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# The Cuban Ripple Effect: Writing Cubanidad in the Diaspora

## **Abstract**

The article, inspired by Antonio Benítez-Rojo's postmodern work on Caribbean identity, *The Repeating Island*, applies the metaphor of a ripple effect to the writers of the Cuban Diaspora. These are writers who have left Cuba after the Cuban Revolution, but who belong to different generations, have left at different times, have established themselves in different countries, and write in different languages on themes unique to their particular experiences and interests. Yet, they share a Cuban identity based on the experience of displacement from their place of origin. Their collective trajectory resembles the ripple effect in water, which expands and changes while maintaining the form of its original source.

## **Keywords**

Caribbean, identity, ripple effect, Cuba, diaspora, cubanidad, literature

## **Disciplines**

Latin American Languages and Societies | Latin American Studies | Spanish and Portuguese Language and Literature



## The Cuban Ripple Effect: Writing *Cubanidad* in the Diaspora

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"... siempre estoy preparando un buen cafecito"

Leandro Soto

The image of a ripple effect can be an effective tool to convey the Cuban diaspora experience and state of mind in terms of spatial-temporal dimensionalities. A ripple in water is a movement outward that is, at the same time, directed by the internal dynamics caused by the initial impulse of that movement. The multi-layered and multidirectional Cuban diaspora, seen through the metaphoric use of this physical phenomenon, is thus framed in terms of dynamic relations in motion. Antonio Benítez-Rojo's concept of Caribbean identity, as explained in his superb postmodern work *The Repeating Island*, is the inspiration for this approach to an understanding of the nature of the Cuban diaspora, which can be understood as one of many "repeating islands." Benítez-Rojo sees a multilayered fluidity as a common trait within the Caribbean world, an archipelago of islands with different histories, cultures and ethnicities, yet unified by the way in which common elements are shared. The image of the ripple effect emphasizes the paradox of exploring something often regarded as essential, such as a regional or national identity, within a constantly changing spatial and temporal frame. Such is the way that cultures evolve as human populations migrate to unfamiliar terrains and identity becomes a point of personal and collective, internal and external negotiations.

This study focuses on representative writers of the contemporary Cuban diaspora and the way in which their literature expresses their positionality, which is forged in the roots of the wide Caribbean culture,

but is also influenced by the globalized world in which these writers currently live. Contemporary Cuban diaspora literature is one of those many cultural expressions that reverberate, as a ripple effect, from this history of displaced peoples who came together in the Caribbean. The complexity of contemporary Cuban diasporic writers stems from the fact that they are labeled as an identifiable group, and yet are living and doing literature within a widening arch of geographic dispersal. This phenomenon is not unique in the history of Cuban letters, since so many famous Cuban writers wrote from abroad: José María Heredia, José Martí, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, and Alejo Carpentier are among many that come to mind. But the contemporary scene has its own characteristics, and those characteristics influence how this new generation perceives the world in which its members live and write at the outer edges of the metaphoric Caribbean waters.

The case of Cuban immigration to the United States is a good example of the way in which multiple factors contribute a particular stamp on a people who arrive in a new land. Each wave of Cuban immigrants is a variation on the same theme of displacement, as well as something new and unique to that particular group. Those who arrived on the Mariel boatlift in 1980 had very different circumstances and backgrounds from the first wave of the early 60s, as well as from those of the *balseros* of the 90s. Many more keep coming, each with a different set of experiences and perspectives, thus challenging essentialist notions of *cubanidad*, the term that communicates Cuba's strong sense of national and cultural identity.<sup>1</sup> But these variations stemming from the many waves of immigration from Cuba, the politics of U.S.-Cuba relations of each period, and the gradual integration into the United States mainstream through the passage of generations, do not erase the existence of a diverse, yet common link to Cuba. Eliana Rivero, in her bilingually written essay "Cuba (tras)pasada: Los imaginarios diaspóricos de una generación," describes the contested concept of *cubanidad* in a broadly inclusive manner, taking into account the multidirectional spatial trajectory of the Cuban diaspora:

Cubanness would be best described as a continuing process of transnational identity construction, in which the transnation—deterritorialized in several regions of its real and imagined geography, but also localized in an island where its cultural

citizens feel (and act) Cuban—would be the focus of citizenship for the descendants of Cuban immigrants (dis)located in several points of the globe. In other words, Cuban diasporic communities play a crucial role in the formulation, observation, definition, and preservation of the transnation, as well of that elusive "cultural citizenship" that we have so far have denominated *cubanidad*. (*Discursos* 41)

The positionality of Cuban diaspora writers can thus be understood as the way they express, through their writing, their particular relationship to this corpus of influences and contingencies in space and time that takes place in the Cuban transnation.

### The Polyrhythmic Roots of *Cubanidad*

Benítez-Rojo reminds us that one of the challenges of encompassing the Caribbean world into an identifiable cultural entity is its long history of diversity, its multiple peoples who came or were brought to the islands of the Caribbean Sea. He identifies the plantation system as the one socioeconomic factor that shaped the destinies of Caribbean peoples in all the aspects of their lives, giving us a glimpse of the ramifications implicit in this system:

The complexity that the multiplication of the Plantation—each case a different one—brought to the Caribbean was such that the Caribbean peoples themselves, in referring to the ethnological processes that derived from the extraordinary collision of races and cultures thus produced, speak of syncretism, acculturation, transculturation, assimilation, deculturation, indigenization, creolization, cultural *mestizaje* cultural *cimarronaje*, cultural miscegenation, cultural resistance, etc. Which illustrates not just that these processes occurred again and again, but also, and above all, that there are different positions or readings from which they may be examined. (37)

We cannot overlook the fact that the collision of races and cultures described in this passage was also an integral part of a ruthless system of exploitation of slaves. This system was to be the root of social,

economic, and racial inequality which persisted, well after slavery was abolished, in the form of social and political strife. Yet in the midst of this brutal exploitation and all its negative consequences, a set of social and cultural phenomena emerged from the daily coexistence of all the players in this system, forming the core of a Caribbean identity, with variations specific to each island's history. These origins and variations are the original identity markers of Caribbean positionality.

Benítez-Rojo applies the concept of polyrhythms to the particular way that Caribbean cultural elements come together:

This polyrhythm of planes and meters can be seen not just in music, dance, song, and the plastic arts, but also in the cuisine—the *ajiaco*—, in architecture, in poetry, in the novel, in the theater, in bodily expression, in religious beliefs, in idiosyncrasies, that is, in all the texts that circulate high and low throughout the Caribbean region. (80)

Alluding to a description of a marketplace in Santiago de Cuba by E. Duvergier de Hauranne, Benítez-Rojo continues:

The marketplace ... is a coming together of rhythms in which there is much of the African, but also the European; it is not a "mulatto" mixture, if that term is meant to convey a kind of "unity"; it is a polyrhythmic space that is Cuban, Caribbean, African, and European at once, and even Asian and Indoamerican, where there has been a contrapuntal and an intermingled meeting of the biblical Creator's *logos*, of tobacco smoke, the dance of the *orishas* and *loas*, the Chinese bugle, Lezama Lima's *Paradiso*, and the *Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre*, and the boat of the Three Juans. (81)

This quote's most important concept is the notion of a polyrhythmic space, which is key to Benítez-Rojo's understanding of the Caribbean world. He focuses his analysis on dynamic interstices, on the way in which the elements come together, but not necessarily blend together. These interstices are just as important, if not more so, than the elements themselves. Following this line of thought, we can understand a work of art or craft as a result of the aesthetic experience taking place in these

interstices where polyrhythms occur. Andrea O'Reilly Herrera comments on the same text in her essay "The Politics of Mis-ReMembering: History, Imagination, and the Recovery of the Lost Generation," also stressing a non-static approach to Cuban culture and its continuity in the diaspora:

Approaching Cuban identity from the position of diaspora and privileging instability over fixity not only speaks to rupture and displacement but also allows for a more complex and nuanced continuation of Cuban culture. This open-ended spatiality and postponement of a fixed meaning acknowledges the shifting nature of Cuban identity—with its long history of relocation and intermingling, its *seam of continuity*, and its recognition that *difference resides alongside continuity*. (187)

In other words, we cannot limit ourselves to the discussion of *cubanidad* in terms of geographical location or longevity within Cuban national borders. What is authentically Cuban does not reside within any single line of continuity, but rather within the interplay of differences and continuity. To speak of culture in terms of movement and dynamics allows for a constant rebirth of new cultural expressions. Polyrhythms, instability, open-ended spatiality, differences that reside simultaneously alongside continuity—all contribute to the understanding of Caribbean, and by extension, Cuban positionality.

In her article "Defying Liminality: The Journeys of Cuban Artists in the Diaspora," O'Reilly Herrera details how Cuban diasporic artists maintain certain key elements of *cubanidad* through an ongoing traveling exhibit directed by performance and installation artist Leandro Soto. "Café: The Journeys of Cuban Artists," in honor of the symbolic nature of Cuban coffee as a cultural element, is an example of the ever-changing, yet persistent, ways in which cultural identity survives and is reproduced through the arts, regardless of location. According to Soto,

"Café" is a transnational "allegory for a social ritual that sustains itself even in exile." It bespeaks the "intensity of the Cuban social character"; yet, at the same time, the act of preparing *café* represents a cultural practice that enables

Cubans—across generations—to preserve and perpetuate their cultural identities. (Soto qtd. in “Defying Liminality” 303)

This exhibit changes location, artists, artistic mediums, themes, with each installation, exhibiting a very fluid and renewable character. In it, we see how the transformational nature of culture becomes the key element of its survival, contrary to the idea that change and distance are the forces of its dissolution.

### **The Ripple: Differences, Repetitions, and Positionality of Diaspora Writers**

The ripple can be seen as a dynamic, changeable phenomenon where differences and commonalities move together, giving each wave its unique form. For the purpose of distinguishing elements of difference, we can explore a limited number of factors that distinguish Cuban diaspora writers from each other: year of departure from Cuba, age at departure, generation of immigration (first, one-and-a-half, second), destination and spatial and temporal trajectory, gender, sexual orientation, class, race, particularities of family and individual life, choice of language used in writing, political leanings, and many other factors that contribute to a writer's individuality. They form a positionality and help construct a subjectivity which also changes with the passage of time. A writer's early works and later works often are quite different in terms of content, style, language, and level of experiential and intellectual maturity; a particular combination of factors such as these distinguishes one writer from others. Moreover, each writer's positionality can also be part of a set of “ripples,” revealing a small wave of repeated elements. This is where certain authors can be grouped on the basis of common themes, shared experiences, writing style, or any other common elements.

Beyond the act of categorizing authors, however, we must be aware of an important consciousness shared by all diaspora writers who have learned to swim in a constantly shifting world of change and adaptation, where change of place is also change of perception. Implicit in this experience is a difficult adjustment within the internal mechanisms of memory and identity. Positionality is a conscious stance, but also a recognition of the forces that work at the unconscious level,

influencing each writer's personal demons. Eliana Rivero is a prime example of this acute consciousness shared by diaspora writers, as seen in her essay "In Two or More (Dis)Places: Articulating a Marginal Experience of the Cuban Diaspora":

Yes, *los cubanos son gitanos del Caribe*. We are nomadic bodies hovering on the borders of the continental mass, being swayed by waves of migration politics, colored by mainstream "tropicalizations"<sup>2</sup> of self, and troubled by conflictive identity constructions. And lest we forget, we come in all colors, several gender identifications, many class interstices, and a whole gamut of beliefs. We are still unable to verbally configure an (even imagined) national identity because we have yet to come to grips with our differences (geographical and political), and because we are preoccupied with our own morphing, ever immersed as we are in the process of negotiating recognizable/acceptable places and modes of being in the transnational Cuba we inhabit. (199)

This consciousness of the difficulties in defining one's identity is repeatedly emphasized among many writers of the Cuban Diaspora, whose displacement puts them on the outer margins of the physical national boundaries of *cubanidad*.

