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

Paradoxically, the *Negrophilia* collection is also an inversion of the discourses of racial domination and dislocation in that it also reveals the psychic orientations of post-Enlightenment man in his relation to and representation of the racial other. He occupies a space of racial phantasmorgia, a figure of cultural perversion invested with a delirious 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 historical demands is the work of Iranian artist Chohreh Feyzdjou (based in Paris), *The Bazaars of Babel*. The grammar of her exhibits are so culturally specific that even the phrase "Product of Chohreh Feyzdjou" reinforces a hermetic discourse of the representation of the other. Its beauty is that it demands a recasting of modernity by placing at its centre the desires of the artist and her work. The immediate, most striking thing about Feyzdjou's "products" is the colour black. Every single object is stained with charcoal or a black dye and arranged in precise, systematic order. This fixing of objects (scrolls, jars, crates, bags and boxes of different sizes) functions as an ironic statement on the West's obsessions with fixity as it struggles to exclude and maintain its grasp on modernity as essentially a white aesthetic edifice.

Feyzdjou makes overtures to new possibilities of an "imaginative culture" in which the guardians of modernity accept their cultural debt to ancient traditions and the aesthetic tropes of ex-colonies in the formation of modernity itself. But it has to be understood that Feyzdjou's chamber of objects is a call for recognition that goes far beyond the West's classical notion of "cultural influences," as is quite often the case when art historians refer to the primitivist forms and aesthetic textures in Picasso. Her yearning is for a recognition of syncretism and Europe's acceptance of acculturation as an evolving and intrinsic component of its symbiotic relationship with diasporic culture. In our modern babel, linked by satellite systems producing a circuitry of electronic images underpinned by syntaxes of migration and exile, cross-cultural translations become the new paradigm through which identities can be expressed.

It is in the Uruguayan artist Carlos Capelan's work that we encounter a subliminal expression of the self as Europe begins to fragment under the tensions of nationalism and ethnic conflict. In an interview with a British newspaper, Capelan 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 manner in which he visualizes this relationship that holds the greatest fascination, for it is predicated upon the historical conditions of a Uruguayan exiled in Sweden.

For the construction of his "chamber of identities" Capelan used 75 litres of mud carefully pasted 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." Capelan uses old books neatly positioned in stacks held down by blocks of rocks; the mud walls are inscribed with quotations from linguistics, 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 sepia 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 hang off the walls, held together by black strings.

Capelan'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 racialized self, cultural boundaries, linguistic borders and spiritual location. Ultimately Capelan's project is about making contact with otherness, of 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 other cultures." On entering Capelan's living room one sees a sign on the wall that reads: WELCOME TO MY ROOM. Capelan's room, like the work of the artists I have discussed and those whose work for, reasons of space, I am unable to discuss, presents us with a nonhegemonic global vision of culture that is syncretic and shamanic.

Together or as individual pieces, the work of these artists constitutes 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 Elias Canetti would have liked to have seen.

Reece Auguste is a British filmmaker and writer. He is a member of London's Black Audio Film Collective.

THE ELUSIVE SIGNS OF AFRICAN-NESS: RACE AND REPRESENTATION AMONG LATINAS IN THE UNITED STATES

Woman with Colours, Licia Bronzin

GLADYS M. JIMÉNEZ-MUÑOZ

African heritage constitutes a shared element among Latin American and Caribbean cultures. 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 then 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 in the Río Piedras Campus of the University of Puerto Rico, my friend Anjelamaría Dávila designated me as a *"jabá."* (This term is roughly equivalent to what people in the United States refer to as a "high yellow".) You see, I have remained a *jabá* 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 convocation? 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 Latinas in the United States who have not recognized their African heritage. Some people require a poet signalling them as being of African descent. Others never needed this detour, being marked by third persons or having self-recognized themselves at an early age. Still others defy all attempts at African identification by claiming to be "indio" within a cultural and 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 grandfather, and my paternal grandmother. I saw this last relative only a few times in all my life, while I never met my paternal grandfather. You see, this side of the family was literally invisible. They were rendered that way by my mother's side of the family who detested my father because he ran away with my mother and because he wasn't white. He was always referred to, contemptuously, as *"el negro ese"* ("that black man") or *"el desgraciao ese"* ("that miserable man").

