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## ➤ Afro-Latinidades and the Diasporic Imaginary

At a major conference on the future of Black Studies at the Harlem-based Schomburg Center, the demographic boom among Latinos and their increased visibility were raised as issues. The concern expressed about “Hispanics” outnumbering “Blacks” as the largest minority in the U.S. echoed a media wave in which “Latinos” had been presented as a crucial voting bloc that also constituted a significant consumer market. Some speakers at the conference even framed the matter as “Black Studies” facing “Latino Studies” as an academic competitor and as a potential threat. Other, more critical voices, warned against buying into corporate and governmental discourses of ethnic and racial identity, and pointed to the emergence of African Diaspora Studies as a comprehensive field seeking to interweave and compare the histories and cultures of people of African descent in the Americas and in the whole world. One of the main issues at stake in the debate was how these terms of discussion, as a binary opposition between Blacks and Latinos, render Afro-Latinas/os invisible.

In this article I will attempt to lay a different ground, in order to transcend these discursive terms in which Blacks and Latinos appear as categorically distinct ethnic and racial designations. In order to do this, I will formulate the argument of Afro-Latinidad as a historical category that can potentially challenge essentialist notions of both Blackness and Latinidad. In this register, I will discuss the specificity of Afro-Latina/o difference as a category, and how an Afro-diasporic perspective could enrich both Black Studies and Latino Studies, while drawing their points of intersection.

### 1. Afro-Latinidades and World-Historical Constellations of Identity/Difference

The signifier “Afro-Latino” is beginning to gain currency in academic language, media discourse, and to some extent even in popular parlance. Its semantic field is fairly broad, ranging from designating the subject of the developing field of research into Latin Americans of African descent, naming the project of a hemispheric political/racial identity articulated by emerging social movements of Black Latinos, to serving as the commercial title of a collection of salsa music in the African continent. Given this wide range and diverse set of meanings, I will write about Afro-Latinidades in the plural.<sup>1</sup> Positing

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<sup>1</sup> Our claim for plurality should not imply a lack of a general definition of the overall discursive domain. A diasporic definition of Afro-Latinidades should problematize narrow nationalist and exclusive world-regional and linguistic designations. An Africa diaspora perspective should recognize local, regional,

Afro-Latinidades as a domain of difference implies analyzing the conceptual and political values embedded in such identity denominations and geo-historical categories.

A very general examination of the hyphenated expression Afro-Latino reveals the linking of African-ness and Latinidad, two complex and contested world-historical categories of identification and cultural production, with their own particular yet entangled genealogies. Mapping the categorical character of Afro-Latinidades calls for an analysis of the historical relationship between African-ness, American-ness, and Latinidad – three key discursive frameworks in modern definitions of collective identity. These discursive categories were created and reproduced as part and parcel of a world-historical process of capitalist development, imperial domination and nation-state formation, along with the constitution of modern/colonial definitions of the self founded on gendered/erotized hierarchies of peoplehood (racial, ethnic, national). This modern pattern of global domination and resistance that we call the coloniality of power constitutes the overall framework within which I analyze the very historical production (or invention) and interweaving of Africa (and the African diaspora), the Americas, and Latin America as world-regional discourses of space, memory, and the self.<sup>2</sup>

One of the main arguments of this article is that if elaborated as a category for post-colonial critique and as an oppositional form of political identity, Afro-Latina/o difference could reveal and recognize hidden histories and subalternized knowledges, while unsettling and challenging dominant (essentialist, nationalist, imperial, patriarchal) notions of African-ness, American-ness, and Latinidad, along with the forms of power/knowledge that are embedded in these categories.<sup>3</sup> In this vein, I will also address the advantages and limitations of using an Afro-diasporic perspective in a project of refashioning both Black and Latina/o studies.

A world-historical postcolonial perspective would allow us to conceptualize the Black Atlantic and African-America as a set of overlapping diasporas wherein Afro-Latinos historically played important roles<sup>4</sup> alongside our analysis of Latinidad as a translocal (hemispheric and global) category.<sup>5</sup> In this register, Latinidad should be redefined and challenged by recognizing the subalternized histories of Afro-diasporic subjects within and beyond the borders of its definition. A fruitful angle for analysis and critique could be the ever changing and contested politics of naming, for instance who is included in and excluded from the designation “African-American” that, in turn, replaced “Negro” and “Black”

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and national differences while it deconstructs and redefines these mediations and frameworks of the self in the light of the diasporic dimensions.

