DISPATCHES FROM AN AFRO-LATINX DECOLONIAL FEMINISM

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Abstract: As women of color feminists connected to Lucumi traditions this article traverses multiple intellectual, geographical and spiritual terrains as part of a journey which recognizes our engagement with, and connection to Black and Chicana feminisms. Here, we expand the seats at the proverbial women of color kitchen table to make room for an AfroLatinx decolonial feminism that sits adjacent to, but independent from both Chicana and Black feminism. Exploring these disparate locations provides a blueprint for our reckoning with the afterlife of colonization and slavery through a diasporic decolonial consciousness and resistance. Working with testimonio as a method and methodology we build a lingua franca through which to communicate the particularities of our consciousness and resistance to coloniality. We map an AfroLatinx feminist standpoint as ni de aquí, ni de allá, and as constituting an "ontology of knowing" that both materially and discursively mark the various worlds.

Keywords: *decolonial afrolatinx feminism, afrodescendant, Lucumi, orishas, testimonio, women of color feminism.*

> ...junto a las puertas del caserón rojizo he vuelto a ver los ojos del guerrero Elegua. / Quien recogerá los caracoles de sus ojos. / ya no sabrá de Olofi si se ha perdido el camino, ya no sabrá de los rituales. / si los ojos de Elegua regresan volverán a atravesar el río. / y bajo la yagruma está el secreto. / las cabezas el sol y lo que silva como único poder del oscuro camino.
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> —Nancy Morejón, "Los ojos de Elegua"[1]

> We are Afrodescendants; this is a term that recognizes our ancestry. We are descendants of the people of African origin who were brought to Latin America and the Caribbean enslaved. We are descendants of the people who came deprived of their freedom, people with

> culture, traditions, languages, customs and dreams. From these people we descend, not from slavery itself. The inheritance of slavery is not ours—it belongs to slave owners and their descendants . . . The inheritance we reclaim is the history of the African peoples who arrived in America, a history we recognize by naming where we come from. That is why we are not descendants of slaves, we are descendants of African people.
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> —Ana Irma Rivera Lassén, "The Heritage that Is Not Ours"[2]

Renowned Afrodescendant Cuban poet Nancy Morejón's poem "Los ojos de Elegua" and Ana Irma Rivera Lassén's allegory about African heritage provide an entry point for exploring how multiple legacies of colonialism and enslavement inform our AfroLatinx decolonial feminism. As two light-skinned, queer women of color feminists connected to Lucumí traditions,[3] we walk together through multiple geographical, intellectual, and spiritual terrains as part of a journey which recognizes how both Black and Chicana feminisms inform our AfroLatinx decolonial feminist consciousness and praxis. Our engagement with and connection to Black and Chicana feminisms functions to expand the number of seats at the proverbial women of color kitchen table, making room for an articulation of feminism that is adjacent to but independent from both Chicana and Black feminism. We honor the distinctiveness of Black and Chicana feminisms for their foundational work that has supported and opened roads towards our decolonial feminist articulation. From this potent intellectual amalgamation, we rely on a differential approach (Sandoval 2000) to make our AfroLatinx decolonial feminism intelligible. We argue that a differential approach to AfroLatinx decolonial feminisms allows for an important critique of the regimes of visibility we encounter from being ni de aquí, ni de allá (Arnau 2020).[4] Grounding ourselves in what Amalia Dache (2021) calls the guerrera

(women warriors) traditions of the Lucumí Orisha,[5] we engage a differential way of being Afrodescendant, mixed heritage, queer Latinx/e feminists who live and work in the U.S. To map out this approach, we touch the ground, pick up our ritual bundles the way that so many of our ancestors within the Lucumí tradition have done before us, and we walk.

The dispatches herein are informed by our location within various systems of colonization, and by our position within the Lucumí spiritual tradition of our West African ancestors. Exploring these disparate locations provide a blueprint for reckoning with the afterlife of colonization and slavery through a diasporic form of decolonial consciousness and resistance. As survivors of "the afterlife of colonialism, slavery, and coloniality" (Sharpe 2016, 18; quoted in Figueroa 2020a, 221), we chart our path to knowledge through the fluid borderlands of a Fronterisleña experience (Rivero 1994). We find that this manifestation of a mestiza consciousness unequivocally aligns with Hortense Spiller's grammatology (1987) and Maria Lugones' decolonial feminist praxis (2010), forming the discursive backbone of our analysis. A focus on the afterlife of colonialism, slavery and coloniality reveals a distinctive node within the matrix of domination (Hill Collins 2008) that captures the differential nature of our AfroLatinx decolonial feminism.[6]

As Morejón's poem points out, resistance within the Lucumí tradition of Cuba means engaging a living cosmology that survived the violence of colonialism, enslavement, and coloniality in the American hemisphere. Outing ourselves as members of the Lucumí lineage requires that we follow codes of salutation and recognition within our tradition, it is a homecoming of sorts. For AfroLatina/x women of color feminists within academia it is also un reto, a challenge, and un riesgo, a risk. Few AfroLatina/x feminists are "out" or identify themselves as believers of a cosmology that

falls outside the Christian belief system practiced by the majority of the Latina/o/x community. The history of Catholic oppression has produced a real and material fear of rejection resulting from the colonial imposition of Christianity that has in previous centuries outlawed and more contemporarily morally condemned non-Western spiritual traditions. Within the dominant Judeo-Christian neoliberal academy, alternate spiritual traditions are often made visible in the service of neoliberalism, i.e., when the academy deems it advantageous to capitalize off this "exotic" worldview. Feminists of color comadres that have come before us—especially Nancy Morejón, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, Akasha Gloria Hull (2001), Toni Cade Bombara, Marta Moreno Vega (2009), M. Jacqui Alexander, and Elisa Facio—have graciously paved the way by daring to speak from a place of spiritualized feminism.[7] This transparency about our own spiritual traditions honors their important work. As Afrodescendant activist scholar Ana Irma Rivera Lassén (2016) asserts, we emerge from distinctive histories, cultures, and stories beyond the violence of coloniality.

Employing testimonio as a method and methodology helps us build a lingua franca through which to communicate the particularities of our consciousness and resistance to coloniality in its various forms; it also disrupts Western approaches (Cespedes, Souza, Bubar, Bundy-Fazioli 2021; Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, and Carmona 2012) to authenticity and belonging.[8] Testimonio as method helps us plot the geography of our existence as queer, Lucumí Afrodescendants traversing across las Americas. It also reveals how our politics and liminality open paths through which we can build a transformational politics. As a relational methodology (Latina Feminist Group 2001; Kovach 2010), testimonio is a critical way to map alternative chronicling of knowledge towards otros saberes, those important but devalued, peripheralized knowledges (Figueroa 2020).[9] Centering a relational framework (del Alba et

al. 2001) through feminist reflexivity (Bromley 2012), testimonio allows us to theorize alternative ways of living AfroLatinidad—making public what has been kept private—and to capture the socially significant experiences that are in conversation with, yet distinct from other feminist liberatory processes. The testimonios we share illustrate our movement among and between Chicana and Black feminisms and our experiences of a Blackness/Afrodescendancy that is tied to Lucumí traditions operating within Hispanic Caribbean/Latin American dynamics and diaspora.[10]

