



Rethinking Doña Marina's History in the Spanish Conquest: Power Dynamics in the Colonial Encounter Between the Spanish and the Nahuatl

Qingyi (Alice) Liu

995 Hopmeadow Street, Simsbury, CT 06070, United States.

ABSTRACT

With knowledge of three languages, Doña Marina formed a linguistic link between the Spanish and the Nahuatl during the Spanish Conquest. Despite her critical position, historical narratives tend to obscure, if not omit, records of her presence. This paper aims to spotlight her complex role: forfeiting her liberty over her personhood upon enslavement while instituting power as she controlled communication across language and culture. As she did not leave any written records of herself, attempts to reconstruct her identity entail examinations of sources written her eyewitnesses – both Spanish and Nahuatl, literary and visual. While many studies have analyzed the role she played as a linguistic mediator, this paper demonstrates that her role was much more extensive. Doña Marina's diverse characterizations across historical narratives reflect efforts by sectors of the Spanish and the Nahuatl populations to institute power during the 16th century colonial encounter. Aligned with other decolonial projects, this paper works against the tendency to simplify the Spanish-Nahuatl colonial encounter as a dichotomy of conquest and resistance.

KEYWORDS: Doña Marina, Spanish Conquest, Nahuatl, power dynamics, Identity

INTRODUCTION

In March 1519, the Spanish conquistadors landed in Tabasco, Mexico and engaged indigenous Maya tribes in a violent struggle. After the Spanish achieved victory, the Maya chiefs presented the conquistadors peace offerings, including twenty enslaved Maya women. In the subsequent conquest of the Aztec Empire, one woman would stand out among the twenty as a critical linguistic bridge between the Spanish and Nahuatl: Marina, or so she was named by the conquistadors during her baptism as her indigenous name remains unknown.¹ As she became an increasingly indispensable translator for the Spanish, the conquistadors began to prefix the Spanish honorific "Doña" before her name.

1 For more information on the many names of Doña Marina, see Camilla Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices: An Indian Woman in the Conquest of Mexico* (Albuquerque, N.M.: University of New Mexico, 2006), 12, 55; Frances Karttunen, *Between Worlds: Interpreters, Guides, and Survivors* (United States: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 6; Matthew Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest: Updated Edition* (United States: Oxford University Press, 2021), 83; Sebastian Loza, "The Tongue of Mexico: Finding Identity in Malintzin and La Llorona," *The Chico Historian* Vol. 29 (2019): 34.

An enslaved Nahuatl woman, Doña Marina was a rare exception among the female members of the Spanish nobility for whom the honorific title was usually reserved. She was one of the only two Nahuatl women to be given the Spanish honorific during the 16th century.² Even 47 years after the conquest, Spanish conquistador Bernal Díaz del Castillo refers to her as Doña Marina throughout his memoir, *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*. The ascription of this title suggests that the conquistadors bestowed a complex kind of prestige on her. They denied her freedom, while giving her a title of respect.

A month after winning a war against the Maya tribes in Tabasco, the Spanish arrived in San Juan de Ulua. It was at this place that they came to recognize Doña Marina's linguistic abilities. When messengers from the Aztec Emperor Moctezuma II (Moctezuma) arrived at their fleet and demanded to speak with Cortés, the Spanish translator

2 Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 73. The only other woman to be denoted the Spanish honorific was Doña Luisa, the daughter of Tlaxcalteca chief Xicotencatl the Elder who, along with 19 other Tlaxcalteca noblewomen, was given to the conquistadors during the Tlaxcalteca negotiation with the Spanish for a military alliance.



at that time, Aguilar, could not understand the messengers. He only understood Maya, but Moctezuma's messengers spoke Nahuatl. The means by which Marina revealed her understanding of Nahuatl remains unclear, but it is known that she made her linguistic abilities known by the end of this meeting.³ With fluency in both Nahuatl and Maya, Doña Marina was immediately identified by Cortés as an ideal translator for the Spanish.

Whether she willingly agreed to translate for Cortés remains undetermined. She was enslaved first by the Maya and then by the conquistadors, complicating the circumstances within which she could exert her own agency. Ultimately, however, she began to work with Aguilar as a translator for the conquistadors through a complex linguistic transfer: the Nahuatl spoke to her in Nahuatl, she translated the message to Maya, which Aguilar then translated to Spanish. Some scholars have argued that she also mastered Spanish later in her life and subsequently translated directly from Nahuatl to Spanish.⁴

Because Doña Marina did not leave any written records of her history, scholars must appeal to several literary and visual sources that were composed near the conquest to reconstruct her character. While many studies have addressed the role that she played as a translator for the conquistadors, this paper demonstrates that historical characterizations of her identity reflected aspects of the power dynamics between the Spanish and the Nahuatl in the 16th century colonial encounter between two sides.

The following paper analyzes four sixteenth century primary sources on the Spanish conquest to elucidate the different ways historical narratives craft their images of Doña Marina to express power. These sources include two

3 Ibid., 41.

4 Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *The Memoirs of the Conquistador Bernal Díaz del Castillo*, vol 1 of 2, trans. John Lockheart (Gutenberg Project: Gutenberg Project, 2010), accessed October 3, 2021, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/32474/32474-h/32474-h.htm>, 84; Jon Manchip White, *Cortés and the Downfall of the Aztec Empire: A Study in a Conflict of Cultures* (United Kingdom: Hamilton, 1971), 174; Karttunen, *Between Worlds*, 301. Whether Doña Marina acquired fluency in Spanish remains debated among scholars. Díaz's eyewitness account does not record Doña Marina's mastery of Spanish, but only that she "was conversant with the language of Guacasualco, which is the Mexican, and with that of Tabasco" (85). In disagreement with Díaz's account, John White and Frances Karttunen both agree that Doña Marina mastered Spanish later in the conquest. White highlights that "in a matter of weeks she acquired fluent Spanish" (174). Karttunen states that Doña Marina was "a trilingual interpreter, translating directly between Spanish and Nahuatl in central Mexico" (301).

literary sources written by Spanish authors and two visual sources composed by Nahuatl *tlacuiloque* (scribes): Hernán Cortés's *Cartas de las relaciones* (1519-1525), Bernal Díaz del Castillo's *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la nueva España* (1568), *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* (1552), and *Codex Florentino* (1577). The different characterizations of Doña Marina in these sources reflect the strategies that both the colonizers and the colonized employed to articulate power in the Spanish-Nahuatl colonial encounter. These attempts challenge the tendency to reduce the encounter to a simple paradigm of conquest and resistance.

