

The Hermeneutics of Mexican-American Political Philosophy

by Elena Ruíz y Flores

English Abstract

This article addresses the continued salience of colonialist attitudes in anti-colonial traditions by looking at the resilience of sexist racism in Mexican-American political philosophy. I draw a parallel between cultural universals in hermeneutic thought and the resilience of colonial interpretive mechanisms in core debates in Mexican-American political philosophy. Drawing on comparative indigenous accounts of anti-colonial resistance, I caution against exclusionary and colonial-parroting tendencies at such a critical juncture of field formation while highlighting the existence of a long quillwork of theory produced by Mexican-American women.

Resumen en español

Este artículo aborda la prominencia de las actitudes colonialistas en tradiciones anti-coloniales, observando la capacidad del racismo sexista para adaptarse en la filosofía política Mexicano-Estadounidense. Señalo un paralelo entre el uso de universales culturales en el pensamiento hermenéutico y la continuación de mecanismos interpretativos coloniales en los debates centrales de la filosofía política Mexicano-Estadounidense. Basándome en pensamiento comparativo indígena de resistencia anticolonial, advierto contra tales tendencias excluyentes y mimetismas en un momento tan crítico de la formación de campo, mientras resaltando la existencia de una larga tradición teórica producida por mujeres Mexicanas-Estadounidenses.

Resumo em português

Este artigo aborda a importância continuada das atitudes colonialistas nas tradições anticoloniais, examinando a resiliência do racismo sexista na filosofia política mexicano-americana. Eu traço um paralelo entre os universais culturais no pensamento hermenéutico e a resiliência dos mecanismos interpretativos coloniais nos debates centrais da filosofia política mexicano-americana. Baseando-me em relatos comparados de resistência anticolonial, eu aviso contra tendências excludentes em uma conjuntura tão crítica da formação de campo, enquanto enfatizo a existência de um longo trabalho de teoria produzido por mulheres mexicanas-americanas.

Mexican-American philosophy is currently undergoing field formation as part of sustained efforts to pluralize academic philosophy in the United States. Like most processes of academization, the governing norms, conceptual prejudices and institutional reward mechanisms rehearsed in the process will influence which voices and narrative identities are most likely to be recognized as legitimate in the emerging field, even if the process is based on reform of existing norms. Historically, it is indigenous and intersectional feminist perspectives that fare worst in these processes, as sexist racism and cultural elitism pervade academic practices at the deepest levels. In light of a key stepping stone in field formation--the first academic conference hosted by the Society for Mexican-American Philosophy, aptly titled, "Cultivating Philosophical Space Towards the Future of Philosophy"-- it is essential to pause and consider the ways in which our endeavor to pluralize philosophy continues to be hampered by deeply-rooted cultural legacies of anti-indigenous sexism and racialized machismo. The prejudices imperial epistemic legacies inflect are, of course, not always overt, but more often operate by grounding philosophical inquiry and methods in ways of seeing and understanding that preserve the very centripetal biases (epistemic, metaphysical, social, linguistic) necessary for the momentum and continued salience of colonialist attitudes in anti-colonial traditions.

One way to see this is by looking at established arguments in an emerging field and combing out tendencies that are unexpected or more tacit than previously thought. I will thus examine established arguments in Mexican-American political thought in order to highlight broader metaphilosophical issues in Mexican-American philosophy that, whether intentional or not, have a tendency to marginalize women and indigenous peoples from full and equitable participation in the field. My aim is not to police disciplinary borders or erect new ones, but rather to tease out the inner workings of discipline formation in such a way that we can get clearer about the kinds of logics and methods at play, how they produce or reproduce marginality, and the kinds of privileged standpoints they promote. To illustrate these tendencies, I point to ongoing debates in non-western political philosophy regarding the cultural provenance of epistemic and interpretive frameworks, or the hermeneutics of political thought. I specifically address Mexican-American political thought and show how traditional discussions over Anglo-European hermeneutical dependencies are often themselves framed via homegrown hermeneutical dependencies that center masculinist and settler colonial views, to the detriment of intersectional feminist and indigenous voices.

