

Seeking Latina Origins: The Philosophical Context of Identity

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English Abstract

This article considers three Latin American figures, Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, Leopoldo Zea, and La Malinche, and demonstrates ways in which the roles they have played can illuminate how intellectual independence, the quest for identity, and racial mixing have contributed to the formation of Latina identities and the development of Latina voices.

Resumen en español

Este ensayo analiza a tres figuras de América Latina, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Leopoldo Zea y La Malinche, y demuestra la manera en que sus trabajos pueden iluminar cómo la independencia intelectual, la búsqueda de la identidad y el mestizaje han contribuido a la formación de la identidad latina y las voces latinas.

Resumo em português

Este ensaio analisa três figuras da América Latina, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Leopoldo Zea e La Malinche pra demonstrar a maneira em que os papéis deles iluminem como a independência intelectual, a pesquisa da identidade e a miscigenação contribuem á formação da identidade latina e as vozes latinas.



This article revisits three foundational Latin American figures, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Leopoldo Zea, and La Malinche, and demonstrates ways in which the roles they have played can illuminate how intellectual independence, the quest for identity, and racial mixing have contributed to the formation of Latina identities and the development of Latina voices.[1] Sor Juana, a gender rebel, uses silence masterfully, and then her voice emerges to question authority and model resistance against entrenched male authority while arguing the case for a woman's right to an intellectual life. Relatedly, a central issue in Zea's work is that the suppression and silencing of gender and racial minorities can be understood philosophically through analysis of historical marginalization. While acknowledging the marginality of women, children, and the indigenous, Zea postulates that racial mixing and nationhood ultimately resolve or erase the problems of the indigenous, and presumably the marginal status women and children possess. In the end, he unintentionally devalues women in his analysis by

arguing that they, together with the indigenous, are included, made equal, and subsumed under the categories of *mestizaje* and *mexicanidad*. However, taken together, the philosophical projects of Sor Juana and Zea allow us to re-evaluate notions of Latina identities by examining how gender issues and racial issues can be considered in an equiprimordial way. Sor Juana and Zea enable us to reflect on the ways in which racial mixing and the quest for intellectual independence have shaped Latina identities from the time of the much-maligned La Malinche to the present. Latina identities have also benefited from the paradigm shift of La Malinche from her traitorous status as the anti-Guadalupe to revered feminist icon, as defined by many Chicanas.

I Sor Juana's Silence as a Form of Agency

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1651?-1695) was a Mexican baroque poet and philosopher. Some have called her the "tenth Muse" in the Spanish literary world.[2] The Nobel Prize winner, Octavio Paz, has placed her self-reflective poetry in the same class as that of Rubén Darío, Emily Dickinson, and Walt Whitman.[3] More relevant to the topic of this essay, Sor Juana also had a first-rate philosophical mind and has become a powerful symbol for independent and socially exploratory thought in the Americas.

Born in San Miguel Nepantla, Juana taught herself to read at age three and accompanied her older sister to school in an attempt to satiate her intense desire to learn. As a young girl, Juana moved to Mexico City in 1660 to live with her grandfather, where she took advantage of the opportunity to read the books in his library. Two years later, she entered the court as a lady-in-waiting and quickly became known for her intelligence, which noted scholars famously verified. The Viceroy and Vicereine enabled Sor Juana's relative freedom of movement at the court and her contact with prominent scholars there. They also paid for her writings to be published in Spain. Sor Juana developed a close, life-long friendship with the Viceroy's wife, the Marquise of Mancera. The Marquise ultimately saved what is extant of Sor Juana's works, some four volumes of collected works, while officers of the Inquisition burned the rest of them. The Marquise's crucial rescue of Sor Juana's writings has prompted scholars to wonder, "Are there any other Sor Juanas out there?"[4] While the Latin American tradition has remained far too invisible in the mainstream philosophical community, the feminine voices within it have taken even longer to be recognized. The considerable price Sor Juana ultimately paid for her intellectual proclivities would hamper the discovery of other such figures, yet the quality of Sor Juana's work provides ample evidence for renewed efforts to search archives and elsewhere to uncover and rescue missing intellectual production by other women.