Exploring this AfroLatinx decolonial feminism requires contextualizing the cultural, historical, and spiritual conditions of our existence. Caridad, hija de Ochún,[11] was born in the South Bronx and raised in a working-class ethnically and racially diverse enclave of South Queens from Puerto Rican and Cape Verdean heritage whose father was a Lucumí priest. Karina, hija de Yemayá,[12] was born in Havana, Cuba, and raised in Elizabeth, New Jersey within a large racially mixed and predominantly working-class Cuban enclave. Her father hailed from a family of both formerly enslaved peoples in Oriente and belonged to an extended family of color whose ancestors held complex social, familial and biological connections to the domicile of the nineteenth century Cuban anti-colonial rebel leader and slave owner Carlos Manuel de Cespedes. Across the decades, we have walked together united by similar historical forces that have traditionally united the sister orishas Ochún and Yemayá. A traditional Lucumí pataki recounts how Ochún and Yemayá came to walk together. In this tale, Ochún falls into a river as she is being chased by the warrior Ogun and disappears into a whirlpool. Yemayá, the Mother Goddess of the ocean, took her under her protection and gave Ochún dominion over all the Earth's rivers. As women warriors and orishas that watch over love, community, and reproduction, Ochún and Yemayá work together. They respectively hold authority over water within

the Lucumí tradition, and as such metaphors of sweet and salty waters guide our own respective and collective codes of relationality. For both of us, our passage across the hemispheric expanse of nuestra América means that our ancestors nos piden que atravesemos el río (ask us to cross the river) to signify our resistance to absorption into hegemonic racial/class/gender/sexual regimes from the Latinx/Latino Americano variety, as well as from northern Americano/Anglo American variants.

The metaphor of el río (the river) is apt here as a liminal space we traverse since to atravesar el río (cross the river) in the midst of complex and often opposing currents of domination and racialization means we navigate the complicated waters of an AfroLatinx decolonial feminism while being careful not to slip and fall in or be carried away by the stream. As women raised within the tradition, designated by religious elders and priests within the religion to be hijas de Ochún and Yemayá, our spiritual lineage and sociopolitical inheritance situate us among and between regimes of visibility[13] where the rules of a patriarchal Latin American casta system both dictates our racialized gendered subjection[14] and inform our respective and collective understandings of decolonial feminist consciousness and praxis within the U.S. neoliberal academy. We now turn to the task of naming the unacknowledged ways that caste, class, and color still operate to extend the life of an oppressive Caribbean and Latin American casta system (Cespedes 2019).[15]

AfroLatina/o/x Differential Geographies/The Constancy of Diaspora

Within the afterlife of slavery (Hartman 2008), Afrodescendant populations in the Caribbean, Latin America, and AfroLatina/o/x populations in the U.S. negotiate belonging amidst the vestiges of the Spanish colonial casta system and the racial stratification system of the U.S which imposes a black/white racial binary. As diasporic AfroLatinx decolonial feminists caught within

coloniality and polarized racial logics, we experience constant diaspora, the persistence of not belonging, of being ni de aquí, ni de allá as well as being unclaimed and unrecognized.

In a constant state of diaspora, we move among and between the static, one-dimensional space produced by the casta system, contending with the anxieties of essentialists, assimilationists and absorptionists alike. We contend that the imposition of two systems of racialization converge upon AfroLatinx populations, making AfroLatinx bodies simultaneously invisible within the U.S. and within Latinidad. Both the racial segmentation system of the U.S., which has contributed to Latinx emerging as a racialized category, and the legacy of the Spanish colonial casta system of racialization converge upon AfroLatinx populations individually and collectively. Understanding how both systems operate makes it possible to address the ways in which AfroLatinx feminists are made invisible within Latinidad and by the demographic category Latinx, deemed identifiable as phenotypically brown (but not black). Unpacking the convergence of both systems becomes the first step towards understanding the ways in which AfroLatinx populations are left outside of U.S. racial understandings of Latinx (such as being left outside definitions of "brown"). It makes palpable the continual impact of the casta system which imposed upon AfroLatinx populations a distinctive racial lexicon utilized to differentiate social status based on the racial categories of negra/o, mulata/o, morena/o or parda/o (depending on pigmentation, education, social status and class pedigree). Over time, the awkwardly phrased label "white" Latina/o/x has emerged, as a contemporary version of what at the height of colonialism would have been the category used to describe white Creoles (children of European colonial settlers from European born settlers). White Latina/o/x imagines a population that is approximate to, and merging with, definitions of whiteness through an Anglo-American register. The U.S. Latina/o/x identifier has positioned Latina/o/x

identified people as somewhere between the polarized extremes of "white" and "black" but, it is clearly "not-Black," an assimilationist shift that retains colonial anti-Blackness and reaffirms U.S. racial logics. At the same time, over the course of a few generations, some AfroLatina/o/x people have become absorbed into hegemonic Blackness as African Americans. Aligning with the purity tenets of whiteness that some Latinas/os/xs and AfroLatina/o/x individuals take up are not possible nor desired for many dark-skinned AfroLatinas/os/xs. But for light-skinned, mixed-hair Afrodescendants who seek to approximate whiteness, this choice reveals that they may privilege somatic melatonin over liberatory consciousness and praxis. Additionally, light skinned AfroLatinas/os/xs who embrace the Latina/o/x identifier and consider themselves raced as brown and "non-Black," evoke an internalized anti-Blackness that is not a viable pathway to liberation for us.

The resultant anti-Black Latina/o/x identity and non-Latina/o/x Black identity has led to an essentialist policing of identity that guards each category, often by superficially determining belonging via skin color.[16] This policing measures proximity to whiteness or blackness based on phenotype, with these transecting doctrines exerting pressure toward absorption into hegemonic northern Blackness. The effect of such pressures disaffirms AfroLatinidad, extending the cultural logic of the long established casta system onto present regimes of racialization. On the one hand, the purity tenets of whiteness and the blanqueamiento of Latinidad bolsters the critiques of mestizaje in the southern hemisphere.[17] On the other, the hegemony of northern Anglophone Blackness requires that dark-skinned AfroLatina/o/x people strip themselves of their specific Latin American and Caribbean heritage of Afrodescendancy—negating histories and cultural practices, rooted in Spanish conquest and Indigenous survival—to fit into Northern hemispheric understandings of Afrodescendancy that is tied solely to Africa.

To shift beyond current essentialist regimes of caste, class, and color, we consider a differential approach (Sandoval 2000) to AfroLatinx decolonial feminism that enables a political praxis of coalition-building, collaboration, and dialogue (Sandoval 1997). Situated in the psychosocial space of ni de aquí, ni de allá (Lopez Oro 2016; Jiménez Román 2001) means continual routing among and between multiple systems of racialization, gendering, class, sexualities, and cosmologies. In an attempt to establish a coalitional framework that brings Black and Latina/o/x studies into conversations about AfroLatinidad geographies, Madelaine Cahuas (2019) contends that Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) fails to directly address Afro-mestizaje as part of her theorization of borderlands. Cahuas (2019) argues that borderland theory insufficiently explains the anti-Blackness that undergirds and shapes Latina/o/x societies in Latin America and the diaspora, pointing to anti-Black ideologies that have been internalized by Latina/o/x populations. However, we find Anzaldúa's conceptualization of those in-between spaces produced through mestiza consciousness compelling for helping us—two light-skinned, mixed race, diasporic queer, Lucumí-practicing Afro Latinx feminists—address the lived experience of being "ni de aquí, ni de allá" that is a consequence of Latin American/Caribbean Afrodescendancy in the western hemisphere. In describing Anzaldúa's borderlands feminism, Chela Sandoval (1997) notes that it is a syncretic form of consciousness that is mobile and traversing, crossing multiple boundaries. As a meta consciousness that resists old/new hierarchies or social inequities, Sandoval argues that "la conciencia de la mestiza" brings forth the polymodal form of consciousness she calls differential. For Sandoval, mestiza consciousness both inspires and engenders an "emerging cross-disciplinary and transnational politics of resistance that is increasingly theorized as 'border,' 'diasporic,' 'hybrid,' or 'mestiza/o' in nature," one that engages in transnational resistance as a "decolonial move [that] emerges from anticolonial and antisexist critique and practice" which "are often underestimated and misunderstood" (352-354).

