Follow Me and *My Footsteps in Baraguá*: Caribbean Influences in Afro-Cuban Women's Literature and Film

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Abstract: Martiatu's "Follow Me" and Rolando's "My Footsteps in Baraguá" are more positive illustrations of West Indian presence within Cuban national space. Descriptions of such Afro-Descendant residuals in places like Santiago de Cuba, Guantánamo, and Ciego de Ávila seem to re-write this legacy from a painful colonial and post-colonial past. The effects of Caribbean migrations become literary themes, expand and reconfigure Afro-Cubanness, and speak to such lesser known influences often overlooked because they are not associated with the capital, Havana.

Keywords: Inés María Martiatu, Gloria Rolando, West Indian, Afro-Cuban, women writers

In homage to Lalita (1942-2013)

Introduction

This article focuses on descriptions of West Indian peoples in Inés María Martiatu's "Follow Me" originally published in 1993, now available in *Over the Waves and Other Stories / Sobre las olas y otros cuentos* (2008a), and Gloria Rolando's documentary, *My Footsteps in Baraguá* (*Los hijos de Baragúa* 1996), as manifestations of an additional influential and potentially challenging Afro-Descendant legacy within Cuban national space. This paper works to confirm how Martiatu's short story and Rolando's documentary navigate their controversial presentation of the West Indian legacy as an integrated diasporic identity that is claiming its rightful place within Afro-Cubanness, this, even as historical studies have confirmed the trauma and rejection West Indian migrants faced upon arrival in Cuba, as well as the ensuing tensions. My discussion works on Martiatu's short story and Rolando's film in order to understand how their main objective of promoting ethno-cultural appreciation may not always have facilitated direct exposure of the differences between being Afro-Cuban and being West Indian, indeed, messages of cultural integration subsumed the productions' ability to go into detail about social issues of divisiveness. Both productions base their narrations on the period spanning the 1920s to the 1940s,

bringing to life those aspects which they find crucial for a deeper comprehension of contemporary Afro-Cuban racial and cultural identity.

In what ways is West Indian identity another branch of *afrocubanidad* or, as Rolando prefers, *cubanidad*? This essay argues that these two works develop strategies that permit in-depth attention to the Afro-Descendant experience, revealing the different historical layers and underlying heterogeneous experiences that serve to add a more dynamic tone to debates about identity on the island. Driving these productions within the cultural sphere are the residuals of Anglophone and Francophone Caribbean cultural influences in the eastern part of the island, in towns such as Santiago de Cuba, Guantánamo, and Ciego de Ávila where, at best, these manifestations are associated with a deeper, separate, colonial and post-colonial past and are not a part of the national consciousness as a recognized feature of their identity.

The internal effects of Caribbean migrations appear as themes within Martiatu's writing and Rolando's film, the latter insisting on their value toward greater acknowledgement of Caribbean influences within Cuban history and identity. Their examination of the Anglo-Caribbean influences brings another perspective to Cuba's heritage as a nation while it confirms the continuing existence of cultural references of a different order that are often overlooked, largely because they are not normally viewed as locally as a phenomenon associated with the entire island or the capital Havana, rather are relegated to the eastern provinces and, significantly, the city of Santiago de Cuba.

The West Indian Legacy, According to Cuban Authors

How do Cuban writers reflect this West Indianness in their literature? "Follow Me" is part of a small collection of works by twentieth-century Cuban writers that describe West Indians in Cuba and seem to move against the historical and literary tradition of associating the Afro-Cuban historical legacy exclusively with those peoples who traversed enslavement. Alejo Carpentier's *Ecue-Yamba-Ó!* (1933) appears to be the first novel to view the migrants, through the eyes of a Cuban character. Translating the title "Praise be the Lord!" it draws its backdrop and cultural support from the various black Caribbean populations that provided cheap labor within Cuba's early sugar industry during the early post-slavery era, while focusing on ethno-cultural differences, even tensions, especially between Afro-Cubans and Haitians. With regard to the idea of West Indianness in Cuba, it is important to mention Nicolás Guillén's poem, "West Indies Ltd." (*West Indies Ltd.* 1934). Guillén's poetry is universal in its approach to the topic as it makes Cuba part of the West Indies in order to support argumentation of the Caribbean as victim of a shared political exploitative legacy of neo-colonialism and North American imperialism.