UNDERSTANDING COLONIAL ENCOUNTERS

In assessing how historical characterizations of Doña Marina shaped power dynamics in the Spanish-Nahuatl colonial encounter, it is first necessary to map the theoretical terrain of empire and colonization. A widely employed and controversial term that scholars use to interpret the creation of cross-cultural interactions within the colonial contact zone is hybridity. Used to characterize the complex interactions between the colonizers and the colonized, hybridity emphasizes the multiple overlapping forces and interests that develop in the colonial exchange.

Homi K. Bhabha's collection of essays *The Location of Cultures* presents a foundational articulation of hybridity.⁵ In this work, Bhabha employs the term hybridity to emphasize fluidity, flexibility, and interdependence in the colonizer/colonized relationship. Challenging colonial tendencies to reduce the contact between the two sides as discrete and opposite forces with the colonizer asserting hegemony, Bhabha argues that colonial projects are instead defined by the multiple ways that both the colonizer and colonized attempt to exert agency in their encounter.⁶ The colonizer and the colonized, then, cannot be viewed as the only two opposite parties in the colonial exchange.⁷

Several scholars have criticized Bhabha's use of hybridity to characterize colonial encounters. These criticisms center on two flaws in the term hybridity: its linguistic connection with the racist and essentialist assumptions of the 18th and 19th century and its implication of a balanced cross-cultural exchange, which negates the often disproportionate distribution of power between the colonizer and the colonized. Two key scholars who have pointed out these flaws are Robert Young and Rey Chow. Young cautions against the term's ties with the colonial European racist assumptions of the colonized as inferior civilizations forced to adapt elements of the European civilization. He warns

5 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis, 2012).

6 Ibid., 37-38.

7 Ibid.

that in trying to “deconstruct such essentialist notions of race today we may rather be repeating the [fixation on race in the] past than distancing from it, or providing a critique of it.”⁸ Chow argues that hybridity tends to flatten the imbalance of powers between the colonizer and the colonized, thus failing to recognize “the legacy of colonialism understood from the viewpoint of the colonized” and risk “ignor[ing] the experiences of poverty, dependency, subalternity that persist.”⁹ The arguments of Young and Chow reveal the flaws of employing the theory of hybridity by reminding scholars of the great impacts that colonialism has upon colonized peoples.

These critiques offer nuances to Bhabha's theory of hybridity that remain important for this paper—foregrounding the complexities of power, consent, and agency within colonial encounters and slavery. The theory of hybridity benefits the present paper by cautioning that any analysis of Doña Marina's textual characterizations must consider the complexity of power interests behind them. In the four historical sources analyzed in this paper, the fluidity of interests is present in the interests of a Spanish military commander hoping for socioeconomic elevation, a Spanish soldier wanting to institute his legacy to posterity, Tlaxcalteca *tlacuiloque* aiming to gain political advantages from the colonial Spanish government, and a variety of Nahuatl *tlacuiloque* defeated in the Spanish conquest attempting to express resistance to Spanish colonial rule. Because these ideological interests diverge, a single, static characterization of Doña Marina across all sources should not be expected.

TWO SPANISH LITERARY SOURCES

Two of the most prominent Spanish primary accounts on the conquest are Hernán Cortés's *Cartas de las relaciones (Letters of Relations)* and Díaz's *Historia verdadera de la Nueva España (True History of New Spain)*. While Cortés only briefly mentions Doña Marina twice in his *Letters* and only once addresses her by her name, Díaz always refers to her as “Doña Marina” and describes her as an agent sent by Providence to assist the conquistadors. This variance reveals different attempts by the Spanish colonizers to characterize Doña Marina in ways that best serve their political interests.

Cartas De Las Relaciones (1519-1525)

Cortés's *Cartas de las relaciones*, or the *Letters*, contains one of the earliest recorded descriptions of Doña Marina. This text consists of five letters that Cortés wrote to Queen Doña Juana and Emperor Charles V of Spain between 1519 and 1525. In

8 Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis, 2005), 35.

9 Rey Chow, *Ethics after Idealism: Theory, Culture, Ethnicity*, Reading (United States: Indiana University Press, 1998), 155.

these letters, Cortés reports on both conflicts and encounters between the conquistadors and the Nahuatl during the 16th century. The Second and the Fifth Letter, which will be discussed below, each include one brief reference to the presence of Doña Marina during the conquest.

By the 16th century in Europe, Cortés's *Letters* became regarded as a principal source on the conquest due to its wide circulation. A French translation surfaced in 1522, followed by Latin and Dutch versions in 1524.¹⁰ Many historians have since begun to rely upon Cortés's account as a genuine source for reconstructing the history of the conquest. However, a more comprehensive appraisal of the narrative entails considerations to the political interests embedded within the *Letters*. Born a *hidalgo* – a person from a family of local prominence but without the title of nobility – Cortés desired socioeconomic elevation.¹¹ As his secretary and biographer Francisco de Gómara records, Cortés “was restless, haughty, mischievous, and given to quarreling, for which reason he decided to seek his fortune.”¹² Cortés himself admitted his desire for elevated status. Towards the end of the Fifth Letter, he asks the Spanish emperor Charles V to “grant [him] the favor [he] beg[s], by allowing [him] a set yearly income to support [him] at court.”¹³ Because his goal was to convince Charles V to bestow on him socioeconomic support, the overriding concern of the *Letters* is to win the favor of the emperor.

To win Charles V's favor, Cortés needed to establish the authority of his text and to justify his insubordination to Velazquez, the governor of Cuba who revoked his authorization of Cortés's expedition.¹⁴ A prominent method he implemented in service of this aim was orchestrating Doña Marina's role in the conquest as a gift that *he obtained* to emphasize his contributions to the Spanish Crown.

In the Second Letter, while justifying the Cholollan Massacre, a campaign of violence that was likely unnecessary, Cortés depicts Doña Marina as part of the thwarting of the Cholollan

10 Michel Oudijk, “The Conquest of Mexico,” *Oxford Handbook Online*, (2012): 2, 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195390933.001.0001.

11 Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 37.

12 Francisco López de Gómara, *Cortés: The Life of the Conqueror by His Secretary* (United Kingdom: University of California Press, 1966), 8.

13 Hernán Cortés, *Fernando Cortés: His Five Letters of Relation to the Emperor Charles V*, trans. Francis McNutt (United States: A. H. Clark, 1908), vol. 2: 348.

14 Hugh Thomas, *Conquest: Cortés, Montezuma, and the Fall of Old Mexico* (United Kingdom: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 141; Paul E. Greene, “The Conquest of Mexico: The Views of the Chroniclers,” *The Americas* 31, no. 2 (1974): 164. doi: 10.2307/980636.

ambush plot.¹⁵ Without mentioning her name, Cortés briefly refers to her as “the interpreter whom I have, an Indian woman of this country whom I obtained in [Tabasco].”¹⁶ According to Cortés, after arriving at Cholollan with the Spaniards and their Tlaxcalteca allies, Doña Marina was “told by another woman native of this city, that many of Montezuma’s people had gathered close by [...] intending to fall upon us and kills us all.”¹⁷ Cortés records that Doña Marina then communicated the information to him and that her information resulted in his decision to launch the Cholollan Massacre.

