

Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy



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APA NEWSLETTER ON

Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy

CARLOS ALBERTO SÁNCHEZ, EDITOR

VOLUME 18 | NUMBER 2 | SPRING 2019

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Carlos Alberto Sánchez

SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY

As I see it, the purpose of this newsletter is simple: to engage with and promote work of possible and actual interest to the Latinx/Hispanic philosophical community in the US. The newsletter is thus a meeting-point, and each individual newsletter is a gathering in which issues, themes, lines of inquiry, local or global urgencies, or otherwise intellectual work of relevance to us can enter into a conversation that is at times just beginning and at times well underway. The newsletter is, in this sense, a record of a continuous conversation about Latinx/Latin American philosophy in the US. Over the past ten years, we have attempted to fulfill this purpose by publishing essays, interviews, reviews, etc., that are both of the highest quality and contribute to what we can call *our* tradition, or, as Manuel Vargas puts it in this issue, *our* "microcanon"—a term that is sure to arouse debate.

We begin the present newsletter with our "Spotlight," where we formally introduce our readers to the new co-editor of the newsletter, Lori Gallegos de Castillo. Lori brings energy, perspective, and vision to the newsletter and, as she transitions into the role of editor, these will be in full display as we seek to solidify the role of the newsletter as a central gathering place for Latinx and Latin American philosophy.

Next, we present three essays: the first, "Letting Go of *Mestizaje*: Settler Colonialism and Latin American/Latinx Philosophy," is the 2018 winner of the APA Prize in Latin American Thought. In this essay, Julio Covarrubias criticizes our blind reliance on the concept of "mestizaje" and urges us to "let it go" given its ideological baggage. Covarrubias tells us that the narrative of mestizaje "speak[s] of a process of elimination. It [speaks to] a kind of cultural genocide that reproduces settler erasures."

Covarrubias's critical dismantling of the ideology of mestizaje is already a contribution to our "canon" or "microcanon." It is to this issue of "canon formation" that our second essay speaks. Manuel Vargas's "Canonical Philosophy, Mexican Philosophy," thinks about the "now-coalescing microcanon of Mexican philosophy," a reflection motivated by the recent Oxford publication of Sánchez and Sanchez, *Mexican Philosophy in the 20th Century*. Vargas suggests that rather than think about "canons," we must now begin to think about "microcanons," which "proclaim

that this and that ought to be studied. Unlike the older kind of canon, they add a further thought: . . . *but only if you are in to that kind of thing.*"

The third, and final, essay, by Gertrude James González de Allen, is a study of Afro-Latinas' relation to the objects under their care. Her study includes an examination of care for sacred objects, paid labor (care for objects that are not one's own), and care for objects that are cherished for their ties to family and history. This focus reveals complexity in the nature of the subjectivity within oppressive systems and responds to Gloria Anzaldúa's call to challenge limiting subject-object dualities.

On the whole, this issue exemplifies the diversity of our interests as a philosophical community and the range of themes that we are willing to explore. It also points to new, future directions in our philosophy, directions filled with possibility and promise. Finally, we invite our readers to consider submitting to the various conferences and publication opportunities included here.

CALLS FOR SUBMISSIONS

APA NEWSLETTER ON HISPANIC/LATINO ISSUES IN PHILOSOPHY

The *APA Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy* is accepting contributions for the fall 2019 issue. Our readers are encouraged to submit original work on any topic related to Hispanic/Latino thought, broadly construed. We publish original, scholarly treatments, as well as reflections, book reviews, and interviews. Please prepare articles for anonymous review.

All submissions should be accompanied by a short biographical summary of the author. Electronic submissions are preferred. All submissions should be limited to 5,000 words (twenty double-spaced pages) and must follow the APA guidelines for gender-neutral language and *The Chicago Manual of Style* formatting. All articles submitted to the newsletter undergo anonymous review by members of the Committee on Hispanics.

BOOK REVIEWS

Book reviews in any area of Hispanic/Latino philosophy, broadly construed, are welcome. Submissions should be accompanied by a short biographical summary of the author. Book reviews may be short (500 words) or long (1,500 words). Electronic submissions are preferred.

DEADLINES

Deadline for the spring issue is November 15. Authors should expect a decision by January 15. Deadline for the fall issue is April 15. Authors should expect a decision by June 15.

Please send all articles, book reviews, queries, comments, or suggestions electronically to the editor,

Carlos Alberto Sánchez, at carlos.sanchez@sjsu.edu, or by post: Department of Philosophy
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FORMATTING GUIDELINES

The *APA Newsletters* adhere to *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Use as little formatting as possible. Details like page numbers, headers, footers, and columns will be added later. Use tabs instead of multiple spaces for indenting. Use italics instead of underlining. Use an “em dash” (—) instead of a double hyphen (--). Use endnotes instead of footnotes. Examples of proper endnote style: John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 90. See Sally Haslanger, “Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?” *Noûs* 34 (2000): 31–55.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS: PHILOSOPHY COMPASS

Philosophy Compass solicits contributions of high-quality papers on issues/themes/ideas related to Latinx/Latin American philosophy.

Papers must not be longer than 6,000 words. Papers should be written for a general audience with minimal jargon but should be opinionated, original survey articles. Submissions should cover more than just a narrow issue or debate, and should contribute something new or original to the area.

“*Philosophy Compass* is an online-only journal publishing original, peer-reviewed survey articles of the most important research from across the entire discipline. *Philosophy Compass* fills a gap left by existing guides within the subject by focusing on what is happening right now in philosophy. Providing an ideal starting point for non-specialists, *Philosophy Compass* publishes well written pieces explaining important debates within all areas of the field.”

Please prepare manuscripts for blind review.

Send submissions to:

Carlos A. Sánchez at carlos.sanchez@sjsu.edu. Subject line: Philosophy Compass. Deadline is ongoing.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS: GENEALOGY

The journal *Genealogy* is seeking contributions for a special issue on “Future Directions in Latinx/Latin American Philosophy.” See the following website for submission information and description of Special Issue: https://www.mdpi.com/journal/genealogy/special_issues/philosophy

Genealogy (ISSN 2313-5778) is an international, scholarly, peer-reviewed, open access journal devoted to the analysis of genealogical narratives (with applications for family, race/ethnic, gender, migration and science studies) and scholarship that uses genealogical theory and methodologies to examine historical processes.

SPOTLIGHT

Lori Gallegos de Castillo

TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY

Q. What drew you to Latin American philosophy?

A. As an undergraduate philosophy major at the University of New Mexico, I did not have an opportunity to take a Latin American philosophy class. Although I believe I received an excellent education, I struggled to find philosophy that spoke directly to the moral issues that I cared about most at the time, which had to do with immigration, the struggles of the poor, and US military interventions abroad. Immigration, in particular, has always been an issue that I have cared about in a very personal way. I worked in family based immigration law as a senior at the university and for some time before starting graduate school. Serving immigrant families in my city was an honor, and I considered going to law school instead of graduate school in philosophy, but I ultimately wanted more opportunities to critique unjust laws, rather than think and work within the confines of the law. I learned later that Latin American and Latinx philosophy offer resources for thinking about the issues that were of great importance to me, and for doing so from the perspectives of those who are most vulnerable. I am convinced that more philosophy programs ought to offer undergraduate courses in Latin American philosophy because there are many students who may find that something in Latin American and Latinx philosophy resonates with them in very meaningful ways.

It wasn't until several years into graduate school that I really had a chance to begin learning about Latin American and Latinx philosophy. I received a grant to attend the Center of Study and Investigation for Decolonial Dialogues' decolonial summer school in Barcelona. It was there, under the instruction of Nelson Maldonado-Torres and Linda Alcoff, that I read works by Enrique Dussel, Anibal Quijano, Walter Dignolo, Maria Lugones, Sylvia Winter, and Frantz Fanon, as well as work in standpoint epistemology. The experience was deeply unsettling and transformative. Many aspects of my thinking—about social justice, about race, about world history, about knowledge and the role of philosophy as a discipline, and my sense of my own

responsibilities in light of all of this—were turned upside down. Many of the lessons that I learned at the summer school, like seeing the legacy of colonialism as ongoing, and recognizing that philosophy can be a complicit or liberatory practice, are now foundational to my thinking.

In addition to decolonial theory, I also gradually learned more about Latina/x feminisms. Eduardo Mendieta introduced me to the work of Ada María Isasi-Díaz. Through my participation as a graduate assistant at PIKSI (Philosophy in an Inclusive Key Summer Institute), Mariana Ortega introduced me to the work of Gloria Anzaldúa. One of the reasons that I am drawn to the work of these and other Latina/x feminists is because they often begin with the everyday lived experience of those who are oppressed, and then they build philosophically outward from there. The works of Latina/x feminists are often written to be taken on their own terms, but they can also be put into fascinating conversation with philosophy from Anglo-American, Continental, or other traditions. I love the idea that everyday moments—even (or especially) those which are typically invisibilized—are a starting place for philosophy. After graduate school, I continued to study the work Ortega, Ofelia Schutte, Linda Alcoff, and Maria Lugones.

Q. What are some of the topics in Latin American philosophy that your current work addresses?

A. Another theme that emerges in Latina/x feminisms is that philosophy should be for everyone, including Latinx people in the US. It should resonate deeply with our concerns and intuitions, and help us make sense out of our lived experience. In this spirit, some of my current work comes from a more personal place, articulating philosophical problems concerning Latinx communities that I see and experience. One article that I am finishing up now is called “Conflicts of Home-Making: Strategies of Survival and the Politics of Assimilation.” It examines the tensions that emerge between Latinx communities who shape their environment in order to feel at home in a place where they are marginalized, and white assimilationists, who are troubled by a shifting US demographic, and who want to preserve their own sense of home.