Part of the silence of female voices in the Latin American intellectual tradition can be traced to the narrow options available to women in the colonial period. In the world of seventeenth-century Mexico in which upper class women had only two lifestyle options, marriage or the convent, Sor Juana chose the one she perceived as the lesser of evils, and the one that would give her the greatest independence. Still a teenager, she entered the Convent of the Discalced Carmelites of St. Joseph in 1667, but left after

three months. In 1669, she entered the Convent of the Order of St. Jerome, which focused more on charity and teaching, where she remained until her death in 1695.

Sor Juana, along with many Mexican Jesuit priests, pursued independent perspectives, those that emphasized freedom of thought and action. A concern with exploratory thought pervades most of Sor Juana's poetry and prose. Her well-known long poem, *First Dream*, seeks unity of knowledge as she employs myriad images demonstrating her considerable erudition regarding Western thought and culture. Her poem, "Foolish Men," questions the hypocrisy of men regarding sexual behavior, especially prostitution, and the Eve-Mary dichotomy many such men seek to perpetuate:

Or which is more to be blamed—
though both will have cause for chagrin:
the woman who sins for money
or the man who pays money to sin?
So why are you men all so stunned
at the thought you're all guilty alike?
Either like them for what you've made them
or make of them what you can like.[5]

Sor Juana, battling the "primitive instincts" of men during the colonial period, was certainly a thinker ahead of her time, and it took much courage to express her views, perspectives that revealed hypocritical stereotypes that trapped women into spaces that stunted their intellectual and moral growth. Indeed, Sor Juana's writings put her at great risk for censure and punishment. Sor Juana's most famous essay, "Reply to Sister Philothea de la Cruz," resulted from a discussion with her long-time friend, the Bishop of Puebla, Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz, in which she expressed criticism of a well-known sermon given forty years earlier by an eminent Portuguese Jesuit, Antonio de Vieira. The bishop was impressed with Sor Juana's argument and requested that she put it in writing. Without Sor Juana's permission or knowledge, the bishop then paid for her critique to be published and titled it "Missive Worthy of Athena." However, in an apparent contradiction, he simultaneously sent a letter to Sor Juana admonishing her for her intellectualism and suggesting that she comport herself more like other nuns by devoting her time to religious rather than secular matters. He signed his letter with feminine pen name, Sor Philothea de la Cruz.

The bishop was evidently not the friend Sor Juana thought him to be, since his letter left her open to attack from a rather misogynist establishment in the Mexico City of her day. The bishop benefited from the public circulation of Sor Juana's critique because it coincided with his own negative assessment of Vieira and because it helped him advance in his rivalry with the Archbishop of Mexico, Francisco Aguiar y Seijas, who was an admirer of Vieira in addition to being well known for his misogyny. That a brilliant critique of Vieira's sermon had been written by a woman would have been heresy enough, but that Sor Juana was a nun also raised issues of religious authority and hierarchy. Sor Juana found herself entangled in the contentious relationship of two

powerful figures in the Church. Thus, it comes as no surprise that she was pressured to conform to traditional expectations for nuns by accepting the punishment of selling her substantial library and musical and scientific instruments.

Among the many techniques analyzed in *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, by Joanna Russ, the one that most closely corresponds to the suppression of Sor Juana's expression is, "She wrote it, but she shouldn't have."^[6] In an extraordinary twist on how to perpetrate this particular form of suppression, the bishop asked Sor Juana to put in writing an oral analysis he thought brilliant, then without her permission paid for her written analysis to be published, and finally admonished her in writing for having written it. Sor Juana's case, then, requires an unusual addition to the suppression technique described by Russ, and becomes "She wrote it, but she shouldn't have (*even though she was asked to*)." Sor Juana's response to this treatment by the bishop came to be a famously defining moment in her life.

After maintaining a silence of several months following the surprise publication of the "Missive Worthy of Athena" and receipt of the bishop's letter of admonition, and no doubt acutely aware of the greatly circumscribed space available to women in colonial times, Sor Juana wrote her now famous "Reply to Sister Philothea de la Cruz." This title would have us believe the reply was directed to another nun. However, this lengthy "letter" was intended for the bishop. Sor Juana cleverly and ironically picked up on the bishop having signed his missive "Sor Philothea de la Cruz," a pen name he used to imply that Sor Juana should model her behavior on what a nun who truly loves God would do (Sister "Lover of God"). This enabled Sor Juana ostensibly to appeal to "Sor Philothea" on a nearly level playing field as a woman who would understand the many feminist arguments included in the "Reply." In typical baroque fashion, Sor Juana capitalized on the masks the bishop's pen name afforded to employ plays on words and intricate conceits to critique indirectly many dogmatic practices of her time and to come close to questioning religious authority over intellectual pursuits, none of which she could have done directly if she appeared to write to the bishop without the ruse of pretending he was "Sor Philothea."

