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DECOLONIAL MOVES

Trans-locating African diaspora spaces

The blackness is visible and yet is invisible . . . The blackness cannot bring me joy but often I am made glad in it. The blackness cannot be separated from me but often I can stand outside it . . . In the blackness, then, I have been erased, I can no longer say my own name, I can no longer point to myself and say 'I'. In the blackness my voice is silent. First, then, I have been my individual self. Carefully banishing randomness from my existence, then I am swallowed up in the blackness so that I am one with it.

(Jamaica Kincaid)

The American Negro must remake his past in order to make his future.
(Arturo Alfonso Schomburg)

Black studies require a complete reorganization of the intellectual life and historical outlook of the United States, and world civilization as a whole.
(C.L.R. James)

The recent boom in the making and marketing of African Diaspora Studies still needs to fully integrate and center the histories, cultures, and politics of Afro-Latinidades. In this writing, I will place Afro-Latinidades in larger landscapes of world-history, more specifically in the context of the global African diaspora as a key geo-historical field within the modern/colonial capitalist world-system. In this inquiry, I will lay-out arguments about the analytical and political values of the African diaspora as a world-historical formation, while making an attempt to gender it analytically. Another main thread of this article will be the significance of Afroamerican politics and intellectual currents for the decolonization of power and knowledge.

In a seminal article Tiffany R. Patterson and Robin D.G. Kelley seek to develop 'a theoretical framework and a conception of world history that treats the African diaspora as a unit of analysis'.¹ They contend that even though black intellectual currents, cultural forms, and social movements have been transnational since the very dispersal of African peoples with the inception of

capitalist modernity and the institution of chattel slavery, languages of diaspora have only been used since the 1950s. In turn, Brent Edwards claims that not only the rhetoric of ‘diaspora is of recent usage for African-Americans’, but 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 argues that African diaspora discourses emerged in the 1960s partly as a response to Pan-Africanist views of the Black world in terms of racial sameness and cultural commonalities that assume basic cultural unity among black people. He advocates for ‘a historicized and politicized sense of diaspora’ and describes the African diaspora as a ‘transnational circuit of politics and cultures beyond nations and even oceans’ that given the contradictions and differences that characterize it would best be analyzed using the concept of *decalage*.² I will argue that geo-historical categories like the African Diaspora and the Black Atlantic are crucial to analyze the translocal networks that weave the diverse histories of peoples of African descent within the modern/colonial capitalist world-system.³

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. Their analysis of the African diaspora as a *condition* linked to world-historical processes of capitalist exploitation, western domination (geo-political and geo-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’ is analytically sound. I will add a third dimension, the African diaspora as a *project* of affinity and liberation founded on a translocal ideology of community-making and a global politics of decolonization. The African Diaspora can be conceived as a project of decolonization and liberation embedded in the cultural practices, intellectual currents, social movements, and political actions of Afro-diasporic subjects. The project of diaspora as a search for liberation and transnational community-making is grounded on the conditions of subalternization of Afro-diasporic peoples and in their historical agency of resistance and self-affirmation. As a project the African diaspora is a north, a utopian horizon to Black freedom dreams.⁴

There is a discussion in transnational Black studies about whether we should make a sharp distinction between Pan-Africanism and African diaspora perspectives. Some scholars contend that 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 (ranging from Pan-African nationalism

to cosmopolitan Black Marxism),⁵ as well as a diversity of African diaspora discourses.

African diaspora/Black Atlantic and the contested terrain of blackness

In analyzing theories of global blackness some crucial questions are: What are the perceived presences of Africa and the meanings of Africanity? How should we analyze the ties that bind and the borders that divide Afro-diasporic (or Black) subjects? The very concepts of Africanity and Blackness have a wide range of significations, ideological implications, and political meanings. For instance, being black does not always imply African descent (e.g., at certain times and places the meaning of blackness in England may include people of South Asian descent), while the identity of Africanity should not be circumscribed neither to sub-Saharan Africa nor to blackness (in the narrow sense of very dark skin).⁶ Hence the need for more complex genealogies to map the myriad of histories, identities, cultural-intellectual currents, and political projects that compose the African Diaspora and the Black Atlantic.

In Afrocentric discourses of Africanity, Africa tends to be imagined as the original homeland that provides the roots of the sameness of all African peoples.⁷ In this light, the diaspora is constituted by people of African descent who live outside of the continent. 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. Africanity is defined according to notions of tradition and authenticity that tend to correspond to patriarchal discourses of gender and sexuality. Nonetheless, not all Pan-Africanisms are Afrocentric, and to establish a simple equation of Afrocentrism, Black Nationalism, and Pan-Africanism would entail a reductive analytical move conflating diverse and distinct traditions of thought and politics.⁸

Pan-Africanism can be defined as a world-historical movement and ideological framework led by activists and intellectuals seeking to articulate a transnational racial politics of black self-affirmation and liberation. The timing of Pan-Africanism can be located in the period from the antisystemic slave revolts of the eighteenth century (epitomized by the Haitian revolution) and Black abolitionism during the long nineteenth century, to the rise of a new wave of antisystemic movements in the 1960s. The climax of such project (political, cultural, and intellectual) was during the early twentieth century Pan-African Congresses and the movements for decolonization of Africa in the 1950s–60s. There are diverse analyses and political projects involving various notions of justice, freedom, cultural democracy, and black liberation within this general rubric.

African diaspora discourses also vary in theoretical outlook and ethical-political project. A useful way to distinguish African diaspora discourses is by using Mishra's distinction between 'diasporas of exclusivism' and 'diasporas of the border'.⁹ Likewise, James Clifford differentiates 'multicentered diasporas' characterized by 'transnational networks built from multiple attachments' from the 'centered diaspora model' in which diasporic identities standing 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. However, the distinctions are not that sharp, even though tracing these differences in broad strokes could be analytically useful and politically relevant.

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 overlooks 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 criticizes Paul Gilroy for theoretically keeping a basic core defining identities in the Black Atlantic (as expressed in Gilroy's concept of the 'changing same'), while Gilroy rebutted that Mercer 'rigorously antiessentialist' notion of diaspora as a 'site of multiple displacements . . . without privilege to race, cultural tradition, class, gender, or sexuality' lacks a sense of historicity in so far as it does not clearly link black histories to capitalism, modern racism, and cultures of resistance.¹⁰

Arguably, Stuart Hall's was able to transcend these terms of discussion by distinguishing between two moments of diasporic identification. The first moment he defines as one of retrieval against loss memory and of cultivating a collective identity in order to develop a sense of belonging and to be enabled to act politically. The second moment is when differences (class, gender, sexual) are liberated to deconstruct the multiple axes of domination (capitalism, patriarchy, racism, colonialism) that frame identifications (class, gender, sexuality, race, ethnic) and organize world-historical patterns of power.¹¹ 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 resemblances in cultural production.