In another project, called “The Interpreter’s Dilemma,” I aim to describe a particular unjust moral burden sometimes experienced by those who practice language and culture brokering for their non-English speaking family members. Focusing on this burden reveals a way in which the marginalization of non-English speaking immigrants impacts the broader Latinx community.

In the last year, I have also co-authored with my brother, Francisco Gallegos, two works in Latin American and Latinx metaphilosophy. One of these works is a chapter that surveys the history of Latin American thought on the question: Does Latin American philosophy even exist? This project has given me the opportunity to learn more about the work of philosophers like José Carlos Mariátegui, Risieri Frondizi, Augusto Salazar-Bondy, and Leopoldo Zea.

Q. What is your assessment of the state of Latin American and Latinx philosophy as a discipline?

A. I have seen how hard many of my colleagues have worked to create a place for Latin American and Latinx philosophy in the US. An increasing number of departments are offering Latin American philosophy courses, and new translations, textbooks, and special issues come out every year. I don’t want to overstate the case, but it seems as though it is no longer completely necessary (as it seemed to be when I was a student) to specialize in one of the broader subfields of the discipline and only dabble in Latin American philosophy on the side. Still, Latin American philosophy in the US faces substantial challenges. One of those challenges continues to be convincing those who have not had much exposure to Latin American philosophy of its richness and importance. I think that for all people, it can be difficult to have an appreciation for that which is very culturally different. This is especially true when one internalizes negative biases about a given area of study. But I also think that if people have an open disposition and are willing to put in some time and effort towards learning more about Latin American philosophy, there is a good chance that they will find these encounters to be rewarding. Another challenge for the field has to do with US scholars’ lack of access to both contemporary and historical works from Latin America. Some scholars, including Carlos Alberto Sánchez and Robert Eli Sanchez, are working hard to address this, but there is so, so much work to be done.

Q. How do you see the role of this newsletter in the broader Latinx philosophical community? And how do you envision your approach as editor?

A. One thing that makes the newsletter an exciting venue is that not only anonymously reviewed articles, but also interviews, translations, syllabi, book reviews, conference reports, and announcements are published. Furthermore, the newsletter is not meant to be restrictive in terms of philosophical style or subject matter. For this reason, I see it as an inclusive point of contact for the growing community of Latin American and Latinx philosophers. At the same time, the APA newsletters are widely distributed, so the publication is able to reach people who may not otherwise have much exposure to Latin American and Latinx philosophy. The newsletter often includes content that is accessible to broad audiences in philosophy, and it keeps a finger on the pulse of the subfield. I hope that the newsletter continues to receive submissions that engage in comparative philosophy, as well as work that aims towards broad audiences in general. One of the great aspects of the newsletter is that it features the work of both established and junior scholars. I would like both of these groups to continue to see the newsletter as belonging to them, to submit often, and to organize special issues addressing emerging areas of importance. I am also interested in encouraging submissions that push boundaries in terms of their focus on work from and/or for those that have been marginalized within the discipline and subfield, such as queer, feminist, Indigenous, and Afro-Latinx philosophies. Finally, I am interested in facilitating the community’s exposure to previously untranslated contemporary and historical philosophy from Latin America.

I am thrilled about, and deeply grateful for, this opportunity to support our community as co-editor (and, eventually, editor) of the newsletter. This is an exciting moment for us, and I look forward to being a part of what we are creating together!

ARTICLES

Letting Go of Mestizaje: Settler Colonialism and Latin American/Latinx Philosophy

Winner, 2018 APA Essay Prize in Latin American Thought

Julio Covarrubias
UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

1. INTRODUCTION

The Latin American discourse on *mestizaje*—that tradition of thought on the cultural and racial admixture of the region that Latin American intellectuals have seen as its unique, defining feature—has fallen into disrepute. It has long been the verdict of historians and social scientists that this tradition functioned in an ideological manner—acting as justification for the ongoing oppression and neglect of Indigenous peoples, as the Latin American version of “melting-pot” assimilationism, or even as a eugenicist project of cultural and racial whitening (“*blanqueamiento*”).¹ At the same time, few other ideas in Latin American history have exercised so much influence over Latin American and Latinx intellectuals—including present-day scholars. All of us, it seems, are held in awe of it, perpetually carrying the burden—as Jack Forbes put it—“of genuflecting before the shrine of *mestizaje* [sic].”² In doing so as uncritically as we tend to, I claim, Latinx philosophers unwittingly reproduce a specific kind of epistemic injustice not only against Indigenous peoples, but “*mestizos*” themselves.³

2. THE HISTORICAL DISCOURSE ON MESTIZAJE

The genealogy of the concept of *mestizaje*, and its institutional uptake in Latin America, reveal that *mestizaje*-discourse is not simply racist, but a function of colonial processes of state-formation—both of which it cannot easily be disentangled from. It’s well known that a key difference between the Spanish and Anglo modes of colonization was that the former didn’t simply condone miscegenation between European and “Indian,” it encouraged it—indeed, utilized it as “a form of colonial governmentality.”⁴ This produced a colonial caste system (the *sistema de las castas*), dividing the population in a manner unlike Anglo settler colonialism: rather than bifurcate all its people according to the binary of “white”–“nonwhite,” the Spanish colony distributed rights, benefits, burdens, and privileges by reference to the *degrees* by which a person was “mixed,” by degrees of their “racial purity.”⁵ It’s in this context that a racial category denoting racial/culture admixture or miscegenation—*mestizaje*—emerged.⁶

The fact of “admixture” in turn spawned the tradition of social and political theory in Latin America that saw this miscegenation as the key social process to be contended

with in the region’s path to modernization. This had institutional implications. To take the case of Mexico, it’s no secret that Mexican nationalism, from the independence movement onward, revolved around various notions of *mestizaje*.⁷ As María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo notes, by the mid-twentieth century, in the wake of the Mexican Revolution of 1910, *mestizo* identity had become “fully ensconced as a principle of citizenship.”⁸ This gave way to a tendency that came to be known as *indigenismo*, a pan-Latin American phenomenon that has been characterized by Peter Wade as centering around the idea that “indians need special recognition and that special values attach to them.”⁹ From the 1920s on, “the indian became a symbol of national identity in countries such as Mexico and Peru: both countries created government departments for indigenous affairs.”¹⁰ Thus, in Mexico, representations of “the indian” proliferated in the wake of the Revolution, for instance, in the work of the muralists.

Based more on the glorification and romanticization of a “lost” pre-Columbian past than on respect for contemporary Indigenous communities, *indigenismo*, too, was ideological. The future, Wade observes, was always envisioned as “integrated and mestizo.”¹¹ Time and again, scholars of race in Latin America have arrived at the same conclusions about *mestizaje* and *indigenismo*: “Historically,” Saldaña-Portillo observes, “the Indian has been understood as the cause for the failure of national cultures to congeal in Latin America. Thus, as state policy, twentieth-century *indigenismo* set out to modernize the Indian element in national cultures, integrating indigenous populations into mestizo life.”¹² By always “recuperating” Mexican indigeneity as a thing of the past, then, *indigenismo* always *erased* the existence of contemporary Indigenous peoples and with this the possibility of Indigenous futures.¹³

3. THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF SETTLER COLONIALISM¹⁴

But what does it mean to *erase* indigeneity? Ubiquitous in settler colonial and Indigenous studies—but *absent* in the literature on epistemic injustice¹⁵—this usage of “erasure” has a distinct meaning from its usage in other “social justice” contexts. Hence, it is right to call it, as Potawatomi philosopher Kyle Powys Whyte calls it, *settler erasure*.¹⁶ More than simply “covering over” or “making invisible,” it is tied in an important way to the analysis of settler colonialism as a territorial project underpinned by a *logic of elimination*.¹⁷ For Patrick Wolfe, the late leading proponent of this view, the organizing principle of settler colonialism is “the elimination of Indigenous forms of life.”¹⁸ Settler colonialism, he says, “strives for the dissolution of native societies,” while also erecting “a new colonial society on the expropriated land base”; “settler colonizers come to stay,” he quips. “Invasion is a structure not an event.”¹⁹

This structure need not require *biological* genocide. As an ongoing territorial project, it can manifest in as diverse strategies as “officially encouraged miscegenation, the breaking-down of native title into alienable individual freeholds, native citizenship, child abduction, religious conversion, resocialization in total institutions such as missions or boarding schools, and a whole range of cognate

biocultural assimilations.²⁰ But no matter its manifestations, says Yellowknives Dene scholar Glen Coulthard, the settler colonial relationship is one “structured into a relatively secure or sedimented set of hierarchical social relations that continue to facilitate the *dispossession* of Indigenous peoples of [i] their lands and [ii] [their] self-determining authority.”²¹ The irreducible element of settler colonial power, therefore, is *access to territory*—an aim secured by the disarticulation of Indigenous senses of place and identity.²²

To epistemically “erase” in this context, then, has an almost literal meaning: to erase Indigenous peoples means to try to make it so that Indigenous peoples do not exist as Indigenous peoples. It is part and parcel to the settler colonial project. This has both a practical component—for instance, policies or practices aimed at eliminating Indigenous peoples—as well as epistemic/hermeneutical components, manifesting in such things as cultural appropriation,²³ in the use, as we’ll see, of colonial categories, and in the designation of Indigenous peoples as just another racialized “ethnic” or “minority” group among others, which obscures the fact that Indigenous peoples are occupied nations undergoing colonization.²⁴

This epistemic dimension reveals that there are specific forms of *hermeneutical injustices* suffered by Indigenous peoples, but ones distinct from the notion of hermeneutical injustice first articulated by Miranda Fricker.²⁵ On Fricker’s account, hermeneutical injustices result from identity prejudices that are built into “collective hermeneutical resources,” the resources available for communicating or participating in meaning-making practices.²⁶ Such injustices occur when structurally prejudiced hermeneutical resources unfairly inhibit the ability of marginalized social groups to make sense of and communicate social experiences that it is in their interest to be able to convey.²⁷ The paradigmatic case offered by Fricker is women’s inability to articulate or, to an extent, to even comprehend their experience of sexual harassment prior to the existence of a concept for this kind of harm.²⁸

