

Constructing Marianismo in Colonial Mexico

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In the late fifteenth century, Iberian conquerors invaded various regions of the “New World.” Veiled under the guise of Christian morality, these men embarked on a mission to obtain “gold, glory, and God” on behalf of the Crown and Catholic Church and instigated the colonial era in Latin America. These invasions permanently altered the social, political, and economic structure for natives living in those areas as racial and cultural mixing of Indigenous American, European, and African peoples ensued. This encounter also generated dissonance between the peoples of Mesoamerica and the Spanish in regards to gender roles, gender relations, and sexuality (Powers 39). In addition to new technologies and diseases, the Spanish also brought a rigid patriarchal philosophy to the New World which contradicted many indigenous beliefs (Powers 40, 45).

It is inconceivable to analyze Spanish conquistadors’ influence on gender roles without investigating the role of the Catholic Church in their ideology. In the early 1500s, the Church introduced a European concept of male dominance and female obedience into the lives of strong-willed indigenous women. Using the Virgin Mary as the ideal example, native women were instructed in the rules of sexual conduct and appropriate gender roles which included female submissiveness and chastity (Powers 55). Modern scholars have termed this ideology *marianismo*. Due to the imposition of Spanish social ideals on indigenous peoples, the roles of women and men in these pre-colonial societies drastically changed (Powers 40). By investigating the impact of *marianismo* on the indigenous gender system in New Spain in the early colonial period, an evident change from a relatively egalitarian gender system to a more rigid patriarchal system reveals itself. Furthermore, through additional examination of this

ideology's influence on the notable female writer Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, a more nuanced understanding of the colonial and current gender dichotomy in Mexico will follow.

Before delving into the colonial gender system, it is critical to understand the basis behind the patriarchal ideology which the Spanish brought to the Americas. During the 800-year Reconquista, a struggle between the Christians and the Muslims for control of the Iberian Peninsula, military activities came to dominate Iberian daily life. According to Karen Powers, constant warfare emphasized the importance of men's roles in combat and resulted in a culture based on violence (Powers 40). Since men were the war heroes, this intensified the patriarchal gender system.

While most of Europe operated under this structure, Iberian gender relations may have been more extreme since it was believed that woman's honor was directly related to her chastity. Therefore, Iberians cloistered their women, particularly elite women, at home so that their husbands could guard their physical and spiritual welfare (Powers 40). This viewpoint is seen in the quintessential Spanish literary texts of the time including "La Mujer Brava" from *El Conde Lucanor*, where the male character instills fear in his wife by physically harming various animals so that she will follow his commands (Ibara et al. 52). This reflects Iberian ideology during the Middle Ages and early Renaissance as men were expected to maintain control over their women whether it be through the instillation of fear or through physical discipline.

Under a patriarchal social organization with support from the Catholic Church, Iberian society did not afford women the luxury of pursuing their personal interests. While women played major roles in the home, they were still expected to submit to and obey their husbands (Powers 40), and men controlled government, religion, and society (Socolow 1). Since positions of bureaucrats, lawyers, judges, and priests were solely for men, women were limited in their

career choices and were barred from contributing to church and state policies. In particular, women of the elite class were generally restricted to marriage or convent life. Additionally, no matter what social or economic status a woman held, it was believed that women lacked the innate ability to reason. As a result, at the level of the state, men represented their women in public and legal matters. Under Spanish law, women could not participate in the legal process as witnesses for last wills, and three female witnesses equaled one male witness (Powers 41).

Not only did the patriarchal Church exist as a political, economic, and social juggernaut in Spain and exacerbated the gender divide, but its support of colonialism altered gender roles in Spain's colonies through its gradual implementation of a male-dominated society. The tenets of *marianismo* used Mary, the mother of Jesus, as an exemplary model for indigenous women to follow (Powers 55). Mary functioned as the New Eve whose image involves numerous contradictions: handmaiden and queen, virgin and mother, role model and unattainable purity (Hamington 9, 10). Contrary to Eve, the epitome of evil for leading man to sin (5), Mary lived a life characterized by humility, chastity, and obedience to her male counterparts including her son, Jesus Christ.