As a political-cultural identity, Blackness is as contextual and contingent as Africanity. Whether the identifier blackness should be attributed to which kind of bodies and populations, as well as the political meanings and values of blackness, are historically contingent and contested matters. Blackness can be

used as a common denominator for the 'dark races of the world' that could promote proposals for 'World Black Revolution'.¹² But the denomination 'black' can also be restricted to the darkest bodies according to pigmentocratic criteria that signify blackness as a sign of the ultimate savagery and Africa as the dark continent without history. I conceptualize blackness as more than simply color, as a contested terrain of memory, identity, culture and politics, as an historical arena in which different political projects, historical narratives, cultural logics, and self-designations are enunciated and debated.¹³ Some arenas of these variations of blackness are the politics of self-naming ('black' and/or 'Afro-descendant'), the question of color (should we distinguish black and brown?), and the entanglements of the local, national, and transnational dimensions of black histories. In this inquiry a key question is what's the relationship between nations and diasporas, and consequently between nationalist and diasporic discourses. Clifford argues that even though diasporas had always been part and parcel of modern nationalisms, 'diasporic cultural forms can never, in practice, be exclusively nationalists' 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 they have a 'sense of being a 'people' with historical roots and destinies outside of the time and space of the host nation'. The very constitution of diasporas are based on the principle of difference, and defined this way diasporic identities challenge nationalist pretensions to be 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 look into how an Afro-diasporic perspective can allow us to rethink self, memory, culture, and power beyond the confines of the nation as unit of analysis (and the dominant form of political community) and to develop a politics of decolonization not confined to nationalism.¹⁴ Analytical constructs like the African Diaspora and the Black Atlantic could allow us to rethink histories, cultures, and politics beyond the nation, while developing 'non-occidental post-imperial geo-historical categories'.¹⁵ In light of the centrality of the African diaspora in formations and transformations of both western modernities and subaltern modernities, an afro-diasporic perspective should be an essential component of any critical theory of the modern world.

In short, I conceptualize the African diaspora as a multicentered historical field, and as a complex and fluid geo-cultural formation and domain of identification, cultural production, and political organization that is framed by world-historical processes of domination, exploitation, resistance, and emancipation. If the world-historical field that we now call the African

diaspora, as a condition of dispersal and as a process of displacement is founded on forms of violence and terror that are central to modernity, it also signifies a cosmopolitan project of articulating the diverse histories of African peoples while creating translocal intellectual/cultural currents and political movements. The Afroamerican diaspora it is not a uniform formation but a montage of local histories interweaved by common conditions of racial, political-economic, and cultural oppression and by family resemblances grounded not only in commensurable historical experiences of racial subordination, but also in cultural affinities and similar (often shared) repertoires of resistance, intellectual production, and political action.¹⁶

Gendering African diaspora discourses

Most accounts of the African diaspora tend to marginalize considerations of gender and sexuality.¹⁷ The gendering of African diaspora discourse is necessary not only to draw a more complex and concrete picture (inclusive of women) of the histories of peoples of African descent in the modern world, 'to make visible social lives which are often displaced, rendered ungeographic' or as 'people without history' but most significantly to perform a feminist critique of the patriarchal forms, mediations, and practices that constitute modern/colonial regimes of power. Black feminists had redefined the theory, history, and politics of the African diaspora.¹⁸ Black cultural critics such as Carol Boyce Davis had greatly contributed to redefine the parameters of black literature by netting a global diasporic field of black women writers. Black feminist scholars like Michelle Stephens and Michelle Wright had performed feminist critiques of Afro-diasporic cultural, intellectual, and political traditions not only led by male figures but also characterized by a masculine gaze and project. Their gendering of the African diaspora has redrawn its character.

Michelle Stephens' *Black Empire* focuses on how early twentieth century Pan-Africanist, US-based Caribbean intellectuals/activists (C.L.R. James, Marcus Garvey, and Claude McKay) developed a 'masculine global imaginary' wherein the African diaspora was conceived as a trans-nationalist project in search of sovereignty and peoplehood, and therefore partly as a battle between Afro-diasporic and western masculinities. As in nationalist discourses, in this masculine narrative of the African diaspora, women tend to be represented as affective and cultural custodians of the race while Africa tends to be feminized as a motherland to be protected and rescued. Stephens describes her work as 'a particularly gendered analysis of black transnationalism and internationalism, informed by a feminist critique of imperial formations and nationalist constructions'. She agrees with Jacqueline Brown's claim urging 'diaspora studies to attend more directly to the politics of gender rather than to 'women experiences' ... we should interrogate how particular practices (such as

travel) and processes (such as diasporic community formation) come to be infused with gender ideologies (or become 'gendered').¹⁹

In her book *Becoming Black* Michelle Wright focalizes on 'African diasporic counterdiscourses of Black subjectivity' by doing critical readings of canonical figures (DuBois, Césaire, Senghor, Fanon) in the Black male cosmopolitan intelligentsia, while contrasting their method and arguments on Black modernity to Black feminist (Audrey Lorde and Carolyn Rodgers) writings. She argues that mainstream Black intellectual traditions construct the Black subject as masculine, and argues that given that 'Blackness as a concept cannot be . . . produced in isolation from gender and sexuality' there is a need of feminist and queer rethinkings of the African diaspora against the 'heteropatriarchal discourse' of nationalism where 'Black women do not exist'. Wright built her argument for a dialogic/diasporic method 'to recuperate the Black female as subject' from Audrey Lorde's understanding of Blackness standing from the figure of the mother. She contends that 'Lorde points to the African diaspora as a complex space in which different types of intersubjects exist' and assert that this means 'moving from the discrete boundaries of the nation to the infinitely more complex conflated space and time of the African diaspora'. Wright defines the African diaspora as 'a series of multivalent and intersected historical and cultural formations' and asserts that 'Black feminist and queer discourses are intimately bound up in producing an African diasporic discourse'. These Black feminist and queer perspectives on the African diaspora respond to the fact that 'not all Black subjects would like to hear all subalterns speak' and reveal the particularly profound forms of subalternization experienced by women of color and black queers. In this vein, the African diaspora should be conceptualized as a contested terrain of gender and sexual politics where the very definitions of project, identity, and agency are at stake.

