



Forgotten Spirits: An Interdisciplinary Exploration of *Mestiza*

Spirituality

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January 4th 2010

For presentation at the 2010 ILLASA Conference

According to Mexican folklore, there are three types of death of an individual. The first is the death we are all familiar with, the death of the physical body. The second is the death when all of your loved ones and everyone who knows you, all pass away. The third type of death happens when all memories of your existence cease to exist. The third death may be delayed through art, history and storytelling. In this paper through story telling and art, I aim to bring to life three inspiring mestiza women: Malinche, Sor Juana Ines De La Cruz, and Gloria Anzaldua. All three of these women, have strong spiritual beliefs and values. While each of their stories is entirely unique, this connection to their spirituality, gave all three of them the strength to survive in the minds and hearts of future generations.

Contemporary literature by Gloria Anzaldua, Ana Castillo, and Cherrie Morraga suggests Chicana feminists have a strong desire to reclaim pre-colonial spirituality, despite their ancestor's strong ties to Catholicism. As a Chicana feminist, I will be exploring this tension through performance art. I will tell the stories of three important *mestiza* women throughout history with a focus on their relationship with their spirituality. Despite the social, economic, and religious barriers for social and educational mobility, these women were able to thrive and transcend expectations of the role of a woman during their time periods. Even in contemporary times, Chicana and mestiza women face a hostile environment, which limits their choices and educational mobility, but they have far more stories of success and role models to draw from to help them transcend limited expectations. One purpose of this paper is to enable students to find inspiration from the stories of successful women of the past.

The three *mestiza* women whose stories I will explore, Malinche, Sor Juana Ines De La Cruz, and Gloria Anzaldua, survived and thrived using their spiritual connections to Christianity. For example, Malinche was among the first indigenous women to be baptized into the Catholic religion by Spanish colonizers in the 1520's, enabling her to survive the conquest. Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz chose to become a Catholic nun so that she would be free to develop her intellectual pursuits, and thus she would survive as an intellectual. Gloria Anzaldua is a Chicana poet and author who combined pre colonial and postcolonial spirituality with politics and poetry to tie together overlapping struggles such as the Chicano movement with queer liberation.

Malintzin



Born as Malintzin, named Dona Marina by the Spanish, and remembered as Malinche, the image of Malintzin has undergone transformations within the Mexican and

Chicano/a paradigms. Her life story is debatable, since there are only a few documents that talk about her early life. And yet, she has become an iconic symbol within Mexican and Chicano culture. Malinzin is known for serving as a translator for Cortez during the encounter between the Spanish and the Aztecs. She also became the mother of one of the first mestizo's, with Cortez as the father. Despite her incredible translation capabilities and her role as the bridge between two cultures, she is remembered in vain. Many Chicano/a and Mexican communities in the US use the term, "malinche" as an insult, signifying "traitor" or "sellout". In fact, Mexican newspapers in the 1960's popularized the term, "malinchista" to be used "to denounce all those who have been corrupted by foreign influences" (Contreras 109). The following excerpt is taken from a Mexican newspaper, "We Chicanos have our own share of Malinche, which is what we call traitors to la raza who are of la raza...In the service of the gringo, malinche's attack their own brothers, betray our dignity and manhood, cause jealousies and mis-understandings among us, and actually seek to retard the advance of Chicanos, if it benefits themselves" (Contreras 108). On the other hand, some view her as a victim, a slave to Cortes and the Spaniards. To them, she symbolizes unreliability and victimization. (Contreras 107). For instance, Octavio Paz views her as "a woman who suffered the humiliation of sexual violation and emotional manipulation" (Contreras 110). She is seen within a conceptual binary, a mere helpless victim or a malicious traitor.

In the mid-1970's, however, a reevaluation of pre Colombian culture surfaced, in which, Cordelia Candelaria presented La Malinche as a "Chicana feminist prototype." (Contreras 107). Adalaia del Castillo formulated Malintzin's actions as "women's resistance to Aztec violence and oppression." (Contreras 111). She reexamines this myth

of Malinche as a traitor and redefines Malinche's role. Rather than being responsible for the destruction of a civilization, she should be credited for "the beginning of the mestizo nation" or the creation of another. According to Gloria Anzaldua, she is one of the three mothers of the gente Chicana. Octavio Paz calls her "Mother of all Mexicans" (Contreras 110). She was able to break free from this problematic pervasive paradigm through which she had been viewed.