<sup>2</sup> On the concept of the coloniality of power see Quijano (2000). On the modern invention of Africa see Mudimbe (1988). On the invention of the Americas see O’Gorman (1951 and 1961); Dussel (1992); Rabasa (1993).

<sup>3</sup> In this formulation, the concept of Afro-Latina/o difference, in so far as it designates subjects whose experience and knowledge are subalternized (marginalized and/or made invisible) by hegemonic occidental discourses, corresponds to what Mignolo (2000) calls colonial difference.

<sup>4</sup> On the concept of overlapping diasporas to conceptualize Afro-American history as a complex ensemble of black histories that includes, for instance, the Caribbean, locales in the U.S. south and north, and different parts of Africa, see Lewis (1995). I will also use the concept of entangled diasporas, which refers to the interweaving of different diasporic fields, for instance, Chinese, South Asian, Irish, and African diasporas in the Caribbean and in the United States.

<sup>5</sup> On Latinidad as a translocal category see Laó-Montes (2001).

as the politically preferred self-designation of U.S. activists of African descent. Is confining African-American to the north a way of promoting the imperial reduction of America to the United States of North America? Is it playing the liberal game of hyphenated ethnicization, to the detriment of critical race theory and radical anti-racist politics? Should we instead redefine the expression African-America to signify Africans in the Americas? In another register, should we choose between Afro-Latino and Afro-Hispanic, or do each of these hybrid signifiers denote particular meanings that reveal specific genealogies?

What actually constitutes an Afro-diasporic perspective is a matter of much debate. Scholars have traced distinct genealogies and developed different discourses of the African diaspora. A full account of these debates is beyond the scope of this article, but I would argue that the specificity of Afro-Latina/o difference raises questions and angles of vision that shed particular light on and make important contributions to such discussions. In this sense, one of the key points of this article is that, in so far as Afro-Latinidades are marginalized from hegemonic narratives of African-ness, Blackness, Latinidad, and Hispanicity, and therefore from their corresponding world-regional (Black Atlantic, Latin America, African-America, Afro-Caribbean) and national ideologies of identity (racial, ethnic), Afro-Latina/o, as a subalternized diasporic form of difference, should be transformed into a critical category to deconstruct and redefine all of the above cartographies of self, culture, and power. To pursue this argument, we need to minimally define Afro-Latinidades as a world-historical field of identification, culture, and politics, as well as Afro-Latina/o as a category of difference.

The concurrent invention(s) of Africa, the Americas, and Europe, along with the rise of “the West”, and the emergence of capitalism as a world-economy in the long sixteenth century are the historical conditions of possibility and production of Afro-Latino/a subjects and discourses. Arguably, we can trace the genealogy of modern/colonial categories of race and ethnicity from late medieval Iberian peninsula religious and linguistic notions of “blood purity” to the early modern stratified classifications (“indio”, “negro”, “mestizo”, “African”, “European”, “white”) developed in the contexts of the conquest of the Americas and the organization of chattel slavery as a key institution of capitalist modernity. The archive indicates the existence of crew members of African descent on the Columbus on the so-called discovery voyages. This should be no surprise not only given that Córdoba was one of the principal capitals of the Islamic world, but also because sugar cane plantations based on African slave labor were first instituted in the Canary and Madeira islands, circa 1450, by the Spaniards and the Portuguese.

In this Mediterranean contact zone<sup>6</sup> centered on the Iberian peninsula that was later partly extended to the Atlantic world, we also have written records of Afro-Hispanic intellectuals such as Juan Latino, a former black slave turned Latin grammarian and poet, who despite marrying into nobility and achieving great recognition, expressed a Black African identity that he contrasted with hegemonic whiteness. “If our black face, King, displeases your ministers, Ethiopians do not like white ones on their males”, he wrote in 1573.<sup>7</sup> The very process of social interpellation and self-naming of this fascinat-

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<sup>6</sup> On the concept of the contact zone as an imperial/colonial space of domination, hegemony, resistance, and transculturation see Pratt (1997).