In sum, gendering African diaspora discourses implies important epistemic breaks and political imperatives including revisiting and challenging the masculinist character of mainstream ideologies of global Blackness, centering women histories and feminist perspectives, and recognizing the significance of gender and sexual difference among the multiple mediations that constitute Afro-diasporic selves. In general, feminist theory and politics provide important tools for the analysis and transformation of modern/colonial constellations of power and knowledge including the capitalist world-economy, empires, nation-states, cultural logics, families, formations of intimacy and the self.²⁰

Diasporas and borderlands: women of color/third world women feminisms

In the United States an intellectual current and social movement that self-defines as 'women of color' and/or 'third world feminism' championed

theoretical critiques and political opposition to global, national, and local modes of domination, revealing the workings of patriarchy through all social spaces and institutions (from the capitalist world-economy and the modern nation-state to formations of intimacy) while recognizing the agency of subaltern women in historical struggles and social movements, and in the forging of alternative worlds.²¹ Women of color feminism stand from long-term intellectual and political coalitions between African-American and Latina women.

This strand of critique and politics engages in 'a critically transnational (internationalist) feminist praxis' based on 'an antiracist feminist framework, anchored in decolonization and committed to anticapitalist critique'.²² The overall transformative project is defined as one of decolonization meaning 'profound transformations of self, community, and governance structures'. This 'unbounded promise of decolonization' entails combating all forms of oppression (class, race, gender, sexual, geo-political, epistemic) in all social spheres and at all scales (local, national, global). This search for decolonizing economy, polity, knowledge, culture, and subjectivity, involves creating a 'decolonial imaginary' to change our lens and inform transformative praxis.²³

The critical theory and radical politics of women of color/third world women feminism converge in crucial ways with the analytics and decolonial project of intellectuals-activists who analyze and seek to transform capitalist modernity from the perspective of the coloniality of power.²⁴ Both analyze modernity from a world-historical decolonial perspective, and both see power as a complex pattern that integrates class exploitation and capital accumulation with ethno-racial, cultural-epistemic, and gender-sexual domination. In short, both women of color feminism and the coloniality of power perspective stand from a 'decolonial attitude' and act for a politics of decolonization.²⁵

Women of Color/Third World Women feminisms had also elaborated concepts of diasporas as spaces of difference and places to build what Maria Lugones calls 'complex unity' or solidarity gained in the intersection of multiple chains of oppression and corresponding strategies of liberation.²⁶ This border/diasporic decolonial imaginary have informed politically and intellectually fruitful coalitions between US Black and US Latina feminists pursuing general goals of liberation and decolonization. In this specific sense of Afro-Latinidad as a feminist political identity, Afro-Latina difference serves as a crucial constituent within a coalitional political community and as a significant element within a field of intellectual production and critique.

One of the principal theoretical contributions of women of color feminism is the concept of 'politics of location'²⁷ that relates the 'multiple mediations' (gender, class, race, etc.) that constitute the self to diverse modes of domination (capitalism, patriarchy, racism, imperialism) and to distinct yet intertwined social struggles and movements.²⁸ Building from this formulation I

propose the concept of politics of translocation to link geographies of power at various scales (local, regional, national, global) with the subject positions (gender/sexual, ethno-racial, class, etc.) that constitute the self.²⁹ Afro-American diasporic subjects should also be conceptualized as translocal because even though we are connected to nationality we are also inscribed within larger geo-historical constellations (the Atlantic, the Americas, global Blackness, the modern/colonial capitalist world-system), at the same time that Black identities are mediated by a myriad of differences (class, gender, sexuality, place, generation). Afro-diasporic subjects can simultaneously be national (Afro-Cuban), local (Louisiana), regional (Afro-Latin American), and global (cosmopolitan Black intellectual/activist). In sum, the notion of African diaspora signifies an ocean of differences and a contested terrain inscribed by distinctive gendered ideologies, political agendas, and generational sensibilities.

In this sense we can analyze the African Diaspora as a Black Borderland, as a geo-historical field with multiple borders and complex layers.³⁰ Claudia M. Milian Arias attempt to 'reconceptualize two foundational models' namely Anzaldua's 'borderlands' and DuBois' 'double consciousness' as a way to construct links between Black Studies and Latino Studies based on a 'relational theory of race' is another important move. Her proposal of 'an open double consciousness' constitutes a useful extension of the analytical and political value of the concept in so far as it 'allows the mixture of blackness to correspond with brown *mestizaje*, alongside the mixture of ideologies that shape these figurations via gender, class, and sexuality'. Milian's comparison of DuBois' double consciousness with Anzaldua's 'alien consciousness' could also be related to Chela Sandoval's notion of 'differential consciousness' but not without recognizing that this last notion supposes and implies an oppositional and transformative praxis.³¹

To close this section I will argue that it is also important to direct the gaze beyond the epistemic and political horizons offered by an Afro-diasporic perspective. Patterson and Kelley point to the limits of African diaspora discourse by arguing that Black history and politics had always been based in more than racial considerations, and had always been articulated with other world-historical processes (South Asian indentured servitude), ideologies (socialism, Islam), and antisystemic movements (labor, feminism). An Afro-diasporic perspective is analytically insufficient and politically indeterminate if we do not specify its world-historical conditions of existence and do not explore its political and ideological possibilities. African diaspora discourses can also predicate exclusionary definitions of identity as we already saw in relationship to gender, but exclusions can also stand from civilizational (Afrocentric) and world-regional (Anglocentric) definitions of blackness and the diaspora. Hence the need to pluralize our concepts and cartographies of the African diaspora, to see its diversity, contradictions, and local

particularities, and to understand the limits and possibilities of Afro-diasporic politics.

Afro-Latinidades: pluralizing African diaspora spaces

In mapping African diaspora spaces we need to historicize them specifying their diversity and complexity while analyzing their linkages. Earl Lewis concept of African-American communities as ‘overlapping diasporas’ is a useful tool to understand diversity and articulation within the African diaspora. I am introducing the concept of intertwined diasporas to signify not only the plurality of histories and projects articulated within the African diaspora, but also the world-historical entangleness of multiple genealogies of diasporic formation (African, South Asian, and East Asian diasporas composing a Caribbean diaspora space), and the transdiasporic character of world cities’ populations (working classes and new immigrants as subaltern modernities).

