archaeological site of the racial self and its psychic foundations in Western culture. It is a complex visual testament to the process of cultural domination and its philosophical and political impact on the black self, resulting in psychic scars, ontological bruising and spiritual fragmentation.

Paradoxically, the *Negrophobia* collection is also an inversion of the discourses of racial domination and dislocation in that it also renews the psychic orientations of post-Enlightenment man in his relation to and representation of the racial other. He occupies a space of racial phantasmagoria, a figure of cultural perversion invested with a delusional identity. And it is probably in this context that the collection has its greatest value as a repository for the study, reflection and analysis of Europe’s historical and contemporary relationship with diasporic subjects.

Placed between the notions of cultural relation and his identity is the work of Brazilian artist Chatreh Feyziou (died in Paris, The Memory of Bobo). The grammar of her exhibits are so culturally specific that even the phrase “Product of Chatreh Feyziou” reinvents a horrific discourse of the representation of the other. Its beauty is that it demands a reasserting of modernity by placing at its centre the images of the artist and her work. The immediate, most striking thing about Feyziou’s “prostitute” is its colour black. Every single object is stained with colored or black dye and arranged in precise, aesthetic order. This listing of objects (vessels, jars, bottles, bowls of different colors) functions as a ironic statement on the West’s obsessions with faith as it struggles to exclude and maintain its group on modernity as essentially a white aesthetic edi
cile.

Feyziou makes overtures to new possibilities of an “unequivalent culture” in which the garb of modernity accept their cultural debt to ancient traditions and the aesthetic tropes of ex-colonies in this formation of modernity itself. But it has to be understood that Feyziou’s chamber of objects is a call for recognition that goes far beyond the West’s classical notion of “cultural influences.” It is quite often the case when art historians refer to the primitive, universal and aesthetic textiles in Picasso. Her yearning is for a recognition of syncretism and Europe’s acceptance of occidentalism as an evolving and intrinsic component of its symbiotic relationship. In our modern babel, linked by satellite systems producing a circuitry of electronic images underlined by systems of migration and exile, cross-cultural translations become the new paradigm through which identities can be expressed.

It is in the Uruguayan artist Carlos Capelana’s work that we encounter a subliminal expression of the self as Europe begins to fragment under the ten
sions of nationalism and ethnic conflict. In an interview with a British newspaper, Capelana declared the nature of his trajectory: “I am trying to focus on the Western self and otherness in relation to this self.” But it is the moment in which he visualizes this relationship that holds the greatest fascination for it is predicated upon the historical conditions of a Uruguayan exile in Sweden.

For the construction of his “chamber of identities” Capelana used 777 litres of mud carefully poured over four walls, 300 old books, 40 rocks and an assortment of furniture with which he created a living room. At once private and yet public, this living room is also a museum that houses objects “with which we surround ourselves to establish our identity.” Capelana uses old books mostly positioned in stacks held down by blocks of rocks; the mud walls are inscribed with quotations from literature, sociology, philosophy, art history and friends. Personal items invested with sentimental values are encased in glass cabinets. The room’s ambience is further heightened by a zeppa quality of lighting produced by reading lamps and triangular standing lamps. On the walls are also fragments of a tree root, elongated objects like dried bones/shells hanging on the walls, held together by black strings.

Capelana’s room is like an ancient shrine. Devotional and ritualistic, it is a kind of cultural testament to the complex issues confronting Europe, issues pertaining to the rationalized self, cultural boundaries, linguistic borders and spiritual location. Ultimately Capelana’s project is about making contact with otherwise, forging through a dialogue free of the violence associated with xenophobia and cultural arrogance. “What I’d like,” he says, “is to build a self that is not hegemonic — which is in contact with nature and with what is happening outside the home and which doesn’t believe this culture is superior to others.”

On entering Capelana’s living room one sees a sign on the wall that reads: WELCOME TO MY ROOM. Capelana’s room, like the work of the artists I have discussed and those whose work for, seasons of space, I am unable to discuss, possess us with a non-hegemonic vision of culture that is syn
cratic and shamanic.