<sup>7</sup> As quoted in Piedra (1991: 294).

ing character, who was chair of poetry at the University of Granada, should, arguably, be a historical template for any genealogy of Afro-Latinidades. From “ladino”, a common designation for Spanish subjects of the low social stratum, who proved proficiency of the languages of empire (Castilian and Vulgar Latin), he named himself “Latino” to establish “an old imperial bloodline and genealogy based on his own linguistic merits” (Piedra 1991: 294) as a master of Classical Latin. Despite climbing the ladders of race and class through his acquired cultural capital, Juan Latino could not shed his embodiment of Afro-Hispanic difference. His relative whitening via linguistic latinization could not erase his black body from being inscribed within the modern somatic-visual regime of pigmentocracy that frames the ontological experience that Fanon (1967) calls “the fact of Blackness”.<sup>8</sup> From our present perspective, to the extent that his story shows some key correspondences and contradictions in the relationship between Latinidad, Hispanicity, and nascent notions of western whiteness, Juan Latino could be seen as an early incarnation of the specificity of Afro-Latina/o difference.

Given that the main focus of our analysis is *Afroamérica*<sup>9</sup>, we should ask what the spatio-temporal parameters of Afro-Latina/o difference are? As we know, the vast territory south of the Rio Grande that today is known as Latin America and the Caribbean is where people were first massively shipped from sub-Saharan or Black Africa in the sixteenth century, as well as where there is presently the largest concentration of people of African descent in the Americas.<sup>10</sup> However, in the hegemonic Anglophone world there is a tendency to marginalize Afro-Latinos from the historical memory and cultural-political mappings of the African diaspora. In the United States, when we use the term African-American, we conventionally refer to North American Blacks as a specifically U.S. ethno-racial designation. Nonetheless, the use of the suffix “Afro” to predicate world-regional and national denominations has been used on the southern side of the American hemisphere since at least the early twentieth century. Cuban intellectual Fernando Ortiz wrote about an Afro-Cuban culture in 1904, and by the 1930s there was an *Asociación de Estudios Afrocubanos*. In Mexico, an *Instituto de Estudios Afroamericanos* was organized in the early 1940s, and published a short lived magazine called *Afroamérica* (Franco 1961). The association and magazine were launched and supported by a trans-American group of intellectuals of (or for) the African diaspora, that included Euro-Cuban Fernando Ortiz, Afro-Cubans Nicolás Guillén and Rómulo Lachatenere, Brazilian Gilberto Freyre, Haitian Jacques Roumain, Mexican Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, Martiniquean Aimé Césaire, Trinidadian Eric Williams, U.S. Blacks Alain Locke and W.E.B. Du Bois, and anthropologist Melvin Herskovits.<sup>11</sup> The point here is not to establish

<sup>8</sup> For an excellent reading of the onto-existential meaning of Fanon’s concept of the experience of blackness see Gordon (1995).

<sup>9</sup> On the concept of “Afroamérica” see Franco (1961).

<sup>10</sup> George Reid Andrews contends that “[b]y the end of the 1900s Afro-Latin Americans outnumbered Afro-North Americans by three to one (110 million and 35 million, respectively) and formed, on average, almost twice as large a proportion of their respective populations (22 percent in Latin America, 12 percent in the United States)” (Andrews 2004: 3).

<sup>11</sup> There is a strategic inconsistency in the differential way in which the intellectuals are introduced. The intention is to show the diverse composition of the group not simply in terms of nationality but also in terms of ethno-racial (and in the case of Herskovits, intellectual) identities.

where the language of *Afroamérica* was first used, or to simply show consciousness of African-ness in Latin America, but to argue for the need for an Afro-diasporic perspective that would allow us to analyze the differences and particularities, as well as the articulations and common ground of the manifold histories of the African diaspora in the Americas.

The basic common ground of the subjects of the African diaspora in the Americas is subjection to modern/colonial regimes of racial classification/stratification as the outcome of a world-system based on racial capitalism and western racism. The institution of chattel slavery constituted capitalist modernity and left profound marks on its basic structures (political, economic, cultural) and psyche. "Race" at once became a universal system of classification that informed all the basic institutions and discourses of western modernity,<sup>12</sup> as well as a basic mediation in national and local configurations of power, culture, and subjectivity. From this angle, the question is not only how "race" and racism built the modern world, but also what was the house that race built, or how racial divides enabled the production of black expressive cultures, intellectual currents, and social movements. In this general sense, given the centrality of the African diaspora in the formation of both hegemonic western modernities and subaltern modernities, an Afro-diasporic perspective should be an essential component of any critical theory of the modern world.