1. What is Mexican-American Political Philosophy?

There are several ways to understand Mexican-American Political Philosophy. One way is to see it as addressing political questions that emanate from Mexican-American experience, where 'political' references dominant themes in classical social and political philosophy (such as the relation between the individual and collective, the nature of the state and legitimacy of the sovereign, questions of personal autonomy and the role of the rational will in social agency and coordinated action in the public sphere, etc.). Given the methodological ties to classical themes in political philosophy, this

approach tends to overlook the reflective life-world and philosophical contributions of interpretive communities traditionally seen as 'outside' philosophy, even while seeming to acknowledge marginalized perspectives. For example, it centralizes Cezar Chavez' labor activism as recognizably 'political' over Gloria Anzaldúa's politics of self-mapping, María Amparo Ruíz de Burton's literary treatment of American territorial expansion and imperial settlement, or Louise Abeita (Blue Corn) Chewiwi's prosaic account of American Indian traditions in the Southwest.

Another way to understand it is as a historically derived series of questions, analyses and responses to the situated concerns of a historical community. In this sense, most, if not all, of Mexican-American philosophy can be considered political; from colonialism to neoliberalism to the post-fascism of the Trump era, collective issues and concerns continue to take place in a context of cultural hostilities and socio-economic oppressions against Mexican-Americans, making political reflection and cultural insight a key component throughout Mexican-American thought. This diachronic approach rests heavily on narrative practices, cultural historiography and ethnographic data, such as specific patterns of migration and politicization of personal identity that emerged in the 1930s, coinciding with the rise of ethnic leadership organizations like the *Asociación Nacional México-Americana* (ANMA), and carried on through the chicana civil rights movement into the 60's and 70s. Along with forging an articulable narrative backdrop of shared reference points--such as the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, *farmworker alianzas*, bilingualism and Spanglish, migrancy and *La Raza*-- it resulted in a diverse field of political thought that ranged from Mexican-American interpretation of Catholic social doctrine in labor activism to Xicanisma feminist theory (a prime example is Chela Sandoval's *Methodology of the Oppressed*) and even contemporary strands of philosophy of immigration. While this approach to Mexican-American political philosophy correctly situates philosophical production in the contextual life-world of historical communities, it has often overlooked voices that fall outside the scope of what dominant mestizo/a historiography recognizes as political history, at times even deploying settler colonial notions of statehood, kinship rights and citizenship to produce collective histories. This has had the effect of marginalizing the reflexive and collective contributions of American Indian women who are also Mexican-Americans and must contend with the intertwined epistemic legacies of Ibero-Anglo gendered sexism *and* the colonial mission system in the Southwest, often by having to rely on non-indigenous narrative practices to be heard or recognized as political subjects in settler administrations and within Mexican-American civil rights *alianzas*.

Finally, a third conception of Mexican-American Political Philosophy centers on a classic dialectic of action-and-agent, referring simply to the philosophical production of Mexican-Americans. This conception tends to favor Western European notions of action that privilege tangible academic production written in Roman alphabetic script by an agent that is recognized as a legitimate social actor, which often rests on an individualistic account of selfhood and, of course, overlooks the communal knowledge production of non-academic cultural workers like the collective political work of the Immokalee Farm Workers. It also favors identities with privileged speaking and subject

positions in Anglo-American culture, contributing significantly to the marginalized histories of Afro-Latina political traditions in Mexican-American thought.

These three formulations: disciplinary, historical, identitarian, are of course not exhaustive, mutually incompatible or universal. There are other ways to think about the field through different methods, topics, and genealogies. These basic formulations do, however, point to the existence of conceptual and representational myopias in prominent accounts of Mexican-American Political Philosophy. What keeps these myopias in place? What sustains the logical universe necessary to maintain exclusions that continue to foreclose the intersectional voices of women of color and indigenous peoples in philosophical production? I suggest that we can catch a glimpse into these structural processes by looking at the ways some common issues in Mexican-American political thought (and Latin American philosophy in general) are debated, like the problem of cultural authenticity and epistemic dependency. Looking at the discursive universe that orders these arguments ahead of their articulation in culture is helpful for seeing how debates ping-pong along *dominant* poles, not as an accidental feature of argumentative practice, but as a pre-discursive form of violence that roots exclusions in pre-predicative spaces, where they are most difficult to detect and can survive the longest.

