

NEGOTIATIONS OF POWER IN MEXICAN AND MEXICAN  
AMERICAN WOMEN'S NARRATIVES

by

CAROLINE LOUISE MCNABB

A THESIS

Presented to the Folklore Program  
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Master of Arts

June 2011

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

Student: Caroline Louise McNabb

Title: Negotiations of Power in Mexican and Mexican American Women's Narratives

This thesis has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in the Folklore Program by:

Dr. Lisa Gilman	Chairperson
Dr. Carol Silverman	Member
Dr. Robert Haskett	Member

and

Richard Linton	Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies/Dean of the Graduate School
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Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Graduate School.

Degree awarded June 2011

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## THESIS ABSTRACT

Caroline Louise McNabb

Master of Arts

Folklore Program

June 2011

Title: Negotiations of Power in Mexican and Mexican American Women's Narratives

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Lisa Gilman

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Carol Silverman

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Robert Haskett

This thesis examines casual storytelling among Mexican and Mexican American women in Oaxaca, Mexico and Eugene, Oregon. I focus on narratives involving powerful female protagonists and explore the ways in which storytelling can represent a negotiation of power in informants' lives. Taking a feminist and performance-centered approach, I analyze informants' perceptions of power and gender dynamics in their own lives and the lives of the iconic characters discussed. Analysis is based upon participant-observation, in-depth interviews, casual conversations, popular culture artifacts, and library and archival research. My research indicates that prose narratives are popular and discussed frequently among the communities I interacted with. Female icons function to shape virtuous feminine behavior and chastise immoral behaviors. Women form and articulate multiple identities and communicate about power and gender dynamics through discussion of these protagonists.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Caroline Louise McNabb

### GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene  
The Evergreen State College, Olympia, Washington

### DEGREES AWARDED:

Master of Arts, Folklore, University of Oregon  
Bachelor of Arts, focus in Anthropology and Music, The Evergreen State College

### AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Folk narratives  
Vernacular Religion  
Folk Art  
Corridos  
Supernatural Beings  
Religious Architecture  
Feminism  
Oral History

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Graduate Teaching Fellow, Folklore Archivist, University of Oregon  
Spring 2011, Spring 2010, Winter 2010

Graduate Teaching Fellow, Intro to Folklore, University of Oregon  
Fall 2010, Fall 2009

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to acknowledge my committee members; Dr. Lisa Gilman, Dr. Carol Silverman, and Dr. Robert Haskett; for their patience and support during this project. They gave hours of thoughtful reading and critique to help me craft this manuscript. I would also like to express my gratitude to the women in Oaxaca and Eugene who informed my research. Thanks, too, to the communities that enabled this research: UO Folklore Program, UO MEChA, Downtown Languages Center, Randall V. Mills Archives of Northwest Folklore, Museo Cultural de Oaxaca, Oaxaca Lending Library, and the city of Teotitlán.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines Mexican and Mexican-American women's narratives, specifically those involving powerful female protagonists. Although I analyze the narratives themselves, my major focus is the function of casual storytelling. My research investigates three popular Mexican legends: La Llorona, la Virgen de Guadalupe, and la Malinche. La Llorona is the legend of the weeping woman who murdered her children. The legend of la Virgen is the narrative of a Marian apparition that began the national worship of la Virgen de Guadalupe in Mexico. La Malinche was the slave of Spanish conquistador Hernan Cortés, who bore his child, creating the first Mestizo Mexican. Each of these narratives personifies a powerful woman, and storytelling about these characters can represent a negotiation of power in the teller's life.

La Llorona, la Virgen de Guadalupe, and la Malinche are iconic figures in Mexico, and they are found in oral tradition, literature, art, and popular culture. Not only are they discussed in conversation and used as moral examples, they are also widely disseminated in entertainment forms. They are ubiquitous in corridos (folk songs), ceramic art, outdoor murals, T-shirts, bumper stickers, novels, and paintings. As icons, they represent parts of national Mexico, and they are used by various political groups to express different ideas. They are also common in family conversation, and in legend and joke telling.

My fieldwork took place in Oaxaca, Mexico as well as Eugene, Oregon. I spoke with ten women of different ages, ethnic identities, socio-economic levels, and from different regions in an effort to compare and contrast their experiences with popular

Mexican narratives. This thesis explores how Mexican and Mexican-American women build community, form multiple identities, and communicate about power and gender dynamics through casual storytelling. My findings show that many narratives are well known and used frequently in daily life. Narratives position strong woman characters as virtuous or evil through moral choices and outcomes. In casual storytelling, Mexican and Mexican-American women emphasize moral behavior, explore personalities as three-dimensional and complex, and use stories as object lessons for children, other women, and sometimes men. Narratives involving evil or neglectful female characters are also occasionally re-told in a women-centric, positive way.

### **Theoretical Viewpoint**

Contemporary popular ideas of Mexican gender dynamics suggest that Mexico is a patriarchal society in which men have economic and social control over women. Women are imagined to be passive and focused on child rearing and home making. These notions are supported by male-oriented travel writings and ethnographies from the 1960s and earlier. Popular films such as *Spanglish*, *Like Water for Chocolate*, *Once Upon a Time in Mexico*, and *Desperadoes* frequently portray Mexican gender dynamics in this way as well. However, anthropologists, historians, and folklorists have been refuting this accepted thinking for several decades now. Researchers have acknowledged that women were often ignored in earlier research, and contemporary fieldworkers, notably Lynn Stephen, now focus more equally on women and men as tradition bearers and active members in the culture. Building upon this scholarship, I utilize a feminist lens to explore female agency in Mexican and Mexican American culture. I investigate

intersections in female Mexican and Mexican-American identity by examining gender, ethnicity, race, and class dynamics in relation to narratives.

My research is an attempt to understand how Mexican and Mexican-American women articulate and negotiate power through storytelling. Within this line of inquiry, I tackle the following questions: How do Mexican and Mexican-American women perceive gender, class, and ethnic dynamics; both in their own lives and in popular narratives about powerful female protagonists? How does storytelling contribute to community building? How do women formulate or express identity through storytelling? Why are some characters coded as “good”, others as “bad”, and still others as “neutral”? How do women interpret these characters and are there multiple interpretations of the same characters? Do women express agency (or lack of it) through storytelling, and if so, how does agency manifest?

I investigate these questions through several scholarly lenses. My studies in Mexican and Mexican-American history help me understand trends and changes in Mexican politics, gender issues, immigration, environment, and popular culture. I utilize feminist and anti-oppression models of intersectionality to explore identity, gender asymmetries, multiple modes of communication, and resistance. I draw from anthropological and folklore theories of performance, meaning-making, and power. Combining these diverse theoretical models enables me to better explore issues of power, agency, and marginality within Mexican and Mexican-American expressive culture.

## **The Legends**

The prose narratives explored within this thesis are categorized as legends. Legends are belief stories that “are based on common knowledge about human encounters with the supernatural (or extranormal) world, concretized by personal experience” (Dégh 2001: 82). Legends can be sacred or secular, and are generally believed to be true by the people who tell them. At the least, their truth is debated, and sometimes quite energetically. These narratives tend to take place in recent history and involve human characters, though they can also include supernatural beings. Legends can be categorized as any of the following: anecdote, belief story, exemplary, horror story, personal experience story, rumor, superstition, urban belief tale, and contemporary or urban legend; though this is not an exhaustive list. Perhaps a more simple way of identifying legends is to distinguish them as supernatural, historical, or etiological.

Legend-telling requires a shared belief system and history. Community members have typically grown up with a similar background and are familiar with the same narratives. In a sense, legend discourse involves a negotiation of truth; narrators and audiences argue whether a story is true and how things really happened. Participants are driven to “express their true feelings, concerns, fears, weaknesses, and failures” (Dégh 2001: 313). Indeed, my informants had very strong opinions about the veracity of the narratives discussed. Some of them fervently believed that they were true, while others scoffed and insisted that they were false and perhaps even politically motivated.

For both the Oaxaca population and the Eugene, Oregon population, popular Mexican narratives of powerful female protagonists are important and well known. La Llorona is known as the weeping woman who forever searches for her lost children. In

some variants she has killed them; in others they were kidnapped or otherwise lost. She is variously personified as evil, neglectful, promiscuous, or a victim. La Virgen de Guadalupe is an indigenized Virgin who is said to have appeared to a recently converted Indian man, Juan Diego (now San Juan Diego), at Tepeyacac, near Mexico City. Her appearance on what many believe to be a sacred pre-Hispanic site of an earth mother goddess hints at her use as an assimilation tool; many assert that the apparition story was fabricated by Spanish Catholic clergy in order to speed conversion. She is a complex symbol, representing hope, nurturance, Mestizo identity, virtuous behavior, sexuality, colonialism, and female strength. La Malinche, sometimes known as Malintzin, Malinalli, or Doña María, was a Nahua woman who played a major role in the conquest of Mexico by translating for Cortés. She also bore a child by Cortés, creating the symbolic first Mestizo. She is often called “la chingada,” or the fucked/violated one. Many modern Mexicans refer to themselves as “hijos de la chingada,” children of the fucked/violated one. Her story is one of betrayal and victimhood. Each of these characters is complex and multi-dimensional. They are strong, vigorous women that are used in storytelling to negotiate and discuss female power.

### **History**

My United States based research is in Eugene, Oregon; and my Mexican based research is in Ciudad de Oaxaca, Oaxaca. The state of Oaxaca, located in southern Mexico, is an area rich with the folklore of a diverse array of folk groups. Oaxaca is a part of Mesoamerica, a cultural area comprising the southern half of Mexico and partway into Central America. This region was historically dominated by the Nahua and Maya

people, but many other indigenous groups existed whose folklore thrived and survived. These groups were united by shared beliefs regarding death and the afterlife, a pantheon of gods and spirits, and the rhythmic cycle of the natural and supernatural worlds (Bierhorst 1990).

Contemporary Oaxaca is home to the Zapotecs, Mixtecs, Nahuas, Mixe, Zoque, Popoluca, and Mazatec Indians and their descendents, as well as the Mestizos that are a result of the mixing of Spanish and indigenous populations. Ethnicity and racial identity is a significant issue in Mexico, where race and class were once the same and are still intertwined in many areas. During Spanish colonialism, *peninsulares* or Spain-born Spaniards occupied the top social niche, followed by *criollos* or Mexico-born Spaniards. Lower still were Mestizos or mixed-race Mexicans, with Afro-Mexicans and *indios* or indigenous people at the bottom. Even today, skin tone and hair texture are signifiers of beauty, with the more European look preferred by many. People with more Spanish lineage tend to have a higher socio-economic status, and there is still quite a bit of racial prejudice toward indigenous Mexicans. Oaxaca is now a popular tourist destination, and European and American ex-patriots have settled there in recent times.

Eugene and Springfield, Oregon are home to a large community of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, some of whom were originally from Oaxaca. Immigration from Mexico to the United States has taken place in several distinct waves. The states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, and Texas were once Mexican territory, but were ceded to the United States in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 (Meier and Feliciano 1972: 68). The Mexican inhabitants were suddenly U.S. citizens, though some of them chose to move south into Mexico. Migration across the largely imaginary

border continued for decades as Mexicans came north for work. In the early 1900s, thousands of Mexicans came north to escape the “liberal” dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, and thousands more migrated during the Revolution of 1910-1920. These were largely economic refugees who sought work in agriculture, canneries, and textiles. The Bracero Program encouraged Mexican guest workers to travel north between 1942 and 1964. Migration has continued despite United States government efforts to curb it through military presence in the 1990s and an actual physical fence in the early 2000s.

Migration patterns show that most Mexicans moving into the United States first settle in the southwestern states of California, Texas, and Arizona, due to proximity and availability of agriculture jobs. However, after living and working in these regions, some families move a second time, settling in places like Rhode Island, Illinois, and the Pacific Northwest (Meier and Feliciano 1972). The Bracero Program, or Mexican guest worker program, also played a role in Pacific Northwest migration, relocating Mexican workers to Oregon from 1942 to 1964. Since the 1970s, Mexican populations have grown in Eastern Washington and Oregon. These communities tend to be tight knit and interrelated. As family members move north, they join their families and friends and receive assistance finding housing and employment. Eugene and Springfield, Oregon have significant Mexican and Mexican-American populations, many of whom moved first to the southwest before settling in Oregon.

### **Methodology**

My interest in Mexican and Mexican-American women’s narratives was no doubt influenced by being the daughter of an anthropologist and choosing Spanish as my high

school language. I visited Mexico in high school and loved exploring the numerous archaeological sites and vibrant local markets. I chose to pursue fieldwork in Oaxaca because of the large body of research regarding the folk art of the region. Once I traveled to Oaxaca, I realized that casual storytelling was a common occurrence, as it happened in every taxicab. I began my fieldwork with multiple perspectives and identities: as a graduate student of folklore; as a queer identified feminist woman; as a middle class Anglo from a nice neighborhood in Anchorage, Alaska; as a painter, fiber artist, and musician; as an able-bodied person with an invisible disability; as an activist; and as a traveler and tourist.

I conducted my research in three waves. First, I visited Oaxaca, Mexico for a month during the summer of 2008. I rented a flat within walking distance of the zócalo (town square) and split my time between language study and exploring the city and neighboring regions. I made contact with artisans through a local women's cooperative, a family of weavers in Teotitlán del Valle, and a family friend who is living and working in Uruapán. I also began library research and visited local archaeological sites and cultural museums. I returned to Oaxaca for two and a half weeks during the summer of 2009. Once again, I rented a flat close to downtown, but this time I spent more time in the weaving village making connections with artisans. I also met several women in the city during my wanderings. I interviewed five women in Oaxaca. Upon my return to Eugene, Oregon, I spent several months making connections in the Mexican-American community and interviewed five women there.

Oaxacan interviews were conducted in Spanish. Eugene interviews were in English with the exception of Ruth's interview, which was in Spanish. My Spanish



language proficiency can best be described as conversationally proficient. I am not fluent, but I understand much of what is said to me, and can communicate fairly well, though somewhat haltingly. Any time I did not understand a word or phrase, I repeated it or asked for a word definition. I translated the interviews myself, and made context-based guesses when I could not hear or understand a word. These are marked with parentheses and question marks in my transcripts. I only utilized quotes that I was absolutely sure of in my analysis and writing. Translation was often problematic, because “[t]he area of meaning of a word in one language is never completely identical with the area of meaning of a similar word in another language” (Nida 1964: 96). At times during interviews, words were used that have layered meanings, and I either selected the nearest English equivalent that made sense in context, or used two words separated by a slash.

My fieldwork approach was explicitly feminist. Men and women have distinctly different communication strategies, due to learned gender roles and behaviors from childhood. In North America, for example, boys are encouraged to be assertive and dominant in conversation, while girls are trained to nurture relationships and interpret other girls’ speech. Thus, in adult gendered groups, women tend to communicate collaboratively in small, intimate groups (Minister 1991: 30). The objective for the feminist interview is to allow interviewees to control the speed and direction the conversation is going in. I noticed that Mexican conversational patterns seem similarly gendered, and thus I allowed myself to express my own gendered communication style, rather than attempting to be dominant and controlling. While women told me their stories, I maintained eye contact and encouraged them with positive minimal verbal

responses (“mm-hmm,” “yeah”). I came to the interviews with several very general open-ended questions, to allow the interviewees to explore the topics they wished to. Although this sometimes resulted in ignoring the topics I was personally most interested in, I felt that this method was more ethical and pleasant for the interviewees. The conversations could not be mistaken for anything but an interview, but they were mostly directed by the interviewees.

Most of my Oaxaca field research was centered in the Zapotec village of Teotitlán del Valle, located 15 miles southeast of Oaxaca City. I conversed at length with several indigenous Zapotec women and interviewed three. The majority of the women I met during my research trip in the summer of 2009 speak both Zapotec and Spanish, and a few of them speak some English as well. The women I interviewed, like most others in this village, make their living by weaving rugs and selling them to tourists and American galleries and traders. Maribel is in her thirties and runs a very successful business with her husband Demetrio. She frequently takes control of the business when her husband travels. She speaks Zapotec, Spanish, and English fluently, but she prefers to speak in Spanish. I also interviewed Maribel’s mother-in-law, Irene. Irene is an elder woman who lives with her husband, Gáspar, and her mother. She speaks Zapotec primarily, as well as Spanish. Her answers were helpful in formulating new questions and using the informants’ phraseology. Framing my questions as an interest in culture rather than discovering “old stories” helped a great deal with later interviews. Last, I interviewed Maribel’s mother Aida. Aida is in her fifties and lives with her husband. They also run a rug business from their home. Aida is bilingual in Zapotec and Spanish.

Besides these interviews in Teotitlán, I spent much time in Oaxaca City, wandering around markets and stores where women tended to congregate. I had many conversations with various women about beliefs in la Virgen de Guadalupe and apparitions. I also heard many local legends from shopkeepers, taxicab drivers, and restaurant staff. I also spent time visiting local archaeological sites and nearby towns and markets. I found my first Oaxaca City informant when I visited a tourism agency and got into a friendly conversation with an agent named Cristina. We chatted several times before the formal interview. Cristina is from Ocotlán de Morelos, a historically Zapotec village located 32 miles west of Oaxaca City. She is 28 years old and commutes daily by bus to the city, where she works as a travel agent. She obtained a license (degree) in general biology but prefers working closely with people in the travel agency setting. She speaks Spanish and is learning English currently. Cristina does not identify as indigenous, saying that her community is made up of people from different places and backgrounds. Later, I attended a conversation group at a library, where I met Karen. Her parents are divorced, and she lives with her father. She speaks Spanish and is nearly fluent in English. I did not learn her ethnic identity, but assumed that she is mestiza because of her light skin tone. She is soon moving to Los Angeles to pursue a degree in Business Marketing. Karen was very excited to tell me stories, and reflected at length on gendered content and events where stories are told.

In Eugene, I spent a good deal of time finding and making a connection with the local Mexican-American community. I interviewed five women, four of whom are from Mexico and one who is a first generation Mexican-American. Ruth is in her thirties and is from a village called Putla de Guerrero in Oaxaca. She has Mixtec roots and speaks

Spanish and English. She moved to Eugene with her husband and children two years ago and works as a Teaching Assistant for children with disabilities, as well as Womenspace, an organization for survivors of domestic violence. She also teaches Spanish at the Downtown Languages program. In Mexico, Ruth worked as a biologist, and hopes to do similar work as soon as her documentation paperwork arrives.

I also spoke with two young women who are students at the University of Oregon and are part of a student organization called MEChA, Movimiento Estudiantil de Chicanos de Aztlán. Dulce is 19 and moved to Oregon seven years ago from Mazatlán. Her mother moved her and her sister to Oregon because she remarried. Dulce speaks Spanish and English fluently and expresses concern about losing her Mexican roots because she feels she has become Americanized. Victoria is 19 years old and was born in Oregon. Her parents are Tarazco and Nayarit from Michoacán. She is bilingual in Spanish and English and her parents speak their native languages in the home, though she herself has not learned them.

I spoke with two more students at the University of Oregon. Elda is in her early forties and is originally from Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua. She is bilingual in Spanish and English. Her family moved to Arizona when she was 15 years old, and later moved to California where she finished high school. After this, she moved back to Mexico for six years and went to college in Mexicali, Baja California. Then she moved with her parents to Springfield, Oregon to open a *tortillería* (shop that sells fresh tortillas) catering to the growing Latino community. Elda has been in Springfield for nine years now and is an Education Assistant working with Spanish speaking high school students. She is also

attending the University of Oregon pursuing a B.A. in History with the goal of becoming a high school social studies teacher.

The last woman I spoke with I interviewed twice. Yasmin is 29 years old and was born in Tijuana, Baja California, but grew up in another border town called Tecate. When she was six, her mother married an American so she spent holidays in San Diego, California. Her family moved to Montana when she was 14, and she completed high school and her undergraduate degree there. She moved to Hood River, Oregon and taught art classes in the local high school before moving to Eugene for graduate school in Arts and Administration. Yasmin speaks Spanish and English fluently and visits family in Tecate fairly regularly. She has struggled with ethnic identity and has often felt like she was neither Mexican enough nor American enough. More recently, she has decided to identify as Latina, as an artist, and as an activist.

These interviews were important to further my understanding of female agency and resistance, coded speech, negotiations of power within storytelling, and formulation of identity and community. I documented my fieldwork with detailed fieldnotes, digital photographs, and audio recorded interviews. While in Mexico, I kept a travel journal and also took copious notes. I reviewed these notes and edited and organized them upon my return. I organized my photographs into a digital album and also printed several and created a scrapbook of my travel experience as both a tourist and a researcher. I uploaded my recorded interviews onto my computer and onto compact discs for safe storage. In the months after my fieldwork, I transcribed and translated the interviews.

## Literature Review

My understanding of Mexican and Mexican-American prose narratives comes from a wide variety of literary sources, as well as ethnographic material. Several worthy collections include John Bierhorst's *Hungry Woman* (1984) and *Mythology of Mexico and Central America* (1990). Bierhorst collected legends, myths, and folktales from Mesoamerican populations, often told in Nahuatl, and translated and analyzed them. These collections have been very helpful in terms of exploring variants of popular narratives.

Many scholars have analyzed La Llorona, la Virgen de Guadalupe, and la Malinche from a variety of perspectives. Maria Figueredo and Pamela Jones offer textual analyses of La Llorona. Jones collected variants in the Oregon region and postulated that La Llorona is a cathartic legend, told to express anxieties about motherhood and poverty (1988: 198). Figueredo distinguishes seven motifs found in La Llorona variants: (1) A woman who mothers children out of wedlock, (2) a man who betrays her, (3) the presence of children, (4) a river or other body of water, (5) drowning in or murder near the river, (6) a wailing voice, and (7) a warning to the listener (2004: 238). Domino Renee Perez analyzes La Llorona from a feminist perspective and proposes that La Llorona is a historical and cultural artifact. Perez examines the wide range of representations and offers strategies for reading and deciphering La Llorona in an empowering way (2008: 44).