Sor Juana's use of masks is evident beginning with the salutation of her "Reply," "My most illustrious lady." Frequently using such ironic titles of respect whenever referring to "Sor Philothea," Sor Juana carefully negotiates deference to authority (she does not forget she is really writing to a bishop) while hiding behind the mask of writing to a woman. This nicely affords her the ability to address topics she could not write directly to a male authority. For example, Sor Juana opens the "Reply" by writing about her need to find:

an adequate way to thank you for a favor as undeserved as it was unexpected—committing my poor scribblings to print—a favor so huge as to surpass the wildest dreams or most ambitious hope, one that could never have entered my mind, as a creature of reason; one of such magnitude, in a word, that not only does it defy confinement within the bounds of language; it exceeds the very

capacity for gratitude, in both scale and surprise.... It is one of those that leave the beneficiary speechless.[7]

Such a stance cleverly obscures her criticism of the bishop's dubious, deceptive behavior. In a discussion of the use of silence, readers can glean that Sor Juana may communicate as much through what she omits as through what she includes in the 'Reply':

Forgive, my Lady, the digression wrung from me by the force of truth; and, to tell the whole truth, as a way of eluding the difficulty of answering; indeed I had almost made up my mind to let silence be my answer. Yet, since silence is something negative, although it explains a great deal by its insistence on not explaining, some brief label is needed to enable one to understand what it is intended to mean. Otherwise, silence will say nothing, since its function is precisely that: to say nothing.[8]

In *Talking Back: Toward a Latin American Feminist Literary Criticism*, Debra A. Castillo distinguishes between choosing to remain silent and simply remaining silent: "One reaction to the pressures of the dominant social force is silence. Initially, however, silence is not a response but a condition imposed from outside: silencing, rather than silence freely chosen." [9] Sor Juana announces her silence in her *Reply*; that is, she explains that she is not going to remain silent, but that talking back, or breaking her silence, is her choice. Castillo rightly argues that "*no decir*" (not speaking) and "*callar*" (remaining silent) are actions of different orders. After months of not commenting, Sor Juana chose to break her silence by voicing through the *Reply* at least a partial version of her objections. In view of the sad politics of her context, she most likely could not have gotten away with more than what she writes explicitly and implies indirectly in her *Reply*.

In "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action," Audre Lorde claims "In the cause of silence, each of us draws the face of her own fear—fear of contempt, of censure, or some judgment, or recognition, of challenge, of annihilation. But most of all, I think, we fear the visibility without which we cannot truly live." [10] In effect, Sor Juana came to believe that her silence was tantamount to becoming invisible, and therefore she made the dramatic decision to break her silence and confront the bishop to the extent possible.

The "Reply" is largely autobiographical. Indeed, what little we know of Sor Juana's life comes primarily from this crucial letter. Sor Juana seeks through her own example, and the example of classical and biblical women, to defend a woman's right to education, knowledge, and reflection. She also manages to extract from St. Paul and St. Jerome passages that she uses to support a woman's right to be educated. The "Reply" showcases Sor Juana's mastery of theology, but she devotes much of the letter to explaining how the study of the secular world enhances and is necessary for the understanding of theology. Thus, she indirectly challenges the bishop's contention that she should devote herself solely to religious matters by proving her erudition in theology

and church history at the same time as she demonstrates her mastery of many secular intellectual domains. Following St. Theresa of Avila, Sor Juana explains to “Sor Philothea” how she philosophizes even while cooking. She writes, “If Aristotle had been a cook, he would have written much more.”[11] Ultimately, Sor Juana proves that devoting herself solely to religious matters would not serve to enhance her unparalleled knowledge or practice of them, but would only diminish her knowledge of the secular subjects that she had also mastered. In this sense, Sor Juana demonstrates that the bishop’s “suggestion” that she limit her pursuits to the religious could only be interpreted as arbitrary and punitive.