2. The Problem of Cultural Authenticity and Epistemic Dependency

While Mexican-American political thought is wide and varied, one common theme historically is the idea of human freedom as a liberatory process from oppression. It is not always, but very often understood under the conceptual umbrella of the great narratives of emancipation that became pillars of western political thought and are bound up in the conceptual scaffolding of the European enlightenment, scientific reasoning, and the conception of nation-states that arose in the late 18th and 19th centuries in Western Europe. To think freedom is to be tied, in a nontrivial way, to a system of interpretation that orders the possibilities of what freedom is (or can be) ahead of its individual articulation in culture, and typically results in a formulation of freedom derived from classical liberal thought. Anti-colonial thinkers (from Domingo Sarmiento to Gloria Anzaldúa) have long critiqued the structural and cultural dependencies established by epistemic reliance on western intellectual systems, even those that imagine the possibilities for our freedom for us. Amongst these critiques, perhaps one of the best known is Jose Carlos Mariátegui's contention that liberation cannot be consolidated without a sense of intellectual autonomy yet to be achieved: "Los artistas, los mayores pensadores contemporáneos, no son todavía Europeos? [...] todos los pensadores de nuestra América se han educado en una escuela europea. No se siente en su obra el espíritu de la raza." (qtd. in Bondy, 38) But while several thinkers have argued for an ontological break with Anglo-European interpretive traditions via new cultural infrastructures (think of the post-revolutionary ethno-nationalism outlined in *The Wretched of the Earth*, the cultural arm of the Sandinista revolutionary government and the 'authentic culture' projects in the island of Solentiname, or separatist factions of *La Raza*), hermeneutic thinkers tend to disagree on the political usefulness of this

approach. This is because hermeneutists generally take such epistemic dependencies to be essential features of *political* resistance since they bear directly on the individual's ability to engage in socially-recognizable forms of oppositional practices, such that human actions constitute a politics.

While hermeneutic thought varies widely and has different genealogies outside the western tradition, western thinkers ranging from Hans-Georg Gadamer, Georgia Warnke, Charles Taylor to even (the later) Richard Rorty all agree on a core hermeneutic insight that lies at the center of the epistemic dependency debate: human meaning and intelligibility should not be understood in terms of tangible, mind-dependent judgments tethered to an objective, mind-independent reality, but as the living product of our deep embeddedness in history and language. On the hermeneutic view, expressing resistance, embodying or verbalizing dissent against political oppressions requires a prior backdrop of intelligibility, a cultural interpretive blueprint that secures the stability of meaning established in communication and everyday experience. This prior background shapes and guides the contours of meaning and interpretation so that understanding can happen at the most basic levels of everyday experience, but it does not mean that human understanding is deterministic or pre-discursive, as in causally anterior to the discursive. Rather, the pre-discursive and discursive are entangled in a dialogical, interwoven process of co-constitution: historical traditions shape and guide, but they do not foreclose transformative possibilities in history. Meaning is enlivened, made what it is when it is taken up in the lived act of interpretation. Moreover, it is historicity and social practices of interpretation that together make up a language that is far more robust than natural languages, one that lets physical gesture and any cultural system of signification (from dance to poetry to politics) take on recognizable form. To "be" is therefore to be woven into history and language as enabling conditions for meaning-making and intelligibility, for being understandable to oneself and others. It is a kind of shared metric of conceptual exchange that works on the basis of something that is not agreed upon (to agree upon things) but grown into, something tacit that allows explicit acts to be recognized as such. While this backdrop lets social acts be read as certain kinds of acts, like political acts of resistance to oppression, it also opens up the way for evolving recognitions of *new or culturally different practices as 'political'* (as in the aesthetic politics of *Mujeres Creando* in Mexico or CADA in Chile). As Rorty argues, "we have to work out of the networks we are, from the communities with which we presently identify" without fear that this will lead to political paralysis or preclude social transformations towards more just democratic societies. (qtd. in Voparil, 176, emphasis added) The open-endedness of dialogue, the unfinishedness of history and our creative capacities as narrative selves can work together to recontextualize and reinterpret epistemic traditions into cultural transformations, such that, over time, "something traditionally regarded as a moral abomination can become an object of general satisfaction" in culture. (1995, 21)

