en un cuadernito, la verdad es que no tenía ninguna intención de que todo aquello llegara a formar un texto. [...] Los apuntes sobre el viaje concreto, o sea, sobre el traslado especial por tren desde la frontera al D.F., abrieron las puertas de la memoria. Empezaron a fluir las imágenes y voces que no sé cuánto hace las había reprimido. Durante varios días no pude hacer nada más que recordar. (32)¹²⁷

As she extrapolates the speaking subject in her recorded thoughts and working memory, Mari illustrates the ability to transform the ordinary of life events into critical scenes in search of a deeper truth. Mari's *domesticana* approach to private-public affairs enables her to reframe the history that informs her lived experience. Because the protagonist writes to create a space of self, *Paletitas de guayaba* documents the ways in which the subaltern subject not only listens and internalizes hegemonic discourse but also reframes language to respond to the power structures nurturing subaltern conditions. Through subversive language, the use of language traditionally deemed inappropriate for women, and the use of language to express a rage and a *domesticana* vision of life, Mari's Chicana *placas* chronicle an awareness of self as a Chicana feminist that is hybrid and complex.

¹²⁷ "When I jotted down random thoughts in my notebook, I never intended for them to end up in a manuscript. [...] The notes regarding the actual traveling, that is, moving through space on a train from the Border to Mexico City opened the floodgates of memory. I was visited by voices and images that I had repressed long ago. During several days I just sat and remembered" (136).

By writing a novella about a woman's struggle for self-identification, Gonzales-Berry honors the tradition of subversive storytelling found in the counter-narratives of frontier women's literature and in Chicana texts. The public articulation of an unapologetic Chicana feminist voice witness in *Mari* emphasizes the survival of the feminist vocabularies woven into the linguistic expression of women prior to and after the conquest of México. In her work, Gonzales-Berry continues the custom of circumventing the erasure of Hispanic women voices by writing a story that promotes the contemporary ways women continue to resist erasure and invisibility. In an interview about her contribution to the Chicano literary cannon Gonzales-Berry stated:

I wrote [. . .] because I believed I had something to say that might be of interest to others. That's the packaged answer. Closer to the truth, or *a* truth, may be that I needed to exercise a rage that was consuming me and I couldn't afford psychoanalysis. That applies to *Paletitas de guayaba*. [. . .] I am not certain why I wrote in Spanish. One answer could be that having been trained in Latin American Literature Spanish is the language in which I have read more literature. [. . .] (Hernández-G, Manuel and Michael Nymann 137).

By drawing attention to the rage she felt for not being able to speak, the author touches on the global tradition of silence women experience as characters in storylines and as authors of literature to the tale of La Malinche. Her publication signals a reluctance to keep the rage inside, or to live life with a muted tongue. She refuses to ideologically live as “una hija de la chingada.”¹²⁸ Her unwillingness to follow a taciturn image of female domesticity as defined

¹²⁸ “The son or daughter of La Malinche, the fucked one” (My translation).

by men, which Mari heavily criticize, reflects the subversive tradition among Hispanic frontier women resisting domination.

Gonzales-Berry pays homage and participates in this Hispana-Chicana tradition by using writing as an outlet to release awakened emotions stirred by rage. This can be compared to Gaspar de Alba's "Los derechos de La Malinche." Anger can be an empowering state of mind that has the power to move one toward action. Paula Moya in *Learning from Experience: Minority Identities, Multicultural Struggles* (2002) writes about the empowerment women gain in expressing rage. In her analysis of Chicana writers, rage functions to break silences. In breaking silences, uttered words become tools of change (178). Thus, Gonzales-Berry and Gaspar de Alba challenge, subvert, and contest limits placed on Chicana feminists by expressing the anger of discrimination, silence and misrepresentation encoded in the terms La Malinche and Chicana.

Rage also enables the protagonist to break into new linguistic grounds. Similar to the creative techniques women have employed within literature to keep their stories alive, through oral traditions, Hispanic women prior to the Chicano movement exerted a right to their speech and thought by breaking numerous boundaries that transformed writing into political acts. For example, pioneer Hispanic writers Cleofas Jaramillo and Fabiola Cabeza de Baca advocated for the celebration Hispanic life, customs and traditions despite foreign colonization of the Southwest. By cherishing Hispanic living, such as in the preparation of food to retelling popular myths and describing Hispanic folklore, early writers show how they resisted erasure. Gonzales-Berry advances these subversive stances and traditions with a young character that breaks into new frontiers of subjectivity by using speech acts to foster Chicana feminist thought.

The protagonist's ire enables her to use brash language to reach a higher level of truth. The use of aggressive and sacrilegious language is another example of Gonzales-Berry's use of Chicana *placas* that enables the protagonist to capture the language of male vocabularies to call attention to her causes and modes of expressions. According to Rebolledo in, "The Problematic of Writing in Spanish," Marina, "seizes the language by appropriating male public language and imposing on that language the alterity, of otherness, of speaking the female body, of speaking female sexuality" (*Women Singing* 177). Her "untamed" tongue expresses a sexuality that subverts the idea that women with desires are "loose women." She talks about gender, sex, and sexuality without hesitation or shame. For instance, as she reflects about her non-traditional relationship with Sergio when she states:

¿Cuándo fue que nos vimos? ¿Apenas cuatro días? No lo creo. Sabes que cuando paso un día sin verte, te extraño tanto que me quiero morir. [. . .] Pero sabes que también me gusta cuando no nos vemos por algún tiempo porque siempre son mucho más intensos mis orgasmos. No sé duran más. Hoy por ejemplo fue increíble, como un torrente de ola tras ola de espasmos eléctricos. Creí que nunca iba a terminar. ¿Te imaginas lo que sería quedarse uno atracado en un orgasmo perpetuo? (63)¹²⁹

Like the intensity of sexual liberation, the energy of rage also functions as a healing tool for women of color and minority women; Mari tells how she breaks with the silence of rage to survive and transcend *machista* conditions.

¹²⁹ When did we last see each other? Was it only four days ago? I can't believe it. You know, when one day goes by without seeing you, I miss you so much I want to die. [. . .] But you know I also like it when we don't see each other for a while because then my orgasms are always so incredibly intense. I don't know they seem to last longer. Today for example, it was just incredible, like a flood of electrical charge was there. I thought it would never end. Can you imagine what it would be like to get stuck in a perpetual orgasm?" (170)

In conclusion, *Paletitas de guayaba* is a brazen utterance of Chicana feminist politics. The publication of the text affirmed the developing thematic within Chicana literary traditions of writing in Spanish as a political act of a woman's right to speak her mind and to define her tongue. Like other Chicana writers of her generation, the search for a new poetic language that would sustain their new feminist imaginary became a model for how to use writing to revisit tales about women in Mexican heritage. Likewise, these new feminist literary expressions explored what it meant to be a U.S. born woman of color with Hispanic roots.

Collectively the works of Margarita Cota-Cárdenas, Alicia Gaspar de Alba and Erlinda Gonzales-Berry trace the unique development of Chicana feminist cultural production of the figure of La Malinche as a metaphor of tongue and language and as a subtext to speak about what it means to stereotype. However, for Chicana authors the use of written language to retell the story of La Malinche made apparent the power of meaning making in the use of language and in the production of labels. This complex exhibition of Chicana *placas* functions as a decolonial tool to reverse negative interpretations on women.

The employment of language to contest and combat the continuation of false and malicious constructions of females underscore how, "Many Chicana writers think of La Malinche as a woman who had and made choices rather than as the woman so often portrayed as the passive victim of rape and conquest" noted Rebolledo (*Infinite Division* 193). By radicalizing the cognitive association between tongue, language, and women Chicana feminists found in writing a way to heal from the perpetuation of a speaking woman as a bad woman. The revisionist stories about La Malinche in the works by Cota-Cárdenas, Gaspar de Alba, and Gonzales-Berry demonstrate how the introduction of feminist languages cultivated

at home allowed women to bring a new linguistic cornucopia to writing that nurtured a positive female identity of self-respect, visibility, and love of female sensibilities.

Chicanas turned to writing to unmask the real *vendidos*—men—while using writing to exhale in an autonomous process of self-healing. By unwrapping the patriarchal language around the public discourse of the image of La Malinche, Chicana writers proved how domestic languages were able to fashion La Malinche into positive female role model. Women were no longer puppets to reinforce misogyny. In the celebration of their cultural heritage, women did not soften their words; instead, female cultural language practices equipped women to reclaim the images of women who had the ability to speak to bring domestic female voices in the public spaces. Collectively, these works show the power of verbal expression to create Chicana *placas* through feminist stories wrapped with a poetic discourse of what Gloria Anzaldúa names “a tamed wild tongue,” and what Amalia Mesa-Bains describes as “*domesticana*,” to arrive at a new linguistic subjectivity, which Emma Pérez has termed as a “*sitio y lengua*.”

Chapter 5: Symbolic Speech Acts in Chicana Visual Narratives: Representations of La Malinche in Chicana Art

The complex representations of human interactions we find in Chicana feminist literature also are found in art. Like scholars and writers, artists played a central role in the flowering of the Chicano movement.¹³⁰ Artists defined the flourishing of a new Chicano identity through visual art that illustrated the thematic and symbolic spirit of what Chicana meant and what *Chicana* signified. The revival of Chicana cultural heritage reinforced an art inclusive of a renewed and positive encoding of Chicana that gave artists unprecedented power to guide social change. For women, artistic production fostered community and ethnic solidarity at the same time that it served as an instrument of revolution. The commitment to use art for activist ends transformed Chicana artists into *activists*.

One of the most important areas of study is how Chicana artists as activists created a visual expression of the movement's ideologies through a non-verbal language that influenced and defined the direction of the Chicano art movement. However, as women created art, their work spoke to a particular artistic revolution that revalidated the lived realities of ethnic minority women. As a result of the invisibility of Chicana representation in art and lack of inclusion in Chicano artistic venues, Chicana feminist artists went beyond the

¹³⁰ Whether direct or symbolic, the Chicano art movement heavily relied on visual language to educate people on emerging Chicana/o politics and sense of community. Artists responded to the movement's call to action through public art that advanced the ideologies of cultural affirmation, self-determination, and cultural nationalism. Murals and poster art used symbols and images visualizing important community themes. Through artistic experimentation, Chicana/o artists created a new artistic expression from the chaos of a hybrid and often fragmented history, adapting themes, symbols and icons from a cultural heritage that had survived the "tests of time." Thus, the artists' renewed interest in cultural heritage initiated a unique artistic renaissance. As a result, visual expression, which drew heavily on the folk arts developed over time through the Southwest, reflected the inscriptions of new visions of subaltern artists.

appeal of common experience. In addition, male domination in artistic circles pushed Chicanas to critique the stereotyping of women in art.

Chicana visual production is an art form that illustrated how women transferred emotions, thoughts, and dreams through various mediums. For example, Ester Hernández's *La libertad* (1976), which depicts a Chicana sculpting the statue of liberty into a powerful Mayan goddess, visually narrated the desire of women to portray themselves and other women as models of strength and power. Chicanas achieved the regeneration of women in visual culture through self-portraits and by sketching those of other women representative of their cultural legacies. For instance, Judy Baca's work, *The Great Wall of Los Angeles* (1960s-1990s), brought women into public arenas and as part of the public landscape.

Second, Chicanas changed depictions of women by painting different representations of cultural myths as seen in Celia Alvarez' *La Malinche Tenía Sus Razones* (1995)¹³¹ and Santa Barraza's *La Malinche* (2006). Alvarez and Barraza feminized visual landscapes developing a female eye that interpreted female archetypes through feminist gazes.

Third, women communicated the promotion of women's sensibilities, issues and concerns in creative works of art. With new representations of the female bodies, Chicanas



Figure 24 Ester Hernández *La libertad* (1976)



Figure 25 Judy Baca Image of *The Great Wall of Los Angeles* (1960-1990s)

¹³¹ "Malinche Had Her Reasons" (My translation).

challenged the patriarchal principle that delegated the power of the production of meaning to males. This too reveals the development of a metalinguistic awareness of language in art. As a result, a distinguishing quality of Chicana visual production is the weaving of theory and practice with creativity in the creation of art.

Since the Chicano Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, the growing use of female cultural figures like La

Malinche reveals how feminists worked to create cultural material that positively represented ethnic women. Artistic

expression functioned as a tool where women fashioned an identity of their own. Through art they outlined a new territory that articulated and imagined feminist visions as part of the common Chicano experience. The particular climate of the 1960s and 1970s proved to be a sophisticated moment where Chicana feminists could test

new propositions of revolution and identity that marked the zeitgeist of the mid- twentieth century. In many cases, the complex negotiation of grasping contemporary definitions of Chicana encouraged artists to experiment with rich oral traditions and visual legacies of the past.

Thus, a primary goal of Chicana artists was to end the regimentation of women's bodies and the objectification of women. In this regard, they not only denounced the way in which traditional art circles

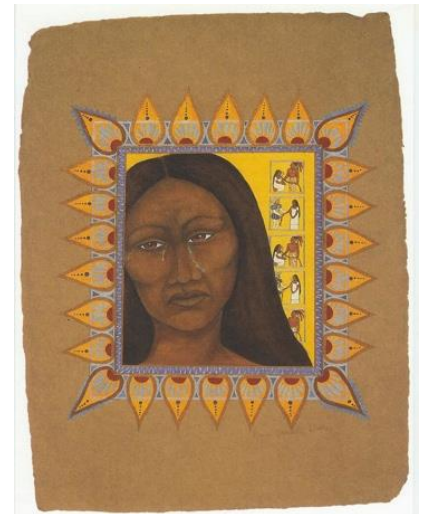


Figure 26 Cecilia Álvarez *La Malinche Tenía Sus Razones* (1995)



Figure 27 Santa Barraza *La Malinche* (2006)

negated their subjectivity and voice, but also brought to the art world their own visual language. As Chicanas painted their own faces or canvas, depicted memories of their life, and represented memories of female world visions, they illustrated the potential of their non-verbal language skills. Telling stories of women long ago became a tactic for women to reclaim language practices of women as a cultural celebration.

Invested in redefining gender relations in both the private spaces of the home and the public spaces of the community, Amalia Mesa-Bains was among the first to narrate the new critical vocabularies of home-based art practices women used as call to action in the practice of “*domesticana* politics.”¹³² The cultural critic and artists analyzed Chicana art from the home languages that framed Chicana perceptive imaginaries. “She thus offers to her readers a method for the further reconceptualization of critical writing about art. Combining the word *Mexicana* (used to describe cheap tourist art from Mexico) with *domestic* (culture of everyday home life), Mesa-Bains follows activist traditions of deconstructing stereotypes by redefining them” (J. A. González, *Invention* 317-318).

Mesa-Bains reveals how Chicana artists of the time developed a unique visual vocabulary that was both critical of patriarchy in their own communities and recuperative of the power of domestic space for women (J. A. González, *Invention* 319). Holly Barnet-

¹³² According to Mesa-Bains, Chicana art production granted women the space to introduce a feminist language rooted in domestic and home-based feminism. Mesa-Bains’ scholarship perhaps best documented the conversation of the development of a new Chicana sensibility rooted in feminist and feminine vocabularies. Mesa-Bains recorded the budding revolutionary acts of female and feminist artists’ response to the call to action of the Chicano movement by articulating their version of what Tomás Ybarra-Frausto defined as *rasquachismo*; “Making do with what one has.” Chicana feminist artistic production drew from the public notions of *rasquachismo* as well as from the private, domestic traditions of *rasquachismo* practiced at home as a way to participate and contribute to the spirit of revolution of the Chicano movement. They enacted a feminist and feminine tradition of *rasquachismo*, which Amalia Mesa-Bains coined as *domesticana*. In Chicana art, *rasquachismo* transforms into a sensibility cultivated at home about women’s lived realities. *Domesticana* explains the development of celebrations of domestic life and at home philosophies nurtured by women. In this sense, we can read *domesticana* as a Chicana feminist genealogy that debunks the fantasies of domestic life imposed by men. *Domesticana* captures a particular activism and home life of Chicanas that contests stereotypical understandings of Chicana experiences in order to develop a new Chicana identity.

Sanchez writes, “In 1996 Amalia Mesa-Bains particularized Ybarra-Frausto’s basic structures within feminine and feminist Chicana representation as *domesticana*, a conceptual and formal sensibility through which certain women artists construct the domestic sphere as place of both paradise and prison, of ‘constriction, subversion, emancipation, and ultimately redemptive enunciation’” (“Tomás Ybarra-Frausto” 92-93).

Barnet-Sanchez explains how “In exploring both ‘barrio life’ and ‘family experience,’” Mesa-Bains, “included ‘home embellishments, home altar maintenance, healing traditions, and personal feminine pose or style’ as the sites of representation in Chicano homes” (“Tomás Ybarra-Frausto” 93). “*Domesticana* is positioned as a form of resistance within the domestic sphere to ‘majority culture’ and as an ‘affirmation of cultural values.’ Yet it also serves as critique and intervention to change those structures of patriarchal restrictions placed on women within that same culture” (“Tomás Ybarra-Frausto” 92-93).

Mesa-Bains’ concept of *domesticana* expresses the struggle of articulating a Chicana identity in Chicano culture and American society and the tension women face in the creation of an art space receptive to female interpretations of a bicultural sensibility. Across her multiple publications explaining the practice and theory of *domesticana*, the shifting language in Mesa-Bains’ writings shows the extent to which home-based sign-systems assisted women to inscribe a sense of belonging into visual culture previously unseen.

While J. A. González establishes Mesa-Bains’ essay “to be an important contribution on Chicana art practices and an example of the importance of carefully conceived innovations in the language of art theory,” her concluding remarks in the section titled

“Questioning the Limits of Domesticana”¹³³ allow for this study’s proposition of *Chicana placas* to begin to address key issues of J. A. González’s inquiries while showing relevance of *domesticana* approaches to reading culture today (318, 322). With new visions of what female figures signified, artists utilized the vocabularies developed at home to instigate dialogues on Chicana identity, which J. A. González credits as the *resistant* element of domesticana:

Works of art are only resistant to the degree that they perform a material rhetoric—a visual argument—that counters another material rhetoric. But resistance is not a quality located *within* or *performed* by the work of art. Instead, it is a semantic transformation performed by the artist and agreed upon by the audience. By rereading signs in the world and ascribing to them a new meaning, by rejecting the constraints of one semiotic system in favor of another, by reconstructing the frames through which one is defined, and by which one is given access to power, these artists create a space for others to examine their own frames of reference, their own ideologies. (J. A. González, *Invention* 322)

¹³³ González wrote: “If scholars are to embrace the concept of domesticana there are a few questions that we might want to consider about its present and future use. I therefore end my response with a series of open questions that I hope others will take up and explore. Is domesticana applicable only to Chicana art of a particular time period or generation? If domesticana relies on the notion of an “unbroken tradition” of domestic arts inherited from Mexico, what happens when the art practices by Chicana feminists break with this tradition? Is irony inherently incompatible with domesticana, as Mesa-Bains suggests, or does it in fact have a role to play? Can there be a middle-class practice of domesticana? If domesticana relies in a shared barrio sensibility, how can one rely on the homogeneity of this sensibility over time? Does the concept of domesticana constrain the critical discourse on Chicano art to the home? Are other neologisms needed for an expanding analysis of Chicana art? If so, what might they be? (323)

As J. A. González introduces the language of “semantic transformations” and “semiotics systems” to foster a critical space for the shifting language of Mesa-Bains’ essay, the expanded role and statement of Chicana feminist visual languages witnessed in Mesa-Bains and J. A. González’s writings hints at the idea of Chicana *placas*. Chicana *placas* shows how, as women continue to break with tradition by experimenting, innovating and deconstructing what their heritage signifies in their contemporary world, they authorized transhistorical and hybrid forms of expression by generating a visual culture rooted in heteroglossia, hybridity and *mestizaje*.

The move away from a bicultural to a metalinguistic awareness of language, the use of home-based language in public spaces meant to “spike” or “alter” language and meaning, and the manipulation of sign-systems by new feminist visions across domestic and public spaces are insignias of the expression of Chicana *placas*. Thus, Chicana *placas* describe how artists apply influences of Mexican artistic culture on Chicano life, and create new techniques and experiment with styles that draw from the history of the Americans such as pre-Columbian culture, Aztec and Mayan mythology and the Mexican Revolution in order to communicate innovative visions of Chicana feminism in an unapologetic style and with an attitude that shows how they converge street knowledge and home wisdom to formulate a new language of Chicana identity.

In the study of the ongoing representation of La Malinche, the dialogic and heteroglot nature of Chicana voices, as expression of Chicana *placas*, illustrate a concept I call the development of a Chicana *lingua franca* because it reveals the continuance of innovative, original and imaginative form of speaking about Chicana identity. The representations of La Malinche in the art of Delilah Montoya and Pola López address questions about the moral

and social traditions of women before and since the discovery of the Americas, especially with respect to placing positive values on women's identities as subjects. In addition, these revisions of La Malinche present a unique dialogue in the construction of female identity in art in relation to the representation of racialized subjectivity such as in the positive and redefined representation of indigenous women that are coded with a complex language of *mestizaje*.

In the work of these two artists, they express the values passed on through domestic spaces of home life into public use seen in positive illustrations of La Malinche as a metaphor of language. Because Chicana representations of La Malinche continue to be a topic of interest and expression, this chapter analyzes the development of La Malinche as *la lengua* in the works of Delilah Montoya's *La Malinche* (1993) and Pola López's *Huipil: Vestido de Mujer* (2001). The chapter describes how the art of Montoya express a *domesticana* sensibility while also being an early example that express Chicana *placas* while the art of López offers a more salient representation of Chicana *placas*.