In the Americas, processes of nationalization of memory, language, and identity, are predicated on a nationalist narrative in which "white" male Euro-American elites metonymically represent the nation, and the subaltern racial others (especially "Blacks", "Indians", and "Orientals") are marginalized or virtually erased from national imaginaries.<sup>13</sup> The continuation of these modern/colonial modes of racial domination after national independence in the Americas is an important feature of what Aníbal Quijano (2000) terms the coloniality of power. The existential condition that Du Bois (1973), referring to the "American Negro", characterizes as one of "double consciousness", of grappling with a split subjectivity (American and African) because of being seen and classified as "a problem" by a dominant racist regime, could be extended to *Afroamérica*. In spite of regional and national differences, this condition of relative exclusion from hegemonic definitions of nationhood that imply a devaluation of memory, a folklorization of culture, and submission to political-economic regimes of racial/class stratification, together frame a common diasporic ground for people of African descent in the Americas. These long histories of relative exclusion and subalternization inform processes of community-making, the constitution of Black public spaces and expressive cultures, and the rise of Black struggles for recognition, democracy, and social justice. Hence we should redefine the concept of African-American to signify a complex and diverse diasporic field that encompasses the histories, cultures, and identities of Afro-descendants in the Americas.

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<sup>12</sup> There is a vast literature on the subject. For a relatively recent attempt to develop a historical sociology to explain how racial formations are fundamental to modern institutions (states, world-economy, structures of knowledge) and cultural/political forms (identities, expressive cultures, social movements, political ideologies) see Winant (2001).

<sup>13</sup> Clearly there are substantive differences, for instance between racial regimes in the United States and Latin America, and in different national contexts of racial hegemony which are complicated by local and regional particularities and by historical changes over time. However, after recognizing significant differences and historical contingencies, we would argue that the dynamic of racial domination and representation described above characterizes the overall pattern of racial formation in the Americas.

I contend that the Afro-American diasporic subject should be conceptualized on the basis of a theory and politics of translocation. The concept of translocation links two entangled domains in the production of identity/difference: the multiple mediations (class, gender, race, sexuality) that constitute the sources of the self, and the mutually determined yet distinct scales (local, national, regional, global) and temporalities<sup>14</sup> which configure modern spatio-temporal patterns of culture and power. The Afro-American diasporic subject should be conceptualized as translocal because even though it is necessarily connected to nationality, it is also inscribed within larger historical constellations (the Atlantic, the Americas, global Blackness, the modern/colonial capitalist world-system). Hence the Afro-diasporic subject can simultaneously be national (Afro-Cuban), local (Louisiana), regional (Afro-Latin American), and global (cosmopolitan Black intellectual/activist). Clearly, this differentiated and rather complex diaspora space is a contested terrain in which various diaspora discourses debate the very meanings and projects that define an Afro-American diaspora.

## 2. African Diaspora Discourses and the Contested Terrain of Blackness

In a seminal article Tiffany R. Patterson and Robin D.G. Kelley aimed to develop “a theoretical framework and a conception of world history that treats the African diaspora as a unit of analysis” (2000: 13). They contend that even though black intellectual currents, cultural forms, and social movements had been transnational since the very dispersal of African peoples with the inception of capitalist modernity and the institution of chattel slavery, languages of diaspora had only been used since the 1950s. Brent Hayes Edwards goes further and claims that not only the rhetoric of “diaspora is of recent usage for African-Americans” (2001: 46), but also that it is still of limited political value given that it is not yet fully integrated into the discourse of Black social movements and political activism. Edwards indicates that African diaspora discourses emerged in the 1960s partly as a response to older Pan-Africanist understandings of the Black world in terms of racial sameness and cultural commonalities that allegedly assume basic political unity among black people. He argues for “a historicized and politicized sense of diaspora” (ibid) and describes the African diaspora as a “transnational circuit of politics and cultures beyond nations and even oceans” (ibid: 47) and that, because of its unevenness and multiple differences (some of which are untranslatable), its structure would best be analyzed using the French concept of *décalage*.<sup>15</sup> Both articles note the significance of Paul Gilroy’s elaboration of the notion of the Black Atlantic in the dissemination of diaspora discourses, not only within Black studies, but also in other fields such as cultural studies

<sup>14</sup> On the intertwined yet distinct character of these frames of temporality (event, conjuncture, *longue durée*), and the co-existence of different temporalities within a single historical field, see Braudel (1968). For an argument that expands this analysis in terms of spatio-temporal categories see Wallerstein (1991). On the politics of translocation and the world-historical production of Latinidad see Laó-Montes (2001).