D.A. Brading and Ena Campbell have contributed excellent scholarship on la Virgen de Guadalupe. Brading traces Our Lady of Guadalupe imagery and narratives across five hundred years, investigating her importance as a national symbol and the

various ways that individuals and communities interact with her (2001). Campbell explores the Guadalupe figure as a political and religious symbol. She also discusses the feminine mystique, stating that Guadalupe reinforces the purity and sacredness of the mother while simultaneously rising above these values. Guadalupe is maternal and morally superior, but is also powerful and a defender of the Mexican people (Campbell 1982: 21). Scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa interpret la Virgen through a feminist lens. Anzaldúa connects la Virgen with her pre-Hispanic counterpart, the Aztec earth mother goddess Tonantzin. She discusses feminist retellings that focus on the Virgen as empowering, both sexually and socially (Anzaldúa 1999).

La Malinche's role in the Spanish conquest is simultaneously a woman betrayed and a betrayer. She is a complex and important figure in national Mexican consciousness. Susan Kellog analyzes her as a historical figure and argues that she was forced to make choices among limited and unsatisfactory options, and was likely driven by a strong will to survive (2008: 81). Popular narratives about la Malinche are useful for feminist analysis of Mexican culture in that they show the roles of gender and sexuality in the Conquest. Octavio Paz offers a sensitive portrayal of the Mexican psyche, analyzing the ubiquitous phrase "hijos de la chingada" and exploring the effects of violation, aggression, and passivity on Mexican identity and self-esteem. The fact that la Malinche is referred to as "the fucked mother" and modern Mestizos consider her to be their origin is degrading (Paz 1985: 87). It is important to note that Paz, though brilliant, is thought by many contemporary feminists to have been misogynous. Although his analysis of Malinche is apt, the popularity of his writing may have actually strengthened the popular conception of Malinche as a traitor and a shameful symbolic mother.

Feminist scholars have since offered a more nuanced interpretation of la Malinche. Sandra Messinger Cypess resists the negative tradition of persecuting Malinche for betraying Mexico, suggesting that this narrative only causes self-hatred for both women and men. She notes that many Chicana writers have incorporated Malinche into their creative works and transform her into a more empowering image, rather than one constructed by patriarchal forces (Cypess 1991: 142).

I draw from these scholarly sources in order to analyze the text and function of prose narratives that informants told me. Maria Herrera-Sobek's analysis of Mexican female archetypes is useful as well. She uncovers several basic personalities: the Good Mother, the Terrible Mother, the Mother Goddess, the Lover, and the Soldier. Women are both worshipped and devalued in these narratives (Herrera-Sobek 1990). My interview questions included prompts about individual thoughts and beliefs about these female characters, and why and when stories are told. I analyze the variants to draw comparisons and common elements. I also discuss the symbolism and meaning of these protagonists and the significance of storytelling.

### **Ethical Considerations**

I am indebted to the ten interviewees who allowed me into their lives and answered my queries with honesty and thoughtfulness. Each of the women I spoke with gave me more than just an hour of their lives; they gave me the opportunity to expand my own knowledge, however imperfect the understanding. As a researcher, it is my responsibility to do my best to avoid harming those who help me. My line of questioning was at times quite personal, and I hope that I did not cause any emotional turmoil. But



more than this, I believe that it is my duty to attempt to give something back to my informants.

Carol Silverman's research with Balkan Roma gave me great insight into feminist ethnographic practice and reciprocity in fieldwork. She worked with informants over a period of years, and experienced a transformation of the relationship. As she became closer to her informants, her role blossomed into more than researcher and informant; they became friends. Now, she maintains contact with many informants, speaking on the telephone, visiting, and doing favors when the opportunity arises. Furthermore, she advocates for these friends and makes an effort to "facilitate, mediate, and provide resources for various cultural, economic, and political projects while eschewing paternalistic and colonizing stances" (Silverman 2000: 197). This work is inspiring and I hope to follow in her footsteps. My time in the field was brief, but I hope to return and maintain contact with my informants. I can and do advocate in small ways; by educating peers in my community about Mexican and Mexican American culture and systemic oppressions that occur; by volunteering my time to help translate when I see a native Spanish speaker having difficulty communicating in the supermarket; and by attending fundraisers for the local Chican@ community.

Another ethical factor is the question of ownership of cultural material. I was very conscientious about formulating detailed release forms, both for my protection and to be clear and honest to informants about what might happen with the words they were giving me. I made sure that each informant understood that I would use interviews to write a thesis and potentially future books or articles. I asked permission to take

photographs, digitally record interviews, and house these files in archives where others could see and use them. I talked at great length with informants in order to be certain that they were freely giving me their words and images.

However, an ethical researcher has a bigger responsibility than simply obtaining consent. There are varied attitudes about who owns the material gained; it would be perfectly legal to publish written material and even make money, without giving informants a second thought. But I strongly believe in the importance of asking for permission at every step of the way if possible, and also extending gratitude and accolades to the people who furnished me with the information in the first place. In some cases, it would be difficult to contact an informant; in this case, one ought to make a good faith effort, and then really think about whether the informant would be happy with the way their interview is being used. Ethics in fieldwork are quite malleable. There is no hard and fast rule. A researcher needs to consider implications at every new juncture (Jackson 1987: 262).

In my fieldwork, there were several occasions where an informant confessed something very personal to me, sometimes with great emotion. Although each informant signed the consent forms stating that I could use their interviews in any way I saw fit, I have chosen to leave some information out because I suspect it might cause embarrassment or emotional pain to an informant. There were times when I felt a deep connection with an informant during an interview and discussed things personal to me. I would not want these things broadcast either. Those interactions were special and

illuminating. Both my interviewees and I were vulnerable and this should be honored as private.

Each interview also resulted in a wealth of information, including illuminating quotes, stories, and songs. These materials will be of great use to me in presentations, lectures, and written materials. I will prominently display or mention the name of the informant who gave me these materials. The quotes, stories, and songs are gifts from talented and articulate tradition-bearers who were very kind to allow me to document them. They deserve recognition for their contribution to research and education.

The following chapters will explore powerful female protagonists, community and identity, and power and gender dynamics. In chapter 2, I provide snapshots of informants' lives, detailing their histories and family structures, where they grew up, and their work. I specifically discuss ethnicity, political identity, and religion. Individual and group identities are explored in relation to narratives. In chapter 3, I describe the narratives in depth, discussing informants' variants and their opinions regarding morality and choices made by the protagonists. Chapter 4 is an investigation of the ways in which gender and power are negotiated in the narratives. I also discuss gender dynamics in Mexico and in informants' lives.

## CHAPTER II

### VALUE OF STORYTELLING

I contend that storytelling is a way of strengthening community and expressing identity. My research shows that storytelling is a way to pass on family and community history, strengthen social networks, and instill pride. Furthermore, storytelling is a way of formulating and articulating personal and group identity. Informants expressed concern that the influence of new media has changed the process and content of storytelling, for better or for worse. For example, increased access to television has impacted more structured storytelling performance, since many children and adults choose to watch television for their primary entertainment. However, my interviews show that storytelling is still quite common in casual settings. Also, the Internet has in some ways encouraged storytelling due to phenomena like YouTube videos that enable youth isolated from a large Mexican-American community to access traditional cultural forms, albeit in a new media setting. The Internet aids in the formation of a new kind of digital community, in which members may be physically separated but can interact together in performative ways. Sharing videos through YouTube and other sites is simply a new way of transmitting oral literature.

My research into storytelling as a way of strengthening networks and expressing identity is informed by Deborah Kapchan's research with women's communication and Joan Radner's work on coding. A critical assessment of women's community must involve an in-depth exploration of women's communication styles. In particular, I focus on the use of creative expressive speech in identity formation. Kapchan asserts that performed genres, such as speech, are significant in creating multiple and hybrid

identities, and female agency is not necessarily transgression (1996: 4). Radner suggests that communities of women transmit coded messages to one another that are inaccessible to men or others in dominant positions. These coded messages are generally implicit and intentionality is ambiguous. However, such messages have the capacity to be subversive and transgressive (1993). I also draw upon the work of Barbara Babcock in order to investigate coded messages in women's communities. Babcock's discussion of "muted" female voices correlates with my first interview, in which my informant Irene insisted that people no longer tell stories. Other informants remarked that they did not know stories or could not remember them well enough to tell them, and then proceeded to relate a narrative with exceptional skill. Babcock cautions the feminist fieldworker to be aware of biases and avoid devaluing women's voices because they are perhaps expressed in different ways (1987: 394).

For many people, folk narratives are a safe and community-sanctioned way to express identity. While explicitly discussing sexuality, gender violence, or racial identity might be inappropriate in many contexts, relating a social narrative is customary and can provide a way to explore individual and group identity. Narratives do not define an individual, but can help one "understand how cultural/social forces or a single act can *shape* a person's or figure's entire identity" (Perez 2008: 110, emphasis mine). Myths, legends, and folktales are typically localized and reflect the culture in which they arise. Thus, they can be a way to explore ethnicity, nationality, sexual and gender identities, political ideology, and religion. Several of my informants use storytelling quite consciously to articulate their multiple identities, while others seemed somewhat uneasy with discussing parts of their identities. Perhaps this was because I was outside of the

culture and would be unable to fully understand their experience. It is also quite possible that some facets of individual identity do not conform to community expectations, and are hidden or private. Still, these informants were at least familiar with narratives that might be used to express identity.

### **Ethnicity and Gender**

Ethnicity was an uncomfortable subject for some informants, and definitely for me, as an Anglo outsider. I was interested to learn if informants were knowledgeable about indigenous-derived narratives because they had indigenous roots themselves, but it felt inappropriate to inquire about such a personal thing. For one thing, I'm aware that there is rampant racism and hueism in Mexico, and many indigenous people are marginalized. It is generally agreed that "the Conquest produced a four-caste system composed of peninsulares, creoles, mestizos, and Indians" (Herrera-Sobek 1990: 37). This was a strict hierarchy with Spain-born Spaniards at the top, followed by Mexico-born Spaniards, then mixed-blood people, and indigenous people at the bottom. Although ancestry and skin tone do not necessarily prevent individuals from obtaining work or other resources, they are still very significant in Mexican society, particularly to those indigenous people who are institutionally and socially oppressed. Some choose to hide their background in order to avoid such oppression. On the other hand, many Mexicans and Mexican Americans are proud of their indigenous roots. I circumvented this problem by simply asking how informants identified within their communities and

nation. Some readily named indigenous groups, while others called themselves Mexican or mestiza.<sup>1</sup>

In Teotitlán, most villagers identify as Zapotec (Stephen 1991: 17, 19). This is one of the rare villages that almost completely retained its indigenous makeup, despite Spanish colonialism in the area. The old pre-Hispanic temple was knocked down and the rubble used to build a Catholic church, but the town remains ethnically Zapotec and still has the ejido system of land ownership (Whipperman 2007: 85-87). Most people speak Zapotec and Spanish; the oldest members speak only Zapotec, and most younger children speak only Spanish. Several people speak Zapotec, Spanish, and some English. Irene, Aida, and Maribel are Zapotec and all live in Teotitlán. Irene and Aida speak Zapotec and Spanish, and Maribel also speaks English quite fluently. The local legends they discussed are mostly indigenous, with some Spanish influence.

Karen and Cristina live in the city of Oaxaca and neither disclosed her ethnic identity to me. Cristina is from a village called Ocotlán de Morelos that she described as a pretty community with people of different ethnicities. She said that some people are indigenous and others came from other places. However, there are Zapotec customs that are traditional to her village. Karen lives in the city and did not specify where her parents came from. However, she was familiar with many legends and folktales from the mountain villages, which are mostly Zapotec, which leads me to believe she is likely at least part Zapotec.

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<sup>1</sup> For an intriguing exploration of criollo identity formation, see Morgan 2002: 4.

Ruth was born in Oaxaca and moved to Eugene two years previous to our interview. She was born in a Mixtec village called Putla de Guerrero in the southern mountain range of Oaxaca. She considers herself Mixteca, although her grandparents were the last generation to speak Mixteco. She expressed some sadness that she does not know her grandparents' language, but is still proud of her ethnicity. The folktales she told me are Mixtec in origin, and were told to her by her grandmother. Dulce was born in Mazatlán and moved to Oregon seven years prior to our interview. She identifies as Chicana and the stories she told me are popular throughout Mexico. Her parents are divorced and she has no contact with her father, who still lives in Mazatlán. She told me that she feels that she has become Americanized and is losing her language and culture.

Victoria was born in Oregon, but her parents are from indigenous villages in Mexico. Her mother is Purépecha, and her father is Nayarit. Her parents both speak their native languages, as well as Spanish. Victoria speaks Spanish and English. She identifies as Chicana and the stories she is familiar with are well known throughout Mexico and not confined to any one indigenous group. Elda was born in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, and identifies as Mestiza. She moved to the United States with her parents when she was 15 years old. She speaks Spanish and English. The stories she told are also popular throughout Mexico, but she tended to focus on indigenous issues within the narratives.

Yasmin was born in Tijuana but grew up in Tecate. She moved to the United States when she was 14 years old. She speaks both Spanish and English. Both of her biological parents are Mexican, but her stepfather is Anglo, so she feels like she lives in



two cultures. She said that she feels unable to fit in either in Mexico or the United States because she is either not American enough or not Mexican enough. She said that she struggles with her ethnicity; she is racially Mexican but culturally both Mexican and American. She told me that she has decided that she does not want to title herself because she doesn't fit into any one box. The stories she told are not from any specific ethnic group, but are nationally Mexican.

Informants also discussed sexual and gender identity, political ideology, and religion. Karen, Cristina, Aida, Yasmin, Dulce, and Victoria all mentioned that storytelling, for them, mostly took place within groups of women and girls. Karen said that she thinks men and women tell the same stories, but from their different perspectives. She engages in storytelling with her female friends and prefers scary stories, such as La Llorona, stories about the devil appearing in different guises, and stories about evil elves that kidnap children. Cristina's experience with storytelling has been with her grandmother and other female relatives. She is most familiar with ghost stories and religious apparitions.

Aida also said that men and women tell stories separately. The most common stories that she hears are of ghostly apparitions in the village. Although everybody discusses these stories, it is typically in gendered groups. She also remembers hearing historical narratives from her grandmother. Yasmin heard stories from her female cousins, her mother and grandmother. She described storytelling as empowering for the women of her family. Dulce does not tell stories herself but said that her mother and grandmother told her stories at bedtime when she was small, and remembers groups of

girls getting together at recess to tell scary stories during elementary school. Victoria frequently tells stories with her female friends, mostly about La Llorona and other scary stories. Storytelling occurs usually during sleepovers and also around Halloween.

Some informants said that men and women tell stories together. For Ruth and Elda, storytelling took place within the family. Mothers and fathers told stories to children. Elda recalls she and her cousins telling ghost stories late at night to scare each other. Her parents would also tell her scary stories to ensure good behavior. Ruth has three children that she tells stories to. Although these stories are the same stories that informants like Yasmin encountered in gender-segregated situations, Ruth and Elda participated in mixed gender storytelling events.

For Maribel, storytelling occurs in mixed gender groups, but is rare. She said that people occasionally tell stories about apparitions in the village, but since she doesn't believe in them, she doesn't pay much attention. She also said that people often recount stories about their own lives. Irene said much the same thing. She insisted that people do not tell stories anymore, that storytelling only occurred in the past. However, she did acknowledge that people frequently talk about the history of the town and things that have happened in their own lives. It seems that her criteria for a "real" story do not include things such as anecdotes, gossip, and historical narratives. I wondered, too, if she was anxious about appearing primitive or backward.

Stories that explore and reflect politics and religion seemed much more common for my informants. Dulce, Victoria, and Elda all identify as Chicana and have been involved with MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil de Chicanos de Aztlán). In their stories,

they tended to focus on indigenous/Spanish interactions and class struggles. Elda dislikes Christianity and identifies as atheist, so she was not fond of the Virgin of Guadalupe narrative. She also disliked La Llorona because the story reflects class, gender, and race disparities. Irene, Aida, and Maribel are all regular church goers, and said that Bible stories and apparition stories were common in the church setting. Yasmin grew up Catholic, with her grandmother teaching her prayers and stories about La Virgen. Although she no longer identifies as Catholic, she still loves the Virgen and uses her in her art to explore feminine and sexual identity.

For each of these informants, folk narratives have had some role in expressing personal identity. In my interviews, informants talked about which stories they liked and did not like, and discussed which characters they identified with. Informants identified as Mexican, Mestiza, Chicana, Indígena, and Mexican-American, and negotiated these ethnic and national identities partially through discussing and telling well-known legendary narratives. These narratives were also useful in expressing gender and sexual identity; stories focused on powerful women with vivid sexualities, and women's agency was explored. Informants also used stories to discuss political and religious identity. Some informants were raised Catholic, others were Protestant; some attended church, others didn't; and some were atheist or agnostic. In each of these cases, religious narratives were told with varying levels of interest and belief.

## Storytelling Events

Storytelling can take place in a variety of settings and with many different participants. It is useful to analyze the event itself to determine the function of storytelling within the community. For my informants, storytelling takes place within the family, at primary schools, with groups of friends, or in the market or other public places. The dynamic between narrator and audience can change depending on the story, the location, and the participants. Sometimes, the narrator has full control over the story, and the audience is silent and rapt. Other times, the story is told more collaboratively, with audience participation and friendly disagreements occurring. Storytelling can be used for education, entertainment, and instilling moral values.

The act of storytelling can be analyzed as a performance. According to Richard Bauman, performance is “a specially marked mode of action, one that sets up or represents a special interpretive frame within which the act of communication is to be understood” (1992: 44). Not every communicative act can be understood as performance, but storytelling is performed in a specific frame. Even without such situational markers as a stage or costume, casual storytelling is a heightened sort of communication. Different narrative forms employ different conventional techniques; a joke might start with “have you heard the one about?,” while a folktale might start with “once upon a time.” For the legends that my interviewees and I were discussing, many started with conventional phrases such as “they say,” “my mother told me,” or “I heard.” These openings take the responsibility of veracity away from the teller, since the narrative is one that they are simply repeating. Also, there is a sense of continuity and

history in these statements: these legends stand the test of time. They have been told throughout the generations.

Deborah Kapchan delineates a set of loose rules for a communicative act to be deemed performance. Performance is public and requires an audience; performance is interpreted by the audience and is thus set apart from practice; it is participatory and engages the audience; and lastly, performance is transformative, both for the audience and the performers (Kapchan 2003: 130). The casual storytelling that I was privy to met each of these conditions. At times the audience and the participants were one and the same; often, multiple women would collaboratively tell a story, sometimes arguing over details. For example, when I was in the market talking to a group of women about my research, they spontaneously told the legend of La Llorona. However, there was some argument about whether or not the children died accidentally. One woman insisted that the children were playing by the river and fell in, but the others said that she threw them in herself. Other times, a mother or other adult female would recount a story for children, which seemed less collaborative. The children rarely argued or asked about details, but offered vocal responses such as gasps or laughter. Sometimes, a taxicab driver or grocery store employee would spontaneously tell me a story, and as an outsider, I would ask questions about unknown words or idioms, and offer positive vocal responses. The instances of storytelling that occurred during interviews were a different sort of communication. Since these tellings were bound by the interview frame and usually directly requested by me, the interviewer; they can be considered induced performances. However, many of the same conventions and formulae did occur.

The collaboration that often occurs during storytelling performance helps to maintain group identity and strengthen relationships. When there is a clear distinction between audience and performer, this often indicates respect for and trust in the narrator, and can also indicate status and cultural and gender differentiation. From my observations and what informants told me, elders often tell stories without any argument or collaboration from younger community members. On the other hand, when audience members actively participate, this is often because of a feeling of closeness and camaraderie; these group storytelling events are mostly between peers and there is good-natured rivalry and argument over details. Storytelling takes place within families to soothe children, teach history or instill values, and to entertain. In some cases, children ask questions and add details that were perhaps forgotten by the teller. In other cases, the child is expected to believe the story at face value and take away whatever lesson was intended.

In Cristina's experience, stories are told mostly by older people, because they have more life experience. She is most familiar with stories about religious and ghostly apparitions, as well as Bible stories. She also thinks that there are more stories in the villages than the cities. Storytelling takes place in tight-knit communities, such as the family and the church, with grandparents entertaining and educating children. Karen thinks that storytelling is very common everywhere she has been. Her family and friends all tell stories, older and younger people alike. Her favorite stories are those that deal with ghosts and other supernatural beings. She was especially excited to tell me legends about murdered people returning to wreak vengeance upon their perpetrators. Such

stories are interesting because they are didactic: they highlight justice after death, and encourage honesty and peaceful behavior within the community.

In Ruth's experience, storytelling takes place primarily within the family. Her grandparents told her many stories, especially when they were working together cutting candles or cooking. Now that she has a family of her own, she tells many stories to her children, mostly animal tales such as folktales about the Coyote and the Rabbit. These are well-known trickster narratives that are part of the Tar Baby Cycle, linked episodes wherein the Rabbit repeatedly dupes the Coyote (Foster 1945: 229). These stories are funny and have a distinct moral at the end. Ruth is familiar with the three powerful female legends, but does not tell them to her young children. Elda did not discuss storytelling within her family, but did mention that when she was a girl, she would gather with groups of friends to tell stories and play outside on weekend evenings. La Llorona was always a popular legend to tell, because it was scary and the children would wonder if it was true. Sometimes they would go near the river to look for the Llorona before they got too scared and went home.

Dulce was also most familiar with ghost stories. When she went camping with her family, her uncle would tell scary stories around the campfire. When she played with other girls at school during recess, they would tell each other ghost stories to try to scare each other, including La Llorona stories. Her older cousins also joked around and told her and her sister scary stories. For Yasmin, storytelling was a personal experience in her family. Stories were spontaneous and were told to teach lessons, reminisce about past events, or just for playing around. Storytelling was centered mostly on the family, with

parents and grandparents telling the children, and the children talking to each other about the stories they learned. The most common time for storytelling was when she and her female relatives worked together, embroidering, crocheting, or making tamales. Her grandmother would talk about the Virgin of Guadalupe, or her cousins would tell stories about La Llorona. Her family also told a lot of historical narratives about life events.