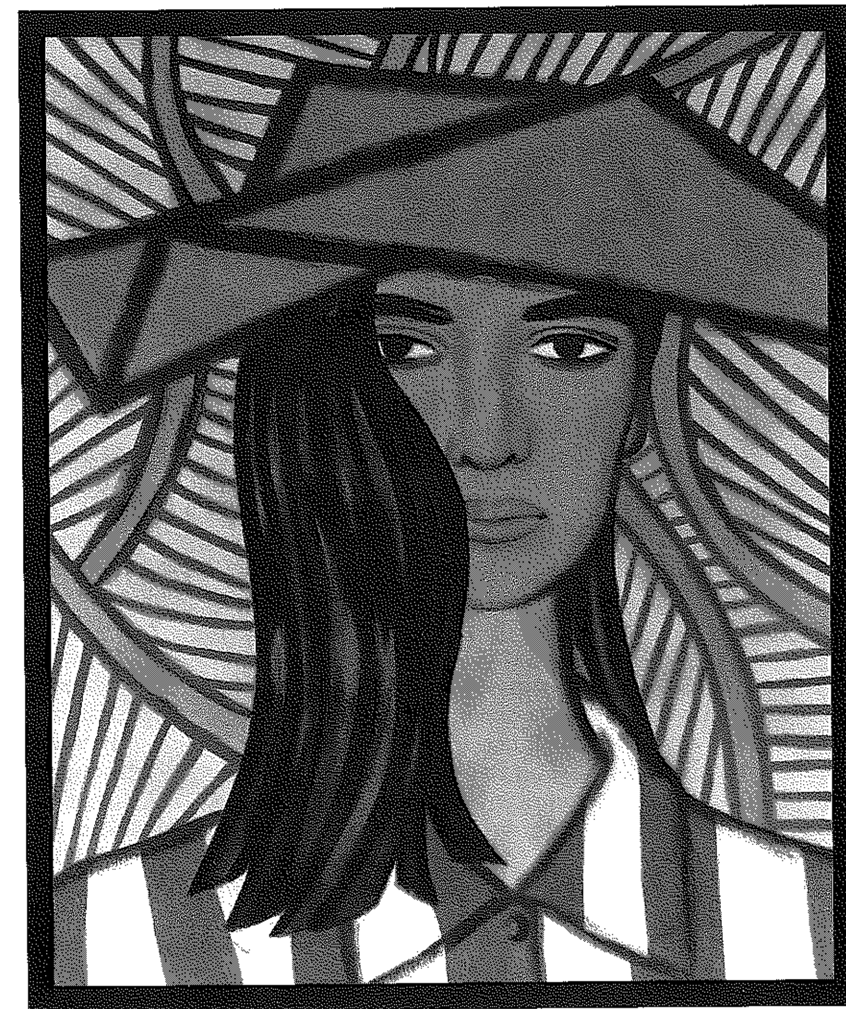
Mind you, my father was no saint. In trying to reclaim these lost meanings, I am not revising what my father did. Rather, I am trying to do two things here, starting with understanding the meanings associated with the physical appearance of Puerto Ricans such as my father: namely, blacks and mulattoes. My second aim in this regard is to identify and explore the links (past and present) between Latin American and Caribbean cultural productions and similar productions originating in Africa.

BLANCA,
BLANQUITA,
JINCHA,
COLORÁ,
JABÁ,
SACALAGUA,
CUARTERONA,
MULATA
CLARA,
ZAMBA,
GRIFA,
AINDIÁ,
INDIA,
MORENA,
TRIGUEÑA,
NEGRA FINA,
NEGRA,
NEGRA
RETINTA,
ETC.

Let us first look at the meanings attached to physical appearance. 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. Latin American 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: *"blanca," "blanquita," "jincha," "colorá," "jabá," "sacalagua," "cuarterona," "mulata clara," "zamba," "grifa," "aindiá," "india," "morena," "trigueña," "negra fina," "negra," "negra retinta,"* 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 dinero y la educación enblanquecen"* ("money and education make a person whiter"). Except in places such as New Orleans and South Florida, 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 people (there and in the U.S. mainland).