La Historia Verdadera de La Nueva Hispana /The True History of New Spain by Bernal Diaz Del Castillo is one of the few first-hand documents written during Malinche's lifetime. In this account, the author refers to her as "la lengua" the tongue of the conquest. According to Del Castillo, she spoke at least two languages: "Doña Marina knew the language [Nahuatl] of Guazacualco, which is that common to Mexico, and she knew the language [Chontal Mayan] of Tabasco," (Castillo XVI). Without her genius ability at translation, Cortes's expedition may have reached the same fate as the first two failed expeditions that Bernal Diaz Del Castillo survived. Castillo himself recognizes this, "sin ir Dona Marina no podíamos entender la lengua de la Nueva España y Mexico" (Castillo XVI). (without the help of Doña Marina we could not have understood the language of New Spain and Mexico.) I will use the description of Malinche's early life, provided by Del Castillo as primary material, and Jane Lewis Brandt as secondary material to create an interpretation of Malinche's early life.

For my performance piece, I hope to break the conceptual binary through which she has been viewed. I will portray her relationship with Cortes as one of love. I will reframe Cortes and Malintzin as equals, who had love for each other. Rather than a traitor or a victim, I will portray Malintzin as an agent of change, a shaper of history, a creator,

the mother of a new mixed race. She represents the fusion between entirely unique cultures. She was able to use both the pre-colonial Nahuatl spirituality and Catholic faith as a source of strength to survive and thrive throughout the encounter.

Visual representation of the Dance mediums

The performance will begin with the baptism of Malinche into the Catholic religion. Visually it will involve the symbolic pouring of water, by using a deep blue silk cloth, which will cover her while a Mexican colonial skirt is put on over her Aztec traditional dress. Music will begin, and she will dance to Aztec music. The music will change and she will then dance to Mexican folkloric music. The visual representation of the two overlapping dresses and the two distinctive traditional dances will represent the symbiosis between the two unique cultures.

Between the dances, each woman will tell a story about herself; excerpts have been included. During the dress changes, prerecorded poems and images will be displayed.

Excerpt from performance piece

The snake with four nostrils left my father one hour to live. He chose me as his successor, to rule over Paynala, after all I was his only kin. My mother never wanted me to rule over Paynala. Thought I could not handle it. So she sold me. Sold me to the pochtecas. I was tied down and carried 200 miles from Paynala to Oaxaca. I was so thirsty. I was renamed Ato by the family who purchased me as a slave.

When the white men came, I was given to them, like a string of decorative beads. They hungered for my female flesh, but Cortez would not let them devour me. He protected me. The ocean protected me. She caught me, cradled me to the shore. Where I was baptized into the Christian Religion. La Virgen protected me. I was taught all of the stories of the bible. I came to embrace the miracles of Christianity. I came to praise la Virgen y el Senor Jesus. But I never let go of my own faith, my own Gods. I tucked them away to be saved for later when I needed them.

Took them out from time to time, in secret, asked them to watch over me. They helped me when I translated between Moctezuma and Cortez. Embraced me when I gave my flower to Cortez. Gave me strength when I gave birth to my firstborn. Guided me when I needed guidance. (based on historical fiction by Jane Lewis Brandt)

*Beauty bathed in her hair
her sexual appeal washed over
her body
her wisdom was deeper
her tongue spoke for two cultures
her mothers tongue
and her oppressors voice
her ability to love had no boundaries,
to love him, them,
despite their cruelty
despite their difference
despite their tyranny.*

*Her genius was to fuse
the oppressed
and the oppressor.
to understand
the Spanish
and the Aztec
and the tlascalans
her ability to love
and forgive
them all
made her the mother of a mixed people.
La Madre de los mestizos.*



Sor Juana Ines De La Cruz

Sor Juana Ines De la Cruz de Asbaje y Ramírez de Santillana, born just after the Renaissance period in 1648, was indeed a Mexican Renaissance woman. She was a poet, a playwright, philosopher, and a nun- despite the fact that reading was forbidden for women during this time period. She also learned Nahuatl and wrote short poems in the language. But most of all she was a feminist, a radical for the time period. She learned to read very early, at age three, a feat exceedingly rare, even for adult for women during the 17th century in Mexico (Kantaris). She believed that women should be educated just like men. When she nine years old, she dressed up in men's clothes and begged her mom to send her to the University, where she could develop her intellectual pursuits. But her mother scorned her for not taking on the role of women during that time period and sent her to live with her grandfather in the capital. Sor Juana claims to have read all the books in his library. She continued to fantasize about cutting her hair, changing her name and enrolling in the University.