These notions played an essential role in educating young native women about Christian gender roles and appropriate sexual conduct (Powers 55). In addition, Mary's similarities to pagan female goddesses facilitated the Christianization of pagans (Hamington 12). While Mary was revered in the early Church, she was hardly addressed in the gospels (13) and did not gain prominence in the Church until the Council of Trent in the mid-sixteenth century (Powers 50), so the truth regarding her historical life eludes modern scholars (Hamington 13). However, the colonial Church elevated her to an even higher role as a means to convert indigenous Americans (16). The dogma regarding Mary's perpetual virginity was also used to conquer the women of

the New World (15, 16). However, the Mexica of Tenochtitlan and the Pueblo Indians of northern New Spain held radically different ideas regarding women's roles in daily life, and this gender shift did not occur immediately upon colonization.

Unlike in Spanish colonial society, women held important political positions in indigenous society. The Mexica, Quechua, and other pre-colonial indigenous peoples believed in gender complementarity, signifying that men and women carried equal weight in society (Powers 41). While there were two separate hierarchies for male and females, these hierarchies were interdependent. At the zenith of the system, the hierarchies merged under a single ruler. Men and women were both eligible to run for office, and within the context of Mexica legal codes, all women were considered jural adults (44), which is explicitly contrary to the Spanish view of women as minors in the courtroom (41). While the Mexica viewed men and women as distinct persons, both held equivalent legal rights, could own property, and could represent themselves in court (44). The Pueblo Indians, who inhabited modern-day northern Mexico, also held views similar to those of the Mexica in regards to gender roles (Gutiérrez 76).

After colonialization, Spanish colonial society was separated based on race as the Republic of the Spaniards and the Republic of the Indians. While both republics were under the authority of the Crown, they were not equal since the Republic of the Indians had to pay tribute to the Spaniards to learn Christian doctrine. In the process, the indigenous hierarchy remained unchanged except for one monumental difference: the Crown removed women from authoritative positions and effectively detached them from the political sphere since men now represented women in politics (Powers 42). Even elite women, while allowed to maintain some of their resources, were not permitted to obtain education like indigenous men. While some indigenous women still participated on the micro-level to advocate change within their individual

communities, men held the ruling title in their towns (46). The Spanish Crown did allow some Mixteca women living in the south of the Aztec Empire to keep their wealth and rank as *cacica* or *curaca* rulers; however, the position of governor, the highest Spanish office, was reserved for men. In addition, once *cacicas* were married, they were forced to transfer their ruling power to their husbands (47).

In the case of the Pueblos, the Spanish created a sexual division of labor. Prior to Spanish invasion, women and men relied on each other for reciprocal support. Women worked in the home, performed religious rituals, and constructed buildings while men hunted, wove, and served as protectors. Men were now expected to perform heavy labor while women ceased hunting, fighting, and participating in religious rites (Gutiérrez 76). All this in conjunction triggered a shift from a parallel gender system to a male-dominated one as seen on the Iberian Peninsula.

Next, the Spanish colonists transformed indigenous religious views. In the early years of Christianity, Christians denied the concept of female deities although goddesses such as Epona, Freya, and Herth were common idols among ancient Europeans (Hamington 11). Goddesses were prevalent in pagan religious beliefs predating Christianity (Powers 41), and these peoples fervently served earth mothers and fertility goddesses (Hamington 11). Not only did the Spanish bring the concept of monotheism under a male deity, but they also used patriarchal concepts to repress female sexuality (Powers 41). The Church implemented Mary as a quasi-goddess model so that previous goddess worshippers could identify spiritually with the Christian Mary (Hamington 11). In allowing pagan populations to practice devotion to Mary, the Church gained a larger following. Mary was therefore viewed as a Christian goddess in the eyes of new converts, and outdated goddess iconography was replaced with images of Mary (12). The

Mexica exchanged the Toci earth goddess with Mary, whom they now viewed as “our mother” (Powers 50), and the Pueblos replaced their Corn Mother goddesses with Mary’s visage (Gutiérrez 90).

Pre-colonial indigenous women could also act as priestesses, healers, and confessors (Powers 48). Once the Spanish invaded, Church teachings barred women from participating in the church as priests or in ritual officiations. Fortunately, women could participate in *cofradías*, groups functioning under the control of the Church, which functioned to defend the community’s physical and spiritual well-being. However, while some women worked their way up in the ranks in the *cofradía*, as in other aspects of life, the highest positions were reserved for men. Nonetheless, many women still continued their ritual practices in secret and created syncretic religions which melded Catholic and Mexica religious structures. In these ways, indigenous women attempted to maintain their hold on their pre-colonial social positions and cultural values (50, 52).