More recent is Marta Rojas's *El columpio de rey Spencer* (1993) that, with "Follow Me," supports the cause as literary productions by Afro-Cuban women that do work to

further the agenda of including the Afro-Caribbean female subject. They include the theme of the settlement of Anglophone and Francophone Caribbean peoples in Cuba during the first three decades of the twentieth century. In the narratives, the portrayals appear as backdrop or have a central role in the text. Rojas's novel alludes to the in-coming West Indians as that other presence, albeit unwanted, that arrived, worked in the sugar cane fields, and settled in to claim its space. The novel talks about their lives and those of their descendants.[1] Worth mentioning also is Daisy Rubiera Castillo's *Reyita sencillamente. Testimonio de una cubana nonagenaria* (1997) that retraces the life of Reyita, Rubiera Castillo's mother, and briefly recognizes the contributions that the presence of Jamaicans and the Marcus Garvey movement made to the development of a black consciousness and African pride movement in the eastern region during the 1920s and 1930s. (Rubiera Castillo 24-26, Guridy 117).

West Indian Arrival in Cuba: Historical Perspectives

The images and descriptions in the film and story coincide with studies by historians such as Conway (17) and Lipman (26) with regard to the view that migration is crucial to understanding the history of the Caribbean. It is an ongoing phenomenon that is useful for the way it allows us to identify crucial transforming moments, especially in terms of its decisive impact on the receiving territory. Lipman (26) envisions the early twentieth century as an opportunity to observe how working-class Jamaicans engaged with early North American capitalism and interacted with the receiving cultures in Panama, Costa Rica, and Cuba. A confluence of economic and political reasons explains why West Indians chose Cuba. By 1914, the landscape of sugar production had totally changed in the Republic, with American bosses at the helm. North American ownership of the sugar mills across the island ensured their control of that market as well as their power over issues of land ownership and the production of sugar cane. Two major owners of industrial size mills were the National Sugar Refining Company and the United Fruit Company.[2] De la Fuente (34) refers to a presidential decree allowing the United Fruit Company to import one thousand West Indian workers in 1913. Using Cuban records, he indicates that between 1917 and 1931 about three hundred thousand British West Indians arrived to work in the sugar industry.[3] They came from Jamaica, Haiti, and parts of the eastern Caribbean such as

[1] Consult Birmingham-Pokorny's "Re-escribriendo la Historia y la Identidad Cubana, la Legitimación del Amor, y el Otro, la novela EL COLUMPIO DE REY SPENCER, de Marta Rojas." <http://afrocubaweb.com/martarojas/columpio.htm>.

[2] Ayala 97, 99, 103, 107.

[3] Different sources offer different figures. Hoernel (234) indicates that between 1910 and 1927, estimated totals surpassed one hundred and fifty thousand West Indians coming into the Oriente region legally. De La Fuente (47) confirms that by the 1920s, the large majority were employed in Camagüey and Oriente. Carr (84) found records to confirm that by the early 1930s there were upwards of one hundred and fifty thousand Antilleans in Cuba.

Montserrat, St. Kitts, and Dominica. Records confirm that they were majority male with very few women and children. While repatriation was the official intention, in the end, many remained.