Storytelling can be a way to bring a community together, or a way to separate from other communities. According to Bauman, this is a case where contrasting or differential identities structure participants' understanding of and involvement in performative social interaction (1971: 35). Engaging with narratives often enables community-building. Many times, these narratives are verbal, but occasionally they are found within art and other expressive materials. In Teotitlán, many Zapotec narratives are personified in the rug designs (Stanton 1999: 40-42). These designs are used by every family and are a way to unify the community through a shared sense of history. I did not personally see any rugs bearing the image of the female protagonists I am discussing, but I know they exist, and symbols from those narratives can be found within many traditional designs<sup>2</sup>.

In Eugene, there has been considerable Mexican immigration in the last few decades. Often, immigrants from the same states and even cities will move together or over time to the same neighborhoods (Meier and Ribera 1972: 119-120). There is a community of Oaxaqueños in Eugene that has been growing in the last ten years. When Ruth and her husband moved here, this community welcomed them with open arms.

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<sup>2</sup> See Notes section for a discussion of rug designs.



They helped them find a house and jobs, and let them stay in their homes until they could get on their feet. This network of help, called *red de apoyo*, is common in immigrant communities. Often, people already know each other through family and community ties, but sometimes they have never met previously. However, the shared sense of origins and ethnic pride- often communicated through folk narratives such as La Virgen de Guadalupe- serves to unify these communities. For example, murals and other public art that depicts La Virgen or other characters is welcoming to Mexican and Mexican Americans because it is a code for shared ethnicity and experiences.

Similarly, at the University of Oregon, Mexican and Mexican American students frequently seek each other out. The student group MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán) is a prime way for students to network, organize, and take political action (Meier and Ribera 1972: 222). Elda was a member in the past, and Dulce and Victoria are current members. They discuss school and national politics and organize rallies and fundraisers. They also discuss and reminisce about Mexico, about their families, their language, and their shared culture. In this community setting, stories like la Llorona, that everybody knows, serve to create community and reinforce bonding and support. Through jokes and casual mention of iconic characters, shared backgrounds are highlighted.

Storytelling can take various forms, and is a way of formulating and articulating group identity. Grandparents imparting wisdom via humorous folktales, schoolchildren exchanging scary stories, mothers talking about the Virgin of Guadalupe over shared labor: these are all ways in which people create and reinforce community. Stories often

take place within the family, but also in the church, at school, and in public locations; and among friends, colleagues, and immigrant communities. Stories can be physically embodied within art or a casual anecdote about something that happened to one's aunt. They can bring a community together or separate it from other communities.

### **Communicating Pride and Community Solidarity**

People sometimes use stories to pass on family and community history, strengthen networks, and instill pride in the community. It is useful to explore the context of storytelling to understand how and why specific legends come up in conversation. The familiarity and shared interests and backgrounds of a community help to create an environment where storytelling can occur. Informants told historical narratives about personal and family history, community history, and national history. They discussed the personalities and representations of historical figures. Informants also used stories to reinforce community beliefs and customs. In these ways, storytelling is a way to communicate pride and solidarity, through cultural maintenance and affirmation (Goldman 1990: 173).

Several informants remembered family elders telling them stories about their lives and the lives of the older generations of the family. Karen said that when she was a young girl, her parents, aunts and uncles, and grandparents told stories to her and her siblings. These stories typically focused on deceased relatives and were told to transmit culture, because her family was afraid that she and her siblings were losing their culture, especially since many of them had moved or were in the process of moving to the United States. Ruth remembers that her great-grandmother often told her stories about her own

childhood. She had vivid memories of the Mexican Revolution and would often recount these narratives while she and Ruth baked bread together.

Elda also had relatives in the Mexican Revolution. When she was a child, her mother used to tell her stories about her grandmother and great-grandmother, who she describes as very strong women with hard lives. Dulce's mother and grandmother told her stories about their childhoods and how they lived. For many informants, it seems that female relatives told them their own histories and the histories of elder female relatives. This might be partially because girls and women often work together. Mothers and grandmothers typically teach girls how to cook, bake, and sew and do other household chores, and storytelling often occurs during these times.

Some informants mentioned that they grew up hearing stories about their communities' histories. Irene, Aida, and Maribel all told me that people often recount stories about the history of Teotitlán. Stories include pre-Hispanic indigenous history, Conquest narratives, and more recent history. People talk about old beliefs and practices, what the old people ate and how they lived, what happened during times of great poverty, and of course history of weaving and rug designs. As is true in all communities, there is also a great deal of gossip about current events. People discuss who is using natural dyes and who is using commercial dyes, who is giving kickbacks to travel agents, who is building on communal property, who is having an affair, or who was seen drunk in the street last week. Gossip can serve to bring people close and reinforce friendships, as well as to chastise the target of gossip and perhaps motivate them to change their behavior. Lynn Stephen's fieldwork in Teotitlán showed that "ritual events provide women with a

forum for airing opinions, discussing community politics, and demonstrating their influence in subtle ways” (1991: 188).

Cristina said that people in Ocotlán de Morelos also told stories about village history. The Danza de la Pluma, a dance that takes place every summer, represents Hernan Cortés and Malinche and tells the story of the Spanish Conquest and the effects on indigenous life. This dance is well known throughout Oaxaca and most villages have their own version. It is dynamic and, as all historical narratives do, tells a specific narrative from one point of view. In Cristina’s village, she says the dance reminds people of the sorrow and shame that the Conquest brought. People are sorrowful because their way of life was irrevocably changed, and ashamed because of Malinche’s role.

Karen and Yasmin both mentioned El Día de los Muertos as a yearly event during which people tell community history. The Day of the Dead is an important calendar custom where participants gather in graveyards, decorate family graves, make offerings to deceased relatives, and reminisce about them (Wasserspring 2000: 101). Karen said that storytelling is very important on this holiday, because relatives use the opportunity to pass on traditions to the children. Yasmin said that the event is not just a gathering, but is about tradition, respect, and remembering others. People recount narratives such as La Virgen de Guadalupe, share memories about relatives and communal history, and lovingly clean and decorate family graves (West 1988: 154).

Informants also discussed national history and famous figures and events. Aida said that people tell stories about what happened during the Spanish Conquest. In Teotitlán, her ancestors utilized underground tunnels going from the temple to Mitla to

escape the Spanish invaders. She also mentioned that Mitla is called the Place of Death because there were human sacrifices there in ancient times. Maribel also talked about the Spanish Conquest, but she focused on the transformation that occurred in the weaving economy. The Spaniards brought sheep and the big loom, which completely changed rug production, size, and the materials used.

Cristina said that people in her village often tell stories about Ocotlán de Morelos, a mysterious figure from Independence times who founded the village and provided the name. She also said that people tell stories about the Spanish arrival and Conquest. Elda heard many stories growing up about famous Mexican historical figures. Her father used to tell her about revolutionary Pancho Villa, and her mother would tell her stories about La Valentina, a soldadera or female soldier during the Revolution. Her own personal hero is Zapotec president Benito Juárez because he fought for indigenous rights. It appears that her parents both taught her history of the Mexican Revolution, but her father focused on his (male) hero, and her mother focused on her (female) hero.

Yasmin also grew up with stories from the Revolution. In Tecate, she had an elderly neighbor who was one of Las Adelitas, Pancho Villa's soldaderas. This neighbor told her stories about fighting in the Revolution and her interactions with Pancho Villa. According to Carlos Monsiváis, anecdotes about the true identity of Adelita are ubiquitous in Mexico (2006: 6); Yasmin's neighbor may very well have embellished her story, but it is still interesting and useful as a cultural and historical narrative. Yasmin's grandparents also used to tell her stories about San Cristóbal, Guanajuato, and battles between Christians and indigenous peoples. Each of these informants heard stories of

real-life legendary historical figures from their elders, and picked up a good deal of historical knowledge from these narratives. Mexican national history is clearly a popular theme in storytelling.

Cristina's village is very ethnically diverse. She says that the people have many different backgrounds. However, they do have some customs in common; for example, weddings and the Guelaguetza. Guelaguetza comes from a Zapotec word meaning "exchange," and is a complex system of economic exchange, including labor, cash, food, drink, and other goods (Stephen 1991: 33). This custom includes an extravagant yearly celebration complete with dancing, food, and drink. Like the Danza de la Pluma, most villages in Oaxaca host this event. It brings communities together, because it requires cooperation and reciprocity between families and participants. It showcases a village's best dancers and people try to outdo each other with gracious hosting. After such an event, people tell stories about their favorite dancers and best meals for a good long time. These stories communicate pride in the community.

### **Belief**

Informants also received information about beliefs and customs through stories. Shared cosmology and beliefs help to knit a community together. Legends about religious figures, such as the apparition of the Virgen de Guadalupe, are one way of transmitting beliefs and values important to a community. Informants also discussed other beliefs and religious behaviors, which are important to contextualize the narration of specific religious legends. For example, Maribel told me about a belief in a mountain deity that is known for granting wishes. Although she does not personally believe in this

being, she has heard many stories of people climbing the mountain to ask for help, usually around home improvement. She said people ask for more chickens, a better roof, money for a new addition on their house, or healthy livestock. I have not heard any more about this deity, so I am unsure if it is a belief in Teotitlán only, but Maribel said these stories have been told for many years and people still make requests today.

Karen told me about the widespread belief in witches. There are both good and bad witches, and they are more plentiful in villages than in the cities. She does not know any witches herself, but has heard stories from others (for discussion about *brujería* or witchery, see West 1988: 140). She also mentioned *curanderos*, or healers, people who have special skills in medical and spiritual healing. Curing occurs through magic, prayer, and various plant-derived concoctions. Not just anybody can be a curandero; it takes specialized knowledge, as well as supernatural powers, a gift from God or other beings (Graziano 2007: 23). Ruth also discussed both witches and healers. She said that witches are people who make divinations with cards. I was unsure if she was talking about the sets of 52 playing cards, or the esoteric tarot cards. She seemed uncomfortable with the topic and did not know anybody personally who did such things. She was more familiar with curanderos and *chamanes*, ritual specialists who heal people through ceremonies and medicines. Magic seems to be a fairly common practice; most people I spoke with were familiar with healing or divination and knew people or had at least heard of people who offered these services. Some illnesses are spiritual and impossible to cure with modern medical intervention. In these cases, people seek out community specialists who use traditional methods for healing. These methods are not incompatible with Christianity, however. Often, healers pray to God and various saints to intercede on a

patient's behalf. These beliefs, along with others, tie communities together through tradition and cooperative techniques.

Religion is an important part of Mexican culture and is present in one form or another in nearly everybody's life. Informants were Catholic, Protestant, spiritual but not religious, and atheist; but all have vivid recollections of the Catholic Church's role in their childhoods. In general, mothers and grandmothers teach children to pray and how to behave in church. They recount narratives of religious apparitions and Bible stories. The Church community is often important for both sacred and secular celebrations. Religion and church-based activities are a major way of building community.

In Teotitlán, it is not an exaggeration to say that community life centers around the Catholic church. The festival calendar is full of political, civil, and religious celebrations occurring at the Teotitlán church as well as churches all over Oaxaca (Whipperman 2007: 435). Many people attend Mass multiple times a week. Children gather in the churchyard to play. The open air market is directly outside the church grounds. The church hosts dances, weddings, funerals, birthday celebrations, religious holiday celebrations, and baptisms. Rites of passage are typically celebrated with music, food, dancing, drinking, and massive decorations. The whole community is invited and takes the opportunity to chat, tell stories, and perform ritual exchanges. The few families that have converted to Protestantism are left out of many of these celebrations, because they no longer feel comfortable in the Catholic church. This separates them from the community and causes tension.



Aida and her husband and children converted to Protestantism eight years ago, very much against the wishes of her parents. She no longer attends village celebrations, because they are always held in the Catholic church. She says it is very difficult to be Protestant in a Catholic village. She feels that other people distrust her and she has a very strained relationship with her parents. Moreover, disagreements about beliefs and customs can make socializing with her Catholic peers difficult. Even important rites of passage are fraught with anxiety, since they are celebrated so differently. Burial customs in particular are a source of tension, because Protestants cannot bury their dead in the Catholic cemetery. Even joyous occasions are difficult, because Aida says the Catholics like to get drunk, while her family remains sober. Thus, they no longer invite Catholic neighbors to their events, and do not attend their neighbors' events. This has effectively cut her family out of the community, with the exception of market days. Maribel, Aida's daughter, also converted with her husband three years ago, and reports the same problems.

The tendency for Mexicans to be Catholic and spend considerable time in the Church is fairly widespread. There are a growing number of Protestants in Mexico, but the vast majority are Catholic and most secular celebrations are held in Catholic churches (life-cycle rituals, for example; Stephen 1991: 179). Outside of the tight-knit village communities, Mexican city-dwellers are often more casual about their religious faith. Many families are nominally Catholic but only attend church for celebrations and important religious holidays. Many younger people are questioning organized religion altogether. Cristina, for example, believes in God but does not identify as Catholic. She avoids discussing religion because she is afraid her community might ostracize her. She

attends events held in the church but does not attend Mass regularly. Similarly, Karen's family is Catholic but she dislikes the Catholic institution, because she considers it corrupt. She does believe in God but refuses to attend Mass.

Even the most devout Catholics often incorporate pre-Hispanic indigenous beliefs and customs into their faith (Whipperman 2007: 417). When I was invited into Teotiteco homes, I frequently saw older Zapotec deities sharing altars with Catholic saint's statues and images of Jesus Christ. Ruth told me that in the village she is from, all the houses had saints' images, as well as images of Cocijó, Lord of the Lightning Bolts. She also mentioned that the saints are utilized far more than God or even Jesus. The saints have the power to intercede on a devotee's behalf, grant miracles and bless people. I heard stories about people harnessing the saints' powers and forcing them to intercede through such means as burying them, locking them in boxes, and turning their faces to the wall. Frank Graziano also noted that devotees would abuse images to coerce them to grant the miracle that had been asked for. Punishment would be lifted upon receipt of the miracle (Graziano 2007: 59).

My Eugene informants seemed much less religious than those in Teotitlán. Elda was very outspoken about her dislike for Catholicism and all monotheistic religions. She said that they are male-oriented and disrespectful to women. In her view, women are extremely important to creation and Catholicism tends to ignore them. Victoria said that her parents are "old school" and she does not share their traditions. However, her parents can be described as casual Catholics; they do not regularly attend Mass, although her mother does pray to portraits of Jesus.

Dulce, on the other hand, does identify as Catholic. She believes in God and has a portrait of the Virgin of Guadalupe in her dorm room that she occasionally prays to. However, she has not regularly attended church since she was in Mexico. She loves the Virgin because she combines indigenous and Catholic belief and is truly Mexican. She wants very much to visit her basilica one day because she thinks it is an important place. Yasmin also feels a special connection to the Virgin of Guadalupe. She was baptized with her name and her grandmother used to take her to church and tell her stories about the Virgin and Juan Diego. She sometimes uses the Virgin's image in her own art. Yasmin also mentioned that most homes in Mexico, such as her aunts' and grandmothers', have at least one image of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

Religious celebrations often unite the people in Mexican and Mexican American communities, offering a chance to relax with friends, catch up on gossip, and impart traditions to children. In Teotitlán, and indeed in most of Mexico, there is a significant celebration almost every month. Irene, Aida, and Maribel all mentioned the Precious Blood of Christ celebration in July, during which people celebrate with processions, puppets, music, and the *Danza de la Pluma* (Whipperman 2007: 437). Other popular events include September's Virgin of the Nativity and October's Virgin of the Rosary. Each of these events is an opportunity for a different family to plan and pay for the food and decorations. A different family hosts every time and over the years each family has this responsibility. Money gets spread around and most people feel that it is a fair custom that encourages kindness, gratitude, and town pride. Cristina mentioned the most popular events in Ocotlán de Morelos: May's Our Lady of Christ and August's Santo Domingo de Guzmán. These religious events are celebrated with fireworks, music, dancing, and

toys for the children. Religious celebrations are also a time for reminiscing about village history, past events, and funny stories about the host. Bible stories and apparition stories are told and discussed, as well.

The stories of saints' lives and other histories of religious figures are a popular topic at church events as well as in the home. Cristina told me that people tell stories of saints' apparitions, especially the Virgin of Guadalupe and the Virgin of Juquila. Although the Virgin of Guadalupe is the national Virgin, each state and in some cases different cities have their own virgin. In Oaxaca, the state virgin is the Virgin of Juquila, who is a child that grants miracles (Wasserspring 2000: 92-93). Cristina's favorite legend is the story of Saint Michael fighting the seven-headed dragon. Each of the heads represents one of the seven deadly sins. Karen also mentioned the prevalence of virgins in apparition narratives. She told me that there are many stories of different virgins appearing in villages and in sculptures and carvings. One woman I spoke to at a market, who declined an interview, told me that she herself had seen a virgin in a tree trunk.

Although not all of my informants are religious, they are all highly familiar with religious narratives. They all grew up Catholic and recall their mothers or grandmothers telling them stories about the Virgin of Guadalupe, taking them to church, and teaching them how to pray. For most Catholic people in Mexico, the Catholic church is a gathering place and there are often religious and secular celebrations held in churches. My Protestant informants report feelings of disunity in the community because they do not attend events at the Catholic church. People frequently tell stories involving saints and virgins, sometimes allegorical and sometimes personal apparition narratives.

Clearly, church-based activities are a prime source of community-building for many people.

### **Storytelling as a Teaching Tool**

Stories can entertain, frighten, and educate. Some, including those discussed in this thesis, are used quite consciously to teach history, geography, moral lessons, and proper behavior. Storytelling of this type can occur in schools or in the home. Singing, dancing, and folk dramas sometimes accompany this kind of storytelling. Cristina said that there are different kinds of stories: some stories are valid and told to give knowledge, while others are for joking and fun. What she called “valid” stories are those that are historically accurate and told for the purpose of educating children. These would include narratives about historical figures such as Ocotlán de Morelos, the namesake of her village.

Irene also mentioned that stories are used in school to teach children. She learned historical information about Teotitlán and Mexico partially through legends in elementary school. Karen’s experience in school, nearly forty years later, sounds remarkably similar. Though schools of course utilize textbooks, teachers also tell stories to inform students about local culture and history. For Yasmin, historical narratives weren’t simply recounted, but acted out with plays and folkloric dance. She remembers playing the role of President Porfirio Díaz’s wife in grade school. Her cousins performed in dances that symbolized historical events, as well, much like the Danza de la Pluma in Oaxaca. Yasmin said that storytelling is how she learned her history, and people communicate

their fears and joys through stories, sharing history and lessons. In most parts of Mexico, many of the old buildings are still standing, which facilitates history storytelling.

Some stories are used for teaching geography. Legends about how things came to be often incorporate natural environmental features. For example, the legend of Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl tells the tragic love story of two young Aztecs. They are unlucky in life but are together in death, and become two volcanoes in Mexico City. Both Dulce and Yasmin mentioned this legend with fondness. They first heard it in grade school when they were learning about local geography. Popo, the active volcano, watches over Ixta, the smaller inactive one (Goldman 1990: 168).

Many stories contain moral lessons. Animal tales, like the Coyote and Rabbit series, are funny and entertaining, but always end with a distinct moral. Ruth described how her grandfather told her fables when she was a young girl to teach her lessons about ethics. Yasmin also said that she learned many lessons of life through stories. Cristina's favorite legend, of Saint Michael and the seven-headed dragon, is about conquering sin. These narratives are fascinating and fun for children to hear, and impart cultural mores and proper moral behavior.

Some stories, particularly the scary ones, are told to explicitly mold behavior in children. Karen heard an abundance of stories about evil elves stealing children when she was growing up. As a result, she avoided wandering and came home when she was told. Several informants also mentioned El Cucui and El Hombre del Costal, mysterious and frightening boogeymen who were used to ensure bedtime compliance. Evil creatures that kidnap or harm children at night are liberally used by parents to discourage nighttime

wandering and staying up late. Dulce remembers her parents telling her to go to sleep or the Coco would get her.

La Llorona is a very popular narrative that is used by parents to encourage good behavior. Elda said that she attempted to find the Llorona with a group of friends once, but they got so spooked that they came right home. Ruth recalls her parents and others using La Llorona to quiet children that were having tantrums. Yasmin has used this tactic herself with younger cousins, saying things like, “You better get inside or the Llorona will come and get you.” She said that La Llorona is sometimes the only way to get kids inside before 8:00 pm because everybody knows she is looking for her children to get into Heaven, and she is likely to mistake any child for her own. These frightening supernatural beings are used by parents, older siblings, and other adults to encourage obedience and silence in children.

### **Media Influence on Storytelling**

Storytelling has changed drastically in the last fifty years. With the increasing availability of media and technology, entertainment looks very different now. Even in small villages like Teotitlán and Ocotlán, most families have electricity and many own televisions (Stanton 1999: 25). Literacy has increased in leaps and bounds and even families who do not have many books do have access to libraries. Internet cafes are everywhere and people can access the internet with just a few coins. In the United States, Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans are flooded with entertainment media. In some ways, storytelling has waned, but in most cases it has simply changed. Sometimes, media influence can actually enhance storytelling. According to Linda Dégh, “modern

vehicles of communication technology have added to the slow-moving regularity of passing on tradition from ‘father to son’ a new and more vigorous form of transmission: the passing on of tradition from peer group to peer group” (1994: 23). The mass media have become a part of contemporary folklore; facilitating transmission and uniting disparate communities.

Cristina had very strong opinions on the matter. She said that before electricity was common in the villages, people told stories frequently for entertainment. Now, however, children are less interested in stories because they can just watch television. Storytelling still occurs, she said, just not to the extent it once did. Ruth, too, believes that oral storytelling is suffering from the impact of television. Furthermore, most mothers in the United States have to work, so there is less time for extended storytelling. However, Ruth has a compact disc with legends from Mexico that she often plays for her children. She also watches a master storyteller on the internet with her children. The site is called “Cuenta Cuentos” and features a Mexican woman telling legends and folktales in a lively and dramatic manner. So her children are still exposed to the stories that Ruth grew up with, just in a different manner.

Mexican narratives can also be found in books; both picture books intended for children, and collections organized by anthropologists and folklorists. Such books can easily be located in public libraries and sometimes schools. In downtown Oaxaca City, the libraries and bookstores are filled with legends in Zapotec and Spanish. Ruth has purchased several picture books for her children, including *La Llorona* and the legend of *Popo and Ixta*, the two volcanoes.