A few years after sending the “Reply” to the bishop, and after having parted with her books and instruments for having done so, Sor Juana succumbed to a plague while ministering to her sisters, and died on April 17, 1695. Her last years were undoubtedly marked by frustration, fear, and repression, but the “Reply” serves as an inspiring defense of her earlier participation in public life, her studies, and her poetry and prose writings. The ways in which she defends intellectual autonomy, particularly for women, and indirectly questions authority that seeks to repress such an endeavor, have led many to champion her as a symbol of independent thought.

In revisiting the silent (because silenced) women’s voices and placing those voices into dialogue within the Latin American tradition, I hope to have the silence say something, correcting the pernicious tendency of keeping the silenced voices from saying anything at all.[12] Perhaps because Sor Juana ultimately broke her silence, José Medina, in *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations*, focuses on her epistemic courage, her resistant imagination, and her heroism, bypassing her initial silence altogether. Instead, Medina underscores Sor Juana’s enormous impact through a phenomenon he calls “echoing”:

Her contemporaries, both supporters and critics alike, took her seriously and engaged with her writings and positions; and this was indeed a crucial mechanism by which her voice and writings acquired currency and became a point of reference for future acts of resistance and for other eccentric voices wanting to exert epistemic friction, which in turn slowly eroded the epistemic exclusions and moved the center of gravity of the social imaginary away from uncontested male privilege. Thus the individual words of an eccentric voice such as Sor Juana’s become part of interconnected discourses that echo each other and become mutually supportive (even if in tension).[13]

That Sor Juana broke her silence is arguably more significant than her initial decision to be silent for months. However, in her *Reply*, readers can discern the effects of her having maintained a silence for a time, and they can understand that she still had to leave much unsaid in crafting her letter. Even in deciding to break her silence, Sor Juana still accepted that she had to self-censor to some extent in consideration of the predicament in which she found herself. While she tells us much in her *Reply*, what she leaves unsaid also speaks volumes. The silence of women’s voices is, to echo the

sentiment of Sor Juana, a silence that says something, namely, something about the work still to be done towards making the Latin American philosophical tradition whole.

II Gender, Race, and Nationality: Zea and the Challenge of *Mestizaje*

Three centuries after Sor Juana, another Mexican thinker foresaw that race should be as important a consideration as gender in Latin American philosophy. Leopoldo Zea's thinking about race was significantly impacted by José Vasconcelos's seminal essay, *The Cosmic Race*, (1925). Yet Zea's exalted view of *mestizaje* was coupled with his denial of the needs of indigenous peoples for a unique group identity in modern Mexico, a polarity clear in assertions such as the following:

The mixing process, which, I insist, is not simply racial, has eliminated the conflict between Whites and Indians.[14]

In any case, the Indian, the *mestizo* and the *criollo*, accepting a division that no longer matters in this country, can all leave their situation of subordination by other means in which racial division no longer matters. What matters are Mexicans plain and simple, of one skin color or another, just as they can be tall or short, thin or fat, without any of these things having anything to do with their social situation in modern Mexico and in Latin America, as she continues to define herself.[15]

The mixing of lineages and cultures, formerly viewed as degradation, is now presented as the race of races and the culture of cultures throughout the most remote regions of the world. This extends to Anglo-Saxon America, which is ceasing to be Anglo-Saxon and is becoming Latinized through the diverse racial and cultural expressions being manifested there.[16]

While Zea often demonstrated a clear understanding of the ways in which indigenous peoples were devastated and marginalized by the Conquest, he believed that *mestizaje* definitively solved the problem of racial discrimination and that his particular sense of *mexicanidad* could offer everyone the privileges of nationhood, of an overarching identity within a national community. Zea's optimism regarding the power of *mestizaje* to eradicate the problem of racial discrimination in Mexico today likely will seem misplaced, and could only have taken form because he generally failed to address specifically issues of social, legal, and economic justice as well as other issues relevant to the plight of indigenous peoples, which have arisen since independence and since the Revolution. Instead, to give him his due, Zea persuasively focused on the marginality produced through social, political, cultural, economic, military, and diplomatic dominations of Latin America by the hegemonic institutions of the "North," with the United States usually not far from his critiques (and with older, colonial issues with Spain as an empire as historical background).