As feminist artists, Montoya and López's depictions of La Malinche elaborated a Chicana feminist vision closing the twentieth century at the same time that they reflected the types of questioning, debates and desires feminist artists posited within the concept of women's art. Their works include the use of home and heritage languages to bring into awareness new visual terrains that culturally engage and dialogue with positive and nurturing interpretations of the figure of La Malinche. Tired of seeing sexualized images of women as objects aimed to satiate male desires, such as in the case of La Malinche as the lover of Cortés, Chicana feminists turned to art to critique La Malinche's visual traditions. They counteracted negative representations of the mother of *mestizaje* focusing on the patriarchal

values that represented La Malinche as a second-class citizen by using positive images that deconstructed negative stereotypes. In this sense, the use of the multiple meanings of language related to La Malinche as *la lengua* was a powerful weapon that enabled them to redefine a new public and open notion of cultural heritage because La Malinche was also in the public eye.¹³⁴

Perhaps the most important observation of Chicana artistic expression on the figure of La Malinche is how Montoya and López visually nurtured the identity of a woman with a new tongue, what Gloria Anzaldúa termed as *la nueva mestiza*. The Chicana artists wove creativity, discourse, and political practice together to illustrate what Gloria Anzaldúa described as the language of the borderlands explored through writing on the figure of La Malinche. The introduction of culturally specific perspectives and women-centered vocabularies, forms, and contexts are evidence of the development of new language that stressed the relationship between text and image. As Anzaldúa in *Borderlands* asserted:

An image is a bridge between evoked emotion and conscious knowledge;
words are the cables that hold up that bridge, Images are more direct, more
immediate than words, and closer to the unconscious. Picture language
precedes thinking in words; the metaphorical mind precedes analytical
consciousness. (91)

¹³⁴ The expression of a cultural heritage rooted in the cultivation and celebration of home languages was one of the ways women transmitted a new domestic perspective on La Malinche. Feminist artists celebrated their cultural heritage by giving presence and making important the doings of women at home. Although traditional representations of women relegated women to domestic life, framing women as caregivers, mothers and daughters, Chicana artists expanded the very narrow interpretation of women's work and social roles by using the languages of home to voice what women really did at home and their powerful potential in public domains. Artists translated and represented images and narratives of salient and popular female figures in the Chicano community to articulate home life perspectives bringing social justice to women's home lives at the same time that they shattered the concept that a woman's place is only at home.

Through their own “picture language,” artists articulated a Chicana feminist politics that brought new discursive debates to the idea that the images we create in our imagination come to life through the languages we use to express those images. Thus, images are powerful signs that only acquire meaning as they move across language and are inscribed with meaning as we signify and interpret images—what Jacques Lacan referred to as the concept of “signifying chains” (López, *Chicano Timespace* 31).¹³⁵ The presentation of La Malinche as a dual metaphor of tongue and language became a powerful mechanism for women to channel new perspectives of self as ‘speaking women’ and as “subjects-in-process.” Through their reinterpretations of La Malinche, Chicana artists show how language equals power.

Iconographical images of La Malinche figured by Montoya and López provide insight on how women reclaimed female cultural icons as they simultaneously manifested new definitions of themselves publicly. In their desire to capture the complexity of Chicana identity, Chicana artists set out on a quest to revolutionize the painted image of women with women-centered knowledge learned at home and cultivated among women’s domestic spaces. Whether perceived or real, how Chicana artists chose to imagine La Malinche underscores

¹³⁵ According to the *Critical Terms for Art History*, the explanation of what a sign is elucidates Anzaldúa’s point: “While in everyday language we often talk as if the significance of a work of art is inherent in its identity as object, this is somewhat at odds with our theoretical understanding of how objects convey meaning. We all know that we do not literally see meaning in a work of art. Rather something compels us to view it as having significance that is not simply to be found there in it as thing, and this compulsion clearly has a lot to do with the habits of our culture. The meaning we attribute to a work is not only mediated but in large part activated by cultural convention. Another way of putting this would be to say that a work of art operates like a sign. It points to or evokes a significance quite other than what it literally is as object through conventions of which we may or may not be consciously aware. The viewer who assigns significance to a work of visual art is like the user of a language who envisages a word or a text as having meaning because she or he has internalized the rules of the language concerned. [. . .] Even with this very basic definition of the object pointed to by the work, we should already be drawing on a complex web of linguistic signification surrounding paintings and other forms of visual image in our culture. If we proceeded for a moment with a laboriously explicit progress from sign to verbal sign, elaborating ever more specific meanings, we could go on to define the figure more closely by interpreting it as a portrait as distinct from a religious or symbolic image. This apparently simple designation opens up a number of divergent chains of interpretation, depending on the meaning we assign to the idea of a portrait. Portrait could be taken in its everyday significance as a likeness of the sitter that is in part determined by the painter’s response to her or him” (Potts, n. pag.).

the importance of language and discourse in expressing Chicana visual meaning that slides and shifts with time. These complex and evolving visualizations of La Malinche also demonstrate the development of a Chicana *lengua franca*.

In the art of Montoya and López, the languages of indo-Hispanic life blur the boundaries between nation, state, gender and sex through their transhistorical and indigenous interpretation of La Malinche. They transform La Malinche into a Chicana cultural foremother in public settings by making traditional domestic practices and spaces into public spaces. While they exhibit a feminized sense of rasquache aesthetics, their works also explore taboo themes, voices and language that reference the use of Chicana *placas*. For this reason, an interdisciplinary analysis of Chicana representations of La Malinche illustrates how Chicana *placas* revolutionize portrayals of *la lengua* by encoding La Malinche with a Chicana's understandings of language and tongue. This transformed La Malinche into a positive Chicana cultural foremother that has allowed women to challenge the public perpetuation of a Spanish Fantasy Heritage while also challenging the negative stereotypes in Chicano culture that negatively stereotypes the unique colonial unfolding of New Mexico.

In addition, while the works are celebrations of Chicana cultural heritage that stress the importance of the resistance and subversion of indigenous histories and the power of female spirituality to overcome colonization and invisibility in past and present contexts that coincide with the politics of *domesticana*, they simultaneously express the struggle and tension of the meaning of a woman by constructing La Malinche as a home-girl archetype. By making La Malinche native to New Mexico, La Malinche functions as a home-girl archetype that Montoya defines as a *Matachin* girl and which López represents as the faces and masks of women in Chicano culture. These thick descriptions of La Malinche

communicate methods of survival intertwined in the *mestiza*'s progressing notion of tongue that praises the continuation of indigenous practices today in altered and reframed contexts.

Dancing to the Beat of Malinche's Indo-Hispanic *Lengua*: A Feminist Voice in the Art of Delilah Montoya

The art of many New Mexico Hispanic women values and respects multiple perspectives and backgrounds. "Artist Delilah Montoya is a longtime resident of New Mexico, the ancestral homeland of her mother's family," wrote art historian Barnet-Sanchez (Barnet-Sanchez, *Montoya* 170). Born in Fort Worth, Texas in 1955, Montoya spent her formative years in the state of Nebraska. Despite her Midwest upbringing, many of her projects explore her mother's cultural roots. Many of the mythologies, ceremonies and cultural values of today's Indo-Hispanic culture define her style. As Barnet-Sanchez says, "Her work is grounded in the *mestizo* and *mestiza* experience of the Southwest and borderlands, bringing together a multiplicity of syncretic forms and practices, from those of Aztec Mexico and Spain to cross-bordered vernacular traditions, all of which are influenced by contemporary Native American and Anglo-American customs and values. Her work explores the unusual relationship that results from negotiating different ways of viewing, conceptualizing, representing, and consuming the worlds found in the Southwest from her own perspective as a feminist Chicana artist from a matriarchal family" (Barnet-Sanchez, *Montoya* 170).

Montoya approaches art as a form of documentation. As a photographic printmaker, she conceptualizes the complexities of Chicana/o culture. She portrays hybrid perspectives, which define the collective consciousness of Chicana/o communities. She explores identity issues through the visual expression she creates at the same time that she pays homage to the

diverse community elements that have shaped her notion of self. She exhibits a Chicana feminist political voice by tapping into the power of historical memory rooted in her cultural heritage. For Montoya, cultural heritage is a fountain of endless energy, power, and strength. For this reason, her art depicts the kinetic vitality contained in the positive estimation of religious, cultural, social, political and historical genealogies and memories of the Southwest.

In 1978, she completed an associate's degree in Commercial Photography and Art at the Metropolitan Technical College in Omaha, Nebraska. Montoya's journey to visualize the spirit of the Chicano movement pushed her to study art in New Mexico, where, in 1984, she received a Bachelor's degree in Studio Art from the University of New Mexico. In her early work she connected the written word (of writers, scholars and activists) to visual images. For instance, she illustrated the work of the Chicano poet, Alurista titled *A'nque* (1979). She also worked collaboratively with Cecilio García-Camarillo and participated in Reies López Tijerina's land grant movement in Tierra Amarilla. Her exhibition career began in the mid-1980s with shows such as *Retratos–Nuevo Mexicanos: A Collection of Hispanic New Mexican Photography* (1987) and *Chicano Aesthetics Rasquachismo* (1988); works which testify to the development of Montoya's artistic language as a Chicana feminist. Her illustrations also were featured in the literary and artistic magazine *Maize* (1977), and *Las mujeres hablan: An Anthology of Nuevo Mexicana Writers* (1988). In addition, she designed the book cover for *Aztlán: Essays of the Homeland* (1989) among others texts.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s Montoya was invited to participate in shows such as *Hecho a Mano* (1988) and Self-Help Graphics' *Otra Vez Gallery* (1989). Montoya represented the New Mexican sensibilities of *Chicanismo* and gained national recognition as one of the leading artists of the exhibit *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965-1985*,

a significant exhibit on Chicana/o art that toured the nation for several years. In 1990, she completed a Master's degree in Printmaking at The University of New Mexico and by 1994 completed a Master's in Fine Art in Studio Art. In 1992, she gained coast-to-coast recognition as a featured artist in two national exhibits *The Chicano Codices: Encountering Art of the Americas* and *Quincentennial Perspectives: Artists Discover Columbus*.

Montoya helped to create and represent the politics of Chicano power by continuing to study art in her mother's home region. Influenced by her mother's cultural legacy, Montoya helped to define the movements of Chicano visual culture and advanced Chicano activism by calling attention to the perpetuation of stereotypes among Chicanos and in dominant society as symptomatic of the workings of internal colonialism. In particular, the young artist challenged the conventional definitions of Chicana identity that stereotyped women into rigid social roles or excluded them from full participation or acceptance in their role as artists and Chicanas. In a talk titled "Sensualismo"¹³⁶ given at St. Mary's of Maryland for the *Crickets in my Mind Exhibit* (1992), the Hispanic artist said:

I've been at it for forty years, and it has been beautiful looking for what was missing not only in my life, but in the bloodstream of the government, churches, and institutions. When I first started on this journey I was trying to solve the enigma behind the hollow mythology that governed the two worlds that I saw, one dying because it was so fat and the other dying of starvation . . . but first let me tell you that I went to a biblical institute but left very soon because I couldn't stomach their mystical hang-ups, and then I joined militant Chicanos from New Mexico. (Montoya, "Sensualismo," 1)

¹³⁶ "Sensualism" (My translation).

With the passing of time, Montoya developed her voice as a Chicana feminist artist and she used art to illustrate the arrival of her own Chicana empowerment. She wished to show the strength of women's immediate contributions to society and across her cultural heritage. As a politicized Chicana, Montoya advocated for women's rights—she argued that frontier women have done the same thing for centuries; they have always needed to be revolutionary in order to survive.

In this way, she affirmed the oral traditions structuring New Mexicana lifestyles and the passing of knowledge from one woman to another. She made important the types of social networks and domestic practices not only in relation to the wisdom of home practices but also of women-centered values transmitted through the practice of arts and crafts. In this regard, her own artistic expression focused attention on the issue of the female body in art while introducing feminist and feminine systems of thought, imagination, and desires in visual culture that aimed to authenticate feminist representations of female images.

Montoya's artistic expression illustrates the solicitation of various Chicano traditions convening with Chicana traditions to shatter stereotypes of female images in the visual field. Art provided Montoya the opportunity to challenge contradictory values visually associated with female archetypal figures that defined women through two sets of rules, the good and the bad. The artist authenticated a new standard on the representation of female images through the camera's eye, by inverting negatives images of women in history into positive examples of agency for contemporary women and a multiracial nation, and a multiethnic America.

For Montoya the languages of community and unity as well as values of indo-Hispanic customs define the *mestizaje* that frames her feminist artistic imagery as seen in the

exhibits *Lifting the Veil: New Mexico Women* (2007) and the *Tricultural Myth* (2007). In her work, the Southwest is a Chicana and Chicano borderlands. Because she views the Southwest as her homeland she promotes the simultaneous existence of indigenous doctrines and Chicano politics. Through the camera lens, she brought forth a photographic perspective of the Southwest as a heteroglot indigenous nation invoking the myth of Aztlán. This context of heteroglossia enabled Montoya to develop an artistic philosophy rooted in the politics of her home heritage.

Since the 1990s, her art has been exhibited in numerous shows nationally and internationally. While there are too many exhibits to name here, her collaborative and individual shows, published works, and artist talks continue to unveil the unique ways Montoya manipulates cultural heritage to generate new positionalities where *mestizos* are in their homeland, celebrating the diversity of people. While her art reflects the principles governing *domesticana* politics—resisting patriarchy, placing a positive value on home life and elevating the domestic arts in visual culture—her style and approach in the search “for what was missing” in her life and the desire to “solve the enigma behind the hollow mythology that governed [her] two worlds” signal the development of Chicana *placas* (Montoya, “Sensualismo,” 1).

In her case, the integration of feminist and feminine visions into mainstream Chicano thought showcases a dialectical phenomenon among Chicana women working to bridge the expressions of traditional female cultural traditions of home with new social realities of working women in public rural, urban and *barrio* environments. This reference the roots of *rasquache* aesthetics but also crosses the borders of traditional understandings of *rasquachismo* that Barnett-Sanchez, in an earlier quote, hinted to as Montoya’s “unusual

relationship that results from negotiating different ways of viewing” the Southwest (Barnet-Sanchez, Montoya 170).

Thus, in 1992, Montoya had much to say about the 500-year anniversary of the Discovery of the Americas. Questions over the state and spirit of her own cultural background inspired *Codex*



Figure 28 Delilah Montoya Frame from *Codex Delilah* (1992)

Delilah: Six Deer Journey from Mechica to Chicana (1992). In *Codex Delilah*, Montoya “brought ancient indigenous migration stories together with the history of nuclear research in New Mexico,” notes Barnet-Sanchez (*Oxford* 170). By engaging with the meaning of *mestizaje*, Barnet-Sanchez observes how “she purposefully positions her work as an alternative to the mainstream, as a catalyst for issues of cultural identity” (*Oxford* 170). The exploration of her mixed cultural background to achieve a heightened ethnic awareness that finds value in hybridity remained a theme she continued to survey in the photographic project titled *Sagrado Corazón* (1994).¹³⁷

Now a professor of Art and Art History at the University of Houston, Texas, Montoya continues to shape her feminist vocabularies by illustrating the strength of women in publications such as *Women Boxers: The New Warriors* (2006) and by offering new paradigms of thinking about Chicana identity in relation to the interplay between text and

¹³⁷ In her series *Sagrado Corazón* (1994), her photographs bring the spectator into the world of Chicana consciousness by depicting *mestizas*, *mulatos* and native peoples within the confines of home. She transmits feminine and feminist attitudes that inspire the celebration of the diversity of life in the Southwest through female semiotics of cultural heritage as a powerful subject matter. Rooted in women’s sense of imagination and creativity, her snapshot *La Malinche* (1993) embodies the archetypal notion of homeland as feminine. Montoya’s *La Malinche* challenges colonial and imperialist stereotypes of the figure of La Malinche in the Southwest and abroad by highlighting the cultural legacies and knowledge of the Southwest that have always translated La Malinche as a positive, rather than negative, cultural artifact.

image in the idea of being *malcriada*. The recent exhibit co-curated by Delilah Montoya and Laura E. Pérez *Chicana Badgirls: Las Hociconas* (2009)¹³⁸ is a case in point. Collectively, she aims to debunk the negative and stereotyped codes relegated to racially mixed people and women in art by reframing the sign-system of bad language to her benefit.

Her use of *malcriada*, which means ill bred, unmannerly or impolite, describes Montoya's use of Chicana *placas*. As a feminist, her constant interrogation with the word *malcriada* shows how she inverts the semiotics of women as *malcriadas* (women as badly or ill-raised) based in part on her own lived experiences. By interpreting the word *malcriadas* as an idea that has meaning outside the ideology meant to denigrate and insult women, she embraces the culturally specific code of *malcriada*, and parallels it with the term *malinchismo*. This establishes a new system of signification on female identity by reframing the semiotics of labels and imaginings.

But the distinctive vocabularies of Montoya's work stem from the development of a feminist politics rooted in visions that represent domesticity as a powerhouse of female empowerment and activism. In Montoya's imaginary world, La Malinche is transformed into a symbol of non-verbal language of Chicana power. In fact, Montoya expands the visual field for the interpretation of La Malinche by interpreting the cultural figure's language acts as her desire for self-determination and self-affirmation, a perspective she initiated in *Codex Delilah* (1992) and further cultivated in the *Sagrado Corazón* project. *Codex Delilah*

¹³⁸ According to the Real Academia Española, The Royal Academy of the Spanish Language, *hocicon* is the adjective of the noun *hocico*, which describes "La parte más o menos prolongada de la cabeza de algunos animales, en que están la boca y las narices." ("The part of some animal's heads were the mouth and nose protrude." The Spanish adjective *hocicudo/a* is defined as "Dicho de una persona que tiene boca saliente" or "Dicho de un animal: De mucho hocico" ("Said of a person who has a protruding mouth" or "Said of an animal with a protruding mouth and nose"). In the colloquial sense of the term *hocicón/hocicon* describes a person who talks too much or sticks his nose in other people's affairs. ("Hocicón" Def. n. pag.).

recreates the codices missing in the understanding of pre-Hispanic culture-the graphic narratives of women by linking the figure of La Malinche to that of La Llorona. Montoya codes her work with the Chicana myth origin that tells the tale of Six-Deer, a Chicana who voyages through time and space to reclaim her identity while vindicating the identities of other women found in Chicana cultural heritage. Ann Marie Leimer's scholarship on *Codex Delilah* not only explains how the artist recodes La Malinche as Lloro-Lloro-Malinche but her extensive dissertation study, *Performing the Sacred: The Concept of Journey in Codex Delilah* (2005) underscores how:

Montoya hails from a family of strong, creative, and articulate women and, not surprisingly, feminist recuperation and reinterpretation of mythic and iconic figures from Chicana/o culture such as the Virgen de Guadalupe, La Malinche, and La Llorona form a central aspect of her work. Her reinterpretation of these figures parallels early reclamation of Chicana icons both in literature and in the visual arts. Increasingly interested in portraying images of women who step outside of accepted gender boundaries (the so-called *las malcriadas* or bad girls), Montoya recently exhibited her re-vision of *Doña Sebastiana* and is currently developing a photographic series on Chicana and Latina boxers with the assistance of María Theresa Márquez. (sic) (Leimer, 186)

Leimer's work accentuates the importance of Montoya's creative ingenuity to focus on La Malinche's "body as a conflicted site of desire, transgression, and creativity" in order to style La Malinche as a symbol of and a victim of transgression (Leimer, 320). Given Leimer's

detailed analysis of La Malinche in *Codex Delilah*, this study will focus on Montoya's representation of La Malinche titled *La Malinche* (1993) in the series titled *Sagrado Corazón*.

The devotion to the Sacred Heart that characterizes the spiritual life of New Mexicans thematically framed the photographic project *Sagrado Corazón /Sacred Heart*.¹³⁹ In the series of 25 collotypes produced by Montoya from 1993-1994, each image of the artist's book presents different conceptualizations of identity that illustrate the storytelling techniques of female non-verbal forms of narration. Thus, the 25 collotypes also can be analyzed to show how she encodes visual expression with Chicana sensibilities that makes evident the development of her own *placas*, as well as the overall development of a Chicana *lengua franca*. Each photograph reflects the artist's metalinguistic awareness of tongue and her deep understanding of the language of cultural *mestizaje*. Her images reference and signal the celebration of cultural syncretism.

One collotype in the collection illustrates how Montoya interprets La Malinche framing her as a symbolic representation of female power and resistance encoded in hybrid and native understandings of La Malinche as a



Figure 29 Delilah Montoya *La Malinche* (1993)

¹³⁹ *Sagrado Corazón* was a one-year thesis project Montoya completed as part of her Masters of Fine Arts Degree at the University of Mexico. Montoya investigated the “manifestation of the heart” represented in the myriad of meanings and perspectives afforded by Chicano peoples through the community (*Artist Statement 1*). She explores the relationship between Christian and pre-Columbian notions of the heart, crystallized during the Baroque period by analyzing the semiotic expressions of syncretism and hybridity coded in the concept of the heart; how the sacred heart is interpreted in divine and religious contexts while analyzing what “having heart” means as a socio-historic experience. For Montoya, the heart has powerful religious connotations. Equal to the heart as a divine symbol is the heart as a cultural icon. As a cultural icon, the heart operates on another level as a symbol of the religious cultural heritage of her own Aztec and Spanish legacies. The heart also signifies the spiritual homeland of her ancestors.

powerful figure and divine image in New Mexico. The work itself is titled *La Malinche*, thus reflects her use of La Malinche as a *placa* by using the languages of indo-Hispanic traditions to interpret the cultural figure. In the photograph of La Malinche, the cultural foremother is dually La Malinche of the *Matachin* dance and now a cultural foremother for Chicanas. There are many types of *Matachines* dances and, as a result, we can read Montoya's representation of the cultural figure as a *placa* announcing a home-grown archetype because the collotype is imbued with the particular vocabularies and notions of cultural *mestizaje* among *nuevomexicanos*. This image of La Malinche is imbued with the hidden language of cultural meaning about what it means to be a *nuevomexicana* that is particular to New Mexico while it also subverts dominant promotions of a Spanish fantasy heritage in the process.