Anzaldúa's metaphor of liminal space in the metaphorical and literal borderlands aptly captures the differential movement among and between our specific Afrodescendant diasporic geographies. We appreciate how la conciencia de la mestiza points to the multiple consciousness emerging from various forms of oppression, and by extension, infers multiple solidarities and resistances. In fact, for us Anzaldúa's mestiza consciousness is especially useful regarding the fluidity of cultural and spiritual geographies. Building on mestiza consciousness in a distinctly Caribbean way, Eliana Rivero formulates a feminist engendering of the borders she experiences in her essay "Fronterisleña," which more fittingly "evoke the coastline of an island, where ocean meets water" (1995, 340). Island borderlands evoke a swaying motion of ocean onto land and land into ocean, both a movement and a stance that continually ebbs and flows—akin to the among and between movements that make up our cultural and spiritual geographies. Borders for us then signify a space where land and sea wax and wane like a tide, heralding the forces pulling at us that are larger, more ancient, and more powerful than modernity's coloniality. A Fronterisleña consciousness—as we use it here—promotes alternative imaginings of place-based consciousness through cultural and historical registers that are distinctly hemispheric, not just North American (read: Anglophone), which connect us to ancestors on multiple continents. The symbol of an oceanic coastline allows for a theorizing of the liminal space within which we live that is critical to our differential AfroLatinx decolonial feminism, one depicting how our literal geographies give way to more fluid conceptualizations of being and moving. Here, we find Yomaira Figueroa's attempt to trace AfroLatina/x feminist methodologies "across intersections of diasporic identities, experiences, and politics" (2020a, 3) useful for revealing the various sociopolitical moments where the casta system meets U.S. racial regimes to further marginalize us. Guided by Figueroa's tracing

of AfroLatina/x feminism across diasporic identities, we employ testimonio as a method of addressing what has remained inarticulable despite decades of feminist dialogue. Importantly, our stories narrate lived and embodied experiences of liminality and rejection as multiply positioned Afrodescendants, formative events that have shaped the contours of our AfroLatinx decolonial feminist standpoint: one that refuses to accept immersion into whiteness or into African American identity and refuses the anti-Blackness of predominant understandings of Latinidad. This AfroLatinx decolonial feminist position, thus, occupies a third space that is multiple, relational, and differential.

For the two of us, writing this essay revealed previously untold experiences about what we have each navigated regarding racialization, gendering, racialized gender, and racialized sexuality. During one of these conversations, Caridad shared that her theoretical-political lifework—indelibly influenced first by African American and Chicana feminists, then more recently by Indigenous feminists—began, not surprisingly, with a desire to understand racialization by examining Latin American race relations. She quickly moved to examine racialized gender and sexuality in the U.S., using testimonio, and has more recently focused directly on intersectionality and decolonial scholarship and theorizing. Driven to articulate an AfroLatinx decolonial feminist perspective, a moment of reflection after an intense conversation with her co-author yielded an email detailing racialized othering that captures the complexity of an identity that borders Blackness and Latinidad:

> After leaving you (Karina) last week my mind was a flutter about all the ways that I've been dissed around my hair, my complexion and how I've been constantly questioned regarding my race politics. I think Ibram's (Kendi) naming me (in his book) as AfroLatina was a real blessing. Some people, like Ibram, see me in my complexity, but

> most do not. Mostly, I have to prove myself time and again, and am suspect even though my connection to Africa and Black liberation comes from important historical connections to African diasporic ways of being in the world.

This moment marked a recognition about Caridad's distinct Afrodescendancy from an African American friend and colleague whose scholarship helped to detail the specific condition of my experiences. Kendi's remarks about me in *How to Be an Antiracist* (2019) encapsulates the peculiar outsider within status[18] that Afrodescendant Latina/o/x people experience within the context of the U.S. where Blackness tends to code predominantly as monoracially African American. Kendi's comments form a bridge of solidarity across multiple diasporas and racializations that softens the pain of rejection AfroLatinas/os/xs often experience in the U.S. The testimonio below details these challenges.

Caridad: Fleshing Differential Ontologies of Among and Betweenness

I embody the convergence of multiple histories that bestow me with a differential ontology with which to understand the racialized-gendered-and-classed colonial renditions of diasporas I encounter and traverse. Typical responses to my multiple heritages/diasporas/migrations and cultures of resistance usually adhere to my phenotypical appearance (in the language of the U.S system of racialization I am light brown or in the lexicon of the casta system, "parda clara") which is "different enough" to cast doubt and acknowledge the "not white" racial category (especially obvious to people of European descent) yet always steeped in deeply colonial racial politics that contradict my Afrodescendant diaspora existence. These contradictions mean I live differentially, among and between racialized cultural worlds that have intensely shaped my AfroLatinx feminist consciousness. Sometimes

these among and between spaces I navigate becomes a chasm that makes it difficult for people to see and to "get" me. For this reason, I understand myself as living in El Mundo Zurdo that Anzaldúa so beautifully wrote about. The effort to render all of me comprehensible to those who are bound to the delusive binaries between white and Black, gay/lesbian and straight, north and south, male and female, poor and rich, Christian, and Non-Christian is a feat so extraordinarily difficult that it threatens to suck out my life force.

This differential among and betweenness may be connected to how I came into being, which preceded my birth by many years because my name was given to my mother in a dream when she was pregnant with my older brother. This story my Mami—who is a prophetic dreamer—tells about my naming signals this differential mode of living. My parents were each other's second marriage, and each had children from their previous relationship. Mami was pregnant with their first child together and my parents were searching for boy names. My dad was already a "junior" and he had a son named after him, so they were seeking other options. Then, Mami dreamt La Virgen Maria came to her and imparted both my impending brother's name, as well as the name of her future daughter. As Mami tells it, the Virgin Mary said to her, "This one will be named Michael Angelo and the next one will be Caridad." Sure enough, Mami delivered a boy that she promptly named Michael Angelo. A year and a half later I arrived, and, naturally, I was named Caridad. For populations within the Lucumí traditions in the Caribbean and Latin America, the name Caridad is synonymous with Ochún. The goddess Ochún is worshiped through the icon of La Virgen de la Caridad. To be named "Caridad" via a dream signaled that this future child was associated with Ochún. Coming into existence this way—through a dream—means I existed, as Gloria Anzaldúa notes, as "the dreamwork in someone else's skull" (1987, 43). My pre-ordained existence maps onto my father's Lucumí

beliefs and makes La Ocha (the Lucumí tradition) my birthright through a foundational association to my AfroLatinidad that very decidedly occurs via Ochún, Yemayá, and Chango. Yet, I have had to keep my spiritual heritage to myself, especially among the Puerto Rican and Latina/o/x community I grew up around as they often expressed fear and hostility about these non-Catholic- or non-Christian-based traditions. The different places and spaces I have traversed all similarly convey mixed responses to my grounding in African diasporic culture, history, and spiritual traditions. When I have shared the spiritual lineages I come from, there is that awkward silence of people who clearly do not want to know about things like dreams and visions, my egun (spirits of my ancestors), and the orishas (spirits)—and do not care to stretch their imaginations beyond the limits of a narrow North American Christian-based Blackness and American Catholic-rooted Latinidad. The reach and dominance of this religious ideology delimits so much of my Afrodescendent experiences and places me in a perpetual state of ni de aquí, ni de allá.