Beginning in 1952, in his analyses of marginality, Zea noted that Indians, women, and children shared equally marginal status.[17] Although he did not develop a separate

treatment of the topic of women or of children, Zea did foresee the ways in which race and gender compete as explanations for marginality and oppression, a topic that has been widely discussed in the twenty-first century since many theorists of race and gender differ on which condition, race or gender, is primordial or definitive. For instance, Naomi Zack has argued, "I now think that the *axis* of oppression should be reconfigured from a liberatory perspective in ways that focus on gender."^[18] My view is that race and gender are well viewed as equiprimordial, though they usually appear unable to operate theoretically with equal force simultaneously. Gender cannot consistently be privileged over race, and vice versa. Theorizing how race and gender work simultaneously has proven challenging. In *Family Bonds: Genealogies of Race and Gender*, Ellen K. Feder writes:

We may find an image that captures the confounding inability to regard simultaneously the operation of race and gender in what are sometimes called 'reversible figure-ground' drawings, popularized by the Gestalt psychologists. In one of the best known of these drawings... a vase is visible against a contrasting background. When we look at the vase, the background recedes, but focusing on this background reveals the distinctive outline of two faces in profile. Despite the fact that the contours of the vase define the faces and vice versa, each image becomes visible only when the other image is forced to the ground; only one is visible at a time.^[19]

As in the figure-ground drawing, if race is foregrounded, gender is backgrounded, and *vice versa*. Zea's ability to foresee the need to weigh race and gender against one another, and to explore their relationship to one another, may be his most salient contribution to the contemporary discussion of race and ethnicity in Latin America. However, he did not view nationality and race on a par, instead decidedly privileging nationality as serving to achieve a corrective liberation from a marginalized Mexican identity. For Zea, a potential, re-formed national identity trumps both racial and gendered identity.

Zea's focus on *mestizaje* seemingly has the effect of erasing the problem of the exclusion of women. Whereas Zack focuses on gender, for Zea, race appears to trump gender when coloniality is simultaneously brought into the discussion. So long as women are contemplated together with men when Zea endorses *mestizaje*, he intends for the new "cosmic race" and nationhood to benefit all Mexicans equally. However, if we consider women's relationship to *mestizaje* separately and specifically, we encounter complications that long pre-date Zea in regard to how, by focusing on either gender or race, one can mask the other to the detriment of a more equiprimordial analysis of Latina identities.

III La Malinche: Inversion of a Paradigm

More than five centuries ago, the woman known alternately as Malinal, Malintzin, Malinche, or Doña Marina was assigned to Hernán Cortés as a slave. La Malinche became one of the most reviled figures in Mexican history because she was believed to

have opened the door to the European invaders and enabled the conquest. La Malinche and a Spanish priest, Gerónimo Aguilar, worked in tandem to interpret for Cortés by transferring Nahuatl (the Aztec language) first to the Chontol Mayan language and then to Spanish. They continued this practice until La Malinche learned Spanish and could herself interpret directly from Nahuatl to Spanish for Cortés. La Malinche also had a child by Cortés. Sandra Messinger Cypess, in *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, summarizes Malinche's identity this way: "Protector of the foreigner, she was also the Great Mother; the child she bore Cortés, Don Martín, was considered the first mestizo, origin of the Mexican nation, the union of the Amerindian and European." [20]

To some in Mexico and Latin America (and the U.S.), La Malinche became a traitor who sold out what is today Mexico, along with its people, because her linguistic skills aided Cortés in his conquest and because she bore his child. However, if Vasconcelos, Zea, and others laud *mestizaje* in the twentieth century as a crowning cultural achievement, why was La Malinche, producer of a historic *mestizo*, viewed in such a negative light and still to blame almost all the way through the twentieth century? In Pilar Godayol's re-reading of the myth, she emphasizes nineteenth and twentieth-century insistence on the traditional myth:

Norma Alarcón tells how, on the day of Mexican Independence in 1861, the politician and man of letters Ignacio 'El Nigromante' Ramírez reminded those celebrating that the Mexican people 'owed their defeat to Malintzin—Cortés's whore' (1989, 58). Ever since the Spanish chronicles, in texts before and after Independence and right up to the twentieth-century literature of Mexican and Chicano authors, La Malinche has been interpreted as a 'Mexican Eve', a traitor who sold herself to the conquerors, an egoist who worked and spoke for herself and not for the community. [21]

Let's exercise a brief revisionist speculation: What if La Malinche had been a man? While he would not have had a child with Cortés, he would still have been his interpreter. Rather than becoming known as El Malinche, might he be viewed today as a brilliant entrepreneur who secured privilege and status for himself, cleverly working his way out of slavery? Why does Gerónimo Aguilar, the Spanish priest who co-interpreted with La Malinche, share none of the blame for the betrayal? He has been de-emphasized almost to the point of invisibility, as if La Malinche had single-handedly interpreted for Cortés. Finally, should Mexican and Chicana women today, upon giving birth, view themselves as perpetuating betrayal, or should they seek to endorse feminist interpretations of history and adopt a new identity for themselves?

The paradigm shift in the Malinche myth began with works such as *El eterno femenino* (1975) by Rosario Castellanos and *Águila o sol* (1985) by Sabina Berman, which re-examined the historical facts and began to question the patriarchal imagery of the myth. Subsequently, Chicana writers have gone much further, inverting the paradigm. According to Godayol "They have identified themselves with her [La Malinche] to such an extent that any negative interpretation of the myth is considered an attack on their community, defined as that of multiple, 'in-between' women living

between two cultures and two tongues.”[22] Contrary to the original themes of the Malinche myth, a theme that reappears in Chicana writings is “the victimization of the figure of La Malinche in a colonial context and the reaffirmation that she was the founder of a new people, ‘*La Raza*.”[23] Among the authors who echo this new portrayal are Carmen Tafolla, Gloria Anzaldúa, Naomi Quiñones, and Cherríe Moraga. Moraga writes:

As a Chicana and feminist, I must like other Chicanas before me, examine the effects this myth has on my/our racial/sexual identity and my relationship with other Chicanas. There is hardly a Chicana growing up today who does not suffer under her name even if she never hears directly of the one-time Aztec princess.
[24]

Through reflection on issues of resistance, assimilation, difference, *mestizaje*, and the appropriation of the figure of Malinche, these Chicana women eventually uprooted the traditional myth and have offered a more salutary and compelling Malinche story.

IV Colonial Difference and Gender Differences

With this reference to Chicana women, the problem of identity has now migrated to the United States. Linda Martín Alcoff deftly describes the trouble of mapping the categories of race from Latin America onto U.S. racial terrain:

The question of Latina/o identity’s relationship to the conventional categories of race that have been historically dominant in the United States is a particularly vexing one. To put it straightforwardly, we simply don’t fit. Racialized identities in the United States have long connoted homogeneity, easily visible identifying features, and biological heredity, but none of these characteristics apply to Latinas/os in the United States, nor even to any one national subset, such as Cuban Americans or Puerto Ricans. We are not homogenous by “race,” we are often not identifiable by visible features or even by names, and such issues as disease heredity that are often cited as the biologically relevant sign of race are inapplicable to such a heterogeneous group.[25]

Individual immigrants face a microcosm similar to that faced by Latin American philosophy itself, a matter of separation and fracture. Walter Dignolo refers to this condition as the double bind between excessive similarity and excessive difference. In “Philosophy and Colonial Difference,” he writes: “The double bind is the colonial difference and the structure of power that maintains it is the coloniality of power.”[26] Such a notion of colonial difference is reinforced by an insight from Robert Bernasconi, who describes the analogous situation of African philosophy:

Western philosophy traps African philosophy in a double bind: either African philosophy is so similar to Western philosophy that it makes no distinctive contribution and effectively disappears; or it is so different that its credentials to be genuine philosophy will always be in doubt.[27]

According to Mignolo, philosophy is located on the edge of colonial difference: “To think from the colonial difference means, today, assuming philosophy as a regional practice and simultaneously thinking against and beyond its normative and disciplinary regulations.”[28] In short, to “decolonize philosophy,” we must think beyond Eurocentrism. By thematizing the issue of Latina identity, we take important steps in the direction of decolonizing thought: of thinking of subjects in broader ways, of including insights from thinkers too often excluded from our discourse by the philosophical Minutemen of our profession, who would limit the field to a select group of male thinkers from England, France, German, and the Anglo-Saxon world (which effectively ghettoizes Latin American philosophy) and so of moving in the direction of achieving the goal of making philosophy into a truly global search for truth.