Sor Juana was, a postcolonial mestiza, insofar as she was had mixed heritage. She was the 'illegitimate' daughter of a Creole mother and a Biscayan (Basque) father. (Kantaris). Because of this illegitimacy, she was shunned upon during that time period. Her family forbade her from entering the University disguised as a man, so she continued her studies privately. She came under the tutelage of the Viceroy Antonio Sebastian de Toledo, who appreciated her intelligence. He even showed her off by inviting several theologians, jurists, philosophers, and poets to a meeting, during which she had to answer, unprepared, many questions, and explain several difficult points on various scientific and literary subjects (Appleton's Cyclopedia of American Biography). Her

eloquence and fearlessness during this “test of knowledge” made her well known throughout the viceroy court. They especially appreciated her beauty, and she had numerous marriage proposals, all of which she refused. Even though, she could not become an intellectual in the traditional way, she became an intellectual using the existing tools that she had. She gave up everything and became a nun. In her time, the convent was the only refuge where a woman could educate her mind, body, and spirit. She entered the Convent of the order of St. Jerome at age twenty where she wrote many poems, plays, studied philosophy, music and science (Kantaris).

In her time in the convent, she contributed to colonial Spanish feminist discourse, a discourse almost non-existent during her time period. Her message was simple: women should be given the opportunity to study just like men. She believed that there was no reason that women should not be given the same opportunities that men have. She also critiques the attitudes and hypocritical behavior of men in her poem, “hombres necios.” (excerpts below, full poem in appendix). The ecclesiastical hierarchy did not like this message.

In 1691, the bishop sent her a letter “praising Sor Juana for her brilliance, but telling her that her duty was not to be brilliant, but to serve God. The role of women was to be silent, not heard.” (NietoGomez 54). Sor Juana politely wrote her famous response 'Respuesta a Sor Filotea', defending right of women to study and write. She said,

Surely you must know more than I; however, as I recall, Jesus did not say that women should be silent not heard. You forget the temple was a place of learning and discussion, and that women were preaching and talking to their people there, not just bowing their heads in silent prayer or absent-mindedly planning their's weeks activities...Yes its my duty to be a servant of God, but how can I understand theology if I cant understand biology, geology, psychology? Of the world's supposed to be a manifestation of God's great goodness, how can I understand that if I don't know anything about it? (54)

'Respuesta a Sor Filotea' has been hailed as the first feminist manifesto (Kantaris).

In her plays and poetry, she “employed parable, allegory, and the language of mythology to deride misogynist and other sorts of ignorance and narrow-mindedness, and to praise audacity and the free expression of opinion.” (Arenal, 39). For example in her poem “hombres necios”, she contests the sexual double standards by mocking childish, self-imposed male fears, by defending sex workers:

*So where does the greater guilt lie
for a passion that should not be:
with the man who pleads out of baseness
or the woman debased by his plea?*

*Or which is more to be blamed—
though both will have cause for chagrin:
the woman who sins for money
or the man who pays money to sin?*

Visual representation of the Dance mediums

The next dance medium, Flamenco will be used to depict Sor Juana Ines De La Cruz. While I go back stage to change costumes, I will have a prerecorded version of *hombres necios*, in English and in Spanish. Visually, Sor Juana will be dressed in a deep red flamenco dress, and blue flamenco shoes. But she will be covered with a black silk cloth to represent the silencing. She will physically be on a platform (to represent the convent she was not allowed to leave, and she will be covered from head to toe. Despite this attempted silencing, she will dance with loud stamps and beautiful elegant movements.

Sor Juana also spoke about women's hair, how hair was a symbol of beauty, but if it covered an empty mind, it was nothing but a mask. According to Anna Nietogomez, "[Sor Juana] said that not until a woman's mind was equal in beauty to her long hair should she have her long hair, so in three months, she would plan to read a certain amount, and if she hadn't she would cut off her hair." (54). In the performance, I will cut a section of my hair to honor Sor Juana.