This is not precisely what’s going on in the case of settler erasure, and yet there is a kind of hermeneutical injustice.²⁹ Consider cultural appropriation. Criticizing “white shamans,” Phillip J. Deloria (Standing Rock Sioux) notes that:

The tendency of New Age devotees to find in Indianness personal solutions to the question of living the good life meant that Indian Others were imagined in almost exclusively positive terms—communitarian, environmentally wise, spiritually insightful. This happy multiculturalism blunted the edge of earlier calls for social change by focusing on pleasant cultural exchanges that erased the complex history of Indians and others.³⁰

While there are multiple epistemic dimensions at issue here, I want to call attention to what we might refer to as *erasure by colonial categories*: when caricatures and fetishistic images of what it means to be Indigenous hermeneutically blot out the complexities of Indigenous identities, experiences, histories, and geographies from

the *social imagination*. By “social imagination,” I refer to the “repository of images and scripts that become collectively shared . . . the representational background against which people tend to share their thoughts and listen to each other in a culture.”³¹ As José Medina notes, hermeneutical injustices don’t just occur because of conceptual lacunae, they can also be produced when the available meanings create epistemic *obstacles* to our even finding certain things *imaginable*.³² As cultural appropriation depends on, and thus replicates, notions of indigeneity that are inhuman—for instance, colonial images of “noble savages” who are always placed in an idyllic past, outside of the *temporal bounds* of modernity³³—the settler imagination thus erases Indigenous peoples.

This harm is tied to the logic of elimination. In erasing contemporary Indigenous complexities, cultural appropriation renders indigeneity no longer fluid or dynamic or coeval: to be Indigenous is to exist in the past. This kind of erasure discursively makes it impossible, unimaginable that indigeneities could be contemporary, implying too that there is no Indigenous future.³⁴ In the context of contemporary colonialism, then, cultural appropriation contributes to the creation of a world where it would be impossible *to be* Indigenous. As Taiaiake Alfred (Kahnawake Mohawk) and Jeff Corntassel (Tsalagi) put it:

Contemporary Settlers follow the mandate provided for them by their imperial forefathers’ colonial legacy, not by attempting to eradicate the physical signs of Indigenous peoples as human *bodies*, but by trying to eradicate their existence as *peoples* through the erasure of the histories and geographies that provide the foundation for Indigenous cultural identities and sense of self.³⁵

Epistemic settler erasure is, then, a distinct epistemic harm suffered by Indigenous peoples. It is an epistemic injustice that is inextricably and concomitantly linked to settler colonization as an ongoing territorial project. It is the *epistemic* dispossession of Indigenous specificity that accompanies—indeed, that is required to achieve—the dispossession of Indigenous peoples of their territory and self-determining authority.

4. LATINX PHILOSOPHY AND SETTLER COLONIALISM

When Latinx philosophers today deploy notions of *mestizaje* in our attempts to theorize the Latinx condition; when we attempt to define Latinx identities in the terms received by us from the legacy of colonization—in all such cases, we cannot help also bring into theory the terms on which the historical discourse of *mestizaje* rests. To show this, I conclude by considering an example: Jorge J. E. Gracia’s attempt to develop a notion of Hispanic/Latinx identity.³⁶ While Gracia seeks a notion of “Hispanic identity” (which he prefers over “Latino” identity) that is non-essentialist, he nonetheless makes use of—as so it seems he must—some notion of *mestizaje* to explain how this “community” came about in the first place. As this is not *ipso facto* problematic, my task here is to show that it commits a form of settler erasure.

What binds together those who for Gracia should be called “Hispanic,” is not any common property or essence, not even genetics, but “a web of concrete historical relations” that were formed in the wake of 1492.³⁷ He calls this the *familial-historical view*, as “we” are tied together by history in the same ways that a family, *qua* group, is tied: historically.³⁸ By “Hispanic,” Gracia wants to denote (roughly) all post-1492 Iberians, Latin Americans, and the descendants of these, wherever they may be.³⁹ Gracia thinks that there’s a bona fide metaphysical reality, based in historical relations, that binds together the peoples who are to be grouped under the category of “Hispanic.” By contrast, he regards the category of “the Indian” to be an artificial invention of colonialism;⁴⁰ such groups, he says, “rather than one family, appear to be clusters of families only occasionally related to each other.”⁴¹ This means that “any barriers between subgroups [of Hispanics] are largely artificial inventions, the product of ideology or nostalgia.”⁴² For this reason, he claims, “it is not even necessary that the members of the group name themselves in any particular way or have a consciousness of their identity.”⁴³ That is, if one has been brought into the fold of the historical relations at issue, “Hispanic” is one’s identity whether one likes it or not.

But acknowledging the historical relations that bind us requires, he says, that we recognize our “racial and cultural heritage.”⁴⁴ “And our reality, as Hispanics,” he says, “is [as a matter of historical fact] one of *mestizaje*, of mixing in every possible way.”⁴⁵ Here, Gracia tries to disentangle the notion of *mestizaje* from what he regards as the “politicized” or ideological uses of the same. For instance, Gracia says that *mestizaje* “does not necessarily entail homogeneity or amalgamation;”⁴⁶ furthermore, he distinguishes *mestizaje* from assimilation “insofar as *mestizos* preserve differences” rather than eliminate them, and he claims these mixtures need not occur between groups standing in asymmetrical relations of social power.⁴⁷ This kind of *mestizaje*, he goes further, “is a process characterized by adoption, rejection, and development” of the elements being mixed.⁴⁸ Thus, he claims, *mestizaje* can “recognize the value of diverse elements originating in different cultures.”⁴⁹ “The reality of Hispanic *mestizaje*,” he concludes, “is a two-way street, and is founded on the tacit acceptance of what the other has to offer, even in cases in which it originates in a relation of dominator-dominated.”⁵⁰

There are a few different issues worth addressing here. The first is that—pace Gracia—this sanitized and ahistorical version of *mestizaje* never took place. The genealogy of the concept I have provided shows that this sanitized *mestizaje* existed neither in political practice, nor even, as some have argued, in the very theories of Latin American intellectuals.⁵¹ What Gracia terms “adoption, rejection, and development” occurs always in a field of asymmetrical social relations of domination. The fact of “adoption” by dominators implies nothing about how they then come to relate to that which they adopt, as cultural appropriation shows. Indeed, the social standing of Indigenous peoples in countries like Mexico reveals that the dominator does not value them morally—even if she finds instrumental value in the goods that can be extracted from their cultures.⁵²

Second, supposing Gracia grants this, he might point out that, still, his claim stands that “our reality” and identity “cannot be understood apart from *mestizaje*.”⁵³ As Gracia says, “anyone who wishes to go back to some distant point of origin to recover some ethnic, cultural, or racial purity—whether Iberian, Spanish, Amerindian, African, Mexican, or whatever—will be sadly disappointed.”⁵⁴ The task is impossible, he says, because “500 years of *mestizaje* cannot be undone.”⁵⁵ But, even accepting the framing of this argument,⁵⁶ this would not apply to Indigenous peoples. The fact of being “mixed” doesn’t, by itself, stop an Indigenous person from being Indigenous. A person who is Triqui is Triqui not because of her genetics or appearance. To some degree, her cultural habits, which may vary, may not be determinative either.⁵⁷ The fact that there is no racial or ethnic “purity” among Indigenous peoples does not, moreover, imply their non-existence as a *people*—this is to revert to the very sort of biologized notion of identity that Gracia sought to avoid, where admixture, in effect, erases indigeneity. By linking *mestizaje* to the present and future in this way, we discursively relegate indigeneity to the past—but, Indigenous peoples *aren’t* stuck in the past.

There is a last point. Gracia goes so far as to suggest that rejection of *mestizaje*, if it excludes subgroups from Hispanic identity, is oppressive, and that accepting the cultural “promiscuity” of *mestizaje* will help to end racism.⁵⁸ For example, in his argument against the “Latino” label, Gracia claims that it excludes Iberians and their *criollo* descendants. “What are these people going to be called?” he asks, “How are we to regard them? I imagine some want to undo history by sending them back to Iberia, but wants will not change anything in this case. Descendants of *criollos* are here to stay.”⁵⁹ This thread runs through Gracia’s book, and I want to claim that it reveals a kind of *settler anxiety*.⁶⁰ While Gracia staunchly disavows any ideological or political aims, that is, a concern nevertheless emerges here about the *territory* in a discussion of *names*. The purely symbolic revocation of membership in the “Hispanic” ethnos to white Latin Americans becomes oppressive to them. It’s not surprising, then, that the preceding passage (“Descendants of *criollos* are here to stay”) turns out to mirror Wolfe’s analysis of the settler colonizer. Arguing that “we (settlers) are you (natives),” as Gracia here does, averts the confrontation between Indigenous peoples and the settler state by erasing the former.⁶¹

The fact of the matter is that to speak of *mestizaje* is to speak of a process of elimination. It is to speak of a kind of cultural genocide that reproduces settler erasures. Gracia’s claim that divisions between subgroups of “Hispanics” are artificial, products of ideology or nostalgia, is thus revealed as itself a product of colonial ideology. But what purpose can it serve, I ask, to force Indigenous peoples, who may not even speak Spanish or Portuguese—and who may even reject Latin American national identities—into the category of “Hispanic,” or even of “Latinx,” for that matter? In attempting to disentangle the notion of *mestizaje* from the “politicized” or ideological uses of the same, I am claiming, Gracia unwittingly does the ideological work necessary to pass off the settler for the native.