Afro-Latinidades tend to be marginalized and even erased from most mappings of the African diaspora, at the same time that African diaspora perspectives need to play a more important role in Latino/American studies. This shows the marginalization of Afro-Latinidades from Latino studies while it reveals our invisibilization in most cartographies of the African diaspora. The same Eurocentric ideology that place blackness at the bottom of the great chain of being and imagine Africa as a dark continent outside of history, locate Blacks at the bottom or outside of Latino/Americanist world-regional and national definitions. On the other end, the geo-politics of knowledge that corresponds to the sequence of British and US hegemony in the modern/colonial capitalist world-system, informs cognitive mappings and historical accounts of the African diaspora and the Black Atlantic focused on the Anglo world. Nonetheless, in spite of this double subalternization of Afro-Latinidades from both Anglocentric accounts of the African diaspora and Latino/Americanist discourses, there is a long history of Afro-Latina/o diasporic consciousness and participation in African diaspora networks. A telling example is the trans-diasporic reciprocity of three cultural movements in three different nodes of a cosmopolitan network of black intellectuals, cultural creators, and political activists in the early twentieth century: the Harlem Renaissance, the Negritude movement, and Afro-Cubanismo. A telling relationship in this black cosmopolitan diasporic world was between writers Nicolas Guillen and Langston Hughes whose friendship, intellectual and political exchange, mutual translation of poetry, and reciprocal introduction to their respective national and linguistic contexts eloquently exemplify Afro-diasporic solidarity within a translocal web of black public spheres.

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. 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 it is revealing of how distinct diaspora discourses define their subject and space. In Puerto Rico Schomburg is barely known while in US Puerto Rican memory he is top on the official list of great Boricuas, at the same that US Black historians remember him as black archivist Arthur Schomburg. Some researchers argue that Schomburg abandoned Hispanic Caribbean militancy after 1898 and eventually let go of his Puerto Rican identity in favor of an Afro-diasporic one.³² But if we dig into Schomburg's work and projects we will get a more nuanced view of his multiple locations and loyalties.³³ His long lasting commitment to Afro-Latinidades can be clearly seen in his struggle for inclusion of Afro-Cubans and Afro-Puerto Ricans in organizations like the Negro Society for Historical Research, and to include Afro-Hispanic writers in anthologies of Black literature. His research in Africans in early modern Spain pioneered the current revision of European history as multiracial. His advocacy for translation of Afro-Latino writers like Nicolas Guillen revealed his effort to articulate a plural African diaspora. Indeed, Schomburg could not give-up his Afro-Latino identity because his blackness was contested in light of his Puerto Rican origin and mixed color. Perhaps, it was partly because of his border subjectivity and liminal positioning that Schomburg was the Black figure in the US early twentieth century who kept good relations with competing characters such as W.E.B. DuBois, Marcus Garvey, Claude McKay, and Alain Locke. In short, Schomburg's project of Black cosmopolitanism, in understanding the diversity and complexity of the racial formations and cultural practices in different African diaspora spaces, challenged narrow notions of both Africanity and Latinidad. Schomburg represents the translocal intellectual enacting a diasporic project in which identity and community are conceived and articulated through and across differences.

Afro-Latinidades as transdiasporic subjects tend to transgress essentialist conceptions of self, memory, culture, and politics corresponding to all encompassing categories of identity and community such as simply 'Blacks' and 'Latinos'. Afro-Latinidades in their plurality and diasporicity demonstrate the limits of categorical definitions of both blackness and latinidad at the same time that they reveal the limits of diaspora discourses themselves. This begs the question of the genealogical and categorical character of Afro-Latinidades.

Afro-Latinidades and world-historical constellations of identity and difference

The composed denominator Afro-Latina/o is beginning to gain currency in academic discourse, media texts, and to some extent in popular parlance. Its semantic field is fairly broad ranging from designating the subject of a field of research about Latino/Americans of African descent and naming a political/racial identity for emerging social movements of Black Latinos across the Americas, to serving as the commercial title for a collection of salsa music in the African continent. In light of this broad range and diverse set of meanings, we write about Afro-Latinidades in plural.³⁴ But in searching to conceptualize Afro-Latina/o as a category we need minimal definitional clarity. Afro-Latinidad is an ethno-racial category that refers to the histories, memories, social locations, expressive cultures, social movements, political organization, and lived experiences of peoples of African descent in Latino/America.³⁵ Afro-Latinidad is a category of difference, in contrast to identity discourses based on hegemonic notions of nationality and race in Latino/America. Positing Afro-Latinidades as a designation of difference should entail an analysis of the conceptual and political values of related denominations (national, regional, ethnic, racial, civilizational) of identity/difference.

The hyphenated term Afro-Latino denotes a link between Africanity and Latinidad, two complex and contested world-historical categories of geography, identification, and cultural production which have their own particular yet intertwined genealogies.³⁶ More precisely, to deconstruct the categorical character of Afro-Latinidades we should analyze the historical relationship of three key discursive frameworks in modern/colonial definitions of historical space and collective identity, namely Africanity, Americanness, and Latinidad. Such constructs have been produced and signified through a world-historical process of capitalist development, imperial domination, and nation-state formation, that entailed the constitution of modern/colonial definitions of the self, based on gendered/eroticized hierarchies of peoplehood (racial, ethnic, national). This world-historical pattern of domination and resistance that we call the coloniality of power is the overall framework from where we analyze the joint historical production (or invention) of Africa (and the African diaspora), the Americas, and Europe as world-regional discourses of social space, memory, culture/civilization, and identity/self.³⁷

I conceptualize Afro-Latinidades using a world-historical/decolonial perspective. If elaborated as a category for decolonial critique and as a critical 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 Africanity, Americanness, and Latinidad.³⁸ Such lens would also allow us to conceptualize the Black Atlantic and Afroamerica as composed by intertwined diasporas

wherein Afro-Latinos had historically played important roles, at the same time that we conceive Latinidad as a trans-American/translocal diasporic category. Thus, Latino/Americanism should be redefined and challenged by accounting for the histories of Afro-diasporic subjects, while African diaspora discourses should become more nuanced and pluralized in light of Afro-Latina/o histories. Given that Afro-Latinidades are marginalized from hegemonic narratives of Africanity, Blackness, Latinidad, and Hispanicity and therefore from the corresponding world-regional (Black Atlantic, Latin America, Afroamerica, Afro-Caribbean) and national definitions of identity and community; 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 narratives of geography, memory, culture, and the self.

In this inquiry, a fruitful angle for analysis and critique is the ever changing and always contested politics of naming. For instance, we could ask who is included and excluded from the designation *African-American* that replaced *Black* that in turn displaced *Negro* as the politically preferred self-designation by US activists and intellectuals 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? It is playing the liberal game of hyphenated ethnicization in detriment of critical race theory and radical anti-racist politics? Should we instead redefine the expression African-American to signify Africans in the Americas? On another register, should we choose between Afro-Latino and Afro-Hispanic, or does each of these hybrid signifiers denote particular meanings revealing specific genealogies?