<sup>15</sup> Brent Hayes Edwards develops the concept of *décalage* (a French signifier that resists translation but that stands for the interstitial and the excess from hegemonic regimes of representation) to theorize diaspora as a contested terrain of differences and negotiations.

and postcolonial theory.<sup>16</sup> However, African diaspora discourses have yet to play an important role in Latina/o studies. This testifies not only to the marginalization of Afro-Latinidades within Latino studies but also to their relative mapping-out of actually existing cartographies of the Black Atlantic and the African diaspora.

Patterson and Kelley argue that diaspora can be conceptualized both as process and condition. “As a process it is constantly being remade through movement, migration, travel, and imagined through thought, cultural production, and political struggle. Yet as condition, it is directly tied to the process by which it is being made and remade [...] the African diaspora exists within the context of global race and gender hierarchies”, they write (2000: 16). Their analysis of the African diaspora as a *condition* linked to world-historical processes of capitalist exploitation, western domination (geo-political and cultural), and modern/colonial state-formation, and as a *process* constituted by the cultural practices, everyday resistances, social struggles, and political organization of “black people as transnational/translocal subjects” (ibid: 19) is very much akin to mine. I will add a third dimension of the African diaspora as a *project* of affinity and liberation founded on a translocal ideology of identification and a politics of decolonization. I will elaborate this concept of diaspora as a project in the conclusion to this article.

There is an on-going discussion in transnational Black studies on whether we should make a clear distinction between Pan-Africanism and African diaspora discourse. The concept of the Afro-diasporic subject as translocal supposes and implies an analysis of diaspora as a contested terrain of identification based on struggle/negotiation and difference, in contrast to pan-nationalist and Afrocentric diaspora discourses. As Edwards (2001) contends, while Pan-Africanist internationalism was based on a politics of identity, the very emergence of African diaspora discourses concurred with the rise of a politics of difference. However, there are various versions of Pan-Africanism (from Pan-African nationalism to cosmopolitan Marxism)<sup>17</sup>, as well as a diversity of African diaspora discourses. In distinguishing theories of global blackness two crucial questions are: What are the perceived presences of Africa and the meanings of African-ness? How should we analyze the ties that bind and the borders that divide Afro-diasporic subjects?

In Afrocentric discourses of African-ness Africa is imagined as the original homeland that provides the roots that account for the sameness of all African peoples.<sup>18</sup> In this register, the diaspora is constituted by people of African descent who live outside of Africa. Here, the African continent is imagined as the primal source and ultimate homeland. In this identity logic the ties that bind are common origin, cultural affinity, and political destiny. Here African-ness tends to be defined by notions of “tradition” and

<sup>16</sup> The concept of the Black Atlantic was used by Thompson (1983) before it was developed and disseminated by Gilroy (1993).

<sup>17</sup> A classic example is the distinction between the theory and politics of Marcus Garvey and C.L.R. James.

<sup>18</sup> The meaning of Afrocentrism is by no means self-evident. There is a growing tendency towards a reductive use of terms such as Afrocentrism and Black Nationalism and I actively want to challenge those facile dismissals of these complex intellectual and political traditions. Here, by Afrocentric discourses I mean those which assume the essential unity of all peoples of African descent as well as the use of a monolithic historical logic in which modern civilization is an offspring of the African continent. See Howe (1998).

“authenticity” that tend to be conventionally based on patriarchal discourses of gender and sexuality. However, not all Pan-Africanisms are Afrocentric in this paradigmatic sense, and to establish a simple equation of Afrocentrism, Black Nationalism, and Pan-Africanism would necessarily entail a quite reductive logical move. In general, Pan-Africanism might be defined as the conscious attempts to articulate a transnational racial politics of black self-affirmation and liberation in the period that ran from the Haitian revolution and the rise of Black abolitionism during the long nineteenth century and that ended with the rise of new antisystemic movements in the 1960s. The climax of this political project came during the early twentieth century Pan-African Congresses and the movements for decolonization of Africa in the 1950s and 60s. Indeed, there is a diversity of theories and political projects involving distinctive notions of justice, freedom, cultural democracy and black liberation within the general rubric of Pan-Africanism.