The point here is not, however, to denounce anyone as a settler apologist. In a way, our coming to think of *mestizaje* in this way is itself a product of the very history I am describing. And so, to end with a confession, let me disclose now that I myself, not so long ago, believed that *mestizaje* could be salvaged, that it could be reclaimed by those of us to whom an Indigenous identity seems “lost” to colonialism and to history. This was a mistake. I—like many others who have thought that *mestizaje* could be reclaimed—was being epistemically duped.⁶² Without realizing that “*mestizaje*” itself just is ideological, and that it cannot be disentangled from its colonial meanings, Latinx philosophers continuing to make use of the trope in positive projects reify settlement as a non-negotiable backdrop. It is time, then, to let it go.

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NOTES

1. See, for instance, Lourdes Martinez-Echazabal’s “*Mestizaje* and the Discourse of National/Cultural Identity in Latin America, 1845–1959,” in *Latin American Perspectives* 25, no. 3 (May 1998): 21–42; and Peter Wade’s *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America* (London: Pluto Press, 1997).
2. Forbes, *Aztecas del Norte: The Chicanos of Aztlán* (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Publications, 1973), 203.
3. In this paper, I establish only the first claim. Establishing the latter is the subject of a broader project that I am currently working on.
4. Maria Eugenia Cotera and María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, “Indigenous But Not Indian? Chicana/os and the Politics of Indigeneity,” *The World of Indigenous North America*, ed. Robert Warrior (New York: Routledge Press), 555.
5. *Ibid.* See also Wade, *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America*.
6. The semantic origins of the term are complex. For a study of its etymology, see Jack D. Forbes, *Africans and Native Americans: The Language of Race and the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples* (University of Illinois Press, 1981).
7. It is important to note here that the discourses and ideologies of *mestizaje* had a variety of iterations depending on their contexts—the analogous concept in Guatemala, for instance, is that of the *ladino*, which has a distinct connotation.
8. María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, “Who’s the Indian in Aztlán? Re-Writing *Mestizaje*, Indianism, and Chicanismo from the Lacandón,” *The Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader*, ed. Ileana Rodriguez (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 405.
9. Wade, *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America*, 32.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Wade, *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America*, 32.
12. Saldaña-Portillo, “Who’s the Indian in Aztlán?,” 406.
13. *Ibid.*, 408–409.
14. In this paper, I am following the lead of recent work outside of philosophy which argues that Latin America should be regarded as a settler society. See Richard Gott, “Latin America as White Settler Society,” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 26, no. 2 (2007): 269–89; M. Bianet Castellanos, “Introduction: Settler Colonialism in Latin America,” *American Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (Dec. 2017): 777–81; and Shannon Speed, “Structures of Settler Capitalism in Abya Yala,” *American Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (Dec. 2017): 783–90. In my broader project, I am developing this argument for the case of Mexico, and considering its implications for Latinxs, for Latin American philosophy, and for settler colonial theory itself.

- Addressing this issue is beyond the scope of this paper. Here I simply assume that Latin America is a settler society.
15. Overall, there is too little engagement in philosophy with Indigenous studies, with settler colonial theory, or with practicing Indigenous scholars in the context of North America—the colonial context where many of us live and work. This oversight, however, is especially concerning in the context of discussions of *epistemic* injustices. I am thus hoping that this paper will call attention to this issue in the literature.
 16. See, for instance, Whyte, “Indigeneity and US Settler Colonialism,” *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Race*, ed. Naomi Zack (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 91–101.
 17. See Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (Dec. 2006), 387–409; Tate A. Lefevre, “Settler Colonialism,” in *Oxford Bibliographies in Anthropology*, ed. J. Jackson (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1–26; and Lorenzo Veracini, “Settler Colonialism: Career of a Concept,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 41, no. 2 (2013): 313–33. It is important to note that such conceptions of settler colonialism were long-held by Indigenous activists prior to its emergence as an academic field of study. Thanks to Kyle Powys Whyte for this pointer.
 18. Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” 388.
 19. *Ibid.*
 20. *Ibid.*
 21. Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 6–7.
 22. Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” 388; see also Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 152.
 23. I am suggesting here, as have others, that cultural appropriation is entangled in a form of cultural genocide. On the historical significance and entanglements of “playing Indian” in settler colonial contexts, see Phillip J. Deloria’s *Playing Indian* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998). For a powerful case that “cultural appropriation is just another word for genocide,” see Anishinaabe/Metís poet Gwen Benaway’s op-ed, “Facing the Legacy of Erasure and Cultural Appropriation in Canadian Literature” (2017) in *The Winnipeg Review*. Available at <http://winnipegreview.com/2017/05/facing-the-legacy-of-erasure-and-cultural-appropriation-in-canadian-literature/>.
 24. For the difference between racialization (as a field of study) and Indigenous studies, see especially Andrea Smith’s “Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, White Supremacy,” in *Racial Formation in the Twenty-First Century*, eds. HoSang, Daniel Martinez, Oneka LaBennett, and Laura Pulido (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 66–90; and her “Native Studies at the Horizon of Death: Theorizing Ethnographic Entrapment and Settler Self-Reflexivity,” in *Theorizing Native Studies*, ed. Audra Simpson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 207–34. For an analysis of the specificity of Indigenous identity and Indigenous struggles, see Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel, “Being Indigenous: Resurgences against Contemporary Colonialism,” in *Government and Opposition* 40, no. 4 (Sept. 2005): 597–614, and Bernard Nietschmann, “The Fourth World: Nations Versus States,” in George J. Demko and William B. Wood (eds), *Reordering the World: Geopolitical Perspectives on the 21st Century* (Philadelphia: Westview Press, 1995), 225–38.
 25. See Fricker’s *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford University Press, 2007).
 26. *Ibid.*, 6.
 27. *Ibid.*
 28. *Ibid.*
 29. Insofar as this analysis of colonial power ties a specific “epistemic harm” (settler erasure) directly to a specific social process (settler colonialism), it might ultimately rupture the categories of the literature on epistemic injustice, since Fricker’s account (for instance) tends to abstract epistemic harms from their entanglements with and functional roles in specific social processes. I am developing this line of thought elsewhere, but cannot articulate it here.

30. Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 174.
31. José Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 67fn. 4.
32. Medina, , *The Epistemology of Resistance*, 67–69, 71.
33. See María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, *Indian Given: Racial Geographies across Mexico and the United States* (Duke University Press, 2016).
34. Compare to Saldaña-Portillo's analysis in "Who's the Indian in Aztlán? Re-Writing Mestizaje, Indianism, and Chicanismo from the Lacandón," *The Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader*, ed. Ileana Rodríguez (Duke University Press, 2001).
35. Alfred and Corttassel, "Being Indigenous," 598.
36. Jorge J. E. Gracia, *Hispanic/Latino Identity: A Philosophical Study* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2000). For a similar analysis of a more favored figure, see Saldaña-Portillo's critique of Gloria Anzaldúa's use of *mestizaje* in "Who is the Indian In Aztlan?"
37. Gracia, *Hispanic/Latino Identity*, 52.
38. *Ibid.*, 50.
39. *Ibid.*, 48. At times, Gracia distinguishes "Hispanics" from "Amerindians" *qua* groups (*Ibid.* 54). I take it, however, that he also intends to count as "Hispanic" peoples Indigenous to Abya Yala (=the "Americas"—*pace* Gracia [*Ibid.* 90]), there are Indigenous concepts used to refer to the whole of Latin America). For instance, Gracia writes that Tarahumaras, Mayans, Aymara, Aztecs, and so on, are all a part of this "historical family" (*Ibid.*, 9, 63, 69). For a recent and provocative take on the concept of Abya Yala, as well as an explanation of its history, see Emil Keme's "For Abiyala to Live, the Americas Must Die: Toward a Transhemispheric Indigeneity," translated by Adam Coon in *Native American and Indigenous Studies* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 42–68.
40. Gracia, *Hispanic/Latino Identity*, 99, 101–103. This turns out to be ironic, for reasons I soon provide.
41. *Ibid.*, 54.
42. *Ibid.*, 89.
43. *Ibid.*, 49.
44. *Ibid.*, 89.
45. *Ibid.*
46. *Ibid.*, 109.
47. *Ibid.*, 110.
48. *Ibid.*
49. *Ibid.*, 111.
50. *Ibid.*, 118.
51. See Lourdes Martínez-Echazabal, "Mestizaje and the Discourse of National/Cultural Identity in Latin America, 1845–1959," *Latin American Perspectives* 25, no. 3 (May 1998).
52. For the case of Mexico, it is also worth pointing out that the state frequently deploys folklorized images of natives not only to spur tourism, but to reproduce the nationalist self-image of the *mestizo*. See Daniel Cooper Alarcón, *The Aztec Palimpsest: Mexico in the Modern Imagination* (The University of Arizona Press, 1997); María Eugenia Cotera and María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, "Indigenous But Not Indian? Chicana/os and the Politics of Indigeneity," *The World of Indigenous North America*, ed. Robert Warrior (Routledge Press), 549–68; and Saldaña-Portillo, "Who's the Indian in Aztlán? Re-Writing Mestizaje, Indianism, and Chicanismo from the Lacandón," *The Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader*, ed. Ileana Rodríguez (Duke University Press, 2001), 402–23.
53. Gracia, *Hispanic/Latino Identity*, 120.
54. *Ibid.*
55. *Ibid.*
56. We might, I suggest, reject the framing of this issue, insofar as it presumes that those who reject Gracia's *mestizaje* narrative want

to return to an "untainted" past, for instance. In point of fact, I am not disagreeing with Gracia on the claim that "admixture" occurred or that Iberian colonial projects have had crucial ramifications on the contemporary identities of those affected by them. I am disagreeing on what the *significance* of this is; I am raising the question of whether there is a "we" ("Hispanics"), and who gets to decide.