As for the Pueblo Indians, Franciscan friars sought to purge the Indians of their “satanic” beliefs (Gutiérrez 71). Because the Pueblos based much of their religious beliefs on the forces of nature including rain, the friars depicted themselves as rain chiefs. The friars arrived in New Mexico during a drought just before the rainy season. They then prayed for rain and instructed the Pueblos to do so as well; when rain eventually came, the Indians associated this with the friar’s mystical powers. This manipulation aided in the Spanish’s physical and spiritual conquest of Indian land and ideology (55, 56). As a result, women’s roles in religion changed. While they often participated in religious rites such as the Snake Dance and the “demonic” katsina dance (79), they could now only assist the priest, clean the church, prepare communion, and watch

male leaders communicate with the gods. The Church now not only controlled women's places in society but also the church (78).

Lastly, personal changes ensued for Mexica and Pueblo women as Spanish presence altered the concept of sexuality, marriage, and family life (Powers 42). Both the Mexica and the Pueblos viewed sex as a joyful and pleasurable act which benefitted both the soul and the body (Powers 56, Gutiérrez 72). While indigenous peoples regarded the soul and body as irrevocably intertwined, the Spanish viewed the temporal body separately from the immortal soul (Powers 56). The Pueblo Indians considered sexual acts as sacred; for example, they performed ritualistic sexual acts such as fellatio by the rain chief during the Snake Dance, but the Church viewed them as promiscuous and as devilish "pleasures of the flesh." To circumvent these sexual acts, Franciscan friars replaced these rituals with songs praising Mary (Gutiérrez 90).

In regards to Spanish views on women and sexuality, Spanish friars viewed Mexica women as vain due to their elaborate clothing, hairstyles, and makeup, these women were often likened to prostitutes. Indigenous women were taught that they were only as valuable as their virginity, and in order to save their souls, women were instructed to dress modestly and emulate the Virgin Mary (Powers 55). While indigenous societies did not value pre-marital virginity highly, the Spanish did immensely. As the Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún preached to one Mexica woman who had sex before marriage: "You lost the grace of God, you placed yourself in sin, you pushed away your guardian angel" (52, 53). Therefore, the Church prohibited acts such as premarital sex which was thought to tempt the body and negatively affect the state of one's soul.

If the Indians participated in "bestial" acts such as premarital sex and ritualistic sexual acts, they were publically whipped to rid their body of sin (Gutiérrez 73). Despite the Church's

fervent efforts, at the start of colonialization, many Pueblo men and women resisted this shift towards purity and away from sexual liberation. These sexual chains implemented by the Church eventually led to the Pueblo's revolt of 1680; while the revolt was initially successful, the Spanish reconquered the area by 1693 (Gutiérrez 77, XIX). However, in post-colonial Pueblo society, men were taught that by action (whether it be sexual in nature or otherwise), they could increase their honor and social standing. Contradictorily, a woman's virtue was directly proportional to her purity and could only be maintained or lost, and there was no way to augment her honor (Gutiérrez 206, 213). By the 1700s, Pueblo Indians also practiced seclusion of women to guard their virginity as seen in medieval Iberian societies (235).

The Spanish also imposed their views regarding monogamy and forced the Mexica to divorce their secondary wives. Prior indigenous practices involved serial polygamy for men of the elite class in both Mexica (Powers 56) and Pueblo society (Gutiérrez 90). In contrast with the Spanish, the Mexica had no concept of "legitimate" or "illegitimate" offspring. While indigenous women were barred from having multiple partners in pre-colonial society, indicating a slight patriarchal influence prior to Spanish colonialization, women indigenous leaders could choose heirs based on matrilineal descent. However, the colonizers chose heirs through the paternal line, so indigenous ruling status was now determined by the paternal line (Powers 45), and the majority of their children from other marriages were now considered "bastard" children and could not obtain their inheritance (58). This further shifted indigenous society towards male dominance. Ironically, while indigenous peoples could no longer have polygamous marriages after colonialization, Spanish conquistadors often had multiple lovers. Those who had mestizo children with indigenous women often removed the children from their mother's care so that Spanish women could raise them (78), although whether they were considered bastard children

or not is unclear. In the case of the Pueblo Indians, friars bribed indigenous men with meat, livestock, and education if they promised to follow God's laws, including monogamous marriages.