Dulce feels that she has experienced culture loss in the United States being away from her cousins and storytelling. She says the people rely on technology now, and video games have replaced stories. However, she too accesses traditional stories through media such as television and internet. She enjoys watching a television program called “Mujeres Asesinas” that dramatically portrays female criminals. One episode featured La Llorona and delved into her representations and explored whether she was a real person. She also watches a television show about La Virgen de Guadalupe, in which people ask for miracles and receive cures from the Virgin. Victoria and Elda were also familiar with this show. It seems that although storytelling has been impacted by technology and entertainment media, it is not in decline. In some cases, traditional stories are still being told, in television programs, internet videos, CDs, and in children’s books.

Whether spontaneous or planned and expected, storytelling certainly has an important place in many people’s lives. Listening to and telling stories is a way to strengthen community and express identity. Sometimes, individuals use certain narratives to formulate and articulate their personal identity or multiple identities; around race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, and religion and politics. Stories are also used to explore group identity, reinforce community ties and instill pride. Often, elders tell historical narratives to young family members to pass on family and community history. Storytelling is also used quite consciously to teach geography, moral lessons, and for behavior management. Although storytelling has changed in recent decades, media and technology is often just a new vehicle to disseminate the same old narratives.

## Notes

Maribel and Aida both discussed the meaning of several traditional rug designs. They both told me that the tree of life is a popular traditional design symbolizing the sequence of life and death, with each member of the family and their years of life. Diamonds are another traditional design that represent wealth; not necessarily material wealth, but the wealth of the soul. The “Greek key” design from Mitla symbolizes birth, life, and death, but for Aida is too dark and macabre, as it has its origin in the human sacrifices that occurred in Mitla. Rugs that have this design tell the story of Mitla, the “place of death.” There are also designs which tell the stories of local churches, caves, mountains, and ancient cities. Another traditional Zapotec design is the snail. The snail shell is a spiral, which also represents life, because it spins around and always moves in a circle. Families in Teotitlán make their living by weaving rugs with these designs and others. Although there are infinite designs, the ones mentioned are the most popular, both because they represent specific histories of the town, and also because the tourists who purchase them like them the most. Sometimes people will use designs that they don’t particularly like, simply because they sell well.

Although each family in Teotitlán weaves the same designs, telling a communal story about themselves and their history, they are competing against each other for profit (Stanton 1999: 85). Aida mentioned with great sadness that the village is divided and there is disunity. Families do not help one another and there is jealousy when someone prospers. Teotitlán is communally owned land, called the ejido system, where each family has access to a fair portion to live and do their work on. Sometimes, a family will

make additions to its home that takes up more room than is considered fair. This isn't usually a problem unless they are perceived to be flaunting their wealth.

Demetrio and Maribel are arguably the wealthiest villagers and their weaving business is prospering. They recently added a small section to their veranda where they washed and dyed their wool. There was some grumbling in the community, but the last straw was when they built a fence. One day, a group of men went to Demetrio and Maribel's home and broke all their dye pots, demolished the fence, and kicked the drying racks down. After this incident, jealousy evaporated and the community was again pleasant toward Demetrio. He had to go purchase new dye pots and repair the drying racks. He did not rebuild the fence. His work was interrupted for several days. He did not report this to the village police, although everybody knew about it. He pretended that he didn't know the members of the mob, either, although they made no effort to disguise themselves. This incident seemed fairly typical- physical aggression isn't very commonplace, but jealousy is. There is a strong desire for people in the village to be at the same economic level. When somebody's business prospers too much, there is a great deal of competition and unpleasant feelings. It is far better to be welcomed and liked in the community than to flaunt wealth. Gossip and storytelling about individuals reflects positive community values, but can also directly comment on perceived unsocial behavior such as hoarding and not sharing.

## CHAPTER III

### POWERFUL FEMALE PROTAGONISTS

Prose narratives tend to exist in multiple versions, reflect the past as well as the present, and reflect both the individual and the community. Narratives about the three female icons discussed fall under the genre of legend. Legends can be sacred or secular, and are widely regarded to be true. They take place in the recent past in the world of today. They feature human characters and tend to focus on a single episode which might be strange, frightening, or miraculous. According to William Bascom, legends “are often the counterpart in verbal tradition of written history, but they also include local tales of buried treasure, ghosts, fairies, and saints” (1965: 5). The women I spoke with identified these narratives as *historias* or *leyendas*, depending on her level of belief. *Historia* is a broad term for narratives, but carries the connotation of historical truth. *Leyenda* roughly corresponds to our legend, but is typically regarded as less significant and is a negotiation of truth.

#### **La Llorona: the Weeping Woman**

The legend of La Llorona is a story of a mother’s despair and regret. The protagonist murders her children and is forever doomed to wander the countryside crying and searching for her children. Her tale is a cautionary one, both for mothers and children. John West refers to this particular narrative type as an “obedience legend: it is told to youngsters as a ‘true’ story of what might get you if you’re out after dark” (1988: 76). The specific reasons behind her murderous act vary widely, and in different variants she can be interpreted as evil, misguided, neglectful, insane, or sometimes good.

Various case studies of Mexican and Mexican-American populations have revealed that La Llorona narratives function to express anxieties specific to that population. For example, adolescent girls at a juvenile detention facility tended to focus on themes of loss, abuse of women, and women criminals. Bess Lomax Hawes postulated that these themes were directly related to the life experiences of the narrators (Jones 1988: 195). Pamela Jones's work is about a population of low-income Mexican immigrant mothers living in Oregon. Through her interviews with these women, she discovered that telling La Llorona legends was a cathartic experience and allowed women to articulate their own hardships with raising children in poverty, having difficulty finding reasonably priced childcare, and being frustrated with parenting multiple children in an environment with little outside help (Jones 1988: 195).

Michael Kearney's work in Ixtepeji, a Zapotec-mestizo town in Oaxaca, Mexico, confirms that central themes tend to directly relate to the lives of those recounting the Llorona narratives. Among traditional Zapotecs, La Llorona is closely associated with aggressive and frightening supernatural elements such as *aire*. Aire is the concept that the air is filled with invisible and potentially dangerous spirits. These spirits can access an individual's body and cause great harm if the individual leaves themselves open to spiritual attack, by harboring jealousy or internal anger. Once attacked spiritually, an individual will manifest physical symptoms. La Llorona is frequently noted to float or fly above the ground; she exists in the air itself. She also has the power to make herself invisible, only appearing to deceive potential victims (Kearney 1969: 200).

La Llorona is occasionally associated with another supernatural being, La Matlaciuhua. These stories position the Llorona/Matlaciuhua as sexually malevolent (Perez

2008: 28). La Matlacihua (or Matlaziwa) is a demoness who appears to men who are alone outside at night. Such men are usually inebriated and cause great worry to their wives and families. La Matlacihua appears to them as a beautiful woman and tempts them to be unfaithful to their wives. When they succumb to her charms, she turns into a hideous demoness and screeches at them, scratching them with her long nails and threatening worse. An apparition like this often results in the victim swearing off alcohol and staying home at night from then on.

Each of my informants told me several variants of these narratives. I include them here to illustrate the dynamism and conservatism as well as my informants' and my interpretations. Three of my informants mentioned La Matlacihua, and two of them directly connected her to La Llorona. Ruth thought that Matlacihua was perhaps the Llorona's Nahuatl name. She told a story that her mother used to tell about the Llorona or Matlacihua appearing at the river to play with the soap when women went to wash their clothing. Yasmin remembered that her female relatives used to tell a story about La Matlacihua in order to dissuade her uncle from staying out at night drinking. Cristina said that she appears as a beautiful woman and "takes the drunkards."

According to Kearney, La Llorona and La Matlacihua are often equated in Ixtepeji. Narratives containing these characters have the same central themes of aire, deception and treachery, abandonment and suffering, and fatalism. Structurally, these variants of La Llorona typically follow a simple sequence of male and female interactions. First, a man abandons a woman; next, the woman drowns her children, who are usually male; next, God punishes the woman; and finally, the woman harms a man, who is neglecting females in his life (Kearney 1969: 203). Although the man in the

fourth step had nothing to do with the events of the first half of the structure, the fact that he has abandoned another woman causes the Llorona figure to become angry.

Interestingly, most men harmed by this figure are said to be pushed into water or canyons; which echoes the murder of the children, who are pushed or thrown into water.

The majority of La Llorona variants, both in Mexico and the United States, have several stable elements. There is always, of course, the Llorona herself; a woman who mothers children, usually out of wedlock. She is always betrayed by a man in some way. Sometimes the father of the children leaves her for a better, more socially acceptable woman; sometimes she is rejected by a lover because of her children from a previous relationship; sometimes the father wants the children but not her. Then there are the children. The number varies between three and five, with three the most common. Each variant of the legend has a river or other body of water, and the children are drowned or killed near it. The water theme is repeated with the tears of the Llorona after she regrets her actions. Perhaps the strongest conservative element is the Llorona's wailing voice. La Llorona means "the weeping woman" and she lives up to this name. She typically cries "¡Ayy! Mis hijos" (Ohh, my children). Lastly, the story itself serves as a warning of some sort to the audience (Figueredo 2004: 238). When told to children, the legend of La Llorona often serves to reinforce bedtime and curb wandering. When told to grown women, La Llorona can be a means of chastising neglectful mothers or commiserating about cheating men. When equated with the Matlacihua figure, the legend can serve to warn men not to neglect their wives and families.

Within this structure, the storyteller can emphasize some elements, downplay others, and add new information. The figure of La Llorona can be represented and

interpreted in myriad ways. Although she is usually seen as a Bad/Evil character, she is often interpreted as crazy and sad, and sometimes even justified in her actions. This legend is one of the most popular in Mexico and within Mexican-American communities. Every person that I spoke to during my fieldwork had heard of her, and many offered their own versions.

Victoria knew two different versions and said that she and her friends talked a lot about La Llorona, especially around Halloween. She says:

The first one is the Llorona, she was very beautiful and rich and her husband dies and then she loses everything and she has three kids with her and she doesn't know what to do. So one day she goes berserk and she throws her kids into the river and drowns them there. And then she becomes more depressed and she drowns herself in the river also... And the other version was the Llorona had a fiancé who didn't want her kids and in order for her to get married with him, she had to get rid of her kids. So the only way to get rid of her kids she had to kill her kids and that's what she did, she threw them in the river from a bridge and then she became really sad and threw herself over the bridge also (Victoria, March 2010).

In Victoria's first version, the Llorona was a socially legitimate mother- one who was married and whose children were born in wedlock- who committed an atrocity because of mental illness or "going berserk." She was married to the children's father, but became depressed after his death. She was unable to parent because she was alone and ill. In the second version, the Llorona had children from a previous relationship. We are not told if they are legitimate. Her prospective partner does not want her children, so



she murders them in order to curry his favor. In this version, the Llorona is clearly a bad mother. She puts her own sexual and relational needs above her own children, and is willing to kill them to please a man. Interestingly, the fact that the man rejects the children seems unimportant and does not reflect on men in general. The first version is frightening because the Llorona is not necessarily evil. She may have even been a good mother, but her grief and mental illness made her do the unspeakable. This could potentially happen to any woman, even a good mother. The second version is frightening because the Llorona is evil. Anybody would be terrified to run into her at night, because she would be liable to do something terrible.

Elda also offered two variants:

Some of them say that it was back in the colonial times, this woman had a beautiful house, beautiful children, beautiful family; she was happily married, happily married. And she found out that her husband was cheating on her and that he was leaving her for the other woman. So she was so mad that she killed her children. And now she is repenting with them. Another story that I've heard was that it was during the conquista [conquest] times that a Spaniard took an indigenous woman as a maid, as a partner. And they had children and then he decided to go back to Spain, back to his family that he had left there. And she was heartbroken and so she decided to, in her *rato de pasión* [moment of passion], she decided to go ahead and kill the kids (Elda, August 2009).

In Elda's versions, the Llorona is less culpable than the father of the children, who provokes her. In Elda's first version, the Llorona was happy and presumably a good mother until she discovered that her husband was unfaithful. The shock of this betrayal

was so great that she literally went mad and killed her children (see Figueredo 2004: 236-237 for discussion about the father's betrayal and the Llorona's subsequent suffering). In her second version, the Llorona is an indigenous woman who has children with a Spanish man during the Conquest period. Left unsaid but implicit is the fact that such unions were rarely consensual, as they involved a major power difference and were frequently coercive. When the man decides to return to Spain to be with his "legitimate" family, this Llorona too experiences an overwhelming moment of anger and insanity, causing her to kill her children. This could be seen as an example of internalized oppression; a mother experiences injustice and turns the trauma onto herself and her children (Figueredo 2004: 240). Elda's self-identification as a feminist may have influenced her storytelling; her details about the masculine betrayal and the description of the Llorona's actions as a crime of passion seem to imply that the man is ultimately at fault. In fact, within moments of relating these variants, Elda states that this legend "does prove that most women's problems do come from a man" (August 2009).

Yasmin offered a lot of information about the Llorona, but did not tell a linear narrative. Her memories of La Llorona storytelling were mostly in early childhood. The last time she remembered actively hearing and telling La Llorona stories was in high school, roughly ten years previous to our interviews. She did believe that the legend probably came from a true story of "a woman trying to assert herself" (Yasmin, August 2009). In Yasmin's version, the Llorona went crazy because her husband left her. She killed her children and her punishment is to wander around trying to find them in order to gain entrance to Heaven. However, the children are already in Heaven, so she is doomed and will never find peace. This version contains explicit Christian elements. Yasmin

repeats herself several times stating that the Llorona cannot enter the gates of Heaven. God actually tells the Llorona Himself that she needs to find the children before entering. However, the Llorona figure does not seem vengeful or evil, simply sorrowful. Yasmin explains that she cries because she made a mistake and is sad. This version also contains a lesson for children: the Llorona might mistake other children for her own and take them in order to gain access to Heaven.

The version that Dulce is familiar with places the Llorona in Puerto Vallarta, the city where Dulce lived in as a child. She says that the Llorona “drowned her kids by a river, and every night she would go and walk the river, she would scream ‘¡Ay, mis hijos! ¡Ay, mis hijos!’” (Dulce March 2010). She says that her family lived close to a river and she would never walk near it at night for fear that the Llorona would appear looking for her children. Dulce knows two versions of the Llorona legend. In the first, she had children out of wedlock and her prospective fiancé did not want to marry her if she had children. So she drowned the children in order to enjoy herself and spend time with a man. In the second version, Dulce says that she drowned her children because she was crazy. She didn’t specify if she was always mentally unstable or if something occurred that caused her to have a breakdown. However, Dulce does strongly believe that she is not at fault. She says “I think she had a mental disease or something, like she didn’t know what she was doing. I think because she goes every night and tells ‘ay, mis hijos’ she feels bad” (Dulce March 2010).

Ruth also mentioned that different geographical areas have different versions of La Llorona. She says, “La leyenda da la Llorona es super común. En mi pueblo nos la contaban... En cada pueblo es diferente” [The legend of La Llorona is very common. In

my village they recounted it to us... in each village it's different] (Ruth July 2009). The one thing each version has in common, she said, is the cry “¡Ay, mis hijos!” She remembers it as a common horror story for children, and one that she didn't like because it was frightening.

Ruth offered more information about the possible origins of La Llorona:

La versión original supuestamente es de que fue un presagio antes de la llegada de los españoles a Tenochtitlán donde unas mujeres tuvieron visiones que estaban viendo a matar a muchos aztecas en la ciudad de México. Entonces ella gritó “¡Ay, mis hijos!” de que estaba viendo que va a ver una invasión de extranjeros [The original version is supposedly from a premonition<sup>3</sup> before the arrival of the Spaniards to Tenochtitlán where some women had visions that they were coming to kill many Aztecs in Mexico City. Therefore, she cried “Oh, my children!” that they were coming, an invasion of foreigners] (Ruth July 2009).

In this older version, the Llorona didn't kill any children, but rather warns her people that the Spaniards are coming to kill them. She is a symbolic mother crying because she cannot stop her children from being harmed. For more discussion of the older version, see Figueredo's exploration of Cihuacoatl, the Aztec goddess who announced the end of the Aztec reign at the hands of foreigners, and simultaneously mourned her symbolic children (2004: 236).

Karen did not tell a linear narrative, but did discuss her thoughts about la Llorona. She said that even in educated areas of Oaxaca, people have reported seeing apparitions of La Llorona. Karen thought that the Llorona appeared in various places because she

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<sup>3</sup> Found in Book 12 of the *Florentine Codex*. One of eight omens said to have presaged the Spanish arrival.

was searching for her murdered children and can never rest. She stated, “es una leyenda popular creo en todo México porque nadie sabe en donde exactamente o porque se lo murieron” [I think that it is a popular legend all over Mexico because nobody knows exactly where or why she killed them] (Karen June 2009). There are different versions in each village and people wonder which river she drowned her children in. Karen thinks that people tell different versions based on what they think may have happened, but since it happened so long ago, nobody knows for sure.

According to versions told by my informants, La Llorona can be interpreted as evil, negligent, sexually promiscuous, and frightening. Alternately, she can be interpreted as a victim, as sad and sorrowful, and too crazy to know what she was doing. Whether or not she was at fault for murdering her children, she always repents for her actions, and is always doomed to repent forever. Sometimes she confuses other children for her own and tries to take them, and sometimes she tries to hurt men to get back at the man who betrayed her. Sometimes she appears to people, and other times she is only heard, weeping and wailing in the distance. Individual interpretations often depend upon the positionality of the teller and the listener. Feminist-identified audiences might perceive the Llorona as a victim of gender oppression; children might consider her terrifying; mothers might empathize with her poverty.

### **La Virgen de Guadalupe/Tonantzin**

Narratives about la Virgen de Guadalupe typically center on the original apparition and/or the miracles that followed. Occasionally, somebody might tell about more recent apparitions, sometimes even their own experiences. For some believers, la

Virgen is conflated with the older pre-Hispanic earth mother goddess, Tonantzin. Others lump multiple virgins together. La Virgen is a powerful intercessor between God and her devotees. She is a Good Mother figure who nurtures and protects all, but especially those who are marginalized by gender, ethnicity, race, or class. Like all folk saints, she is particularly receptive to the pleas of the marginalized, and pays special attention to their needs. La Virgen is not a typical Marian apparition: she is distinctly indigenous, with brown skin, traditional native garb and symbolism, and a preference for speaking Nahuatl, the Aztec language. She also has European Catholic elements, thereby ensuring loyalty and conversion to Spanish colonialism and Catholicism. She is at once a symbol of spiritual conquest and a protector from the same.

It is said that she first appeared in 1531 to a recently converted Aztec man named Juan Diego. According to legend, he was crossing Tepeyac Hill to visit a sick uncle when suddenly, a beautiful woman appeared. She spoke softly in his native tongue, asking him to tell the local bishop to build a chapel in her honor. This Juan Diego immediately did, but the bishop refused him in disbelief. A few days later, on December 12<sup>th</sup>, Juan Diego was again walking near Tepeyac Hill when the Virgin appeared. When he explained what the bishop had said, she pointed to a nearby rose bush that had suddenly flowered, telling him to pluck them and bring them to the bishop as proof. Juan Diego marveled at the roses blooming in December, and did as she said. When he approached the bishop a second time, he opened his cloak and the roses tumbled out, revealing an image of the Virgin stamped on the cloth. These two miracles the bishop could not refuse, and he hurried to build a basilica for her (Peterson 1992: 39).

It is widely believed among devotees that the hill where the Virgin appeared and where the basilica was built just happened to be where indigenous people had been visiting for years to worship an earth goddess named Tonantzin. This belief can be traced to a comment made by Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, and has been repeated so often that it is regarded as “the truth.” Tonantzin means “Revered Mother” and was likely a term for any number of female deities, rather than just one monolithic goddess. Sahagún could have been referring to Cihuacoatl, Coatlicue, or even some other goddess. As for the supposed temple at Tepeyac, no archaeological excavations have been undertaken in that area, so any pre-Hispanic religious activities are supposition rather than proven fact. Scholarly historians connect the Mexican Guadalupe to the cult in Extremadura, Spain; the images are quite similar and the name is the same (Read and Gonzalez 2000: 187). Still, even after the basilica was built, many people visited and called La Virgen by the older name Tonantzin, thus conflating or hybridizing her (Campbell 1982: 7).

It is important to note that devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe was neither spontaneous nor ubiquitous. Increasing textual evidence shows that the original apparition narrative, though written in flawless Nahuatl in 1649, was in the grammar and style of a peninsular-educated Spaniard; there was “nothing to suggest any Nahuatl influence” (Brading 2001: 359). A translated English excerpt follows:

[Juan Diego] stood looking toward the top of the hill to the east, from where the heavenly, previous song was coming... He heard himself being called from the top of the hill. A woman said to him, ‘Dar Juan, dear Juan Diego.’ Thereupon he stepped forward to go where he was summoned... When he reached the top of the hill, he saw a lady standing there; she called to him to go over next to her. When

he came before her, he greatly marveled at how she completely surpassed everything in her total splendor. Her clothes were like the sun in the way they gleamed and shone (Sousa et al. 1998: 63).

Clearly, this text is European in grammar structure and word usage. However, this became the standard version of the apparition, and was translated into several languages and performed as plays to indigenous communities. Over time, it was accepted as being an original indigenous account.

Furthermore, the iconic image was not actually created until 1615-1620, when Flemish artist Samuel Stradanus produced a woodcut based on a painting (Peterson 1992: 40). It seems likely that the apparition and dissemination of the narrative were manufactured by Spanish friars in an effort to speed conversions and assimilate indigenous Mexicans to Spanish culture. Still, the veracity of the narrative is not imperative to prove or disprove when discussing folk narratives, since devotees fervently believe in her. I am more interested in how she is interpreted in narratives and how believers and nonbelievers talk about her and experience her as an icon.

Of my ten informants, all were quick to discuss personal religious beliefs, and seven specifically talked about virgin apparitions. Maribel, Cristina, and Karen mentioned stories of various virgins appearing in their hometowns in Mexico. Victoria, Dulce, and Yasmin talked at length about la Virgen de Guadalupe and her importance in their daily lives. Elda, as a feminist atheist, asserted that la Virgen was a myth to control indigenous people, and tied her to Tonantzin. Certainly, the Virgin of Guadalupe is well known and influential in Mexico and among Mexican Americans. Informants' religious beliefs are significant because they feed into interpretations of the apparition narrative.