In a similar fashion, African diaspora discourses vary in theoretical outlook and ethical-political project. A useful way to divide African diaspora discourses is by using Mishra’s (1996) distinction between “diasporas of exclusivism” and “diasporas of the border”.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, James Clifford differentiates “multicentered diasporas” characterized by “transnational networks build from multiple attachments” (1997: 14) from the “centered diaspora model” in which diasporic identities stemming from a history of uprooting and dispersal are based on a myth of return to an original homeland. The shift to diaspora discourse in transnational Black studies and in Black cosmopolitan networks (and to a lesser extent in Black racial politics), implied a broad division between Afrocentric/Black nationalist narratives and multicentered/postnationalist understandings of diaspora. Indeed, the distinctions are usually not that sharp, but tracing these differences, in broad strokes, is analytically useful.<sup>20</sup> Invocations of diaspora from Afrocentric and Black nationalist viewpoints tend to recycle Pan-Africanist internationalist analyses and politics. In contrast, postnationalist analyses of the African diaspora criticize Pan-Africanism for holding an essentialist view of African/Afro-diasporic cultures and a nationalist ideology which allegedly overlook differences (class, gender, sexual, ethnic) and minimize the possibility of alliances beyond racial divides. But there are significant differences in each camp, as revealed by a debate in which Kobena Mercer (1988) criticizes Paul Gilroy for theoretically keeping a basic core defining identities in the Black Atlantic (as expressed in the concept of the “changing same”), while Gilroy (1993) rebutted that Mercer’s antiessentialist notion of diaspora lacks a sense of historicity in so far as it does not clearly link black histories to capitalism, modern racism, and cultures of resistance. Stuart Hall (1990) was arguably able to transcend these terms of discussion by distinguishing between two moments of diasporic identification. The first moment he defines as one of retrieval of lost memory and of gaining a sense of collective self in order to develop a sense of belonging and to be able to act politically as a collective. The second moment is when differences (class, gender, sexual) are imploded to deconstruct

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<sup>19</sup> According to Mishra (1996), diasporas can follow a logic of identity that could be as exclusive (for example, of other genders and races) as nations, or in contrast could follow a logic of difference that could serve as a premise for more flexible and inclusive practices of belonging.

<sup>20</sup> For two important attempts to elaborate a genealogy of theories of the African diaspora and an analytical framework to develop an Afro-diasporic perspective as a keystone in modern critical theory and politics see Edwards (2001), and Patterson and Kelley (2000).



the multiple axes of domination (capitalism, patriarchy, racism, colonialism) that frame identifications and organize world-historical patterns of power.<sup>21</sup> For Hall, Africa is neither an origin nor an essential culture or civilization but a symbolic marker of shared histories of displacement, oppression, resistances, counter-memories, and familiar resemblances in cultural production.

In this article I am arguing for an analysis of the African diaspora in which the diaspora is a multicentered field of force and a complex (and fluid) geo-cultural formation and domain of identification that is framed by world-historical processes of domination, exploitation, resistance, and emancipation. In this kind of inquiry a key question is the nature of the relationship between nations and diasporas, and consequently between nationalist and diasporic discourses. Addressing this matter, Clifford contends that even though diasporas have always been part and parcel of modern nationalisms, “diasporic cultural forms can never, in practice, be exclusively nationalist” given their history and condition as “articulation of travels, homes, memories, and transnational connections” which place them in an “entangled tension” with both host and sending places (nations, regions, continents). Therefore, a diasporic community represents “a stronger difference than an ethnic neighborhood” in so far as it has a “sense of being a ‘people’ with historical roots and destinies outside of the time and space of the host nation” (1997: 254). In this sense, the very constitution of diasporas is based on the principle of difference, and defined this way diasporic identities challenge common nationalist claims of being the master discourse of identity and the primary framework for culture and politics.

The argument here is not for displacing nations with diasporas, and/or for replacing nationalism with postnationalist discourses, but to theorize how an Afro-diasporic perspective can allow us to rethink self, memory, culture, and power beyond the confines of the nation as a unit of analysis (and the dominant form of political community), and to develop a politics of decolonization beyond mere nationalism.<sup>22</sup>

Interestingly, even postmodern and postcolonial discourses of the African diaspora tend to marginalize or altogether erase the question of gender.<sup>23</sup> The gendering of African diaspora discourse is necessary not only to draw a more complex and concrete picture (inclusive of women) of the histories and agency of peoples of African descent in the modern world, but most significantly to inscribe a feminist critique of the patriarchal (gender and sexuality)<sup>24</sup> forms and mediations that compose the overall structure and

<sup>21</sup> Hall (1990) analyzes the politics of difference of this second moment using Derrida’s concept of difference as an epistemic and political principle of deconstructing categorical identities on the basis of alterity. The same theoretical and political logic is used by Rhadhakrishnan (1996) to formulate an argument about ethno-racial identities and diasporicity in the U.S.. Hall’s analysis of world-historical identities in relation to global constellations of power and an epistemic and political logic of alterity also resembles analyses by Latin American critical theorists Enrique Dussel (1992) and Anibal Quijano (2000).