But let us return to the ways in which racial divisions represent the existing splits within Puerto Rican national culture itself. Like all cultures, Puerto Rican national culture has primarily defined itself 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 alien and strange to Puerto Rican-ness. Historically, one of the principal symbols of such strangeness and non-Puerto Rican-ness has been blackness and, specifically, African-ness. Whites and most of the intermediary racial categories that constitute the Puerto Rican population have traditionally perceived and understood blackness as something literally foreign. This tradition has a long and sorry history, going back to the nineteenth century. Let me give you a recent example: a black Puerto Rican friend of mine from Carolina (one of several municipalities in Puerto Rico with large concentrations of blacks and mulattoes) was recently asked if she were from the Dominican Republic. The implication is obvious: if she is black then she must be from some other country or island, not from Puerto Rico. (Interestingly enough, in the Dominican Republic black Dominicans are often asked if they are Haitian...)

While the Hispanic heritage is much celebrated and praised, African heritage is avoided and ignored. This is even true among those corresponding to the darker-skinned end of the spectrum, where the emphasis is on non-African identifications: either toward the non-existent "Indian" element among mulattoes and blacks in the Caribbean or toward the "whiter" element among the mestizo and mulatto populations of Mexico, Central America, and South America.


Yasmeen, Lidia Bronzin

But African heritage among Caribbean and Latin American peoples is not just a matter of attributing specific racial meanings to such things as dark skin, nappy hair, flaring nostrils, and/or broad lips. Many of the cultural expressions that define our peoples originated on the African continent, particularly in Western Africa. The most obvious case is music. In the entire Antilles, in the coastal areas of the Yucatán peninsula and Central America, as well as in the Caribbean coastline of South America, it is almost impossible to dance and listen to any popular music that hasn't been influenced by or is not a derivative of African musical forms and instruments, from specific percussion devices to the polyrhythms and syncopation that structure entire musical genres. Can you imagine salsa music without bongos, congas, timbales, batás, quintos, and so on? Can you imagine cumbia, merengue, plena, bomba, danza, bolero, guaguancó, soca, reggae, calypso, samba, joropos, etc. without syncopation and polyrhythms? Leaving aside laughable products such as the movie, *The Mambo Kings*, can you imagine Tito Puente without timbales or, better yet, Celia Cruz without "Químbala, Cumbala, Cumbaquím Bambá"? Celia Cruz has been singing and dancing for more years than I have been on this earth. Most people have heard of her —she has even given concerts in Japan! I don't know anybody who has not danced to "Químbala, Cumbala, Cumbaquím Bambá." (Talk about the construction of imagined communities and of ways of fashioning collective identities!) As a common cultural denominator, she is an obvious illustration of the points I am trying to make. Other reference points could be included: from food to religion, from dress to funeral rites, from forms of greeting to vocal inflections.

Now then, we should not separate our Latina-ness from our African-ness because much is at risk when attempting to disengage the two. Perhaps the best way of addressing this directly is by raising another set of questions. Take for instance the recently deceased Caribbean writer and poet Audre

Lorde in her biomythography *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*. Here Audre Lorde explores many topics that are central to my own work, such as race, sexuality, and gender. In *Zami*, Lorde illustrates the connection between self-identity and language. By reclaiming her African heritage, she affirms her ability to rename and re-identify herself. In the beginning of her book she asks: "To whom do I owe the power behind my voice... To whom do I owe the symbols of my survival"? Lorde recognizes her debts. Do we? What is the nature of our debts? What symbols are these? What history is this and why is this history ours? What power is this? What and where is our voice?

What happens when this African past remains invisible and when this African presence remains absent? What is the difference between this invisibility and absence in the U.S. mainland and such invisibility and absence in the Caribbean or Latin American. Would this part of me have remained silent in the same way if I had been brought up in the United States instead of in Puerto Rico? How is being of African descent different there than here? And, most importantly, what does this signalling, these detours, these self-recognitions, as well as these invisibilities, these absences, and these silences have to do with relations of power? Would recognizing one's African heritage be so difficult and complex if it didn't go against ruling interests and predominant identities? What happens when one goes against such powerful interests and identities?