By claiming that he had learned of the ambush plot through her, Cortés’s fleeting depiction of Doña Marina highlights her role as a crucial linguistic intermediary between the Spanish and the Nahuatl. However, while he suggests that Doña Marina had a prominent role in thwarting the ambush, he stresses that it was *his* action that led to his acquisition of her. She is unnamed in the text to emphasize that Cortés had “obtained” her. Cortés states “I” several times to assert his power over her.¹⁸ Thus, Doña Marina’s depiction was incidental to Cortés’s ability to acquire gifts, establish connections with local peoples, and identify the instrumentality of the people who accompany him in his conquest. Additionally, the inclusion of Doña Marina insulated Cortés from a potential charge that he acted unwisely. If he

15 Townsend, *Malintzin’s Choices*, 81; Matthew Restall, *When Montezuma Met Cortés: The True Story of the Meeting that Changed History* (United States: Ecco, 2018), 208. The Cholollan Massacre was launched by the Spanish against the citizens of the altepetl (city-state) Cholollan. During the event, the Spanish and their Tlaxcalteca allies blocked exits out of Cholollan and massacred thousands of Cholollan citizens. No Spaniards were killed. However, the massacre was likely unnecessary. As Townsend notes, “what seems more likely is that it was the Tlaxcalans who wanted to punish Cholula: until recently they had been Cholulas allies, and Cholula’s recent realignment with Tenochtitlan had left them more vulnerable than they liked” (81). Or as Restall notes, “the Tlaxcalteca led the Spaniards to Cholollan for their own political purposes” and “the alleged Cholotec ambush was probably a Tlaxcalteca ruse devised to manipulate the captains” (208). Cortés attempted to justify the massacre by framing it as a response to an ambush plot that the Cholollans allegedly planned to launch on the Spanish.

16 Hernán Cortés, *Fernando Cortés: His Five Letters of Relation to the Emperor Charles V* (United States: Arthur H. Clarke Company, 1908), vol. 1: 217.

17 Ibid.

18 Ross Frank, “The Codex Cortés: Inscribing the Conquest of Mexico,” *Disposito* 14, no. 36/38 (1989): 190, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41491359>. This interpretation follows Frank’s argument that “Cortés establishes the authority of his narrative by describing features and events from his position on the scene” (190).

were to be blamed for misinterpreting the intentions of the Cholollans, Doña Marina would be the scapegoat.

The second reference to Doña Marina in the *Letters* appears in the Fifth Letter. On November 8, 1519, Cortés arrived at Tenochtitlan, the heartland of the Aztec Empire, and met with Moctezuma. The meeting between Cortés and Moctezuma meeting was a quintessential moment in history, representing the first official meeting between Spain and Tenochtitlan. In narrating this crucial encounter, Cortés draws attention to Doña Marina’s role in helping the Spanish establish political ties with the Nahuatl to amplify his abilities. In contrast to the Second Letter, here Cortés identifies Doña Marina by name:

I replied that I was the captain of whom the people of Tabasco had spoken, and that if [Moctezuma] wished to learn the truth he had only to ask the interpreter with whom he was speaking, Marina, who traveled always in my company after she had been given me as a present with twenty other women. She then told him that what I had said was true and spoke to him of how I had conquered Mexico and of all the other lands which I held subject and had placed beneath Your Majesty’s command.¹⁹

This part of the text not only emphasizes Doña Marina’s role as a translator but also the contributions that she made in forging political alliances. By mentioning that Moctezuma could directly “ask” Marina for confirmation of his statement, Cortés characterizes her as having the ability to facilitate the crucial negotiations during the conquest, ones that may have led to military alliances between the conquistadors and local tribes. However, Cortés once again frames his reference to Doña Marina as a part of his abilities to acquire her: “...she had been given me as a present...” This illustrates that in the rhetoric of the *Letters*, Doña Marina operates as a marker that proves Cortés’s ability to conquer, receive presents, and negotiate with the Aztec rulers. As Cypess notes, Cortés employs a “self-serving practice” in his letters, “[using] Doña Marina to verify his own deeds and loyalties to the king; her indirect discourse served as a reflection of himself.”²⁰ The rhetoric of “presents” also signals the kinds of references that a royal family would wish to hear about in diplomatic exchange. By pointing out his ability to subjugate native people and gain presents from them, Cortés shows his ability to obtain valuable objects that boost the economic prospects of the Spanish Crown.

Cortés reduces Doña Marina’s presence as translator to emphasize his own actions during the conquest. Most of the time, he omits her presence entirely, implying that he was

19 Cortés, *Letters of Relation*, vol. 2: 273.

20 Sandra Messinger Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature: From History to Myth* (N.p.: University of Texas Press, 2010), 26.

communicating directly with indigenous people. In the only two times he refers to her, he omits her name in the first and her Spanish honorific in the second. This partial erasure, in which Cortés both introduces and occludes Doña Marina, demonstrates that while he wished to claim responsibility for her presence and work, he also did not want to grant her too much importance. His dependency on co-opting his description of Doña Marina to assert and claim power for himself demonstrates the strategies by a military leader to find power in the dialectic of exchange between the military and the royal family.

Historia Verdadera De La Conquista De La Nueva España (1568)

Rather than minimizing Doña Marina from the narrative of the conquest, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, a foot-soldier during the conquest, accords Doña Marina more agency in his 1568 memoir *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* (*The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*). The only Spanish chronicler to devote an entire chapter in his account of the conquest to Doña Marina, Díaz's attitude toward her is perhaps best encapsulated in his statement that "it was, through her only, under the protection of the Almighty, that many things were accomplished by us: without her we never should have understood the Mexican language, and, upon the whole, have been unable to surmount many difficulties."²¹ Unlike Cortés, Díaz frames Doña Marina as an agent of Providence whose diplomatic presence during the conquest shaped the success of the conquest.