An individual who is a devout Catholic might fully believe in the truth of the apparition and identify as a *guadalupana*, while an atheist might be more skeptical.

Maribel was raised Catholic but converted to Protestantism a year and a half before our interview. She does not own any icons and does not believe that they are holy. Therefore, she is wary of stories about apparitions of saints and other holy figures. She discusses how others in her community are Catholic and do have these beliefs: “Se piensa también que allí tienen piedras con figuras religiosas. Y se dice que allí aparecieron, que los encontraron, y ahorrita los tienen allí” [They also believe that religious figures appear in rocks. And they say that over there there are apparitions, that they encounter them, and now they have them there] (Maribel June 2009). She goes on to say that people petition these religious figures for good harvests, fertility, and home repairs.

Cristina does not identify as Catholic; she does believe in God, but not in the immortal soul, nor the efficacy of attending church. She has heard many apparition narratives, but thinks of them as stories only.

Un aspecto que dicen es del santo, es una historia. Que le apareció un santo, un imagen. Un imagen de La Virgen de Guadalupe, un imagen de La Virgen de Juquila, o así tipo de esas historias, se cuenta, todavía se cuenta. Yo creo que antes no había la luz eléctrica, no había televisión. Entonces querías que contar algo [One aspect that they tell is of the saint, it's a story. That a saint or image appeared to somebody. An image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, an image of the Virgin of Juquila, or this kind of story, they tell, they still tell. I think that before there was no electricity, they didn't have television. Therefore they wanted to recount something] (Cristina June 2009).

Cristina recounted two apparition narratives that she was familiar with because they took place near her village. In the first, the Virgin of the Assumption appeared in a small community to the south of Cristina's village. She was a statue in a church, but would awaken and walk away in the middle of the night to wash her clothing in a nearby river. There were many sightings, and the people noticed that her wool robe was covered with the thorns of the local plants, thus indicating that she was straying from her temple and wandering around outside. At some point, the statue was stolen, but the Virgin later appeared in a rock at the river where she used to walk. Miraculously, near her feet, there were the tiny footprints of the baby Jesus (Cristina June 2009). Religious statues are often treated as if they are living, and are fed, clothed, and otherwise cared for. Apparition narratives occasionally describe the images as actually living: "the images themselves may weep, bleed, sweat, and otherwise seem to be animate" (Hall 2008: 3). Cristina also mentioned the Virgin of Juquila, who was a child virgin in the city of Juquila. Devotees ask her for miracles and she often acquiesces.

Karen also believes in God but not in organized religion, because she says that the church is corrupt. She was raised Catholic, and her family is still Catholic, but she disagrees with the financial practices of the Church and the Fathers themselves, who she says are rich while the congregants are poor. Despite her dislike of the Church, Karen was eager to talk about religious narratives. She said:

Hay muchas historias como que se aparecen las virgenes en los pueblos. Sí, se aparecen muchos a los niños. O en la casa también a veces se aparecen en la esculpa o cosas así, pero es solo porque la gente cree mucho en esta [There are many stories about how virgins appeared in the villages. Yes, they appear to

children a lot. Or in the house also, sometimes they appear in carvings or things like that, but it's only because the people believe so much in that] (Karen June 2009).

Campbell mentions the tendency to localize virgins in Mexico; "there is a local patron or patroness for almost every village" (Campbell 1982: 11).

Victoria's family is Catholic but she was not raised in the church because her parents wanted her to assimilate to American culture. She does not identify as Catholic or with any particular religion; nevertheless, she is familiar with stories of the Virgin of Guadalupe. She related the following narrative:

When [Juan Diego] sees her back in 1539 (sic) back in Mexico and she tells him to build a church right there and then he comes into another church and shows them the flowers, the roses that she put in his shirt. And then supposedly my friend told me that the cloth that he had is still up there in the church today; that it's very powerful, that one time the church burned and that's the only thing that was not burned... And then there's this thing where you have to walk on your knees from a certain place all the way to the church of Guadalupe and then say thank you to her and stay on your knees, no matter if you're in pain or your knees are bleeding and spurting blood it doesn't matter. They have to do that for her because she's the symbol of women and for mothers (Victoria March 2010).

What Victoria describes here is classic devotional behavior for pilgrimage.

Visiting shrines is part of the "spiritual contract" created between the saint and the devotee; in exchange for granting wishes, the saint requires devotion and service. People might ask for help finding a job or conceiving a child, and promise to visit the shrine and

say prayers. Pilgrimage aids in devotion because it renews faith, places the devotee in a supportive community of like minded individuals, and heightens the power of relics and images (Graziano 2007: 59).

Although she repeatedly claimed that she didn't know much about religion or the Virgin of Guadalupe, Victoria was able to recount the basic elements of the original apparition narrative: the appearance of the Virgin to Juan Diego, the request for a church, the roses, and the cloak. She added details that she was unsure of, but had learned from a friend, about the miraculous qualities of the cloak itself. She also knew about the annual pilgrimage and gave graphic details about the physical suffering that devotees undergo in order to honor her. When I asked her about how the Virgin is the symbol for women, Victoria told me that "the Virgen de Guadalupe is also known as the mother of all. She's our mother. We need to take care of her because she's taking care of us" (March 2010).

Dulce does identify as Catholic, but said that since her grandmother forced her to go to church so much when she was in Mexico, now she hardly goes at all. She believes in God and considers herself Catholic, but is fairly casual and rarely attends church. She does have a portrait of the Virgin of Guadalupe in her dorm room that she prays to, a Mexican American version of *altares*, or home altars (Olalquiaga 1992: 38). She also likes to watch a television program that involves people praying to the Virgin for miracles and then receiving divine intervention. She would like to someday visit the basilica in Mexico City in order to see Juan Diego's cloak with her image on it.

Dulce also asserted that she didn't really know the story and had very little knowledge about religion or the Virgin of Guadalupe. This lack of knowledge is what Westerfelhaus terms "ritual habit," participation and belief in a myth without direct

knowledge (2007: 101). However, her narrative shows that she does indeed know the story. She said that the Virgin of Guadalupe is loved by Mexicans because there are many indigenous people in Mexico, and the Virgin combines indigenous and Catholic belief. “Juan Diego was Indian. He apparently had a poncho and he saw her, she just appeared. And she talked to him to send a message to a town. And when she left, she left her image on him, on the poncho. So that’s what’s supposed to be at the basilica of Guadalupe: the mantle that her image went to. It was a miracle. So people go to the basilica, they will go on their knees and it’s like they are offering her their grief so she can make a miracle” (Dulce March 2010). Although Dulce was unclear about the details of the Virgin’s request, she did know about the miracle of the cloak (Herrera-Sobek 1990: 35), as well as the pilgrimage custom of walking on the knees. Dulce also mentioned that the Virgin is a mother figure who is protective. She said that when she thinks about the Virgin or looks at her portrait, she feels a sense of peace and comfort.

Yasmin was familiar with the apparition story, as well. She says, “The way I started hearing it is that Diego was an indigenous man. And the Virgin Mary one of these days, one day the Virgin Mary appeared to him. And told him what he needed to do, and he picked roses I believe, and put them in his shawl. And all these roses, he took them to the church, and when he took the roses out, there was that image of the Virgin Mary” (Yasmin August 2009). She also explained that she did some research on the image and learned that historians and anthropologists have not been able to identify the pigments. Many people believe that this is proof that the image was a miracle. Yasmin’s version of the narrative contains the apparition to Juan Diego, the request, the roses, and the cloak. She did not mention the annual pilgrimage but did say that most homes in Mexico have a

portrait of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Yasmin learned about the Virgin of Guadalupe from multiple sources: her grandmother, her mother, her godparents, and her primary school in Mexico.

Yasmin does not identify as Catholic but as a spiritual person. She loves the Catholic imagery, especially the Virgin of Guadalupe, and incorporates it into her art. She says that the Virgin is important for many reasons: “It’s about respect to your mother, respect to your grandmother. It’s honoring what was and what is within a woman, which is inner strength” (Yasmin August 2009). Yasmin believes that the Virgin went through persecution and judgment, and is strong as a result. Folk saint devotion relies on inclusion and a sense that the saint is “one of us” (Graziano 2007: 32). Yasmin believes that the Virgin has maternal qualities and is empowering for women everywhere. She says that the apparition story brings hope and perseverance to women.

Elda has a strongly opposing point of view about the Virgin of Guadalupe. She is an atheist because she believes that monotheistic religions are male oriented and patriarchal. She says that women are an important part of creation and procreation and are not given the respect they deserve in Catholicism and other religions. Elda asserted that, “The Virgin of Guadalupe was another myth that the Spanish were able to manipulate in order to control the rest of the indigenous people. What they did was they just gave a different name to Tonantzin... She is a source of pride and everything, but it’s just another tool to manipulate, to control. She’s the caring being, she’s always taking care of everybody else” (Elda August 2009). Elda is angry about the use of the Virgin of Guadalupe in the spiritual conquest of the indigenous people of Mexico.

The Virgin of Guadalupe is a multivocal symbol, representing conquest and patriarchy as well as female power and self-determination.<sup>4</sup> According to Jeanette Favrot Peterson, “Guadalupe has been used alternatively, and sometimes simultaneously, as a symbol of liberation as well as one of accommodation and control” (1992: 39). The fact that the basilica erected in her honor was built atop the older temple to Tonantzin hints at the Christianization agenda of the Spanish invaders. This was a very common assimilation tactic used by Spanish friars in the Americas. Archaeological sites at Mitla and Teotitlán show quite clearly how the Spanish tore down indigenous temples, using the same stones to build Catholic churches in the same locations. In the case of the Virgin of Guadalupe, pilgrims continued to travel to Tepeyac Hill, many times still calling her by her older name, Tonantzin. Over time, Guadalupe gained popularity and is now the patron saint of Mexico.

Certainly, the Virgin of Guadalupe was used purposefully to justify the Conquest, but she also represents myriad other interests. Father Miguel Hidalgo, who famously uttered the Grito de Dolores during the 1810 War of Independence, used her image to rally nationalist troops and stir up anti-Spanish sentiment. She was again associated with liberal nationalism during the 1910 Revolution. Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata and their guerrilla armies wore her image on their clothing and carried her image on standards (Peterson 1992: 45). Thus, Guadalupe became a symbol for social reform, freedom, self-determination, and progressive attitudes.

She has also been used to mark ethnicity in Mexican immigrant and Mexican-American communities in the United States. Reproductions of the Guadalupe image

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<sup>4</sup> For a deeper discussion of multivocality, see Westerfelhaus 2007: 102-103.

possess both iconic and indexical power; the image exudes the power of Guadalupe herself, and also connects believers to the pilgrimage site as well as other followers (Westerfelhaus 2007: 98-99). Her image has become highly commodified and she now appears on prayer candles, posters, tattoos, T-shirts, jewelry, advertisements, and public murals. These cheap reproductions are certainly kitsch to some, but have great symbolic meaning for devotees, in that they are indexical and highly valued (Olalquiaga 1992: 42, 47). The Virgin of Guadalupe can in this way be a strong symbol for community solidarity and ethnic pride. Those who connect her with Tonantzin often use her to represent indigenous pride, rights, and community. In recent decades, feminist artists and writers, such as Yolanda López, have reinterpreted her as a strong empowered woman, a symbol for Mexicana and Chicana feminism.

The Virgin of Guadalupe as a female protagonist is nearly always coded as a Good/Virtuous woman. However, individuals and groups who use her image have highly varied motives, from assimilation and colonialism to maternal nurturing to female empowerment and sexuality. Victoria, Dulce, and Yasmin all associate the Virgin of Guadalupe with hope, perseverance, mothering and spirituality. Elda associates the Virgin with Conquest and manipulation of indigenous people, but also with the pre-Hispanic earth goddess Tonantzin. Regardless of how individuals perceive her, the Virgin of Guadalupe is a national Mexican symbol whose popularity has extended into popular culture.



## La Malinche/Malintzin

La Malinche is the contemporary name for the indigenous woman known as Malintzin or Doña Marina. Many scholars believe that she was twice sold into slavery, first by her people to the Aztecs, and then by the Aztecs to Hernán Cortés, the Spanish conquistador (Lanyon 1999: 38-39). However, it is also quite possible that she was “given” to the Spaniards to serve as a secondary wife to help cement an alliance, something that was common among indigenous nobility. Malintzin was an extraordinarily gifted young woman: she spoke her native language; Nahuatl, the Aztec language; and she quickly learned Spanish from her new captors. She was a very skilled speaker<sup>5</sup> and had great understanding of the different cultures around her. Thus, Cortés realized that she would make a splendid diplomat (Swyt 1998: 191).

Malintzin became the translator and companion to Cortés, aiding him in communicating with the Aztecs and other indigenous communities of Mexico. It is no exaggeration to say that her diplomacy and grasp of languages greatly speeded the Spanish Conquest. As well, she bore at least one child by Cortés, named Don Martín (Lanyon 1999: 94). This boy was among the first mestizos, and because of his famous parents, became the symbolic first true Mexican. Malintzin, on the other hand, eventually became known as the first betrayer of the indigenous people of Mexico. Her hispanicized name La Malinche is now synonymous with betrayal; to be a malinchista is to be a betrayer. She is also called La Chingada, the fucked mother. To be fucked is the ultimate shame in Mexican culture; she was not a willing participant but a duped woman,

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<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of her multilingualism and courtly speaking skills, see Karttunen 1997: 301.

a used woman, who sold out her children, the people of Mexico.<sup>6</sup> This notion of betrayal, however, is far more nuanced than popular belief suggests. There was no pan-Indian identity in Mesoamerica at that time, so Malintzin was probably loyal only to her natal ethnic group. To her, the Aztecs would have been an enemy, and helping the Spanish defeat them would have seemed like a good thing to do.

When asked about historical narratives, five informants discussed Conquest history, and three specifically mentioned La Malinche. Cristina made a bitter joke about the bravery of the Spanish conquistadors. Aida told me about how the Zapotecs hid in tunnels underneath Teotitlán and Mitla to escape being killed by the Spaniards. Maribel explained that the Spanish brought sheep and the big loom, transforming weaving and the economy of the village. Cristina said that Malinche was the spouse of Cortés and also mentioned her appearance in Oaxaca's danza de la pluma. Dulce told me that she learned about Malinche at a MEChA retreat. Yasmin discussed how Malinche was the symbolic mother of the first mestizo, and asserted that rather than conquest, it was transformation.

Although Aida did not explicitly discuss Spanish violence or the effects of conquest and colonialism, she did mention that there was a system of tunnels that the Zapotecs utilized to escape when the Spanish arrived. She is clearly knowledgeable about the history of her town and the effects the Spanish conquistadors had on indigenous life.

Abajo la iglesia católica, existen ruinas donde se dice que este no se hicieron los españoles o no se o era mucho antes, de que la gente de aqui tiene aceso hasta

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<sup>6</sup> Octavio Paz has a sensitive exploration of the verb chingar and the psychological implications of identifying as the children of a chingada; see Paz 1961: 85-86 in particular.

Mitla. De que cuando hubo este cuando llegaron los españoles fue que este hicieron subterranos, hacer tuneles para conducirse hasta Mitla. Si es lo que cuenta la gente. Entonces de aquí dicen que por todos lados existen tuneles de aquí a Mitla, de aquí hasta Juchitán, Oaxaca [Underneath the Catholic church, there exist ruins where they say the Spanish did not make them, they were there long before; the people from here had access to Mitla. When the Spanish came they went to the subterranean, to make tunnels, to lead themselves to Mitla. Yes, this is what the people say. Therefore here they say that there are tunnels everywhere from here to Mitla, from here to Juchitán, Oaxaca] (Aida June 2009). Other people that I spoke with corroborated this information. However, there has never been an official archaeological exploration of the ruins in Teotitlán, so there is no hard evidence for such tunnels. Unfortunately, this kind of research is underfunded and unlikely to occur anytime soon.

When I asked Maribel if people told stories about historical events that are important in Teotitlán, she immediately mentioned the arrival of the Spaniards. She said: Cuando vinieron a conquistar por los españoles fueron los que trajeron el telar de estos tapetes ahorrita. Porque antes aquí utilizaba el telar de cintura... de la cintura se hacen cosas pequeñas solamente. Y como para frío. No para tapetes para el grueso... Entonces los españoles llegaron unos trajeron los borregos, porque antes no había borregos. Utilizaba el algodón [When the Spanish came to conquer there were those that brought the loom for these rugs now. Because before here we used the belt loom... from the belt loom they could only make little things. And for the cold, yes. Not thick rugs... Then the Spaniards came

and brought the lambs, because before we didn't have lambs. We used cotton] (Maribel June 2009).

It makes sense that Maribel would focus on the ways in which Spanish colonialism changed the economy of Teotitlán. Weaving rugs is her livelihood. The Spanish introduced both the large loom and the sheep, both of which transformed weaving completely. Now Teotitecos make wool rugs on a large scale; they incorporate complex designs and sell the rugs at a profit which enables most of them to have electricity and modern appliances.

Cristina told me that she thinks a lot of the old stories stopped being told because of the Conquest, that they “came apart” when the Spanish came. When I asked her about the Conquest, she shook her head and said, “Los españoles. Esos españoles que vienen en valero. Estos españoles que nos vinieron en valero” [The Spaniards. Those Spaniards that came in bravely. Those Spaniards that came to us in bravery] (Cristina June 2009). She laughed and shook her head again. Cristina asserted that La Malinche isn't a figure from a story, but a real historical figure. However, she didn't think she was very relevant other than being the wife of Hernán Cortés. She was aware of the controversy surrounding Malinche, and said, “No sé si fuera mal” [I don't know if she was bad] (Cristina June 2009). She also discussed the annual danza de la pluma that occurs in various localities of Oaxaca every July (Harris 1996: 157). These dances feature Hernán Cortés, Malinche, and other historical figures. I asked Cristina if they were intended to celebrate the Conquest, and she replied, “No que celebra, pero que celebrar algo representativo. ¿Bailan su pena, no?” [Not to celebrate [the Conquest], but to celebrate something that it represents. They dance their shame/sorrow, right?] (Cristina June

2009). Again, here is the theme of shame connected with Conquest and being the product of violence, rape, and exploitation.

Dulce was not exposed to any Malinche narratives until she attended a MEChA retreat (Movimiento Estudiantil de Chicanos de Aztlán, or Student Movement for Chicanos of Aztlán). There she went to a workshop where somebody gave a presentation specifically about La Malinche. She said, “Some people see her as a bad person, like she betrayed the Indians, while others see her as she didn’t do that. All I know is that at the workshop that people see her as a bad female because she betrayed the Indians and helped Hernán Cortés” (Dulce March 2010). Dulce was unable to offer any personal opinions because she had only recently learned about Malinche, and didn’t remember very much from the presentation anyway. But she did take away the notion of betrayal and that Malinche is viewed as a “bad female.”

Yasmin had a decidedly different view of Malinche. “She was the first woman in Mexico that was with a Spaniard so her child was the first mestizo, the first Mexican. She betrayed the indigenous peoples because she showed the Spaniards everything, and it’s like, no, it wasn’t an invasion, it was a transformation people! So it’s just interesting how women like that that have made a change are seen [as] malicious or like they’re betraying the traditions of the world... But without her, we wouldn’t have any other Mexicans I guess” (Yasmin August 2009). Yasmin clearly knows that many people have a negative view of Malinche, but she sees her role as transformative rather than as a betrayer, a view echoed by Read and Gonzalez, who assert that Malinche was performing her proper role in an alliance forged by indigenous leaders. “Historically then, she was neither a traitor to Mexico nor victim of circumstances, but a highly intelligent woman

performing an extremely fine job according to indigenous standards” (Read and Gonzalez 2000: 205). Yasmin focuses on the mixing of ethnic groups and creation of mestizo people, rather than on the violence of the Conquest. In doing so, she takes the blame away from Malinche. Yasmin acknowledges that Malinche “showed the Spaniards” things and aided in conquest and colonization, but notes that women like Malinche are always blamed for things not necessarily in their control.

Some feminist scholars and artists have written reinterpretations of La Malinche. Instead of positioning her as a traitor, she is seen as a woman who made difficult choices in order to survive. Scholar Sandra Messinger Cypess reconstructed an alternate history of La Malinche, one in which Malinche was an “independent, active translator, who searched for the right words to bridge the gap between two cultures” (Cypess 1991: 151). Susan Kellog’s analysis of La Malinche reveals her as a historical agent with very limited choices. She did not choose to be a slave, or to be sold or given to Cortés. But when this life was forced upon her, she made the most of it, using her charms and language abilities to survive and even thrive. As a slave, her sexual contact with Cortés couldn’t have been consensual. It is unknown if there was love, attraction, or desire, but the fact that she was a slave means that she did not really have the power to say no if she wanted to. Thus, producing the first mestizo Mexican was a neutral act, neither positive nor negative.

John Bierhorst’s *The Hungry Woman* contains a variety of myths and legends told by Aztec and mestizo informants. One anonymous informant, when asked to tell the collector who the weeping woman was, told an interesting variant in which the Llorona was La Malinche. In this version, Cortés threatened to take their son back to Spain and leave Malinche behind, since the boy had Spanish blood but Malinche was only an

Indian. Malinche killed their son and herself, because she couldn't stand the thought of giving up her child (Perez 2008: 31). This portrayal of La Malinche humanizes her. She isn't a heartless traitor, but a desperate mother. She doesn't want her mestizo son to go back to Spain and forget his indigenous mother. Perhaps, for this Malinche, assimilation to Spanish culture is a fate worse than death. In fact, Perez describes the act as "tender mercy," "political euthanasia" (2008: 81).

Malinche is frequently coded as a Bad/Evil woman, a betrayer and traitor. Many narratives emphasize her willingness to help the Spanish conquistadors colonize Mexico. She is often portrayed as a sexual temptress whose promiscuity led to the enslaving of her people. Although she is the symbolic mother of modern Mexicans, she is a shameful mother, one who was violated. Some narratives, however, revise this negative history and paint her in a more positive light. Instead of viewing her as a scapegoat, she is seen as a powerful agent of change, someone who took advantage of her skills to better her situation.