Mayra Santos, a black Puerto Rican poet and cultural critic, suggests that we carry out a reading of our skin by understanding history and relations of power in ways that are very much related to the visibility or invisibility of our bodies. She explains in "*Sobre piel o sobore papel,*"

> *Los signos de la negritud, están escritos sobre piel, sobre espacio o sobre papel, siempre suelen ser problematicos en su lectura. ...Una vez se aprende a escribir se añaden nuevas marcas al cuerpo, o se le acondiciona a asimilar y romper espacios alternos. Se utiliza esta tecnolojía para crear nuevos universos de sentido. Aparecen otras marcas (diplomas, palabras, slogans) que las y los negros debemos llevar encima como tatuajes para probarnos lo suficientemente "negros" o lo suficientemente "decentes."*

> The signs of blackness are written on skin, on space, or on paper; reading these signs always tends to be problematic. ...When one learns to write, new scars are added to the body, or the body is conditioned to assimilate and break with alternate spaces. This technology is used to create new universes of feeling. New scars and signs appear (diplomas, words, slogans) that we black women and black men have to wear like tatoos to prove that we are sufficiently "black" or sufficiently "proper."
> (My translation.)

She speaks of "race" as something that is not natural, fixed, or always obvious to everyone, everywhere, and at all times. Rather, Mayra Santos sees "race" — white, black, mulatto, etc.— as socially constructed. Specifically, she sees blackness as being constructed in particular ways:

> *O los pelos planchados o las trenzas africanas, o el beeper o los ilekes santeros, o la conversación intelectual o el remeneo de nalgas—estas contraposiciones escinden a las comunidades negras por el medio y decididamente delatan una horrible confianza en la transparencia (o en su contraparte, la posible invisibilidad) de la negritud.*

> Or the processed hair or the African braids, or the beeper or the orisha icons, or the intellectual conversations or the undulation of somebody's butt —these contrasts split black communities through the middle and decidedly betray a horrible trust in the transparency (or in the case of its opposite, the possible invisibility) of blackness.

Hence, blackness that is "too transparent" can also be threatening. In other words, being black is located within a set of rules and regulations that are acceptable only when and if being black is associated with power structures. This type of pressure, according to Santos, "does not only come from reactionary spaces." It can also come from those spaces that are "self-proclaimed as the ones which define what is considered beautiful and politically proper in alternative ways."

This is why embracing our African heritage is something very complex. Charlotte Neuhaus, a light-skinned black half-Puerto Rican student in my Williams College course this spring ("U.S. Women of Color and Cultural History"), continually pointed out that it is one thing to claim our African-ness and quite another thing to live it, to endure it, and to survive it. Black and mulatto Latinas do not necessarily have the same options, undergo the same experiences; neither are they the subjects of the same social effects. This is particularly true in the Caribbean and Latin America, as well as within Latina/Latino communities in the United States. It is one thing to be able to identify ourselves and quite another to have people identify us against our will and before we have any say in the matter. Latinas who are light-skinned or mulattas must recognize our relative privileges over darker-skinned or black Latinas. Among us, as well as between us and the white communities, there is also the much overlooked phenomenon of "passing." This is evidently similar to what happens to light-skinned African American women, a phenomenon and a process that requires greater study, discussion, and scrupulous problematization.

Another one of my students, an African-American woman by the name of Nicole Moore, called to my attention Audre Lorde's observations in her essay "Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger":

> Every Black woman in America lives her life somewhere along a wide curve of ancient and unexpressed angers.
> My Black woman's anger is a molten pond at the core of me, my most fiercely guarded secret. I know how much of my life as a powerful feeling woman is laced through with this net of rage. It is an electric thread woven into every emotional tapestry upon which I set the essentials of my life —a boiling hot spring likely to erupt at any point, leaping out of my consciousness like a fire on the landscape. How to train that anger with accuracy rather than deny it has been one of the major tasks of my life.