The prominence Díaz attributes to Doña Marina aims to institute power for the conquistadors in the public memory of the conquest. Because Cortés emphasizes his sole agency in the *Letters*, the wide circulation of the text in the sixteenth century perpetuated in European memory the impression that the success of the conquest was caused by the cunning of a single military commander. This impression is further advanced by *Historia general de las Indias* (*General History of the Indies*), an official account of the conquest authored by Cortés's secretary Francisco López de Gómara. Drawing predominantly on Cortés's *Letters*, Gómara's account emphasizes Cortés's singularity in the success of the conquest, leaving little room for the involvement of other conquistadors or the indigenous allies.²² In response to the emphasis on Cortés's singularity, Díaz authored his own memoir of the conquest in 1568 to "relate the strict truth."²³ In *True History*, Díaz notes that "with the historian Gómara it is always thus: Cortés did this, Cortés did that, Cortés was there, Cortés left there . . . [H]e could not possibly have been everywhere, and have done everything himself."²⁴ Refuting Gómara's claims, Díaz states that "it is to us the true

Conquistadores who discovered and conquered [the Aztec Empire], and from the first took away their idols and taught them the holy doctrine, that the prize and reward of it all is due."²⁵ In the 19th century, after being published several times in Spanish, English, German, French, and Hungarian, Díaz's account became a principal source of information about the conquest for scholars.²⁶

Díaz aimed to use his memoir to accomplish two goals: to assert the conquistadors' contributions to the conquest and justify their actions by framing them as a part of God's will and the effort to spread Christianity. To achieve his goals, Díaz depicts Doña Marina as an agent of the Divine Providence who made diplomatic decisions that affected the outcome of the conquest.

In Chapter 37, the chapter devoted to Doña Marina, Díaz summarizes her life story from before her meeting with the conquistadors to her life after the conquest. In his summary, Díaz characterizes Doña Marina as the embodiment of the biblical figure Joseph from the Book of Genesis. This comparison is most explicit when Díaz notes that "the [history of Doña Marina] reminds one of the history of Joseph and his brethren in Egypt."²⁷ His description of the life of Doña Marina does indeed parallel the story about Joseph. In Genesis 37:18–36, Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers, who hid their guilt by painting goat's blood on Joseph's coat to trick their father into thinking that he was killed by an animal.²⁸ Yet despite the ruthless behavior of his brothers, Joseph forgave them after rising to prominence in the royal court of Egypt.²⁹ Díaz describes Doña Marina's life along similar lines. Like Joseph's brother, Doña Marina's mother sold her into slavery to secure an inheritance for the son she had with her new husband and concealed her act by declaring that her daughter had died.³⁰ Like Joseph, Doña Marina forgave her mother after achieving success as a translator for the Spanish. The parallelism Díaz constructs between Doña Marina and the biblical Joseph situates her story within the Christian view of Providence. Díaz suggests that Doña Marina was sent by the Christian God to assist the conquistadors and by doing so orchestrate the conquest as a part of the Divine Plan of Providence.

25 Ibid., 155.

26 Oudijk, "The Conquest of Mexico," 2.; Francis J. Brooks, "Motecuzoma Xocoyotl, Hernán Cortés, and Bernal Díaz Del Castillo: The Construction of an Arrest," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 75, no. 2 (1995): 170, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2517303>.

27 Díaz, *Memoir of Bernal Díaz*, 85.

28 David Michael Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha: New Revised Standard Version* (United Kingdom: OUP USA, 2010), 63.

29 Ibid., 63.

30 Díaz, *Memoir of Bernal Díaz*, 85.

21 Díaz, *Memoir of Bernal Díaz*, 85.

22 Ibid.

23 Díaz, *Memoir of Bernal Díaz*, 85.

24 Ibid., 131.

As an agent of Providence, Doña Marina's critical diplomatic appearance in key moments of contact between the Spanish and the Nahuatl further locates the conquest as part of the Divine Plan. A key moment of the conquest was the Cholollan Massacre. Following Cortés's account, Díaz also describes Doña Marina as the source of the Spanish information regarding the ambush plot. However, while Cortés uses Doña Marina to amplify his abilities, Díaz notes that she was "altogether very shrewd" and portrays her as the key figure who helped the Spanish to circumvent destruction.³¹

According to Díaz, the wife of a Chololteca chief approached Doña Marina, informed her of the impending carnage, and offered her a home if she left the conquistadors. However, Díaz claims that Doña Marina stood by the conquistadors with complete loyalty. Pretending to accept the noblewoman's offer, Doña Marina probed for more information about the planned ambush. When the noblewomen disclosed further information, Díaz remarks that "Doña Marina artfully concealed the real impression all this made upon her mind," lied to the noblewoman that she would go to her home with her, returned to the Spanish camp, and "related to our general the whole of the discourse she had had with the old woman."³² Díaz records that, with Doña Marina's information, the conquistadors decided to launch the Cholollan Massacre, which allowed them to circumvent the Chololtecas' ambush plot.

Díaz's claim that Doña Marina "artfully concealed" her true thoughts demonstrates that she was a powerful diplomatic figure who deliberately inserted her power to affect the outcome of the conquest.³³ In Díaz's account, she fully knew that she was on the same side as the Spaniards and manipulated the situation to her side's advantage. She cunningly obscured her true intentions to the Chololteca noblewoman and extracted information from her that benefited the conquistadors.

31 Díaz, *Memoir of Bernal Díaz*, 201.

32 *Ibid.*, 201-202.

33 Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 82. It remains impossible to ascertain the degree of agency Doña Marina possessed during the conquest. Townsend notes that "if she valued her life at all, there could not have been any contest in her mind about remaining behind anywhere that the Spanish went" (82). If she decided to go with the noblewoman, she would most likely have been sacrificed by the Cholollans, for she had arrived as an enemy and could have been perceived as an impersonator of god, both of which were critical offenses to the Nahuatl. If she avoided being sacrificed, she would have likely been nothing more than a vulnerable concubine. As Townsend notes, "she had no family ties to render her marriageable or make her the mother of heirs" (82). Thus, when we examine the context that spurred Doña Marina's decision at this point, we can infer that it is unlikely that she actually made the choice to stay with the Spanish.

A second instance of Doña Marina's role as a diplomatic protagonist appears in Díaz's descriptions of her role in assisting the conquistadors to convince Moctezuma to accept captivity in the Spanish camp.³⁴ In Díaz's account, when a frustrated Spanish soldier demands that "[Moctezuma] must either quietly follow us, or we will cut him down at once. Be so good as to tell him this; for on this depends the safety of our lives,"³⁵ Doña Marina strategically avoids translating his message directly. Díaz notes that Doña Marina understood that a direct translation of the soldier's outburst would disclose the weakness of the conquistadors' position, allowing Moctezuma to realize the power in his position, and consequently reduce their chances of compelling Moctezuma to accept imprisonment. Instead, being "uncommonly shrewd," Doña Marina advises Moctezuma to "make no further difficulties."³⁶ She then continued to prompt his acquiescence: "I am confident they will pay you every respect, and treat you as becomes a powerful monarch."³⁷ Finally, she clarifies what would happen if he refused: "they will cut you down on the spot."³⁸ In narrating the hostage of Moctezuma, Díaz accentuates Doña Marina's ability to foresee and navigate political strategies in favor of the Spanish. Because she was the agent of Providence, Díaz strategically depicts her in a position of power guiding the conquistadors during the conquest to further his claim that the conquest occurred within the Divine Plan of Providence and is therefore justified.