57. In this paper, I can't hope to address the meaning of indigeneity. The account I defer to is one found in Indigenous studies, which (roughly) describes Indigenous identity as (i) being a way of living in particular communities of practice, (ii) always specific (there is no "Indian," but there are Navajo, Purepecha, Triqui, Zapotec, etc.), (iii) always grounded in place/territory and the webs of relations between humans, nonhumans, and territory therein. See Alfred and Corttassel (2005).
58. Gracia, *Hispanic/Latino Identity*, 121.
59. *Ibid.*, 18.
60. This is not intended as an *ad hominem*. As recent work in Indigenous studies defines it, *settler affect* is a social phenomenon that refers to the ways people in settler contexts come to internalize settlement affectively as the background horizon of possibility; that is, it describes the sets of feelings and emotions that depoliticize settlement by making it appear as "common sense." I regard "settler anxiety" as a subtype of this. For an important exploration of the settler structures of feeling, see Mark Rifkin, "Settler Common Sense," *Settler Colonial Studies* 3 (2013): 322–40.
61. Bernard Nietschmann discusses "we are you" strategies as methods the state uses to dispossess Indigenous peoples ("The Fourth World," 236). See also Alfred and Corttassel, "Being Indigenous," 602.
62. For the most recent attempts along these lines, see especially Diego von Vacano's attempts—futile, in my view—to rehabilitate Jose Vasconcelos's work on race, in "Zarathustra *Criollo*: Vasconcelos on Race," *Forging People*, ed. Jorge J. E. Garcia (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), 203–27; "Race and Political Theory," *Race or Ethnicity: On Black and Latino Identity*, ed. Jorge J. E. Garcia (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2007), 248–66; and the chapter on Vasconcelos in his *The Color of Citizenship: Race, Modernity, and Latin American/Hispanic Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). In my broader project, I address this issue in relation to Chican@ attempts to reclaim indigeneity, which raises similar concerns.

Canonical Philosophy, Mexican Philosophy

Manuel Vargas

UC SAN DIEGO

CULTURE AND CANONS

It is hardly news to recognize that over the past few decades there has been widespread pressure towards something of a global monoculture. The nearly globally ubiquitous presence of McDonald's, Walmart, Hollywood movies, and American pop music, for example, is taken as one of the leveling effects of contemporary forms of capitalism. Somewhat concurrently, this has been accompanied by something of a collapse of a monoculture within the United States. Depending on where you live in the US, there may be no McDonald's and Walmarts—or there may be many. Pop albums don't have anything like the shared consumer base they once did. Instead, the algorithms of Spotify, Pandora, and Apple Music provide ever more customized tastes to individuals. Similarly, with notable exceptions, the era of movies providing a shared experience seems to have

collapsed. Where entire generations could be counted on to have seen *ET*, *Titanic*, or *Gone with the Wind*, modern movie audiences tend toward greater fragmentation.

That's how things can seem. The death of US monoculture may be a kind of myth, the sort of eviction from Eden that only seems possible because some corner of society felt culturally authoritative and licensed to disregard cultural endeavors that were not a part of those worlds. But fictions can have real power. In this case, there is at least some reason to believe that there is something right about this story. That is, an incomplete but wide swath of the English-speaking world shared a robust body of overlapping cultural experiences and touchstones, and this has given way to a more fragmented cultural landscape.

At the same time, it isn't as though this fragmentation took away expectations of knowledge required for various kinds of cultural authority. Canons, in some form, seem to be inevitable requirements of organizing knowledge. On one way of thinking about it, the canonical is just respectable information. More precisely, the canons are ideas, texts, et cetera that one can expect others in the same field to be under significant pressure to know in some more-than-trivial way.¹

If culture-wide canons collapsed with the monoculture, then an important successor has emerged in the form of *microcanons*. If you present yourself as a science fiction cinephile, you are revealed as a fraud if we discover you are unfamiliar with *Solaris*; *2001: A Space Odyssey*; *Star Wars*; and *Alien*. If you play platformers, you better know who Mario and Luigi are; if Indy Car racing is your corner of culture, then Mears, Unser, and Penske better mean something to you.² Broad cultural authority has given way to smaller, local forms of authority partitioned by discrete, frequently overlapping identities, interest groups, and communities.

Although the particulars are different, there is a parallel situation within universities. The gradual abandonment of a standardized general education curriculum, increased skepticism about canons composed solely of "dead white guys," and ongoing pressure to specialize have meant that many—perhaps most—undergraduates now leave college without having read Euripides, Augustine, Eliot, Kant, Tolstoy, and so on.

How this came about is surely a complicated matter, partly connected to the expansion of higher education to more than the leisured classes. Undergraduate educations are now more frequently shaped by comparatively local conceptions of what is valuable, conceptions that are reluctant to assert their authority for all learned peoples everywhere. If you take a course on Latin American writers for your literature requirement, you will surely read Borges, García-Marquez, Allende, and maybe Bolaño. If you take a nineteenth-century British poetry class, you'll still read Byron and Shelley. Microcanons, like all canons, proclaim that this and that ought to be studied. Unlike the older kind of canon, they add a further thought: . . . *but only if you are in to that kind of thing*. The loss of confident insistence that *all* learned people need to know this material just is the

loss of a single broad canon within higher education. What we have is the proliferation of more specialized micro-canons, smaller pockets of conversations within what once presented itself as a single, larger conversation.

The erosion of a monoculture—or, at least, the erosion of the authority of a myth about a monoculture—has taken away the grounds for a certain kind of canonicity. There is little or no scholarly, literary, or artistic information that represents itself as the kind of thing that all learned people must know. One consequence of this is that in a *non-monocultural* world, wide-ranging expertise is hard to earn. Cross-canonical expertise isn't impossible, but it is difficult. Specialization has made the universal genius an anachronism, one that only occurs in fiction.³

Still, pluralism produces some of what the monocultural myth aspired to, albeit in a more modest form. We now readily recognize the possibility of cross-canonical texts. These are texts that matter to multiple communities of knowledge, oftentimes for diverse reasons. Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, or Bourdieu's *Distinction*, or Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* are hardly confined to their original disciplinary homes. The possibility of cross-canonical texts is not a panacea. That a text might instructively speak to multiple bodies of inquiry does not guarantee that the relevant parties are even aware of it. Absent scholars with fingers in distinct scholarly networks, cross-canonical significance is difficult to achieve.

To think of canons as simply about identifying what work is good or not is to miss the varied motivations we have for regarding some texts as respectable background knowledge in a field. Fights about canons are often fights about, variously, which *techniques* we should favor for thinking; which *assumptions* we should take for granted; which *styles of exposition* we are prepared to countenance; which *conversations* we take to have a kind of authority over us; and even, sometimes, which *kinds of people* we are hoping to create. The decision to teach Rawls rather than Burke, Nietzsche rather than Shaftsbury, Beauvoir rather than Tertullian isn't just about what kinds of propositional knowledge and what patterns of reasoning are valuable. It is also partly about the kinds of people we hope education will produce, and, sometimes, what kinds of people will become philosophers.⁴

As one might expect with this smorgasbord of functions, canons can be shaped by diverse interests. Indeed, the emergence and persistence of some academic fields as *fields* has been plausibly shaped by the role such fields have played in class signaling⁵ and moral education.⁶ Canons may also shape their practitioners by selection effects, via style, form, and content. Faux-mathematical formulations of philosophical theses may be a mostly innocent feature to some, while repellent to others. Dialogue and poems may entice me, while only essays will do for you. Requirements that one learn a canon may play a role in pulling in some people and concerns and pushing out others. This is, of course, a contingent matter that turns on the fit between, on the one hand, the current style, form, and content of the canon, and, on the other hand, the dispositions of the day. If you find it hard to overlook the racism and sexism of, say,

Aristotle, Locke, Kant, and Hegel, then the cost of the buy-in to the discipline looks different than if you don't mind, don't notice, or can readily overlook those things with a dismissive wave of the hand.⁷

THE SITUATION OF PHILOSOPHY

Many of us have a sense of Anglophone philosophy being both late to the retreat from canonicity but at the same time particularly resistant to the possibility of completely relinquishing its traditional canon. This is, I think, because philosophy (at least as a discipline in the Anglophone world) has a somewhat atypical position with respect to canons.

For Anglophone disciplinary philosophy, the canon just is the thing in virtue of which it makes sense to think of it as a field or a discipline. That is, there is a shared tree trunk of information—the history of *Western* philosophy, as it is called—in virtue of which the field of philosophy has mostly held on to its image of being a field. That sense of unity is perhaps anchored in, or maybe expressed in, a tremendous convergence around the importance of that familiar range of historical figures. The branches from that trunk admit of different characterizations (e.g., analytic vs. everyone else—Continental, pluralist, phenomenological, pragmatist, etc.). There is a fairly widespread sense (whether accurate or not) of some kind of division that happens after Kant, at some point in the nineteenth century. So, even while contemporary subfields within philosophy take on the narrower shape of microcanons with no expectation that specialists outside those subfields will have read those texts, we remain certain that Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Hume, and Kant remain figures we philosophers are all under some non-trivial pressure to know at some level of detail.

The unity of that trunk, and the convergence around the history of the subject (at least in our pedagogical requirements), tends to be the fig leaf that hides the absence of any interesting uniformity to the diverse kinds of things that have counted as philosophy. Transformation and loss of our current canonical structure would be costly to the field and its practitioners in at least three further ways. First, if philosophy has more than one trunk—a hedge-like-structure, perhaps—it becomes harder to ensure the transmission of specific conversations and particular kinds of knowledge.⁸ Second, the scope of one's expertise is made smaller if the canon or field becomes larger. My expertise at Kant is comparatively less significant the more pillars we add to our temple. Third, and more inchoately, I suspect that some in the field think that the more widely we spread our attention, the less well suited we are to appreciate the really great work in the field. Our current mighty dead are particularly mighty. If one sees the power of that work, the world-historical influence it has had, this seems to set a pretty high bar for work that aspires to a place in that pantheon, and too-easy expansion of what is central to philosophy devalues that and threatens to shrink our own ability to appreciate the lofty heights achieved by our intellectual ancestors.⁹

Perhaps the costs described above should be paid, but we do well to acknowledge that these challenges lurk and to

recognize that they are important barriers to both radical transformation of the canon, as well as abandonment of a canon.