It is true that we live in an age in which many people want to claim the term "minority"; for some this is a matter of convenience. But I know few minorities that want to claim their African heritage.

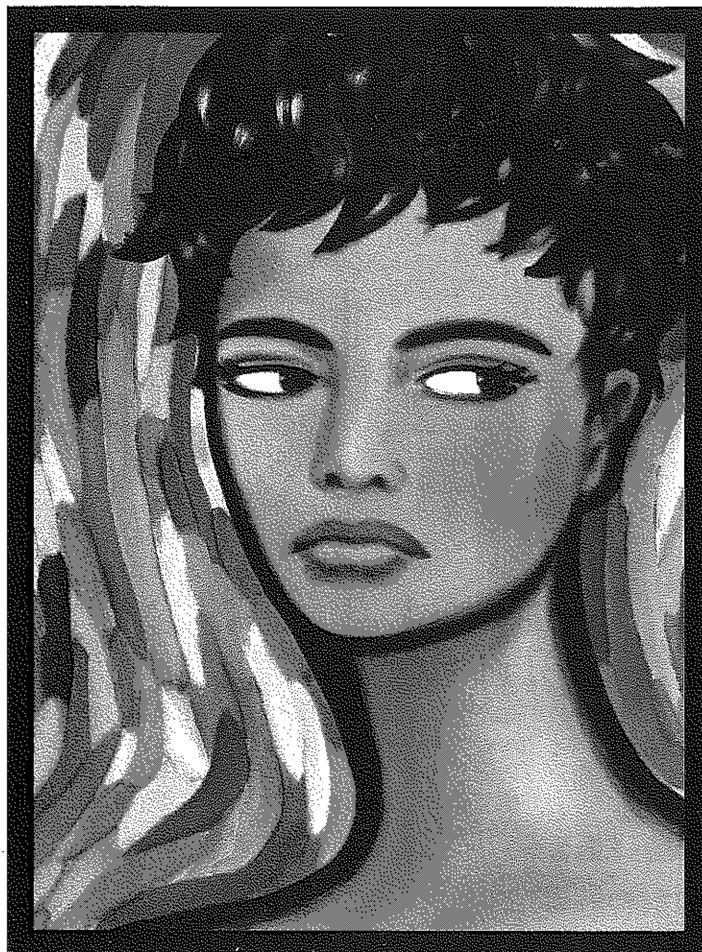
EVERY BLACK WOMAN IN AMERICA LIVES HER LIFE SOMEWHERE ALONG A WIDE CURVE OF ANCIENT AND UNEXPRESSED ANGERS

As a Puerto Rican woman living in the United States today, I first encountered "Latina"as a category and self-consciously began to adopt it when I came to New York State. In Puerto Rico I never used this expression, among other things, because we assumed our Puerto Rican-ness in many problematic and contradictory ways: as a way to differentiate ourselves from those who were not considered Puerto Rican and lived in the Island ("dominicanos," "cubanos," and "americanos") and as a way to distance ourselves from those Puerto Ricans born and/or brought up in the United States. But this national-cultural identity was and is also assumed in the Island to establish distinctions between degrees of Puerto Rican-ness. The members of certain political parties are perceived as more Puerto Rican than others. Men are understood to be more representative of Puerto Rico (ideologically and politically) than women. Educated people of means are seen as more Puerto Rican than the ignorant and poor majorities of the population. The lighter skinned you are, the more Puerto Rican you feel and are treated. Heterosexuals are perceived as more Puerto Rican than lesbians and gays, and so on. You see, we continuously struggle with our Puerto Rican-ness in a national, political, cultural, gendered, sexualized, and racialized context.

When I came to the United States I had to distinguish between, on the one hand, being a Latina or "hispana" (from, "hispanoparlante" or Spanish speaker) and, on the other hand, being what the U.S. Census Bureau calls a "Hispanic" (literally: having a Spanish surname). As a Spanish-speaking Puerto Rican woman who has learned to treasure the rejection of the colonizer —of being IN but not OF the United States— these two categories confronted and positioned me in completely different ways. For me, being Hispanic was not the same as being Latina. Being a Latina meant (a) coming from the racially mixed populations of the Caribbean and Latin America and (b) being a product of the cultures that unevenly combined as a result of the Iberian Conquest. All over the Americas, historically this mixture has a totally different racial inscription than simply having a Spanish surname because this last category includes Europeans. Moreover, in the United States today, only Europeans are white.