It would be misleading to reduce Latin American philosophy to any one set of issues or to essentialize it. Mignolo’s point about colonial difference is merely a useful frame by which to see some of the reasons why Latin American philosophy has been systematically excluded from the academic and high-culture canon for so long, but it cannot and should not be used as if it provided an objective stance from which to dictate content. In considering the problem of Latina identity, we cannot ignore the role that such legacies of colonization have played in Latin America and continue to play for Latinas in the United States and elsewhere.

V Conclusion

What is the price of not giving enough attention to the colonial condition of Latinas in the United States? As Alcoff reminds us, “The U.S. pan-Latina/o identity is perhaps the newest and most important identity that has emerged in the recent period. The concept of a pan-Latina/o identity is not new in Latin America: Simón Bolívar called for it nearly two hundred years ago as a strategy for anti-colonialism, but also because it provided a name for the ‘new peoples’ that had emerged from the conquest.”[29] For Alcoff, philosophy can play an important role in developing the tools to enable us to come to an understanding of the identity of both Latinos and Latinas, as race and gender are brought to our attention. The initially silenced voice of Sor Juana, which eventually surfaced as a significant example of effective resistance and the power of female agency, can help us navigate these difficult waters. By revisiting the history of thought in Latin America, certain voices, too long silenced, may be heard again, or even for the first time, enabling a more complete, richer, fruitful account of the problem of Latina/o identity to unfold.

A concluding point: Linda Alcoff came to the problem of Latina/o identity in order to address a matter of social justice. In the opening of *Visible Identities: Race, Gender and the Self*, Alcoff explained:

In this book my goal is to cast serious doubt on [the] suspicion of difference by explicating some of the important features of specific identities: race/ethnicity, sex/gender, and the new pan-Latino identity.[30]

Alcoff brings visibility to the pan-Latino identity, weaving these issues into her thought so that a new set of problems can emerge to broaden our field. Moreover, Alcoff is aware that the conception of philosophy as standing above or apart from other disciplines must fall if we are to have the tools we need to address the new problems facing us:

In this project I join with the new movement of scholars (often working in ethnic studies and women's studies) who argue that the acknowledgment of the important differences in social identity does not lead inexorably to political relativism or fragmentation, but that, quite the reverse, it is the *refusal* to acknowledge the importance of the differences in our identities that has led to distrust, miscommunication, and thus disunity. In a climate in which one cannot invoke history, culture, race, or gender for fear of being accused of playing, for example, "the race card," or identity politics, or "victim feminism," our *real* commonalities and shared interests cannot even begin to be correctly identified. When I refuse to listen to how you are different from me, I am refusing to know who you are. But without understanding fully who you are, I will never be able to appreciate precisely how we are more alike than I might have originally supposed.[31]

Alcoff calls for philosophers to join forces with other disciplines and melt the boundaries that separate practitioners so that we can come to a fuller understanding of the problem of identity. So a more careful look at what is often excluded in discussions of identity in the Latin American tradition, namely, the topic of gender, can lead us to revisit the history of Latin American thought, and free the voices of figures such as Sor Juana from the silence that had entrapped them and robbed us of their wisdom and insights. Imagining La Malinche as a traitor involves imagining that she willingly assimilated, or in Mignolo's terms, that she willingly acquiesced to excessive similarity rather than differentiating herself and becoming an *other* in the eyes of a Spanish coloniality of power. However, what if La Malinche, unlike Sor Juana, who had two choices (marriage or the convent), had only one choice (acquiesce)? Perhaps an added benefit much to be hoped for is that a more inclusive account of identity might also finally, humanely clarify and exculpate La Malinche.