To visualize this ontology of being among and in-between, of a differentially generative dynamic of non-belonging and liminality, I turn to the fluid movement of rivers. Miriam Jiménez Román (2001) once made an excellent point in a conversation with me about mixedness: She questioned whether the in-between space functions as a relevant and viable space for an AfroLatina/o/x politics.[19] Envisioning AfroLatina/o/x resistance and praxis from a singular analytical lens of racialization makes her comments compelling. However, if one applies an intersectional lens that examines racialization via sexuality, class, ethnicity, and other mutually constituted social categories and systems of power, one can begin to see how third space feminism that moves us from either/or thinking, steeped as it is in white supremacist and settler colonial cultural logics, to a both/and perspective that becomes queerly liberatory.[20]

From a differential perspective, I move among and between geographies, intellectual, and spiritual traditions. Born in the South Bronx in New York City in 1964, smack in the middle of the Great Social Movements of the twentieth century, I began life during a decade of change and resistance. We lived in Puerto Rico during the early part of my childhood and before spending the latter half in South Queens. All along this route I have found myself moving among and between races, ethnicities, sexualities, classes, and regions, among and between Yoruba and Caribbean Afrodescendants, African Americans, AfroCaribbean and Latina/o/x folks, generations (Boomers, Xers), boroughs (the South Bronx, South Queens, Manhattan), the U.S. and Puerto Rico, even between zodiac signs (I'm a Sagittarius with a Scorpio cusp), among and between musical genres (hip hop, [classic] salsa, and reggae), among and between mountains, oceans and rivers, among and between English, Spanish, and Spanglish, among and between North America, South America and West Africa. Yet I like to think about this differential geography not so much as a problem, but instead through the refracted lens of Puerto Rican Jewish writer Aurora Levins Morales (1986) who writes:

> I am new. History made me.
> My first language was Spanglish.
> I was born at the crossroads and I am whole (50).

Born at the crossroads means that until you begin to envision that in-between space as valuable, rich, and productive, you will live on the edge of Anzaldúa's barbed wire, to quote Anzaldúa again, which entails the pain and struggle of erasure and invisibility. In spite of the barbed wire, I assert my AfroLatinx presence as unapologetically part of a transnational African diasporic reality. It means I often simultaneously endure the indignities of the binary, whether they be racial, ethnic, class, gender, religion, or sexual identity. In this sense, my ontology has been characterized by a nomadic kind of existence where ni

de aquí, ni de allá blend deliciously entre brisa, mar y arena, that beautifully mobile metaphor Cuban literary critic Eliana Rivero offers in "Fronterisleña" (1994) to depict the coming together of sand and sea in the swaying of ocean waves. It is also reminiscent of Ana Mendieta's[21] iconic and impermanent artwork which has to be viewed in the moment as it eventually disappears, leaving only its spectral imprint behind to hint of its former presence.

This liminal space is buoyed by various sociopolitical legacies: the racial and religious casta system of Latin America, the rules of gendering and racial hypodescent within the U.S., neoliberal color-blindness, the wages of colonial and neocolonial Christianity, and the numbing effects of historical materialism, each offset by the grounding and healing practices of Lucumí. My liminality begins by enduring pronouncements that I am not enough—not "Black" enough, not "white" enough, not "queer" enough—not ever enough. Being grounded in Lucumí traditions allows me to endure the barbed wire with a smile and a deep acknowledgement that my egun—ancestors—and the orishas—guiding spirits—walk with me and so despite all the rejection from various poles, I remain faithfully and proudly Afrodescendant. As a result, my AfroLatinx decolonial feminism is born out of the dialectical moments among and between multiple systems of marginalization that make me and my embodied ambiguity untranslatable.

Being caught among and between multiple regimes of assimilation, accommodation, and absorption, some of us mark our Afrodescendancy through the complicated ways we encounter this persistent being ni de aquí, ni de allá, living within this constant state of diaspora of multiple borderlands (Cantú et al. 2010; Anzaldúa 1987). This way of life compels a "speaking within and against" (Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill 1996, 23) other feminist traditions and practices to render our liminal selves comprehensible.

Translating ourselves requires alchemizing the various routes we traverse, from which we can build a bridge toward our comprehensibility. Using testimonios helps us highlight the particulars of this feminist third space to capture our constant state of diasporas differentially.

AfroLatina/o/x Intellectual Archive/Embodying A Decolonial Feminist World Sense

Wandering through multiple diasporas employs a kind of world sensing (Oyěwùmí 1997, 3), which is conceptualized as a space where feeling is more important than seeing, a space that uses various senses to perceive, captar, what lays outside the limited hegemonic regimes of visibility. To chart differences across Black and Chicana feminisms, world sensing is useful for engaging new ways of being and knowing that are often omitted in articulations of AfroLatina/x feminist discourses. For instance, world sensing allows me to name the spiritual traditions—Lucumí—that sit at the core of our AfroLatinx decolonial feminism that are often absent. Accordingly, world sensing has allowed us to name our discomforts with "empty spaces" (Zamora et al. 2017, 7) so we move towards formulating what an AfroLatinx decolonial feminist perspective contributes to feminist theorizing about coloniality and resistance.

In recent years, there has been increased interest in AfroLatina/o/x populations, and this newfound interest has appeared in the works presented at academic conferences, the publication of books and anthologies on AfroLatina/o/x as an identity category and topic of inquiry. Some imaginings about what constitutes AfroLatina/o/x experience look for interconnections with African American political movements, giving less attention to articulations of the lived cultural and political experiences

of those inhabiting multiple forms of AfroLatinidades. Part of our work, then, involves a critique of the specific regimes of visibility we experience in being ni de aquí, ni de allá by first noting the overreliance on the archive as a measure of presence for AfroLatinidad. Leela Fernandes' (2013) feminist critique about regimes of visibility proposes strategies of representation in regard to transnational knowledge production so that these tactics of representation[22] take "ontology seriously" in order to lay bare the "real material and discursive structures and formations shape the effects of these representations" (118). Thus, we understand that our own mobile crossings through ni de aquí, ni de allá as constituting an "ontology of knowing" that both materially and discursively mark the various worlds we traverse. To some degree, our discomforts emerge from aspects of AfroLatina/o/x studies which have privileged locating AfroLatina/o/x bodies within the archives of colonial institutions (Mirabal 2016), acquiescing the colonizer's burden of proof to provide the representational evidence of our importance. Much of this work focuses on finding s/heroes of AfroLatindad history, as if finding photographic evidence and archival material of lost historical figures in the archive can substantiate our racial legacies, using the past to provide racial legitimacy in the present in order to preserve AfroLatina/o/x futures. A kind of visibility anxiety pervades much of this work. Instead, here we are, existing outside of archives and colonial institutions living and breathing in the present moment. Or, as Zamora (2013) contends, "our bodies are archives" (29) that store memory, "re-create and disseminate knowledge" (31). Our lives provide a history, and via the use of testimonio, we unpack the living archive that brings to the women of color kitchen table an AfroLatinx decolonial feminism that contributes to the ongoing political work of feminist theorizing. The testimonio offered below is a second example of this work.

Karina: Proof Beyond the Archive of Racialized Gendered Politics Through Quince Photos

My (Karina's) testimonio about the racialized gendered politics behind my quinceañera photographs provides a clear example of the ways in which our lives offer a historical record. Quinceañera photos are part of an important Latina/o/x cultural practice and coming-of-age ritual that mark a young woman's formal entrance into womanhood. Historically, celebrating los quince was reserved for elite, white Spanish families and aspiring middle-class families of any color in the Caribbean and Latin America. This ritualized event communicated that a young woman from a respectable and prosperous family was at a marriageable age.