### **Cuban-American and Cuban Diaspora Writers**

Much has been said about the different waves of Cuban writers who have left Cuba since 1959, and yet, upon close scrutiny, we can also detect within each wave even smaller groups that share particular characteristics. Moreover, within each group there are also differences that distinguish each particular author, and may even link him or her to another set of authors with shared commonalities. An example of this phenomenon is the one-and-a-half generation of Cuban-Americans, born in Cuba and brought to the United States at a young age. This particular generation has a very strong experiential and thematic bond. In their works, identity is problematized by the need to bridge the pull of both worlds. This characteristic is well represented in such works as Cristina

García's *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992), Achy Obejas's *Memory Mambo* (1996), and Elías Miguel Muñoz's *Brand New Memory* (1998), whose recurring themes include the search for identity and the recovery of memory. Both of these themes are commonly set within the framework of intergenerational family relationships, which in turn is set in the larger frame of a life lived in an American setting. Writing *cubanidad* is what these writers do, not in a nostalgic search for the past, but in a search for clues to the self so that it may live in the present on its own terms.

Just as Gina struggles in *Brand New Memory*, Pilar in *Dreaming in Cuba*, and Juani in *Memory Mambo*, the protagonist in Elías Miguel Muñoz's first novel in English, *Crazy Love* (1989), engages in delicate negotiations between his present life and the forces of the past which are embodied in the form of family expectations. The family is the place where contested Cuban memories face each other, in what can be described as a hotbed of love, togetherness, affection, frustration, dependency and abuse. Muñoz takes his title from a Paul Anka song whose lyrics are apparently about a romantic love. However, we learn from Julián, the aspiring young Cuban-American musician, that, in his life, the song is about family and relationship in general:

Crazy love it's just crazy love....  
 Set me free from this crazy love....  
 Don't ... you see  
 what you are doing to me...  
 You upset my heart right from the start  
 with your crazy love. (Anka)

Julián, in fact, is struggling with his crazy love for, among others, his controlling grandmother Eusebia, who is constantly demanding his presence, wanting to know his every move. In one of the many stream-of-consciousness scenes, he directs his inner thoughts to his grandmother:

(Remember, Abuela, when I asked to be given swimming lessons, back in the days of Varadero, and you raised hell? Swimming was dangerous. Why, you could

drown!). It was strange, like gravity. Stronger than his will to be free. They called and he ran to their feet. The familial summoning was heard more powerful than ever before. The recorded message bounced off the walls and pierced his brain, pecking at it like a famished bird of prey over its victim. His father: "Please, *mijo*, come home..." His mother: "Home... home... home immediately!" When did it start, this madness? Long before he was born, no doubt. Long before any member of his family existed. The Island. Spain. Africa. Who could trace it all the way back, and for what purpose?

He had indeed come home *immediately* in order to become a faithful and abiding member of the clan. Don't resist the pull of history, Julián Toledo. Give up the treasured American realm of individuality. No room for individuals in your culture. No such thing as a floating self. (Muñoz 146-147)

Julián is constantly juggling his desire for success as a Latin musician in the United States and his obligations to his family's needs. At the same time, he is aware that in order to succeed, he must give up some of his authenticity, be willing to be commercially viable in an Anglo market. He can't seem to satisfy his family nor the American music world. The two forces are vying for control of his life, and his relationship to them is a constant navigation in rough waters, complicating an already difficult process of self-realization.

