

**LA MALINCHE: A SYMBOL OF IDENTITY (RE) CONSTRUCTION OF
THIRD WORLD COLOURED/ BLACK LESBIANS**

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Abstract

Identity of “women of color” “Black women” was constructed, categorized and then marginalized; their body was objectified as a means of scientific and anthropological knowledge, and a site of exploitation and domination. Feminism failed to include colored/black women’s views and notions in their own agenda and further anti-racist group was limited to black men. Hence women of color have been thrown out mainstream narratives and repeatedly violated by misogynistic practices. Taking this into account this paper has focused on the Mexican myth of La Malinche whose colored indigenous body was an object of exploitation and a site of resistance, and self-identification and pride within the paradigms of coloniality. It also explored how contemporary Mexican- American lesbians deploy this very myth to articulate their liminal sexuality and their hybrid and bordered identities. They flaunt the very points of contention of the Malinche’s ill fame, like her double speak, her unfaithfulness and her manipulative skills to reclaim their own identities around her. The paper highlights the intersectionality of third world lesbian activists and recognition of their double marginality and oppression. Furthermore, their fight against racism, normalized heterosexuality and class oppression where Malinche becomes symbolic in their narratives of such intersectionality.

Key Words: *La Malinche, Race, Gender, Identity, Lesbians, Black women, Third world women, Chicanas*

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Black/ coloured female identity has always been categorized and marginalized, and their body is objectified as means of scientific and anthropological knowledge. Venus Hottentot is one of those examples whose African female body was showcased as a mystery in front of Western European spectators. Her body was caged and turned into an object of curiosity, studies, gathering knowledge and information during and after her life. Her Buttocks, genitalia, breasts were exhibited, touched, and turned into a matter of speculation and its difference in size, shape and colour from white women's body had placed her out of the set "normality" of women's perfect body shape and colour. Instead excessiveness of her genitalia and buttocks were marked as a proof of her wild sexuality. In the misogynist and racial study her body was exposed only as object, a matter of study and not a human being; little attention was paid to her image, her intelligence, her self-subjectivity and Identity (Nisco 65-72).

Humiliation experienced by Hottentot is not because of one discourse but often shaped by many dimensions of her identity (race, gender, class). As her African body and her colour are product of intertwined pattern of racism and sexism. But on one hand, feminists attempt to politicize on the basis of experiences of women and on the other antiracists try to politicize these experiences of being black. However, because of her intersectional identity of both women and black within discourses that are shaped to respond to one or the other, is finally marginalized within both.

With this background, the present paper will focus widely on the third world colour, Chicana and black women who have crossed the border or their ancient generations who have experienced the border. It is important to know how their identity and body have been exploited, controlled and subordinated through within different dimensions. The subsequent will concentrate on female character *Malinche*, an indigenous woman of Aztec empire of 16th century, stood up and fought against all odds at the time when México was colonized and where women were subservient. This paper in defence of this character will put forward points to show that *La Malinche* flaunted her colour, sex, and class and saw strength in her identity. She became symbolically the first women who resisted, and because of her oppositional strength, Chicanas/ blacks/ colour women claim her as their mother and declared themselves "malinchistas" -her followers. The analysis has been influenced with the writings of border writers especially of Gloria Anzaldúa who in collaboration with other border writers re-read *La Malinche* and gave scope to its reader to see her differently as more empowered and strong women of Mexican history.

Fear, Violence, Shame, Submissiveness in Third World Women

The section will look into the migrated third world, coloured or black women living in south of United States especially near border space who are married to permanent resident and are submitted to their husband. They are prone to sexual and domestic violence, marital rape. Catastrophically, because of fear of deportation they do not come forward and raise their voice. They are unwilling to come out and speak about their personal life in public and at times saving the honour of family from shame is their priority. Lack of knowledge of public interaction; culture barrier and bilingual inability are other reasons that make them submissive to their husbands or waivers. Also they are often burdened with the child care responsibility, lack of job skills which even more complicate their lives (Crenshaw 1241-99). Their fear of loss and shame of being exposed are the result of violence which they receive from their male counterpart from the beginning.

Again it is important to cite here about Chicana women who tried to come forward to be part of Third world people's movement or Chicano movement in United States to save their identity, civil rights, and to fight for their race. These women were given space in the movement but mere as a support of their male counterpart as faithful follower, sexual partner or nurturing mother figure. This heterosexual and hetero-social relationship of male and female confirmed the authority of men. And these coloured women activists contributed to their struggle as silent, unquestioning and submissive support system (Harris, Introduction). This movement was for all colour people but it bordered one section of its group. Within these fights of race, patriarchy perpetuated to limit women. So women as passive or who tried to be active are in any how subjugated within their race.