The following is a poem that I wrote, inspired by Sor Juana Ines De La Cruz:

*Without my books I do not exist.
Without knowledge I am nothing.
Why does the world persecute me?
All I want is to put beauty into thought
Rather than thought into beauty.*

*Why do they agree to see me for my physical beauty?
But scurry away when I reveal my intellectual passions?
Am I crazy to desire philosophy, science and poetry
More than the thought of a family, a husband or a child?
For me, it was motherhood or my mind.*

Gloria Anzaldua



Gloria Anzaldua a self-described “chicana, dyke-feminist, tejana patlache poet, writer and cultural theorist,” was born to share-cropper/field-worker parents on September 26th, 1942 in South Texas. (Anzaldua) She has been an influential woman in Chicano studies, queer studies, and discourse on Mestizaje. During her lifetime, she won a number of awards for her work, such as the Lambda Lesbian Small Book Press Award for *Haciendo Cara*, an NEA Fiction Award, the Before Columbus Foundation American Book Award for *This Bridge Called My Back*, and the Sappho Award of Distinction. In addition, her text *Borderlands/La Frontera* was selected by the *Literary Journal* as one of the 38 Best Books of 1987 (Voices).

In contrast to Malinche and Sor Juana, she lived in a time in which she would not be silenced. Furthermore she was educated, she could write, she had choices that the other women did not have. This enabled her to explore and embrace her mixed spirituality which included a devotion to “la Virgin de Guadalupe, Nahuatl/Toltec divinities, and to the Yoruba orishás Yemayá and Oshún,” For example, she sees la Virgin De Guadalupe as the most potent religious, political and cultural symbol of the Chicano/mexicano, “She, like my race, is a synthesis of the old world and the new, of the religion and culture of two races in our psyche, the conquerors and the conquered. She is the symbol of the mestizo true to his or her Indian values.” (Anzaldua 52).

In her most famous text, "Borderland La Frontera, The New Mestiza" she talks about the 'mestiza' mentality, which is about flexibility and self-transformation of a Chicana. She claims that a connection to spirituality is essential in this self-transformation:

The patriarchal culture dominated by men instilled in us the picture of weak, vulnerable women. But in reality, females are subject to dualities. Women are capable of being both strong and weak, invincible and vulnerable, serpent-goddess, embody heavenly and underworld powers, mother-warrior characteristics just as the female goddesses.” (Anzaldua, 54)
Anzaldua’s emphasis on spirituality as a means of strength is a powerful and enlightening image.

Since her work was widely published, I will use her own poetry to depict her in the performance. The following is a poem about being mestiza taken from Borderlands:

*“Because I, a mestiza
continually walk out of one culture
and into another,
because I am in all cultures at the same time,
alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro,*

*me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio.
Estoy norteadada por todas las voces que me hablan
Simultaneamente.
(Anzaldua, 99)*

Visual representation of the Dance mediums

For Gloria Anzaldua, she will break free from traditional dance forms and will use interpretive dance and belly dance to signify the sexual freedom that she created for herself. In her discourse, she talks about breaking free from traditional life. In fact, she made the choice to be a lesbian, she claims, “for the lesbian of color, the ultimate rebellion she can make is through her sexual behavior. She goes against two moral prohibitions: sexuality and homosexuality...I made the choice to be queer (for some it is genetically inherent.” (Anzaldua 41).

Between the dances, each woman will tell a story about herself; excerpts have been included. During the dress changes, prerecorded poems will be played and images will be projected.

Conclusion

These three women have many commonalities that braid their stories together. They all had strong connections to La virgin Guadalupe, the mother who unites people. According to Gloria Anzaldua, La Virgin de Guadalupe is “the symbol of the mestizo...Guadalupe unites people of different races, religions, languages, chicano protestants, American Indians and whites.” (Anzaldua 52). Malinche’s connection to La Virgin de Guadalupe is one of time and geography. The apparition occurred right around

the time Malinche would have been in her late 20's. No one knows for sure the date of Malinche's death. Some accounts date her death around 1529, though other sources give 1550's. The apparition of la Virgen in Mexico happened in 1531. In her infamous, *Repuesta*, Sor Juana Ines De La Cruz uses the son of Mary- Jesus to defend women's right to know about the world around them. And Gloria Anzaldua uses the image of La Virgen de Guadalupe to unite different cultures.

They also all have connections to *mestizaje*. Malinche is the mother of the first mestizo; Sor Juana herself is a mestiza, being Basque and Creole; and Anzaldua wrote and theorized about *mestizaje*. All three of them excelled despite their limited circumstances. Malinche was one of the first translators between the Spanish and the Aztecs, despite being sold as a slave twice. Sor Juana Ines De La Cruz was published internationally and her story has gone on to inspire women worldwide to develop their intellectual pursuits. Gloria Anzaldua inspired a Society for the Study of Gloria Anzaldua whose mission is to "provide a place for scholars, students, and community to come together with the intention of engaging in the continued study of Anzaldua's intellectual and spiritual work." All three women had internal tensions between pre-colonial and post-colonial spiritualities. Malinche was raised believing in the pre-colonial Aztec and toltec gods and goddesses, but was later baptized into the Catholic faith. Despite not having Nahuatl blood, Sor Juana learned the language and wrote some poems in that language. All three will continue to live in the minds, spirits, and hearts of men and women for generations to come.