As a girl living in a primarily working-class Cuban enclave in Elizabeth, New Jersey the pressure to, por lo menos (at the very least), have the quince photographs led teenaged me—-Karina—and my mother to walk through the door of Cespedes Photo Studios on Elizabeth Avenue. Mired in the trappings of appropriate white womanhood, colonialism, and heteropatriarchal respectability, I had previously attended a number of elaborately choreographed celebrations organized for white Cuban girls in Elizabeth, New Jersey and witnessed working-class parents spend thousands of dollars on these events. Cespedes Studios, which was owned by a white Cuban, was in itself a local institution in the city of Elizabeth. Cespedes was the photographer of choice for most Cuban/Latino-all-important-life-events, including the quince photos. Living a microcosm of Cuban pueblo life transported to New Jersey, las Cubanitas of Elizabeth proudly and prominently displayed their Cespedes Studio pictures in their living rooms, often right above their plastic covered couches.

For my mother, the photos were the most important aspect of any quince. Unlike an expensive quinceañera party, it helped that the photos were relatively affordable

and payable in installments. The day we walked into the photo studio to capture these images was formative and unforgettable. As I pushed the door open, I tripped the door security, setting off a deep, deafening vibrating bell sound. I had little sense that I would walk out of that studio moving through a rite-of-passage that would usher me into a different kind of racialized womanhood.

At first, the owner of the photo studio and my mother chatted about Cuba, what towns our respective families hailed from, and the usual niceties I have come to call the "Latino hello" (there is also the long and ritualized Latino goodbye). The "Latino hello" takes about ten minutes as everyone announces their origin and pedigree in what is a game of sizing one another up in terms of class, caste, and power. The owner of the studio eagerly let us know that although my mother and I did not know him, he knew my father and uncle really well. The three of them had been childhood neighbors back in the eastern province of Oriente, Cuba long before the revolution of 1959.[23] The owner of Cespedes studios proudly boasted about his direct descendancy from Carlos Manuel de Cespedes and, at fifteen, I just figured this was part of the "Latino hello." I did not know that Carlos Manuel de Cespedes was such an important figure in Cuban history. For me at the age of fifteen, de Cespedes was not as important as my quince pictures. Much later I learned that de Cespedes is considered the father of the Cuban nation. He was a Cuban planter and slave owner from eastern Cuba who during the nineteenth century "liberated" those he held in bondage and, in exchange, the libertos fought in Cespedes' rebel army as free men against Spanish colonial rule.

As the protocol of the "Latino hello" became extended beyond the usual timeframe, I noticed that the owner of Cespedes Studios became increasingly animated as he recounted how upset he was with both my father and my uncle. He was angered by how both brothers shamelessly walked into his store

and yelled "primo!" The more he talked, the more agitated he became about the audacity to publicly call him primo, both when they all lived in Cuba and now again as they were all transplanted in the U.S. The owner's grievance was that the brothers claimed to be descendants of Carlos Manuel de Cespedes among Cubans in Elizabeth. This had embarrassed the Cespedes Studios owner and called into question his racial superiority in front of clients.

He took this opportunity to send my father and uncle a message about their impudence as he promptly pulled out old photos of his family, and in his agitation tapped the pictures with his pointer finger and said authoritatively, "This is who my family is! These are my grandparents!" And, with all the bombastic force of an entitled white Cuban patriarch, yelled at us, "Your family are really the descendants of the slaves who in gratitude for being liberated kept the last name! But your uncle and father have been saying they are part of the family when they are not." It was infuriating to witness how an entire century later this entitled owner of Cespedes Studios adhered to the rules and legacy of the Spanish casta system and put us in our place by reminding us that our relatives were once owned by his family. The owner of Cespedes Studios did not see just another light skinned Cuban girl of color enter his shop. He saw what would have been his former property walk through the door, now "uppity" and "liberated" and daring to contract his services as a social equal. The photos put in front of me were from his all-white former slave owning family taken at the end of the nineteenth century, sitting in upholstered chairs, like a choir, the first row of elite well-dressed men and women strikingly pale for the Caribbean, the last row pompously standing. They looked bitter and cold, but most of all loveless. Over the years as I have thought about these pictures, I wondered what painful experiences members of my family and others held in bondage endured at the hands of this family. The pride and arrogance that the owner of Cespedes Studios

exhibited felt like the tip of the iceberg of their own cruelty. His photos were his archival "proof" of their greatness, and my family certainly did not have any photos like those to show. We did not have a similar archive, photographic "proof" of my father and uncle's claims.

A century after that slave owning family had their photos taken, I sat rigidly in front of this man named Cespedes for my own picture a thousand miles away from Cuba, but somehow I am transported back to the island as this descendant of the former slave owner sharply goads me, in between his tirade, to smile more broadly because my smiles were not expressive and convincing enough. There I sat, taking cheesy pictures for my quince, wearing an orange boa roped around my shoulders.

To make matters worse, when this entitled, white Cuban man yelled about slave-names and the "gratitude" of the newly liberated, my mother who had been silent throughout his tirade finally responded when the photo studio owner disdainfully exclaimed "Ustedes!!!" with, "Bueno, ¡yo no! Yo nada más me case con un Cespedes pero yo no soy descendiente de esclavos—yo y toda mi familia somos blancos (Well not me! I only married a Cespedes but I am not the descendant of slaves—I and my entire family are whites)." My mother's response asserted her whiteness, positioned herself as not being descended from the enslaved, and renounced any connection to her ex-husband (my father) and her ex-brother-in-law. It left me speechless. In that moment, I witnessed my mother forsake me as a way to escape the rage of this white man, align herself with whiteness and distance herself from my Blackness.

I found myself, as many AfroLatina/x girls might, stunned, caught in the middle as I sat there roped by the ugly orange boa around my shoulders while my mother blanketed herself with her Cuban whiteness, refusing to attest my

father's family history—my history. Instead of standing up for me, she appeased this angry bitter ex-fulano de tal privileged white Cuban man who had lost racial and social status he clearly enjoyed in Cuba now within the confines of the U.S. Within the U.S working class Cuban enclave of Elizabeth, New Jersey, the owner of Cespedes Studios was not seen by non-Latinos as white, nor the respected descendant of a prominent family of anti-colonial heroes. He was just another working-class Hispanic man machucando el inglés (unable to speak proper English), no longer heir to the social hierarchy established through social pedigrees of caste, class, and color within Caribbean and Latin America context. The clash of our identities, like a slap in the face, must have felt crippling as he contended with being reduced to serving the daughter of a childhood nemesis who walked through the door of his shop expecting the same dutiful customer service he bestowed on white Cuban families in the area.

We left Cespedes Studios that day exhausted and with only the proofs for those ugly orange boa quince pictures in hand. To this day I only have the proofs of these images as evidence of this encounter because we never bought the actual photos. The next time I saw my uncle, I told him about my terrible experience with my quince pictures at Cespedes Studios. Knowing how important the pictures were to my family, my uncle offered to pay for them. But I let him know that I could not stand the thought of them hanging on the wall, saying with disgust, "No Tío! Yo no quiero esas estúpidas fotos." My uncle just smiled—knowingly and proudly.