This passage from *Crazy Love* is truly representative of the shared theme of search for authenticity within the split world of Cuban-American life, a life full of vacillation and ambivalence. The young protagonists question both the Cuban exile mentality and U.S. mainstream assumptions regarding the basic components of identity: gender, race, ethnicity, class, language, nationality, community, and family. Their perspective is often one of ambivalence towards both worlds, a view from the margins. But however marginalized their perspective may be, they still exhibit a need to belong to family, community and nation. There is an almost authorial bravado exhibited by these writers who, from their marginal stance, provide us with an insider's view of the complexities of Cuban and Cuban-American identity. They refuse to see reality through a black and white prism.

Each writer belonging to the Cuban-American one-and-a-half generation shares a strong bond with the other members of that group, but also has a unique combination of subthemes that are not necessarily shared,<sup>3</sup> and that may link her or him to writers belonging to other Cuban diaspora groups. This type of group-crossing is evident in the way Cristina García's *Monkey Hunting* (2003) shares an exploration of the Chinese-Cuban connection with Zoé Valdés's *La eternidad del instante* (2004). In these works, both writers portray, through multigenerational family sagas, Cuba's *chino-cubano* history, making it one of the links to their common *cubanidad*. García and Valdés are good examples of the way writers of the same generation may share some common elements and differ drastically in others. García was born in 1958 and Valdés in 1959, both in Havana, but García was brought to the United States as a very young child, whereas Valdés remained in Cuba well into her young adulthood. García lives in the United States and writes in English, Valdés lives in France and writes in Spanish. This comparison is just one example of the difficulty one can encounter in determining clear categories based on traditional labels of nationality, place of residence, or language when discussing the literature of Cuban diaspora writers. There are clear distinctions, but also commonalities which combine in interesting ways, exemplifying Andrea O'Reilly Herrera's notion that "*difference resides alongside continuity.*" ("The Politics" 187)

There is now a new wave of Cuban writers living in the United States whose unique trajectories and literary productions contribute to our understanding of how their positionalities are shaped. Representative of this new generation are Yanitzia Canetti, born in 1967, and Teresa Dovalpage, born in 1966, both of whom have come to the United States in the 90s as adults, educated and professionally formed in Cuba. When critics write about them, they refer to them as "Cuban writers."<sup>4</sup> They may live in the United States, but their life as children and young professional adults in Cuba gives them a different set of literary priorities. Both are very versatile, unhindered in their thematic explorations. Canetti's first two novels, *Al otro lado* (1997) and *Novelita rosa* (1998) are written in Spanish. *Al otro lado* is set in Cuba with a female Cuban protagonist who struggles to reconcile good and evil in her life through her confessions, while *Novelita rosa* is about an immigrant Mexican woman living in the United States obsessed with the world of the *telenovela* she watches on Spanish language television. Canetti is

also an accomplished literary translator. Teresa Dovalpage is particularly interesting because she wrote her first novel, *A Girl Like Che Guevara* (2004), in English, and wrote her later works, such as *Posesas de la Habana* (2004), *Muerte de un murciano en La Habana* (2006), and *El difunto Fidel* (2009) in Spanish, contrary to the expectations of gradual assimilation into the English world.<sup>5</sup> These two writers may be Cubans living in the United States, but they are far removed from the previous generations of Cubans who settled in this country. They are the children of the Revolution, and were young adults in Cuba during the Special Period of the early 90s. They did not go through the initial idealism of the people who initiated the revolutionary process. The main thematic tracks of the Cuban revolutionary discourse, the Cuban exile discourse, and the Cuban-American discourse are not evident in their work. For example, in Dovalpage's *Posesas de la Habana*, the setting is Havana in 1990, and the negative tone of the discourse is based on the author's first-hand experience of that time and place. It could be said that the work of Teresa Dovalpage is part of a wider demythification stance with regards to the society produced by the Cuban Revolution, linking her more to Cuba's *novísimo* generation of writers of the 90s than to either the Cuban exile or Cuban-American writers. Isabel Álvarez Borland points to Yanitzia Canetti, Daína Chaviano,<sup>6</sup> Zoé Valdés, and Teresa Dovalpage as writers who render "a feminine vision of the *Período Especial* that is parodic, testimonial, and erotic all at once" ("Fertile" 255). This grouping of writers by Álvarez Borland is an example of a link that joins writers who have wide differences in experience, geographic location, themes and styles of writing, and yet display a gender-specific perspective on the Cuban experience of the 90s, thus providing a very particular type of shared *cubanidad*. Their positionality is both individual and shared, depending on how, and when, a common link was formed, and the way in which it is expressed in their literary works.