While the Mexica and the Pueblo Indians permitted polygamy in pre-colonial society, adultery was considered a major transgression (Powers 28) because it affected familial stability. Both men and women convicted of adultery were typically killed with a blow to the head, although women were usually strangled first. In addition to adultery, Mexica couples could divorce if the wife could not produce an heir or if the husband could not support the family (Aguilar-Moreno, 353). While indigenous peoples punished adultery for its negative effects on family life, the Spanish Church viewed adultery and divorce as jeopardizing to the immortal soul (Powers 28). Often spoken at ritual celebrations, this common New Mexican proverb demonstrates the Spanish view on adultery: "Keep your eyes off the wife of the guitarist" (Gutiérrez 239). Nonetheless, although the Church frowned upon adultery, as aforementioned, it was perfectly acceptable for conquistadors to have multiple indigenous lovers (Powers 74). In colonial New Mexican society, men now viewed women as sexual pawns to obtain honor and demonstrate their virility (Gutiérrez 221). Ironically, the Augustinian Monk wrote that "women should strive to become male in virtue," illustrating the pervasive double standard that existed in both societal and church life for women. Women, particularly indigenous women, were also more likely to be punished for sexual crimes (Powers 95) and were often abused by Spanish men (104).

The Church also controlled marriage practices in the colonies until the late eighteenth century. There were several canonic impediments to marriage including polygamy, bigamy, consanguinity, and differences in religion (Gutiérrez, 243). However, as previously described,

these impediments did not prevent Spanish men from polygamous relationships with indigenous women of different religious views. In pre-colonial Mexica society, trial marriages and pre-marital sex were common. These experimental marriages often lasted for a few months up to three years and often resulted in children. Nonetheless, these children were welcomed into indigenous society, whereas in Spanish society, they would have been ostracized (Powers 29). Ultimately, the Church's goal was to preserve a person's chastity until marriage, and the implementation of these cannon laws aided that goal (Gutiérrez, 243).

Eventually, the Spanish rid their colonies of pagan views and altered indigenous political and social life for both men and women. While indigenous men's roles changed during conquest as they accepted their dominant role over women, through a "double jeopardy of conquest," women were conquered sequentially by the Spanish and then their male counterparts (Powers 45). The irony exists that *marianismo* ideology implemented by the Catholic Church elevated the Virgin Mary on a pedestal while simultaneously using her as an icon to suppress women. Women who could not reflect Mary's perfect image of piety and chastity were considered corrupt, susceptible to satanic activity, and closely watched by the Church (Hamington 17).

While women of the early colonial era were poorly educated in general, the onset of the Enlightenment ignited an interest in educating elite women on a more intellectual level so that they could pray, read religious texts, and educate their children in Christian doctrine. However, this move was not driven by the desire to improve social equality; rather, education was thought to repair women's many defects including weakness of character and increased sensitivity (Socolow 178-180). Consequently, through the auspices of the Church, some colonial women learned to read in order to serve as better wives and mothers (178). However, writing was a

luxury which was an unnecessary and unsafe act for women as the Church viewed it as transgressing the quiet and submissive role imposed on them under *marianismo* (Powers 55).

In actuality, the only “unsafe” aspect of teaching a woman to read is that she might formulate her own ideas, as some divergent women like Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz demonstrated (Socolow 178). As a female writer, Sor Juana questioned the Church and Crown’s subservient roles for women in a patriarchal environment. Through her writings, she addresses both religious and secular influences (Stinnett 133) and participates in “ecclesiastic resistance” against Church dogma which supported traditional women’s roles such as seclusion from worldly ideals, which would prevent women from participating in intellectual discussions (28, 133). This written form of resistance proved to be problematic for Sor Juana as she was a woman stepping out of her subservient role to argue with dominant male figureheads of the time.

Juana Ramírez y Asbaje was born in New Spain in the mid-seventeenth century. As a child prodigy who devoted her life to learning the language of religion, science, and the arts, she was deemed the “Mexican Phoenix” by her contemporaries for her unparalleled command of literature and poetry (Arenal et al. 1, 2). Admittedly, Juana had much greater access to education than other women because her grandfather owned a large library and was of the elite class. She was born a *criolla*, meaning she was an American born of Spanish lineage (3), and was therefore of higher social class than *mestizas*, or mixed-race women. However, she was still considered socially inferior to men and had two life options: marry or enter the convent.

Because the convent was the only space where women could live without the hindrance of performing marital duties, Juana chose the life as a bride of Christ (Arenal et al. 3) and took the name Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (4). She was still expected to pray, perform chores, and take vows of celibacy, obedience, and poverty (Lavrin 8, 9), but convent life allotted her the freedom

to study. This was considered the most favorable path for women as they could preserve their virginity by mirroring Mary's exemplary virginity (23). As described in her famous letter "La Respuesta" ("The Response"), Sor Juana writes that she chose convent life in order to obtain her salvation (de la Cruz, 50). Ironically, she does not mean salvation through Christ; in this context, she is referring to her salvation through knowledge.