For a genealogy of Afroamerica

We can trace the genealogy of modern/colonial ethno-racial categories to the historical shift from the late medieval religious-linguistic notions of 'blood purity' at the Iberian Peninsula, to the early modern racial classifications (*indio*, *negro*, *mestizo*, *African*, *European*) developed in the contexts of the conquest of the Americas and the organization of chattel slavery as a main institution of capitalist modernity. Archival evidence indicates the presence of people of African descent on Columbus crew at the so-called discovery voyages. This should be no surprise given that Cordoba was one of the principal centers of the Islamic world and that 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 centered on the Iberian peninsula that later was partly extended to the Atlantic world we also have written record of Afro-Hispanic intellectuals such as Juan Latino, an African born who became Latin grammarian and poet, and who in spite of marrying into nobility and

achieving great recognition continued expressing a Black African identity that he contrasted with hegemonic whiteness.³⁹ The very politics of location and self-naming of this fascinating character who became chair of poetry at the University of Granada should be an historical template for any genealogy of Afro-Latinidades. From *Ladino*, a common designation for Spanish subjects of the low stratum that proved proficiency of the language of empire (Castilian), he renamed as *Latino* to establish 'an old imperial bloodline and genealogy based on his own linguistic merits',⁴⁰ as master of Classic Latin. Despite escalating the ladders of race and class through 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 been inscribed within the modern/colonial somatic-visual regime of pigmentocracy that frames the onto-existential condition that Fanon calls 'the fact of Blackness'.⁴¹ From our present perspective, to the extent that his story shows some key correspondences and contradictions in the relation 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 and as an early modern expression of Afro-diasporic subjectivity.

Given that the main focus of our analysis is *Afroamerica* we should ask, what are the spatio-temporal parameters of Afro-Latina/o difference?⁴² The vast territory south of the Rio Grande that 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, and where there presently is a largest concentration of Afro-descendants in the Americas.⁴³ But 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 US ethno-racial designation. However, the use of the suffix 'Afro' to signify world-regional and national denominations had been used in the southern side of the American hemisphere since the early twentieth century. Cuban intellectual Fernando Ortiz wrote about an Afro-Cuban culture in 1904 and by the 1930s was one of the founders of the *Asociacion de Estudios Afrocaribeanos*. In Mexico an *Instituto de Estudios Afroamericanos* was organized in the early 1940s and published a short lived magazine called *Afroamerica*.⁴⁴ The *Asociacion* and magazine were launched and supported by a trans-American group of intellectuals from (or for) the African diaspora that included Euro-Cuban Fernando Ortiz, Afro-Cubans Nicolas Guillen and Romulo Lachatenere, Brazilian Gilberto Freyre, Haitian Jacques Roumain, Mexican Gonzalo Aguirre Beltran, Martiniquean Aime Cesaire, Trinitarian Eric Williams, US Blacks Alain Locke and W.E.B. DuBois, and anthropologist Melvin Herkovits.⁴⁵

The point is not to establish where the language of Afroamerica was first used or to simply show Black consciousness in Latin America, but to argue for the need of an Afro-diasporic perspective that would allow us to analyze the differences and particularities as well as the articulations and common grounds of the manifold histories of the African diaspora in the Americas. Such globalized and pluralized Afro-diasporic perspective should be a basis for refashioning both Black Studies and Latino Studies.

The most general common ground of Afro-diasporic subjects in the Americas is the subjection to modern/colonial regimes of racial classification/stratification as the outcome of a world-system based on racial capitalism and western racisms. The institution of chattel slavery was a key constitutive element of capitalist modernity and left profound marks on its basic structures and psyche. 'Race' became at once a universal system of classification that informed all the basic institutions and discourses of western modernity, as well as a basic mediation in national and local configurations of power, culture, and subjectivity. What is at stake here 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.⁴⁶

In the Americas, processes of nationalization of memory, language, and identity, stand from a nationalist narrative in which white male Euro-American elites are assumed to represent the nation, while subaltern racial others (Blacks, Indians, 'Orientals') are marginalized or virtually erased from national imaginaries.⁴⁷ The continuation of these modern/colonial modes of ethno-racial domination and class exploitation after national independence in the Americas is an important feature of what Anibal Quijano terms the coloniality of power.

In this vein, the existential condition that DuBois characterizes as 'double consciousness' referring to the 'American Negro', of grappling with a split subjectivity (American and African) and of denial of substantive citizenship by nation-states because of been seen and classified as a problem by a dominant racist regime, should be extended to the whole of Afroamerica. In spite of local, regional, and national differences, this condition of relative exclusion from hegemonic definitions of national self and history that imply a devaluation of memory, a folklorization of culture, and submission to political-economic regimes of racial domination and class exploitation, frame a common diasporic ground for people of African descent in the Americas.⁴⁸

These long-term histories of relative exclusion and subalternization inform historical processes of community-making, the constitution of black publics 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. In this register, double consciousness refers to Afro-diasporic expressions of belonging and citizenship based on Afroamerican identifications with places and spaces located below (Palenque de San Basilio in Colombia) and beyond the nation (Afro-Andean geographies, Afroamerica). Afroamerica can be represented as a creolized polyphonic diaspora space, a translocal crossroads, a Black borderland. The play of differences within the Afroamerican diaspora calls for a politics of translation, not only in the narrow sense of linguistic translations, but speak to the need of cultural and political translations to facilitate communication and organization, to create the minimal conditions to construct the diaspora as a decolonial project.⁴⁹

In mapping the multiple genealogies of Afroamerican communities we should account for both their heterogeneity and their multiple connections. For instance, Afro-North America can be defined as a shifting historical formation, as an on-going process continuously re-composed by a diverse constellation of African diasporas re-located from the US, the Caribbean, Latin America, Europe, and the African continent. In turn, the eastern region of Cuba is largely Haitian and West Indian, while Afro-descendant communities in Central America are largely composed by offspring from immigrants from the Anglophone Caribbean and by Garifuna people that the British had expelled from Saint Vincent in 1789 after realizing their inability to colonize them. Also, world cities like New York and Paris have been for many years diasporic crossroads and Afro-diasporic borderlands where Afro-descendants from different places meet, develop ties, and reach-out to other peoples and diasporas.