The vision of these incoming migrants as problematic in the areas of health, crime, morality, and witchcraft attests to the general view of them as outsiders and a very serious threat to national and cultural hegemony. Both film and story refer indirectly to their status as less fortunate Black migrants and even as they focus on their cultural specificities there are only a few indirect references to the challenges they faced. Literature and film do not really tell the story of the deep antagonisms that emerged over time, rather, seem to leave this as a sub-plot, beneath the specific focus on their lives and those of their families. We can attribute Lola's wanderings, emotional instability, and vivacious personality as compensation, even defensive in light of public reaction to her as being essentially non-Cuban, while the interviewees in Rolando's documentary seem to cluster together, living in the same place, a mechanism of defense perhaps. The documentary, while never directly revealing tensions with locals, mentions the few options available to them in the system for jobs, social mobility, and enrichment. It displays their very simple rustic homes, however, through pleasantries, skirting the idea of the precarious living conditions of the migrant workers. Both film and story are less direct in terms of revealing the unpleasant nature of their experiences in Cuba than, for example, Carpentier's novel *Ecue-Yamba-O!* or the earthy, rustic, direct tones visible in Marta Rojas's *El columpio de Rey Spencer*. History, rather differently, describes the social interaction as problematic for they were envisioned as unclean, bearing diseases such as malaria and intestinal parasites that were sure to spread locally.[4] They were ostracized as violent criminals, practitioners of *brujería* or witchcraft; to quote McLeod, "Afro-Caribbean immigrants constituted a "double threat" – moral a as well as physical – to the health of the Cuban nation." (57).[5] The de-emphasis of pain and suffering in the story and the film allows for focus on cultural implantations i.e. what they brought and left in Cuba, as well as the idea of social integration between Cubans and West Indians over time. The film will cheerfully route into scenes of *alegría* (joy) and festivity – drumming, song, and dance – that include West Indians, their Cuban children and grandchildren, and neighbors.

Martiatu's story seeks out a mechanism to establish a sense of self-affirmation and historical pride and draws on the historical international phenomenon of the Marcus Garvey Movement. By the early 1930s, the Great Depression caused

[4] McLeod (58-59), Carr (86). Carr (87) goes on to mention the writings of the influential ethnographer, Fernando Ortiz whose initial studies on Afro-Cuban identity (*afrocubanidad*) during that period presented European driven concepts about "racial hierarchy in which blacks were constructed as "morally primitive," sensuous, closer to nature, and prey to irrational fears and taboos." (Carr 87).

[5] McLeod (1998, 601) adds to this by pointing out that there was real fear of the black migrant as politically destabilizing, a source of uncleanliness, a danger to whites, practitioner of witchcraft, and a threat to national standards of morality. Also consult De La Fuente (49-53).

tremendous unemployment among Cuban blacks and West Indians, a situation that produced somewhat of a united front at the lowest levels of the labor force, setting the stage for the kind of social uprising of which the ruling elite was fearful. The workers organized around issues of labor even as out of this grew new forms of nationalism that were driven by discourses of racial identity. (85).[6] This new era of nationalism and freedom meant that blacks and mulattoes now had opportunities to be fully involved in the political life of the country and they were determined to do so. According to Carr (85) the Cuban branch of Marcus Garvey's movement, the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) as well as the Cuban Communist Party were the two main arenas of operation and inspiration. Cuba's UNIA spoke of a multi-ethnic cubanidad or Cubanness, part of their rallying call to black pride, while Marxist labor activism assessed inequalities based on class. (Carr 85). In the story, Lola's involvement with Garveyism will take place in Cuba and Panama and the literary message seems to be that exposure to this particular kind of race-based activism spans outward to become a legacy that stays with subsequent generations and will remain forever as a particular mark of cultural consciousness that set this people apart. "Lola discerned for the first time the key to understand her firstborn; the works and dreams made sense in that everything was related to part of a huge drama that touched her and contained her at the same time." (Martiatu 7).

My Footsteps in Baraguá

My Footsteps in Baraguá is one of several film projects that register Rolando's contemplation of the surrounding islands of non-Hispanic heritage. Her initial film projects prior to *My Footsteps* were during the 1970s together with producer Santiago Villafuerte and confirm her years of experience and specific cinematographic and artistic focus on Caribbean ancestry and migration. One of these was the script for the 1977 feature film, *Tumba francesa* that recounts the Haitian experience in Cuba.[7] The film traces the roots and development of the Tumba Francesa societies and their deep connections with the Haitian Revolution. Her script writing continued with *Haiti en la memoria* (1986) that relives the Haitian migration into Cuba at the turn of the twentieth century, a legacy that is today part of Cuba's national heritage. This groundwork on Haiti finds its epicenter in her own production called *Reembarque/ Reshipment* released on September 10, 2014, a historical recount of Haitian farmhands in pre-revolutionary Cuba, a cheap labor force provided for the sugar industry that suffered discrimination,

[6] Lipman (26-27) and Carr (96-102) discuss the overlaps between West Indian identities and labor organizing on the one hand, and national entities such as the local unions and the Communist Party on the other.

