

MALINTZIN PEDAGOGIES: Susto y choque at an East Dallas Park

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What if Malintzin's sons had called her an ugly-ass, n-word bitch?

How do we know they didn't? What if her coping mechanism for surviving Cortes' psychological prison was to reject her indígena maternal cariño in favor of golpes y patadas? O ¿qué si, in a counterfactual, a Mexica elder, or two or three, emerged from (co)comunidad to gently admonish the boys? To guide their bodymindspirit away from colonial bro culture and toward self en armonía?

Mamá Malintzin, I need you to help me make sense of this choque that has left me norteadada. Torcida in a state of paniqueo and cognitive dissonance because, like most things about being a racialized mujer in a hypermasculine settler-colonial transcontinental project, there's no clear good or bad guy.

Mamá Malintzin, I need you to teach me how to explain to miijo, a mixed-race Chicano with a brown Xicana mother and a white father, why the boys on the playground called him a fucking white-ass and his mother the n-word? Why he's too brown for the private school for niños especiales who found his brand of special was just a bit too, um, descontrolado ("Mom, can you increase his ADHD medication?"). And why he's not brown enough for the Dallas public school named after a civil rights icon. Pero lo que más me urge, Mami Malinche, es explicarle a miijo porque este grupo de chamacos, estos cinco huercillos, led by their oldest brother, himself a familiar phenotype—

brown, chaparrito, ponchado, and with a sprouting bigotillo—would shadow my son’s movements on the playground spewing homophobic, racist, and misogynistic slurs.

How naïve I was to think that using my “teacher voice” would settle things between *mijo* and one of the younger *chamacos* who looked to be no older than nine. ¡Qué pendeja! That’s how I felt when the *huerco* shot his middle finger right at me, like an *espina de nopal* coated in *mercurio* piercing my Mexican Karen’s ego.

There’s that *choque* again. My multiple subjectivities, wanting to be gentle but firm, using my *sangre livianita*, as *papi* would say, to score well on the matrix of colonized parenting, como dijo el tal Baumrind, con sus artificially delineated categories of good and bad parenting: authoritative, authoritarian, neglectful, or indulgent. How useless this PhD in human development and family studies was proving to be! No developmental theory (internal working models, anyone?) could help me understand why I suddenly felt una *furia fenomenal* toward these *chamacitos*. They were just kids, right? How threatening could they be? Pero a la vez, my *nepantla facultad* made it clear that this *susto* was real, despite my hoity toity education leaving me wholly unprepared to deal with it.

Cálmate, *niña*. Why so much anger directed at these brown boys who could be my *sobrinos*, los *primos de mijo*? Or maybe the *rabia* was directed at myself for repeating Malintzin’s original sin. For *chingando* a un *gringo* and cursing *mijo* and *mija* with both unearned white privilege and perpetual liminality of contemporary mixed-race *mestizaje*. A global north ontological racial in-betweenness that no progressive, diversity-minded PTA parent could adequately address during feel-good Hispanic Heritage Month. Angry at myself for

hardening my heart toward these children whose young existence had clearly been pockmarked with unchecked hatred and violence and god knows what else.

Pero mi intuición, despite efforts to gaslight it, was telling me that this budding misogynistic, racist, and homophobic terror they were unleashing at this East Dallas park is exactly what the Texas colonial project intended. A model city of neoliberal maltrato y descuido, the onslaught of toxic dude culture (the guns! the vigilante womb-surveillance! the gender-denying police!) invites hypermasculinity of the white supremacist kind, and all melanin shades are encouraged to participate.

De repente I felt a tug, “Mommy, I’m scared.” Allí estaba miya with tears and runny mocos staining her broad cheeked face. I’d kept a side-eye on miya this whole time, but suddenly it was clear that the threat wasn’t isolated to my son. There were other little girls playing in the mulch, including my mixed race, güerita Chicanita. Y pues me puse más brava. I couldn’t shake the choque, the internal conflict rooted in the spoils of neoliberal urban development and diaspora, the privilege of moving into the middle class and birthing white adjacent, pseudo Chicax children while my raza neighbors remained tethered to violent labor exploitation, underground economies that prey on young, docile, brown bodies, and the institutionalized devaluing of collectivist family ways of knowing. I wanted to leave, but I could not let hate triumph on this day.