Intertwined diasporas on ‘the belly of the beast’: Blacks, Latinos, Afro-Latinos

Afroamerican subjects-peoples are intertwined diasporas in their history, ethnic composition, cultural expressions, and political projects. Perhaps, the clearest example of the diasporicity and translocality of Afro-Latinidades are Afro-Latinos residing in the United States, who are situated in-between Blacks and Latinos in the US national space at the same time that they link Afro-North Americans with Afro-descendants south of the Rio Grande.⁵⁰ However, some short sighted analytical and political perspectives that are attempting to become common sense in both academy and public culture across the Americas keep feeding the tendency to divide Black and Latinos (and Black and Latino Studies) as sharply distinct and even opposing domains of identity, culture, and politics.

In analyzing Black-Latino coalitions we should observe Afro-Latina/o multiple identities and affiliations. To Arturo Schomburg we could add Denise

Oliver's double membership in the Black Panthers and the Young Lords. In their platform the Young Lords advocated Afro-Indio identity. Schomburg himself used the pen name Guarionex who was a Taino warrior chief.⁵¹ Afro-Puerto Rican writer Piri Thomas in his classic Nuyorican novel *Down these means streets*, articulates with clarity how sharp distinctions between Blacks and Latinos produce disturbing dilemmas for mulatto subjects like him. Thomas narrates how after agonizing about whether he was 'Black' or 'Puerto Rican' he realized that he was both, an Afro-Latino. He realized that his blackness and his *mulataje* were not in contradiction but constitutive of both his Puerto Rican and Afro-Latino identities. In this context the concept of mulatto does not mean a racial hybrid between black and white and/or a brown product of *mestizaje*, but it is rather used to signify how Afro-Latina/o difference could transgress and transcend such ethno-racial binaries.⁵²

If we view Blacks and Latinos as distinct groups, their relationship should be represented in its diversity and complexity. This means recognizing the 'patterns of cooperation, conflict, and ambivalence' as put by political scientist Mark Sawyer. There is a growing scholarship on Black and Latino relations that analyzes the actual and potential roles of Afro-Latina/os as 'bridging identities'.⁵³ This strand of research had taken important steps in identifying sources of conflict while analyzing bonds and potential forms of coalition-building. Researchers had shown how similar histories and conditions of Black and Latino subaltern sectors (and to some extent middle strata) account for shared sensibilities informing campaigns against racial discrimination (for Affirmative Action, against mass incarceration of Black and Latino youth), urban injustices (in housing, education, and health care), and economic inequality (living wage, union organizing).⁵⁴ This should not deny how different forms of racism (Latino anti-Black) and xenophobia (nativism of Black and Latino US citizens), and how various political agendas and ideologies (ethnic-racial competition of Black and Latino political classes), are sources of Black-Latino conflict. The ambiguities and shifting character of Black-Latino coalitions are shown in the electoral race of Antonio Villaraigosa who was elected major of Los Angeles in 2004 with the majority of the Black vote but was not supported by Blacks in the prior election. Our task is to develop analytical frameworks to understand the articulations of power and culture embedded in different definitions of Blackness and *Latinidad* and distinct forms of Black and Latina/o politics.

The liberal ethnic optic that informs the terms of politics in the US, produces simplistic notions of justice, community, and coalition-building. If the main basis of cultural and political affinity is de-racialized ethnicity, class and gender differences are irrelevant, and labor and feminist organization of marginal importance. In this logic, coalitions that matter are ethnic and in the electoral arena, while social movement organizations such as community-labor coalitions, broad-based alliances for racial justice, feminist of color

alliances, Black-Latina/o Gay and Lesbian networks, and the myriad of institutions and informal networks that compose an emerging wave of collective action north and south of the Rio Grande are written out. The forms of power and difference (class, gender, race, ideology) that distinguish Latino identities and agendas are erased, hence producing a false sense of sameness and a superficial notion of community. This results in a minimal concept of democracy as formal representation, and of justice as a share of the pie for the ethnic community. Concerns on the relation between democracy, difference, freedom, and justice, that give substance to these ethical-political principles are absent. Fundamental differences among Latino political traditions, ideologies of power, and projects are also ignored.

For instance, Nicolas Vaca's critique of sixties discourse on alliances between US people of color and the connection between US minority struggles and third world liberation movements have implications for Black-Latino Studies and their the racial, class, gender and sexual politics. Feminist coalitions of women of color/third world women is implicitly dismissed as passé in this outlook. Women of color feminism critiqued and challenged the patriarchal character of the nationalist discourses of the sixties at the same time they frame their analyses of domination in a world-historical decolonial perspective. This clearly opposes Vaca's understanding of Latino community and politics as an ethnic race, as well as its view of the world as a sum of nations where Latinos are an ethnic group within the United States. Vaca's liberal gaze ignores domination (imperialism, racism, patriarchy) and exploitation (neo-liberal capitalism) at the global level and its connections with regimes of inequality (class, ethno-racial, gender, sexual) at national, regional, and local scales in the United States (Vaca 2004). In contrast, third world feminism anchors a politics of decolonization in a critical analysis of the entanglements of capitalism, imperialism, racism, and patriarchy from the local to the global.⁵⁵ Its coalitional politics of sisterhood promotes alliances among women of color (Black, Latina, Native American, Asian) as part of a broad-based movement for radical democracy and social justice. This is also the kind of decolonial critique and politics of decolonization enabled by Quijano's concept of the colonality of power.

Decolonial moves: Afro-Latinidades and the decolonization of power and knowledge

The global spread of neoliberal imperial doctrines and policies since the 1980s had been met with the rise of a new wave of antisystemic movements epitomized by the campaigns against neoliberalism organized by the Zapatistas, mass demonstrations of global reach (Seattle, December 1999; world anti-war,

February 2003), and the boom of social forums (world, regional, national). We should situate the growth of transnational Afro-Latina/o politics since the late 1970s and early 1980s in this world-historical context. The rise of explicitly black (or afro) cultural/intellectual currents and social/political movements in Brazil, Cuba, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Ecuador, Dominican Republic, Honduras, Panama, Peru, Puerto Rico, Nicaragua, Uruguay, Venezuela, and Argentina, and their growing relations with US Afro-Latinos reveal the emergence of an Afro-Latina/o hemispheric movement. The colonization by transnational capital and states of previously under-exploited Afroamerican regions such as the Pacific Coast in Colombia, Esmeraldas in Ecuador, and Pinones in Puerto Rico, informs the rise of social movements affirming Afro-diasporic identities and combating racism while claiming place and ecological integrity, and vindicating black cultures and local knowledges against the sweeping negative effects of neoliberal globalization. The growth of Afro-Latina/o movements is also intimately related to the emergence of strong and vibrant Amerindian movements in Latino/America. The salience of such movements had moved institutions of global capital (e.g., Interamerican Development Bank, U.S. Agency for International Development, and the World Bank) to acknowledge the conditions of inequality of most Afro-Latinos and to develop projects in Afro-Latina/o communities. These interventions by key institutions of transnational capitalism provoke debates that unleash the different social, economic, cultural, intellectual, and political issues at stake.