Notes

[1] I am very grateful to Adriana Novoa and Andrea Pitts, and to two anonymous reviewers, for their insightful and helpful suggestions on this essay. I use the plural forms, "Latina identities" and "Latina voices," throughout the essay so as to individuate rather than homogenize or unify Latinas in the context of identity. See Arlene Dávila, *Latino Spin: Public Image and the Whitewashing of Race* (New York University Press, 2008) and Cristina Beltrán, *The Trouble with Unity: Latino Politics and the Creation of Identity* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

[2] See, for example, Stephanie Merrim, *Early Modern Women's Writing and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1999), 139.

[3] See Octavio Paz, *Sor Juana, or The Traps of Faith*, Trans. Margaret Sayers Peden (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

[4] This question formed the title of a paper given at a convention of the Modern Language Association.

[5] Alan S. Trueblood, *A Sor Juana Anthology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 113.

[6] See Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1983).

[7] Alan S. Trueblood, *A Sor Juana Anthology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 205.

[8] *Ibid.*, 207.

[9] Debra A. Castillo, *Talking Back: Toward a Latin American Feminist Literary Criticism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), 37.

[10] Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde* (Berkeley, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984), 42.

[11] Trueblood, 226.

[12] For more on the function of silence in Sor Juana's essay, see Amy A. Oliver, "La ironía de 'la más mínima criatura del mundo,' Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, en su *Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz*," *Cuadernos americanos*, Año II, No. 1 (enero/febrero de 1988), 64-71.

[13] José Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 234 (emphasis his).

[14] Leopoldo Zea, *Fin del siglo XX ¿Centuria perdida?* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1996), 99. "La mestización que —insisto— no es simplemente racial, ha disuelto la pugna indio contra blanco."

[15] Zea, *Ibid.*, 100. "En todo caso, el indígena, el mestizo y el criollo, aceptando una division que ya no cuenta en el país, podrán por igual salir de su situación de subordinación por otras vías en las que nada cuenta ya esa division racial. Se trata de mexicanos sin más, de un color de piel o de otro, como pueden ser altos o bajos, flacos o gordos, sin que lo uno o lo otro tenga nada que ver con su situación social en el México moderno y en la América que va perfilándose." Additionally, Zea wrote similarly, "The race that has formed in Latin America is not an inferior race because it is the sum total of races and cultures."

"Not being white, having a particular culture, far from being an expression of inferiority, comes to be an expression of what makes a person a person; that is, their personality and their individuality. People are equal, but different; they are similar by being individuals."

[16] Leopoldo Zea, *Descubrimiento e identidad latinoamericana* (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1990), 67. "La mestización de estirpes y culturas, vista ayer como degradación, se extiende ahora como raza de razas y cultura de culturas por las más remotas regions de la Tierra. Se extiende sobre la América

Sajona, que va dejando de ser sajona y se latiniza al asumir las diversas expresiones raciales y culturales que allí se van dando cita.”

[17] See Leopoldo Zea, *Dos ensayos sobre México y lo mexicano* (México: Porrúa, 1987).

[18] Naomi Zack, “Ethnicity, Race, and the Importance of Gender,” in *Race or Ethnicity? On Black and Latino Identity*, Ed. Jorge J.E. Gracia (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 120 emphasis hers.

[19] Ellen K. Feder, *Family Bonds: Genealogies of Race and Gender* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 90.

[20] Sandra Messinger Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature: From History to Myth* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1991), 9.

[21] Pilar Godayol, “Malintzin/La Malinche/Doña Marina: Re-reading the myth of the treacherous translator,” *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 1, April 2012, 61-76.

[22] Godayol, 68.

[23] Godayol, 69.

[24] Cherríe Moraga, *Loving in the War Years* (Boston: South End Press, 1983), 100.

[25] Linda Martín Alcoff, “Is Latina/o Identity a Racial Identity?” in *Hispanics/Latinos in the United States: Ethnicity, Race, and Rights*, edited by Jorge J. E. Gracia and Pablo de Greiff, (New York: Routledge, 2000): 23-44.

[26] Walter Mignolo, “Philosophy and the Colonial Difference,” in *Latin American Philosophy: Currents, Issues, Debates*, edited by Eduardo Mendieta (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), 82.

[27] Cited by Mignolo, in *Ibid*, 82.

[28] *Ibid*, 85.

[29] Alcoff, “Is Latina/o Identity a Racial Identity?” *op. cit.*, 317.

[30] Linda Martín Alcoff, *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 6.

[31] *Ibid*.

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