So on this view, there is not a subject prior to its social constructions, yet we are not *totally* determined by conventions and epistemic dependencies. They can be reconfigured over time or through a coming together of cultural traditions and internal

contestations, such that the plenum of the possible is gradually expanded to include marginalized voices or perspectives. Civil rights movements are the most frequent examples of this position, where the claims of a 'minority' are gradually recognized by a 'majority' and eventually folded into the everyday fabric of shared social sensibilities. At day's end, so the argument goes, you're going to have to use some normative language to undo normative binds, such that epistemic dependencies are not wholesale rejections of cultural autonomy, but *enabling conditions for their achievement*. This position acknowledges the problematic provenance of the political paradigms used to mobilize resistance against various forms of oppression (e.g., the fact that most tools are historically, colonial tools, from peninsular Spanish to the discourses of Enlightenment freedom and emancipation). But what it does do, on the hermeneutic view, is situate social agents in positions of *strategic wealth*, with access to discourses that help dismantle the social legitimacy of socio-political oppressions and advocate for civil rights within established structures of power. It opens up access to power to oppose power. As Dewey notes, "if you find yourself a slave, do not accept your masters' descriptions of the real; do not work within the boundaries of their moral universe. Instead, try to invent a reality of your own by *selecting aspects of the world* that lend themselves to the support of your judgment of the worthwhile life." (qtd. in Rorty, 1995, 30) Political resistance for oppressed groups thus entails that *the cultural dominance used to enact oppression* will somehow feature in the process of liberation. As the slave Caliban in Shakespeare's *Tempest* says, "you taught me language, and my profit on't is I know how to curse." When seen in this context, western interpretive traditions that establish the basis of our epistemic dependencies can be seen as fluid, open-ended starting points for orientation in action rather than closed worlds of pure historical insight that foreclose social transformations towards more just, historically reparative and plural societies.

This approach, which constitutes the strongest position against interpretive autonomy in the epistemic dependency debate, can be helpful in modern-day Latin American and Latinx social contexts, where the resilience of neocolonial oppression, neoliberal violence, gender-based harms and other structural forms of domination necessitates access to a plurality of methods to combat harms as they exist today. That is, with the irrevocable imprint of complex structures of colonial violence. So what that our weapons come from elsewhere? We begin where we are, where the harms are lived out in concrete settings and which may require one to use linguistic and social tools inherited from European imposition to engage in rights-based advocacy strategies. After all, we cannot argue for a philosophical position we do not survive long enough to take. The urgency of labor trafficking, human trafficking, the increasing spread of anti-migrant and racialized violence often seem to morally require these strategies, regardless of their cultural provenance. Epistemic dependencies on western intellectual systems, on this account, are not coffin nails on authentic social liberation but enabling conventions that provide predicative possibilities and interpretive grounds to stand on, from which to fight on with an experiential sense of standing on solid ground, even if the goal is to undo that very ground of coloniality.

This has been a common way of looking at the debate of cultural authenticity and epistemic dependency from a hermeneutic perspective. Comparative political accounts of anti-colonial resistance can help us get a deeper look at this debate and the possible imperial epistemic prejudices it supports.