In spite of significant differences and contradictions, the drive for Afro-Latina/o self-affirmation had produced local and national organizations that provided effective leadership within popular movements, articulated regional identities and alliances (Afro-Andino), convened world-regional meetings (Black Latin American women conferences), and participated in hemispheric meetings (Afro-Americans in and after Durban). Afro-Latinos in the United States are protagonist actors in these hemispheric networks at the same time that they serve as bridge in US Black-Latino coalitions. An important example in the cultural front are the exchanges between Afro-Cuban and Afro-North American politicized hip-hop artists which had challenged in theory and praxis commodified versions of rap while advancing a radical aesthetics of hip-hop culture as an expression of the African diaspora in the domain of transnational youth cultures.

The scope and scale of such movements give them the potential of significantly contributing to questioning and challenging racist regimes and processes of domination throughout the Americas. An important feature of many of these emerging discourses of Afro-Latinidad is a diasporic-translocal perspective that links racial democracy to class struggle, and wherein Black women are championing feminist demands with campaigns against imperialism and neoliberal capitalism. In these explicitly subalternist Afro-diasporic politics the question of power is clearly tied to the question of knowledge. Similarly to

the social movements of the 1960s–70s that created Latina/o studies and refashioned African-American studies, Afro-Latina/o cultural practices and social movements are not only claiming a space in the academic world but also demanding authority and recognition for their vernacular modes of knowledge.⁵⁶ Afro-Latinidades are an important source for the decolonization of power and knowledge. Afro-Latina/o difference can pose a challenge to both Black Studies and Latino Studies to revitalize the critical and radical paths that gave them birth and could prevent them from losing their transformative decolonial character. Black radical cosmopolitanism had been a fountain of decolonial knowledge and politics since its very inception. Paraphrasing Nelson Maldonado Torres, we contend that Africana Studies represents one of the main traditions of critical cosmopolitanism in modernity and had always been a field of production of critical theories based on a decolonial attitude.⁵⁷ In this register, critical traditions of both Black and Latino Studies converge in so far they are both based in a radical decolonial politics of liberation (anti-imperialist, and in often also anti-capitalist) framed by world-historical and transnational perspectives. Afro-diasporic feminist perspectives entail particularly complex analytical frameworks and political projects in which imperial power, ethno-racial domination, and class exploitation, are systemically link to gender and sexual oppression. Hence, if we understand diaspora not only as condition and process, but also as a radical project for the decolonization of power and knowledge, this cross-fertilization of critical Black and Latino Studies could be a crucial resource of liberation in both the epistemic as well as in the ethical-political fronts.

If we conceptualize decolonization as a long-term and uneven process that results from the combined historical effect of everyday resistances, social struggles, and antisystemic movements, and given the centrality of racial regimes in the colonality of power and knowledge, Black struggles and racial politics are crucial in the *longue duree* of world decolonization. This has a long historical trajectory from the nineteenth century Haitian revolution, to the US Black Freedom movement of the 1960s, and the anti-Apartheid movement. The current rise of Afro-Latinidades places Afro-Latina/o difference at the heart of world processes of cultural and political contestation and construction of alternative futures. This clearly includes struggles over the reconfiguration of the structures, logics, and categories of knowledge. In this tune, an Afro-diasporic decolonial imaginary could serve as the foundation for a new alliance between Black Studies and Latino studies, a trans-diasporic alliance for which Afro-Latinidades should and must be a bridge.

Notes

- 1 See Patterson and Kelley (2000) followed by several comments on the article.

- 2 For Edwards (2001, p. 65) the French word '*décalage*' is the kernel of precisely that which cannot be transferred or exchanged, the received biases that refuse to pass over when one crosses the water. It is a changing core of difference; it is the work of 'differences within unity', an unidentifiable point that is incessantly touched and fingered and pressed'.
- 3 Edwards also articulates a useful distinction between the African Diaspora as a global category and the Black Atlantic as a transnational regional category. The long denomination modern/colonial capitalist world-system is used by several intellectuals as a theoretical representation of capitalist modernity as an historical totality in which coloniality serves as the underside of modernity. See among others, Grosfoguel (2003), Grosfoguel and Cervantes (2002), Quijano (2000), Mignolo (2000, 2006).
- 4 I use the concept of utopia as a horizon of alternative futures grounded on the possibilities of the present that serves as a source of hope and as a north indicating us in which direction to go. See Bloch (2000), Santos (2001), and Wallerstein (1998). For the concept of Black Freedom Dreams see Kelley (2003).
- 5 A classic example is the distinction between the theory and politics of Marcus Garvey (transnational racial nationalism) and C.L.R. James (Black Marxism). See Robinson (2000).
- 6 A relevant question here is whether North Africa is part of the definition of the African continent and the implications for definitions of Blackness and Africanity. A current example is from France where many of the youth who rebelled in November 2005 were of North African ancestry and self-defined as Black.
- 7 The meaning of Afrocentrism is by no means self-evident. There is a growing tendency of a reductive use of terms such as Afrocentrism and Black Nationalism and we actively need to challenge those facile dismissals of complex intellectual and political traditions. Here by Afrocentric discourses I mean those narratives which assume an essential unity of all peoples of African descent which can be traced to common African origins, an analysis based on a monolithic historical logic in which modern civilization is simply an offspring of the African continent. In the latter sense, Afrocentrism is the flip side of the coin of Eurocentrism but using the same kind of monocentric logic of historical development. See Howe (1998). For alternative theories of history based on polycentric perspectives see Dussel (1996, 1998), Mignolo (1997), Prashad (2001), Shohat and Stam (1994).
- 8 A visible example is Gilroy (1993).
- 9 According to Mishra diasporas can follow a logic of identity that could be as exclusive (e.g., 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. Mishra (1994), as quoted in Clifford (1997). The very idea of diasporas of the border challenges a sharp distinction between diasporas and borderlands and therefore between Latina/o Studies and Black Studies. See Milian (2006).