Ironically, within antiracist discourse the problem of violence against women of colour seemed as just another manifestation of racism. The gender subordination within the community is reconfigured as a result of discrimination against men which contribute to the cycle of violence and gender issue is left untouched. However, the Women of colour/ Chicanas tried to bring their sexual concern, activism, leadership, refusal of child reproduction but their issues were labelled as foreign influence of white feminists which could ruin their movement. Moreover, lesbian colour women are marginalized in double manner. Lesbian women are seen as threat to their social institutions, family, community and male dominated culture. Lesbian women were tabooed as bad women who according to them use to keep their own desire before those of community and are traitor to their family, people and community. So, within their own race and community they are deprived of their rights and independence. And this ignorance of difference within group and negligence of their concerns contributes to tension in subordinated groups.

Object, Dependent, Victim, Deprived are Third World Women

Within the white feminist discourse, colour women / black women are considered as objects of their study for their literature and political issue and not as human being. They are segregated from feminist group and are refused to access pen and publishing house (Black woman Talk Collective, 126). Colour women are forced to ask for help and dependent on white women to

mediate their voice which is generally moulded by them. Also white feminists are not receptive to the issues of Black and Third world women which they consider as personal (Yamada, 72). This unfriendly, impersonal and inhuman behaviour make black or coloured women feel more victimized which result in their uncomfortable situation and uncooperative attitude towards white feminist. Their cultural and lingual differences even subservient them in the feminist panorama and are deprived of accessibility. Henceforth, white feminists reproduce the subordination and marginalization of women of colour by approving policies or strategies of empowerment that either exclude or wholly disregard the particular intersectional needs of women of colour. And also the white women's group in publishing houses does not include women of colour in their committee. Only those women of colour are allowed to enter who can "white wash" their ideas and themselves, follow them and get divided from their own sisters which is more penalizing for them because their voices get scattered. Besides, there is existing difference in treatment of colour among lesbians. Hence victims of patriarchy are doubly victimized of racism and class oppression.

The above argument is supported by this example, the concept of rape is quintessentially used to position people of colour and specially women of colour/ black women in social strata: a raped woman of colour/ black woman's sexual conduct is viewed through sceptical lenses whether she is actually raped or not; she protested the rapist or was seducing the rapist as these women are considered sexually wild. They are often tagged as prostitutes or bad women and "a prostitute or a bad woman cannot be raped". Many times their cases are unregistered, unseen and kept out of media touch and hence public eyes. If any case is registered then black women who are raped are racially discriminated against their rapists whether white or Black, surprisingly average prison term of a rapist for raping a woman of colour or black woman is less than that of raping a white woman (Crenshaw 1241-99). This inattention stems from the way the problem of rape is conceptualized within antiracist and anti-rape reform discourses. Both agenda formally includes black women but racism is not problematized in feminism and sexism is not problematized in antiracist discourses. So in both the cases black women is relegated to a secondary position.

Malinche: An Influence for Third World Women

Further moving towards the second part of the paper, *La Malinche* forces us to critically analyse the intersection and interrelation and interdependence between race, class and gender. *Malinche* was an indigenous female slave of Aztec empire and was gifted to the (white) Spanish conquistadors in 16th century. In her own indigenous community women were suppressed and possessed an inferior status. They were victim of patriarchy and they had no right to speak on high public occasions. They were not more than slaves of their Aztec ruler who gifted 20 women including *Malinche* to colonizers. *Malinche* was one of those women whose voice was abated. Under European conquistadors her suppressed voice got an opportunity and unknowingly she crushed European catholic restriction against women as speakers in public. With her intellect and communication skill she became "Lengua" (tongue) of head of Spanish colonizers and resisted her own community. Her silent mouth became an interpreter and at times a manipulator, without her both misogynist communities were incomprehensible to each

other. Hence her voice, marks one of her most striking and positive disruption of patriarchy on both the indigenous and European sides. (Cypess 17) She became a public persona standing between white and indigenous group, the two dominating group dependent in all manner on her voice.

La Malinche descended from “lengua” to her womanhood and exercised the traditional female function where she was relegated to the position of a national property, for political alliances and sexual exploits. She was raped and forced into motherhood by European whites. Her indigenous body was merely treated as object of sexual pleasure and her intellect was used to extend coloniality. At one point of time we see, her body was controlled by others but at the other she herself commanded her body by rejecting European dress and continued to wear her indigenous clothing. As Castaneda (Castañeda 87) says:

Male constructed Indian women’s bodies, both symbolically and materially, as a site to effect territorial and political conquest, women constructed and used their bodies, both symbolically and materially, as instruments of opposition, resistance and subversion of domination.