3. Epistemic Imperialism and the Imaginative Limits of Philosophical Inquiry

American Indian philosophy and feminist anti-colonial thought often warn of the myopias of both uncritical and *strategic dependencies* on western conceptual systems. The worry, among many, is that normative tools help, on the long view, perpetuate the normative systems they dismantle. The structure of address in rights-based discourses and philosophical discussions of undocumented migration (the kind we often hear at the Eastern APA), for example, create a praxis of short-term gains but long-term structural losses, still centering the legitimacy of the sovereign and the enabling conventions of sovereignty, among other things. But the worry is not purely formal in nature or with the abstract logic of conceptual relations. In fact, many feminist thinkers have taken this stance on anti-essentialist grounds and worries over the retrenchment of patriarchal state legitimacy in rights-seeking discourses. The concern here is with what this type of thinking does in relation to *colonial* value systems and their angiogenesis in culture. It helps normalize the structural transmutation of colonialism into cultural imperialism, economic neocolonialism and modern-day neoliberalism. This happens, in part, because a parallel narrative of ‘cultural progress’ is produced as a fundamental value to colonial systems of knowledge production and exchange—and it is *this* that gets uptake in the dominant hermeneutic resources of settler culture: our acquiescence to settler imaginaries of our resistance (which, in turn, are promoted through institutional reward mechanisms). This position, along with the rich literature on indigenous self-determination and ethnographic refusal, is often dismissed on what I’m here calling *europragmatic* grounds. Europragmatics depict socio-political emergencies as *modern day historical happenstances* rather than the outcome of deeply rooted and continuing structural oppressions, or by erecting a false binary between past and present. (see Simpson, 2007) The crisis that forces one to falsely choose between europragmatism and refusal is not new. As Kyle Whyte notes, the very notion of ethical urgency in response to anthropogenic climate change is a europragmatic colonial construct that, while correctly noting the pressing need for environmental stewardship, conveniently glosses over the environmental apocalypses colonial violence inflicted on indigenous peoples. (2018)

Not heeding these kinds of concerns has made it more difficult to track the logic of multivalent *structural* harms, the kind we see today in the resilience of racialized machismo and marginalization of indigenous traditions in Mexican-American philosophy. Multivalent harms operate by producing variance at homologous sites of historical oppressions so that structural asymmetries of power are preserved while officially recognized harms are alleviated in some form. The alleviation is contingent on the recognition; what is key is that the mechanism and motility of processes regulating power are preserved so that a system of debt is applied to freedoms through their

recognition. The continuation of colonialist thinking in anti-colonial traditions likewise hinges on the logic of coloniality having more than one site of attachment and operative modality, so that the determinants of freedom can be shaped and controlled through a system of social practices that is itself productive of freedoms and, most importantly, the ongoing struggle for them.

European hermeneutic thought tells us of the strategic usefulness of foreign (colonial) interpretive frameworks, but what it says is not as important as what it *does* in saying it— what worlds it tacitly licenses and enlivens as a *social practice* tasked with naming the parameters of truth and human understanding recursively, via its *own historical traditions*. This tradition trades in the interpretive power and privilege of settler history, temporality, and futurity, where the making-do and can-do-ness of our existence is predicated on selecting aspects of the world that covers over hermeneutic violences done to many worlds *so only one could emerge*. To challenge this—to refuse it—is to run up against closed argumentative circuits that draw on internal historical figures, claims of the impossibility of objectivity or standing outside a historical tradition, the historical effectiveness of the historian herself, the hermeneutical performative contradiction in critiquing claims while being understood as making a critique, etc. All the while, this consumes one's interpretive energies via an association that links survival with answering questions that take the philosophical form of 'tell us how you are (or aren't) like us.' More than being existentially exhausting, this instrumental universalism is a *transgenerational* productive harm that works to curtail our imaginations and possibilities for taking and making our own possibilities for freedom.

One way to understand this problem more broadly in philosophy is as a result of epistemic imperialism. Epistemic imperialism is a metaphilosophical concept that unpacks the ways philosophical concepts, methods, classical concerns and units of analysis reproduce interpretive conditions favorable to the dominant assumptions (epistemic, metaphysical, ontological) of Anglo-European intellectual traditions. It encircles critical reflections and critiques of western intellectual traditions (including histories of colonial domination) with a logical net that produces, for instance, performative contradictions and hermeneutic traps *that are recursively validated* by the logical maps laid out through Anglo-European intellectual history. This means self-authoring tools like epistemic imperialism can be easily charged with a number of fallacies to reabsorb challenges it may pose to epistemic dominance. The fact that such a concept was just enumerated, explained and produced for delivery at a professional conference or publication in a trade journal can be cited as examples of its metaphilosophical weakness.