- 10 See Gilroy (1992) and Mercer (1988, 1990).
- 11 Hall analyzes the politics of difference of this second moment using Derrida's concept of differance as an epistemic and political principle for deconstructing categorical identities on the basis of alterity. The same theoretical and political logic is used by Raghavakrishnan to formulate an argument about ethno-racial identities and diasporicity in the US. See Hall (1991a, 1991b), and Raghavakrishnan (1996). 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 and Anibal Quijano. See Hall (1993), Dussel (1996), and Quijano (2000).
- 12 For the concept of the 'dark races of the world' see Du Bois (1935). I learned about and got the platform for a 'World Black Revolution' from my colleague and friend John Bracey.
- 13 This is captured with much poetic wisdom in James Baldwin's expression 'Black is a Country' that also serves as title to Nikil Pal Singh's book. See Singh (2004).
- 14 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. Two interesting attempts to develop a historical sociology of nationalisms and to distinguish their diverse political meanings are Lomnitz (2001) and Lazarus (1999).
- 15 Coronil (1996).
- 16 For the concept of family resemblances see Wittgenstein (1968).
- 17 Clifford (op. cit.) observes that gender is outstandingly absent from diaspora discourse in general. Patterson and Kelley (op. cit) discuss the importance of gendering analyses of the African diaspora. 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 in social movements, expressive cultures and forms of subjectivity. The sheer absence for the most, 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.
- 18 See among others, Boyce Davis (1994), Hill Collins (2000), Gunning *et al.* (2004), McKittirick (2006), and Nassy Brown (2005).
- 19 This quote of Brown is from Stephens. See Nassy Brown (1998).
- 20 See among others, Stoler (2002), McClintock (1995), and Mies (1998).
- 21 See Moraga and Anzaldúa (1983), Grewal and Kaplan (1994), Mohanty and Alexander (1996), Mohanty, Russo, and Torres (1991).

- 22 Mohanty (2003).
- 23 For the concept of decolonial imaginary see Perez (1999).
- 24 For the concept of the coloniality of power see Quijano (2000).
- 25 It is important to observe that significant currents of African-American and Latina feminism did not abandoned the elaboration of the anti/post-colonial 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 foundations of Latino studies in the 1960s/70s while feminist scholars developed critiques of the patriarchal forms of anti-colonial nationalisms while developing their own versions of decolonial theory and politics. See Perez (1999/), Sandoval (2000), and, Mohanty (2003). For the concept of decolonial attitude see Maldonado Torres (2006).
- 26 See Lugones (2003).
- 27 See Alarcon (1989), Grewal and Kaplan (1994), Frankenberg and Mani (1993).
- 28 For the concept of multiple mediations see Mani (1990).
- 29 I proposed a politics of translocation in the introduction to the co-edited volume *Mambo Montage*. See Lao-Montes and Davila (2001).
- 30 Clifford (op cit) distinguish 'borderlands' and 'diasporas' as two different spatial formations and as frameworks for identification and politics, at the same time that their meanings and dynamics intersect.
- 31 See Sandoval (2000). Also see Allen (2003) problematization of DuBoisian concept of double consciousness.
- 32 See among others, Des Verney Sinnette (1989), and James (1999).
- 33 See Sanchez (2001). Arroyo (2007) also engages in an analysis not only of the differential racial significations of Schomburg in different contexts and according to distinct criteria but also about his gender and sexual locations.
- 34 However, for the sake of style In this article I use Afro-Latina/o and Afro-Latinidades interchangeably.
- 35 The conceptual expression Latino/America signifies a geo-historical construct that designate Latino/America as a world-region that encompasses not only the nation-states south of the Rio Grande that emerged from the colonization and subsequent falls of the Spanish and Portuguese empires, but also include Latin American diasporas in the US. It should be clear that these geo-historical constructs are limited and exclusive both in the ways the region is conceived (e.g., Is Haiti part of Latino/America, which reveals both the question of the placing of the Caribbean as well as the role of Latinism as an ideology invented in the nineteenth century within French imperial discourse?), and in who are the subjects/citizens in question (e.g., Are Aymara people Latin Americans? Is Aymara a Latin American language?). See Mignolo (2006).
- 36 For world-historical groundings of modern/colonial categories of the self see Hall (1991a, 1991b), and Quijano (2000).

- 37 For the concept of the colonality of power see Quijano (2000). For the modern invention of Africa see Mudimbe (1988). For the invention of the Americas see O’Gorman (1961, 1986), Dussel (1992), and Rabassa (1993).
- 38 In this formulation the concept of Afro-Latina/o difference, in so far as it designates subjects whose experience and knowledge are otherized and subalternized by hegemonic occidentalist discourses constitutes a form of Mignolo’s category of colonial difference, See Mignolo (2000).
- 39 For the concept of contact zone as an imperial/colonial space of domination, hegemony, resistance, and transculturation see Pratt (1992).
- 40 As quoted in Piedra (1991). Also see Fra-Molinero (2005) & Lao-Montes (2005).
- 41 See Fanon (1967). For an excellent reading of the onto-existential meaning of Fanon’s concept of the experience of blackness see Gordon (1995).
- 42 For the concept of Afroamerica see Luciano Franco (1961).
- 43 Andrews calculates 110 million Afro-descendants south of the Rio Grande (Andrews 2004).
- 44 See Ortiz (1906), and Luciano Franco (1961).
- 45 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 showing ethno-racial (and in the case of Herkovits intellectual) identities.
- 46 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).
- 47 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 above described dynamic of racial domination and representation characterize the overall pattern of racial formation in the Americas.
- 48 For the transnational/translocal extension of the concept of double consciousness also see Gilroy (1993) and Sawyer (2005).
- 49 For the politics of translation see Santos (2004, 2005).
- 50 See Marquez (2000).
- 51 Taino is the name given to the people who inhabited Puerto Rico at the time of Columbus arrival.
- 52 For two fairly promising elaborations of such sort of concepts of ‘mulatto’, ‘mulataje’ see Arroyo (2004) and Buscaglia (2003). Also see Martinez-Echezabal (1990). The signifier ‘mulatto’, similarly to ‘mestizo’, is conventionally used to connote a false image of ‘racial democracy’ in Latin America, the Hispanic Caribbean, and among US Latinos. However, analogously as the way in which Anzaldúa re-defined the ‘new mestiza’ to

develop a theory and politics of identification standing from the play of differences, the concept of mulatto can serve as an conceptual and political tool to challenge racial reasoning and to analyze 'race' through its multiple mediations and myriad of historical articulations.

- 53 See Sawyer (2005b).
 54 See among others, Dzidzienyo and Oboler (2005), Betancur and Gills (2000), and Jennings (1994).
 55 For the 'entanglements' of modern/colonial hierarchies within world-systemic logics see Grosfoguel (2003).
 56 An important example is the effort for an 'Ethnic University' in the overwhelmingly Afro-Colombian Pacific coast of Colombia, that parallels the Indigenous University in the Ecuatorian highlands.
 57 See Maldonado Torres (2006).

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