

La Malinche / D^a Marina / Malinali / Malintzin

- 1498-1505 This Aztec woman's name at birth probably was Malintzin or Malinali or Malinche (Spanish version). She was born in Painal, Coatzacoalcos (on the coast at the center of Campeche Bay; also, the core of the ancient Olmec region, and nowadays the center of Mexico's petroleum region).
Her father was the Aztec *cacique* (chief or leader) of the town. When she was a little girl, Malinali's mother died. Her father remarried, but when Malinali's stepmother died, her father sold his daughter to merchants from Xicalanco. These merchants in turn sold Malinali to other merchants from Putun-Chan, which is located in the Mayan region of Chokan-Putun (in the region of Tabasco). The people of Chokan-Putun gave tribute in material goods and sacrifice victims to the Aztec empire.
- 1519 12 March: the Mayan *cacique* of Putun-Chan gave Malinali and 20 other young women to Cortés as a gift as a chieftain gives gifts to a guest. By such gifts the *cacique* sought to buy peace and goodwill from Cortés and his Spanish conquistadors. Cortés took Malinali as his mistress. (Cortés' wife was still in Cuba.)
When Cortés and his forces arrived at Veracruz, Cortés gave Malinali to Alonso Hernández Puertocarrero as the latter's concubine.
At Veracruz, Jerónimo de Aguilar—who had been rescued from the Mayas and who spoke Spanish and Maya—noticed that Malinali spoke both Náhuatl (the Aztecs' language) and Maya. Armed with this knowledge, Cortés took Malinali back. (Aguilar had learned Maya during the 8 years he had lived in Yucatán, 1511-1519.)
The Spaniards heard Malinali's name as "Malinche". (There are other interpretations of her name including the idea that it refers to her birth day.)
Malintzin / Malinali / Malinche learned Spanish quickly.
Meanwhile Puertocarrero returned to Castile, Spain; he was a direct representative or agent (procurador) for Cortés' relations with king Carlos I/V of Spain. (Nominally, Cortés was under the jurisdiction of Governor Velázquez of Cuba.)
- 1519-1521 Cortés, his Spanish soldiers, and thousands of native allies, with the aid of Malinali, conquered Tenochtitlán and the entire Aztec empire.
- 1519-1524 Cortés and Malinche became inseparable, doing everything and going everywhere together. She was his concubine and he became known as "el Señor Malinche, el Malinche, *el hombre de Malinche*" (Mr. Malinche, the Malinche, Malinche's man). She

- taught him everything she knew about the Mesoamerican people, their languages, beliefs, psychology, history, myths, fears, and customs.
- 1522 A son was born to Malinali and Cortés. The boy was baptized as Martín Cortés.
- Malinche / Malinali was baptized and changed her name to Marina.
- 1524 Cortés, whose wife joined him in Mexico, then had Marina marry one of his lieutenants, Juan Jaramillo, because the later was single and Cortés wanted to appear to be a faithful Catholic, and he wanted Malinali to be a proper married woman according to Catholic dogma. (Cortés wife had a difficult personality and they were not a happy couple, to say the least. Jaramillo had been a captain of one of the ships the Spaniards used to cross Lake Texcoco during the conquest of Tenochtitlán.
- 1524-1528 Marina received honor, social stature, respect, dignity in the newly conquered city of Tenochtitlán-Mexico City. She was given the official title of Doña Marina (Lady Marina).
- 1528 Jaramillo and Doña Marina acquired the former pleasure estate owned and occupied by Moctezumo (Motecuhzoma), which was near Chapultepec. Nowadays it is in Mexico City's neighborhood (*la colonia*) of San Angel, which is and always has been a high class neighborhood in Mexico City. (The address is 95 Calle República de Cuba.)
- Jaramillo was elevated to the social status of the *grandees* (*los grandes*) of México; he served in the city hall, he was a royal *procurador*, etc.
- A daughter baptized as María was born to Doña Marina and Jaramillo. Later María married Luis de Quesada.
- 1528-1550 Sometime during these years Doña Marina died.