<sup>22</sup> The question of nationalism is quite complicated and beyond the scope of this article. However, I want to state that I disagree with a tendency in postmodern/postcolonial theory to simply dismiss nationalism as *passé*. To address nationalisms we need to historicize nationalist discourses and movements and their articulations with other ideologies and movements such as socialism, feminism, and pan-Africanism, given the vast variety of nationalisms.

<sup>23</sup> Clifford (1997) observes that gender is outstandingly absent from diaspora discourse in general. Patter-son and Kelley (2000) discuss the importance of gendering analyses of the African diaspora.

<sup>24</sup> In practice, I am bracketing the question of sexuality in this article. However, this should not mean a denial of the centrality of mediations of sexuality in world-historical constellations of power and hence

institutions of the coloniality of power. Feminists have played a key role in contesting (in theory and practice) the patriarchal character of the capitalist world-economy, of modern empires and states, and even of anti-colonial movements. In the United States, an intellectual current and social movement that self-defines as “women of color” and/or “third world feminism” has championed theoretical critiques and political opposition to global, national, and local modes of domination, revealing the workings of patriarchy in all social institutions and self-formations, while recognizing the agency and significant role of subaltern women in social movements and in the construction of alternative worlds. One of the principal theoretical contributions of this feminist tradition is the concept of “politics of location”<sup>25</sup> that relates the “multiple mediations” of the self to diverse modes of domination and to distinct yet intertwined social struggles and movements. Building on this concept I propose the notion of the politics of translocation to extend the same logic to the concentric scales (local, regional, national, global) that compose the spatio-temporal frames of capitalist modernity. The concept of the politics of translocation is akin to a theory of the African diaspora as a global field of cultural production and political organization, characterized as much by structure and affinity as by agency and difference. This sort of diasporic “decolonial imaginary”<sup>26</sup> has informed politically and intellectually fruitful coalitions between U.S. Black and U.S. Latina feminists, pursuing general goals of liberation and decolonization under the rubric of “women of color” and “third world women”. In this specific sense of Afro-Latinidad as a political category, Afro-Latina difference<sup>27</sup> serves as a constitutive element within a coalitional political community, and as a crucial component of a field of intellectual production and critique.

Afro-Latinidades (north and south of the Rio Grande) tend to be marginalized and even erased from most mappings of the African diaspora. Indeed, the same occidentalist ideology that located Blackness at the bottom of the great chain of being, and imagined Africa as the dark continent outside of history, situated Blacks either at the end or altogether outside of Latino/Americanist world-regional and nationalist discourses. But in spite of this double subalternization of Afro-Latinas/os (from African-American/Afro-Caribbean, and from Latino/Americanist discourses), there is a long history of Afro-Latina/o diasporic consciousness and participation in African diaspora networks. A telling

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in the expressive cultures and forms of subjectivity. The sheer absence for the most part, outside of feminist critique and queer theory, of an analysis of the sexual logics and libidinal economies inscribed in diaspora discourses in general and of Afro-diasporic trajectories in particular, imply an urgent need for an eroticization of critical theory and historical analysis.

<sup>25</sup> See Alarcón (1989); Kaplan (1994); Frankenberg/Mani (1996).

<sup>26</sup> It is important to observe that significant currents of African-American and Latina feminism did not abandon the elaboration of the anti-/postcolonial critiques and the politics of decolonization to address questions of memory, self, and power in the United States. Most male scholars rejected the so-called colonial analogies that served as the foundations of Latino studies in the 1960s/70s, whereas feminist scholars developed critiques of the patriarchal forms and contents of anti-colonial nationalisms while developing their own versions of postcolonial theory and decolonial politics. See Pérez (1999); Sandoval (2000); Mohanty/Russo/Torres (1991); Alexander/Mohanty (1997); Mohanty (2003).