A second way Díaz employs Doña Marina to justify the conquistadors' actions during the conquest is by depicting her involvement in converting Nahuatl to the Christian faith. As Townsend highlights, "everywhere she went, everywhere the Spanish paused, Malintzin was asked to translate as a priest offered an explanation of Mary and ceremoniously presented an image of her to the town."³⁹ The only means through which the Spanish priests could communicate to the Nahuatl, Doña Marina's frequent involvement in religious conversions brings the conquest within a Christian view of history.

In Díaz's account, after arriving at Cempoala, "Cortés desired Doña Marina and Aguilar to [inform the Cempoala chiefs that] we were the vassals of the great emperor Charles [...

34 Historians diverge upon the possibility of the conquistadors compelling an Aztec monarch to captivity. For more information on this topic, see *Collision of Worlds* (David Carbello), *Malintzin's Choices* (Camilla Townsend), *When Montezuma Met Cortés* (Matthew Restall), and *Between Worlds* (Francis Karttunen).

35 Díaz, *Memoir of Bernal Díaz*, 251.

36 *Ibid.*

37 *Ibid.*

38 *Ibid.*

39 Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 78.

and] added a good deal about our holy religion."⁴⁰ By noting that they were introducing Christianity through Doña Marina to save the supposedly "barbarous" Nahuatl from their "abomination" of human sacrifices,⁴¹ Díaz aims to locate the conquest as a part of the Divine Plan to spread Christianity.

Díaz repeatedly mentions Doña Marina communicating Christianity to the Nahuatl. At Tlaxcala, Díaz notes that "Doña Marina and Aguilar told the inhabitants a good deal about our holy religion, and [aims to] bring them back from kidnapping and sacrificing human beings."⁴² Later, while narrating the negotiation that led to military cooperation between the Spanish and the Tlaxcaltecas, Díaz again depicts Doña Marina communicating the Christian faith to the Tlaxcaltecas:

Besides this, [Cortés] told them many other things concerning our holy faith, which Doña Marina and Aguilar explained right well to them. Similar discourses took place on every occasion: Cortés at the same time showed them the image of the holy Virgin, holding her inestimable Son in her arms, and he explained to them how that represented the blessed Virgin Mary: she was now high in the heavens above, and was the mother of our Lord Jesus Christ, whom she held in her arms, conceived by the Holy Ghost; that she was a virgin before, after, and during his birth. She was our mediator with her heavenly Son, our God.⁴³

Díaz describes Doña Marina as a person who had the ability to "explain" aspects of Christianity. The religious language involved in the message implies that her work moved well beyond basic linguistic translations to include knowledge of the Spanish religion. Using Doña Marina to underscore the Spanish attempts to convert Nahuatl to Christianity, Díaz aims to justify their brutal annihilation of the Nahuatl during the conquest and the destruction of the Aztec civilization.

TWO NAHUATL PICTORIAL SOURCES

The narratives of Cortés and Díaz came to dominate contemporary memory of the Spanish conquest due to their wide circulation and scholarly dependence on textual resources. To build a more balanced picture of Spanish-Nahuatl power dynamics during the colonial encounter, however, Nahuatl visual and literary sources should also be consulted in conjunction with the Spanish literary ones.

The following section analyzes two of the most prominent Nahuatl pictorials that narrate the conquest: the *Lienzo*

40 Díaz, *The True History*, 105. Cempoala was the altepetl the conquistadors arrived at before Cholollan.

41 *Ibid.*, 389.

42 *Ibid.*, 139.

43 *Ibid.*, 181.

de Tlaxcala (the *Lienzo*) and the *Codex Florentino* (the *Florentino*).⁴⁴ While the *Lienzo* uses Doña Marina to demonstrate the Tlaxcaltecas' allegiance to Spain and moralize their actions during the conquest, the *Florentino* integrates her into its narrative to institute Nahuatl agency under the Spanish colonial regime.

This divergence between depictions of Doña Marina in the *Lienzo* and the *Florentino* establish her ideological malleability in the earliest visual Nahuatl sources on the Spanish conquest. Instead of conforming to a monolithic Nahuatl perspective of the conquest, these two pictorials reflect the diverse political interests of *altepepeme* (plural: city-states), distinct culturally defined perceptions of the past, and the hope of the elite *tlacuiloque* (scribes) to retain prestigious titles in colonial Mesoamerica.⁴⁵

Lienzo de Tlaxcala (1552)

In 1552, the municipal government of Tlaxcala commissioned the *Lienzo*, a large painting, to be sent to Spain.⁴⁶ Most of the painting was created on a single piece of *amatl* (linen) that measured approximately 6.5 feet wide by 16 feet long.⁴⁷ A large scene describing the political structure of Tlaxcala occupies the top portion, while 48 scenes showing the Tlaxcaltecas' aid to the Spanish conquest dominate the portion below. Four of the bottom 48 scenes are painted on

44 The *Codex Florentino* includes a pictorial and a literary portion. However, it is generally classified by historians as a pictorial.

45 Carbello, *Collision of Worlds*, 8.

46 Karttunen, *Between Worlds*, 8; Claudia Rogers, "Malintzin as a Conquistadora and Warrior Woman in the Lienzo de Tlaxcala (c. 1552)," *The Historical Journal* 64, no. 5 (2021): 9. doi:10.1017/S0018246X20000576. While the original painting was lost, there are existing facsimiles based on copies of the painting and agree with it in overall detail. This paper uses the facsimiles developed in 1882 by Alfred Chavero, published in fragments on LLILAS Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas at Austin and Vistas: Visual Culture in Spanish America, 1520-1820 (LLILAS Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin, accessed November 1, 2021, <https://lililabenson.utexas.edu/>; Leibsohn, Dana, and Barbara E. Mundy, "Vistas: Visual Culture in Spanish America, 1520-1820," accessed June 1, 2021, <http://www.fordham.edu/vistas>, 2015.