Epistemic imperialism has several implications for non-western intellectual traditions. First, it creates and maintains interpretive spaces in philosophy that are self-confirming rather than culturally open and plural, ensuring that some practitioners rely on roots and others parachutes as entry points into discussions, yet without the recognition of the epistemic labor involved in the latter. Second, it clears the way for the devaluation of non-dominant intellectual traditions through tacit methodological

assumptions and processes rather than patent value judgments, for which analytic tools are more readily available. Third, it makes it more difficult to think through historical oppressions like coloniality on the basis of non-dominant logics and assumptions.

Returning to Whyte's examples of indigenous environmental philosophies, for example, we can see how western environmental philosophy habitually deploys pre-understandings of nature as an inanimate resource to promote value judgments that are allegedly in line with indigenous cosmovisions of environmental stewardship and responsibility towards the earth. A multivalent harm is being produced in this case, yet epistemic imperialism makes it difficult to see this. What is most audible in settler culture is the 'reasoned' imperative to protect natural resources (or create sustainable/renewable resources) and a further association is made, peak to peak, between western and non-western environmental claims. The point is not to stop movements aimed at protecting so-called natural resources, only that *it matters* that the pre-understandings of nature Anishinaabe and Ojibwe women rely on to fight for water protections differ significantly from the Malthusian models of population catastrophe that guide the bulk of water sustainability movements today. One yields solutions that *structurally support settler industrial economies* while the other leads to possibilities of political resistance beyond classic liberal paradigms (and may also raise further reparative claims to restore indigenous women's rights in water governance). The exclusion of indigenous pre-understandings of nature is thus not an accidental feature of the development of western interpretive systems in the Americas: it takes institutions, public acts and social practices to actively maintain the logical spaces in which western conceptual orthodoxies prevail in interpretive dominance.

Hermeneutic silencing (as a structured 'undisclosedness') can thus be a normalized part of intellectual traditions that aim at clarifying or expanding human understanding; how we think, what we think, and the thinkability of our own thoughts is always bound up within larger networks of social practices, institutions, and economies of social organization *that cannot be severed from the dynamics of power and force yielded by dominant social groups*. It is Dewey's imperative towards the slave's imaginative courage, not the slave's interpretive defiance, that gains audibility in philosophy. It is Heidegger's critique of nature as a standing reserve that is raised to the level of argumentative rigor in environmental philosophy, while Amerindian environmental thinking is marginalized. When 'non-western' thought is folded into environmental philosophy, the binary imaginary of the orient as the 'other' of the West guides interpretive selection, so that Asian philosophical traditions historically dominate publications in comparative environmental philosophy, even while remaining marginalized.

On this account, philosophical inquiry is not a universally valid science of thinking that clears the way to truth and human understanding, but rather to a very delimited concept of truth that is bound up with the development of a very specific understanding of Reason dating back to 5th century Athenian elites, and which was integral to the success of the European colonial project. That does not mean it is completely worthless

or cannot be rehabilitated to be less imperial and violent. But this cannot happen without sufficient attunement to the way it continues to support hermeneutic dominance and the interpretive resilience of coloniality *at the structural level*.

Take the hermeneutic response to the problem of epistemic dependency outlined earlier. From a hermeneutic standpoint, the idea of ontological self-determination (via, for instance, indigenous linguistic sovereignty) as a political response to the problem of interpretive reliance on non-western epistemic frameworks falls flat: we must rely on something shared for the things we say to each other to make sense—even in the case of protest. If there is nothing or too little survives to make up a horizon of meaning to be shared, then, sad though it may be, we must move forward through the colonized and imperial languages we inhabit in order to make sense of our lives in artful and courageous ways, moving towards liberatory goals envisioned, in large part, through settler colonial and imperial colonial political frameworks of emancipation. Civil rights movements highlight the transformative force of this hermeneutic insight. I think this is more than a total failure of philosophical imagination. It involves not only a historization of civil rights movements from the top down, with historiographical units of analysis that record what is recognizable to Official history, but relegates oppressed groups to structural struggles for self-determination as a basic feature of existence. It also relies on an imaginary of the world where indigenous peoples and communities did not survive or are always hermeneutically dependent on the interpretive web set up by coloniality. Who produced this image of the world and of *sensemaking*? One does not need to quote Nietzsche to argue the products of our thinking reflect the conditions of one's life-word, so that our needs interpret the world as much as reflective and pre-reflective processes based on historical traditions. I believe there are traditions that are absolutely terrified of waking up to find they are not needed, that someone (a culture) they needed to oppress to be themselves outgrew or outright refused them. As in life, this is a point traditions can become especially violent and double-down on their curatorial power over salience in cultural accounts of know-how. But this violence will not be easily legible under settler logics, which maintain an instrumental chokehold on cultural universality.