Nepantla waters rose around me, sending me into a state of ahogo as I gasped for a sense of firme conocimiento. Like me, these five chamacitos signaled their racialized otherness with multiple visual and sonic markers. In contrast, the mixed-race Chicano/a I was aching to protect broadcast illegibility, a precarious embodiment attracting odio y repugnancia in this urban playground.

The slurs grew louder, more frequent, more threatening. What would I do if they attacked one of my kids? What kind of internalized or horizontal racism would that trauma inflict on my already liminally conscious children? So, I whipped out my phone and started recording. No sabía que más hacer. Not my proudest moment. The older boy puffed up y se me acercó. “You can’t do that! That’s illegal, you creepy ass bitch!” And he wasn’t wrong. “You need to stop terrorizing these kids,” I heard myself say, feeling dangerously close to embodying the collective Karens and Beckys of social media. After a few tense minutes the boys left, swaggering across the street to the nearby apartments, slurs trailing in the air.

What the hell was I going to do with the video anyway? Call the police on a group of brown kids? Wouldn’t that make the picture of La Chingada? Worse, I had weaponized one of the oldest tools of settler-colonial corporeal regulation—visual surveillance, the technology of the oppressor.

I was rattled. What could I have done differently? I wanted to call mami, my sisters, my Tía Gaby—anyone who would understand the aching desperation of not knowing how to protect mijo y hija from Malintzin’s other sons. But I didn’t call. Porque ya las oía decir, “Te dije, you should have moved to the suburbs, Plano or Frisco or somewhere...not East Dallas.” Somewhere where the white Mexicans live, where the rents are higher so the people MUST be nicer. Somewhere less Raza, like your cousin Verónica who Made It because she lives in the McMansion by the strip malls.

¿Y qué tiene que ver esto con los Big Problems of the world? Digo, have you seen the news? There’s relentless bombing in Ukraine, an unending queue of Amber Alerts documenting an egregious rise in girls ‘and femmes’ abductions, and Melissa Lucio¹ sits on death row as of this writing.

There's that gaslighting again. It has everything to do with it. Por supuesto que sí. What has happened to these young boys in this wretched colonial project? What have they witnessed in a city where the white cop who shot twelve-year-old Santos Rodriguez *in the head* served a laughable two years behind bars? Two fucking years. Where it took the Dallas Police Department fifty years to apologize to Santos' mother only to misrepresent him, his family, and his community by erasing his Mexicanness in the race-neutral plaque that sits afoot his commemorative statue in what used to be Little Mexico. No, mi amorcito, this city doesn't see those boys the way they see you. And because Black-White is all people know about race, this city, state, and nation cannot make room for more complex racial identity, you will only be legible per their prescribed Anglo settler-colonial code. A circumscribed other at the mercy of untethered racial, gender, and sexual animus. You and they will internalize the hate, albeit quite differently. It's why they call me ugly, the n-word, and a bitch. Because in order to survive in the land of Texas Rangers lynching Mexicanos y Tejanos with impunity, they know they must drown women with physical and symbolic spit. It's why they call you gay and white, because their oppression was systematized by men who look like your father, and that makes you complicit as a mixed-race Chicano.

You will not learn about the lynching and police brutality of mestizo boys in your history courses. Not in the Black and brown schools of East and South Dallas, nor in the private schools where white kids are docile and medicated. El Jefe Abbot is winning, don't you know? Haven't you heard about Senate Bill 3?² Pero no se rinda, mijo, because it's not up to him to teach our comunidad about 500 years of violence, of Indigenous genocide, rape, and displacement, and of erasure by deindigenization of mestizx. Tenemos que desahogarnos nosotras mismas. Empezando con estos chamacitos.

What if we learned we were all the children of Malintzin?

Notes

1 Melissa Lucio spent fourteen years on death row for the murder of her two-year-old daughter, Mariah, after she was coerced into making a false confession. Her execution was stayed by the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals on April 27, 2022.

2 Referred to as the “critical race theory” law, Texas Senate Bill 3 was signed into law in 2021, prohibiting teachers from discussing controversial topics of race and racism in the classroom.