<sup>27</sup> The ways in which I am signifying the prefix “Afro” in this context constitutes a larger discussion which the spatial confines of this essay exclude. It can, for instance, signify the coalition between U.S. Blacks (in the ethnic sense) and Chicanas as in Afro-Chicanas, thus implying a coalitional feminist identity; or it can imply Latinas of African descent (as in Afro-Cubans and Afro-Boricuas.)

example is the diasporic reciprocity of three cultural movements in three different key nodes of a cosmopolitan network of Black intellectuals, cultural creators, and political activists in the early twentieth century: the Harlem Renaissance, the *Négritude* movement (based in Paris), and *Afro-Cubanismo*. An important relationship in this Black cosmopolitan diasporic world was between writers Nicolás Guillén and Langston Hughes, whose friendship, intellectual exchange, mutual translation of poetry, and reciprocal introduction to their respective national and linguistic contexts eloquently exemplify Afro-diasporic solidarity.

Another revealing example that should inform our project of remapping the African diaspora by inscribing Afro-Latina/o histories within it is the biography of Arturo Alfonso Schomburg.<sup>28</sup> The life and legacy of Arturo Schomburg – a Puerto Rican-born mulatto who founded what still is the most important world archive of Black history, was a pillar of the Harlem Renaissance, and became president of the American Negro Academy – is a pregnant source for this discussion. The differential construction of Schomburg’s biography by Puerto Rican, Black American, and Afro-Caribbean intellectuals is revealing of how distinct diaspora discourses define their subject and space. In Puerto Rico Schomburg is barely known while in U.S. Puerto Rican memory he is top on the official list of great Boricuas, and U.S. Black historians remember him as Black archivist Arthur Schomburg. Jamaican historian Winston James (1998) argues that Schomburg abandoned Hispanic Caribbean militancy after 1898 and eventually let go of his Puerto Rican identity in favor of an Afro-diasporic one. But if we analyze Schomburg’s labor and projects we receive a more nuanced view of his multiple locations and loyalties. His long lasting commitment to what we now call Afro-Latinidades can be clearly seen in his struggle for the inclusion of Afro-Cubans and Puerto Ricans in organizations like the Negro Society for Historical Research and of Afro-Hispanic writers in anthologies of Black literature. His research into Africans in early modern Spain pioneered the current revision of European history as multiracial. His advocacy for the translation of Afro-Latino writers like Nicolás Guillén revealed his effort to articulate an African diaspora. Indeed, Schomburg could not give-up his Afro-Latino identity because his Blackness was contested in the light of his Puerto Rican origin and mixed color. It was perhaps partly because of his border subjectivity and liminal positioning that Schomburg was the one Black figure in the U.S. in the early twentieth century who kept good relations with opposing characters like W.E.B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, Claude McKay, and Alain Locke. My main point, however, is that his project of Black cosmopolitanism stemming from a recognition of diversity and complexity in the racial regimes and cultural practices of different African diaspora spaces challenged narrow notions of both Africanity and Latinidad. He was, in the words of Lisa Sánchez-González (2001), a “transamerican intellectual” who promoted a diasporic project in which identity and community were conceived through and across difference.

To close this discussion on African diaspora discourses, it is important to look beyond the contributions of an Afro-diasporic perspective. Patterson and Kelley (2000) indicate the limits of African diaspora discourse by arguing that Black history and poli-

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<sup>28</sup> At the time of writing the most complete biography of Schomburg is the one written by Elinor Des Verney Sinnette (1989). However, a more global, comprehensive and analytical biography is still needed.

tics have always been more than racial, and have always been articulated with other world-historical processes (such as South Asian indentured servitude), ideologies (socialism, Islam), and antisystemic movements (labor, feminism). Hence an Afro-diasporic perspective is analytically insufficient and politically indeterminate without analysis of its world-historical conditions of existence and without specifying its political-ideological articulations. In the same vein, in mapping diaspora spaces it is necessary to historicize them in their spatio-temporal diversity and contradictory nature. For this purpose, Earl Lewis' (1995) concept of "overlapping diasporas" is a useful tool for understanding diversity within the African diaspora. Here I am also introducing the concept of entangled diasporas to signify not only the plurality of histories and projects articulated within the African diaspora, but also the world-historical entangled-ness of multiple trajectories and genealogies of diasporic formation (for example, African, South Asian, and East Asian diaspora composing a Caribbean diaspora space), and the trans-diasporic character of world cities' populations (especially of the working classes and new immigrants). Afro-Latinidades as quintessential trans-diasporic subjects tend to transgress the essentialist conceptions of self, memory, culture, and politics that produce all-encompassing categories of identity and community such as "Blacks" and "Latinos". Hence, Afro-Latinidades, in their plurality and diasporicity, demonstrate the limits of categorical definition of both Blackness and Latinidad, at the same time as they reveal the limits of diaspora discourses themselves.

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