Upon hearing what had happened with my quince pictures, my paternal grandmother Emma shared stories about how the dispute over legitimacy was connected to a niece of Carlos Manuel de Cespedes. This woman had a child with a Black lover. To hide that she had an out-of- wedlock child with a Black man, the child was given the mother's last name of Cespedes and

raised among the servants within the Cespedes households of Veguita and Manzanillo—both geographical sites of Black resistance to both enslavement and Spanish colonialism. That child, according to my grandmother, was my paternal great grandfather. When my father and uncle yelled "primo!" at the owner of Cespedes Studios, this was the lineage they invoked and the one the bitter owner of Cespedes Studios repudiated. His anger masked the shame he may have felt over a white woman in his family having a sexual relationship with a man of color. His fury was fueled by his need to assert his whiteness and the clout he held once upon a time in Cuba.

All of this has left me pensive about Afrodescendancy, race, family, names, and a host of other questions. Many times I have wondered what my great-grandfather's relationship was to his white elite mother, a woman born into that stiff and cold family sitting in the pictures placed in front of me that day as I sat to be photographed. I have wondered if their relationship was as fraught with tensions and abandonment, spurred by retrenchments into whiteness my own proudly white Cuban mother had exhibited.

Years later, as an adult, I came across Black feminist writings and from these works gathered greater understanding and clarity about white women's inability to stand up against white supremacy and support Black women. These texts helped me understand why my mother had not stepped in to protect me when faced with the rage of a white Cuban man. I often think of Hortense Spillers's (1987) brilliant article "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" where she articulates the language and symbolic system of oppression that impedes our ability to communicate complex stories about the lives we actually live. Her attention to the ways in which systemic racism imposes tropes such as the "black matriarchs" and "absent black fathers" also excellently expressed the deep connections between

Afrodescendant daughters and fathers who endure white supremacy and the afterlife of slavery. Spillers's work deeply resonated with me because of her ability to name what I felt at the age of fifteen, and the connection between myself and the lives led by men like my father, uncle, and great grandfather. Spillers's work helps craft different stories about the complex dynamics AfroLatinx populations live within the matrix of domination within the U.S., Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Latin America, and also requires translation across multiple contexts, between worlds, and different audiences.

Also important was the work of Ida B. Wells (2014) and her brave anti-lynching efforts. Her powerful acts of calling white women out, particularly those who had sexual relationships with men of color but remained silent when their Black lovers were lynched, ducking and running for the protection of white patriarchy to avoid the anger of white men. Legal scholar Patricia Williams's book *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* (1991) and her narrative about her own ancestry as a descendant of a slave owning judge and the young teenage girl he held in bondage were pivotal for me to understand the conflict, both legal and emotional, of having the master as one's kin. The work of sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (2008, 1990) on the matrix of domination and intersectionality provided a blueprint for understanding and mapping the distinctions between U.S. racism and helped me distinguish between U.S. racialization and the afterlife of the casta system at work within the Caribbean, as well as within the many Latinx enclaves in the U.S. Additionally, the touchstone work of M. Jacqui Alexander (2006) reminds us that we are not born women of color but become women of color. Furthermore, the work of Saidiya Hartman (2008) on the afterlife of slavery resonated so deeply with me because in her scholarship, I found articulations of an undying system, akin to what Fanon (1963) called an undying colonialism. This Black feminist literature maps out how the legacy and

afterlife of slavery shapes the most mundane of events, where family rituals, daily interactions, or how a seemingly commonplace act of purchasing photos for a quince revealed the legacy of enslavement and double-colonization Afro Latina/o/x populations endure. Healing from this painful formative experience necessitates that I name the matrices of domination that subjugate AfroLatina/o/x populations.

Black Feminist Intellectual Traditions

Finding the works of Black feminists clearly provided important insight about what Karina witnessed as a Cuban girl raised in New Jersey. As AfroLatinx feminists with queer and decolonial leanings, we are deeply indebted to African American feminists and especially note how their influential writings have helped us both understand something important about U.S. Blackness, womanhood, racialization, and difference.[24] The beauty and love these scholars and writers inspire about Black women's experiences have left indelible marks on our consciousness. Their articulations of frameworks and practices familiar to our own, like other mothering, multiple oppressions, the matrix of domination, the dialectics of Black womanhood, and outsider within status, have helped us make epistemic and ontological sense of our lives as we walk the lands of el norte. We have both run towards Black feminisms with open arms, yet many times our open arms have been met with quizzical looks. The complexities of being Afrodescendant from the Spanish speaking Caribbean means that we have experienced being overlooked because we do not somatically code as Black but rather as mixed-race, i.e., white proximate, meaning that we are inadvertently held accountable for systems of colonization, enslavement, and racialization that do not resonate with our specific experiences. With our amalgamated genealogic ties to African heritage, our distinctive ways of being Afrodescendientes do not easily resonate in the North American hemispheric

context. The colorism invoked by our mixed-race status often means we are instead held to account for systems of enslavement, colonization, and racialization that are not resonant with our specific experiences. Sometimes the work of mixed-race Black women resonates with us as we wrestle with this particular struggle. Yet, the essentialist thinking about race (Zamora et al. 2017) foregrounds Anglo American whiteness, meaning we have to somersault through understandings of racialization that are not salient for the blended way we experience our Afro and Latino admixture.

Whereas Black feminist literature provided clarity about the legacies of enslavement, the Chicana feminist literature spoke to the particularities of the afterlife of Spanish colonization and the trauma of U.S. imperialism. Chela Sandoval's (2000) attention to differential consciousness named important mechanisms through which alternate ontologies were possible through queer decolonial efforts within Latina/x and Latin American feminist thought. AfroLatinx decolonial feminism is similarly indebted to the inroads made by Chicana/x feminists and the incredible scholarly literature they have produced. As such, both of us often draw on the intellectual frameworks from the works of Anzaldúa (1987), Moraga and Anzaldúa (1981), Alarcón (1991), Sandoval (2000), Zavella (2011, 1991), and Pérez (1999). Moreover, Anzaldúa's powerful articulation of our Lucumí orishas Yemayá and Elegua within borderlands theorizing validated the presence of our people and our traditions in ways that demonstrated her commitment to coalitional politics, cross-cultural dialogue, and decolonial liberation. Anzaldúa acknowledged the hidden story of those omitted voices through imagining a mestiza consciousness that included Yemayá, Ochún and Elegua. Both Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga engage the reader in the all too familiar language of casta power as they theorized from within the U.S and the experience of internal colonization through a decolonial lens. Concepts such

as mestiza consciousness, el mundo zurdo, y la facultad signal the significance of accessing consciousness via a complex system that requires translating across various languages and world views. Like Anzaldúa, we find ourselves "speaking in tongues" to communicate beyond the colonizer's language yet "within and against" the languages imposed by systems of domination (1981, 163). The powerful work of queer Chicana feminists gives language to the afterlife of Latin American enslavement and imperialism, alongside the multiple ways that Caribbean and Latin American and North American anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism plays itself out among and between U.S. Latina/o/x enclaves and people.

This alchemy of feminist scholarly literatures also provides insights into the subtle and overt forms of power that magnify the anti-Indigeneity and anti-Blackness among U.S. Latina/o/x populations. For Karina, it is quite clear that had she remained in Cuba, her assessment of multiple systems of racial formation would have been thwarted. The legacy and afterlife of the casta system at play in the Caribbean and Latin America would have been her primary and only system of racialization. Instead, what has emerged for each of us is the understanding that for AfroLatina/o/x descendant populations within the U.S., an overpowering bipolar system of racialization is merged with the Spanish colonial legacy of the casta system in Latin America, requiring that AfroLatina/o/x-identified individuals walk cautiously through multiple worlds, compelled to fuse different bodies of scholarly literature, epistemologies, and ontologies together to make sense of this intersectional position. In fact, when we think of the history of women of color feminism in the U.S., we are reminded that Barbara Smith, Gloria Anzaldúa, Aurora Levins Morales, Audre Lorde, Cherríe Moraga, and many of the contributors to *This Bridge Called My Back (1981)* walked together in parallel formation. Their collaboration set the path for the many yet to be named and still

unintelligible stories that would be told in the future. Hence, the demarcation of Black feminist thought from Chicana feminist thought as separate and distinct silos is a convenient myth of white supremacy since they were each built in conversation with each other. That "potent meshing" (Bambara 1981, xli) is an alchemical fusion that happens through collaboration and collective scholarly and activist praxis.