In New Mexico, the *Matachines* dance is a ritual dance performed to honor La Virgen de Guadalupe or the patron saint of a given community. Although this dance tradition is tied to the ceremonial practices of indigenous communities (popular among the Pueblo community of New Mexico, Montoya's representation brings the often invisible significance of La Malinche's native influence on Chicano folklore. She illustrates a new reality of cultural *mestizaje* in New Mexico that codes Chicana/o visual culture with new meanings about *la lengua* by relocating what La Malinche means in the dance she represents via image. The dance transmits a dramatized form of storytelling about the conquest from the subject position of the subaltern passed on through oral traditions.

In the *Matachines* dance, a variety of masked and costumed characters perform an indigenous interpretation of the conquest. The dance combines European music and indigenous dance steps. The characters in the dance include the main protagonist, La

Malinche, followed by a cast comprising of El Monarca, Moctezuma, La Perejundia, El Toro, Los Abuelos, and additional dancers, usually 10-12, who are masked and dress differently from the other dancers. The two rows of masked dancers, who wear a *cupil* (crown), also carry a *pluma* (trident), a rattle or gourd. The *Matachines* dance, performance and ceremony came into existence as a way to offer a counter-narrative of the Discovery of the Americas among native and indigenous tribes across North America. The dance reflects cultural syncretism, and the skillful inscription of indigenous cultural values onto European structures of knowledge.¹⁴⁰

In “A History of the Matachines Dance,” Adrian Trevizo and Barbara Gilles explore the many facets of historical knowledge that contributed to the possible development of this folk tradition. In giving a detailed account of the *Matachines* dance found in Mexico and across greater Mexico, La Malinche’s power is rooted in the indigenous perspective that she is a goddess. Trevizo and Gilles explain:

At the turn this century, a traveler to central Mexico could observe a parallel to the “devilish sacrifices” in honor of a female divinity, ‘In the dance that the Indians preserve as a tradition of the ancient Mexican dances, Malinche is the only female and she is offered certain reverences and ceremonies.’ 51 And in present-day northern New Mexico, the matachines still perform the ofrenda de la palma (offering of the dance wand) in honor of La Malinche, ostensibly the personification of a Christian goodness.

¹⁴⁰ For more detailed reading on *Matachines* consult *Expressing New Mexico: Nuevomexicano Creativity, Ritual and Memory*, edited by Phillip B. Gonzales and *Nuevomexicano Cultural Legacy: Forms, Agencies, and Discourse* edited by Francisco A. Lomelí, Víctor A. Sorell, Génaro M. Padilla.

The Christian symbolism is present in Yaqui Indian *matachines* groups, in which the *malinche* represents the Virgin Mary.⁵² In Nahuatl, the Spanish *María* becomes *Malía* (which means “whirling one” in Nahuatl), and a Nahuatl has no “r” sound. With the addition of the honorific suffix *tzin*, or one of its variants, such designations as *Xanta Malietzin* occurs.⁵⁴ The *Malinche* of the *matachines* and related dances may well be a syncretized form of the Virgin Mary and one or more of the female divinities of the Nahuatl people, such as *Tonantzin*.⁵⁵ Whether Europeanized and Christian or pre-Hispanic and indigenous, this powerful supernatural is a worthy companion and valuable ally of revenant forces fighting for cultural survival. (122)

Therefore, the variations of this ritual dance reflect the changing cultural and social realities but its performance to venerate *La Malinche* or the idea of feminine divinity has continued in hidden and masked ways.

This is the subject of Enrique R. Lamadrid’s essay “*Moctezuma and the Elders, the Virgin and the Bull in New Mexico: the Matachines Dance of Greater Mexico.*” Lamadrid underscores the prevalent role *La Malinche* plays in the cultural practice of the *Matachines* dance in the land of enchantment. He details how the folk and popular dance is itself an act of cultural resistance and at the same time the dance celebrates cultural survival because it reverses the male point of view of *La Malinche* as a traitor. In fact, he observes the strength of *La Malinche* in the Southwest that corroborates with Montoya’s vision when he states:

The significance and details of *los Matachines* can vary widely between regions and cultures. In Hispano communities, it has a strong sacred character and is performed in devotion to *Guadalupe* and the saints. In Native communities it is often a more

secular celebration. . . . As a multiplicity of localized sub-themes play out, it becomes clear that besides the basic plot, innovation and change are the only constants of the *Matachines* traditions. The most compelling symbol of this protean versatility is incorporated into costumes, crowns, and objects like the palma held in the hands of dancers. Ultimately, communities perceive themselves in dance. Every year that dance evolves and speaks to the people of changing times. Unsatisfied with the single female role of the Malinche, women everywhere are participating as never before. In northern New Mexico and the Mexican state of Durango, all-female groups have emerged. . . . The truest consensus of the *Matachines* is that of eyes and hearts following the Malinche skipping between the lines of dancers on the plaza. She is hope. She is adoration. She is the future. (13-14)

Montoya uses her metalinguistic awareness of the *Matachines* to visually narrate Lamadrid's observation of women challenging conventional definitions of Hispano and Native American identity by showing the beauty of feminine indo-Hispanic roots and the subaltern understanding of gender roles and gender relations that give women agency. Exposing such visions in masked ways with pride is how Montoya reflects a *domesticana* sensibility with a *placas* style.

In Montoya's *La Malinche*, La Malinche is usually a female girl or preteen. In this collotype, La Malinche is Marissa Gonzales, a *mestiza* from the community who volunteers to perform the role of the historical La Malinche in the *Matachines* dance.¹⁴¹ In the collotype,

¹⁴¹ Montoya is able to depict an alter-native image of La Malinche by translating the hidden transcript coded in the representation of La Malinche in the *Matachines* dance into photography. As a result, the dance not only narrates the historical actions of La Malinche as an interpreter for Cortés, but also uses movement to present the other worlds that *mestizos* navigate through to resist and subvert the imposition of Western thought. The ritual dance is the symbolic expression of counter-hegemonic discourses all while also being a performance of cultural affirmation. In this sense, Montoya presents a new vision of La Malinche that depicts her as a dreaming

the young La Malinche wears a white dress, embroidered at the ends with lace reminiscent of a formal dress fit for a Holy Communion ceremony. The dress itself signifies cultural hybridity and the meshing of indigenous and European traditions.¹⁴² She wears white flat shoes and a veil that drapes freely over her hair. Malinche's all white dress references a young girl's innocence and preparation to receive a holy sacrament—a communion, or confirmation or baptism. Alternatively, the young woman also signifies La Llorona who was said to dress in all white. The young woman's dark brown hair is loose, falling over her shoulder on one side and reaching almost to her arms. She holds a candle and rosary in between her hands directly in front of her. A ring decorates a finger on her right hand while two rings shine on her left hand. She has brown, perhaps hazel eyes.

There is almost a sculptural stance to La Malinche's pose. The allusion to popular prints and conventional symbols reminiscent of a classical female virgin is signaled by her stance. La Malinche stands alone like a religious figure that is oversized—she is a life size statue of La Malinche. In fact, Montoya frames La Malinche as a Marian image that is reminiscent of *domesticana* practices of using religious language in secular ways. What is missing, however, is the classic downward gaze so often linked to female religious iconography. Montoya inserts matriarchal values in La Malinche by signifying her as a divine symbol meant to convey to the spectator the power of the feminine domain. In Montoya's photography, the divine La Malinche exhibits a gaze that is direct, confident and stern that inscribes a home-girl archetype of La Malinche. The camera's eye stares directly

warrior, a cultural guide, who created a resource from her voice and her movements with language. Montoya honors La Malinche by envisioning her as a powerful recourse as she celebrates her as a Chicana cultural foremother. A source of help in a difficult situation such as the unfolding events of the conquest, the artist focuses on the matriarchal, feminine and feminist visions that empowered La Malinche to use her language skills to mediate between the clash of cultures.

¹⁴² A traditional representation of La Malinche would have her dressed in a *huipil*.

into the young woman's eyes as she returns the stare at the viewer in a confident and piercing style of a *pachuca*.

Her gaze captivates the viewer's sight and you are immediately drawn to her beauty as much as her subjectivity and presence. Because the gaze is mutual, you look at La Malinche at the same time she looks at you; the portrayal of the young La Malinche violates the traditional tenets of voyeurism in photography. The young woman expresses the confidence of a woman in her motherland, with a gaze ready to speak. The fact that Montoya elaborated new identities for La Malinche and other important cultural icons such as Coatlicue, La Curandera, and La Genízera¹⁴³ demonstrates the artist's intent in creating a Chicana New Mexican pantheon of female deities through the convergence of domestic wisdom and street knowledge. By offering a syncretism of representations of goddesses, historical images and ordinary women, Montoya invokes new subjectivities about female beauty of *mestiza* women that affirms the emergence of Chicana *placas*.

In the photograph, La Malinche stands in stark contrast to her environment. La Malinche is the center of attention. A tablecloth functions as an altar cloth, showing the inventiveness, imagination and creativity of Chicana feminist *rasquache* aesthetics. The studio signals a home space with the presence of candles, curtains, drapes, and roses. With roses and candles on La Malinche's side, a spiritual atmosphere is created that parallels the way many virgins and saints are framed and decorated in religious contexts. Moreover, roses are symbolic for the Virgin Mary. The candles that rest elevated on both sides of her body reflect the element of devotion and spiritual life. The roses and decorations can be read as objects added to infiltrate the space. By showing La Malinche as a divine figure, Montoya

¹⁴³ *Genízera* means a daughter of mixed ancestry. In Spanish, the word *jenízera/a* was a term used in the caste system to describe a child of parents from different nationalities or backgrounds.

instills new meanings to the representation of La Malinche in Hispano and Chicano male-dominated visions, which view La Malinche as a *vendida*. This semiotic play expresses her Chicana *placas* as she breaks with La Malinche as a negative or taboo subject in Hispanic culture across languages of expression, meaning and context.

The artist's stylized landscape is meant to present a vision of home where objects do not disturb La Malinche as a subject, and which further invite the viewer to contemplate the multiple meanings of La Malinche. The use of colors within the same chromatic scheme avoids distraction from La Malinche through color or texture. A natural sense of calm establishes a space of spiritual and meditative reflection. Thus, the portrait is an intimate look into the household values of Chicana spirituality and what devotion looks like inside the private and often sacred spaces of female devotion. Montoya further affirms a *domesticana* politics, a Chicana sensibility to talk about La Malinche, by creating a sanctuary space for La Malinche.

In her thick description of what La Malinche means in Chicana/o homelands, this representation of La Malinche asserts a cultural pride about La Malinche woven in the messages of the *Matachines* onto the tapestry of Chicano culture and American art history. Because Montoya regards La Malinche as a divine symbol, she embodies a Chicana interpretation of spiritualism, hope and innocence that subverts the erasure of women in history and in contemporary times. For this reason, the image of La Malinche speaks about a certain awakening in Montoya's collective consciousness triggered by the misconceptions of Chicana artistic expression and the ostracism they faced when presenting their own visions of Chicano power during the height of the Chicano movement. What bothered Montoya most

about the early politics of the movement was the inability to see how Chicana art connected the core values of the movement.

As a result, her Chicana visual expression offers alternative modes of reading that only hybrid lenses of interpretation could bring forward. What Montoya truly advocated for, in her use of Geertz “thick description,” is the need for the manipulation of the dominant languages that govern all modes of communication, even our own structures of the imagination, in order to emancipate the indigenous languages that are inscribed, hidden, and coded in *mestizo* language, culture and thought. Montoya’s thick description of La Malinche affirms her coming into her own language. By deliberately engaging with the meaning of Chicana identity and her own connection to La Malinche, Montoya showed the survival of female oral traditions and strength of domestic memory crossing borders into new cultural and social fields. Thus, Montoya offers a revamped symbolic account of the intersections of religious, social and political as explored through the medium of photography. She offers a counter-narrative of La Malinche as a Chicana cultural foremother by using La Malinche’s metaphor as *la lengua* to encourage Chicanas to foster their own domestic and home rooted languages and to reclaim their identity through speech acts in the same way La Malinche created subjectivity for herself with language in a very public way.

In this regard, we can read *La Malinche* as Montoya’s thick description of innately Chicano practices of *rasquachismo* and *domesticana* manifesting in her visual vocabulary and charting new semiotic terrains through the practice of *placas*. Barnett-Sanchez’s concept of Chicana and Chicano art displaying a “critical discourse from within,” is useful to understand how Montoya’s construction of La Malinche addresses “the multiple roles of the vernacular in Chicano/a art” that “provide the first analytical mechanisms by which to

interrogate the specificities of what we see when we look at certain kinds of Chicano/a works of art from an expressly formal perspective” (“Tomás Ybarra-Frausto” 91). As the art historian states:

Rasquachismo and *domesticana* were not set forth as comprehensive structures applying to all Chicano/a art. Instead, they were offered as pathways for understanding conceptual and visual elements of certain art forms and their connection to the communities from which they came. To paraphrase Mesa-Bains, these concepts have assisted critics to understand how Chicano/a art contributed a means of constructing and redefining—not merely reflecting—identities, worldviews, and ideologies. Or as George Lipsitz wrote recently, Chicano art also constitutes a process of art-based community-making, not just community-based art-making. (“Tomás Ybarra-Frausto” 9)

For this reason, one of the most important elements of Montoya’s collotypes is how she creates a critical discourse beyond *domesticana*. By blending the private and domestic aesthetics developed among Chicana feminist artists, Montoya unveils how oral traditions also frame the domestic sphere and sense of popular culture among women. Montoya bridges the languages of *domesticana* with those of *rasquachismo* to create a constructed space that merges the domestic and public.

In Montoya’s effort to carry out a community project that explores the *mestiza/o* notion of identity, one way her work evidences *placas* is through the literal use of graffiti. Behind the veil of a *domesticana* setting, Montoya’s constructed space is adorned with *placas*. In her desire to include contemporary voices of how youth define Chicano identity, she enlisted young artists to help her construct the backdrop stage that framed the twenty-five

collotypes. She empowered them to utter their own Chicana/o tongues through the familiar style of visual writing of *placas*. By collaborating with young, Chicano artists and members of the community, Montoya's studio became a nurturing domestic space where public and private languages culturally affirmed Chicano power. As artists aided in the creation of Montoya's constructed space, "a process of art-based community-making" transformed the constructed spaces into a community of voices that graphed new cultural meaning onto the walls (Barnet-Sanchez, "Tomás Ybarra-Frausto" 93). But due to the high rate of heritage speakers of Spanish, especially among New Mexican youth, Montoya's use of Chicano *placas* most likely reflects a New Mexican version of the heritage learner of Spanish experience. This often-unconsidered voice, as well as her approach to a metalinguistic awareness of languages of youth, and the use of images to generate a new language of Chicana power represents the making of Chicano *placas* into Chicana *placas*. In *La Malinche* Montoya brings the street languages of youth and the sensibilities of public communication into home spaces.

The wall of transcript voices became an important backdrop where Montoya illustrated how Chicano *placas*, Chicano codes and symbols articulated a language of cultural resistance and affirmation. She empowered the language of young aerosol artists at home by inviting them to define a domesticized form of public art through spray paint. The domestic walls of home thus are transformed into a domestic poetic-mural. In this regard, the power and tradition of public art of the Chicano movement is a force of energy that decorates the intimate spaces of the home as these domestic murals staged her portraits. Young artists engage in the process of thinking about the meaning of cultural icons and also in the process

of empowering their own voice by defining their own identities in relation to ideas that linked domesticity and La Malinche.

Like oversized prints, the work of the young aerosol artists create a one of kind custom wallpaper that acts like poetic murals and miniature photomurals where the designs that define the cultural heritage of the artist's imagination are transferred onto the surface of home living, making them into domestic decals or *placas*. In her prints Montoya stretches new realities that create movements within a home setting from the energy generated through ritual dance and the memory of La Malinche that pierces the heart of the viewer with symbolic visual language.

Barthes' idea of the punctum effect where a photograph has the ability to 'pierce the viewer,' reveals how Montoya captures the aura and heart of La Malinche's messages by stressing her iconic importance for Chicanas as a metaphor of language and tongue. By referencing the world of meanings inscribed in the portrayal of La Malinche in ritual dances, her snapshot "pierces the viewer" with a Chicana feminist political voice. Her image documents a subjectivity in process at the same time it reminds people that despite the reality of the ever-changing nature of life, Chicanas have developed a language of their own that values the important cultural memory and the celebration of cultural heritage from feminist, feminine and domestic positionalities.

Montoya also brings prominence to the image of La Malinche by enlarging the cultural images usually relegated to a picture frame of a Chicano calendar print by using the walls of a home as a picture frame large enough to include the collective voices of a community. Montoya redefines the significance of interior design by rethinking the role of decoration in the depiction of cultural images. In *La Malinche*, Chicano/a *placas* continue to

have visibility but are redefined through the intimate symbols of a feminine world where curtains and flowers transform these poetic-murals and manifest feminist imaginaries into a language of altered meaning.

With her *malcriada* attitude of ‘why not use the whole wall,’ the domestic space itself becomes a system of semiotic negotiations and production helping to redefine La Malinche. While Montoya applies a *domesticana* sensibility to construct a vision of La Malinche, Gaspar de Alba’s “alter-native” reading of the ways Chicana feminist theorize new identities in Chicana and Chicano art also shows how the artist begins to mark *placas*. In “The Alter-Native Grain: Theorizing Chicano/a Popular Culture,” Gaspar de Alba theorizes:

One way of interpreting resistance in Chicana/o cultural production is through a semiotic reading of signs from a poststructuralist perspective, that is, a perspective that illuminates the many voices of a given sign—its multivocality—as well as the intertextual dialogue that exist in all cultural production. (104-105)

It is against the collective voices of artists’ spray-painted images where an enlarged and new discourse of La Malinche emerges in a context of the celebration of Chicana ways of understanding La Malinche as a Chicana semiotic center of language politics.¹⁴⁴ Shattering the traditional representation of La Malinche as the lover of Cortés often seen in Chicano

¹⁴⁴ In “The Alter-Native Grain: Theorizing Chicano/a Popular Culture,” Gaspar de Alba invokes “her Chicana feminist perspective” to outline “three approaches to reading resistance: (1) poststructuralist semiotics, used specifically to analyze the ways in which a popular text can signify and elicit *concientización*, or cathartic moments of political awareness; (2) ethnographic criticism, which explores different forms of audience reception to popular texts, particularly those that resist dominant ideologies in radical ways; and (3) *rasquachismo*, the theory and praxis of popular pleasures as subversive and uniquely working-class strategy, demonstrated by Chicano’s humor and by artistic appropriation of Chicano’s cultural ‘kitsch’.” (103) Later in her essay, Gaspar de Alba upholds Amalia Mesa-Bains argument that Chicana/o *rasquachismo* and *domesticana* is not kitsch when she states, “‘Kitsch’ is not an accurate translation or example of *rasquachismo*” (115). In this dissertation, I argue that a Chicana *lengua franca* results from the convergence of these three approaches at the level of language production and from the positionality of a heteroglot and hybrid dialogic imagination, which empowers women with a metalinguistic awareness of language.

calendar art, Montoya's collotype uses photomural techniques to articulate intimate understanding of La Malinche in a very public way.

Unlike a typical Chicano public space, with its usual range of colors and collection of prized male heroes, Montoya's constructed space is a feminist and feminine landscape that features a variety of elements which characterize the Chicana *lengua franca* in visual aesthetics. She manipulates print techniques and materials in her collotypes of home through feminist languages of culture. In fact, Montoya decolonized the image of La Malinche by favoring *mestiza* elements in her photos, converting photography into works of fine art and folk art that go beyond each art form, bridging the languages of each in order to bring to view the realities of *mestizaje*.

Because Montoya encodes the La Malinche with her own Chicana sign-system, as seen in the graffiti *placas* as well as her stance, in her thematic exploration of La Malinche Montoya underscores how she is without question a New Mexican cultural icon—a *nuevomexicana* home-girl/home-grown archetype. In the same way that Chicano ideology reversed the negative language on what *Chicano* meant, Montoya uses the feminist vocabularies of her cultural heritage and the feminine aspects of her understanding of feminine archetypes to infuse a *malcriada* politics into art where what is viewed as a bad woman in Western thought, is actually a powerful cultural archetypes in non-Western knowledge.

Hence, in the midst of the traditional views of looking at graffiti as a masculine language of the streets, Montoya's election to bring graffiti into the home creates a dialogue between public and private forms navigating cultural meaning through subaltern language practices. She brings justice to the interpretation of La Malinche in New Mexico by

manipulating a century's worth of meanings associated with La Malinche and symbolically presents the sacredness of La Malinche's speech acts which are imbedded in the hidden storyline of indigenous ritual dance. Montoya's *La Malinche* is perhaps one of the most powerful examples of the introduction of new non-verbal metalinguistic frameworks in the visual arts. She bridges La Malinche with La Chicana by showing that logos, wisdom and heroism of female glossing are elements that unite them. In her cryptographic exploration of La Malinche, Montoya unlocks the coded message of feminism and femininity in the figure of La Malinche and the hidden transcripts and codices rooted in female identity about the true meaning and value of women with voices that are publicly unapologetic just like *placas*.

Feminist Visual Communication in Apparel Design: The Art of Pola López

New Mexico is home to many high caliber Hispanic women artists. Some focus on continuing the long and rich history of New Mexico folk art by practicing traditional arts and crafts while others experiment and innovate through the incorporation of new technologies.

The work of Pola López achieves a unique balance of transforming the old into the new by using New Mexican Hispanic cultures as recourse for advancing a contemporary artistic expression. Her works encompass contemporary definitions of folk traditions and new definitions of American art informed from a multiethnic lens.

López creates art derived from the personal and careful observation and absorption of familial, cultural, religious, and ethnic community values of Northern New



Figure 30 Pola López *All One People* (1991)

Mexico and the wisdom of an art passed down through oral tradition that saturates the artistic expression of the Southwest. In works like *All One People* (1991), *Who Wins This Game?* (1991), and *Taos Matachines* (n.d.) López incorporates the unique symbolic expression of the Southwest by focusing attention on cultural practices and artifacts found across sectors of society. Works such as *I'm Not Your Hood Ornament* (1997) give importance to everyday events, while offering a Chicana feminist reading and critique of the complexities of ordinary culture.