47 Carmen Aguilera, "Of Royal Mantles and Blue Turquoise: The Meaning of the Mexica Emperor's Mantle." *Latin American Antiquity* 8, no. 1 (1997): 8 doi:10.2307/971589. In 16th century Mesoamerica, linen was usually reserved for the upper class. The selection of linen as the material for the *Lienzo* points to, as analyzed later in this section, the significant role it plays in securing special privileges for the Tlaxcalteca elites from the Spanish crown.

loose pages in a book.⁴⁸ Together, the 48 scenes are arranged in chronological order and in a seven-by-thirteen grid-like pattern with Nahuatl annotations.⁴⁹

Reflecting the attempts by Cortés and Díaz to use their narratives to achieve political interests, the elite Tlaxcalteca *tlacuiloque* sought to use the *Lienzo* to locate a place of power for themselves within the larger power structures of Spanish imperialism. The pictorial aimed to secure the special political privileges, including political independence and tax exemptions, that Cortés had promised to give Tlaxcala after the conquest during his negotiation with the Tlaxcaltecas for military alliance.⁵⁰ To fulfill these interests, the *Lienzo* attributes the successes of the conquest to the united efforts of the Spaniards and the Tlaxcaltecas. While the *Letters* and *True History* note Spanish singularity, the *Lienzo* underscores cooperation between Tlaxcaltecas and the Spanish. To construct the image of cooperation, the pictorial also omits events that reverse this image. Most notably, it excludes the war between the Spanish and the Tlaxcaltecas that preceded their military alliance.

Of the 48 scenes in the *Lienzo*, Doña Marina appears in 18. In these illustrations, she is almost always shown prominently, reversing the secondary position that women traditionally assumed in Aztec society. The visibility of her depictions demonstrates the significance of translation in historical circumstances – who translates, what gets translated. Historically, translators are supposed to be invisible and make translation “transparent.” However, instead of giving her invisibility, the Tlaxcalteca *tlacuiloque* show Doña Marina in prominent positions to augment the dual messages they embedded in her depiction: the Tlaxcalteca allegiance to Spain and the moral justifications for Tlaxcalteca actions during the conquest.

The first half of the pictorial portrays Doña Marina as a peaceful translator. In this section, the *Lienzo* includes Tlaxcalteca elements on her attire to underscore her identification with its *tlacuiloque* while aligning her spatially and gesturally with the Spanish to illustrate her contributions to them. An example of this occurs in the last of the four scenes

48 Constance Cortez, “Now You See Her, Now You Don’t,” in *Invasion and Transformation: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Conquest of Mexico*, ed. David Carrasco and Eduardo Matos Moctezuma (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2020), 80.

49 Karttunen, *Between Worlds*, 8.

50 Floreine Asselbergs, “The Conquest in Images: Stories of Tlaxcalteca and Quauhquecholteca Conquistadors,” in *Indian Conquistadors: Indigenous Allies in the Conquest of Mesoamerica*, ed. Laura E. Matthew and Michel R. Oudijk (United States: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014), 65-101; Rogers, “Malintzin as a Conquistador and Warrior Woman,” 5.

painted on loose pages. The scene illustrates Doña Marina translating between Xicotencatl the Elder, the Tlaxcalteca chief, and Cortés during the negotiation that forged a military alliance between Tlaxcalteca and Spanish troops.⁵¹ Her attire combines Spanish shoes with the traditional Nahuatl costume for women: a *huipilli* (cotton tunic) and a *cueitl* (a long wraparound skirt worn underneath the *huipilli*). While the combination of her Spanish and native garments suggests Spanish-Tlaxcalteca unity, the decorations on the hems of her native garments align her with the elite Tlaxcalteca *tlacuiloque*. The hems of her *huipilli* and *cueitl* are decorated with small squares or dots, symbols of prestige in Tlaxcala.⁵² Thus, she is aligned in prestige with the Tlaxcalteca *tlacuiloque*. This alignment reflects some of the hierarchies of power within the Nahuatl social structure. Not only was the population made up of many different *altepeteme* (plural: city-states), but within each *altepetl* (city-state), there were also many different social positions.

While Doña Marina's apparel in Scene 4 aligns her with the Tlaxcalteca *tlacuiloque*, her placement and posture within the image associate her with the Spanish conquistadors. Facing the Tlaxcaltecas, she is positioned closely below Cortés and assumes the same pointed gesture and the same position as him. By positioning Doña Marina in this way, the *Lienzo* echoes Díaz, who notes that, at the point of this meeting, “Cortés was termed Malinche by all the tribes through whose territories we had passed [...] because our interpreter Doña Marina was always about his person.”⁵³ Her compositional and gestural alignment with Cortés suggest she is forging communication with the Tlaxcaltecas for him. As a representation of the Tlaxcalteca *tlacuiloque*, her translations signal Tlaxcalteca contributions to the conquest.

Doña Marina's depiction as a peaceful translator extends beyond Scene 4. In Plate 28, “the Spanish arrival at Hueyotlipan,” she dresses in Tlaxcalteca attire decorated with small squares and dots, stands between Cortés and the Tlaxcaltecas, and assumes the same pointed gesture as

51 Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 70. It is unclear whether the Tlaxcalteca leader depicted was Xicotencatl the Elder or his son, Xicotencatl the Younger, but the accounts authored by Díaz and Cortés record that it was Xicotencatl the Elder who negotiated with the Spanish. In the moment illustrated in this scene in the *Lienzo*, the Tlaxcalteca women presented to Cortés comprised of princesses, the lord's daughter, and slaves. The lord's daughters were intended for intermarriage between the Tlaxcaltecas and the conquistadors.

52 Elizabeth Aguilera, “Malintzin as a Visual Metaphor in the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*,” *Hemisphere: Visual Cultures of the Americas* 7, 1 (2014): 14. <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/hemisphere/vol7/iss1/4>.

53 Díaz, *Memoir of Bernal Díaz*, 176.

Cortés.⁵⁴ In Plate 45, "Temple of Toci," she wears Tlaxcalteca attire and stands at a central position between two Spaniards and two Tlaxcaltecas.⁵⁵ Her compositional and gestural alignment with the Spanish suggest that she used her linguistic skills to contribute to the Spanish cause of the conquest.

In the second half of the pictorial, Doña Marina's portrayals evolve beyond a peaceful translator. Uniquely in the *Lienzo*, she is frequently characterized as an active protagonist in pivotal scenes of battle. Because Aztec women in the 16th century rarely ventured onto the battlefield, it remains unknown whether Doña Marina was actually a military participant.⁵⁶ However, these depictions of her in battle can be interpreted as visual metaphors encapsulating a second way the *tlacuiloques* of the *Lienzo* co-opted Doña Marina into their narratives to demonstrate Tlaxcalteca allegiance to Spain and to justify Tlaxcalteca actions during the conquest.

The first example of Doña Marina's portrayal in battle occurs in Plate 19, "Cholollan Massacre."⁵⁷ In this scene, two Spanish and one Tlaxcalteca warrior slaughter two Chololtecas in the temple of Quetzalcoatl, while another Spanish conquistador tramples the dismembered bodies of the Chololtecas at the foot of the temple. Doña Marina is placed prominently on the right of the illustration. Her hand is outstretched toward the events unfolding at the temple and forms a pointed gesture. Her gesture suggests that instead of a peaceful translator, she was a commanding warrior intricately connected with the violence occurring in front of her. While Cortés's record of the same event frames Doña Marina as an instrument for him to use, the *Lienzo* shows her actively directing the event.