Our political genealogy as U.S. women of color feminists committed to the decoloniality outlined by the collaborative project embodied in *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981) upholds a relational politics of coalition building, collaboration, and dialogue resulting from our engagement with mestiza consciousness. We understand Anzaldúa's use of the casta system's category of 'mestiza' as an oppositional and decolonial articulation of the ways in which survivors of both colonization and enslavement, can, in Anzaldúa words, see through the eyes of the serpent and eagle (simultaneously from above and below), and walk in multiple worlds engaging them all differentially. As Lao-Montes stated, "the multiple streams of Afro-Latina feminism … boom and bloom in the belly of the beast … explicitly seeking to decolonize the empire from within … Afro-Latina feminisms cross borders of multiple kinds (north/south, national, gender, sexual, linguistic) thus setting the stage for translocal feminist solidarity and decolonial coalition-building for intersectional politics of liberation" (2016, 14). He further notes that "this requires building complex unity, to use Maria Lugones' concept which entails a complex … process involving multiple translations and negotiations (ibid)." Our testimonios make possible a new path towards an AfroLatinx decolonial feminism that highlights differential moments of multiple translation and negotiation, establishing connections and collaboration among and between women of color feminists beyond rhetorical renderings.

AfroLatinx Decolonial Feminism, Differentially: Testimonio as Ritual

Coming back to the river through the ritual of testimonio gives us much to unpack regarding the multiple intellectual traditions that inform our efforts to make intelligible the complexity of AfroLatina/x feminist consciousness and praxis that is neglected through U.S. identity politics that does not fully consider questions of interlocking color, class, and caste. Only a small number of AfroLatina/o/x scholars such as Coco Fusco (2001), Angela Jorge (2010), and Miriam Jiménez Román (2007) have written about AfroLatina/o/x identity through a decolonial lens regarding racialization among Spanish Caribbean Afrodescendant women. Born in Cuba, raised in Jamaica and living in the U.S within the borderlands of Black feminism and AfroLatina/Antillean feminism, Sylvia Wynter's work is another example of an Antillean scholar from the Spanish and Anglophone Caribbean whose feminist decolonial lens emerged out of a lived philosophy and politics of liberation that bridges Africa, the Caribbean, and Americas.[25]

While much of AfroLatina/x feminist scholarship recognizes the constant state of diaspora, Chicana/x feminists have historically and geographically been "at home" in the Southwestern territories, despite the displacement from the very ground walked by their ancestors that was a consequence of colonization and U.S. occupation that renders them de-territorialized Indigenous peoples. As diasporic AfroLatinx feminists from Spanish Caribbean heritage, we have endured multiple displacements and migrations across American continents and do not have a historical, spiritual, or social connection to land in these northern territories. In short, as diasporic feminists we fully understand that we walk through the territories belonging to other peoples. We cannot claim "home" here for to do so would be to displace and dishonor those that have provided safe passage through their lands.

Claiming "home" in our countries of origin is equally complicated since those nation-states are not often places of succor or support for those of us marginalized within it and often disavowed as diasporic feminists living up north. Both are clear reminders of not being de aquí. El granito de arena that we bring to the women of color kitchen table is by distinctively embodying a decoloniality that does not claim land or "citizenship" rights within the imperial boundaries of the U.S., yet is steadfastly committed to a differential AfroLatinx decolonial feminism built on world traveling.[26]

These dispatches articulate fluid movements through sweet waters that enacts our particular differential and relational ways of being AfroLatinx decolonial feminists. Produced out of conditions of living a cosmology we have been born in helps us evoke our world sense regarding our feminist politics, consciousness, and practices where we see differentially, move relationally, and act multiply. Colonization has produced a warfare among us where we must choose between either adhering to crude identity politics that exclude and erase or blatant essentialisms that assume somatic similarity equates to a self-conscious politics of what it means to be Afrodescendant. We do not all similarly arrive at a self-reflexive, politically informed consciousness and politics about our Afrodecendancy, because the colorism and pigmentocracy of old castas and new regimes of racialization (still) equate somatic conformity with belonging. Coloniality makes our dispatches sometimes feel more like communiques from soldiers in the trenches of conflict zones. Engaging as guerreras through our respective orisha, we prefer the pathway provided to Afrodescendant feminists by Black and Chicana feminisms of a differential lens that brings back the missing bodies and a relational practice of world sensing that promotes love, reproduction, and sensuality towards more potent coalitions.

At the very heart and soul of our testimonios lay epistemic moments of solidarity that have encouraged some AfroLatina/x feminists to walk with great enthusiasm alongside our Chicana/x feminist counterparts, creating their own ontologies of knowing. For both authors, Lucumí binds us to our ancestors and to our historical, cultural, and spiritual lineages. We engage in testimonio as ritual to merge the multiple feminist pathways we traverse towards the creation of our own decolonial perspectives. We ask La Virgen de Guadalupe/Tonantzin/Coatlicue for her blessings because as we walk through the intellectual and geographic spaces our Chicana comadres call Aztlán, we understand that we have been gracefully granted passage. We also recognize the peoples and lands that historically belong to the Indigenous nations and territories today occupied by innumerable settlers, migrants, and formerly enslaved subordinated settlers, and ask permission and safe passage. With this understanding we return to the river, lay down our bundles, touch the ground and make peace with belonging, finding home in the movement among and between the spaces where we find affinity. And as we celebrate our comadres— Audre Lorde, Toni Cade Bambara, Ntozake Shange, Hortense Spillers, Gloria Anzaldúa, Maria Lugones, and Jacqui Alexander— we remember Cherríe Moraga's dream about being met at the river (1981, xlv). We tread towards the water's edge, throw in our white flowers for Yemayá and Ochún, set our bundles down, and extend to our comadres the invitation to meet us here, at the river.

Notes

[1] Morejón, (1967).

[2] Rivera Lassén, (2016), 68.

[3] Lucumí refers to the cultural, linguistic and religious traditions of the enslaved descendants of the Yoruba people of Southwestern Nigeria and parts of Benin and Togo brought to the Americas during the era of Spanish and Portuguese colonization. Many of them were taken to Cuba,

Puerto Rico, most islands in the Caribbean and to Mexico, Brazil and other countries in South America. As a Yoruba-based form of African traditional religion, Lucumí is a cosmology that provides spiritual and social practices of resistance and renewal. For more on Lucumí, see Amanda Villepastour (2020).

[4] This phrase translates as being from neither here nor there, conceptualized as the in-between liminal space of diasporic life by Latina/o/x scholars, such as Jiménez Román (2001) and Lopez Oro (2016). As a theoretical formulation, it gestures towards a third space. However, we find that the gesture has to be intersectional and decolonial for it to be liberatory. Several Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x scholars have also conceptualized this as an important sociopolitical space. See Ramos (2022), Falero (2021), Almanzar (2017), Zavella (2011), and Delgadillo (2011).

[5] Orishas are deities within the Yoruba Lucumí tradition of West Africa.