SOME CHALLENGES FOR THE INCEPTION OF A CANON OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY MEXICAN PHILOSOPHY

The recent publication of Sánchez and Sanchez's *Mexican Philosophy in the 20th Century*¹⁰ provides an extraordinary opportunity for reflecting on the limits and promise of canon-formation. The volume is a rare case of an actual, genuine *event* for a field. That's not hyperbole. Within the United States academy, it constitutes an important creation moment for the field of Mexican philosophy, and it does so in part by making possible the teaching of a range of courses in Mexican philosophy.

Acknowledging the importance of this volume does not denigrate the essential and important work in Mexican philosophy that came before it, in both Spanish and in English. However, before the publication of *Mexican Philosophy in the 20th Century*, the US wing of this field was the work of mostly lone specialists fortunate to find *any* interlocutors in the Anglophone philosophical world. With the publication of this volume, a nascent community of scholars on this side of the border has a collection of texts from which to draw, to train new students, and to which we can direct interested colleagues. The anthology provides a critical mass of interrelated texts, many of them historically important and philosophically rich, most of which are now available in English for the first time.

In light of the foregoing, it is difficult to see the book as anything other than the nascent formation of a microcanon for Mexican philosophy within the Anglophone philosophical world. This last bit matters in an important way: a microcanon in the heart of the academic empire, as it were, is a microcanon at the heart of a global system of knowledge production and credentialing.

This can be ethically complex in a number of ways. First, as Pascale Casanova¹¹ and others have noted, one way for scholars in the global periphery of academe to achieve status in the periphery is to achieve it in the center. Fifty years ago, that might have meant seeking fame in France; today, that is more likely to mean that the United States is where the main stage is to be found. Whatever the right account of what propels the center's uptake of work at the global periphery of academe, the result is the incentivization of certain kinds of work in the periphery, and, relatedly, the creation of distinctive roles for such figures—for example, the Latin American philosopher as a representative of a community or tradition who gains her relevance speaking on behalf of that community or its intellectual traditions.^{12, 13}

Second, canon-formation and the consequent attention by scholars based in the US is likely to have an outsized impact on what is regarded as canonical outside the United States. So the power to influence what is canonical Mexican philosophy is disproportionately in the hands of people outside of Mexico. It is easy to exaggerate the conversation-shaping powers of scholars in the United States. Still, it is

not implausible to think that the US academy's canon of Mexican philosophy will exercise considerable influence on any wider understanding of Mexican philosophy, perhaps even in Mexico. Thus, one might have reason to worry that the narrative of Mexican philosophy may get away from Mexican philosophers, and that this would be true even if the history of Mexican philosophy were a more central preoccupation in Mexico than it currently is.¹⁴

It is not obvious what the alternatives are. Ongoing failure to engage with and study Mexican philosophy within the US hardly seems appealing. For that matter, one might object that the best hope for the history of Mexican philosophy is for it to be cared for by a wider community of scholars. The history of German philosophy has done well in large part precisely because it is not exclusively in the hands of German philosophers. The aspiration to have the legacy of one's labors limited by something as arbitrary as a national border is, I suspect, not easy to defend.

Still, this does not mean that there aren't risks to which we ought to be attentive, especially at moments of canon-inception. Responsible scholarship, as always, is the order of the day. And to the credit of Sánchez and Sanchez, this is not a volume that was constructed *ex nihilo*, and without consultation of scholars in Mexico who work on Mexican philosophy. There is a fairly standard set of canonical twentieth-century figures in Mexican philosophy, formed by scholars in Mexico and histories of philosophy in Mexico. Figures like Sierra, Caso, Ramos, Vasconcelos, Zea, and Villoro have already been variably present in English language accounts of philosophy in Mexico. It is also a strength of this volume that it involves the intentional rehabilitation of figures that have been mostly abandoned by contemporary Mexican philosophy (a handful of important scholarly exceptions like Guillermo Hurtado's crucial work duly noted). Sánchez and Sanchez include figures like Portilla and Uranga, who tend not to be studied in contemporary Mexican philosophy's understanding of what is valuable in its own history. The inclusion of these figures is not haphazard, but an intentional effort to incorporate philosophers who were important in their own time period, and for whom there is reason for us now to read.

What's missing? What else might we want to include? These questions have some urgency at the moment of canon-formation precisely because changing an established canon is oftentimes harder than creating it from the get-go. But as noted above, these questions also get some of their urgency from what texts *do*. Tacit norms and values are often all the more powerful for our pretending that they are not there. To teach Sor Juana and Uranga, like teaching Beauvoir and Nozick, is often a matter of what knowledge we transmit and which arguments we find worthwhile. And, again, it is *also* about what kind of philosophers we are trying to make in the next generation. The burden is on us to pick who gets resurrected when we try "to open our veins and inject some blood into the empty veins of the dead."¹⁵

In light of these concerns, one might think there is a natural list of ways we might hope to supplement this volume.

Our canon might include a larger selection of women—especially, but not exclusively, feminist—philosophers, more philosophers outside the ambit of Mexico City, and, potentially, more people from outside traditional academic circles. As easy as it is to point to these as ways to build on what Sánchez and Sanchez have already given us, none of these would have been uncomplicated additions to the present volume.

First, consider the status of women in the volume. It is easy to charge that women philosophers are underrepresented (there is one selection by a woman author among the nineteen readings in the volume). Even so, volumes like this are inevitably circumscribed by access to permissions, by a concern to faithfully represent literatures and traditions that were often created under conditions not adequately hospitable to women authors and their work. If one thinks that mere inclusion for the sake of inclusion is often no favor at all, then expansion on this front may not be a straightforward matter. Still, from the standpoint of what kind of canon we might have reason to want, it might be appealing to endeavor to seek to form this microcanon in a more expansive way.

Second, on looking beyond figures who have notable connections to Mexico City, this too is a difficult matter. What makes further expansion difficult is that, of course, the greatest concentration of educational resources and cultural influence has historically been located in the capital. Trying to tell a story about, for example, the history of philosophy in the United States before World War II would, for similar reasons, be heavily weighted to figures with ties to a geographically small region of the North Atlantic seaboard.

Third, on the matter of the inclusion of non-traditional, potentially non-disciplinary philosophers, matters are especially fraught. There are some in this volume: O'Gorman and Reyes, for example. However, effectively presenting the value of Mexican philosophy to a new audience is partly a matter of the values and interests of that audience. If your audience for a volume like this is the modal Anglophone teacher of philosophy, then the inclusion of non-academically trained philosophers in a volume on Mexican philosophy runs the risk of confirming (too common, often-frustrating) background expectations that there is not academically serious philosophy in Latin America. There is a battery of concerns here for the specialist in Mexican philosophy, ranging from stereotypes that what work there is, is mostly literary to the idea that the only material of interest is from "wisdom traditions" and not anything like a recognizable disciplinary system of knowledge (which is, itself, a complicated and unobvious assumption). Thus, to incorporate elements of "not immediately academically recognizable philosophy" is to run the risk of a double marginalization—making a marginal field more marginal by emphasizing its exoticism.¹⁶

Perhaps these pragmatic considerations can and should be outweighed by other aspirations—e.g., aspirations to change what it means to do philosophy, to be a philosopher, and where we should look for philosophy. I take no stand on these things. My point is only that limited disciplinary

attention is not allotted in a vacuum, and that no choice about these things is without cost to uptake and audience-formation.

I applaud Sánchez and Sanchez for the broad-mindedness they have shown. I also want to continue to encourage those of us working in this field to ask ourselves what we've overlooked, what we can incorporate into our now-coalescing microcanon of Mexican philosophy. If we answer these questions partly in light of not just what *has* mattered, but also in light of what sorts of philosophical sensibilities we hope to produce, my suspicion is that the resulting canon will be one that we are happy to live with for a longer period of time.

WHAT WOULD SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

What would institutional success in the US look like for the history of Mexican philosophy? One answer: were particular texts of Mexican philosophy to achieve new cross-canonical significance, this would clearly be a kind of institutional achievement.

Perhaps the most likely promising future is one where particular figures inside Mexican philosophy, but outside the traditional historical canon, come to play a role in one or more disciplinary microcanons, and, eventually, in the kinds of things we expect philosophy majors to know. How might this happen? The most likely path involves convincing specialists in some or another sub-field that a particular figure or work in Mexican philosophy has insights that matter for work in that other specialist field. The standing challenge to overcome is a familiar one: there is a potentially unbounded set of things that could be relevant to our projects and no one has time to read everything, so we all rely on heuristics to sort works, figures, and the like into things we pay attention to and endeavor to respond to. In circumstances like these, one has to show that if reading Villoro can help us better understand what communitarians care about, then Anglophone political philosophers have reason to pay attention. If "Essay on the Ontology of the Mexican" can sustain new and interesting work for specialists in moral psychology, then it has a shot at cross-canonical significance in that way. And so on.

If the foregoing is right, one takeaway from all of this is that *if* we want cross-canonical standing, it means that we can't all stay in the silo of Mexican philosophy. We could reject that aspiration, but that too has costs. And none of this is to deny that the field benefits from some scholars who specialize and exclusively pursue research within the history of Mexican philosophy. By itself, however, that is not a promising path to cross-canonical viability.