Together or as individual pieces, the work of these artists constructs a living map: a map of the self and its psychic foundations as we approach the next century, a map built on a new set of philosophical and cultural values. Perhaps it’s the kind of map that Elisa Cunotti would have liked to have seen.

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African heritage constitutes a shared element among Latin American and Caribbean culture. Yet, if this is one thing we all have in common as Caribbean and Latin American peoples, how and why is it that most of us do not want to recognize this African legacy? Why the reluctance? Why does this African past remain invisible? Why does this African presence remain absent? What is specifically Caribbean or Latin American about this invisibility and this absence?

Yet I remember that it wasn’t until I was seventeen years old that I explicitly became aware of my African-ness. When at that time I enrolled as a student at the Rio Piedras Campus of the University of Puerto Rico, my friend Anselma Dávila designated me as a "jibaro." (This term is roughly equivalent to what people in the United States refer to as a ‘high yellow’). You see, I have been described as all my life because my friend is a poet and poets have the power of invoking beings, identities. And who was I to dispute a poet’s power of conviction? But why did this part of me remain silent until someone else summoned it? If this was something I already was, why wasn’t I aware of it before? Why did my African-ness require a wake-up call? There is a large number of Lottines in the United States who have not recognized their African heritage. Some people require a poet signaling them as being of African descent. Others never needed this detox, being marked by third persons or having self-recognized themselves at an early age. Still others daily adopt us of African identification by claiming a Caribbean identity or a cultural or geographical space (such as the Caribbean) where — except in St. Vincent — Indians have not existed for over two hundred years.

As with most people who come from the Larger Antilles, I would have to define this African-ness as one that begins at home. Among my immediate family, this meant my father, my paternal grandmother, and my paternal grandfather. But let us not relativize only a few times in my life, while I never met my paternal grandmother. You see, this side of the family was literacy. It was at some point that my mother’s side of the family distanced my father because he ran away with my mother and because he was not black. Even my family, the descendents of the African-ness, “of negro ese” (“that black man”) or “de negros ese” (“that miserable man”).

Mind you, my father was not so. In trying to reclaim these lost meanings, I am not reviewing what my father did. Rather, I am trying to do two things here, starting with understanding the meanings associated with the physical appearance of Puerto Ricans such as my father: blacks and mulattos. My second aim in this regard is to understand and explore the links (past and present) between Latin American and Caribbean cultural productions and similar productions originating in African cultures.

Let us first look at the meanings attached to physical appearances. The divisions within my immediate family not only illustrate the divisions within most Puerto Rican families (on the island and in North America). Such divisions also illustrate the existing splits within Puerto Rican national culture itself. As with most Caribbean and Latin American peoples, I must first clarify that Puerto Rican racial divisions and the racism that accompanies them are different from the ways in which the races are designated and positioned in most of the United States. In Latin America and Caribbean cultures (particularly Spanish-speaking ones) position people in a broad racial spectrum, going from different shades of white at one end to various forms of blackness at the other, with an even wider band of intermediary categories: blanco, "blanquita," "jibaco," "color," "blanco," "mulato," "mestizo," "indio," "moreno," "negro," "negro liso," "negro," "negro retinto," etc. Often, a person can shift from one category to the other by simply becoming more educated or acquiring more money as the saying goes, "el diablo es lo que uno quiera," and the education makes a "parson white." Except in places such as New York or Chicago, or Puerto Rico, in much of the dominant Euro-American culture of the United States one is simply "white" or "black," with very little room for anything in between. These differences, however, should not delude us into thinking that racism and racial divisions simply don’t exist among Caribbean and Latin American peoples (there and in the US as well).