What are the common threads shared by these contemporary Cuban diaspora authors? There are clear distinctions among them based on the particularities of difference, but we can also say that there are reasons why we consider comparing them in the first place. First and most obviously, they are all Cuban in some way. Secondly, they have all experienced displacement from their original Cuban culture and from the locus of their family connections and first memories. They may belong to

different generations and may have experienced Cuba at different periods of their lives and in the island's different historical phases. Some have experienced Cuba through borrowed memories, as in the case of very young "one-and-a-halfers" or U.S.-born first generation Cuban-Americans such as Chantel Acevedo, author of the novel *Love and Ghost Letters* (2006). These may or may not have returned to Cuba at some point in their lives. What is certain is that Cuba is present in most of their work, directly or indirectly. The characters may or may not live in a Cuban setting. Their *cubanidad* is both the difference and the continuity, a shifting, ever-changing identity that defies an essentialist conception. At some points the *cubanidad* of the diaspora is diminishing through generational changes, as ripples do at their outer edges. But following the metaphorical use of water, we also know that there is a constant fluidity that defines it, and so it is with human creativity. In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century there is a new set of writers added to this constantly expanding pool, bringing with them their own themes and styles, and contributing a new creative force to the literature of the Cuban diaspora.

### **Transnational *Cubanidad***

Beyond the Cuban diaspora experience there are many other diasporas stemming from political and economic instability on a worldwide scale which are setting the stage for new types of encounters. The Cuban diaspora is part of this global phenomenon, and the works of its far-flung authors is increasingly manifesting its transnational scope. Isabel Álvarez Borland refers to the perspective of Cuban historian Rafael Rojas, who views the generation of the 1990s writers, who went to countries such as Spain, Mexico, France, Colombia, and Venezuela, as different from previous generations. The writers in this group seek a dialogue with each other rather than with Cuba. Álvarez Borland points to works such as *Historias de Olmo* by Rolando Sánchez Mejías (2001) and José Manuel Prieto's *Enciclopedia de una vida en Rusia* (1998) as examples of works whose nomadic characters avoid a historical exploration of their displacement from Cuba, focusing instead on the symptoms and human predicaments of their exiles. Because of the apparent distancing from a historical exploration rooted in nation, works such as these are considered "postnational," turning away from Cuba's strong nationalist literary tradition ("Fertile" 254-55).

In spite of the evidence pointing towards a new global perspective in the literature of contemporary writers, turning them away from a nationalist perspective, I would argue that being "postnational" is not necessarily a manifestation of being "postCuban." *Cubanidad* is not necessarily linked to nationalist discourse if we view it as an evolving cultural phenomenon within an increasingly transnational context. José Manuel Prieto's novel *Livadia* (1999), translated into English as *Nocturnal Butterflies of the Russian Empire* (2000), is a prime example of the significant influence of Cuba's historical trajectory as a Soviet ally. The title of this novel in the original Spanish version is the name of a famous resort on the shores of the Crimean Sea in the Ukraine, site of the summer retreat of the last Russian tsar, Nicholas II. J., the protagonist, is Cuban, but the world in which he moves is the post-Soviet Union territory, Northern Europe, and Turkey. The unique alliance of Cuba and the Soviet Union born out of the Cold War launched a new direction in the lives of many Cubans who have lived, studied, and worked in the former Soviet Union, and their lives have been indelibly linked to that experience. Regardless of whether an author such as José Manuel Prieto sets his novel in Cuba or not, or whether he directly dwells on his condition beyond Cuba's shores, his work is indeed linked to his intimate knowledge of Russia coupled with the particularities of his Cuban identity. The protagonist of this novel rarely alludes to his Cuban origins. Revealingly, even though he uses the Russian language on a daily basis, he sometimes curses in his native Spanish when he encounters critical moments in his life. At one point in the narrative J. hears merengue music, which he recognizes right away, and comments:

It was strange to hear this song, a merengue, here in Livadia. A couple of adulterers were meeting in the woods—it was just background music, not important to them. But it was to me. I tried to find it later in a record store, but was out of luck. (It was, after all, Crimea, Southern Russia). (*Nocturnal* 158)

These allusions to J.'s Cuban origins are rare, yet they provide the reader with glimpses of the internal dislocation of the protagonist as he travels through a world that is very different from his native terrain. Even though J.'s adventures are fictional, his trajectory reflects the author's own transnational existence. José Manuel Prieto studied, lived and

married in Russia during his young adulthood, and later lived in Mexico and the United States. Significantly, he writes his novels and short stories in Spanish, giving further evidence of being firmly anchored in the language of his native Cuba. His *cubanidad* is nothing less than a true reflection of the Cuban condition of his time, experienced by him and many other Cubans in post-Soviet Russia.

If we return to Antonio Benítez-Rojo's concept of Caribbean identity, we can see this new tendency as another ripple in a polyrhythmic movement where elements come together, diffused in part by the impact of migration and transnational forces, but also expressing *cubanidad* in a new light. There is both an outward expansion and an inward gaze, reflecting perfectly Antonio Benítez-Rojo's more cosmic rendition of the various ways in which one can look at Caribbean culture, and by extension, the literature of the Cuban diaspora:

...if we may venture a leap of the imagination, the Caribbean could be seen ... as a loosely bounded figure combining straight lines and curves, let's say, a spiral galaxy tending outward—to the universe—that bends and folds over its own history, its own inwardness. (36)

To speak of ripples in water or expanding galaxies is another way of speaking about the way in which writers engage in that inward look, from whatever distant corner they may inhabit, creating works that contain within them the core of *cubanidad*, as well as the substance of their immediate, surrounding world.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For a brief history and assessment of the current state of *cubanidad* see Morukian <[http://www1.sis.american.edu/students/sword/Current\\_Issue/essay6.pdf](http://www1.sis.american.edu/students/sword/Current_Issue/essay6.pdf)> and the book *Cuba the Elusive Nation: Interpretations of a National Identity*, edited by Damián J. Fernández and Madeline Cámara Betancourt.

<sup>2</sup> Rivero uses the term "tropicalizations" in reference to the concept of (trans)cultural performative identity constructions discussed in the book *Tropicalizations: Transcultural Representations of Latinidad*, edited by Frances Aparicio and Susana Chávez-Silverman.

<sup>3</sup> An example of such a sub-theme is the issue of sexual identity. Elías Miguel Muñoz addresses this issue within both Cuban and U.S. cultures in two of his novels, *Crazy Love* and *The Greatest Performance*. Achy Obejas does the same in much of her work, including the short story collection *We Came All the Way from Cuba So You Could Dress Like This?* and the novel *Memory Mambo*.

<sup>4</sup> They are described as Cuban writers. See Canetti's webpage, <<http://www.yanitziacanetti.com/eng/sehadicho.htm>>.

<sup>5</sup> In a similar reversal, Elías Miguel Muñoz has written a fifth novel, *Vida mía* (2006), in Spanish, after having written his previous three novels in English.

<sup>6</sup> Daína Chaviano's 1998 novel *El hombre, la hembra y el hambre* depicts the life of young Cubans in the 90s who engage in prostitution and odd jobs instead of fulfilling their professional aspirations due to the dire economic conditions of the *Período Especial*.

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