Malinche has been double victim of patriarchy, class and racism, as she was gifted by her own people to the conquistadors and there, she was received not as she but was rather baptized and given a Christian name *Doña Marina*. She was white coloured. Her master Hernán Cortes turned to be her lover but kept *Malinche* as second woman of his life as his mistress and had a son who was turned to be illegitimate because he left *Malinche* and his son, when his white woman came to live with him. Here, if *Malinche* were a white and high class woman then Cortés would have never left her instead made her his second wife. This situation is very similar to thousands of black, Indian, Chicana women who are treated as ‘whore’ of white man and *Malinche* represents these marginalized women.

Malinche who was not more than a female slave rejected the dominance and took control of her own sexuality. She never oppressed her own sexual desire and refused to follow her community’s desire of reproducing a generation of their race instead she never bothered of purity or impurity of her sexual reproduction. *Malinche*’s sexual independence has influenced many Chicanas, Black, and Colour lesbian as Gaspar de Alba says: ‘like *Malinche*, Chicanas “refused the favour” of male domination and biological destiny imposed by patriarchy that ensures the perpetuation of the laws.’ As lesbianism was always thrown out of men led Chicano movement or third world people’s movement. Third world, Black and Chicana lesbians who were seen as polluted by sexual license of European influences, came to believe ‘we can do what we want with our bodies, using them to pleasure or to be pleased by other women’. Third world lesbians rejected their male dominating movement and white feminism which was narrowed to heterosexism and homophobia. Lesbians reversed the religious and cultural doctrine that sexuality for women is meant for reproduction and not for pleasure or self-fulfilment. They also reversed the assumption that lesbians are just wanna-be men rather than women loving women. To be a woman- loving woman means woman cannot be controlled by man. (Gaspar de Alba 53) Now third world lesbians challenge the established norms of

patriarchy i.e. sexuality, identification, motherhood, and religion which are mediums to function patriarchy.

Coming to the narratives till 1980's where *La Malinche* has been re-presented as *La Chingada*, *La Traidora* and *La Llorona* by world known male, center based, white Mexican writers and painters like Octavio Paz, Carlos Fuentes and Diego Rivera. Her body is symbolized by them in their books and paintings as land which has been conquered, captured and controlled. *Malinche* is tabooed as a woman who sold her people for herself, betrayed her community and kept her own desire before the whole empire. Every Chicana woman who wants to seek liberation and freedom of thoughts, of decision making, of sexuality is forced to internalize the negative side of *Malinche* by their white and male counterpart to make them subordinate and submissive. As Gloria Anzaldúa says 'the worst kind of betrayal lies in making us believe that the Indian woman is betrayer'. Chicana women are forced to hate *Malinche* and to close the door at the face of their own identity. There is immediate need to end this game of politics, policies and cultures which is shaping *Malinche*' body, race and sexuality towards negativity.

Conclusion

Malinche's indigenous body, colour and class were different discourses which made her to suffer but at the same time her intelligence, her merits, her capacity helped her to overcome her deprived plight. As *Malinche* made her language, her voice and her power to outreach and broke the pre-existing dominance in her community. She turned her body as site of struggle and resistance. Her self-controlled sexuality made her identity stand out from Aztec empire and Spanish community. *La Malinche* proves herself not to be an impotent mother like her own who gave away her daughter to get rid of her and escaped to restart her life as wife of another cacique but she turned to be "mother" of many subordinated voices and gave vision to border coloured lesbian writers as they are carrying out the work which *Malinche* began in the public arena. Since *Malinche* is considered the first 'public voice as a woman among the Mexican conquistadors' (Cypess 22). It is her resistance that third world women affirm their oppositional *malinchismo* and refuse relational and others' appeal to disown *Malinche*. She encourages third world colour women to speak of violation, suppression and stand against own people if necessary. The un-belongingness of Chicanas to any of the discourse makes them closer to this bordered woman. Third world women are inspired to fight against their subjugation through their body, their sexuality and their voice in the form of writing which kills their fear, reveals their anger, strength and empower them, unite them. (Anzaldúa et al. 217) Now, second or third generation women are not ready to undergo through the same victimization which their mother and grandmother have gone through. Third world women have felt the need to unite with earlier generation to break the silence, the language barrier etc. They challenge patriarchy, racism and class categorization collectively. Their fight is not limited to a gender, a race, a class but they are opposing it as a whole single discourse because

They believe the need to struggle against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice

based upon the fact that the major system of oppression is interlocking. ("A black Feminist Statement" 210)

Malinche, who fought alone for her dignity, chose her own destiny likewise, third world women need to fight and take responsibility and carry their fight with dignity and strength. As Cherrie Moraga (Moraga and Anzaldúa 33) says 'It is much easier to rank oppression and set up a hierarchy, rather than take responsibility for changing our own lives.'

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