[7] *Tumba francesa* is drumming, song, and dance of the eastern Cuba that originally belongs to the Haitian slaves who settled, fleeing their home island during the revolutionary turmoil of 1790s.

repatriation, and slave-like conditions.[8] In terms of the Anglophone Caribbean, *Pasajes del corazón y la memoria*, a 2007 production, is structurally similar to *My Footsteps* in nostalgia and personalized remembering. *Pasajes* romantically retraces the steps of Caribbean migrants back and forth between Cuba and the Cayman Islands. It tells the history of the indelible connection between Cubans and Cayman islanders.

My Footsteps bears the format of a documentary film that blends history, interviews, reenactment, and staging as strategies for capturing a fading legacy. Filmed in Ciego de Ávila, it is a production dedicated to peoples of the English-speaking Caribbean who arrived and settled in Cuba from the first decades of the twentieth century. A period popularly known as the *época de las vacas gordas* (Quesada 194), of substantial growth because of the sugar boom, it was marked by the major migratory movement into Cuba of cheap labor to work at American controlled *centrales* or sugar mills like the United Fruit Company and the Baraguá Sugar Company. (Quesada 194). This documentary was the first project of the independent filming group that Rolando created called Images of the Caribbean or *Imágenes del Caribe*.[9] She admits that at the time no one understood what she wanted to do and describes this project as daring for they had one small camera, about $150, and an idea resulting from her trip to Jamaica. (Craig and Rolando 95). It presents the lives and customs of West Indians and their Cuban descendants living in Baraguá in a kind of ethnographic production that does seem to romanticize the people and their history as part of the plan to show that they are Cuban, having lived there for just about a century.

Rolando dedicates her production to Caribbean intellectual and literary icons Nicolas Guillen, George Lamming, and Rex Nettleford, her contribution to recovering the legacy of the Africans in Cuba as well as to expanding studies of the African diaspora at the end of the twentieth century.[10] She describes how her discovery of West Indian literature, specifically George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*, her presence at Carifesta 1979, and travel to Barbados where she learned about steelband, Nettleford's artistry and vision, and heard about Marcus Garvey, were all life-changing experiences. She also credits her life as a university student in Havana, in contact with students from Africa and the Caribbean. (Craig and Rolando 96-97, Quesada 192). Rolando confirms

[8] Quesada (187, 192-194); Negra cubana tenía que ser. "Gloria Rolando." Web. 1 February 2015 <http://negracubanateniaqueser.com/diccionariodeafrocubanas-2/gloria-rolando/>; Valrey, J.R. "Meet Gloria Rolando, on tour with her new film 'Reembarque' on Haitian farmworkers in Cuba before the Revolution. BayView: National Black Newspaper. Web. 1 February 2015. <http://sfbayview.com /2014/11/meet-gloria-rolando-on-tour-with-her-new-film-reembarque-on-haitian-farmworkers-in-cuba-before-the-revolution/>; Duarte, Amelia. "Reembarque hacia los orígenes." Granma. Web. 2 February 2015 <http://www.granma.cu/cultura/2014-09-11/reembarque-hacia-los-origenes>.

[9] The idea "independent filming group" has to be taken with some caution since they were allowed to work on projects even as, given the revolutionary structure of the time, ICAIC still retained its authority over the entire process and its release to the public.

[10] Rolando. "Los hijos de Baraguá – My Footsteps in Baraguá." Web January 26, 2015. <http://www.afrocubaweb.com/gloriarolando/Baragua.htm>.

that her visits to Jamaica and Barbados were influential in creating the idea for this documentary. She perceived commonalities and realized that these West Indians and their descendants were in Cuba and clearly identifiable by their language and their names. She also realizes that most people today would not be aware of this phenomenon as Cubans speak Spanish and their stories of migration are different. She talks about pockets of West Indian resistance as they try to hold on to their culture, this view existing alongside her argument that they are also Cubans and this is a part of Cuban history. She rejects the notion of an isolated minority and moves aggressively to display their story as part of Cuba's historical complexity (Rolando and McCluskey 4, 11).