López was born April 7, 1954 in Las Vegas, New Mexico to Anne Romero and Junio López. At an early age, López studied painting. As a child, she gravitated toward art in school and to projects of artistic nature. In addition to being a State Senator, her father owned the Alpha Printing Company, which published the Alpha News. Because López often accompanied her father to work, the world of print had a profound effect on her creative vision. The important roles of graphic arts to communicate news, to educate, and to enrich the mind, were among the strongest contributors shaping López's early exposure to the arts.

López pursued an art degree from New Mexico Highlands University but because college general education course requirements obstructed



Figure 31 Pola López *Who Wins This Game?* (1991)



Figure 33 Pola López *I'm Not Your Hood Ornament* (1997)



Figure 32 Pola López *Taos-Matachines* (n.d.)

her desire to practice art, she left school and set on a quest toward artistic self-discovery in 1972. Furthermore, the Brown Berets¹⁴⁵ left a lasting impression on the young López when they took over her high school during her junior year. Witness to the emergence of new public art during the early Chicano movement the budding artist pursued her passion.

In an interview with Kathryn Córdova, the artist recounted her reasons for leaving school, “I wanted to paint, to do my art” (68). In 1978, she opened La Galería de Colores, which served as a gallery space and art supply store because she noted, “that it’s hard for artists to get supplies” (Córdova 68). In business for nine years, the gallery afforded the artist the time, space, and resources to develop a style that started to grow into a more personalized form. She quickly showed her promise. As a talented self-taught artist, she explored her native New Mexico. It is through art that she developed a Chicana consciousness thematically that responded to the incessant journey to define her identity. With the passing of time, she met and wed a northern New Mexican wood artisan, Taoseño Luis Jaramillo, with whom she had two children, Catalana and Jazz. With Jaramillo, she relocated her art supply store to Taos under the name Taos Studio Connection.

For several years, as she raised her children, she focused on painting. After her divorce, she moved to Santa Fe. López brought her domestically cultivated and regionally saturated vision of the world to the public spaces and galleries of the state’s capital. Because of her interest in creating her own art, especially bringing voice and visibility to her hybrid cultural reality and heritage, she received much attention for her ability to use color to capture the aura of New Mexican Hispanic. The recipient of numerous “Best of Show” awards, her publications, book and film projects have impressed private collectors and art

¹⁴⁵ The Brown Berets are an organization that aims to improve Chicano communities by bringing about educational reform and an end to violence.

patrons who have collected her work over the trajectory of her artistic career. Indeed, the inspiring sense of human spirit in search of itself in the land of enchantment attracted art patrons, museum curators, and foundations to collect her work.

Her father is credited with introducing López to the continuous relationship between word and text and to the dialogistic nature of languages conveyed in artistic expression. With her father's support, López was encouraged to create the unique use of word and image when she was commissioned to help with his artistic endeavor in poetry. She illustrated *La jornada oscura*

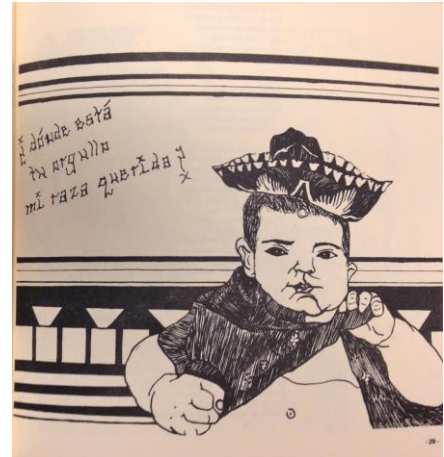


Figure 34 Pola López Illustration for “Orgullo de Raza” (1983)

(1983) a collections of his poems in Spanish and English. Published in Juárez, México by El Labrador Press, the salient theme of voyage is captured in the following quote, “In singular fashion we walk ‘La Jornada Oscura’ wondering when and where it will come to an end and if it will begin again” (n.pag.). López demonstrated her understanding of the rich cultural heritage of the borderlands through her study of Southwest culture in visual terms. As the poems alternate from English to Spanish, López shows the limitless possibilities of language in the interpretation of words in the imaginative world.

To briefly illustrate, in “Orgullo de Raza,”¹⁴⁶ the poet asks a series of questions that critique and confront the lack of cultural pride among *raza* exemplified in call-to-action Chicano literary pieces. The writer is lamenting the slow loss of cultural memory and pride previously seen during the Chicano movement. Instead of invoking dominant tropes defining

¹⁴⁶ “Raza Pride” (My translation).

the early Chicano movement, through the use of Mexican Revolutionary cultural heroes or Aztec warriors, a different sensibility is noted when the artist paints a baby boy in a *mariachi* or *charro* suit. López's understanding of her father's bilingual poetic expression allowed the artists to develop a metalinguistic awareness of her heritage she expresses in the use of text as image and image as text. She shows the acquisition of street language and the significance of Chicano *placas* when she uses wall writing in her illustration.

The artist appropriates the coded language of Chicano *placas* to show her father's sense of Chicano pride at the same time she uses Chicano *placas*, to exert a Chicana feminist critique about the limiting roles of women in relation to domestic and public spheres. The wall behind the boy is decorated with geometric figures and lines and the inscription of a Chicano *placa*. The stylized writing reads, “¿dónde está tu orgullo mi raza querida?”¹⁴⁷ (López, *Jornada* 28). Transforming text into image, López also transforms the meaning of the first verse of the poem by using artistic license to construct a liminal space for hybrid voices of Chicana/o culture to come to life. Chicana *placas* describe a vernacular that reflects how women applied and translated the linguistic sensibilities of *pachuco* speech and of Chicano argot as well as the wisdom of home culture to their own experiences.

Appropriating public and *pachuco* language use and expression, López illustrates how she developed her own *placas* to bring to the public female perspectives on Chicano language. Chicana *placas* refers to the linguistic repertoire, style and design of utilizing all languages at hand and if necessary inventing new modes of expression to make the history of women visible. López exhibits an emerging *placa* style by juxtaposing the image of the boy with a textual marker that function as a visual call to action to think about Chicano

¹⁴⁷ “Where is your pride my beloved people?” (My translation).

commitment and fidelity to the ideals of the movement. In visualizing a poetic depiction of “raza” she inserts her own critique and depiction of *raza* politics by not only writing in Spanish but by constructing a visual space with the patterning and visual codes of Chicano public life that compliments the poems. She compliments the verses in the poem that read, “¿Dónde está tu orgullo/ Mi querida raza?/ ¿Cuánto lo perdiste/ Que no se olvida? Nunca Me dijiste/Hasta ahora/Que bendito estaba/Y el tiempo no borraba [. . .]”¹⁴⁸ (López, *Jornada* 28). Visually “¿dónde está tu orgullo mi raza querida?” is expressed in a *placa*, the language and code systems of *pachuco* culture (López, *Jornada* 28). By writing in *placas*, López shows her awareness of *pachuco* life, the power of the graphic lettering of *pachuco* calligraphy, and the weight of *pachuco* words scribed deliberately on public walls.

Her artistic use of language, in both the use of writing and symbolic figures, place value on the sensibilities defining New Mexican identity: the unique vernacular of Northern New Mexican dialect, the development of Chicano cultural aesthetics rooted in the respect of nature, rural life and the recognition of an indo-Hispanic reality. I cite this work in particular because it shows how she broke into the public spaces of the Chicano art scene by creating her own Chicana language by domesticizing Chicano *placas*. In López’s case, the ongoing use of written language as a graphic tool has proven to be a useful method to articulate her Chicana feminist perspective with clarity, voice, and empowerment. In this sense, López follows La Malinche’s path as a cultural mediator, her art is a graphic narrative that mediates between worlds and languages in the same way that La Malinche transculturated meaning and codes across languages.

¹⁴⁸ “Where is your pride/My beloved people?/How much you have lost? That you have forgotten?/ You never told me/Until Now/How sacred it was/And time did not erase [. . .]” (My translation).

Practicing art for well over 25 years, López has continued to discover and rediscover herself in the medium of paintings. Currently, she lives and works in Los Angeles where she fosters new visions of the future of Chicana art. She continues to create works of art that celebrate her New Mexican roots and



Figure 35 Pola López *Martha of Quetzal* (2013)

Chicana feminist traditions by illustrating images of women’s history in pictures, images of women left out of art history and by giving voice to contemporary female activists in Chicano popular culture. For example, in *Martha of Quetzal* (2013) López frames Martha González, a Chicana singer of the East Los Angeles band Quetzal, as a fierce model of Chicana power. This work of art also belongs to a series the artist refers to as “small paintings in brown frames” which focus attention on young and contemporary Chicana activists in the Los Angeles area (López, “Pola’s Blog Spot” n. pag.).

In *Angel Warrior Elegante* (2013) López captures the beauty of older women and the confidence a woman gains in old age when she embraces her identity without reservation. By pairing the Spanish word “*elegante*,” meaning elegant, with “angel warrior,” López redefines how we should read images of older women with multiple languages. In her work,



Figure 36 Pola López *Angel Warrior Elegante* (2013)

the woman is stylish in appearance, with a confident look parallel to a flamenco dancer. She stands gracefully and exhibits a sense of pride in wearing a *rebozo* (shawl) and American

Indian jewelry made of turquoise and coral. Her body language signals Chicana *placas* because it reflects the pose of confidence seen among males in the streets. This parallels M. González's gaze in the previous picture. Given that M. González is a home-girl from East L.A., López manipulates the history of aesthetic production in the portraiture of M. González, by appropriating the poses assigned to males to create a Chicana *placa* of M. González as *firme*.¹⁴⁹ Her image is a visual text of a woman worth naming, a significant contemporary *artist* who makes public announcements of the types of metalinguistic expression of women in music. Her music articulates new avenues of Chicana imaginaries.

The exploration of images of women as signs emphasizing the multiple interpretations of what Chicana means has been a transcendental theme in López work. For this reason, the multiple meanings she navigates in her use of text and image shows how she has developed a metalinguistic awareness of the potential of the Chicana tongues she voices through the interplay between text and image. Her non-verbal language, observed Kathryn Córdova, is filled with a sense of consciousness and critical thinking. Her art is Chicana “picture language,” as Gloria Anzaldúa would say, that uses non-verbal forms of communication to articulate a Chicana feminism that embraces all forms of female hybrid traditions. In other words, the artist's *placas* approach to art expresses the political uses of cultural heritage by revising the role of women in traditional practices of art production. Through *placas* she is able to mark, label, tag and show the many faces and masks of women across history as illustrated in *Huipil: Vestido de Mujer* (2001).

¹⁴⁹ “Firme” is a word in *caló* for someone who looks good or is of respectable character as a result of an outstanding quality of trait. (My translation).

In *Huipil: Vestido de Mujer* López draws from the new political force in Chicana cultural production to establish the natural alignment and connection between contemporary Chicana feminist ideologies to the politics of resistance and survival of indigenous traditions and practices. Working in non-verbal forms, she critiques the historical misrepresentation and underrepresentation of women in art. While the artist had painted an earlier study, the final painting was exhibited in 2001 in her studio gallery in downtown Santa Fe. López showed this work in an exhibit that she and other Chicana artists organized in defense of Alma Lopez's controversy with the *Our Lady* (1999) art piece. Our Lady was included in an exhibition titled *Cyber Arte: Tradition Meets Technology* curated by Dr. Tey Marianna Nunn at the Museum of International Folk Art (MOIFA) in Santa Fe, New Mexico. But because *Our Lady* (1999) featured the Virgin of Guadalupe in a flower bathing suit, criticism and controversy erupted from Catholics who considered the Californian artist's vision too provocative.¹⁵⁰



Figure 37 Pola López *Huipil: Vestido de Mujer* (2001)

With the help of a collective of active Chicana feminists, López used her exhibit space, Emanations Studio Gallery in downtown Santa Fe, New Mexico, to counter the lack of respect for Chicana feminist politics, and Latina traditions and contemporary indigenous women artists. With the name, *Las Malcriadas....Coloring Out of the Lines* (2001), the show aimed to create solidarity for Alma López and promoted unity and the right to Chicana self-expression. In this exhibit, Chicanas focused on “taboo” subjects and themes as a way to

¹⁵⁰ For a complete account of Alma López's controversy see *Our Lady of Controversy Alma López's "Irreverent Apparition"* (2011).

respond to the idea that women produced “bad” art and that their expression reflected “unscrupulous” behavior and attitudes. The following year, *Huipil: Vestido de Mujer* was exhibited at the National Hispanic Cultural Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico for the exhibit *AHORA, New Mexican Hispanic Art* (2002).

The subject of *Huipil: Vestido de Mujer* (2001) is a woman’s indigenous blouse or dress known across the Americas as a *huipil*. The most famous *huipil* is that of La Malinche. In fact, because La Malinche is only depicted in codices wearing a *huipil*, López visually inscribes new Chicana codices about La Malinche through the image of the *huipil*. López’s *huipil* becomes a way to create discussion about the representation of women through the mother of *mestizaje*, the figure of La Malinche. She uses the *huipil* as a metaphor of La Malinche and La Malinche as a metaphor of language and tongue. Thus, the *huipil* symbolically references the language and tongue of women, and is a Chicana *placa* signing La Malinche.

Because indigenous dress is itself a coded matrix of cultural pride and belonging, López chose the *huipil* as a symbolic reference to La Malinche in order to discuss the importance of visual languages represented through images and its relation to dress to define cultural heritage. López engages in a study on the symbolic mother of *mestizaje* to provide a critique on the role and representation of women and to discuss how female identities are made. Referencing this cultural and historical artifact, López creates cultural continuity among pre-Hispanic women and *mestizas*, indigenous and Chicana women today through the *huipil*. In her hidden transcript of La Malinche, the *huipil* is a symbolic reference to La Malinche as much as the articulation of the resistance toward assimilation and acculturation by women through wardrobe. Like La Malinche who always is depicted wearing a *huipil*, the

present day use and popularity of *huipiles* in the twentieth century shows the reality of incomplete colonization of women's bodies despite the historical violence inflicted on women across history.

Because the *huipil* dominates the canvas, the spectator is forced to focus on the *huipil* and the designs that characterize the *huipil*. The sheer magnitude of the *huipil's* size also stresses the importance the artist gives to the idea of women's fashion. She styles new representations of female identity through a reframing of wardrobe. Because the garment identifies the indigenous group and the community a woman belongs to, it is common for a *huipil* to vary in design. In other words, there are variations in *huipil* design because the *huipil*, embroidered with geometric designs, states where you come from, who you are and why you are wearing it. Given that embroidered geometric designs in various colors differentiate one *huipil* from another, both color and design act as a visual language where women communicate who they are and what they are not. Moreover, each *huipil* has a weaving and embroidering that is unique because each designs defines whether the *huipil* is a tunic worn for everyday use or if the *huipil* is meant for a special ceremony, religious ritual or event.

The *huipil* also is a feminine celebration of ethnic and cultural pride because it transmits important values of women from one generation to another. Thus, in López's 46 x 46 acrylic painting, López voices the complex terms of Chicana identity by presenting the dualities and multiperspective images of women. Her representation of the figure of "La llorona," "La virgen," "La reina," "La loca," "La ángel," "La puta," "La bruja/curandera,"

“La diosa” and “Superwoman”¹⁵¹ engage the relationship between word and image that taps into the visual language of her cultural heritage. Each image is represented both verbally as well as visually, calling upon the viewer to contemplate these multiple signs and their symbolic significance. She uses color as an indigenous and spiritual practice that reimagines female identity because, for the artist, the use of color has two parts, the physical and the spiritual energy behind (Interview 2014). Recuperating those *mestiza* and indigenous sensibilities that are innately feminine in the representation of her cosmic vision led the artist to use the *huipil* to explore female images. The artist’s *huipil* is a personal statement about the strength of La Malinche’s legacy through geometric design, words and symbols about contemporary female identity.

In her use of text and image like a *placa*, she fashions a *huipil* that represents a spectrum of female cultural representations and describes the positive and negative associations linked to each labeled-woman. The geometric dimensions of each block explore the different dimensions of the core selves of women and the coloring that goes behind that identity, as seen in the tears of “La llorona,” the eyes of “La curandera,” and the heart of “La malcriada.” The *huipil* is designed as geometric grid, where aside from referencing indigenous architecture, design, and mathematical wisdom, the different geometric pieces of the *huipil* express the indigenous idea that while each piece of the *huipil* is its own representation and world, the varying pieces that decorate the *huipil* can come together to become a whole.

¹⁵¹ “La llorona,” (The Wailer); “La virgen,” (The Virgin); “La reina,” (The Queen); “La loca,” (The Crazy Woman); “La ángel,” (The Angel); “La puta,” (The Whore); “La bruja/curandera,” (The Witch/Healer); and “La diosa” (The Goddess) (My Translation).

In the middle of grid-like representation of women that characterizes the *huipil* is “La diosa” but directly below is the symbol of the common superhero “S” (like that of Superman) with the written word Superwoman below. The lipstick red “S,” is a sign and color of empowerment. Unlike the scarlet red “A” as a sign of shame in the dress of the young woman Hester Prynne in *The Scarlett Letter* (1850) by Nathaniel Hawthorne, López’s “S” makes a powerful feminist statement—the everyday Chicana is symbolically a superhero and not a figure of shame. López presents images of Chicanas as models to follow because they are neither the extreme of a positive stereotype of a woman, “La virgen;” or negative stereotype of a woman, “La malcriada”. Ordinary women, as López illustrates, are the real super heroes. The development of a feminist philosophy that values ordinary women and see them as cultural role models is communicated in the box designated to the Superwoman.

López defines Chicanas as Superwomen when she illustrates with words, “la mama, la hija, la tía, la abuela, la prima, la suegra, la vecina, la nieta, la amiga... ..I make tortillas, I babysit, I save money for your emergencies, I clean. I cook. I’m always there. Super Woman.” They are the unspoken counterparts of the extreme (*la contra cara invisible*), a kind of antidote to the unrealistic extreme of binary relations that govern the representations of women in dominant society.

Each *huipil* design represents one of many *máscaras* (masks) and *caras* (faces) that Chicanas have to signify who they are, thus representing the plurality of Chicana identity. López states, “it is an idea of wearing our faces, caras, our mascaras of who we are. We wear different faces at different times” (Telephone Interview 2014). The *huipil* is replete with encoded messages that reference Chicana feminist politics. The *huipil* explores the very notion of what Chicana and *Chicana* signifies as a codex, or *placa*. Thus, she creates a *huipil*

of her own that questions the labeling of others as an act of resistance to establish a dialogue empowering's one voice while paying respect to La Malinche. That said, among the various *máscaras* and *caras* López articulates in reversing the negative representation of La Malinche symbolically signs the origin of negative stereotyping of women. She also offers a different realm that inscribes new concepts in the manipulation of negative language used to describe women to voice a new sense of self and group affirmation that engraves a positive space for women in language itself.

Not only does López's work reveal how a Chicana from the borderlands views La Malinche, the way she contextualizes La Malinche establishes how women of color can address the misrepresentation of ethnic women in visual domains. With each work she offers a story that visually affirms the grains of resistance that has allowed native cultures to survive admits colonization and genocide as well as a Hispano culture that learned to adapt to changing circumstances in the face of isolation by customizing indigenous peoples. Her art truly reflects a Chicana feminist rendition of self-affirmation, cultural nationalism and self-determination.

In her use of text and image the artist conveys a deeply feminine cosmology and pantheon that defines Chicana cultural archetypes through the use of written language and text as graphic representation dialogues with female iconography in Chicana cultural heritage. In this sense her visual language expresses her Chicana *placas*, feminist coded graphics and images that present a new voice about women's identity, and which redefines women in public art.

Like other revisionist efforts in Chicana art, López challenged distorted representations of La Malinche found in traditional visual culture through a feminist

metalinguistic awareness of her. Domestic and indigenous teachings of La Malinche in New Mexico interpret the figure of La Malinche from the position of *mestiza* and native philosophies that interpret her image in counter-hegemonic fashions to dominant and colonialist tradition. In indo-Hispanic contexts, La Malinche is not a traitor, but rather an innocent woman who represents hope. She is symbolically the future mother figure because as the mother of hybridity her legacy is the guiding force for all generations to come. In other words, López conveys the power of La Malinche's legacy and voice by showing how she is connected to the land through the idea of the "mother earth."

With a desert landscape decorating the backdrop scene of the *Huipil: Vestido de Mujer*, invoking nature with indigenous feminine perspective is another form of exhibiting *placas*. The *huipil* is spread over the cactus, almost as if the cactus wears the *huipil* with a posture of with pride and honor. The painting itself speaks about how López transmits a matriarchal worldview where women are rooted to land and where feminine elements are celebrated as sacred symbols and realities.

López also shows a female interpretation of the desert landscape to convey the idea that the Southwest desert is full of life and color like the women who inhabit the land and the female heritage that nurtures contemporary interpretations of the Chicana imaginary. This painting reflects the Chicana sensibilities of manifesting a visual culture where the identity of Chicanas are linked to and signified by the particular places they call home.

The New Mexican artist achieves such perspectives by debunking the stereotypical view of the desert as arid, barren and lifeless. López presents a landscape full of life. As she personifies the desert landscape and textures a Chicana *huipil* with new symbols and forms López creates a Chicana sign-system that resurrects indigenous values that connects woman

to land and both to a symbiotic and harmonious relationship. Like Montoya, López's creates art that transmits the empowerment of Chicana languages through the embrace of indigenous forms of spiritualism and the affirmation of indigenous practices and perspectives that make *mestizo* identity in the American Southwest unique.