La Llorona, La Virgen de Guadalupe, and La Malinche are strong, vivid women and highly symbolic figures. As the weeping woman, La Llorona represents maternal neglect, cruelty, and desperation; but she is also a marginalized person, a victim, and is destined to repent and weep forever. As an indigenous Marian apparition, La Virgen de Guadalupe is a symbol for community solidarity, hope, and perseverance; but she is also a tool of assimilation and conquest. As a historical woman, La Malinche is reviled for betraying her people, but she was betrayed herself and had little control over her own life. These three figures are powerful and multivocal. They are not simply Bad or Good, but

can be interpreted in myriad ways, and their stories are told and retold in Mexican and Mexican American communities.

### **Gendered Storytelling**

Informants gave me varied information about gendered storytelling. Some claimed that women and men tell stories together; others said that they tell stories separately. Some grew up with mothers and grandmothers telling them stories, while others had grandfathers or uncles that also participated. Sometimes the same story is told differently by male or female storytellers. Some stories are told only by women. According to Ruth Finnegan, “meaning and artistry emerge in performance: this means attention not just to words but also to how they are delivered” (1992: 93). In exploring specifically female gendered storytelling, it is important to note nonverbal communication, metaphoric language, and intonation.

Women’s communication is often coded in various ways, because men’s culture is oppressive and dominant; women must negotiate both the male and the female domain. Coding is “the expression or transmission of messages potentially accessible to a (bicultural) community under the very eyes of a dominant community for whom these same messages are either inaccessible or inadmissible” (Radner and Lanser 1993: 3). Women’s communication is frequently policed, so women develop ways to communicate that appear benign and pass under the radar. Women utilize such techniques as appropriation, juxtaposition, distraction, indirection, trivialization, and claims of incompetence. Although I did not observe explicit policing by men, I noticed these coding strategies in interviews as well as participant-observation of storytelling and



conversation. Appropriation occurred when women would subvert the patriarchal narrative about a particular character: for example, suggesting that the Llorona killed her children because her lover was abusive. Trivialization was ubiquitous; women would often engage in storytelling during feminine activities such as cooking and childcare. The transmission of narratives was then viewed as a way to pass the time or entertain children. Another common technique was the claim of incompetence. Nearly all of my informants would begin a narrative with the excuse that they didn't really know the story that well, or had forgotten most of it. They would then typically recount the narrative with an impressive knowledge of details. I asked informants to tell me about their own experiences with gendered storytelling.

Several informants gave me examples of male storytellers. Yasmin's grandfather often played guitar and sang narrative songs or *corridos* to her. The corrido tradition is typically performed by men, though there are some women who participate. Corridos are Mexican ballads, folksongs that tell a story (Chamberlain 2004: 28-29). They are frequently historical and dramatically narrate military events and praise revolutionary heroes and female soldiers. There is also a repertory of corridos about specific female archetypes such as the Terrible Mother, the Good Mother, the Lover, the Soldier, and the Mother Goddess. These are the same personalities found in the popular legends, analyzed as archetypes by María Herrera-Sobek (1990: 117). However, corridos and other narrative forms performed by men tend to focus on the male perspective, but powerful women are praised as mothers and lovers.

In Teotitlán, Aida and Maribel both told me that male taxicab drivers often tell stories about ghostly apparitions. Since there are no female taxicab drivers in Teotitlán, it is safe to say that these particular memorates are told only by men. Again, these stories tend to be male-focused. Many apparitions are of female ghosts, but the significance of the story is the reaction of the male witness. However, women often retell these stories from a third party perspective. Other memorates, such as visions of various virgins or La Llorona, are told by both men and women. Aida claimed that these stories are told differently by men and women, and usually separately. I would venture to guess that male and female storytellers focus on gendered issues within these stories. Maribel, however, said that men and women tell stories together. This could be a reflection of generational differences, since they are mother and daughter. Aida spends more time with other women in the market, while Maribel works side by side with multiple men and engages in gossip and storytelling with them.

In downtown Oaxaca, Cristina said that women and men tell stories both together and separately. Some stories, like historical narratives and ghost legends, are shared between mixed-gender friends and are a topic for group conversation. Others, like the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe, are more popular among women and are told by mothers to daughters. Karen had a different experience, however: for her, storytelling has been among women only. This could be due to her parents' divorce and the fact that she spends more time with female relatives and has mostly women friends.

In Eugene, informants had mixed experiences with gendered storytelling. Victoria has mostly women friends, but tells stories with both men and women. Dulce

also has predominantly female friends and only experiences storytelling in her circle of women friends. She went to an all-girls school and grew up with all women. She does interact with Mexican and Mexican American men, in MEChA and other places, but does not engage in storytelling with them. For Elda, storytelling was mixed-gender. She had a group of male and female friends that she played with outside when she was in elementary school, and they would frequently tell stories, especially about La Llorona. For Yasmin, legends and myths were passed on more through the women in her family: female cousins, her mother, and her grandmother; though, as mentioned before, her grandfather did sing narrative songs and pass on stories in that way.

Some stories seem distinctly gendered. The warning in the Matlacihua legend is specifically for men, and told by women. The miracles of La Virgen are mostly favored by women and shared among female relatives. However, historical narratives and ghost stories seem to be popular with both men and women, and can be told together or separately depending on the individuals involved. Some informants posited that perhaps certain individual tellings of these stories are gendered just because it comes from the perspective of the teller. It seems likely that a man telling the Llorona story might focus more on the plight of the (male) children than the reasons why the Llorona was driven to such a thing. Many female tellers dwell more on the poverty and depression of the Llorona, which might be close to their own experience. Narratives about military revolutions or immigration experiences might also be skewed depending on the teller. A male storyteller might prefer to talk about Pancho Villa, while a woman might focus instead on the soldaderas. People tend to be more interested in details that are close to

their own experience. In this way, men and women might be telling the same basic stories, but emphasizing different elements.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS OF POWER AND GENDER DYNAMICS

I draw heavily on Michel Foucault's theories of power, as well as scholarship by Lisa Gilman. Instead of a facile assumption that there is a binary structure of the dominated and the dominating, Foucault asserts that there is rather a multiform production of relations of domination and resistance. There are multiple systems of power that produce and sustain culture and society and generally accepted truths. In this regime of truth, sexuality is a political apparatus. Gender and sexuality are ordered and policed to condition people to fit into economic and social relations (Foucault 1979: 55). Power, rather than being a simple linear relation, is in fact a complex system whereby individuals may be marginalized in some ways but privileged in others. This relates back to feminist theories of intersectionality<sup>7</sup>; agents have multiple identities, and are not oppressed completely but have agency in some areas of their lives. Each agent acts within a system of interlocking oppressions and opportunities for power; what Gilman terms "webs" or nets of power, where agents have access to some but not all (2009: 170).

As an example of these webs of power, my informant Maribel takes control of her and her husband's textile business when he is traveling. This often occurs for weeks or even months at a time. While he is gone, Maribel handles the finances, hires and manages employees to perform specific tasks, and selects designs and colors for rugs. However, there is a clear division of labor based on gender. Although this division is not necessarily oppressive, it is nonetheless interesting to consider gender norms and how

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<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of structural and political intersectionality, see Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, eds. Kimberlé Crenshaw et al, pp. 357-383. New York: The New Press, 1995.

responsibilities are allocated. In the case of textile production, the actual weaving is left to men; women only actively participate in carding, spinning, and dyeing wool. Also, Maribel is responsible for most of the childrearing duties, and is expected to be demure and passive when she is in public with her husband. Though she has considerable economic power, her social power is somewhat lessened when she is in mixed-gender circles. With other women, however, Maribel is confident and a conversational leader.

I argue that gender disparities and notions of patriarchy in Mexico cannot really be compared to the many different gender systems operating within the United States. Nor can I focus all of my attention on gender oppression. Class, race, ethnicity, and geographical location all impact power and marginalization. I investigate women's perceptions of gender and gender dynamics and explore multiple identities and webs of power in my informants' lives. Power is frequently negotiated, played with, and refuted in storytelling. I also discuss gendered storytelling and ways in which women articulate and negotiate power through storytelling. Female protagonists may be empowering or disempowering to women. Some characters represent female purity and are used to instruct and chastise women; other characters demonstrate considerable power and are examples of female agency. Depending on how women interpret these characters and how they use the stories in their tellings, narratives might provide rigid gender roles or previously unthought-of paths of resistance or personal goals.

My analysis of women's interactions is informed by the performance framework developed within folklore studies, sociology, and anthropology. I explore performance in terms of Richard Bauman's keying, patterning, and emergence; Richard Schechner's six points of contact; and Edward Schieffelin's cultural construction of symbols. Bauman

argued that informal speech acts can be socially transformative. According to Bauman, performance involves special codes, figurative language, parallelism, special paralinguistic features, special formulae, appeal to tradition, and disclaimer of performance (1977: 16). In my research, I noted each of these features of performance during storytelling. Women often prefaced narratives by stating that it was “just a story” and they didn’t really know anything. Narratives used formulaic language and structures. Language was highly metaphoric and flowery. Stories often began and ended with specific phrases. Interactions between participants, performers, and audience are also important to analysis; as is emergence. When storytelling in groups, women often interrupted each other to offer different versions or points of view. Audience members were expected to laugh at certain points in some stories, shake their heads with sadness in other stories. Frequently, during performance, storytellers would add extra bits of information, particularly if the audience was especially rapt.

Schechner describes ritual performance as being akin to theater. Drawing from work with Victor Turner, he posits that there are six points of contact between ritual and theatrical performance: a transformation of being and/or consciousness, intensity of performance, audience-performer interactions, a whole performance sequence, transmission of performance knowledge, and evaluation (Schechner 1985). In my fieldwork, I did not attend formal storytelling events. However, the performative aspects of the interviews and casual storytelling that I was privy to did indeed fit Schechner’s six points of contact. Performance consciousness in these cases is an acknowledgement of alternative variants and the ability to improvise. Even casual storytelling carries a special intensity, as tellers lean in close to the audience (sometimes just me) and relate narratives

with vivid description and energy. There were lackluster performances too, where informants seemed bored and there was no such intensity. Audience-performer interactions were significant, as mentioned above. At times, bystanders interrupted with corrections or added information. Transmission can be described as the acquisition of narratives from a lifetime of casually hearing stories at home and in the community. Children and adolescents practice telling these stories to each other, and over time some individuals become gifted storytellers. It is in the telling and listening that knowledge is transmitted. Evaluation happens easily and often, especially during more casual storytelling events. When I was in the kitchen with a group of women sharing stories about La Llorona, they interrupted each other with good humor to state that their own version was the correct one.

Schieffelin posits that community members actively construct their social and symbolic reality through ritual performances (1985: 722). Although casual storytelling is not ritual performance, women certainly do create a value system by using shared symbols. Protagonists such as La Llorona, la Virgen de Guadalupe, and la Malinche act as social symbols that women use to construct gender and sexual roles, individual and group identity, and common values. Concepts of Good/Virtuous and Bad/Evil are culturally constructed in part through narratives about powerful female characters.

The performance framework is an effective means of analyzing women's interactions during casual storytelling and interviews. The casual storytelling that I was privy to was inherently performative, and even during interviews, informants often utilized performance framing. I witnessed many instances of casual storytelling in outdoor markets, folk art shops, grocery stores and taxicabs. During interviews, some



informants became increasingly animated while recounting stories, and also provided reflection about more formal storytelling events.

Storytelling can be a way of articulating and negotiating power. Some female protagonists are coded as Bad/Evil and women are encouraged to fear and dislike them. Such stories are used to control the behavior of women and girls. Feminine power is perceived as frightening. However, these characters often have varied and complex interpretations. Some female protagonists are coded as Good/Virtuous and women are encouraged to identify with them. These stories sometimes highlight and celebrate feminine power but sometimes they justify gender disparities. Some stories negate the idea of female passivity and submissiveness entirely and are told to chastise men to control their behavior. In this section, I will explore varying interpretations of the three central protagonists in the stories my informants discussed.

### **Bad/Evil Protagonists**

The Llorona figure is perceived by many as evil, terrifying, and sad. She murdered her children in cold blood and is doomed to search for them forever. Many people say that she is being punished by God and is unable to reach Heaven. What's more, she may not recognize her children and is liable to take any child out alone at night, making her frightening to children and parents alike. Her story is a cautionary tale for women, as well. Her lesson is to be more patient, more nurturing, more understanding of men's failures. Anger and sadness are taboo. Women must always care for husbands and children first, lest they become a Llorona themselves. Women must be

passive lest they develop anger and disrupt the very fabric of social life (Perez 2008: 123).

Interestingly, most of my informants described La Llorona as a sad character. Many questioned her mental status, positing that perhaps she was depressed or otherwise unstable. The betrayal of the man in her life was nearly always a focus, suggesting that perhaps she had an excuse or is forgivable. Although nearly all informants said she was evil, most also said she was a victim at the same time. Certainly, La Llorona is being punished through storytelling, but in some cases her story might be a way of relieving anxiety about childrearing or a sort of escape valve for anger about bad husbands or boyfriends. Although neglectful men have a significant role in the story, they are not the focus and these narratives are not typically told to adult men.

Pamela Jones's collection of Llorona tales from WIC recipients demonstrates that women's age and family role influences which details are most emphasized. According to Jones, her informants were all mothers, and they "modified the llorona themes to express their unconscious anxieties about taking care of their children" (Jones 1988: 208). Poverty was often mentioned as the reason the woman killed her children; informants explained that she could not care for them due to food shortages and lack of support. These women were themselves receiving support from the state to purchase healthy food for their children. It seems likely that they were concerned about their ability to feed their own children, and thus focused on that detail of the Llorona tale.

My informants were of varying ages and family roles. Those that seemed interested in talking about La Llorona were childless, but ranged in age from 18 to 42.

They focused most on the betrayal of the man as the reason for the Llorona's anger, and described the murder of the children as a mistake that she instantly regretted. These informants all had experience with male betrayal in their lives. Several informants came from single-mother homes due to divorce of the parents. Some had experienced unpleasant or abusive relationships with men. It is impossible to guess whether these experiences caused the focus on male betrayal in the Llorona tale, but it is worth noting.

Other storytellers emphasized the Llorona's promiscuity, her neglect of her children, the murder itself, the religious aspect, or the punishment. In some versions, La Llorona is a loose, immoral woman who enjoys staying out late at night drinking and carrying on with men. Her children get in the way of her lifestyle, so she kills them. Or, her general neglect causes them to die in some way. Some stories focus on the cold-blooded act of murder, describing the Llorona holding them under water, pushing them into a canyon, or stabbing them with a knife. Others skip over the part with minimal detail and focus instead on her regret and subsequent punishment. Some versions discuss her inability to reach Heaven, but unlike most Christian narratives, there is no hope of relief or forgiveness. She is doomed to always wander and search for her children.

Versions that emphasize promiscuity or neglect function to instruct women in proper female behaviors. Of course, how such stories are intended to function is often different from how they actually function. Gloria Anzaldúa wrote that the three mother symbols are twisted in order to maintain female passivity: "Guadalupe to make us docile and enduring, la Chingada to make us ashamed of our Indian side, and la Llorona to make us long-suffering people" (Anzaldúa 1999: 53). Women are supposed to be nurturing

mothers in monogamous relationships where they care for their husbands and children more than themselves. These stories are told with a feeling of disgust and anger for the Llorona. Stories that describe the murder incredulously ask how a mother could do that to her children. My informants sought empathy with the protagonist and explored the possible reasons behind her behavior, from insanity to satanic evil. These versions are intended to warn children about being alone at night, and to position the Llorona as a Terrible Mother that nobody would want to emulate. Stories that detail the range of feelings the Llorona has after the murder question whether it was premeditated or a terrible mistake. These versions portray the Llorona as a suffering woman who regrets her actions; “wailing is the Indian, Mexican and Chicana woman’s feeble protest when she has no other recourse” (Anzaldúa 1999: 55). She is a sympathetic character and women can see how her life was so difficult that she made a mistake. Versions that discuss the Heaven aspect are clearly heavily influenced by Catholic beliefs. To be unable to enter the gates of Heaven is the worst nightmare imaginable.

Several informants emphasized her possible mental illness. She is described as depressed, crazy, and ill. The reason for killing the children is often unclear. Something happens that pushes her over the edge and she simply “goes crazy.” These informants sympathize with her plight and suggest that she is not at fault. The whole world is against her and her instability makes her do the unthinkable. These stories explore women’s marginalization and often also nuance her race or class. It is understood that women, especially indigenous and poor women, are targeted by men and the economic and social system in general. The way that storytellers embellish and describe the Llorona’s mental illness suggests that it could happen to anybody. She is a sad figure, an

oppressed woman with bad luck. Some informants went so far as to say that she was the victim in the story. Her mistreatment from men is the cause of all her troubles; she “was the first victim” (Kearney 1969: 202).

Although many versions of La Llorona function to shape the behavior of women, some portray her as a sympathetic and marginalized woman. In many tellings, she is the symbolic Terrible Mother (Herrera-Sobek 1990: 16) who frightens children, men, and other women. She is punished by God and through the stories. She is an object lesson for appropriate parenting and sexual behavior. But in some versions, she is a victim and the story is a lesson in racism, sexism, and classism and how these can negatively affect women. Feminist revisions cast the blame on the oppressive patriarchal system that put the Llorona in the predicament in which she found herself. Some revisions use humor, parody sexual roles, or change the outcome entirely (Perez 2008: 72). Depending on the teller, the Llorona may be weeping with rage, fear, sadness, regret, or mental instability.

La Malinche is another Bad/Evil character. She is recognized as being both the betrayer of Mexicans and the mother of all modern Mexicans. Her role in the Conquest was undeniably major (for discussion of her linguistic talents, see Cypess 1991: 31), yet there are competing stories as to why she helped the Spanish. Some see her as a victim, others as a survivor. For the most part, informants brought her up after I asked about “bad” female protagonists. She is recognized as being a historical figure, but one that has been exaggerated and perhaps falsified. Many informants were not exactly sure why she was bad necessarily, but did connect her with betrayal and shame.

La Malinche symbolizes the dark and shameful side of Mexican femininity, the Violated Mother or Traitor Eve (Herrera-Sobek 1990: 67). She is seen as a woman whose sexuality was out of control, a common stereotype for indigenous women in the Americas (Cypess 1991: 25). She was so lascivious and tempting that Cortés could not hold himself back and had to take her as a mistress. Although it is generally agreed that the union was non-consensual, it is still seen as her fault because she was too sexually potent. Even in cases of rape, women are the guardians of sexuality and family honor and are to blame (Stephen 2002: 52). Most Mexican historians are in agreement that Malintzin was sold as a slave twice and likely did what she felt she had to do to survive (Cypess 1991: 33). But Malinche as a national figure is a symbol of treachery and sexual wantonness.

My informants who discussed La Malinche mostly identified as politically liberal and as Chicanas. Thus, their views of Malinche may not represent those of the mainstream Mexican population. Elda was adamant that most historical narratives are written by white men and thus biased. She felt that La Malinche was maligned in history books and in popular consciousness. Yasmin identified Malinche's role in the Conquest as transformative rather than treacherous. She focused on Malinche as the mother of modern Mexicans and said that she was the beginning of the mestizo race and the new syncretic culture. These views position Malinche as a survivor and a creative woman. Revisions of the Malinche narrative focus on the patriarchal system and her lack of real choices (Cypess 1991: 138). Other revisions subvert this paradigm entirely, instead celebrating Malinche's strength and sexuality (Cypess 1991: 171).

Popular narratives focus on the dual betrayal; Malinche betrayed by her people, who sold her into slavery, and as a betrayer who sold out indigenous people to aid the Spanish. Her violation, sexually and symbolically, by the Spanish is seen as shameful, despite the undeniable fact that many young indigenous translators were victims of sexual assault (Karttunen 1997: 310). She is called La Chingada, the fucked one, the fucked mother. Her children, modern Mexicans, are the product of rape and are thus themselves tainted with the shame of violation (hijos de la chingada; Paz 1961: 79). She is clearly a victim, but also a betrayer. It would have been better if she had died rather than aided the Spanish. She is punished through these stories, castigated for her choice to survive. She is an endless source of shame. Her effect on women is general mistrust and a belief that all women have the potential to be a betrayer themselves. Interestingly, the men in the Llorona and Malinche narratives are neglectful, violent, and cruel, but these narratives do not function to alter men's behavior. These legends almost always portray the women as responsible for the terrible situations, and are intended to guide women's behavior.

### **Good/Virtuous Protagonists**

If La Llorona represents the Terrible Mother and La Malinche the Violated Mother, La Virgen de Guadalupe represents the Good Mother (Herrera-Sobek 1990: 1) and the Mother Goddess (Herrera-Sobek 1990: 33). She is the embodiment of all that is good and pure. She is sexually chaste, kind, quiet, nurturing, and a fierce protector of her people. Women strive to be like her and men worship her. Still, she has varied interpretations, and has also changed throughout the years. Many people, historians and indigenous Mexicans alike, connect her with Tonantzin, the pre-Hispanic mother earth

goddess. Even if she were not directly connected, there is no mistaking her many similarities and ways in which she has been hybridized with both Catholic and indigenous elements. In the last 450 years, this character has transformed sexually, losing her vivid sexual power and becoming more maternal and thus less threatening (Nash 1997: 356).

La Virgen is seen by many to be a savior figure, one who will intercede with God on behalf of her devotees. She is seen as an empowering female character and is lifted up as the perfect woman and mother. This is a prime example of *marianismo*; Mexican women gain prestige and value from their maternal and wifely role (Herrera-Sobek 1990: 11). However, this worship also has the effect of being stifling for some women, who may not be interested in child-rearing or caring for fathers and husbands. There are also varied opinions on whether she was a tool of the Conquest, or a warrior and protector of indigenous people.