Since Sor Juana was a woman, many regarded her varied talents as intriguing (Arenal et al. 2), while others desired to cage her curiosity. New Spain's society sought to stifle *marisabias*, or female know-it-alls. Nonetheless, despite various efforts to deter young Juana from seeking education, including a public examination by forty of the most knowledgeable men in the realm, nothing could quench her thirst for knowledge (3). Women were forbidden from attending secondary school or university, but Sor Juana was self-taught (Socolow 178). As described in "La Respuesta," she refused to eat cheese because it was the food of idiots (de la Cruz 49), cut her own hair if she did not adequately learn academic material (51), and even attempted to dress up as a man to attend college although her mother prevented her from doing so (49).

She eventually chose convent life to expand her knowledge and was permitted to continue writing since her writings brought revenue to the convent (Stinnett 135). As all nuns did when they entered the convent, Sor Juana chose a male confessor: Father Núñez (Yerger 54). Male confessors perpetuated the notion of male dominance as they often controlled the nun's physical and spiritual sanctity. Nuns were often directed to perform self-beatings and submit a detailed journal to their confessor (Powers 110). However, Sor Juana was strong-willed, and church figureheads held dissenting views regarding women's ability to participate in scholastic discussion; Sor Juana desired to study and write about religious and secular material while

Núñez was against it (Arenal 5). Despite the stringent rules of the Church authorities such as the Inquisition, which monitored her compliance to expected female standards (Stinnett 135), Sor Juana demonstrated her intellectual abilities in her writings and defended her role as an intellectual of the time. She also actively fought for women's right to participate in intellectual discussions on both religious and secular texts because she believed that other intellectual women deserved the option to study freely. Her views regarding women's position in society are best exemplified through her written argument against several male church figureheads in "La Respuesta."

In 1690, Bishop Juan Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz, a close friend of Sor Juana, published a letter written by Sor Juana without her permission. In this letter, Sor Juana critiques a sermon by the Portuguese Jesuit preacher Antonio Vieyra (Yerger, 64). This publication was dangerous: not only did Sor Juana openly refute a man's interpretation of the Bible, but she also interpreted the Bible herself, an act which was forbidden for women. Writing under the pseudonym "Sor Filotea de la Cruz," Fernández named the document "Letter Worthy of Athena" and also included comments condemning Sor Juana's interest in secular studies. The goal of Fernández's comments was two-fold: first, to get Sor Juana to address strictly religious topics in her writings and avoid secular ideas. Second, he urged her to live a more traditional monastery life. Fernandez's letter ultimately tries to force Sor Juana into the expected submissive role that nuns and other women of that time should live.

In "La Respuesta," Sor Juana contests the notion that women are incapable of reason and should only devote their lives to religious study. To combat Fernández's first point stating that women should only study religious texts, Sor Juana points out that she better understands God as a result of studying secular texts: "Without Logic, how should I know the general and specific

methods by which Holy Scripture is written? Without Rhetoric, how should I understand its figures, topes, and locutions?” (de la Cruz 52-55). To argue her point that women belong in the intellectual arena, she cites forty-four women who have contributed to various areas of intellectual study including biblical characters such as Deborah and Ester (77). She also mentions Doctor Arce, a reputable male professor of scripture, who argues that women should not preach but should still be allowed to study and write privately (81). By citing a man’s opinion, she is reinforcing her argument and undermining Fernández’s second point.

However, her most damning point arises when she interprets Saint Paul’s words in I Corinthians 14:34-35. “As in all the churches of the holy ones, women should keep silent in churches, for they are not allowed to speak, but be subordinate, as even the law says. But if they want to learn anything, they should ask their husbands at home. For it is improper for a woman to speak in the church” (New American Bible, 260). In Sor Juana’s interpretation of this verse, she states that these words have both a formal and material interpretation. The formal interpretation by the Church states that women should not preach nor should they study privately. However, in her material interpretation, a much more liberal view, she agrees that women should not preach, but they should be able to study privately (Myers 107, 108). By supporting the material interpretation, she actively defies Church teachings and becomes an open target for the Inquisition and prominent church leaders.