Gadamer, for instance, envisions a model of understanding where cultural *differences* can come together along the model of an ongoing conversation, where what originally sounds strange or unfamiliar to one conversant can gain audibility in a process of fusing horizons of meaning (*Horizontverschmelzung*). Because this process is in principle always unfinished, the opening for more voices, claims, and views that may oppose those of the dominant culture is left open. Yet this horizontalist imaginary misses the deep imbrication of power asymmetries in regulating *what can rise to the level of the yet-to-be-fused* and relegates large segments of the world's inhabitants to generations of interpretive struggle. Even in horizon fusion, what is being fused is the *dominant normative voices* and interpretive standpoints which effectively sieve intersectional voices through a categorical colander that lets flow through those aspects of identity, agency and cultural selfhood traditionally recognized as 'disclosable.' (This is one critical myopia in dominant analytic conceptions of hermeneutic injustice). Given the

history of coloniality, those cultural processes are not going to be objective or value free, but laden with power differentials, class-based racialized and gendered asymmetries. As one who dwells under interpretive conditions where audibility and public licensing of one's voice is given over to them as a matter of historical tradition, Gadamer, like his analytic counterparts, cannot easily track this problem in his thought, yet assigns the status of *universality* to his hermeneutic model of human understanding. He cannot easily see how silencing is a *normatively* active aspect of interpretive disclosure (beyond a mere formal feature of all interpretation), or how the cultural functioning of prejudices endemic to an interpretive tradition can allow things like sexist racism to seamlessly continue to operate *simultaneous* to political resistance to oppression as a structural feature of existence. On this account, Mexican-American thought can engage in sustained projects of liberation all the while replicating the patriarchal structures of male domination and colonial hierarchies of power, both at the conceptual and disciplinary level of Mexican-American philosophy. This is where we find ourselves today, where encyclopedia entries on Mexican philosophy enumerate pages of bibliographic references to Anglo and mestizo men on both sides of the border, yet, but for the compulsory Sor Juana citation, leave out the work of Mirta Vidal, Norma Alarcón, Kim Díaz, Rosalie Flores, Alma García, Cherríe Moraga, Natalie Cisneros, Aída Hurtado, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Chela Sandoval, to name only a few.

Ultimately, what the hermeneutic approach overlooks is that the *context of signification* in which strategic interpretive wealth is spent is not itself strategic, but rooted in structural and historical oppressions that dispossess specific beings over others. The question is not whether you wear the social talking mask or the talking mask wears you, but that the enabling conditions for speaking and being heard are themselves enabled *by a prior background violence that harms the very structures of meaning and signification of some interpretive communities over others*. One interpretive horizon will always prevail in this case; the one that diagnoses the episteme of our times and ways of making sense as a universal feature of existence, so that discussions over Anglo-European hermeneutical dependencies are often themselves framed via homegrown hermeneutical dependencies that center masculinist and settler colonial views, to the detriment of intersectional feminist and indigenous voices.