What are the politics of location of the term "Hispanic"? Whom do we identify with —in terms of power within the racial hierarchies (not only in the United States, but in Latin America and the Caribbean) —when we all become "Hispanic"? To whom do we owe our heritage in each case? For instance, if we identify as "Hispanics," who then has a claim on this identity? Who can cash this cultural I.O.U.? Can Europeans claim an African heritage? Would they want to? What are the symbols that we use in expressing our cultural identities? What is at risk when we use, live, and circulate these symbols? How are these symbols related to those things that oppress us and continue to position us as "inferior" cultures and "lesser" peoples?

One of my principal contentions here is that, regardless of whether we were born in the United States, were raised here, or migrated here from elsewhere, and regardless of how we perceived ourselves racially in our countries and communities of origin, Latinas in the U.S. mainland should be aware of our common identity and condition as racially oppressed women. Since we come from geographies understood to be the products of racial and cultural mixture —specifically, a mixture that contains considerable measures of African "blood" and African cultural elements— our claims to a European heritage and identity always remain suspect, no matter how fair our skin, how Castilian our Spanish, or how "American" our English. Whether we like it or not, this is an integral part of the ways in which we are positioned as social subjects in this country. This is one of the contradictions represented in the way in which our national-cultural identities intersect our gender identity. But this not only takes place against us, that is, to oppress us by constituting us as racially inferior



Nadedge, Licia Bronzin

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 American, Native American, and Asian women in this country. On the other hand, as Chandra Mohanty and Bernice Johnson Reagon 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 bone of contention, 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, to a greater or larger 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 far 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 grandparents and who we are going to deny. Culturally, it means having to sort out and separate the elements of the music we dance 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 Iberians, or we are "American" simulacra, not Latinas. While this may be less true for Chicanas and Mexicanas, this is unavoidably the case for those of us of Caribbean descent. This African background and present influence is an integral part of our identity and it is immediately related to that which defines us as Latinas in general and as Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Cubans, Panamanians, Venez-uelans, Colombians, etc., in particular.

It is VERY IMPORTANT that we ask ourselves: what have women who do recognize their African heritage (puertorriqueñas, dominicanas, Haitienes, West Indians, African Americans, and others) taught us in terms of being a woman of color in the United States in general and being a Latina in particular? What debts do we have in this case? Recognizing our African-ness within *this* context helps build coalitions not only *among* Latinas but also *between* Latinas and other women of color in the U.S.

This unity, if it is to succeed, must be a pluralistic and ongoing project. As Audre Lorde says, "meeting across differences always requires mutual stretching." The beauty and simplicity of Audre Lorde's suggestion here is that such an effort, that is, the linkage of disparities, should not, in and of itself, erase the disparities being joined. It is something we have to be constantly working at and within —and, sometimes, even against (when it is used to deny the possibility of creative difference) — building and rebuilding, as we struggle to survive in a colonialist (externally and internally) and white-supremacist fortress like the United States. This is why we must also strive to build coalitions, among Latinas and between Latinas and other women of color, and so on.

What does it mean to embrace our African heritage and how important is this? What is at risk when we re-think our Latinaness as inherent to our African-ness and vice versa? To embrace African-ness means to contain, to incorporate, to adopt, to defend, to include a network of identities that for centuries have been excluded, deported, refused, repudiated, erased, ignored, and attacked. This is yet another element that includes our experience within the African diaspora: like our slave ancestors —particularly the captive women— today in the United States we continue to live in multiple ways the experience of exclusion, deportation, refusal, repudiation, erasure, ignorance, and attack.

Especially for those of us of Caribbean ancestry, any attempt to construct a Latinaness that denies our African-ness is, ultimately, just a defence of a European-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 our selves.

Gladys M. Jiménez-Muñoz teaches in the Women's Studies Department at State University College Oneonta-SUNY, Oneonta, New York.

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