

# Motherhood in Latin America

The structure of motherhood has been historically theorized through the lens of the European ideal of a white heterosexual family. **To fully understand motherhood in Latin America one must take into consideration the factors that only affect Latin/x American mothers.** In doing so one can properly understand the motivation and influence of maternal figures and stereotypes of mothers from a Latin American background

My research work aided in the development of the first drafts of the chapters of the book on motherhood in Latin America. Working with professor Marinescu, from the Spanish and Portuguese department, to create a different lens to analyze the roles and figures of bad, good, political, domestic, queer, and non-mothers from Latin America. The finalization of this work will be the future publication of this book.

"When a woman becomes a mother, a set of changes is set off within her; the most altering is that she, as if under a spell, loses her autonomy of mind. ... Another person has existed in her, and after their birth they live within the jurisdiction of her consciousness. When she is with them she is not herself; when she is without them she is not herself."

- Claudia Dey, *Mothers as Makers of Death*

## Three key figures of motherhood



### The good mother:

- ❖ **The Virgen Mary** has become the quintessential figure of motherhood through the heavy influence of the Catholic Church throughout Latin America.
- ❖ She symbolizes a selfless mother willing to put anything including herself after the life and purpose of her children. Her life completely devoted to her children.
- ❖ There is also a loss of self where in motherhood she is no longer herself first but rather a mother before anything else.

### The bad mother:

- ❖ **La Llorona** or weeping woman is a figure of myths and legends. As the legend states she haunts bodies of water across Latin America searching for children to replace her own who she drowned after her lover left her.
- ❖ She is the epitome of a bad mother not only killing her own children but those of others too. Some believe that La Malinche drowned her kids after her Spaniard lover left her and became la Llorona.



### The traitor:

- ❖ **The Malinche** is commonly known for her historic background as traitor to the Aztec empire by helping translate for conqueror Hernán Cortés.
- ❖ However, for giving birth to her and Hermán's children she is also known as the mother of the first Mestizos.
- ❖ She is trapped between the polarity of being a mother to the Mexican race and of being a traitor to her own people.

## Mestizaje

- The foundation of *mestizaje* is built on the familial dynamic of a European father and an indigenous mother.
- This stereotype is built on the historic context of the Spanish colonization of the Americas. Women were raped and or given to colonizers, aiding in the creation of new identity that was not indigenous nor Spanish but rather *mestizo*. These children were often considered illegitimate by their Spanish fathers and dominant society.
- The history of *mestizaje* shapes Latin America and helps shape the cultural preference for lighter skin, as well as the normalization of a family structure with submissive mothers and absent fathers.
- Most recently artistic portrayals of *mestizaje* and *motherhood* have questioned its heteropatriarchal foundation and privileged a more multifaceted approach.

I would like to continue the work I have done here by developing my Spanish thesis around the legend and history of la Malinche. She is a complex figure known for being either a mother, a traitor, a survivor, a translator, amongst other things.

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