[6] Colonialism is the systemic practice of asserting political and economic control over a country or people other than your own. Coloniality refers to the inseparability of coloniality from modernity and connected to longstanding patterns of power, control and hegemony of the European colonial project that continue as racial, social and political legacies that reach into the present.

[7] For thoughtful mediations on spiritualizing intersectionality, see Méndez (2018) and Facio and Lara (2014).

[8] We agree with Figueroa (2020a, 4) that notions of belonging are tied up with settler colonial imaginings that for the dispossessed and exiled, we/they are tethered to the master's tools.

[9] About the concept of "otros saberes," Figueroa (2020a, 2) writes that it is: The practice of "introducing, engaging, and circulating" peripheralized knowledge or otros saberes is contingent on intellectual and praxical generosity. In using the term otros saberes, we follow Figueroa's understanding that it refers to the epistemological break that occurs when devalued or othered knowledge is understood and valued as other ways of knowing.

[10] Lucumí religious practices, like many other religious/spiritual traditions, has been appropriated by Caribbean populations that identify as white. Such sects/"houses" of Lucumí tend to erase blackness from the spiritual practice, and engage with aspects of the religion and the deities as archetypal universal representations that are oddly separated from the living peoples from which such traditions emerged.

[11] Ochún is a goddess of sweet waters in the tradition of Santería that represents love, sensuality, community and reproduction and rules over rivers.

[12] Yemayá is the Mother goddess of the Lucumí pantheon, thus mother to all the other deities, and represents motherhood, children and healing. She also rules over the sea.

[13] Here, we find Fernandes's (2013, 104) notion of regimes of visibility in U.S. transnational feminism that results in "seeing like the state" helpful for working out how the proverbial ni de aquí, ni de allá exists for us as an "ontological area" (See her chapter on "Regimes of Visibility, Transnational Feminist Knowledge" (pgs. 104-135) for a robust discussion about the limits of representation).

[14] See Hartman (1997).

[15] This system of racial classification operates through degrees of individual ancestry in order to legally and socially distinguish between the parents and the offspring through elaborate categories of racial mixture such as Indian, Black, mulatto, pardo, moreno, mestizo, prieto, morisco, sambo, lobo, etc. Evolving from the medieval Spanish idea of "limpieza de sangre," the Spanish casta system in the Americas predestined legal states of bondage and organized access to rights and privileges. The system evolved out of the violence and ideology developed during the Spanish Reconquista's systemic annihilation of purported religious impurity, which ejected Jewish and Muslim populations from Spain (Cespedes 2019).

[16] An older Latin American pigmentocracy that played out within the Spanish casta system gets transposed to the northern hemisphere and easily grafts on to hegemonic racial identity politics of colorism. We are reminded of the question of color and authenticity within the now classic pieces "La Guera" by Cherríe Moraga (1981) and "La Prieta" by Gloria Anzaldúa (1981). See also Angela Jorge's (2010) and Miriam Jiménez-Román (2007) regarding how color and anti-Blackness play out among Nuyoricans.

[17] See Turner (2014) for a critique of new mestizajes and how these intersect with new mixed-race studies in a U.S. context. See Martínez-Echazábal (1998) and Miller (2004) for critiques of mestizaje specific to Latin America.

[18] We use Patricia Hill Collin's (1986) formulation of the "outsider within" purposefully to point out that, as intersectional thinking suggests, oppression and marginalization are experienced simultaneously and multiply. While she applied this to the relationship between Black women and white academic spaces, we extend it to look at how this concept works among Afrodescendent peoples. See "Learning From the Outsider Within: the Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought," *Social Problems*, 33(6): 14–32.

[19] Personal communication, November, 2000. Miriam and Caridad overlapped for three years while they both worked at El Centro de Estudio Puertorriqueños from 1999-2002 where they had intense conversations about AfroLatinx issues.

[20] Here we are indebted to Patricia Hill Collins's book *Black Feminist Thought* (2008, 1990) for the analytical formulation of the both/and.

[21] Mendieta (1948-1985) was a Cuban-American performance artist best known for her ephemeral "earth-body" artwork which often involved using or tracing her own body in combination with natural elements like sand, mud, and blood.

[22] The invisibility of AfroLatinx feminist voices, in spite of the many interconnections possible between Black and Chicana feminisms has an important history of representation to address. A new generation of AfroLatinx feminists have increasingly appeared in print over the last two decades, and prior to this the presence of AfroLatinx feminist bodies may have physically appeared within Latina/o/x studies and women of color feminist spaces. Yet a distinct AfroLatinx feminist perspective has remained obscured by more hegenomic understandings of Latinidad. The rise of an AfroLatinx feminists academic literature has required arduous training across three generations,

and critical conversations between and among women of color about the ways in which an AfroLatinx feminist perspective exists outside the regimes of intelligibility available within women of color feminist spaces. Women of color feminist scholarly work had yet to address this absence, and our respective training within Chicana and Black feminism enabled a path towards marking the specificity of an AfroLatinx perspective. Yet, AfroLatinx feminists found themselves speaking in tongues across the existing differences in order to navigate the symbolic and discursive systems of our Chicana and Afroamericana comadres. It should be noted that we are indebted to earlier Black and Latina feminists who made inroads into publishing, and publishing houses such as Kitchen Table Press (co-founded by Barbara Smith and Cherríe Moraga), Aunt Lute Press (publisher of Anzaldúa's *Borderlands*), and Third Woman Press founded by Norma Alarcón. These important feminist presses became spaces where Chicana/o/x and African American feminists held decision making power regarding influential feminist writing. We recognize the lack of similar visibility and institutional access to the production of knowledge available to AfroLatinas/xs, particularly how this creates an important distinction in the intellectual presence of AfroLatinas/xs within academia. The lack of access to representation for AfroLatina/x feminists bolstered an invisibility and potentially pushed AfroLatina/x feminists to assimilate into either anti-black Latinidad, or to seek available shelter within Black studies. Critical publishing by, for and about women of color has always been an important feminist method of disrupting knowledge production. In short, it is a pillar of the larger liberatory project of disassembling the matrix of domination (Hill Collins, 2008) that bravely situate an alternative canon against the grain of powerful, established publishing communities that prioritized the writings of white men, white women, and men of color. Yet, within the heroic undertakings of women of color feminist publishing in general, and Chicana/x/Latina/x publishing in particular, the voices of AfroLatina/x feminists only begun to emerge more recently. Zamora et al. (2017, 7) analyzes the "empty space" that exist for AfroLatina/x feminist perspectives between Black feminists and Chicana feminisms that grafts easily on to their lack of control over publishing that has limited their scholarly output and intellectual input.

[23] The 1959 Cuban revolution was a nationalist movement. Within this nationalist movement Fidel Castro emerged gradually as a leading figure, the historiography on his rise to power eclipses the collaboration required to ensure a people's revolution in which many Cubans, many of them black, made the revolution possible.

[24] We are especially indebted to bell hooks (2019, 1989), June Jordan (1995), Ntozake Shange (2010), Patricia Hill Collins (1990), Angela Davis (1983), Bonnie Thornton Dill (1988), and Audre Lorde (2012) for their excellence and brilliance in guiding us to broader and more critical understandings of Blackness, gender, and racialized gender and racialized sexuality.

[25] The recent growth of AfroLatina/o/x studies within the U.S. has moved Sylvia Wynter's work from out of the interstices of the matrix of domination so that it is more fully appreciated for its hemispheric perspective.

[26] Yomaira Figueroa's uses "world traveling" (2020b, 3) within an AfroLatina feminist context. See Lugones (1987) for the originating conceptualization.

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