The idea of a homegrown hermeneutical dependency seems like a tautology since all hermeneutical dependencies are, for hermeneutists, home grown. But in colonized contexts, the problem is easy to see: European epistemic dependencies were pre-predicatively privileged by colonizers and imposed onto Amerindian cultures. When hermeneutical dependencies develop in a historical tradition forged in cultural asymmetries and domination, what is acknowledged as new, emergent, or fused interpretations *depends on the mechanisms of power that survive through social institutions, public acts and practices*. The 'home' perspective replicated in the postcolonial world is thus not homegrown from the roots at all. Newly 'homegrown' hermeneutical dependencies *replicate epistemes of power*, where power legislates what can and cannot gain audibility in culture or must struggle significantly to do so. The processes of replication are many. For instance, when a bivalence (like male/female)

used to regulate interpretive dominance is threatened, cultural asymmetries of power remain in place by hooking onto the valued side of a cultural binary and linking to a related binary. [Recall that colonial binaries based on the creation of the category of gender (as sexual dimorphism) set up a hierarchical (rather than reciprocal) binary of male/female, as does the category of race based on the valuation of phenotypical whiteness.] Multivalence shows how harms are reproduced by the simultaneous production of advantage and disadvantage. Thus, when racialized machismo and anti-indigenous sexism take place in Mexican-American philosophy, what gets tracked via homegrown hermeneutical dependencies is the rising visibility of *mestizo* men in the field rather than the precarities produced by their organizational and argumentative practices.

Internal colonialism is not a new concept, yet it is rarely discussed in terms of epistemic frameworks or intersectional harms. One reason for this is the worry that deep structural oppressions at the epistemic level will project a vision of ourselves and our communities that is radically tied down, dependent, and perhaps even immobilized discursively. Or worse, that we will become blind to the very real and visceral material violence that goes unacknowledged as the depth of the structures that inform human and labor trafficking. But this is a reflection of the imaginative limits of philosophical inquiry, which still leans firmly on Greco-Roman conceptual orthodoxies and exclusionary logics that do not easily accept contradictions, or hold two things together in the same spatio-temporal imaginary. It has become commonplace in social and political philosophy to entertain visions of freedom forged in conditions of epistemic servitude. In the process of field formation, argumentative strategies and positions are all too often consolidated to reflect not only the dominant voices of an interpretive tradition, but also a deep and lasting *failure of philosophical imagination*, one that binds the limits of the possible to philosophical histories produced largely through imperial epistemic assumptions about self and world. We often come to believe in the veracity of truths disclosed by units of analysis and metrics of conceptual exchange that are themselves impoverished for grasping the complexity of the questions pertinent to our lives, or worse, cover-over them. The imaginative possibilities for our freedoms and well-being have been limited by the epistemic imperialism endemic to philosophy. Yet, precisely out of this predicament, I think Mexican-American political thought is in a unique position to forge a new path in philosophy if it can 1) take heed of the ways colonialist attitudes are still dominant in its practices of marginalization and 2) learn from the long quillwork of feminist theoretical production by Mexican-American women.

Elena Ruíz y Flores
Michigan State University

Bibliography

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands: La Frontera*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007.

E-Yeh-Shure' (blue corn). *I Am a Pueblo Indian Girl*. New York: W. Morrow and Co., 1939.

Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press, 2011.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014.

Rorty, Richard. "Feminism and Pragmatism," in *Feminist Interpretations of Richard Rorty*, ed. Marianne Janack. University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010 [1995].

Ruíz, de B. M. *The Squatter and the Don*. New York: Modern Library, 2004.

Ruíz, Elena. "Latin American Philosophy at a Crossroads," *Human Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Fall 2011), pp. 309-331.

Salazar, Bondy A. *Existe Una Filosofía De Nuestra América?* México: Siglo Veintiuno, 2006.

Sandoval, Chela, and Angela Y. Davis. *Methodology of the Oppressed*. Minneapolis, Minn. Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2008.

Sarmiento, Domingo F. *Facundo: Or, Civilization and Barbarism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004

Simpson, Audra. "Ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, 'Voice' and Colonial Citizenship," *Junctures: The Journal for Thematic Dialogue*, no. 9 (2007), pp. 67–80.

Valdez, Luis. "The Tale of La Raza," *Bronze*, vol. 1 (no. 1), Nov 25, 1968.

Voparil, Christopher J. *Richard Rorty: Politics and Vision*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006.

Whyte, Kyle. "Indigenous science (fiction) for the Anthropocene: Ancestral dystopias and fantasies of climate change crises," *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*, Vol. 1(2018), pp. 224–242.