As a symbol, La Virgen de Guadalupe is multivocal; she can represent many different ideologies, concepts, and values. New World saints tend to be multi-layered, due to the diversity of social, cultural, and religious identities of those who follow them (Morgan 2002: 172). According to Jeanette Favrot Peterson, “Guadalupe has been used alternatively, and sometimes simultaneously, as a symbol of liberation as well as one of accommodation and control” (1992: 39). Certainly, during Spanish Conquest and the subsequent colonization, La Virgen was used as an assimilation device. Cortés and his soldiers replaced indigenous idols with images of the Spanish Guadalupe (Peterson 1992: 40). She was seen as uniquely Mexican, a combination of Spanish and indigenous



imagery. She justified the Spanish presence and the need for vaguely parental control. However, her mestizo features were also a source of pride for the new Mexicans. She was distinctly indigenous, with brown skin and black hair. She spoke to Juan Diego in Nahuatl, the Aztec indigenous language, and called him her brother and son. She was there to protect indigenous interests.

Her image has been consciously used to represent various movements and ideas. She was used to justify Conquest but also to empower native Mexicans. Later she was used to rally revolutionary troops and glorify Mexico. She is also frequently used to code a physical location as Mexican or Chicano. For example, in many Mexican American neighborhoods in the United States, her image can be seen in murals, in barbershops and other places of business. Sometimes she specifically represents women, other times she stands for all Mexicans and Mexican Americans. She can symbolize both Catholicism and liberal revolution.

La Virgen's connection with older indigenous deities is controversial. Scholars including John Bierhorst argue that she appeared in the exact spot that Tonantzin was worshipped, and the Virgin is a hybrid of Catholic imagery and the older pre-Hispanic earth goddess. June Nash contends that "the metamorphosis of Tonantzin into the Virgin Guadalupe at a preconquest shrine for Tonan is a synecdoche for the conversion process relying on syncretism" (1997: 350). It is certain that the indigenous-looking Mary greatly speeded conversion to Catholicism in Mexico. Other historians argue that Tonantzin was not really a distinct goddess at all, but rather an amalgamation of several different mother and grandmother deities. Whether or not there is a legitimate link to a specific

indigenous goddess, many present-day Mexicans and Mexican Americans believe this to be the case. This matter-of-fact belief that Guadalupe was once known as Tonantzin, a specific Aztec goddess, is a clear example of social memory. Social memory is “an expression of collective experience: social memory defines a group, giving it a sense of its past and defining its aspirations for the future. In doing so, social memory often makes factual claims about past events” (Fentress et al. 1992: 25). Though historians point out the lack of evidence, the significant factor to me is the community agreement that this is indeed a fact, and an important one. There is currently an interesting movement in feminist-identified Chicana artists, portraying La Virgen as Tonantzin. Visual artist Yolanda López, for instance, has painted a series of Guadalupe images combining Aztec imagery, Guadalupana symbols, and her own mother and grandmother. In these works, she pays tribute to motherhood, feminism, and the Chican@ movement (Goldman 1990: 170). Several of my informants named Tonantzin as La Virgen’s precursor or even the same figure. It appears that for some Mexicans and Mexican Americans, La Virgen is a symbol of Spanish Conquest and assimilation. Identifying her as Tonantzin is empowering and a source of both ethnic pride and a sense of sadness for the historical context.

Devotional behavior surrounding the Virgen illuminates her supernatural powers as well as her uniquely feminine powers. Persons approaching her basilica walk on their knees, to the point of extreme pain and injury (Taylor 1987: 12). This provides proof of their devotion and love for her, and in return she will listen to their prayers and supplications. She has the power to intercede on their behalf with Jesus and God. As a folk saint and a nurturing mother figure, she is more approachable than the far-away and

possibly angry or uncaring God. The Virgin is often portrayed as being a small woman, humble and kind, just like one's own mother. However, she certainly has power- the power to talk with God and Jesus and argue on the behalf of believers. She can also perform miracles herself, and has on many documented occasions. For example, she was said to have stopped the flood of 1629 in Mexico City (Taylor 1987: 12).

La Virgen de Guadalupe can be interpreted in various ways: as a savior, as a mother, as a tool of oppression, as a symbol of liberation, or as the perfect woman. She has undeniable power and strength, yet this could be both empowering and stifling for women. Her purity and goodness have the effect of reproducing gendered ideals and contributing to gender inequality. She is an example of feminine strength and a figure to emulate, but at the same time she is impossible to fully emulate. Her devotees both venerate and imitate her, imperfectly (Morgan 2002: 3-4). She is simply too perfect; she always looks out for other people, never herself. Her children always come first, with no thought for her own needs. Her narrative encourages women to strive to be just like her, but also provides unfair restrictions on what it means to be a good woman. Many interpretations, however, revise this construction and position her as first and foremost a woman, unafraid to acknowledge her own needs. Some interpretations connect her with Tonantzin and other pre-Hispanic goddesses. In some versions she is sexually potent<sup>8</sup>, in others she is de-sexualized. Her effect on women depends on both the storyteller and the listeners.

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<sup>8</sup> See fertility symbolism connected with Tonantzin, Sandstrom 1982: 40.

### Chastising Men

Some powerful female characters are not used to mold female behavior at all, but rather to chastise men. La Matlacihua is one of these protagonists. An Aztec demoness, she appears late at night to men who have been out drinking. She appears as a beautiful seductress and tempts these men, but just as they approach, she turns into a hideous demon. She scratches their faces with her long nails and pushes them into ravines. In Ixtepeji, Michael Kearney found that the Zapotecs equated her with La Llorona. However, while La Llorona generally attacks children, Matlacihua seeks only to injure men, “especially *parranderos*, or men who are carousing about town at night, which carries the connotation that they are carrying on with women- other women- and that they are neglecting their wives and children” (Kearney 1969: 203).

Several of my informants had heard of this story, though not all were familiar with the name Matlacihua. Yasmin remembers the women in her family telling her uncle this story fairly frequently, to remind him not to stay out late or get too inebriated. She says that the story was told in a somewhat joking manner, but was definitely meant to chastise her uncle and encourage him to behave properly. In Teotitlán, Aida and Maribel recounted stories of beautiful women appearing in the middle of the road and causing car accidents. These women appeared only to drunk men and would occasionally pursue them, which often resulted in the men avoiding alcohol for a significant period of time after the event. These stories were told with laughter, but also a sense that irresponsible men get what is coming to them.

While there is no denying that La Matlacihua is an evil character, she does seem to be a positive force in the lives of women. These stories are almost universally told by women to men, with the express motivation to discourage inebriation and extramarital affairs. Matlacihua is a powerful woman who can achieve what regular women cannot; she can punish men swiftly and with no recourse. She takes revenge on lousy husbands and fathers, something that many women may indeed wish for. She is the mascot for lonely, ignored, and angry wives. By telling this narrative, women are exerting their own power to frighten husbands and remind them that their wives ought to come first.

Each of these narratives carries messages of gender dynamics and negotiations of power. La Llorona, as the Terrible Mother, is the symbol of parental neglect and her narrative is told partly to express anxieties about parenting. La Malinche, as the Violated Mother, is the symbol of shame and conquest and her narrative is told to explain the roots of mestizaje and the legacy of betrayal. La Virgen de Guadalupe, as the Good Mother and Mother Goddess, is the symbol of perfect femininity and her narrative is told to uplift mothers and strengthen patriotism. La Matlacihua, as the Cruel or Vengeful Mother (Herrera-Sobek 1990: 27), is the symbol of internalized anger and her narrative is told to punish wayward men. These protagonists are representations of gender roles and interpersonal relations. La Llorona and La Malinche are Bad/Evil female characters and stories with these characters highlight their fearsome and unpleasant qualities. Listeners, particularly women, are encouraged to dislike them and strive to be better women. Ballads and prose narratives about these characters are “socializing agents designed to instruct, coerce, and frighten rebellious and unruly young women into ‘proper’ behavior” (Herrera-Sobek 1990: 72). La Virgen de Guadalupe, on the other hand, is a

Good/Virtuous character and her stories focus on her maternal and protective qualities. Women and men both are encouraged to love and worship her; she encourages men to treat women well, and women to emulate her. Each of these characters is used to motivate behavior changes in female listeners. La Matlacihua, however, is a different sort of powerful woman. Her story is told primarily by women to men to control their behavior. Though these narratives have fairly straightforward messages about gender dynamics, there are multiple interpretations. Depending on the storyteller, the audience, and the context, these powerful female protagonists have multiple complex messages about female power, submission, and appropriate roles. Many contemporary Chicana feminist writers consider these three protagonists to be “central to the formation of Chicana feminist thought” (Perez 2008: 44).

### **Gender Dynamics**

There is no denying that Mexican culture is largely patriarchal<sup>9</sup>, yet gender disparities within Mexican and Mexican American culture really cannot be compared to dynamics in Anglo-American culture. In fact, Anglo-American ideas of Mexican masculinity are largely imagined; Américo Paredes writes that “Mexican machismo is not exactly as it has been painted for us by people who like to let their imaginations dwell on the rape of Indian women. Machismo does not appear in Mexican folklore until very recent times... We note, furthermore, a certain influence of the United States” (1971: 24). Indeed, gender roles and inequality are culturally specific and different from those in the dominant American culture. It is important to take into account historical context,

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<sup>9</sup> For more discussion of machismo, see Vaughan 2006: 27; for violence against women, see Monsiváis 2006: 3.

cultural mores, and the impact of different waves of conquest and colonialism. Furthermore, there is gender parity and female power in many circumstances and aspects of women's lives. There is also a thriving grassroots feminist movement in Mexico, which is largely unconnected to movements in the United States (Stephens 2006: 255).

The Mexican feminist movement was strongly connected to the Revolution of 1920. Women played very active roles as *soldaderas* as well as cooks, nurses, and traffickers. After the Revolution, women were integral in organizing and carrying out new social programs. "As the majority of schoolteachers, they built revolutionary schools and carried out cultural missions, literacy campaigns, and public health and job training workshops" (Buck 2008: 153). This strong involvement with social action was publicly empowering for women, and led to organizing for civil rights and planning social services. Mexican feminists have provided education about family planning and home economics, mobilized job training programs, campaigned for legal rights, and organized welfare programs for food and healthcare.

In order to attempt an understanding of gender dynamics in my informants' lives, I asked them for their own thoughts and perceptions. Informants discussed gender roles and dynamics that they witnessed in their daily lives. In examining gender roles, I utilized a Foucaultian lens, understanding these roles to be multiple and complex. Gendered behavior and expectations around gender and sexuality are part of a multiplicity of discourses, "discourses that [are] interlocking, hierarchized, and all highly articulated around a cluster of power relations" (Foucault 1978: 30). So ingrained are these relations that they can be difficult to notice and tease apart, particularly if they are

within one's own cultural and social milieu. Therefore, I asked interviewees for their own thoughts on gender roles, but I also made my own interpretations based on behaviors and relationships I witnessed.

I took note of individual examples of personal agency and submission in informants' life histories. In analyzing agency, I borrowed from Gilman's concept of multiple agencies. Individuals do not interact within a strict ladder of hierarchy and dominance, but rather negotiate power within a web of interrelationships. Social relationships have differing levels and intensities of power, struggle, and resistance, and these are always changing. Thus, an individual may have more opportunity for agentive behavior in some aspects of their lives, and less autonomy and power in others. An individual operates within "a unique web constituted by such things as her personality, needs, abilities, desires, and multiple social relationships, all of which can inform each decision that she makes" (Gilman 2009: 170). In my interviews, I asked about family, living situations, social relationships, and work in an attempt to understand this web for each of my informants. Lastly, interviews explored consciously gendered storytelling and the meaning thereof.

### **Informants' Perceptions of Gender**

Many informants offered their thoughts about sexism when asked about gender roles. It was generally accepted that women tend to be marginalized both in the social and economic spheres; yet, women's strength was also highlighted by informants. Marginality can be both a heavy imposition and a route to creative expression. "On the one hand, women's marginality is imposed; patriarchy enforces the rule of men from the



very center of a society's organization (i.e., through the formation of laws, customs, and institutions that promote and preserve male domination) and leave women at its periphery... On the other hand, marginality lends women the capacity to remain detached from the status quo" (Young and Turner 1993: 17). This detachment is precisely what enables women to form intimate groups and collaborate both politically and creatively. Still, sexist oppression is a source of frustration for women in Mexico and the United States.

Aida expressed some anger and bitter feelings about institutional sexism in Teotitlán. She said that women do not have access to government jobs, only weaving and homemaking. She believes that the men of Teotitlán are all chauvinists and the system reflects the cultural belief that women are inferior mentally. Teotitlán has an ejido system whereby the village collectively owns the land. Each family has access to a fair plot and the work of keeping the village running is shared through the civil cargo system (Stephen 1991: 161). Government positions such as president, police, and garbage collection are rotated every year or few years and over time, every man is responsible for doing his part of the work. I did notice that there were no women in these positions, and Lynn Stephen's 1991 research in Teotitlán confirmed that women were excluded from these government jobs (Stephen 1991: 216). More recently, though, women have had some access to political positions in Teotitlán. In 2004, Stephen found that due to women's increasing mobility and education, they were voting and a few held cargo positions. However, "[w]hile such changes are notable, women who did go to community assemblies and who took on public leadership roles also faced a significant backlash not only from men in their families but also from other women- often their

mothers or mothers-in-law criticized them openly for not following tradition” (2005: 286).

Gender roles are clearly defined in the family, at least in Teotitlán. Household work in particular is separated according to gender, with women and girls cleaning, making tortillas, and taking care of children (Stephen 1991: 61). Upon marriage, couples are patrilocal, living with the husband’s parents for several years before moving into their own home. Both Aida and Maribel complained about this, saying that they resented living with their in-laws and wished they had their own homes earlier. Wives are expected to help mothers-in-law and pool their resources. This is a big help for mothers of sons, but mothers of daughters do not receive this help when their daughters marry.

In Teotitlán, the economy is closely tied with weaving, and weaving is a highly gendered activity. Each family unit is its own small business (for more information about production units, see Stanton 1999: 7). Women and children clean and card the wool, and then the women spin it into yarn (Stephen 1991: 61). Women gather the plants used to dye the wool, and dye it together with their husbands. Men do the actual weaving on the large looms, often creating large and intricate patterns that they follow. In the past, before the Spanish introduced wool and the large looms, women did all the weaving work on small backstrap looms with cotton yarn (Stephen 1991: 96). With the new tools, weaving was transformed and men took over the prestigious design work. However, most of the women I spoke with in the village said that they were happy with this division of labor. They did not consider it oppressive, but a good balance. This corresponds with the Mesoamerican concept of gender complementarity. Husbands and

wives work together, each with their specific roles, to create rugs and blankets to sell. Spinning the yarn is just as important as weaving the rug itself; without women's labor, there would be no rug.

My Mexican American informants identified gender roles in their families as well. For the most part, mothers and grandmothers cooked, cleaned, and raised children while fathers worked. However, many mothers worked outside the home as well, and many fathers actively participated in child-rearing. Several of my informants come from single-mother families, where their mother handled finances, worked outside the home, and raised the children. Generalizations about gender roles and the presence or absence of sexism in the family really cannot be made in the case of my Mexican American informants, as their backgrounds are so varied.

However, one distinctly sexist custom was discussed by several informants, both Oaxacan and Mexican American. Many informants recalled their grandmothers and mothers telling them about the common custom of men kidnapping women in order to elope. In some cases, this seemed to be forcible rape and cloistering until the woman agreed to marry or her family agreed. In other cases, though, the woman seemed to have considerable agency in choosing whether or not she wanted to marry. Sometimes, the kidnapping was planned by a young couple to get out of the highly restrictive and elaborate courtship and wedding process. Lynn Stephen documented this as a form of engagement called *por robar* (by theft), in which couples elope (Stephen 2002: 46). In Teotitlán and other very traditional villages, the entire process of dating, engagement, and marriage is negotiated by the mothers and grandmothers (conferring quite a bit of power

to women), and involves large exchanges of money and gifts, rules about timing, and sometimes even witnessing of the sexual union by an older female relative. Young couples who wish to marry but do not wish to undergo this process will sometimes elope to avoid the whole ordeal. Fake kidnapping is often utilized in these cases. However, when it is not previously agreed upon, the woman in question would often be surprised and angry. Ruth said that these kidnappings weren't necessarily a sexual violation and the woman had the choice to leave and not marry the man. Elda, on the other hand, said that this was a barbaric practice that hurt women. Yasmin told me a humorous story of how her grandfather tried to kidnap her grandmother, but accidentally grabbed the wrong woman, who hit him over the head and ran away. Narratives about kidnapping seemed somewhat popular among informants' female relatives, perhaps to explore ideas of gender inequality, or perhaps to warn women of male violence.

As in all cultures, women do sometimes experience sexual trauma in Mexico. Several informants told me about the high amounts of rapes that occurred during various military revolutions (rape in the Mexican Revolution, Vaughan 2006: 24). This information was passed down from grandmother to mother to child; women warning girls about sexual oppression and assault through shared history. One such example was told to me by Ruth. Her grandmother told her the story of when she was a young girl during the Zapatista Revolution. She was quite pale skinned with long, straight hair, fitting the standard of European-appearing beauty. It was widely known that when the Zapatista soldiers came into a village for food and shelter, they would often take advantage of attractive young women as well. Ruth's grandmother was frightened of this possibility, so when she heard the soldiers coming, she smeared ashes on her skin and hair to make

herself appear dark-skinned and ugly. She also borrowed a neighbor's baby so she would look older. She did these things to protect herself from being raped, and apparently, her tactics worked. This story was told somewhat frequently to Ruth when she was a child, perhaps to warn her about gender oppression and violence and the importance of personal safety and extreme caution around strange men.

Another example of sexism is the undervaluing of women's work. Elda argued that women are not valued or compensated for the work they do in the home. She was referring to child-rearing, cleaning, and cooking. It is true that these tasks are generally not paid labor. Cooking, especially tortilla-making, is arduous and very time consuming. Women typically have to rise hours earlier than men to prepare food. While men who work outside the home get to come home and relax, women often have to continue working to ensure the family is fed and comfortable. However, more and more, women are working outside the home too. In the United States, Mexican immigrants and Mexican American women often work in the wage economy. Common blue-color jobs include cannery work, domestic labor, and textiles (Meier and Ribera 1972: 251). Many Mexican Americans are scaling the socio-economic ladder and landing more prestigious positions.

Migration from Mexico to the United States can sometimes actually strengthen patriarchal gender relations. Although Mexican families that move to urban cities enjoy greater access to services and support networks, those who live in more rural areas are restricted due to lack of mobility. Thus, rural Mexican American women are often isolated at home and focus on mothering and housework (Schmalzbauer 2009: 757). On

the other hand, when men move to the United States for work without their families, they are forced to learn how to cook, clean, and wash clothing. Often, when their wives and families join them, these men continue performing these tasks (Stephen 2007: 191). My informants in the United States all reside in the city of Eugene. They have access to social services, education, employment, and support networks. Four of my five Eugene informants are students at the University of Oregon. They will likely have access to good jobs and have more opportunities than their mothers and grandmothers. Clearly, there is an intersection with class. Those with access to education will have more opportunities than those who are uneducated.

In Teotitlán, women's work is more restricted than in the United States. Available work includes home-making, which is unpaid, and weaving, which pays the family as a whole. With weaving, the work is collaborative and each member of the family has an important role. Women are valued for their spinning and dyeing work, and are necessary and appreciated for their part in the family business. However, the complex design work is undertaken by men only, who receive the credit from foreign investors and tourist buyers. It is the man's name that is stitched into the rug to claim artist ownership. Despite this trend, however, many women in the village, including Aida, are happy to work with their husbands and receive compensation. Aida said that in the past, women had more children and did not work, but now women have fewer children and work, and succeed more. This is partially because of the transformation of the economy, and also because of reproductive education. Women have knowledge and access to condoms and can choose the size of their families.

Despite some sexist customs and institutional and social gender oppression, women are not marginalized all the time in either Mexico or in the United States. Some women, especially mothers, have considerable power in many arenas. Robert Haskett has documented Mexican women's political roles and found that they are often hidden or subversive (Haskett 1997: 147). Yasmin asserted that even though Mexico is a very patriarchal society, women rule. They are strong leaders in the family and community, and often collaborate. Mothers have a lot of sway and control much of the family economy, which is frequently viewed as a "woman's space" and therefore devalued and deemed inappropriate for men. Women gather together at the market to talk, sell their wares, and shop. The market, another woman's space, is off-limits to men and thus a location for much freedom of speech and behavior.

These locations of empowerment can be discussed in terms of domestic versus public domains. "The domestic domain includes activities performed within the realm of the localized family unit. The public domain includes political and economic activities that take place or have impact beyond the localized family unit and that relate to control of persons or control of things" (Sanday 1974: 190). Women tend to have more control of the domestic domain; cooking, cleaning, and raising children. Unfortunately, these activities are unpaid, indicating that women are disempowered. However, women can and do gain status in the public domain. In Teotitlán, for example, women play a significant role in textile production. Their work has a recognized monetary value. Maribel often takes over the family business, allocating money and supplies and managing employees. When her husband is gone, she is recognized as the authority

figure. Though this is uncommon, it is perhaps indicative of a societal shift in women's power.

Women are not necessarily subservient in the public domain. Even when men are clearly in positions of power and authority, women have considerable influence. According to Michelle Rosaldo, "in various circumstances male authority might be mitigated, and, perhaps rendered almost trivial, by the fact that women (through gossiping or yelling, playing sons against brothers, running the business, or refusing to cook) may have a good deal of informal influence and power" (1974: 21). In Teotitlán, gossip, women's speech, is frequently used to manage the behavior of men who are misbehaving in various ways. Because women's activities are not valued by men, men avoid them to avoid a social perception of emasculation. The threat of femininity means that women often have considerable autonomy in their own spheres.

In Mexico, as in the United States, a strong grassroots feminism has been growing. Many women are taking action to educate themselves and demand fair treatment. Married couples are negotiating finances and domestic roles. Single women are choosing whom they date and whether they want to continue their education. Knowledge is being shared in women's spaces.

### **Informants' Life Histories**

The women I spoke with had varied and complex histories. Although I was not able to gather a full life history, I did ask broad questions about life experiences. What informants divulged was very intriguing in terms of agency and power. I was particularly



interested in instances of unexpected social, sexual, and economic power. Again, I did not examine these power relations as top-to-bottom oppression and submission, but rather as a “system of force relations” (Foucault 1978: 92). Furthermore, it is important to remember that power does not always constitute a negative force that inhibits individuals, but is also a productive force that forms knowledge and discourse (Foucault 1979: 119). Power is much more than repression; it is a series of interactions and relationships that individuals actively participate in. Thus, I took note of each informant’s personal marginalization and privileges.