The corollary to this is that the disciplinary status of cross-canonical works will hinge on both the apparent value of the work *and* the significance of the other canons in which the work features. Not all cross-canonical significances are equal. Gabriel García Márquez's role in world literature matters in a way that Moenia's significance to electronic music does not. Without passing judgment on the intrinsic virtues of either work or the genres in which their work figures, the canons in which they figure have very different standings within the wider artistic community, and this

difference in standing of the fields has consequences for the distribution of intellectual and academic attention on those works.

At least some of us now face a challenge: Can we take this gift, this book, and find ways to make it meaningful and valuable to both our students and colleagues? I'd like to think the answer is yes, and that in so doing we can make manifest the promise of Mexican philosophy. Achieving this goal requires more work—work that, thanks to Sánchez and Sanchez, as well as their collaborators in translation and publishing, we now have the opportunity to pursue. We are all in their debt.¹⁷

NOTES

1. It may be tempting to put this in terms of the idea that something is canonical *if it matters*. That's too simple, as a work can matter without being canonical. A work may close off certain possibilities without that work or idea being held in special regard within a field. Suppose Copernicus's work put an end to a particular theological metaphysics. It doesn't follow that we think of Copernicus's *On the Revolutions of Heavenly Spheres* as a canonical work in theological metaphysics. Or a work might shape a field in the wrong way, for example, by being so terrible as to make others avoid the topic, view, or figure. Even so, the mark of the canonical within a field is, roughly, being "the kind of thing one is under significant pressure to know" is surely an imperfect characterization, but good enough for present purposes.
2. In comparison to canons, microcanons have narrower, non-universalizing expectations about the value of their contents and the scope of those to whom those attendant expectations apply. If one has a notion of the canonical that is compatible with this sort of thing, then it may make sense to think of microcanons as a species of canon with a narrower-than-typically-recognized authority. For my purposes, the chief advantage of "microcanon" is to highlight the comparatively narrow band of authority and expectation imposed by this knowledge, compared to more traditional conceptions of the canonical.
3. Tony Stark evidently has competences ranging from rocketry to robotics to high energy physics to artificial intelligence. Bruce Banner allegedly has seven PhDs. No wonder he's so angry: that's a lot of committee members he had to please.
4. If teaching Rawls or Hume or Kant or Aristotle can help us make the right kinds of people—and it would be strange if we didn't hope that teaching philosophy didn't help form the dispositions that make us kinds of people (good citizens, committed communitarians, principled individualists, moral skeptics, and so on)—then choosing who we teach says something about who we want to create, who we want to speak to, and which conversations we want to have. Competing aspirations about this are, of course, par for the course. The other side of this is that we also have concerns to *not* cultivate other ways of thinking, convictions, values, and kinds of people. We sometimes teach and read to avoid producing certain types of persons.
5. See T. Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).
6. See Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).
7. Rickless contends that "students at all levels are more intellectually engaged when they can identify, at least in some way, with the authors of the texts they are reading. And this is particularly true, I think for undergraduates." See, S. C. Rickless, "Brief for an Inclusive Anti-Canon," *Metaphilosophy* 49 (2018) 167–81.
That seems right, although I'd add that the importance of the degree of identification may vary in complicated ways across the involved social identities, class, subject matter, and so on, and that there is a want of good empirical data about the particulars.
8. Rickless notes this as well, although he is inclined to think that this is a cost that is worth paying for other reasons, some of which overlap with the concerns I've raised about the price of admission to the discipline.

9. Of course, there's also something of a self-fulfilling prophecy about this fact, both as a matter of influence and as a matter of appreciating its intellectual heights: it is hard for work to have influence and be properly appreciated if it is never taught. In contrast, when something is frequently taught it is much easier for that work or figure to have real influence, and for us to know what is great about that work or figure.
10. Carlos Alberto Sánchez and Robert Eli S., *Mexican Philosophy in the 20th Century: Essential Readings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).
11. P. Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).
12. Ofelia Schutte, "Cultural Alterity: Cross-Cultural Communication and Feminist Theory," *Hypatia* 13, no. 2 (1998): 53–72.
13. As Casanova warns, such scholars are under pressure to remain within the neat confines of her intellectual role as a bridge between those communities.
14. For similar concerns see A. Barceló, "Against Latin American Philosophy Going Mainstream," *Philosophical Percolations* (2016). Retrieved from <http://www.philpercs.com/2016/05/against-latin-american-philosophy-going-mainstream-.html>.
15. José Ortega y Gasset, *Meditations on Quixote*, 1st American ed. (New York: Norton, 1961).
16. This is a point that is distinct but not unrelated from the familiar problem in various "marginal" (to mainstream Anglophone philosophy) fields of the "double bind" of being too exotic to be philosophy or insufficiently exotic to be worth sustained philosophical attention of scholars at the center. For the particular case of Latin American philosophy, see Mignolo (2003), who draws from Bernasconi's (1997) discussion of the challenge of African philosophy for Continental philosophy. Walter Mignolo, "Philosophy and the Colonial Difference," *Philosophy Today* 43 (1999): 36–41; Robert Bernasconi, "African Philosophy's Challenge to Continental Philosophy," in *Postcolonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader*, ed. E. C. Eze (Oxford, United Kingdom: Blackwell, 1997), 183–96.
17. My gratitude to Joshua Landy for an especially fruitful discussion about microcanons, and to participants and audience members at the 2018 Pacific APA session on *Mexican Philosophy in the 20th Century*.

Afra X and the Subjectivity of Taking Care of Objects

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INTRODUCTION

"The work of mestiza consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended. The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts."¹

"The new mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. . . . She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns ambivalence into something else."²

This essay is derived from a commentary posed by Mariana Ortega in relation to my work at the 2018 Latina Feminist Roundtable. Ortega argued that the subjectivity of taking care of objects was very important and hoped for a greater expansion of the topic in my work. Since the conference, I have thought carefully about the subjectivity of taking care of objects. The result is this short study—a thinking on the concept. It is important to note the idea of a study. In this context, a study means that I am giving the concept separate added consideration, like an artist just draws a hand (as opposed to the entire human body) for the purposes of apprehension of its complex parts.

This study also responds to Anzaldúa's call to transcend subject-object duality through an exploration of Afra X's (Afro-Latin women's) relationships to objects, such as collections of objects, veneration of objects, and objects of labor (like beds or watches). In particular, it examines how relationship to these objects can be transcended beyond sites of bondage. Guided by Anzaldúa's thought, it argues for seeing these relationships as a practice "in plural personality" where the contradictions provided by these relationships create an ambivalent space and where new possibilities can emerge. This effort generates a better understanding of Afra X's codes and mechanisms for surviving and thriving in sometimes very difficult circumstances.

OBJECTS OF SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE

For many years in graduate school, the objects and symbols I experienced of the colonial era contained vastly different and contradictory meanings depending on their context. The Mammy figurine is such an object/symbol. In the academy, Mammy was theorized in a variety of ways: 1) a symbol of slavery in the United States' South, and 2) the subjugation of Black women in the Americas and the Caribbean. Yet outside of the academy, I witnessed Mammy's admiration, veneration, and collection as symbols of strength, spiritual and intellectual acuity.

The young intellectual resolved the contradiction by privileging the theoretical scholarship—a one-dimensional understanding of the image as racist and abhorrent. Years later (in the twentieth century) and as a mature scholar, I revisit this contradiction with the thought that there is a clear complexity that is not easily explained by racism.

Postcolonial critics of the Mammy figure link the image with colonial domination of Black women in the Americas. From this context, the emphasis is not only to critique the various aspects of this figure, but also to critique the system which gave rise to this symbolism. In other words, the Mammy figure in this context is an aberration that, by necessity, must be deconstructed and eliminated. From this view, non-contextualized displays of this image represent a complicity with racism and colonial subjugation of Black womanhood.

Given the academic and theoretical understanding, I wondered why my aunt so proudly displayed these objects with reverence and joy. Was this an instance of internalized racism? Why were the figures contextualized in altar? Who did they represent to her? What did it mean to collect,

possess, and venerate these objects? The assessment of an internalization of racism did not fit, since there was a clear place of honor and respect given to objects which possessed a specific (non-racialized) meaning. The meaning attached had nothing to do with the academic conceptualization of Black female subjectivity. To my aunt, the Mammy was a heroine, of sorts. She represented a powerful spiritual, healing, and social symbol. This symbolism stood apart from an object of subjugation, enslavement, poverty, deprivation, use, and degradation. These objects served as codes for experiences in her spiritual life. They were the bridge between worlds (her present body, her spirit life, her relationship with spirits and ancestors, her past, and her future). Titi called these Mammy figurines La Madama, a name I would hear often in her stories. In the essay "Espiritismo in the Puerto Rican Community: A New World Recreation with the Elements of Kongo Ancestor Worship," Marta Romero Vega confirms my aunt's view. She writes:

The Madama spirits know the secrets of curing negative energy and attracting positive energy. When they manifest in spiritual session, they are elder women of sacred knowledge. Dressed in gingham colors or white cotton, they tend to manifest as heavy-set women wearing large skirts with their heads covered with a scarf. Bearers of medicinal and psychological healing secrets. . .³

The immense pride I witnessed Titi having in caring for her Madama was genuine. The pride was derived from the idea that she was a keeper of secrets. Also, she was in alliance with powerful spirit women capable of facilitating change, imparting great wisdom, and able to heal. Through these figures my aunt maintained a linkage with alternate realms in varying worlds. These realms she always maintained in her presence. It was as if the figurines were a physical manifestation of a spiritual relationship. The altar was representative of an agreement—she adores the spirits, and, in turn, the spirits aid her. For this reason, the Mammy figurines represented a mantle of protection and a working team, especially in difficult times. Additionally, the figurines represented the honor and satisfaction in knowing that a specific spirit loomed and stayed with her.