La Malintzin / Malinche / Malinali / Doña Marina is considered in Mexico as one of the traitors of the Mexican people—all Mexican people, natives, *mestizos*, blacks, etc. The word masculine and feminine forms of the word *malinche* are synonymous with traitor. Even so, her name (Malinche) has been given to many geographical places in Mexico including rivers, volcanoes, etc. In the 20th century, under the influence of the rising tide of pride in Mexico's indigenous past, the term and concept of *malinchismo* was invented. This refers to the social process by which one betrays one's own people and nation.

Sometimes it is not remembered that she (Malinali) was first betrayed by her own father. Note, however, that when Cortés placed Malinche directly alongside himself, when he was seen constantly in public in her presence, when he consulted her about all strategic and tactical matters, Cortés and she placed themselves in direct opposition to the engrained Mexican and indigenous patriarchal order. This near egalitarianism between Cortés and Doña Marina was due, of course, to Cortés military needs. But it is

also due to a certain, though relative, acceptance of a woman as a man's equal, which, in part, comes from Hispanic customs. The most obvious example of this male-female egalitarianism, which was fully accepted and even applauded by Spaniards in the early Renaissance are the Catholic Monarchs, Isabel I of Castile and Fernando V of Castile/Aragón. In part, the persistence of the extreme negative connotation of *malinchismo* parallels the persistence of Mexican *machismo*, which, therefore, can be seen to have existed both in the Aztec period and in the post-Conquest period.

No extant sixteenth-century painting of Malinali has been preserved. Various eye-witness sources said that she was beautiful for very pretty. In the early twentieth century, attention was focused on her as the embodiment of the oppressed—violated, even, raped—indigenous people of Mexico, and, as mentioned above, her name became a famous Mexico curse word as Mexican national pride began to surge in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). Not particularly wishing to prejudice your own imagined image of her, nevertheless, it is important to see at least one prominent version of how she was viewed in relationship to Cortés in the 20th century. The following shows a mural entitled “Cortés and Malinche” (1926) by José Clemente Orozco in the San Ildefonso Museum at 16 Justo Sierra street in downtown Mexico City:



Two brief passages from a book by Analisa Taylor (*Indigeneity in the Mexican Cultural Imagination: Thresholds of Belonging*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2009) are cited here by way of tying together several humanities themes that link sixteenth-century events, especially in Mexico, with twenty-first-century trends. Both passages are from Taylor's chapter on "From Malinche to Matriarchal Utopia: Gendered and Sexualized Visions of Indigeneity" (82-104).

- (1) However, in Mexico's current political climate, mestizo nationalism as an ideology capable of shaping social imperatives is clearly at an impasse. Two interrelated factors have rendered this ideology anachronistic in times of globalization: first, the emergence in recent decades of indigenous movements for autonomy have put pressure on the state to both recognize Mexico as a multiethnic nation and grant collective rights to indigenous communities; and second, the federal government has dismantled its populist economic and social development model in favor of an export-oriented, social austerity model as a means of reducing the mountains of foreign debt the nation has incurred over the past four decades. The bottom line here is that

- even as women's economic burdens have shifted in these times, such that work outside the home is no longer an option but an imperative, mainstream representations of women's social roles have remained anchored in the narratives of mestizo nationalism (92).
- (2) Within the [dominant narratives of Mexican national identity], the figure of Malinche has taken on a notoriety that stretches far beyond her historical role in the sixteenth-century conquest of central Mexico. As Cortés's multilingual interpreter, consul, and mother to his child, Malinche has been invoked in twentieth-century cultural production as the archetypal abject mother of a modern mestizo nation. In locating the origins of modern Mexico in the sexual union of the historical figures of Malinche and Hernán Cortés, mestizo nationalist imaginings negate the multiethnic composition of pre- and post-conquest Mesoamerican society. At the same time, they buttress a series of binary oppositions in which the feminine is associated with indigeneity and subjugation while the masculine is associated with hispanicity and conquest. As an object of scorn, her name, which isn't really even her name, has been invoked to negate the agency of indigenous women in Mexican society. The historical figure of Malinche is conjured up today when one is accused of being a *malinchista*, of selling one's people out to foreign interests, as it implies accepting subaltern status in exchange for a modicum of personal benefit in the context of colonial or neocolonial domination" (100).