But let us go further and examine the ways in which racial divisions represent the existing splits within Puerto Rican national culture itself. Like all cultures, Puerto Rican culture has been historically defined not only as what it is, but — even more importantly — as what it is not. To be Puerto Rican is to have nothing to do with that which is defined as "negro ese." Historically, one of the principal symbols of such strangeness and non-Puerto Rican-ness has been blackness. As I have already noted, this has characterized my father as "negro ese." Whites and most of the intermedioary racial categories that constitute the Puerto Rican population have tradi-
Lo dice, pero he sido un testigo de la vida de una mujer en América Latina, de la lucha por la dignidad, la libertad y la justicia. Esta es una lucha que sigue en curso, y en la que todos podemos participar a través de nuestra voz, nuestra acción y nuestra solidaridad.

En el caso de las mujeres, es especialmente importante destacar su papel en la lucha por los derechos humanos. Las mujeres han sido y siguen siendo pioneras en la promoción de la igualdad y el reconocimiento de sus derechos, tanto en el ámbito de la legislación como en la sociedad en general.

La lucha por los derechos humanos es un tema que nos toca a todos, independientemente de nuestra raza, nacionalidad o religión. Cada uno de nosotros tiene la responsabilidad de luchar por la justicia y el respeto de los derechos humanos, y de hacer nuestro pequeño aporte a la construcción de un mundo mejor.

En última instancia, la lucha por los derechos humanos es una tarea compartida, y todos podemos hacer nuestra una parte importante en este esfuerzo. Cada uno de nosotros tiene el poder de hacer una diferencia, y juntos podemos lograr grandes cosas.

En resumen, la lucha por los derechos humanos es un tema que nos toca a todos, independientemente de nuestra raza, nacionalidad o religión. Cada uno de nosotros tiene la responsabilidad de luchar por la justicia y el respeto de los derechos humanos, y de hacer nuestro pequeño aporte a la construcción de un mundo mejor. Y juntos, podemos lograr grandes cosas.
women. It can also be used in our favor, that is, as one of the ways in which we can come together as women by structuring a specific collective identity that will help us resist both types of oppression (that is, racial domination and gender subordination).

Nevertheless, the racial and national-cultural common identity that we share as Latinas is still even more complex than that. On the one hand, this is something that already from the start unites us, among ourselves, as women who share the common condition of general racial subordination—something that, by the way, we also share with African Americans, Native Americans, and Asian women in this country. On the other hand, as Chandra Mohanty and Sarita Johnson Rascoe have pointed out, this is only a starting point—and a very difficult and uncertain starting point at that. Merely sharing this condition of oppression does not in and of itself guarantee the political consciousness of promoting such a unity and cooperation. It makes solidarity possible and at the same time becomes a hope of realization, precisely because this potential unity encompasses so many differences and contradictions among ourselves: as Latinas from different national backgrounds, specific racial categories, social classes, sexual identities, levels of education, political ideologies, etc. Likewise, sharing a general racial oppression—that is, to a greater or lesser degree, is historically part of the African diaspora—is a phenomenon that encompasses many differences and contradictions among us as people of Latin American and Caribbean background, and among us as part of the racially oppressed peoples in North America. Too often, many Latinas are asked to choose between being a Latina or being of African descent. And, to too many of us, this strikes very close to home. Literally, it means having to choose between who we are going to recognize as our legitimate grandmothers and who we are going to deny. Culturally, it means having to sort out and separate the elements of the music we dance to, and listen to, of the food we eat, the spiritual beliefs and practices we have lived, and so on, until we distill the purely European ingredients that we are expected to call "our own."

My position on this matter is that one cannot be a Latina without recognizing one's African heritage: without it, we are caricatures of the Others, or we are "American" simulacra, not Latinas. While this may be less true for Chicanas and Mexicanas, this is unavoidable for each one of us. But unlike the Others, the Latinas are talked about and spoken to, not just defined by an African-ness that—particularly in the United States—nobody acknowledges: it is another attempt at "passing." As Latinas, to embrace an African heritage is to embrace ourselves—all of ourselves.

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