Surrounding the *huipil* are vibrant forms of flora found in the American Southwest such as *Echinocereus pectinatus* (Mexican rainbow cactus), *Escobaria villardii* (Sacramento Mountain foxtail cactus), *Opuntia valida* (San Antonio prickly pear) and *Opuntia phaeacantha* Tulip prickly pear. López's use of plants exclusive to New Mexico or in the Borderlands of the Southwest reveals another level of inscribing Chicana perspectives to visual culture. Many of the plants in the painting have medicinal properties and are regarded as sacred plants. By incorporating healing plants into her painting, López demonstrates her knowledge of botany and its significance in culture. The artist pays homage to *curanderas*, women who practice folk medicine in the Southwest.

Thus, López imagery sends positive messages about the desert and about women that links women with nature as a collective unite. The artist expresses a tender and yet full of life understanding of dessert life that has life even in the indigo-purple shades of night. In this painting, López's use of blending shades of indigo and purples defines a night's sky as a colorful and beautiful visual experience. The desert plants that surround the *huipil* give a sense that they are framing the *huipil*. In the same way, the aura of the sky embraces the varying dessert plants and the *huipil*. Together sky, plants, and *huipil* create a visual harmony between nature's elements and the humanity of women as symbolized in the *huipil*. This exhibits how López invokes her home languages to define her artistic expression.

There is no question that López's artistic style focuses on redefining the representation of women in history and generating a new respect for underrepresented groups through art. While the artist represents women in new roles with subjectivity, presence and through her use of colors, texts and images, she generates a new politics of identity for women. In her paintings, brush strokes articulate a strong sense of power that illustrates the dialogic synchrony between image and text. In her art, she draws from the literal meanings of written language and the symbolic interpretation of non-verbal language to construct a visual vocabulary that celebrates the hybrid elements of cultural heritage from the subject position of a politicized Chicana.

López defines her artwork as, “featuring contemporary fine art with the flavor-sabor of a fusion of *Mestizo* (mixed indigenous/European background), Latina, (Latin feminist), Chicana/Chicano, (social and political art) and Hispanic art genres. Colorist oil paintings with the spirit-espíritu of magic realism; crows, corn, Mayan symbols and local images of her native New Mexico are available” (sic) (López, “Pola López Visual Artist” n. pag.). But the particular mix of López's language pedagogy also embraces a heteroglot tongue that validates the hybrid language of visual empowerment cultivated at home. “Therefore her vibrant canvases are immersed in the symbols of a *Mestizo* culture that encompasses European and native influences with a definite indigenous feminine perspective,” (López, “Biography: About the Artist” n. pag.).

In sum, Montoya's and Lopez's feminist renditions on La Malinche provide a rich context for analyzing how Chicanas used the creative arts to communicate ideological perspectives on what it meant to be Chicana, to affirm the creative power of women, and to foster a space where public and private dialogues of Chicana community were welcome. The

visual language employed to give life to the imaginings of the Chicana artist records the types of artistic release women need, without fear or limitation. By depicting themselves in domestic contexts and by using domestic content to construct a world where they were included and visible, women's subjectivity shifted from a position of being objectified and exclusion to one of belonging. The artwork by Montoya and López also disclosed the advent of a new economic exchange among women—women were building community in public art spaces and announcing their relations in a public manner by working together. Chicana artistic production envisaged domestic gazes that enacted their own particular locality and vision of the world. Through the manipulation of their cultural heritage, women reclaimed a mother tongue and female visions dismissed and affected by colonization and conquest through the inventive form and textual-visual 'manipulations' that Chicana *placas* license.

Chapter 6: Representations of La Malinche as a Speaking Glyphs in Chicana Art

Chicana feminist artists in the twenty-first century continue to demonstrate the significance and relevance of La Malinche in visual culture. Building from early Chicana revisionist works, new depictions show both continuity and change to the established motif of La Malinche as a symbolic cultural foremother. The use of new material expression on La Malinche reveals how women continue to break into new artistic frontiers from earlier representations of La Malinche as a Chicana archetype of *la lengua*. By contemplating new visions that represent La Malinche as a positive representation of language and tongue Chicanas continue to empower their own voices and languages to define Chicana identity.

Innovations to depictions of La Malinche in traditional art practices today, such as in paintings and illustrations, reveal the Chicana tradition of viewing La Malinche as *la lengua*. At the same time, the introduction of La Malinche as a subject matter in new artistic mediums, such as sculpture and installation art, illustrates the different ways women use La Malinche to discuss issues related to language within Chicano traditions and especially within bilingual and heritage speakers of Spanish.

Maya Christina Gonzalez and Viviana (Viva) Paredes are two artists extending the symbolic representation of La Malinche as an image of language and tongue into a “speaking glyph”. In their depictions, both Gonzalez¹⁵² and Paredes reflect the Chicana imagination’s ability to advocate the goals of movement and Chicana feminist ideologies by depicting La Malinche as a semiotic force of language to support positive representations of subjectivity

¹⁵² The use of Gonzalez in this chapter makes reference to Maya Christina Gonzalez. All other Gonzalezes will be identified with the initial of their first name.

and identity related to speaking. Because these two artists represent La Malinche as a “speaking glyph” or reference La Malinche’s image as a speaking subject, they not only show the different languages women develop to understand La Malinche today but also represent the cross-border and trans-American dialogues occurring in the borderlands.

This chapter analyzes how Gonzalez makes new inroads to La Malinche through her incorporation of La Malinche as a paramount cultural image in children’s books that illustrate La Malinche as a positive female role model and also in the works *Self-portrait Speaking Fire and Flowers* (2008), and *La Malinche* (2009). Gonzalez celebrates the cultural legacy of the very actions that granted La Malinche historical presence by giving new meaning to her speech acts across inter-generational audiences. The artist advances a Chicana perspective on La Malinche by carving a space in art that supports decolonial forms of storytelling.

Meanwhile for Paredes, a thematic exploration of La Malinche as a “speaking glyph” provides a space in which to reclaim a sense of cultural and linguistic loss at the same time that it articulates a language of survival among female domestic realms. In *Pocha Tongues* (2004) and *Pocha Indígena* (2005), the sculpted tongues are themselves represented as if speaking like a three dimensional model of La Malinche’s own speech glyphs. As a heritage speaker of Spanish Paredes reclaims her *mestiza* roots and regenerates the wisdom of women through her sculptures of tongues. The tongues symbolically reference the historical record of La Malinche’s many tongues. Her series of tongues invoke language issues and articulate advanced notions of using one’s cultural memory to revitalize indigenous knowledge by bringing new meaning to oral and popular traditions in today’s trans-American society.

This chapter focuses on the work by Gonzalez and Paredes who represent La Malinche as a “speaking glyph” to show how story and image operate as a shifting sign, or a Chicana *placa*. These women code La Malinche with *mestiza* languages that bring forth new visions on indigeneity and *mestizaje*, while continuing to deconstruct patriarchal language by altering language.

For example, the move from literal to more symbolic representations of La Malinche shows the semiotic power of Chicana systems of communications that have developed over time. The uses of speech glyphs, as well as other symbolic language referencing La Malinche, illustrate how women continue to navigate the complex system of signs, signifiers and referents in a way that more openly manipulates and alters the language of La Malinche to tell new stories. Both artists reflect the complexities ingrained in the affirmation of the cultural heritage of *mestiza* women today that confirms the development of a Chicana *lengua franca*, and through their unique form of signing La Malinche as a *placa*. In their works, the expression of a Chicana identity is in constant dialogue with the language of visual culture, cultural memory, and sense of Chicana/o heritage as they intersect with each individual person’s lived and historical reality.

In this way, the artists show the relevance of *domesticana* traditions outlined by early Chicana visual artists while simultaneously using La Malinche’s speech glyph as a Chicana *placa* in an effort to further decolonize the languages of official and unofficial histories, whether written, illustrated or communicated orally. They reference the pictorial depictions of La Malinche as a translator and interpreter in the historical archive *General History of the Things of New Spain: The Florentine Codex* (1590) by Fray Bernardino de Sahagún in order to signify the legacy of La Malinche’s role as interpreter and translator in visual frameworks

(Figure 40). The images of La Malinche in these codices record indigenous histories, societal traditions, cultural practices valuable to Chicanas because the textual and visual cultural *mestizaje* of indigenous and Spanish forms of communication offer women the opportunity to tell new stories from their sensibilities on language-meaning-text-image.

The analysis of La Malinche's representation as speaking subject through the use of speech glyph show the types of visual vocabularies Chicanas use to remap subaltern identity. They advance Pola López and Delilah Montoya's *malcriada* politics and attitude by manipulating both text and image to sign a metalinguistic awareness of Chicana identity, flipping and revising codes in order to re-read this cultural foremother. Gonzalez's and Paredes' advancement of La Malinche's speech glyph into a Chicana *placa*, signifying female subjectivity and speaking women, transforms the indigenous speech glyphs into contemporary indigenous *placas*, useful in the affirmation of Chicana identity.

Deslices del *grito* de la chicana: La Malinche as a Speaking Glyph in the Art of Maya Christina Gonzalez

A leading American illustrator of multicultural children's books, Maya Christina Gonzalez is a Chicana painter based in San Francisco. She was born January 24, 1964. "I grew up in the Mojave Desert of Southern California in the 1960s and 1970s in a town called Lancaster. I felt like I was out in the middle of nowhere. The world was all sky and desert. My father was a lineman and my mother was a homemaker. My father is Mexican American and my mother is white. I have a younger brother close to my age named David," states the artist ("Maya Christina Gonzalez," 1).

When her family moved from California to Oregon, Gonzalez's multicultural identity made her unique. During her adolescent years, she turned to writing to express this difference,

which motivated her to pursue a degree in creative writing at the University of Oregon. In college Gonzalez saw literature as a way to connect to the world. She read the scholarship of emerging Chicana writers and identified most with the experiences of subaltern and multiethnic literatures of the world. It was not until near the completion of a writing program at the University of Oregon, that she discovered art. Gonzalez enrolled in an art history course after a friend pleaded for company, but, once in class, she realized art was the language of her spirit. She best explained the relationship between the desert and her own identity formation as a Chicana and artist when she stated in an interview:

My favorite thing about the desert was the sunset. In general, there wasn't a lot of vibrant color. Things were very beige and muted. But nearly every evening, the sky at the end of our street looked like smeared fuchsias--all reds, pinks, purples and oranges. I became fixated on what I used to call Hot Pink. It was my personal color. The sky presented it to me every night in a passionate way that I took very personally. ("Maya Christina Gonzalez," 1-2)¹⁵³

The art history class reignited the stored memory of her childhood about herself as an artist. In fact, the study of art reawakened the spiritual ties to landscapes her mind and soul had

¹⁵³ She continues to elaborate: "My love of Hot Pink followed my love of drawing. I tell this story often to grown-ups and kids when I speak about my work. As a little kid, my favorite parts of coloring books, or any book for that matter, were the very first and very last pages--the empty ones. I would draw in my big round Chicana face every time. I believe in some way I knew that I belonged in those books, that my face should be reflected back at me from those pages. Growing up, while I did come in contact with a great many books, I never saw myself in any of them. Not only did I not see myself, I was never struck by the art or the characters in them, the way I was struck by the sunset. The books felt valuable because I loved learning, but they felt far away. I longed for reflections like the sunset. I looked for myself, for my face, out there in the world around me. When I grew up, I retained a feeling that the literature and media that a child reads and looks at should be a real reflection of her life, inside and outside. This provides a sense of being embedded in reality, a sense of belonging" ("Maya Christina Gonzalez, 1-2)

much enjoyed as a child. Gonzalez recognized that she had developed an artistic sensibility from her connection to mother earth.

Art became the space in which Gonzalez depicted a “critical discourse from within,” as art historian Holly Barnet-Sanchez has observed about the distinctive art practices of Chicana artists (“Tomás Ybarra-Frausto” 91). She first cultivated her artistic sensibility by making and selling jewelry in Oregon. This craft granted her the time and space to develop her own artistic philosophy. She developed a critical sense of art as a non-verbal language by examining how colors spoke to her as they had when she was a child. In the quest to clarify the mysteries of her own phenomenological experience with a radiating light form that awakened her one night as a child, Gonzalez turned to art to channel her visions of the world and to finally give voice to the enchanting and spiritual aspects of nature defining the memories of her childhood.

Since her move from Oregon to San Francisco to pursue painting, Gonzalez approaches art as a powerful tool that can nurture forms of expression often undervalued and underutilized. She considers the practice of art a form of empowerment and self-affirmation. For her, creativity is a powerful site where certain languages and forms of expressions that are disappearing, becoming lost or silenced in modern Western thought and life can be preserved. But across time, the artist has created a discourse that frames art production as a community practice and as a positive social justice space. Through her work Gonzalez invokes a critical discourse reflective of her subject position as a Chicana feminist.

Because she is a Chicana of mixed ancestry, Gonzalez experienced the effects of language shifts and loss. Though her Mexican American father grew-up as a fluent Spanish speaker, he also experienced firsthand the effects of racial and ethnic discrimination during

the early part of the twentieth century when children were reprimanded and punished for speaking Spanish at school. As a result of the language trauma he endured, he did not actively teach his daughter Spanish. Likewise, her mother's own assimilationist perspectives added to the sense of internalized colonialism the Chicana felt throughout her childhood. Although the intent of Gonzalez's parents were to spare their daughter from the effects of what Anzaldúa termed "linguistic terrorism," her home life experiences simultaneously narrated the hidden cultural practices developed among Chicano communities that resisted and subverted this "linguistic terrorism" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 80). These include establishing Spanish as the language of home, passing on cultural values in domestic settings, and forging strong familial and community ties.

Despite her mother's own personal views and her father's own language trauma, Spanish might not have been the language of her public life, but it also was not a dead language at home. The artist recalls that Spanish was a language spoken at home, the language that defined her cultural interactions with family and community members (Interview, 2014). Her community taught her alternative modes of discourse rooted in hybridity that circumvented and nullified the messages transmitted in dominant and public discourses that sought to oppress minority populations. She recalls Spanish being the language of family functions and which defined the communicative transactions of personal affairs.

In other words, developmental moments in her own personal identity formation were not divorced from the transmission of oral traditions in Spanish that characterizes the cultural practices of Mexican American and Chicano communities in the Southwest. But because during her early childhood Spanish was publicly considered a subordinate language, the

Chicana channeled her sense of love and pride for her culture through art. For this reason, her art shows the development of a critical discourse rooted in the practice of oral traditions and in feminist practices rooted in domesticity that celebrates a Chicano heritage speaker's sense of *mestizaje* with the same openness and sense of love she felt among her family and friends.

Afraid of losing the wealth of knowledge about history, culture, and nature embedded in the languages of her community, Gonzalez was determined to preserve her cultural heritage. She realized that positive cultural memories could be kept alive by creating visual narratives of a community celebrating itself. In the case of missing or lacking narratives, the artist's role could be one of activist; the artist also had the ability to invoke the imagination to create new stories that would bring justice to fragmented or missing life tales. In memory of her father, she decided to use art as a tool for social justice. In 1994, after working several years as a jewelry maker, she moved to San Francisco to dedicate herself to painting.

That same year she had a show for *Día de los Muertos*¹⁵⁴ at La Galería de la Raza. She sold most of her work. Impressed, Harriet Rohmer, an editor for Children's Book Press, invited the artist to work for the press. Rohmer was in need of someone to illustrate Gloria Anzaldúa's *La Prieta and the Ghost Woman/Prietita y La Llorona* (1995).¹⁵⁵ Gonzalez realized she had the ability to illustrate the rich oral traditions of her culture—stories, songs, and histories passed on to younger generations through storytelling. In this early work with a children's publishing house, she learned that the transmission of culture could exist outside of written forms to really influence children to think positively about themselves because she knew firsthand the power of visual images in the formation of children's identities.

¹⁵⁴ Day of the Dead Celebration

¹⁵⁵ "La Prietita" describes someone who is of dark skin in a diminutive form.

Gonzalez's lively and colorful visual narratives allowed her to view the creative process as a spiritual tool to heal one's mind and soul from traumas, such as the feeling of not belonging, not being good enough, having your language and culture oppressed and your tongue symbolically cut off. Art allowed her to represent herself in image and text, to etch her identity into existence by becoming visible. "I believe that belonging is one of the subtexts that can be found in all of my books in some way," the artist notes ("Maya Christina Gonzalez," 2). She elaborates how her Chicana vision structures her imaginary:

It's in the way that I paint, the way I develop the characters, the environments I create, even the intention with which I paint. At each step in the process, I hold my own heart as a child in my awareness, as I hold the collective heart of the children I paint for. I focus on a sense of belonging, of being reflected, on the reality of being a child in this world. I imagine my father at five years old as he entered a school where only English was spoken. He spoke only Spanish. Although half of my family spoke primarily Spanish at family events, I was not taught Spanish growing up. The lesson of my father and much of our culture at that time was of assimilation. On one level, I am painting these books for the little boy my father used to be and hoping that our world is changing, expanding its perceptions. ("Maya Christina Gonzalez," 1-2)

With the three principles that guide her work—everyone is an artist; there is never a right or wrong way to make art; and art is always an act of courage—Gonzalez's art reflects a high level of social consciousness that defies conventional art dogmas ("Maya Christina Gonzalez," 2). Her own art philosophy reflects a critical discourse reflecting the influences of Chicana feminist politics, especially *domesticana*.

But her world vision also shows how she uses the creative process to empower the voice that lives as a heritage language and in this way reframes heteroglot elements in all multiethnic, minoritized, subaltern and colonized peoples as decolonial praxis. The development of a visual language emerging from hybridity reflects the flourishing of her Chicana *placas* approach to use language and to work within the system of visual language to assert new realities by marking new codes. She states, “When I paint a book, I’m constantly thinking of a child in the classroom or library grazing the book spines with her fingers, her eyes searching for something that catches them like sunsets caught mine” (“Maya Christina Gonzalez,” 1-2). Thus, *La Prietita and the Ghost Woman* is one of the first examples where Gonzalez exhibits Chicana *placas* in her use of La Malinche’s speech glyphs.

In *La Prietita and the Ghost Woman*, she captures that fulcrum of change that defined Chicana feminist efforts of the early 1990s, which used the creative process to ignite a method of lucid dreaming propelling Chicanas to exploit the plentiful resource of their collective memories to advance a new Chicana identity. The epistemologies of Anzaldúa’s “border thinking” concentrated on narrating a more favorable depiction of women in history through concepts such as *conocimiento* and *facultad*¹⁵⁶ embracing cultural memory and subaltern wisdom (Saldívar, *Trans-Americanity* 14). Anzaldúa inverts La Llorona’s role as a child-stealing she-monster witch into a guiding force that fosters the young protagonist’s understanding of *curanderismo* and also protects her from the evils of the Texas Rangers. Aware of the pre-Hispanic tie of viewing La Llorona as La Malinche, the characterization of La Llorona-La Malinche as a guide or interpreter by the author is reinforced visually by the illustrator who encodes the narrative of La Malinche through her speech glyphs. In both text

¹⁵⁶ Knowledge and ability (as in faculty)

and image of *La Prietita*, the negative stereotype of La Llorona-La Malinche is replaced with a feminist reading and method of representing women in accordance with Chicana discourses.

As an apprentice to Anzaldúa's philosophy, the artist contributed to a developing Chicana visual culture where images operated to convey new symbolic thought about the life of La Llorona structured through Chicana feminist languages of domestic life that mirror *domesticana* politics. Similar to Delilah Montoya and Pola López, Gonzalez's visual narratives in *La Prietita* shows how art turned Chicana dreams into new discursive realities that illustrated the power of Chicana domestic knowledge. In her use of colors and symbols the illustrator references La Llorona-La Malinche through a visual narrative where the ritual practices, spiritual perspectives, and world visions of non-Western origin of Chicana traditions is being transmitted to La Prietita, a young girl learning the healing practices via oral tradition from the *curandera*, Doña Lola (short for Doña Dolores).

The story begins with Prietita asking Doña Lola for a remedy to help her mother who has become ill. Having all but one ingredient, Prietita volunteers to find *ruda*, the rue plant for Doña Lola. *Ruda* is useful for a variety of health conditions and ailments including: calming pain associated with intestinal problems, treating ear inflammations and nervous disease, regulates heart palpitations, is a cleansing agent for exposed sores and wounds, and induces menstruation and killing lice. Determined to heal her mother, Prietita walks toward the King Ranch and crosses the barbed wire fence of the King Ranch because she knows the rue plant grows in the woods.

As she crosses the landscape of authorized and unauthorized spaces, she hears a crying sound that awakens the memories of her grandmother's tale about the traditional legend of La Llorona. Scared, she heads back for the fence and discovers she is lost. At this

point, Prietita trusts that her senses will help her. Guided by the smell of water, she finds a white-tailed deer next to a lagoon. Asking the deer for help, she hears a faint voice telling her “follow me” (n. pag.). She follows the animal but it runs off. Amidst the rolling fog, the protagonist finds a Salamander. She asks the animal for help knowing well that they have no voice. She follows the Salamander until she hears the crying sound again.

After help from a white-winged dove and a *juagarundi* (a jaguar of a specific species) and lightning bugs, Prietita hears the crying sound again. In all these scenarios the artist incorporates identifiers of La Malinche’s speech glyphs, through yellow speech glyphs into the public landscape. Gonzalez visually illustrates the collective voices of nature and the ghost lady that help Prietita journey through the enchanted woods with the use of symbolic speaking glyphs. The yellow speech glyphs encode a language that her cultural mother is guiding her. But they also symbolically represent the spirit of the Chicano movement’s cry for liberation as a young protagonist is depicted defying “private poverty” in the name of keeping female healing traditions alive and in more contemporary terms, a woman’s cry of liberation because it depicts the young protagonist willfully traversing and crossing public spaces as an independent woman. In this case, we can read the glyphs as signaling a modern-day Chicana archetype, a home-grown/home-girl who is comfortable in private and public spaces. These “speaking glyphs” show how she uses non-verbal codes to insert La Malinche’s legacy in the visual narrative of this storybook.