Returning to Anzaldúa's notion of mestiza consciousness, I would argue that the collection of Mammy figurines my aunt maintained was much more than a site of duality suggested in Anzaldúa's quotes above. The act of taking care of these objects is a space of transcendence, i.e., to live in and with multiple realities and consciousness, to leave everyday reality, and connecting with the power of the transcendent. Beyond the realities of motherhood, marriage, life in a tough city, and in a country that used her for labor, there was a vibrant life in connecting to other worlds. This connection provided access to different communities, access to wisdom, power, and protection. So in the caring of objects of spiritual significance a radical episteme is practiced, where dominant and oppressive sources of knowledge (arising from the dominant culture in this world) are bypassed in favor of non-Western ontic epistemologies found in other entities (such as ancestral Black female spirits) in other worlds. The subjectivity of taking care of objects of spiritual significance can be an

ambiguous space, for there are a variety of ways in which Titi's practice could be interpreted or misinterpreted. Nevertheless, Titi happily lived with this ambiguity because there was an advantage to that ambiguity. No one could lay claim to her actions, knowledges, and choices. This was a form of control.

FOREIGN OBJECTS OF CARE

"They dropped me here and here I've lived
And because I work like a dog,
Here is where I was reborn.

And I sought to rely on epic story of the Mandiga
after epic story.
I rebelled."⁴

Afra X are Black Latin American women who are conceptualized as entities that labor. Their bodies are used as mechanisms for toil, anywhere. They work "like a dog," as Nancy Morejón suggests in her poem. Often, they are given the care of objects, foreign to their personhood, belonging to someone else and for the benefit of other entities. In the labor of foreign objects, their bodies are nothing more than facilitators of another person's possibilities. As cooks, they satisfy someone else's hunger. As maids, they provide a clean living space for another's enjoyment. As field hands, they make it possible for another to have food and clothing. As nannies, they make it possible for another to have freedom to work or have a more mobile life. In this subjectivity of toil, how is transcendence possible? As Morejón suggests above, what does it mean to be "reborn"? How does she "break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner," as Anzaldúa recommends? In what ways are rebellions (that are not suicide missions) possible?

My mother, Ana, was an Afra X. She was an afro-descended, Spanish-speaking migrant's daughter, and sister, mother, aunt, friend, neighbor, and laborer in the twentieth century. She was a Puerto Rican who worked at a hotel created on the grounds of an old plantation in St. Croix, which was owned by a racist white family. Although the twentieth century—a time in which she would be born and die—was a post-slavery age, it is a period in which she would remain signified in the logic of an enslaved system. In that ontology, she was little more than a slave having to work long, hard hours, earning low, meager wages. She cleaned guest rooms by hand carrying heavy bags of laundry on her back. Why did she do it? This work was "honest." As a widow, it was a way to provide for her children. She was the mother of Black "native" sons and daughters, whose humanity would still be in question, whose ability to reason would be ignored, challenged, or erased, whose road to professional success would be in danger of being thwarted, stalled, or denied, and whose place in the social strata would often be silenced.

Despite a very clear erasure in the philosophical literature regarding her subjective position, I find myself asking about the ways in which she understood, manifested, and powered through her world. How did she manifest her subjectivity? What was her epistemic ontology in the face of such a difficult, "labored" life? Was there any freedom or power in her daily labors? And, if so, what were they? The

resulting educational and professional successes of her children and grandchildren, despite the odds, is one very important answer to the question of “Why continue?” The rebellion referred to by Morejón might be in the changed lives of those who would follow in her ancestral line.

In the book chapter “The identity Crisis in Feminist Theory,” Linda Alcoff argues that a major task for feminist theorists today is to “deconstruct and de-essentialize” the idea that women are neither rational nor free, like men.⁵ I wonder if this notion posed by Alcoff is a theoretical possibility for working class women of color? Essentially, is it a theoretical impossibility for there to be freedom and choice in the labor that is such a big part of some women’s lives? Most importantly, is the idea of being thought as “rational” or “free like men” an unnecessary project, especially for women of color?

There is a very well-established philosophical conversation about labor in Western philosophy. The most well-known is the idea that there is a kind of alienation in labor—an idea from philosophers such as Hegel, Marx, and Heidegger. A very lively and important debate, this discourse is based on the rise of industrialism and the traditional worker (white and Western). Undoubtedly, this discourse is of value, especially because it critiques capitalism as a system that exploits laborers. In thinking about the specificity of Afra X’s life, there is a complexity that is missing in the dialogue of alienation. Within this complexity is the idea that work can be a kind of freedom or a space of transcendence from ordinary life.

I have often observed Afra X choosing to work when she does not need to or should not. In these cases, work represented a life of capability outside of the home space, where neither children nor spouses dominated their existence. For example, aunt Celia chose to remain a watch factory worker for many years after her retirement age. She claimed to continue because at home her husband treated her like a child, always trying to tell her what to do. At work, she claimed to have peace.

Recalling Anzaldúa’s idea of living with contradiction, the problematic exists that even in this very exploitative system, a woman of color can find a space for self-actualization. It is important to note that I don’t want to suggest that for Afra X there is a pure reversal in spaces where freedom is possible, i.e., where the home space is purely oppressive and the workspace is liberating. The ambiguity is that there was opportunity for transcendence in both spaces. My aunt who escaped home for work simply adored cooking and took pride in her kitchen skills and management. Thus, both places had ambiguity.

OBJECTS OF FAMILY HISTORY/MEMORY/PSYCHE

In the care of objects, we keep family history, memory, and psyche. This is essential for those who have migrated from highly communitarian environments and now find themselves in work silos, where so much of the new host culture is foreign, unknown, unwelcoming, or not readily attainable. The care of objects of family history and psyche are essential when we live in situations where our keys to culture and community don’t fit the present circumstance.

The first object I collected and for which I still care is a small green afghan I asked my mom to make for me when I was in college. It was and continues to be a very functional and durable object. This object, which she crocheted, contained her daily meditations, prayers, and good wishes for me. It is that psychosocial energetic messaging which carried me through the alienating spaces of the classroom, the textbooks, the living quarters (dorms, off-campus housing, etc.), the environment (landscape, weather, etc.) in both undergraduate and graduate school. In a world devoid of cell phones, unlimited phone call plans, FaceTime, Snapchat, and texting, it was the afghan which gave me daily reminders of my mother’s words, love, and care.

There is an important distinction that should be made between taking care of objects of familial history and materialism and consumerism. Taking care of objects of familial history refers to having a select few objects that link us to the historical past. Sometimes it is just one object, but it may be a few. Some of these objects contain meaningful significance in one’s life. On other occasions, objects of family history, memory, and psyche tell a partial story, or even a fragmented one. For materialist consumers, objects owned have primarily monetary or social value.

Returning to Anzaldúa’s notion of ambiguity, it is important to note the ambiguous connection to land. As a migrant, I still have an ambiguous connection to the United States. Even though I am a US-born citizen, my ambiguity to the mainland remains. I was not born in the mainland. Neither my umbilical cord nor my parents are buried here. Even though this land feeds and sustains me, I am not rooted in the same way as most around me are. Psychically, I am not fully here (in the mainland) nor fully there (in the Caribbean). So I occupy this alternate space that is in between the physical worlds that produced and consume/sustain me. Yet, I don’t feel complete in this new, wonderful host home. This ambiguity causes an in-betweenness, i.e., of not being psychically complete anywhere. This I must continue to live with. There is no true home. The objects of family history, memory, and psyche create bridges between existences, and for moments at a time, I might feel complete.

Sometimes, objects of care are things for which knowledge is partial or constructed. The second object of care I remember having was my dad’s old manual typewriter. He has been deceased since I was five years old. It was a typewriter that I had used in high school (before I had access to a computer). Even though I did not need it at college, I carried the typewriter on a plane from the Caribbean to Pennsylvania following one of my trips home. This typewriter, although precious to me, was of fragmented knowledge because no one really told me much about it. I knew it was my dad’s and that he used it. That’s all. I constructed and created the meaning of the typewriter based on the notion that it had belonged to him. The meaning for me was symbolic knowledge of his work ethic and how he must have thought it important to own essential equipment to do good, serious work. A typewriter in his day may be like having a computer in my day. So the object had several meanings. First, it conveyed the importance of work in his life, i.e., that he would buy tools to complete it well. Second, it was important to buy and own your work

tools. Third, it was the idea of his presence in the object itself. I had his typewriter, something he touched and used regularly.

As ordinary citizens, we don't see ourselves as curators of our living/work spaces and the objects we choose to have in those living spaces. But we are. On a daily basis we can choose what to hold, what to carry, what to keep, what to display, and what to honor. There is freedom and self-actualization in these choices.

CONCLUSION

In response to Anzaldúa, I have argued for a transcendence of subject-object duality through a close examination of Afra X's relation to objects of care. In the keeping of altars, Afra X creates a space of transcendence where plural subjective positions are possible. In the objects of foreign care, Afra X can find self-actualization, even given the contradiction of labor exploitation. Finally, I have shown how objects of family memory and psyche can form bridges between the worlds in which the Afra X lives. This practice of objects of familial care is a practice of plural personality. It is, finally, important to point to the implication of this study, which is to also show the ways in which feminism's comparative projects with men (especially as it involves thinking through a theoretical perspective that would include Afra X and other women of color) are shortsighted.

NOTES

1. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands, La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 80.
2. *Ibid.*, 79.
3. Marta Moreno Vega, "Espiritismo in the Puerto Rican Community: A New World Recreation With the Elements of Kongo Ancestor Worship," *Journal of Black Studies* 29, no. 3 (January 1999): 348.
4. Nancy Morejón, *Black Woman and other Poems/Mujer Negra y otros poemas* (Miami: Mango Publishing, 2004), 8.
5. Linda Martín Alcoff, "The identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," in *Visible Identities: Race, Gender and the Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 134.

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