

Celebrating Black European Women

By Cassandra Ellerbe-Dueck

The existing wealth of documentation regarding the presence of African derived peoples in Europe points to the fact that Blacks have been and still constitute a growing segment of the European population. However, despite such documentation, the existence of these groups has been mainly ignored in the recording of European history (Earle and Lowe: 2005). Black women in particular have either been “invisible” or their bodies and persona pathologized within European historiography.

Organised within the framework of the “European Year for Equal Opportunities” and initiated by Beatrice Achaleke, AFRA (International Centre for Black Women’s Perspectives in Vienna, Austria, and co-organised by Helen Felter, representative of Tiye International (The Netherlands); the Black European Women’s Congress (26-29 September 2007) made history by challenging what Paul Gilroy (2004: 141) has called “ the peculiar synonymy of the terms European and white”, and also offering a gendered perspective on what it means to be a Black European¹. One hundred and twenty Black European women delegates from sixteen European countries and the United States arrived in Vienna, Austria, for the three-day conference. This milestone event culminated in the formation of the Black European Women’s Network. The conference provided a space and platform for the strategic discussion of various issues such as migration, political participation, qualification and access to the labour market, identity and self- empowerment, gendered racism, mechanisms of social exclusion, psychosocial conflicts (particularly women and children), and the role of Black European women within European societies.

The drafting of the Vienna Declaration (see: www.bewnet.eu), recommendations and strategic networking practices resulting from the conference

¹ The term Black European refers to individuals with ties to the African Diaspora, who were born and socialized within a European context.

will be used for lobbying on behalf of the needs and demands of Black European women on a national as well as European level.

An international symposium titled “The Future of Diversity Management in Europe” is scheduled for 12 March 2008 on the premises of the Austrian representative of the EU Parliament and Commission. The symposium will precede the follow-up strategic meeting scheduled 13-14 March 2008 in Vienna, Austria. For more detailed information regarding AFRA and the Black European Women’s Network, please see both English language websites: www.blackwomencenter.org and www.bewnet.eu .