Her approach is emotional and historical for she is working on a very important legacy that also has very personal implications for these are the roots of her own family. Her decision was to produce documentaries using as inspiration they knowledge she gained about her own origins and family history, as well as aspects of the past that mark her as a Cuban. (Rolando and McCluskey 3). She confirms that the experiences of the black family are central to her work, noting that the pre-revolutionary society in which she grew up had a clear racial divide, its own system of segregation, making it very difficult for a poor family such as hers. She is very specific in the way she works, seeking to present these parts of history that are often left untold. "I want to see this kind of history and the struggle in which black people have engaged." (Rolando and McCluskey 3). For her, the insistence on self-defining as "Cuban" and not necessarily "Afro-Cuban," which has always been one of the marked differences between Cuba and the United States, does not negate the fact of their African-originated identity, nor does it mean that their stories receive due recognition. "Africans arrived in the condition of slaves and African culture was never considered part of the official culture." (Rolando and McCluskey 3). Rolando's approach is diasporic and unifying. She insists that geographical dispersion of Afro-Descendants through migration does not preclude cultural approximations. She is ready to demonstrate just how much proximity there is among blacks regionally and among the continents. (Quesada 194). She credits the Cuban Revolution with reversing the tide of silence and lack of information by supporting and disseminating productions about blacks in the Revolution and in history. (Rolando and McCluskey 4). Even as she has never hidden the fact that there are financial and infrastructural challenges to being an independent filmmaker in Cuba, Rolando's films continue to find favor in a system known for its censorship of any material deemed anti-revolutionary or too politically critical. Her focus on aspects of origins, roots, and legacies have allowed her to bypass problematic illustrations; she tends not to work with the present, preferring instead to fill historical gaps and recreate crucial moments in the history of blacks and resistance. Her desire for mutual cultural understanding explains the avoidance of historical tensions and conflicts, even as she confirms her deep awareness of just how important are recognition and reversal of those fissures.

Rolando's focus on migration is particularly crucial for confirming that in Cuba there are other legacies associated with blacks beyond that of the original forced migration into enslavement. She describes in her interview just how an important and emotional a topic migration is in the Caribbean and the United States, as confirmed by the reaction of audiences everywhere to this film.

Migration has been and is a constant theme in the life of the people of the Caribbean. In the municipality of Baragua, in the present province of Ciego de Avila, Cuba, the stories and customs of the English speaking West Indians and their descendants remain alive. Today, they are a part of Cuba (Rolando and McCluskey 11).

She goes on to reiterate the broad spectrum of emotional reactions to the experience that ranges from ongoing nostalgia for that island home which they never see again, to expression of love and attachment for the place they now call home. As a people, they have worked hard to ensure that their children's children and future generations remember their stories and understand the legacy behind the non-Cuban surnames they bear. Rolando works on the theme of migration using memory. She zooms in on individuals who tell their stories of travel, dislocation, and migration among the islands, into and out of Panama and Costa Rica during the first two decades of the twentieth century when this phenomenon was at its peak, in large part driven by the sugar boom that provoked the need for a large labor force. Her tone in the production is decidedly romantic as she captures the delightful simplicity and peaceful agedness of the place and the older generations. The documentary is a work of art (i.e. imagination) and concrete reality for this is a story that also has to be imagined if it is to be told. The old houses and sugar mills, the West Indian folk songs and dances, the Maypole, the old family photographs are framed side by side as images of the past and re-enactments today, the latter especially serving as direct reminders of this culture's evolution and survival. Their phenomenon is the way they were able to replicate the life they left behind in their original island spaces. Rolando strives to present these subjects from their perspective, in the way they see themselves and how they would like to be understood. They are products of British colonization in the Caribbean even as they bear all the traits of their African ancestry. In the film, Rolando best illustrates this through their music and dance. They have come from many different islands, however, in Baraguá, they are one community, bonded by the sugar rush, the traditions of dishes and folksongs, the rhythms of the drums, and their religious practices as Anglicans.[11] The film insists on a message of their cultural specificity; it seems interested in bypassing the idea of nationalism or argumentation of Cuban national identity, preferring instead to promote the idea of the construction of a diasporic phenomenon that has emerged independent of loyalty to country. Even as the film bypasses the notion of nation, it seems to promote the notion of cultural absorption, fusion, a merging, demonstrated most effectively in the way the old West Indians gather with

[11] Ibid.

their subsequent generations and descendants, blacks, mestizos, Hispanic, Cubans of all shades and tones to dance and sing together in the streets in a kind of carnivalesque *comparsa* display, perhaps Rolando's message of influences, blends, and fusion, a process of cultural integration that is Afro-Cuban, however, in a way that is forever dynamic.