In addition, the glyphs also are indicative of the voices of her cultural heritage that help her to survive and which will prove to be a guiding force in her future role as a *curandera*. As the story continues, when Prieta finds herself by the lagoon, she suddenly sees, “a dark woman in white emerge from the trees and float above the water” (n. pag.). Instead of

fearing the ghost woman, she asks the spirit for help. With the light of the moon providing some light, the ghost woman guides Prietita to find the rue and the path home. When she crosses the barbed wire, she turns to say farewell but the ghost woman vanishes. Now night, Prietita finds her family who had been looking for her with flashlights. When asked how she found her way back, Prietita states that La Llorona served as her guide.

While Prietita's cousin Tete reminds her of the tale of La Llorona as a child kidnapper, *la curandera* offers a revisionist perspective when she states, "Perhaps she is not what others think she is," reflective of the presence of female visions that operate outside dominant culture (n. pag.). Prietita's success at finding the rue with guidance from the ghost lady is clearly a rite of passage that makes Doña Lola proud because she was victorious in facing and navigating the world independently. In the process she too learns how to activate a cultural memory that allows her to be guided and protected by the voices of women and of nature.

Through her use of visual language, Gonzalez makes an intertextual reference to the historical figure of La Malinche. For example, the representation of La Llorona-Malinche of the book's cover signs the image of La Malinche with radiating speech glyphs that parallels the image of La Malinche in the historical codices where La Malinche is depicted with multidirectional speech glyphs that indicate she is speaking to both



Figure 38 Image of La Malinche
Translating from the *Florentine Codex*
(1590)

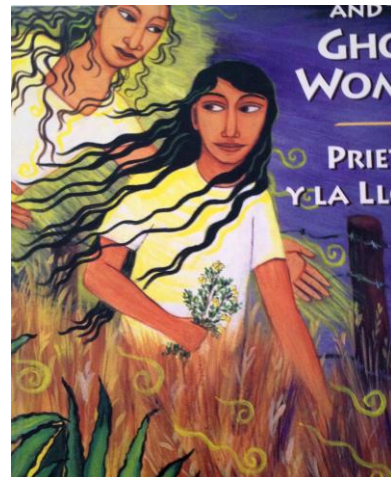


Figure 39 Maya Christina Gonzalez
Book Cover Illustration of *La Prieta and*
the Ghost Woman/Prietita y La Llorona
(1995)

Hernán Cortés and Moctezuma. The image in the children's book depicts the cultural foremother as guide for the protagonist through yellow "speaking glyphs," as stated earlier. The artist tags the history of La Malinche by reframing the historical speech glyphs as a Chicana *placa* that signals a positive representation of the spirit of Chicana foremothers.

Gonzalez offers a second example of using La Malinche's speech glyph as Chicana *placa* through the image of Doña Lola. At her kitchen table with her young apprentice at her side Doña Lola draws Prietita the image of the rue plant she will have to find in the outside world if she is to help cure her mother. Doña Lola is depicted wearing a dress with a speech glyph design that covers the whole dress. Although she does not dress Doña Lola with a *huipil*, the modern day dress reflects Gonzalez's use of Chicana *placas* in patterning the dress with La Malinche's speech glyphs. The design of the dress is meant to activate the viewer's schemata and collective consciousness to link Doña Lola with La Malinche and women as speaking subjects.



Figure 40 Maya Christina Gonzalez
Illustration in *La Prieta and the Ghost*
Woman/Prietita y La Llorona (1995)

This domestic scene shows the oral tradition of women to women transmission of knowledge and the domestic space transforms into a site of agency where indigenous cultural practices are passed from one generation to another. Again, in text and image, Gonzalez represents La Malinche as a Chicana *placa* by hinting to the idea that Doña Lola is a Chicana foremother. In addition, the kitchen is transformed into a native Chicana university—a space of learning, teaching, and research—a place of feminist acumen. But knowledge does not stay

confined within the walls of the home. Prietita attains the permission to step outside the home and with the image of the *ruda* enters the public and natural world. In other words, she crosses the domestic/public divide with Chicana *placas* or “speaking glyphs” protecting her in her journey that mirrors the way the use of the sign “c/s” or “con safos” was meant to protect Chicano *placas* and the expression of wall writing in public domains. The transformation of La Malinche as a symbol of sacred speech affirms what Laura Pérez defined as subverting “the cultural fear attached to figures we symbolize as female” (Pérez, *Hociconas*, 6). Parallel to Anzaldúa’s own empowerment through writing, the artistic process allowed Gonzalez to use art as a dream catcher to present new visions that work to end the negative stereotyping of female cultural archetypes.



Figure 41 Maya Christina Gonzalez *Self-portrait Speaking Fire and Flowers* (2008)

The work titled *Self-portrait Speaking Fire and Flowers* (2008) reflects how the Chicana artist advances La Malinche’s metaphor of *la lengua* into new symbolic dimensions when she transforms La Malinche’s “speaking glyphs” into her outer artistic language. In fact, she characterizes her own integration and digestion of what “speaking glyphs” mean by using the famous glyph as a Chicana *placa* to depict herself as a speaking subject. In this description of self, Gonzalez offers her own version of “speaking glyphs” as glyphs that are “speaking fire and flowers.”

Self-portrait Speaking Fire and Flowers (2008) is a 25 x 32.5 inch charcoal and ink on archival paper piece that records the spiritual transformation she underwent as an artist.¹⁵⁷ An outspoken self-portrait, this piece reveals the end of her psychological and physical sickness. The up-close profile focuses not on her face or physical body but on the breath of a new life that exudes from her mouth. She presents an image of herself as a healthy undressed but jeweled woman. Her multiple hoops compliment the multiple rings of her tattoo. Her necklace, nose ring and varying styles of rings in her hands add a feminine dimension to her look. Her voluptuous wavy long black hair is free. It soars across the canvas like flying feathers and like streams of black-colored flowing wind. Gonzalez's eyes do not look at the viewer, instead they are transfixed, enchanted by the sky. Her head is facing up, also looking at the sky. Her mouth is wide open. Both hands operate like flying buttresses structured to hold her mouth open. The tips of her fingers work like hooks meant to clamp her mouth wide open. This compliments her eyes, which also are wide open.

As she holds one arm in the air, the hybrid inscription of indigenous symbols that characterizes the tattoos on the left arm becomes visible. Her symbolic use of *placas* by way of tattoos is visible in the signifying image of the three dots. The three dots, which appear in

¹⁵⁷ Although at first unaware, the artist's exposure to lead and other toxic chemicals from a "negligent screen print incident" while printing *The Pomegranate* (1996) was detrimental to her health (Artist's website, 2014). Unaware of the severity of the heavy metal poisoning she had been exposed to, the artists' health deteriorated. A suffering Gonzalez turned toward a path of spirituality and healing and used art to articulate a sense of hope and life despite the unfortunate condition of her toxic body. Since she was unable to dedicate herself to large paintings, she worked with small illustrations, using materials easy to hold. Gonzalez's quest to heal her body took her on journeys across the world. She traveled to India, Puerto Rico, Mexico, and Brazil in search of non-Western remedies because Western medicine practices were not deemed appropriate for her case. Her last option brought her back to the homeland of her childhood, Southern California where Gonzalez began working with a unique Chinese healer. During this time, she studied the art of her heritage. Relying on the spiritual aspects of her cultural traditions, Gonzalez was able to tap into new visions anchored in her unconscious imagination.

her hand and face are a Chicano code for living *la vida loca*.¹⁵⁸ Through a thick description analysis of the artist's self-portrait, a Chicana feminist reference to *la loca*¹⁵⁹ is encoded as cultural capital. This image of *la loca*, of herself in an enchanted state, is an image of a courageous woman announcing the coming into her spirit. It is an image of a woman who liberates the flow of energy coming out of her mouth, in a spiritual reference of "speaking glyphs" of fire and flowers.

The energy of the image is concentrated in the rhythms of the inked shapes and forms of fire and flowers that blowout across the air. Her painting technique plays with the contrasting colors of a body whose exterior is charcoal black and white but whose insides utter a wind of change that is fire red and marigold orange. The utterance of a woman conveyed through the emotional release of flowers and fire and the liberation function as non-verbal sound and speech. Her self-portraiture inscribes *mestiza* identity in the present while affirming indigenous culture and the language transmitted through warrior rituals and dance. Her choice of color reflects the spiritual celebration of her emotional state – *el grito de alegría*.¹⁶⁰

Parallel to Gloria Anzaldúa's statement, "from the wailing of suffering and grief to the *grito* of resistance, and on to the *grito* of celebration and joy" (Anzaldúa and Keaton, *Interviews*, 180) the artist introduces the Chicana *grito* as a subversive act meant to decolonize the portrayal of yelling women as she-monsters, witches, heretics, crazy and ill women. Her self-portrait is the visual counterpart of the announcement of a Chicana agency

¹⁵⁸ "The crazy life" (My translation).

¹⁵⁹ "The crazy woman" (My translation).

¹⁶⁰ "The cry of joy" (My translation).

in the enactment of a holler as captured in the work of Pola López's *grito* defined in *The Inner Scream* (2008). This parallels the types of screams and cries Sandra Cisneros articulates in "Woman Hollering Creek" (1991).

Her yelp is a multidimensional scream of liberation. It is the scream of joy, the re-expression of the *grito* of the Chicano movement reinvigorated through the spirit of La Malinche. In fact, the spirit of La Malinche marks a new cultural awareness that capitalizes on what the "speaking glyphs" means. As Gonzalez embodies La Malinche's legacy, she reinstates an indigenous perspective of womanhood in the Americas to show women interpreting the Chicano movement's goal of *el grito* through twenty-first century interpretations of Chicana power through *placas*. Thus, her speech glyphs are Chicana *placas* embedded with multiple meanings: they represent a chant of what Chicana cultural heritage looks like in the twenty-first century, they are a bellow signaling the release of mental, historical and physical trauma and illness,¹⁶¹ they are a powerful warrior cry and a public announcement that she, like La Malinche, is a speaking subject.

Gonzalez confirms what Delilah Montoya and Laura E. Pérez in the exhibition catalogue of *Hociconas* described as the use of a scream attached to female figures to produce fear "as a transformation of that fear into a fountain of speech and other energetic action. This energy is a cry against war, and for deeper spirituality [. . .] it is a cry in favor of the poor, the undocumented, the historically wounded and exploited. The self-loved and

¹⁶¹ It articulates the degree of transformation Gonzalez went through in healing herself across a decade. The work narrates how the artist arrived at a new identity. With a deep motivation to reach out to herself, Gonzalez set on a quest to understand and accept who she really was. In other words, she had to confront the fact that she was sick and had to commit to embrace this part of her identity (like a shadow beast) in order to accept her current state of existence in a more open and compassionate manner. By opening herself to her deepest nature, she arrives at a new conscious and unconscious self-perceptive mode. In this process of self-discovery, Gonzalez showed great courage to continue to practice art to challenge and not hide from a potential she intuitively felt within.

thereby loving body of women, of a “feminine” sensibility, of that considered specifically the territory of females, even if socially constructed” (6). Thus, her self-portrait affirms Pérez’s argument that Chicana artists challenge racism, bigotry, patriarchy, and homophobia by invoking hybrid spirituality, one of them being rethinking to power of one’s voice.

By empowering her mind and body through self-portraiture, Gonzalez creates subjectivity for herself, and presents a new call to action for future Chicanas to articulate visually the arrival of a new vision of self. The intertextual reference to La Malinche shows the types of thick descriptions, the types of desires coming into fruition



Figure 42 Maya Christina Gonzalez
La Malinche (2009)

in the imagination that draw from ancestral strength of empowering one’s voice through language. She shows a critical discourse erupting from within her soul, her being, that reach up to the sky in the form of fire and flowers that announces not only the arrival of a new dimension of Chicana cultural pride but also which affirms with a *grito* the jubilation of freedom in rediscovering one’s life through one’s voice. As an example of a Chicana *placa*, *Self-portrait* shows the power of voices and languages of the Chicana imagination that still need to be articulated. At the same time, the glyphs represent the rediscovery of feminine warrior roots, which also are meant to commemorate the warrior within the artists that has awakened.

The artist continued to use La Malinche’s glyph as a Chicana *placa* in the work titled *La Malinche* (2009). A 7 1/4 x 15 inches archival inks on archival paper work, this tiny but

powerful image of La Malinche illustrates Gonzalez's use of her tongue and *lengua franca* to manifest additional visions of a Chicana cultural heritage on the figure of La Malinche. In this representation of La Malinche she continues to rely on a Chicana feminist cultural spiritualism to break silences and taboos on *malinchismo*. She achieves this by revolutionizing the very notion of how La Malinche is imagined and envisaged. In a description of the work the artist states:

La Malinche is the name that refers to the woman who was given to Cortez and served as his interpreter as he changed the face of Meso-America in the name of Spain. In this piece I explore the symbol of the La Malinche myth and history for personal and cultural purposes. Her dress says repeatedly "The Colonizer Within is The Colonizer Without." (M. C. Gonzalez, *Artist website*, n. pag.)

This figure of La Malinche is unlike any other visual image of La Malinche. In fact *La Malinche* defies our conventional understanding of the cultural foremother. Reversing the ways Cortés "changed the face of Meso-America" this illustration communicates the artist's desires to reinvest in the spirit of indigenous practices as a way to successfully navigate the abrupt changes brought about by the arrival of Spanish conquerors.

In other words, she abandons the hypercritical languages of the colonizer and the colonized. Her play with text and image through the introduction of text in the very fabric of the dress, that reads, "The Colonizer Within is The Colonizer Without," provides a rethinking of La Malinche in syncretic and complex forms. Her portrayal of La Malinche anchors itself in the indigenous standards she has grown to trust and where she finds the liberty to foster new visions beyond the colonizer's gaze and vision of interpretation. The dress repeatedly

states, “The Colonizer Within is The Colonizer Without,” to address the issue of language loss and how colonization has affected her modes of thinking and communicating. She brings voice to her father’s own linguistic experience and of her own as a heritage speaker of Spanish by calling attention on how the colonizer’s language starts to separate the subject by stripping or inhibiting the mother tongue and also by inhibiting philosophies that foster a close connection to nature and indigenous ways (Telephone Interview, 2014). According to the artist, the quote deals with the constant adjustment *mestizo* and indigenous people deal with as a result of Western culture’s rational, linear, empirical, scientific logic that separates people from their own body, spirit and multidimensional sense of being. Thus, she uses Chicana *placas* to communicate non-verbally how we embody so many ideas through language in her repurposing of La Malinche’s speech glyph (Telephone Interview, 2014).

The artist recodes La Malinche to revive a deep cultural understanding that concentrates on the complexity of masks and the hidden transcripts of symbolic codes in non-Western artistic expression. In this imaging of La Malinche, she has no face. Her face is replaced by a large “speaking glyph.” Instead of having a human face, two images of deer-like heads or masks take the form of bulging red eyes. Out of La Malinche’s neck rests a “speaking glyph.” This giant “speaking glyph” symbolically defines La Malinche as speaking woman. We understand it to be La Malinche because Gonzalez labels this image with the word La Malinche. The identity label rests on her neck like a red tattoo. Here we see the use of Chicana *placas* operating to define the Chicana bad girl. The ‘La Malinche’ *placa* is a tattoo inked across her chest, in a scarlet red. Like Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, the idea of transgressive women who defy tradition is repackaged through a Chicana imaginary. At

the same time, the ‘La Malinche’ *placa* is a “con/safos” sign, meant to show honor, respect and pride.¹⁶²

The application of new visions on the body allowed the Chicana to revolutionize the study of La Malinche from a mestiza’s understanding of the indigenous realm. Like Pola López, she challenges how women’s identities are marked by wardrobe through the medieval Renaissance gown La Malinche wears. For example, this representation of La Malinche wears a corset, which we can read as a critique of how women’s bodies are controlled and manipulated. In fact, Gonzalez challenges the imposition of European norms by showing how European designs have been unable to fully define the indigenous perceptions and understandings of physique.

The physical and metaphysical dimensions of La Malinche’s figure offers a visual narrative that navigates complex discourses related to female identity through body politics. La Malinche wears a dress that features the faces of the conquistadores at the bottom of the dress, symbolizing how patriarchal modes of treating women and colonial designs corroborated to construct a negative interpretation of her true identity. The male faces represent a critique of the ways men have screened their vision onto how women should fashion themselves. However, because these faces are at the bottom of the dress, the artist inserts a counter-narrative story in this image of Malinche. If La Malinche moves she will sweep the floor with the faces of her own traitors.

¹⁶² Her art method also reinforces Gloria Anzaldúa’s writing in *Tilli Tlapalli/The Path of Red and Black Ink* when she states, “For the ancient Aztecs, *tilli tlapalli*, *la tinta negra y roja de sus códices* (the black and red ink painted on codices) were the colors symbolizing *escritura y sabiduría* (writing and wisdom). They believed that through metaphor and symbol, by means of poetry and truth, communication with the Divine could be attained, and *topan* (that which is above—the gods and spirit world) could be bridged with *mictlán* (that which is below—the underworld and the region of the dead) [. . .] An image as a bridge between evoked emotions and conscious knowledge; words are the cables that hold up the bridge (*Borderlands* 91).

Gonzalez also offers a powerful counter narrative in fashioning La Malinche in a dress typical of the early colonial period of the Americas. In this sense, La Malinche is represented as a colonized and decolonized subject. Red fabric in Europe was a powerful status symbol. A true red dye only came into European consciousness after the Spanish discovered the cochineal dye and introduced it to Europe in the early half of sixteenth century. In other words, red fabrics tell the often-invisible histories of how the Americans influenced and changed European culture and society.

The lack of physicality in the representation of La Malinche, therefore, introduces another psychology of self that challenges Westernized notions, showing how a person devoid of Westernized visions of self does not lead to self-destruction. While La Malinche seems historically unrecognizable, she is not a neurotic woman, nor a wild beast, or an erratic monster-creature. She is also not a repressed or abnegated woman, as is often the depiction of women under a *malinchista* discourse. This decolonized image of La Malinche challenges Western conventions of the image and representation of women through the use of masks such as deer-heads that show how women have multiple faces, in the incorporation of speech glyphs that represents how decolonization has liberated the speaking subject, and the inclusion of braided snake-like extensions that make reference to the multifaceted traits of earth-mother-goddesses such as Coatlicue.

In this representation of La Malinche, she is not judged for her actions, but rather is imagined to assume the powerful traits the artist sees in the imagining the mother of *mestizaje*. Gonzalez uses her own spiritual wisdom to challenge and shatter old myths of La Malinche while defining new standards under which to think about how indigenous peoples inhabit notions of body. This image of La Malinche takes into consideration, the lost

attributes of La Malinche found in the *lengua franca* of Chicana ways of seeing. That said, she offers a vision of La Malinche with increased sensitivity to the non-verbal patterns of pre-Columbian semiology that offer cryptographic narratives of resistance and survival. By linking the cultural strength of Coatlicue with La Malinche in the same way that Gaspar de Alba makes a link between the Coatlicue and La Malinche, Gonzalez places positive value on mothers: Coatlicue as the earth-goddess mother and Malinche as the symbolic mother of *mestizaje*. By tapping into the unspoken language of her own Chicana imagination, her practice of cutting and reorganizing thoughts demonstrates how the artist decolonizes the linguistic and discursive structures of Western philosophy structuring art world in order to allow other voices, such as her own, to be heard. The manipulation of coloniality and their signs serve as a pathway toward empowerment.

In this way she also is able to define La Malinche as a symbol of freedom—a freedom of being, thinking speaking. La Malinche becomes a symbol that speaks about women who have been through the harshest conditions and survived. The ability to transform the madness ascribed to La Malinche’s life becomes a powerful source of life and energy. La Malinche as a “speaking glyph” gives women the strength of voice while empowering women with a new Chicana language where glyphs are vents that let loose, language a weapon to achieve a decolonial self-affirmation of identity through taboo visions.

The assertion of self in Gonzalez’s work pays homage to the hidden meanings of female power, hope, and spirituality. It is in the exploration of her roots, where the cultural experience of *mestizo* identity is framed as a multilingual awareness. The development of a consciousness where spirituality and creativity transform heritage into a tool of empowerment and healing reflects an unruffled trans-American discourse that women

preserved at home. Her work demonstrates how, despite the challenge of time, a deep awareness of self in spiritual contexts fosters the development of keen *placas*, where new visions of self modeled after the legacy of La Malinche offer Chicanas a radical transformation of self.

Hence, cultural heritage is a central theme in Gonzalez's art that cannot be dismissed. The study of her ancestral visual culture operated like a divine light of life that nurtured and transformed the practice of her own art when she was recuperating from her accident. She stated:

I have long studied the painted books of Mexico, but became compelled by their ability to communicate multidimensional realities with the most basic tools while I was extremely ill from 2003-2006. I felt the images open up and speak to me... As I became weaker and surrendered more to the deep healing that was necessary for my illness, my work dropped into what felt like a personally as well as culturally relevant form. I went from large, colorful paintings to small pen and ink drawings with very little color... Now completely strong and healed, I find that I must keep up with the small drawings. They are my constant and small conversations with my deepest heart regarding my own mysteries of being and life in lesson. (Pérez, *Hociconas* 8)

This creative process fostered a new imaginary in which the manipulation of cultural heritage allowed her to heal. She consumed and digested the codes of her ancestral roots that empowered her mind to not only decolonize her thoughts, but also to detoxify her body by rethinking what her life and body meant. In this way, her art enacts modes of spirituality that

find strength and empowerment through a decolonial understanding of self as a cultural being. The “deep heart” conversations with herself, intersecting with the “mysteries of being and life” show how the manipulation of cultural heritage gave her the agency to pattern and structure new pathways of seeing. The “personally” and “culturally relevant form” of her artistic methods manipulates world visions in a new liminal space, in the intersection between past and present where her inner self could be heard.

In sum, her images weave history and memory with life in the present that constructs a space within art where the artist is able to speak on an intimate and personal level. As she configured new realities, the expression of her individual self through visual means reflects her arrival at what Emma Pérez has termed a “decolonial imaginary.” The Chicana illustrates how, in nurturing the non-Western, domestic, and indigenous realms of her imagination, she cultivated a new *lengua franca* that articulated a new visual vocabulary based on the acceptance and convergence of the complex hybridity of her heritage. She discovered the lesson in the mystery of her cultural foremother, the empowering and healing power of La Malinche’s “speaking glyphs” and of her use of them as a *placa*.