Beyond depicting Doña Marina with pointed gestures indicative of active command, the *Lienzo* also shows her carrying weapons of war. Plate 22, "Battle at Tepotzotlan," situates Doña Marina next to a European shield and sword. Plate 26 Doña Marina holding a European shield in front of her as she stands amid a group of Spanish and Tlaxcalteca soldiers, confronting their enemy. In Plate 45, she stands between the Spanish and native warriors amid the battle, wielding a European shield. In all of these illustrations, her position and weaponry represent her as an active participant in the battle; by extension, they indicate Tlaxcalteca allegiance to Spain.

The *Lienzo's* characterization of Doña Marina in battles also mirror illustrations of the Virgin Mary in both the *Lienzo*

54 Aguilera, "Malintzin as a Visual Metaphor in the Lienzo de Tlaxcala," 14.

55 Ibid, 15. Temple of Toci is a shrine along the causeway leading to Tenochtitlan.

56 Rogers, "Malintzin as a Conquistador and Warrior Woman," 4.

57 Cypess, La Malinche in Mexican Literature, 35.

and other 16th-century Mesomeric codices as a religious conduit and a military commander. This echo transfers some of the attributes of Mary to Doña Marina and thus provides a visual mechanism by which she, and her actions, can be integrated into a Christian European understanding. As an embodiment of Mary, the *Lienzo* shows that Doña Marina's contributions to the conquest, in whatever form they took, whether linguistic or military, should be interpreted as guidance from Providence.

The *Lienzo* features the Virgin Mary only once: in Plate 8, she looks over the conversion of four Tlaxcalteca lords, while Doña Marina recedes to the background next to Cortés. In this scene, Mary fulfills the role of the religious conduit between the Spanish and the Tlaxcaltecas. Naverette even proposes that Mary displaces Doña Marina from her usual central position because Mary fulfills the symbol of an intermediary.⁵⁸ Like Mary overseeing the conversion of the Tlaxcalteca lords, the *Lienzo* shows Doña Marina overseeing the conquest of the religious space of the temple of Quetzalcoatl (Plate 19) and the temple of Toci (Plate 45). Beyond overseeing religious conversion, Mary is also depicted in war. For example, in the *Huexotzinco Codex*, which has one of the earliest Nahuatl portrayals of Mary, she appears on an ornate war banner created by the *altepetl* of Huexotzinco.⁵⁹ This illustration of Mary on an object of war suggests that she is directly involved in battles, characterizing her as a conquistadora leading the Nahuatl *altepetl* to success.⁶⁰ Similarly, Doña Marina's adjacency to weaponry in the *Lienzo* shows her as a conquistadora connecting different peoples during the conquest.

The overlap between the visual representations of Doña Marina and Mary is likely caused by Doña Marina's involvement in religious conversions. An eyewitness of the conquest, Gonzalo Rodríguez de Ocaña, notes that, "because of Doña Marina's work, many Indians became Christians and submitted to the rule of [the Spanish crown]."⁶¹ To the Tlaxcaltecas, Doña Marina was always the preacher of the Christian faith, the conduit for conveying ideas of Christianity. Thus, she was likely perceived as the physical representation of the abstract Mary that the Spanish described to them. Townsend highlights that, to the Tlaxcaltecas, "addresses

58 Federico Navarrete, "La Malinche, la Virgen y la montaña: el juego de la identidad en los códices tlaxcaltecas," *Historia* 26 (2007): 300-302.

59 Rogers, "Malintzin as a Conquistador and Warrior Woman," 10; "Huexotzinco Codex, 1531," Mapas Project, University of Oregon, accessed November 13, 2021, <https://mapas.uoregon.edu/huexotzinco>.

60 Ibid, 11.

61 Probanza de buenos servicios y fidelidad con que sirvió en la conquista de Nueva España la famosa Doña Marina, Patronato 56, No. 3, Ramo 4. Archivo General de Indias, Sevilla, España.

to the flesh-and-blood Malintzin would probably have resonated strongly once people had been told about Mary.”⁶² Speaking directly to the Tlaxcaltecas as she translated ideas of the Christian into Nahuatl, Doña Marina likely seemed like the physical personification of the Mary that only existed in the conquistadors' descriptions. The phonetic resemblance between the Nahuatl reverential forms of Mary and Doña Marina may also have forged a connection between the two figures. Because the letter n is silent in Nahuatl, Doña Marina's reverential Nahuatl name, “Malintzin,” sounds similar to Mary's, “Malitzin.”⁶³ The phonetic resemblance between Mary and Doña Marina permitted further associations to form.

The *Lienzo's* depiction of Doña Marina as Mary also moralizes Tlaxcalteca actions in the conquest. In the same way that Díaz uses Joseph and the Christian God to justify the Spaniard's brutality, the Tlaxcalteca *tlacuiloque* used the representation of Doña Marina as Mary to justify Tlaxcalteca actions by depicting them as done under the guidance of Providence. As Barton Kranz notes, Nahua pictorials tend to “emphasize the claim that they had converted to Christianity soon after the first encounter with the Spaniards.”⁶⁴ The parallels between the biblical figures and Doña Marina further locate the conquest within a broader Christian narrative of history.

BOOK XII, CODEX FLORENTINO (1577)

While the *Lienzo* integrates Doña Marina's depiction to demonstrate allegiance to Spain and moralize Tlaxcalteca actions during the conquest, Book XII of the *Florentino* uses her characterization to express resentment against Spanish colonial rule. The volume does so by giving her equal power as the Spanish and the Nahuatl in the exchange between the two sides.

The *Florentino* is an illustrated, bilingual Nahuatl and Spanish research study on Nahuatl culture and history conducted by Franciscan Friar Bernardino de Sahagún.⁶⁵ Sahagún worked with Nahua *tlacuiloque* from a variety of *altepeme*, including most notably Tlatelolco, Azcapotzalco,

62 Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 78.

63 *Ibid.*, 78.

64 Travis Kranz, “Visual Persuasion: Sixteenth-Century Tlaxcalan Pictorials in Response to the Conquest of Mexico” in *The Conquest All over Again: Nahuas and Zapotecs Thinking, Writing, and Painting Spanish Colonialism*, ed. Susan Schroeder (Eastbourne; Portland, Or.: Sussex Academic Press, 2010), 60.

65 This paper uses the John Lockhart translation of the Nahuatl portion of Book XII, published in *Early Nahuatl Library of the University of Oregon*: “Florentine Codex, Book 12,” ed. John Lockhart, *Early Nahuatl Library*, University of Oregon, <https://enl.uoregon.edu/search/node/florentine%20codex>.

and Cuautilan to produce twelve books, each with a pictorial portion of Nahuatl expressions mixed with European artistic traditions and a literary portion consisting of parallel columns of Nahuatl texts and their Spanish translations done by Sahagún. The relevant volume for this study is Book XII, “How the War was Fought here in Mexico,” which narrates the Spanish conquest.