Giovannetti (129) has identified four stages in the production. Religion, language, food, music are the primary focus of the first part in an attempt to depict the main aspects of their lives. They are manifestations of day to day practices back home. A historical overview comprises part two that clarifies how and why they came to Cuba; many family stories connect to the Panama Canal, which was their first stop, before transitioning to Cuba. The historical description continues in the third section, this time with a focus on their experiences living and working in Cuba with depictions of their meagre dwellings and difficult working conditions as migrant laborers. The final segment of the documentary describes how and why they ended up establishing roots in Baraguá. Even as parts of the video do touch on precarious living and working conditions, Giovannetti (129) is of the opinion that the documentary does not touch on the influence of the Marcus Garvey Movement and the way UNIA was central in organizing the West Indian migrant labor sector. Rolando did subsequently reveal in an interview her deep awareness of the hardships they faced, especially as blacks. She never denies that racism and discrimination existed and exists in Cuba. She also points out that the eastern part of the island is different in part as a result of this particular legacy and her plan is to reflect on such phenomena, creating a more dynamic approach to the legacy of blacks in her country. (Rolando and McCluskey 11). The filmmaker pictures her mission in life to reaffirm Caribbean interconnectedness using key moments in Cuban history, as she puts it, "*Conocernos* (énfasis), para ver todos los puntos que tenemos en común." (Quesada 195). She continues to focus on the larger purpose of her mission i.e. a clearer picture of what constitutes Cuban identity.

> […] esta historia te demuestra cuán caribeña es la isla. Porque a veces la gente piensa que Santiago es lo único "caribeño" de Cuba, por su proximidad a Haití, a Jamaica. Cuba –toda la isla completa- estuvo alterada por el sistema de plantación, colonial, con una metrópolis que iba manejando los destinos económicos, sociales, políticos del país. Y es una característica de los países caribeños. (Quesada 191).

Rolando's words give voice to her own investigations about shared identities and they line up with other available scholarship that, for example, does point to early forms of collaboration among Afro-Cubans and West Indians. Historians have uncovered and described these communities' widespread involvement in Marcus Garvey's UNIA movement during the 1920s. McLeod found that while Afro-Cubans and West Indians had separate UNIA groups in Santiago, in Havana they were part of the same association. (McLeod 2003, 84). De La Fuente (40) describes instances of conflicting

labor interests between West Indians and locals, the result of the very divisive labor structure put in place by the dominate United Fruit Company that would have affected relationships between West Indians laborers and all local workers. Rolando's cultural rendition of the experience is working toward another objective which is to reveal interconnections between Cuba and the Caribbean, ultimately creating a more dynamic portrait of Afro-Cubanness, especially in terms of its history.

One key aspect is the way the documentary, by design, works against the popular trend of identifying the West Indian subject using the term *jamaiquino* creating the illusion that they all were from Jamaica, a reductive, potentially excluding, and pejorative expression that identified who was not Cuban. While the documentary reveals their conscious identification as British subjects, in the end, the moments when they identify specific islanders, naming their island of origin – Jamaica, Grenada, Montserrat, Barbados – take precedence, a way of expressing pride in their various homelands and counteracting the popular trend of identifying them all as coming from a single unifying space of origin. (Giovannetti 129-130). The interviews present individual stories and the way in which the camera zooms in and focuses on one person at a time and the story each one has to tell creates deeper appreciation of their individual national legacies along with the way they now see themselves also as Cuban. This, even as their language, their love of cricket, and their religious identity as Anglicans are clear representations of their non-Hispanic colonizing influences. (Giovannetti 130). This filming strategy is very effective for easing the very specific lines of divide that Cuba has developed around itself ideologically, result of Cold War international relations. The documentary works to trace the unceasing intra-regional familial alliances and migrations that impacted Afro-Caribbean peoples, the effects of which continue to date, all this taking place, in spite of regional geopolitics.