Under Rehabilitation—Sustaining New Visual Words/Worlds in Wounded Tongues: The Art of Viviana Paredes

Viviana (Viva) Paredes was born January 4, 1954 in San José, California to parents of Mexican nationality. The diverse nature and sense of cohabitation that defines Northern Californian communities where a strong art tradition and presence defines the roots of these communities—from Union Square to Chinatown, the Castro District to the Mission District, and SOMA (South of Market)—influenced the life-long Bay Area native. The Chicana artist’s birthplace sculpted her vision of place and nurtured a deep sense of origin. In addition, the

civil rights movements and struggles for social justice era of the 1960s and 1970s shaped her formative years and artist-activist outlook on life. She currently lives in San Francisco, California, with her adopted daughter Maya and her partner Sandra Hernández, a nationally recognized Chicana advocate for public health.

Paredes' artwork explores issues of how she was transformed growing up Chicana in the Bay Area. She stressed how her surroundings and environment shaped her identity, "Historically, the Bay Area has been at the forefront of diverse political and social movements...growing up in an environment that fostered a rich counterculture helped formulate my Chicana/Pocha perspective" (Paredes, *About the Artist*, n. pag.). In her works of art, Paredes reflects an imagination and Chicana consciousness that centers on the reality of having to navigate metalinguistic worlds that define the complex conditions of politicized subjectivities. In the quest to continue defining what is Chicana/o identity, her art engages with interpretations of land, home, and homeland from her unique third-world, queer woman of color perspective.

As does Anzaldúa, Paredes too sees being a *pocha*, as twin skin to her Chicana identity. In so doing, she signifies *pocha* as a positive identity for Chicanas based on the celebration of linguistic diversity—which ranges from being a speaker of limited Spanish fluency, but proficient in English with an Americanized accent, to a speaker with the ability to interchange words in English and Spanish that is characteristic of *caló*. In addition, Paredes uses the word *pocha* to further contextualize her Chicana identity. She uses the term as a cultural signifier to reference the unique internalized forms of colonialist experiences lighter-skinned Chicanas face. Many fair-skinned Chicanas are often called *pochas* and face

reverse discrimination because individuals who have clear accents in English, or who code switch from one language to another when speaking, are often defined as *pochos* and *pochas*.

As a result, *pocha* often operates as a linguistic label to describe the particular experience of Chicanos in having to negotiate their identities between two languages, an English language imposed on an already mixed Spanish tongue. “Words distorted by English are known as anglicisms or *pochismos*. The *pochos* is an anglicized Mexican or American of Mexican origin who speaks Spanish with an accent characteristic of North Americans and who distorts and reconstructs the language according to the influence of English,” noted Anzaldúa in “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” (*Borderlands* 78). Anzaldúa further stated how, “Chicanas who grew up speaking Chicano Spanish have internalized the belief that we speak poor Spanish. It is illegitimate, a bastard language. And because we internalized how our language has been used against us by the dominant culture, we use our language differences against each other. [...] . . . we are afraid the other will think we’re *agringadas* because we don’t speak Chicano Spanish” (*Borderlands* 80). However, Paredes uses the term *pocha* as a source of empowerment that aligns itself with Anzaldúa’s declaration that, “There is no one Chicano language, just as there is no one Chicano experience,” (*Borderland*, 78). In this sense, Paredes embraces her identity as a Chicana *pocha* to advance new understanding of language issues that visually address what Anzaldúa defined as a new Chicana politics on tongue:

So, if you really want to hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself. Until I can accept as legitimate Chicano Texas Spanish, Tex-Mex and all the other languages I

speaking, I cannot accept the legitimacy of myself. Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having to always translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate.

I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I will have my voice: Indian, Spanish, white. I will have my serpent's tongue—my woman's voice, my sexual voice, my poet's voice. I will overcome the tradition of silence. (*Borderlands* 81)

While Paredes was directly involved with the Chicano movement, her contributions to the politics of the movement came after she attended art school. Like many other Chicana artists, she belongs to a long tradition of women who were not able to cultivate their artistic talent prior to adulthood. Parallel to the experiences of other creative women, art became a calling that with the passing of time transformed into an outlet. The creative process became a sanctuary that allowed Paredes to manifest new interpretations of what it meant to mature into a *pocha* identity that was no longer “ashamed of existing” and which was eager to “overcome the tradition of silence.”

As an artistic late-bloomer, it was not until her 40s that Paredes occupied creative spaces and discovered her talent in the visual and popular arts. But unlike other artists vested in defining art through traditional mediums and practices that characterize Chicano art production, Paredes discovered her voice by thinking and working outside conventional forms. Sculpting allowed her the opportunity to work within a different medium and form of human communication. Within the confines of visual language of the material she articulated

the lessons learned from her own lived experience. Art was the agent that gave Paredes a voice and language previously existent in passive forms.

In 1999, she had the opportunity to make new inroads in the non-traditional field of sculpture with a two-person exhibition titled *The Spirit of the Abstract* at the Encantada Gallery of Fine Arts in San Francisco. In this show, the artist illustrated the power of conceptual art to open new visions on the interpretation of the heritage of Chicanas and of *pochas* at the turn of the century. In 2001, she completed a Fine Arts degree in sculpture from the California College of the Arts and Crafts. By the time she graduated, Paredes was showing great promise as an artist, and by the end of the decade, was an established Chicana artist. She graduated with high distinction for her dexterity in working with a diverse range of materials as a conceptual artist able to transform raw and organic materials into works of fine art. Through her installations and sculptures, Paredes fomented a new connection that aligned abstract and postmodern expression with the aesthetic traditions of *rasquachismo* and *domesticana*—the abstraction of Chicano lived reality from what is at hand.

Upon graduation, Paredes encountered the world of glass. She explored glass out of a curiosity for the material when she learned that her art studio neighbor worked with this delicate but malleable crystal. Her attraction to glass, coupled with a creative license to transform rigid material, gave her the idea to articulate her Chicana lived experience. It is at this moment when, conceptually, Paredes focused her artistic gaze on what it meant to have a tongue. Glass gave her a new lens from which to visualize the languages of her imagination and to reflect thoughts and visions as if in a mirror. It was at this point where Paredes produced her now famous tongue sculptures.

By engaging with language issues, Paredes addressed the questions of the subalterns' reality and the right to speak made popular by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. She also visually reinforces Emma Pérez's idea of "*sitio y lengua*." These theoretical methodologies on "third space feminisms" offer Chicanas the opportunity to write themselves into history through a "decolonial imaginary" that breaks with the colonizer's methodological assumptions and examines new tools for uncovering the hidden voices of Chicanas (Pérez, *Decolonial Imaginary* Publisher's Comments n. pag.).

Paredes, like other Chicana activists, focuses on tongues because they are a powerful icon and symbol of language. Paredes debunks the perception that women with tongues produce fear by showing the beauty of female sculpted tongues. Like a conversation, Paredes' art continues to deconstruct the negative understanding of female tongues and the women who use their language to create agency and visibility for themselves: La Llorona, La Malinche, and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. But issues linked to notions of tongue and language bear additional layers of significance for Chicana lesbians who historically have been negated the dually inscribed sense of language and tongue in the Spanish word *lengua*. Within the Chicano movement, lesbians were denied a tongue from which to bring justice to their contributions in society as a result of *machismo* and homophobia that marred the movement's efforts. Like other Chicana lesbians, Paredes deconstructs the *malinchista* perspective that regarded outspoken women or lesbians as traitors and *vendidas* of Chicano patrimony. She also references the sexuality of tongues for lesbians.

Perhaps the ongoing negotiation of lesbian struggles for a voice was the reason why this artist's work concentrates on sculpting a new cultural memory with language and tongues from the cultural signifier of La Malinche. Paredes tackles the negative interpretation

of women, LGBTQ and otherwise, as traitors and *vendidas* in domestic contexts by representing La Malinche as a powerful sign, a shifting signifier. Her art redeems the domestic knowledge of Chicana *pochas* who break with silences by showing how the wisdom preserved at home and passed on from women to women are forms of counter-narrative practices encoded with messages of sustainability and survival. Paredes explores contemporary notions of indigenous sensibilities, stemming from her understanding of *curanderismo* that brings value to female figures.

Nevertheless, yet to be examined is how Paredes uses her domestic grounding to contest present day negative stereotypes about the dangers of speaking women. While her work thematically roots itself in offering a new sense of pride in domesticity, her work is equally about how she uses public and private notions of domesticity to celebrate outspoken women. This section aims to show how the cultivation of Paredes' *pocha* sensibility has allowed her to use her *lengua franca* to manipulate Chicana cultural heritage in order to manifest coded representations of La Malinche that emphasize *la lengua's* speech glyphs as a Chicana *placa*. This becomes clear when we analyze Paredes' body of work from a Chicana semiotic perspective that uses a thick description to understand the ways contemporary Chicanas offer new radical interpretations on domesticity.

Like other contemporary Chicana feminists, Paredes understands that there is still much ground to cover in unlocking the symbolic weight of La Malinche as a speaking subject, in particular her powerful role and presence in the cultural memories defining the history and origins of Chicano culture. What it means for women to have tongues and what is signified when Chicanas define an identity through *pocha* tongues are the semiological metaphors Paredes explores. She engages with tongues as a heavily loaded universal symbol

of language and tongue and femaleness to describe the disconnection she felt with her own tongue and of not having a language.

Although Paredes had worked on her glass tongues upon finishing school, it was not until 2004 when Paredes was able to articulate how working with glass allowed her to illuminate a new landscape of the Chicana imaginary's symbolic relationship to La Malinche as a Chicana icon. In 2004, Paredes defined the significance of the series of tongues she had created when she started an artist-in-residence program at the Northern California San Francisco Recycling & Disposal. An artist-in-residence fellowship at the Recology in San Francisco from November 1, 2004 - January 31, 2005, gave Paredes the opportunity to develop an exhibition directly engaging with the ideas of reduce, reuse and recycle. Following the "integrated resource recovery ecosystem" philosophy of Recology, *Artificial Nature, Recycled Memories* opened in January 2005.

This program encouraged Paredes to explore what conservation and sustainability meant not only for the environment but also of the self as a part of the totality of nature that reflected her *curandera* philosophy. Conserving resources, the environment, and art, however, was something familiar to Paredes. The idea of accessing and using materials to the best of their potential, often were visions that the artists had learned as behavioral and ideological Chicano cultural practices known as *rasquachismo*. In other words, her cultural background had already set her on a path to reimagine garbage. It reminded her not only of the resourcefulness of her domestic upbringing, but also of the *rasquache* aesthetic defining her understanding of Chicano popular art. Paredes' powerful message about how the creative process allowed her to explore her identity explains why notions of language-tongue as a "*sitio y lengua*" are transcendent themes in her work:

Ever since I can remember, I was told not to be what I am, Chicana.

Discouraged from speaking my mother tongue and encouraged to pass, by the age of six I stopped speaking altogether. Language has always been central to my artistic and life observations. It wasn't until I was in my 40s that I discovered that I was dyslexic. With this new understanding it became clear to me why my disenfranchisement with written language was so profound. I returned to school and formally studied art. I found my voice in organic materials and the creation of three-dimensional forms. The silence in art allows me to think; it's a place where objects become words and process becomes the dialogue. I live in a state of *Nepantla*, the world in-between. Between memory and longing, and that is where my art resides. (Recology, "Viviana Paredes" n. pag.)

Taking matters into her own hands after art activated the passive languages of her cultural memory, Paredes was left to sort out the cultural baggage she had internalized in her life. Discovering her voice in art, the acts and processes that allowed her to break with her life-long silences, functioned as watershed moments to establish an identity as she saw fit. But in detailing her experience with language loss in her artist statement, Paredes provided a lesson in how to turn a tragedy into a source of empowerment. Like a *curandera*, she found a remedy through the ritual practice of art.

Manipulating materials and ideas, she finds a way to reconnect to the past by remapping the lesson of her ancestry. In this way, she not only pays homage to her ancestry but also discovers the importance of indigeneity and the role of her grandmother. In her artist's website, we come to know the influence of her grandmother:

Influenced by her grandmother Petra, a native of Chihuahua, México, Viviana was initiated into the ancient tradition of medicinal plants and curanderismo (the tradition of healing physical and spiritual health through the use of medicinal plants). In her work, we can observe the delicate interrelationships of our natural world and the disconnections modern society has to nature. Viviana's work comes from a deep sense of belonging to something greater than the self. Mixed media sculptures and installations are Viviana's dialogue, through the art making process natural materials are transformed into conversations involving the artwork and viewer. (Paredes, "Artists Website," n. pag.)

The curators at Galería de la Raza also describe the major role her grandmother played in the formation of the multidisciplinary artists. Because of her grandmother, Paredes was "exposed to the ancient tradition of Curanderismo (a holistic healing practice that uses medicinal plants to aid physical and spiritual ailments). Informed by this alternative method of healing, her work stems from a deep sense of belonging to something greater than the self. Through her art, Paredes explores the disconnect modern society has with nature and the delicate interrelationships present in the natural world" (Galería de la Raza, *Studio 24 Presents: Viviana Paredes*, n. pag.). This is why her work is equally about the heritage experience of Chicanos in the United States and about new ways to recuperate and revitalize indigenous traditions under constant threat of extinction in today's global but neocolonial reality.¹⁶³

¹⁶³ The most salient themes in her work include curanderismo, indigeneity and cultural memory. The curandera's legacies proffered by Paredes narrate the inspirational stories of regular people doing extraordinary things. Curanderas are everyday women, mothers, sisters, friends and grandmothers who are the kindred soul of the community because of their ability to help alleviate and heal illnesses of the mind, soul and physical body. She presents new definitions of power for Chicanas drawing from her curandera wisdom.

From her work with glass and tongues, three series have developed into her now collected work: *My Pocha Tongues* (2004), also known as *Pocha Tongues* (2005), and *Pocha Indígena* (2005). In the semiotic world of new Chicana feminist aesthetic practices, La Malinche is proving to be a coded-sign of ways to empower one's voice today. In other words, her glass tongues show how Chicanas continue contextualizing La Malinche as a "speaking glyph." The most powerful representation of the semiological advancement of La Malinche is Paredes' thick description of domesticity through a semiotic handling of La Malinche as a Chicana *placa*.

My Pocha Tongues (2004) are a series of blown glass tongues sculptures that range in form and number. They also vary in size: 12 x 4 x 1 in. to 7 x 5 x 1. In 2005, eleven tongues defined this body of work, while by 2007 a new tongue was added. By 2011, Paredes' tongues had grown to sixteen when she exhibited her work in *Latina/o Visual Imaginary: Intersection of Word and Image*, curated by Holly Barnet-Sanchez. The tongues are filled with organic materials cast in glass. Licorice Root, Wild

Oats, *candula* (marigold), Lungwort, Black Malva, Bilberry, *contra yerba* (Arizona poppy), *sangre de dragón* (Dragon's Blood), and Blue malva are among the medicinal herbs with which Paredes fills her tongues. The simplicity and ornamentation of the tongues reference a garden. She presents a vision of tongues that, like the resources found in land, can be used as a healing tool. She demonstrates a connection to land and its many contrasting elements, wet and dry, colors, and the knowledge of plants as the retention of indigenous cultural practices



Figure 43 Viviana Paredes *My Pocha Tongues* (2004)

signifying resistance and survival. The dry gardens signify a *pocha* discourse about language honoring the rituals of *curanderas* and their secret knowledge of how to heal the wounded tongue.

Despite the arid context of her tongues, her work shows a certain element of life: she transmits the message of the ever-changing dynamics of life and also speaks about the permanent aspect of native cultural practices. In the every changing world, some things remain the same—the herbs represent an impermanent cultural knowledge and practice that survives despite adversity. Here the adversity is the ways native and indigenous tongues have been silenced and robbed.

By uniting tongue and herbs through a *domesticana* interpretive lens she also expands on the idea of *domesticana* signifying practices—the Chicana sensibility of using the creative process to reconnect to nature and land, to connect body to language and tongue. Like herbs with the potential to become active, to morph into something more if properly activated, Paredes' *pocha* tongues show the path to a new consciousness, the coming of new expressions. This connection between tongue and nature creates a new relationship between woman and nature where the medium of sculpture and installation art allows Paredes to transform the visual landscapes of wall writing. By mounting the tongues on the wall, Paredes creates a three dimensional *placa*, tongues cast with multiple meanings and movements, like shifting signifiers.

The tongues are mounted on a white wall, arranged to meet the viewer's eye, spaced in a non-lineal cascading manner. The tongues rest against a blank backdrop. Like an unpainted canvas, the tongues provide the first images of a new vision—Chicana tongues protruding, but which have yet to paint their surroundings. Collectively, they reflect a world

of languages, idioms, and dialects, organized like metaphoric continents of linguistic terrain floating atop an ocean of whiteness. From afar, the tongues look like the mother earth, outlining the landscapes of human communication and that of the natural world. From a peripheral view, they radiate out, soaring up to the sky. A reference to Chicana bodies, the tongues signal the arrival of a new Chicana subjectivity. The tongues reference La Malinche at the same time they associate the cultural foremother with the figure of the *pocha* in contemporary Chicana/o art.

By utilizing the space of the blank wall, Paredes provides an opportunity for the tongues to communicate new messages to the viewer. Because they are sticking-out, as if they are speaking, they become interacting tongues—extended tongues with movement, tongues in signaling poses, tongues positioned to offer a good lick. I argue that *My Pocha Tongues* is one of the early examples where the artist extends the traditions of her *domesticana* sensibilities to enact Chicana *placas*. She shows that the tongues of Chicano experience are not singular or homogenous. On the contrary, they are multiple and heterogeneous like Chicano history itself.

Paredes complicates the hybridity of these multiple tongues by filling the tongues with different herbs and dry flowers, creating a rainbow of chromatic expressions that further signify these tongues as queer. Each tongue is a one of a kind representation of the ways to heal wounded tongues. Paredes also references the multiplicity of lesbian experiences and of lesbian desire through her rainbow of tongues that offer a counter-discursive expression on *Chicanismo*. They are *pocha* tongues because they represent the forms of human communication that have been labeled as refuse, that has been traditionally disposed because Chicana *pocha* tongues have been viewed as queer, as other, as not belonging.

Unlike the traditional forms of Chicano art practices—spray painting, mural, posters—Paredes' election to make art in non-traditional mediums characteristic of Chicana/o art carves the space for a new vision of female tongues to flourish. Since 2005 her artistic work on tongues makes a semiotic relation to the power ambivalence in the coding, signing and interpretation of language. They are tongues the eye cannot resist. Each tongue is a different image that develops a heteroglot narrative of what tongues and languages signify through semiology. In the interpretation of what each tongue means as an entity individually and collectively as a part of the whole, Paredes' semiotic tongues are "speaking glyphs." They are tongues that signify what Laura E. Pérez has termed as "spirit glyphs." Paredes' artwork focuses on issues of language through tongues act as spiritual testaments to the ways women have cultivated cultural celebration in *la lengua* to successfully voice Chicana identity.

Simultaneously, through her work on tongues Paredes challenges the negative stereotype of La Malinche's myth as *la lengua*. This makes her art a form of storytelling to create positive myths about women in history who use their language and tongue to make themselves visible. By subverting the traditional concept of La Malinche's linguistic superiority as something bad, tongues are the subject matter that allows her to engage in new conceptual representations that feminize language issues for subaltern and minority populations into favorable contexts. In 2007, Katherine R. Lieber, editor of Art Scope Net, offered a narrative on the visual impact of Paredes' tongue:

Language is fundamental, the most intimate element of identity both ethnic and personal. Nothing comes so close to the bone in defining who you are, with whom you identify, with whom you can meld -- or from what you are cut off. In *My Pocha Tongues* (blown glass and medicinal herbs: 12 x 4 x 1 in. to

7 x 5 x 1 in.: 2005), artist Viva Paredes references the *pocha*, slang for a Mexicana who can't speak Mexican: Mexican by culture, but cut off and different. Arrayed on the wall, the blown glass vessels are long, short, thick, thin, tongues of animals and human beings, tongues of many degrees of suppleness, shape and substance. Composed of clear, slightly frosted glass, each is filled with a different substance: dried flower buds, wood shavings, wheat, herbs. But what are the *pocha* tongues? Trophies? Representations of her own experience? Memories of different linguistic transactions, each with its own flavor, sweet, astringent or bitter? *My Pocha Tongues* walks an intriguing line between criticism and accommodation. That the herbs are identified as 'medicinal' adds a healing or mediating feel to the presentation.

("Nuevo Arte: Colección Tequila Don Julio," n. pag.)

The artist's collection of tongues is also a collective consciousness. The ritual practice of using tongues and the icon of tongues as a bridge or dialogue visually brings the Chicano vernacular of La Malinche into new discursive fields. In this way, the herbs reference becomes the metaphor of the second skin-the herbs as a second skin enclosed in the protective material of the glass make herb and glass a unique style of how Chicanas create their own *placas*. The herbs season and cover the tongue. The medicinal and cultural traditions of the Hispanic West and Southwest explored in her work connect art with the natural environment since these herbs are all from the native landscapes of the Southwest and Greater Mexico.

With *My Pocha Tongues* Paredes advances her different interpretations between notions of *pocha*, tongue and identity that begins to articulate a new reality about language

and Chicano identity. By personalizing her art, *My Pocha Tongues* is transformed into a site where a public and private dialogue about the complex deep issues of cultural identity, representation and authority. In particular she places at center stage the unresolved issues that have not allowed Chicanos to move on, the historical tension of cultural memory with the idea of women having tongues. *My pocha tongues* takes on a very personal journey on Paredes' own relationship to her tongue at a semiotic level. She presents a conceptual understanding of La Malinche that pushes the limits on the semiotics of La Malinche in today's society as she illustrates how La Malinche is a subject matter still relevant in the Chicana imaginary.