Irene was born in Teotitlán and has lived there her whole life. She has not traveled extensively but does participate in many community events. She lives with her husband and his aging mother. Each week, she visits the outdoor market to socialize with other women. She also sees a psychologist with her friends in the local free clinic, where they read together and discuss personal histories. Irene is a homemaker and also works with the textiles with her husband. She is Catholic and attends Mass and church events. She did not discuss her thoughts about gender roles or women’s power. Whether this was because I was not asking the right questions or she simply did not wish to, I don’t know. Irene also denied that people in the village tell stories, perhaps because she was concerned about appearing “primitive” or “backwards.”

Aida was also born in Teotitlán and has lived there always. However, she has had more opportunities to travel outside the village. She has visited the United States on several occasions, and traveled around Mexico, but has no wish to move away from her home town. She lives with her husband; her daughters have all moved out of the family

home to live with their husbands. Aida chose to keep her last name when she married; although it is somewhat rare for a woman to do so, she acted as if it was no big deal. She works with her husband in their moderately successful weaving business. She spins and dyes the yarn, and her husband weaves the rugs. Aida told me that she highly enjoys the dyeing process. She does not resent the division of labor, but finds it preferable. She finds joy in creating beautiful colors and using natural homemade dyes. She takes pride in her work and thinks that she and her husband make a good team. She also enjoys the various rug designs, and feels a connection with the history of her town. Aida offered a great deal of personal information about traumatic events leading up to her religious conversion, which greatly shaped her perception of her identity in the church and surrounding community.

Maribel was born in Teotitlán as well. She has traveled quite extensively and been to the United States many times. She and her husband operate a very successful weaving business and often visit galleries in Los Angeles and other metropolitan cities to meet with investors. Frequently, her husband travels alone and leaves her in charge of the business. Historically, this is not uncommon; male outmigration has often meant that women take over household and community labor (Stephen 1991: 115). Maribel oversees their employees and makes decisions about designs and production. She handles the finances and is alone sometimes for weeks on end. When I expressed admiration for her ability to take control of the entire business, she calmly told me that it was not difficult and she enjoyed doing it to help her husband. When he is home to manage the weaving and create designs, she returns to her regular role of carding, spinning, and dyeing wool, which she says she also enjoys a great deal. Maribel also

enjoys the different rug designs and discussed their connection with Zapotec and Aztec mythology and local history. She also referred to her marriage as a team; they work together, and although they have different roles, they are equal.

Cristina was born in Ocotlán and lives there still with her parents. She went to college and received a license in biology. She used to work in a laboratory studying forest and aquatic life. She enjoyed the science a great deal, but discovered that she did not like the hours or location of her work. She subsequently got a job with a travel agency in downtown Oaxaca, where she commutes by bus every day. She works full time and says she loves her job. She enjoys interacting with customers and helping them find the perfect travel destinations. She also has the opportunity to travel around the state. Cristina gets together with girl friends fairly regularly to go dancing in the city. She is not interested in marriage any time soon, and lives with her parents because it is easy and customary.

Karen has lived in Oaxaca City for most of her life. Her parents are divorced amicably and she lives with her father. She sees her mother, who is a doctor, on a regular basis. She excelled in school and is on her way to Los Angeles to study Business Marketing at UCLA. She plans to get her Bachelor's degree and then stay for an extra year for a specialization. She has visited Los Angeles several times and will be staying with extended family until she finds her own apartment. I asked her if she was nervous and she replied that she was excited. She can't wait to live in her very own apartment and pursue her ideal career in the United States.

All of my Oaxacan informants exercised considerable agency in their life choices. Irene has many friends in the village and spends a lot of time pursuing community activities. Aida enjoys working with her husband and occasionally travelling. Maribel frequently takes control of the family business. Cristina is very independent, has her own income, and casually dates as she pleases. Karen is about to embark on a major life transition, moving away from her parents to go to a prestigious university. Although these women undoubtedly face gender oppression and hueism/racism, they have the power to make their own choices and seem satisfied with their lives for the most part. They are active participants in their families, work, and social networks. In some cases, their narratives reflect and comment upon their agency and gender roles, but often they minimized their power when discussing their lives.

In Eugene, Oregon I spoke with four Mexican-born Mexican American women and one U.S.-born Mexican American woman. Ruth was born in Oaxaca and was a trained biologist for several years before moving to Eugene two years before our interview. Before obtaining her documentation, she only had access to domestic service positions cleaning laundry. She utilized a support network of other Mexican immigrants in Eugene for locating housing and jobs. Recently, upon receiving her documents, she has been able to find more satisfying work. Now, she teaches Spanish at the Downtown Languages Center, and also works at Womenspace, a domestic violence organization. She enjoys helping other immigrants learn English and access the local support networks, and helping battered women overcome traumatic events and find safer situations.

Victoria was born in Oregon; her parents moved to the United States from Michoacán a decade before her birth. She is studying political science at the University of Oregon and wants to be a paralegal or work for state legislature. She is a very active Democrat and passionate about politics and the law. She is a member of MEChA, but does not frequently attend because she feels that only a very specific viewpoint is accepted there.

Dulce is from Mazatlán and moved to the United States with her mother when she was 12 years old, because her parents divorced and her mother remarried. Her mother was a teacher in Mexico but now works with Public Health in Lakeview, Oregon. Dulce is a Freshman at the University of Oregon. She is very active in MEChA and with other student organizations focusing on students of color and liberal politics. She joined MEChA for community with other Chican@ students and also because she wanted to be more involved in local politics. The high school she attended was predominantly white and she felt like she didn't fit in, so she feels more comfortable being involved with MEChA.

Elda is from Chihuahua and moved to the United States when she was 15 years old. She later moved back to Baja California to go to college. She studied English to Spanish translation and worked as a translator for some years before moving back to the United States. Nine years before our interview, Elda moved to Springfield, Oregon with her mother and father to open a tortillería. They chose the Springfield/Eugene area because there is a large population of second-wave Mexican immigrants and their tortilla business caters to the Latin@ community. Currently, Elda is a History student at the

University of Oregon, and she also works as a bilingual Education Assistant at Springfield High School. Her plan is to attain a teaching license in order to teach high school history and social studies. Elda was married at one point, but is now divorced and says that she is much happier single. She is a self-identified feminist and speaks out against all manner of marginalization, particularly those she has experienced being a woman of color. Her feminist identity made our conversation quite illuminating: she disliked most of the popular narratives because she felt they were highly sexist and reflected male dominance and patriarchy. Her insights into social rejection of unpleasant protagonists and feminist retellings proved to be very interesting and helpful for my research.

Yasmin was born in Tijuana and lived in Tecate until she was 14 years old. Her parents divorced when she was three years old, and her mother remarried to an Anglo man. They moved to Montana where her grandfather had a ranch, and then moved to a place closer to town. She learned English through courses in Mexico, but mostly through immersion in high school. She told me about feeling confused in her identity, being bilingual and bicultural. She became very interested in how art, culture, and language correlate. She moved to Hood River, Oregon after she graduated the University and was an art teacher in a district that was half Hispanic. She believes that the arts are a universal language that can communicate multiculturalism. Yasmin then moved to Eugene to attend a Master's program in Arts and Administration at the University of Oregon. She wants to pursue arts programming because creative expression in a community setting were a big part of her transition to being bicultural and she wants to help others explore the same thing.

My Eugene, Oregon informants also displayed personal agency in their life experiences. Ruth chose to move to the United States to find a better economic situation for herself and her family. She works with women who have been sexually and physically abused, helping them access support. Victoria and Dulce are very politically active and are pursuing higher education in order to find fulfilling careers in their futures. Elda left an unsatisfying relationship and is a feminist activist. She is pursuing her dreams of teaching and helping young students of color. Yasmin is using her experience as a bicultural woman of color to create interesting and creative community arts programming. Each of these women experiences institutional and social sexism in various ways, but are very much in control of their lives and are making choices to further their interests for themselves and their communities. These choices, as well as the choices that were rejected, are reflected in the stories they tell.

Informants' lives and experiences with gender roles and oppression are very connected with popular narratives about powerful women. Feminist-identified informants, like Elda, recognized the gender oppression in the La Llorona legend and used the legend as a prompt for a discussion about sexism and sexual violence. Those who struggled with feelings of racial inadequacy, like Yasmin, pinpointed the dichotomy between the indigenous protagonist and the European man who betrays her. Yasmin also dwelled on the love and comfort the indigenous mother figure of the Virgen brings to her. Karen's parents are divorced and still friendly, and her mother is a doctor, so she has little first-hand experience with gender bias. She was less interested in discussing gender roles and sexism in narratives, instead focusing on the exciting thrill of telling ghost stories. Cristina comes from an ethnically diverse village with primarily indigenous people living

in it, and seemed most emotionally upset by narratives that dealt with racism, especially combined with sexual aggression against indigenous women. She strives to be independent, both financially and socially, avoiding dating and marriage in order to work and spend time with female friends. Informants were largely aware of their privileges and marginalizations within their networks and larger communities. They were all active agents with complex histories and goals, and were able to articulate similar positionalities within the narratives we discussed.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

Prose narratives such as legends are not merely children's amusement; they are highly meaningful social texts; "beneath a great deal of humor lies a deeper meaning" (Bascom 1954: 343). Often, legends express common anxieties within a culture and are a form of fantasy or escapism. La Llorona stories illustrate many fears, including mothers' concerns about poverty and women's concerns about being victimized. Telling the story of a woman so frustrated that she killed her children might be a satisfying escape from the very real challenges of motherhood. La Virgen de Guadalupe narratives frequently express sadness or fear about unpleasant social and political environments, and reflect a desire for nurturing and safety. La Malinche stories touch on the loss of culture, family honor, and ethnic pride, and provide an outlet for shame and anger.

Legends also function to validate culture. According to William Bascom, "[w]hen dissatisfaction with or skepticism of an accepted pattern is expressed or doubts about it arise, whether it be sacred or secular, there is usually a myth or legend to validate it" (1954: 344). La Llorona can be used to chastise women to stay home, dress conservatively, and be highly attentive mothers. The political use of La Virgen during colonial times is well documented; she was explicitly utilized to justify Conquest and the Spanish right to rule. La Malinche is an example of why women are inferior to men; she betrayed her children and country because of her feminine inability to reject sexual advances.

Legends also play a significant role in education. La Llorona is a teaching tool to ensure compliant behavior of children. She is a boogeyman who frightens children into following curfew and going to bed on time. La Virgen de Guadalupe is a clear example of religious pedagogy. Her narrative increases interest in Catholicism and religious practices, and advocates for devout behavior. La Malinche is used as a history lesson, to discuss the Conquest and issues of race, gender, and class.

A related but distinct function of legends is to encourage conformity. A well-timed story or even reminder of a known story might be used to chide bad behavior. If a child is crying excessively, a mother might warn, “Watch out, or La Llorona will come and get you.” If a husband returns late smelling of liquor, a wife might mention La Matlacihua and her punishments for men who stray. These legends can also express praise for good behavior. La Virgen de Guadalupe in particular can be used in this way; her feminine qualities of devotion, love, and nurturing might be a way to express approval of a woman’s domestic skills.

The three main legends discussed in this thesis fall under separate categories of legend. La Llorona is a supernatural legend, a “supposedly factual account of occurrences and experiences which seem to validate superstitions” (Brunvand 1968: 88). These narratives reveal underlying beliefs or fears about magic, revenants or ghosts, and can be frightening or simply provide evidence for spiritual beliefs and practices. La Llorona is a scare tale designed to admonish children and women, but also questions the efficacy and morality of suicide and explores what happens after death.

La Virgen de Guadalupe is a religious legend, a story of the life of a Christian saint. This narrative is written down in numerous forms, but circulates orally as well. There are often new accounts of miracles and apparitions, that are not sanctioned by the Catholic church, but reflect local vernacular belief. La Malinche is a historical legend, a narrative based on history that has entered oral tradition. National legends have a tendency to “cluster around the most dramatic events in the country’s history” (Brunvand 1968: 99). Indisputably, the Spanish Conquest was a major historical event in Mexico’s history. The Malinche narrative is one way to explore the complicated feelings of shame and anger around the violence of the military and cultural invasion.

The women I had the privilege of speaking with told me many different variants of the legends we discussed. Versions they were exposed to depended upon geographical location, family history, ethnicity, childhood companions and schooling, and other contextual factors. Individual interpretations were due to each woman’s unique positionality: her background, experience, and identity. Although the legends can certainly be said to be “the same,” storytellers have a great deal of leeway in embellishing or adding new details. In this way, narrators have the ability to make a decision about what, specifically, to share, and “in so choosing, he or she communicate[s] something personal as well as cultural, if we have the skills to recognize it” (Hymes 2003: 121).

Barre Toelken describes mode and movement in folklore as being regulated by the twin laws of conservatism and dynamism: “Balancing the dynamism of change in performance is the essentially conservative force of tradition itself” (1979: 34). In other words, variation occurs within the framework of the specific genre. Legends tend to

retain the kernel of the story, the cultural world-view, and religious and cultural beliefs and mores. Elements that may change between tellings or performers include style, tone, language, the context of performance, and the meaning and interpretation.

La Llorona narratives typically include a woman, a previous or continuing sexual relationship with a man, a child or children, a betrayal by the man, the accidental death or murder of the children, and the regret, death, and punishment of the woman. However, within this framework, many details can vary. The Llorona may or may not be married; she might be unhappy, crazy, neglectful, or evil; and the reasons for killing her children are highly variable.

The Virgen de Guadalupe apparition narrative is fairly conservative, though other narratives are highly dynamic. The apparition narrative nearly always involves her appearance to Juan Diego, his interaction with the Bishop, and the subsequent building of the basilica. Other narratives can center on miracles, blessings, or personal apparitions. The symbolism of La Virgen is extremely variable and dependent on the beliefs and politics of the performer and audience. La Malinche narratives are structured around Malinche and Cortés during the Spanish Conquest. Dynamic elements include the degree of detail around Malinche's history and personality; whether or not the sexual relationship was consensual; Malinche's motivation for aiding the Spanish; and the narrator's personal views about mestizaje and cultural change.

The potential for dynamic changes introduced by narrators creates a milieu for feminist coding, as well as appropriation and transgressive retellings or interpretations. According to Radner, the context for such coding "exists when there is a situation of

oppression, dominance, or risk for a particular individual or identifiable group; when there is some kind of opposition to this situation that cannot safely be made explicit; and when there is a community of potential ‘listeners’ from which one would want to protect oneself” (1993: 9). I did not glean any kind of danger or policing of the women in my interviews, but they might very well have reasons for wanting to keep some of their conversations and stories coded or within a like-minded community. For example, women discussing intimate partner violence might couch their discussion in the structure of the Llorona story or even the Malinche story. They might dwell on those details in order to process emotions and gain support and advice from other women. In my interviews, I learned that some informants used the Llorona story to express fear and anger about men, anxiety about childrearing, and frustration with racism and classism. Some informants used the Virgen de Guadalupe story to express pride in their strength as women, or anger at their perception of gender inequalities. Some informants used the Malinche story to express disappointment in sexual shaming and victim blaming. Legendary narratives have the capacity to contain multiple meanings depending upon the performer and the audience, and the women who narrate and comment upon them sometimes insert veiled meanings.

My research has been a fascinating glimpse into the ways in which storytelling functions to articulate multiple identities, both for the tellers and the protagonists. Through interviews and participant-observation, I determined that storytelling has a powerful role in community building and personal and family identity. Stories are used to instruct children and adults in proper behavior, teach family and community history, and instill pride in the community. Stories are also used to communicate beliefs about

gender roles and dynamics. Women actively negotiate cultural messages about gender and power, using narratives to encourage certain behaviors and discourage others. Some stories and tellings are explicitly feminist and subversive, while others fall within the patriarchal model. La Llorona, La Virgen de Guadalupe, and La Malinche are examples of powerful female protagonists. Narratives about these characters position them (and women in general) as docile, maternal, dangerous, sexual, traitorous, kind, loyal, evil, neglectful, promiscuous, nurturing, patriotic, subversive, strong, virtuous, crazy, or victimized. Through collaborative or individual storytelling, these characters' personalities are explored, subverted, argued, and questioned.

Folk narratives can be a way to express personal identity. Informants used stories to explore ethnicity, gender, religion, nationality, sexuality, and politics. Narratives are also used to articulate group identity. Stories bring together families and communities and strengthen relationships. Stories are used for entertainment, education, and moralizing. Stories can also communicate pride and community solidarity, and are used to pass on history and strengthen networks. Storytelling also has a major role in religious instruction and religious community building. Finally, stories articulate and explore gender roles and dynamics.

### **Fieldwork and Analysis**

Analysis is by its very nature incomplete. Not only are conclusions based upon assumptions and the researcher's own biases, but individuals have specific life experiences which are themselves interpreted through both the individual's lens and the researcher's. Since a researcher cannot possibly interview each member of the society,

and these members' experiences and beliefs may change day to day; analysis is imperfect. As Clifford Geertz explains, "the more deeply [cultural analysis] goes the less complete it is. It is a strange science whose most telling assertions are its most tremulously based, in which to get somewhere with the matter at hand is to intensify the suspicion, both your own and that of others, that you are not quite getting it right" (1973: 29). The point of anthropology and folklore is to ask questions and add them to what other researchers have asked, to create a body of knowledge that others can consult in order to ask more questions.

In my own research, many questions were asked that led to more questions. While I attempted to follow conversational tangents, many queries were left by the wayside, and many more came to mind days and weeks after the interview was completed. It is my hope that the conversations that were recorded can help other researchers and community members to join the ongoing dialogue about Mexican and Mexican American women's experiences with powerful female protagonists of traditional prose narratives.

The questions that I asked explored women's agency in Teotitlán, Oaxaca City, and Eugene, Oregon. Interviews uncovered webs of power relationships and complex decision making in women's lives. Informants revealed extensive details and opinions about popular protagonists and their symbolism and history. Informants also discussed their experiences with covert and overt sexism and how it affects them. Furthermore, family, community, and religious life were discussed.

My research suggests that Mexican and Mexican American women utilize narratives to communicate about power, gender roles, and morality. Storytelling also functions to build community, educate listeners about history, and articulate multiple identities. The three major protagonists- La Llorona, La Virgen de Guadalupe, and La Malinche- are multivocal symbols that communicate women's expected roles and deviation from them. These narratives can be used to encourage proper behavior and instruct against socially deviant acts. However, they can also be used to subvert dominant patriarchal narratives; some versions are explicitly feminist and celebrate female power.

### **Final Thoughts**

Social researchers build upon the theories and findings of previous researchers. Fieldworkers are members of a community that shares knowledge through essays, books, lectures, archival materials, and documentaries. No researcher begins from nothing. When I began to study Mexican and Mexican American women's narratives, I had a wealth of information to learn from before I could build from there. I read scores of historical accounts, collections of folk narratives, folklore scholarship, and ethnographies. The anthropologists, folklorists, historians, travel writers, cultural theorists, and religious theorists who came before me gave me a foundation from which to build. In return, the information that I have gathered will be made available to other researchers, through essays, articles, lectures, and this thesis. It is my hope that the questions explored in this research will help others formulate their own questions and continue the dialogue.



My research does not stop here. I am inspired by Elaine Lawless and others who have chosen to explore reciprocal ethnography<sup>10</sup>. My goal is to meet again with each informant in order to share my analysis with them and ask for their reactions. I would like to enable a two-way interpretive process whereby informants critique my interpretation and give their own. I know from personal experience that interviews can yield phrases and sentences that do not really reflect what the interviewee intended. My own words have been used in ways contrary to my intentions. I would like my informants to have the opportunity to tell me if my assumptions were correct and if I used their words properly.

Analysis can be tricky. The basis for my own interpretations is scholarship, my own life experiences, and observation. With a different set of experiences, I may very well have come up with different interpretations. Each individual has their own specific lens. I know that my interpretations are likely very different from those my informants may conclude from the same data. Hence, making space for informants' ideas and interpretations would yield an interesting and useful array of responses. I trust that my own conclusions are valid, but believe that others' interpretations are equally valid.

I plan to do my best to contact informants and offer them the chance to read this thesis and critique it. Eugene informants will be relatively easy to re-contact. Oaxacan informants will be more difficult. When I have the financial resources to return, I could find Teotitlán informants with little trouble. Karen and Cristina, however, might be very

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<sup>10</sup> Lawless, Elaine J. "Reciprocal' Ethnography: No One Said it Was Easy." *Journal of Folklore Research*, Vol. 37, No. 2/3, Special Double Issue: Issues in Collaboration and Representation (May - Dec., 2000), pp. 197-205.

difficult to find, since Karen was in the process of moving and Cristina is at an age where changing jobs is common. Still, I will make an effort to do so.

Besides asking for reactions to my analysis, I would like to re-interview informants to gather further information. Follow up questions include a deeper examination of family structures and the types of stories told by different family members; more complete life histories of informants; specific questions about agentic behavior and how informants perceive their own personal power; and a more thorough examination of the details of narratives. I would also like to pursue more participant-observation of storytelling in groups. To do this, I would have to attend life cycle celebrations, such as quinceañeras, weddings, baptisms, and funerals; and religious and civil celebrations, such as the Precious Blood of Christ celebration or the Guelaguetza. I would especially like to visit Mexico City in December to observe pilgrimage to the Basilica of the Virgin of Guadalupe. I would like to interview self-identified devotees about devotional behavior, miracles, beliefs, and their knowledge of the apparition narrative.

My interviews yielded very interesting information about narratives, power and agency, gender roles, and beliefs and customs. I will be able to utilize the transcripts for more analysis, and this thesis and potentially other articles or books will allow other researchers insight and allow them to build upon the questions I asked. However, this is only a beginning. Any cultural analysis is imperfect and incomplete, but with the potential for deeper examination. It is my hope that this thesis will spark intellectual

curiosity in other researchers and others will continue this line of research and other related questions.

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