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Appendix

Hombres Necios by Sor Juana Ines De La Cruz

Hombres necios que acusáis
a la mujer sin razón,
sin ver que sois la ocasión
de lo mismo que culpáis:

si con ansia sin igual
solicitáis su desdén,
¿por qué quereis que obren bien
si las incitáis al mal?

Combatís su resistencia
y luego, con gravedad,
decís que fue liviandad
lo que hizo la diligencia.

Parecer quiere el denuedo
de vuestro parecer loco,
al niño que pone el coco
y luego le tiene miedo.

Queréis, con presunción necia,
hallar a la que buscáis,
para pretendida, Thais,
y en la posesión, Lucrecia

¿Qué humor puede ser más raro
que el que, falto de consejo,
el mismo empaña el espejo
y siente que no esté claro?

Con el favor y el desdén
tenéis condición igual,
quejándoos, si os tratan mal,
burlándoos, si os quieren bien.

Opinión, ninguna gana:
pues la que más se recata,
si no os admite, es ingrata,
y si os admite, es liviana

Siempre tan necios andáis
que, con desigual nivel,
a una culpáis por crüel
y a otra por fácil culpáis.

¿Pues cómo ha de estar templada
la que vuestro amor pretende,
si la que es ingrata, ofende,
y la que es fácil, enfada?

Mas, entre el enfado y pena
que vuestro gusto refiere,
bien haya la que no os quiere
y quejaos en hora buena.

Dan vuestras amantes penas
a sus libertades alas,
y después de hacerlas malas
las queréis hallar muy buenas.

¿Cuál mayor culpa ha tenido
en una pasión errada:
la que cae de rogada
o el que ruega de caído?

¿O cuál es más de culpar,
aunque cualquiera mal haga:
la que peca por la paga
o el que paga por pecar?

Pues ¿para qué os espantáis
de la culpa que tenéis?
Queredlas cual las hacéis
o hacedlas cual las buscáis.

Dejad de solicitar,
y después, con más razón,
acusaréis la afición
de la que os fuere a rogar.

Bien con muchas armas fundo
que lidia vuestra arrogancia,
pues en promesa e instancia
juntáis diablo, carne y mundo.

(English)

Silly, you men-so very adept
at wrongly faulting womankind,
not seeing you're alone to blame
for faults you plant in woman's mind.

After you've won by urgent plea
the right to tarnish her good name,
you still expect her to behave—
you, that coaxed her into shame.

You batter her resistance down
and then, all righteousness, proclaim

that feminine frivolity,
not your persistence, is to blame.

When it comes to bravely posturing,
your witlessness must take the prize:
you're the child that makes a bogeyman,
and then recoils in fear and cries.

Presumptuous beyond belief,
you'd have the woman you pursue
be Thais when you're courting her,
Lucretia once she falls to you.

For plain default of common sense,
could any action be so queer
as oneself to cloud the mirror,
then complain that it's not clear?

Whether you're favored or disdained,
nothing can leave you satisfied.
You whimper if you're turned away,
you sneer if you've been gratified.

With you, no woman can hope to score;
whichever way, she's bound to lose;
spurning you, she's ungrateful—
succumbing, you call her lewd.

Your folly is always the same:
you apply a single rule
to the one you accuse of looseness
and the one you brand as cruel.

What happy mean could there be
for the woman who catches your eye,
if, unresponsive, she offends,

yet whose complaisance you decry?

Still, whether it's torment or anger—
and both ways you've yourselves to blame—
God bless the woman who won't have you,
no matter how loud you complain.

It's your persistent entreaties
that change her from timid to bold.
Having made her thereby naughty,
you would have her good as gold.

So where does the greater guilt lie
for a passion that should not be:
with the man who pleads out of baseness
or the woman debased by his plea?

Or which is more to be blamed—
though both will have cause for chagrin:
the woman who sins for money
or the man who pays money to sin?

So why are you men all so stunned
at the thought you're all guilty alike?
Either like them for what you've made them
or make of them what you can like.

If you'd give up pursuing them,
you'd discover, without a doubt,
you've a stronger case to make
against those who seek you out.

I well know what powerful arms
you wield in pressing for evil:
your arrogance is allied
with the world, the flesh, and the devil!