Art empowered Paredes with a language of self she previously had been unable to voice. That being the case, her artwork speaks to her overwhelming desire and need for voice, an issue still affecting all Chicanas today. The creative process gave her the agency to reclaim herself in the visual banks of the imaginary. "Mixed media sculptures and installations are [my] dialogue, through the art making process natural materials are transformed into conversations involving the artwork and viewer," states Paredes ("Artists Statement," n. pag.). Art made from organic materials appeals to people's emotions about their relationship to language and tongue as a communicative experience that is innately human but also the particular experience of Chicana feminists. Anjee Helstrup-Alvarez, Associate Director & Curator of Movimiento de Arte y Cultura Latino Americana (MACLA) notes:

Viva Paredes' visually stunning artwork immediately captures one's eye. Her contemporary sculptures created from glass, bronze and other sources are brought to life with an infusion of organic materials. It is the organic matter

that situates Viva's artwork in the realm of alchemy. This is appropriate as her grandmother was a curandera, a healer who used indigenous herbs to cure ailments of the body and soul. Viva continues her grandmother's tradition of healing by creating artwork that explores the sacred space of ancestral memory, culture, and linguistic history.

Beyond the form and beauty of her objects, what holds our attention and burns the image into memory is how Viva's work emanates from her personal experiences as a Chicana and connects those experiences to a larger societal history. It is here, that she is sculptor of spaces and emotions that reclaim lost stories and honor the present struggles. Indigenous cultural forms, such as the molcajete (grinding stone), are reoccurring motifs in her work, but they are transformed beyond their original utilitarian usage. This transformation occurs by layering, by creating multiple objects that speak of the history of labor and the work of women, both past and present. Densely scented fragrances fill her vessels and the texture of organic matter intertwined with the hard matter creates additional layers imbued with meaning from cultural connections. It is here, that the primordial meets the contemporary. It is here, beyond form and beauty, that the art of Viva Paredes lingers in our memory and heals our soul. ("Beyond Form and Beauty," n. pag.)

Indeed, much of Paredes art situates itself within the ability of art production to function as a way to tell stories. This act has become a central process of empowerment for Chicanas over time, since storytelling breaks silences. The forms in which Paredes uses art to break silences is perhaps one of the most powerful testaments of how Chicanas/os today are imagining

worlds in which their languages and visions are positively valued. But she also uses her understanding of heritage to warn a new generation about the dangers of losing one's ancestral tongues and the need to constantly value our languages as a form of cultural continuity.

Soon after producing *My Pocha Tongues* and *Pocha Tongues*, Paredes created another series of sculpted herb-filled tongues titled *Pocha indígena* (2005). *Pocha indígena* is a series of six glass blown tongues, filled with medicinal herbs that vary in size and shape. Each tongue is structured to reflect the view of a tongue in a mouth wide open, like those seen in anatomical representations. The exterior of each glass tongue is engraved with a pre-Columbian design. The design engraved on each tongue not only characterizes the tongues as indigenous, but also presents the glyph as a code that marks and defines the tongue. The visual glyph takes on the role of a lingual reference—its indigenous features characterize tongue as preserving indigeneity in its taste buds. The pre-Columbian icon, which covers the tongue from the apex to the base, operates as the taste buds that style the flavor and visual taste of the tongue. In this way, the integration of indigenous symbols becomes another way Paredes inserts Chicana *placas* into her work.



Figure 44 Viviana Paredes *Pocha Indígena* (2005)

But because the tongues are incapable of speech, Paredes advances the idea of *pochismo*, which helps the viewer to contemplate a full sense of what Paredes means in the interpretation of the title of the work *Pocha Indígena*. In this case, the tongues make

powerful comments about the sublingual sentiment that defined and marked the artists' life as a heritage speaker of Spanish, the effects of language loss as a result of colonization, and the need to promote the experiences of subaltern and alternative modes of thinking.

This series directly addresses the way indigenous languages are also affected by language loss. Her inspiration for this series came from her desire to address how immigrant and farm working communities in the Imperial Valley encompass a linguistic profile that is different from the common forms of Chicano language issues. Her art gives voice to the reality of additional languages of present day immigrant communities facing the same issues of language struggles common in the traditional forms of understanding the Chicano experience. From Zapotec to Purepecha to Nahuatl and Mayan, Paredes' indigenous sense initiates a conversation in her artwork that pushes the uneasy and interlacing ties between the linguistic and cultural bodies that inhabit her Chicano homeland. Her tongues probe the ongoing question: Are we as a subaltern community going to allow continued forms of linguistic colonization among *raza* to continue? Paredes finds a solution to present day cycles of oppression by showing how the indigenous features still ingrained in the cultural memory of *pochos* and *pochas* are the tools with which we can decolonize our minds, bodies and realities. As a result, *Pocha Indígena* provides viewers with a contemporary sample of how women use art as political and subversive act to foster a new awareness on the politics of language.

But as indigenous tongues, Paredes creates a new system of signification between the interpretative linguistic domain of what *pocha* and what *indígena* signifies. In other words, her semiotic interpretation of culture also provides a thick description of the links between Chicano notions of *pocha* and of *indígena*—that is, both terms describe disenfranchised social

conditions. Her uses of tongues are shifting signifiers and as *placas* are sites of power and praxis. She charts new visions on Chicana lesbian subjectivity by making Chicana lesbians the experts of a counter-hegemonic tongue and of a counter-narrative language from which to tell new stories.

Again, this mixed media artwork reflects the notion of offering an interdisciplinary semiotic reading of the concept of culture by referencing La Malinche as an indigenous “speaking glyph.” Adding to the development of Chicana feminist interpretations of La Malinche, the glass tongues reflect the types of dialogues women are creating in the visual world stemming from the engagement with historical texts and contemporary writings about La Malinche. In this sense, Paredes signifies La Malinche as super heroine and cultural foremother and not in the traditional ways we are used to seeing her, constructing an image of La Malinche that compliments Maya Gonzalez’s own graphic representations of La Malinche. Paredes depicts La Malinche as a symbol of female domestic ancestral empowerment. She places La Malinche in a modern setting, with a notion that we inherit languages from the past that are ambiguous and fragmented. But in presenting *pocha indígena* tongues, she also advocates the need to understand why our tongues continue to be indigenous, why despite the real experience of being cut off linguistically, our tongues are secretly armed with a coded system of knowledge about how to unlearn coloniality.

The artist’s stylized sculptures and installations are beautiful and provocative—visual examples of art as a tool for social justice. In juxtaposing what is beautiful with what is familiar, she initiates the changing bodies of Chicano art. She shows the subtle and radical transformation to the politics of identity taking place in the contemporary through expressions on culture that speak for themselves, seeking balance in juxtaposing the beautiful

with the provocative. Most of all, Paredes' art shows how women today still struggle to freely imagine themselves as powerful speaking subjects. Her artistic palate shows the ways contemporary Chicana feminist lesbians are taking transhistorical postures in the interpretation of culture that illustrates the continuity of traditions from pre-Columbian times to present. Paredes uses conceptual approaches to art to challenge and go beyond the traditional. Just as she deconstructs her materials, melting glass in order to shape it into a new object or converting refuse into objects of high art, deconstructing artistic techniques is just one way she is breaking ground in Chicana art.

From her use of color to her use of symbols—all are specifically crafted to tell a story. In this way she references how ancient civilizations documented history in public forums such as on walls and in visual forms similar to the Aztec codices. But Paredes pays attention to the power of symbols and how symbols are already encoded with meaning, as is the case of the idea of what *la lengua* means in Chicano heritage. She simultaneously emancipates and activates the symbolic codes of own cultural memory by depicting the different relations women have to *la lengua*. In this way she demonstrates a sacred craving for language rooted in the *domesticana* principles of domestic life.

The use of medicinal plants in her work shows her acute awareness for the reemergence of non-Western medicinal practices in the Western world. The centrality of flora in Paredes' work is how she advocates for the importance of indigenous traditions in our culture. The incorporation of native elements in her art shows transforms both the objects and the space in which they are being exhibited. Nature enters into the museum space not as a foreign object that must be tested and measured before it goes on display but rather as a sacred element that must be looked on with reverence and veneration.

The same idea applies to the transformation of space in the presence of natural herbs. Herbs enter the art space altering the controlled space on an art gallery or museum into a sacred and homely space. In this sense, Paredes transforms the traditional unhomely experience of the museum space in her use of herbs. In the museum space, the herbs are Chicana *placa* because they threaten the sterile and controlled museum space.

To conclude, the art of Maya Gonzalez and Viviana Paredes reflects all at once the continuation of cultural nationalism, cultural affirmation and self-determination. For these reasons, their art explores issues that continue to be central points of struggle since the Chicano Civil Rights Movement. Their alternative methods of presenting the tale of La Malinche allow them to connect to a wider audience and to be able to transmit a message about how understanding the history of La Malinche is an act of healing. They raise visibility of the important voices of women in art and open the doors of the imaginary for new opportunities of engagement and dialogue through a thick description of feminine and feminist interpretations of home. By embracing the Chicana vision of La Malinche they create a visual *placa* that contests the disjuncture between the private and public life of women. And by continuing to break with historical silences, they make a bridge between the present notions of self while changing the landscape of who can speak. They are creating a future of change where women's tongues function as weapon and a tool of conviviality, where "speaking glyphs" become a source of empowering one's voice.

Conclusion

Issues of language extend far beyond the field of linguistics. We use language to communicate complex logic, discourse and arguments, as much as to convey thoughts and sentiments. By extension, we also use language to express the complex conditions and positions in which we live as unique cultural beings. Individual and collective conceptualizations of the world come to life through language use. From the values and morals we inherit, to how we structure the worlds we live in or even those we imagine, our modes of communication reflect simultaneous notions on culture, society, politics, sexuality, gender, and citizenship. Perhaps this is what drew Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa to say, “I am my language,” elucidating how indeed use of tongue marks and defines our identity (*Borderlands* 81).

In this dissertation project I have examined how Chicanas negotiate issues related to language, identity, and politics to achieve decolonial interpretations of La Malinche. I have examined the literary, critical, and visual works on La Malinche to illustrate how women cultivate positive understandings of female identity, express their gender roles, shifting social conditions, and lived experiences by initiating dialogues related to women and language. The analysis of how women offer thick descriptions on La Malinche as *la lengua*, a symbol and metaphor of language and tongue, provides the contexts from which to study how women create new systems of meaning by privately and publicly reframing what La Malinche signifies. In the critical, literary and artistic representations of La Malinche, the aim of this study is to outline how her figure is a multivalent sign, a shifting signifier.

The underlying goal of this study is to expand the interpretative modes in which Chicanas have decoded and recoded La Malinche to make clear how revisions to La Malinche brings to the forefront the Chicana feminists' desire to express what cultural and literary critic Tey Diana Rebolledo and art history critic Holly Barnet-Sanchez have termed as "a critical discourse from within" (Rebolledo, "The Politics of Poetics," 354; Barnet-Sanchez "Tomás Ybarra-Frausto" 91). The development of a feminist metalinguistic awareness of self and a desire to express that self without shame or reservation proves to be a unifying link among critics, artists and writers in their use of La Malinche to articulate new visions of Chicana identity. However, as a result of the development of a series of relations between women desiring to express their critical vocabularies, the study of how feminists frame La Malinche as a metaphor and symbol of language empowerment, and the consistency and amplification of using *la lengua* as a model of self-affirmation, linguistic and cultural pride underscores two feminist developments.

First is the continued development and elaboration of hybrid forms of language use and expressions to explain Chicana history and contemporary realities from a heritage experience, a concept I call a Chicana *lengua franca*. The expansion of feminist modes of interpretation and analysis of cultural figures like La Malinche, as seen in Gloria Anzaldúa's "mestiza consciousness", Emma Pérez's articulation of a "*sitio y lengua*," Gaspar de Alba's "alter-native" philosophy, Amalia Mesa-Bains' concept of *domesticana* and Laura E. Pérez's view of "Chicana spirituality" reflects the development of a *lengua franca*, the continuance of innovative, original and imaginative forms of speaking about Chicana identity that reveals the dialogic and heteroglot nature of Chicana voices.

Second is the evolution and progress of encoding a feminist and feminine sensibility of language that, when uttered and articulated reflect the development of Chicana *placas*. Chicana *placas* are a style of inscription and language use among Chicana feminist that signs the ways women break into language by coding new meanings into the sign-systems of language itself, at the same time that *placas* are also a metaphor and symbol—a *placa* is a shifting signifier. As a shifting signifier, representations of La Malinche allow the myriad and heteroglot experiences of women to gain presence across the spaces of textual and visual languages.

The introduction of my project presents the questions, thesis, and methodology defining my study. I explain how this study draws from interdisciplinary methods used in postmodernism, feminism, subaltern studies, and semiotics to analyze how women patterned their own codes of knowledge as they reclaimed cultural icons associated with language. I offer an abbreviated history on the literary and art criticism on La Malinche to contextualize the development of Chicana feminist perspectives on La Malinche over time. From Cordelia Candelaria's argument that Malinche was a "proto feminist model" and Tey Diana Rebolledo's view of La Malinche as a "Chicana cultural foremother," to Norma Alarcón's interpretation of La Malinche as a "paradigmatic figure" and the use of *malinchismo* in a subversive way to celebrate queer embodiments of La Malinche by lesbian feminists, the amplification of what La Malinche signifies within the realm of Chicana feminist thought also makes visible the variety of interpretation, meaning and significance related to La Malinche. (Candelaria, "La Malinche" 1; Rebolledo, *Infinite* 193; Alarcón, "Traduttora" 57). Chapter one outlines key themes in this study: La Malinche as a sign of female empowerment, the making of positive images of women by reversing or manipulating

negative stereotypes, the advancement of a Chicana feminist imaginary, the development of a hybrid Chicana tongue, and the empowerment Chicanas have cultivated in their interpretation of domesticity across private and public spheres.

Chapter one explores the development of Chicana feminist thought in relation to the figure of La Malinche. I address how language issues became vital in redefining Chicana identity and highlight the aspect of language central to this study. This chapter analyzed representations of the figure of La Malinche as a heteroglot sign to elucidate how Chicanas were able to subvert and alter the meaning and interpretation of La Malinche. In this process they generated new codices of empowerment that brought authority to the ways women use language to frame and describe their world. La Malinche served as a translator and interpreter to Hernán Cortés during the period of Discovery and Exploration of the Americas as a result of her giftedness with language. She is also represented as the mother of mixed-race people, the union between indigenous and Spanish bloodlines and cultures because she gave birth to Cortés' son, the first *mestizo* (the symbolic image of the first multiracial subject).

La Malinche's representation in early Chicano cultural production by both men and women speaks to the significance of her figure in understanding the ways in which Chicanas/os invoke cultural images to develop a collective Chicano imaginary. The use of cultural heritage to redefine the very identity of the term Chicano allowed the interpretation of cultural images from a Chicano perspective to fuel the political aims of the Chicano movement. While the use of male images in Chicano cultural pantheon, such as Pancho Villa, Emiliano Zapata, and Moctezuma were infused with new cultural meaning that positively coded Chicano identity, the dominant vision of female archetypes historically limited a sense

of empowerment for women because female images, such as that of La Malinche, perpetuated male-perspectives that negatively stereotyped women and negated the reality of their feminine nature. Although Chicanos replicated the understanding of La Malinche in modern Mexican contexts, that is, La Malinche as a *vendida*, a traitor and sellout for her role in the conquest, early Chicana feminists questioned the linguistic-cultural systems of *vendida*, *malinche* and *malinchismo* used to construct a negative identity for the cultural foremother and for early Chicana activists.

Women used literature and art to gain the agency to reimagine their identity by examining language issues and feminist thought at its intersections. An analysis of critical inquiry, literature, and art by Chicana artists that represented La Malinche reveals a complicated interpretation that confounds as well as contests negative associations linked to the figure. Chapter two examines the interrelationship that Chicana artists and writers share in creating new forms of self-representation and spaces by deliberately altering, and manipulating the reinterpretations of this icon. I analyze the development of Chicana feminist artistic and literary expression as *gritos* to show how the language and visual arts allowed women a space to elaborate their perceptions and values about what it means to be a woman and to take pride in the cultural heritage fashioned through a Chicana imaginary.

The development of La Malinche into a Chicana feminist cultural, historical, and folkloric figure representing language and tongue contributes to our understanding of how women not only contested and challenged patriarchal traditions and misogynistic language, but also how the development of a new Chicana feminist consciousness empowered women to further develop the voices and languages maintained at home. This enabled them to create

shifts in the understanding of the significance of La Malinche as a cultural archetype among feminists across all domestic contexts of the Chicano experience.

Therefore, chapter three explores through an interdisciplinary lens, how women create new understandings of identity by engaging issues of language to reframe how we understand historical representations of women defined in cultural heritage. Concepts of self-affirmation and self-determination emerging from the Chicano movement empowered women to create and use a female-defined voice as a tool for liberation while deconstructing patriarchal modes of communication. In their own quest to define Chicana identity they developed Chicana feminist thought and praxis. The desire to define their identity created a new context for women to educate themselves about their cultural heritage, and, through scholarly and creative practice, reclaim histories that yielded revisionist and decolonial readings about La Malinche. By addressing the element of manipulation in patriarchal and historical discourse, Chicana feminists demonstrated how literal and symbolical language use constructs images of good and bad women as illustrated by the contributions on Chicana *domesticana* by Mesa-Bains. From the contributions of Chicana feminist thought, this chapter also argues that the development of Chicana *placas* has allowed feminists to name the manipulation of their cultural heritage, and to shift the representations of women, such as La Malinche, by signing, marking, and tagging new images of women in creative expression. The continued forms of breaking into language also reveals the development of a Chicana *lengua franca*.

The stories of each of the authors analyzed in chapter four reveal a multilayered understanding of La Malinche. This chapter details how women used writing to cultivate and expand a metalinguistic awareness of self that had been cultivated from home-based feminist

traditions, that is, domestic forms of feminism in operation prior to the civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s. As a result of the Chicano and Feminist movements these traditions developed in unprecedented forms. For example, *Puppet: A Chicano Novella* (1985) by Margarita Cota-Cárdenas illustrates how, for women, it became important to look at a series of relations between how women read and understood the relation between languages, identity and female images in Chicano cultural heritage from the ways men interpreted them. Like Cota-Cárdenas, the works by Alicia Gaspar de Alba “Los derechos de La Malinche,” (1989) and Erlinda Gonzales-Berry’s *Paletitas de guayaba* (1991) continue to show the agency women gain by signifying their metalinguistic tongues to transform La Malinche into a Chicana *placa*. The texts of Gaspar de Alba and Gonzales-Berry show how women eradicate the rhetoric of *malinchismo* across the borderlands and also in trans-national contexts. Thus, Chicana *placas* is the language Chicana feminists used to tag and mark themselves into existence. Like graffiti (wall writing), Chicana *placas* is a form of writing that is dually text and image.

As we saw in chapter five, the art of Delilah Montoya illustrates how La Malinche is also a powerful visual image. Montoya’s art continues to prove the development of a Chicana *lengua franca* through a depiction of La Malinche that advances Mesa-Bains’ *domesticana* politics. In *La Malinche* (1993) the cultural foremother is a symbol of female spirituality, a metaphor of resistance and survival against colonization, and a representation of Chicana quest for auto-definition. Pola López likewise expresses the ability to negotiate new visual vocabularies of La Malinche through symbolic speech acts that narrate a new identity for Chicanas and Malinche alike. She offers a different image of La Malinche by referring to her through dress, the *huipil*. The *huipil*’s design in the work *Huipil: Vestido de Mujer* (2001),

however, offers a conglomeration of Chicana images and stereotypes that are positive and negative. She manipulates and plays with the languages of visual and textual female stereotypes that brings a new “*sitio y lengua*” to Chicana identity. Parallel to literary expressions of La Malinche, in art, the cultural foremother is a multivalent sign, a shifting signifier capable of sustaining many voices and languages.

In the case of contemporary artistic expression, the analysis of Maya Christina Gonzalez’s and Viviana Paredes’ artwork on La Malinche is the focus of chapter six. In *La Prietita and the Ghost Woman* (1995), *Self-portrait: Speaking Fire and Flowers* (2008), and *La Malinche* (2009) Gonzales references La Malinche through her speech glyphs. She transforms the cultural foremother into a shifting signifier that expresses the plurilingusitic realities of women today. Exploring the themes of La Malinche, tongue, and indigeneity through the use of new materials and through the teaching of *curanderismo*, the works *My pocha tongues* (2004) and *Pocha indígena* (2005) by Paredes reference La Malinche through sculpted tongues. In these two works, the tongues are “speaking glyphs” that showcase how women continue to create *placas* to bring voice to their own shifting and sliding identities.

Drawing from the critical analysis by art historians and literary critics, this study yields a more complex understanding of how Chicana artists and writers exhibit a shared experience in the use of language to construct alternative narratives to understand female images that have shaped and defined Chicano culture and history. My dissertation contributes a new theoretical framework that reads feminist expressions of La Malinche as a transhistorical and decolonial phenomena. I hope to bring a new framework of analysis to the image of La Malinche that will show how relations among women have fostered a new Chicana imaginary and a new tongue that points to the workings of a Chicana feminist

decolonial tongue; that is, the active use of language to rethink and reconceptualized notions of history and its connection to contemporary affirmations that articulate and theorize new visions of self by defying imaginaries and structures of language through Chicana *placas*.

This interdisciplinary study further demonstrates that diverse approaches from literary and art criticism, women's and feminist studies, cultural and semiotic studies to the study of La Malinche are necessary to foster new frameworks of interpreting the complex history of La Malinche and the readings Chicana feminist offer as they reimagine La Malinche. This study examines the written and visual expressions of La Malinche by Chicana feminist writers, artists and critics through an interdisciplinary lens to analyze how women have utilized their cultural heritage to negotiate new understandings on issues of language, gender, and identity by decolonizing the structures of language, sign-systems, as a means to empower women with their own tongues.

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