Rather than interpret the conquest as an opportunity to acquire special privileges, as their Tlaxcalteca counterparts had done, the Tlatelolca *tlacuiloque* of the *Florentino* saw it as a usurpation of their autonomy.⁶⁶ Since they were not allied with the Spanish during the conquest, the rest of the Nahua *tlacuiloque* went along with the Tlatelolca *tlacuiloque's* expressions of resentment against Spanish colonial rule.

This desire to demonstrate resistance is embedded in Doña Marina's characterization in the volume. In the literary portion, the Nahuatl *tlacuiloque* ascribes her power by denoting Aztec honorific suffix to her name. This especially augments her power as the suffix is not extended to Moctezuma.⁶⁷ Complementing the literary portion, the pictorial portion embeds power in her position, visual prominence, and attire. Out of the 161 scenes in the volume, she appears in 7. In these scenes, her portrayals construct a triangular relationship of power sharing: the Spanish, the Nahuatl, and her being located between these two powers. Because Doña Marina was a member of the Nahuatl, her power metaphorically extended to the Nahuatl *tlacuiloque*.

In the frontispiece, or “front cover,” of Book XII, Doña Marina is identified on the right, standing between a Nahua man on her left and Aguilar and Cortés on her right.⁶⁸ The power in the linguistic middle ground she occupies is indicated in three ways. First, she stands in the foreground while both Cortés and Aguilar recede to the background. Second, she stands slightly taller than both the Nahua man on her left and her Spanish counterparts. Her visual prominence against the Spanish and Nahua men beside her signal her foremost importance. Third, in the same way that the small dots and squares on her native garments in the *Lienzo* signify prestige, the two-horned style of her hair resembling the hair style of

66 David Carbello, *Collision of Worlds: A Deep History of the Fall of Aztec Mexico and the Forging of New Spain* (United States: Oxford University Press, 2020), 138; Cortez, “Now You See Her, Now You Don't,” 80; Kevin Trerraciano, “Three Texts in One: Book XII of the Florentine Codex,” *Ethnohistory* 1, (2010): 54, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00141801-2009-053>.

67 Sebastian Loza “The Tongue of Mexico: Finding Identity in Malintzin and La Llorona” in *Chico Historian*, 34; Karttunen, “Rethinking Malinche” in *Indian Women of Early Mexico*. ed. R. Haskett, S. Wood, and S. Schroeder (United Kingdom: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 295.

68 *Ibid.*, 78.

Aztec matriarchs in Book XII of the *Florentino* indicate the prominent power she wielded.⁶⁹

The same strategies are seen in Chapter 18. A scene in the chapter depicts her sitting with Cortés on a balcony, translating between him and an indigenous character below. While Cortés and the indigenous character occupy margins of the illustration, Doña Marina dominates the middle.⁷⁰ The garments she wears resemble those worn by Aztec noblewomen, and her hair is coiled in the distinctive style of the Nahuatl matron. These upper-class elements rendered on her attire signal the prestige that the *Florentino* afforded her.

Chapter 18's illustration of the first meeting between Cortés and Moctezuma also accentuates Doña Marina's power in the tripartite power relations by ascribing her visual prominence over the two military leaders. Corresponding to Cortés's record of the meeting, this illustration in the *Florentino* also shows Doña Marina occupying a liminal space between the Spanish conquistadors and the Aztec soldiers. However, unlike Cortés's record, the illustration in the *Florentino* gives her power in multiple ways. First, she occupies approximately the same visual axis as Cortés and Moctezuma. This suggests equality in the power the three characters possessed.⁷¹ Second, she is depicted slightly larger than both Cortés and Moctezuma. Her visual prominence conveys that the two military leaders depended on her linguistic abilities to communicate with each other. If speculations upon Doña Marina's mastery of Spanish at this point of contact is correct, then it can be inferred that she was the only interpreter at this moment.⁷² Aguilar no longer translated for the Spanish, and her singularity in the linguistic transfer brought her incredible power. As Rachel Phillips notes, "she disturbs the easy dichotomies into which, without her, the Spanish conquest of Mexico could be resolved [...] She made impossible in Mexico the easy dualism of Spaniards versus Indians."⁷³ Complicating

69 Ibid., 60.

70 Tzvetan Todorov and Anthony Pagden, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 101.

71 Martha J. Cutter, "Malinche's Legacy: Translation, Betrayal, and the Interlingualism in Chicano/a Literature," *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 66, no. 1 (2010): 6, doi:10.1353/arq.0.0058.

72 Prominent historical records of the meeting only refer to the presence of Doña Marina as translator. Thus, historians have speculated that Doña Marina had mastered Spanish and was the only translator interpreting between the Spanish and the Nahuatl by this point of contact.

73 Rachel Phillips, "Marina/Malinche: Marks and Shadows," in *Women in Hispanic Literature: Icons and Fallen Idols*, ed. Beth Miller (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 113-4.

any understanding of colonialism through a simple lens of conquest and resistance, she represents the multiple and often overlapping power dynamics that would arrive with Spanish and Nahuatl interaction.

CONCLUSION

While most studies on Doña Marina focus on her role as a linguistic mediator during the Spanish conquest, this paper demonstrates that her significance in history extends far beyond that of a translator. By assembling four, sixteenth-century primary sources that represent diverse perspectives on the conquest, this paper shows that the characterizations of Doña Marina in historical narratives reflect attempts by different parties across the Spanish and Nahuatl socio-political spectrum to advance their political positions in the post-conquest era.

A study of the different ways historical sources bear upon the history of Doña Marina point to the versatile nature of power relations in the Spanish-Nahuatl colonial encounter. Instead of conforming to the simple dialectic of conquest and resistance, the diverse characterizations of Doña Marina indicate attempts by both the colonizer and the colonized to assert power. Cortés harnessed Doña Marina as a manifestation of his abilities, Díaz presented her to institute power for the conquistadors in the memory of the Spanish conquest, the Tlaxcaltecas emphasized her proximity to the Spanish to acquire political privileges, and the Nahuatl artists of the *Florentino* emphasized the centrality of her power in the conflict – a centrality that perhaps amplified their own in the context of a document commissioned by a Spanish friar to document their lives and customs.

The ways historical sources draw upon Doña Marina's role in the conquest reveal the deep imprint that she had upon all powers in the Spanish conquest. But rather than giving her a voice, each power used its memory of Doña Marina to amplify their voice seeking political interests in the colonial encounter.

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