While Sor Juana questioned the ideals of hegemonic masculinity and the Church’s teachings, the Church ultimately stifled her opinions and forced her into a submissive role that is characterized by the *marianismo* ideology. As a result, Sor Juana recanted her controversial ideas, sold her books and scientific instruments, donated the proceeds to charity, and eventually reinstated Núñez as her confessor in 1693. She then renewed her vows, signed a statement of

self-condemnation, and supposedly turned to a life of penance and self-sacrifice characterized by the ascetic life. While many scholars debate the cause behind the renunciation of her life's work, it is thought to be a combination of pressure from church leaders such as Father Núñez, Bishop Fernandez, and Archbishop Aguiar y Seijas, fear of the Inquisition, and fear from the various threats she received ordering her to stop her studies. This resignation was uncharacteristic of Sor Juana and simply demonstrates the pervasiveness of the Spanish patriarchal system as she was forced into submission to follow the "timeworn cultural paradigms of women as either pure vessels or fragile victims" (Arenal et al. XVI). Like Saint Catherine of Alexandria, Sor Juana too lived to prove that intelligence and the soul were not owned by one gender above the other (Arenal et al. 3). These ideas also resemble the concept of gender complementarity seen in the Mexica gender system, but like the Mexica, these fiery ideals were quenched by the Church.

Sor Juana is thought to have laid the foundation for feminism in Hispanic countries through her "revolutionary reversal" of gender identifications (Arenal et al. 2). However, by investigating the history preceding Sor Juana's controversial writings, it is important to note that women had a voice and political influence in pre-colonial societies such as the Mexica of Mesoamerica due to gender complementarity (Powers 40). While there were other factors in the first century of the colonial era which aided in this shift such as high indigenous mortality due to disease, which weakened the overall population, Spanish patriarchal practices undeniably disrupted indigenous gender systems (40, 41).

While many Mexica and Pueblo women attempted to maintain their pre-colonial roles under Spain's influence, few elite women managed to keep their political roles, and a decline in female status occurred (Powers 45, Gutiérrez 73). In the midst of implementing a male-dominated social structure, the Church dismissed the indigenous pagan customs as devilish and

eliminated those ideals by the start of the seventeenth century (Hamington 16). While Sor Juana's writings were revolutionary in the context of the patriarchal culture of New Spain, in reality, they were not completely novel given the Mexica and Pueblo Indians' egalitarian beliefs which lent women a voice in the political, economic, and social arenas. Additionally, if one considers that indigenous people's beliefs were not immediately stifled upon conquest since they practiced rituals to female goddesses in secret and women played a role in forming syncretic religion (Powers 50), this lends credibility to the notion that women still tried to contribute to religious practices during the colonial era.

In conclusion, the Spanish Church and Crown inflicted its "civilized" ideals on the "barbaric" peoples of Latin America and irreversibly altered their ways of life in terms of political, social, and economic organization (Socolow 1) while also transforming indigenous gender systems. The influence of the patriarchal ideals and the construction of the *marianismo* ideology fostered a paradigm shift towards male dominance and simultaneously demoted women to an inferior status regardless of their prior position in the social hierarchy. Sor Juana was born in the midst of this shift, and her writings serve as a testament to the influence of *marianismo* in New Spain's society during the early colonial period. While she actively challenged the concept of male intellectual dominance and fought for women's rights to learn, write, teach, and interpret the Bible, Sor Juana dedicated her life to her "vice" – the humble pursuit of knowledge – and was ultimately reprimanded for her controversial egalitarian and religious ideals.

However, considering that gender complementarity existed in Mexica society less than a century prior, her statements do not represent an entirely unique concept. The true controversy arose from the fact that she was a disobedient woman who defied Spanish gender conventions and questioned a man's interpretation of the Bible. Had she been born male, her fate would have

been different, her views would not have been as vehemently questioned, and her provocative writings would have been fairly debated amongst the intellectuals of her time. By the late 1700s, some male writers such as Feijóo began publishing pieces in support of women's rights, but this was over a century too late for Sor Juana (Socolow 178). Although modern Hispanic societies have generally become more secular and have realized Sor Juana's dream for women to participate in intellectual debate without castigation, the seemingly anachronistic influence of *marianismo* lingers today. As liberation theologian Virgil Elizondo wrote, "The devotion to Mary is the most popular, persistent, and original characteristic of Latin American Christianity" (Hamington 16). Many Hispanic women are still expected to put family needs before their own and submit to their husbands while maintaining the pure and modest life which Mary embodies.

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