The criticism that the film faces is its nostalgia which does work against a more forceful portrayal of the negative aspects and many difficulties they faced that are clearly recorded in history. The racism, ostracism, maltreatment, quarantines, and deportations of the 1920s and 1930s in Panama and Cuba do not appear here. The film touches very lightly on the Baraguá sugar company and labor conditions at the mill, which was their reason for migrating to Cuba in the first place. It does not go into issues such as the segregationist behavior and rules implemented by the North Americans, nor does it describe the discriminatory and hierarchical divisions between whites and blacks, local Hispanic Cuban workers and black West Indian workers, white employees and black immigrants, local and West Indian blacks and so on. Yet, there are moments about the environment of the sugar mill and the clear separatist culture imposed by the Americans; there are flashes of their substandard living conditions, explanation of the way West Indian women worked as servants for the white elite, and the ensuing contrast with how white prosperity. There is mention of the idea that their claim of being subjects of the British Crown may have provided some sort of protection against the usual forms of cultural hostility that immigrants face. Rolando seems to have

deliberately avoided this path for her film, focusing instead on landscape, lifestyle, religious expression, family life, dishes, folklore and those aspects that clearly demonstrated Cuba's claim to West Indianness. Giovannetti (130) values the film for the way it brings greater understanding of West Indian trajectory between the Panama Canal and eastern Cuba. In the documentary, one of the migrants named Holdey describes how he left Monsterrat with his brother and father to work in the Canal Zone. As that project soon ended they subsequently decided join the family in Cuba instead of returning home to Monsterrat. (Quesada 196). Rolando goes on to identify the Panama Canal as the reason for the second big separation of Caribbean families (the first was slavery), especially the men, many of whom never returned to the islands. The images of the Canal Zone stress the fact that this was a labor force of West Indian men who submitted to terrible environmental, labor, housing, and health conditions. Discrimination came in the form of the American system of segregation established in the Canal Zone and in the very low wages. The migration into Cuba was also an experience of trauma as by the mid-1920s they faced open hostility and deportations en masse, a testimony that is today an important part of the history of Santiago de Cuba. (Quesada 196-197).

Follow Me

Martiatu (1942-2013) is an integral part of that group acclaimed writers such as Nancy Morejón and Georgina Herrera for she is of that generation and has worked extensively in the fields of theatre, chronicles, short stories, poetry and film, using these genres as mediums into themes on Afro-Cubanness, many with a specific focus on the black woman. Her writings have been widely published in Cuba and beyond and her better known works are: *Algo bueno e interesante* (1993); *El rito como representación* (2000); *Una pasión compartida, María Antonia* (2004); *Cuba. Costumbres y tradiciones* (2006); and *Bufo y Nación. Interpelaciones desde el presente* (2008b). She also compiled the Afro-Cuban collection of plays, *Wanilere teatro (2005),* compiled the plays by Eugenio Hernández Espinosa in *Teatro Escogido* (winner of the 2006 Premio de la Crítica) and in 2011, in collaboration with Daisy Rubiera Castillo, produced *Afrocubanas*, a collection of essays.[12]

Over the Waves and Other Stories/Sobre las olas y otros cuentos (2008a) reveals Martiatu's artistry as a prose writer. It is a compilation of her short stories published since the early 1990s in a variety of magazines. The themes are varied and relate to the Afro-Cuban universe – racism, marginalization, santería, and the black female emotional experience. Her words reveal her intention behind "Follow Me," the focus of this essay:

[12] Martiatu also wrote critical essays primarily on her main area of interest, theatre. Consult Manzor-Coats y Martiatu-Terry (1995); Martiatu-Terry (1997, 1999, 2003, 2011a, 2011b).

> En algunos de estos cuentos, sobre todo "*Follow me!*" cuyo personaje central es una mujer jamaicana, por supuesto dialogo, como dices, con otros lugares de este mismo Caribe. Como sabes, una importante migración de todas las islas y hasta delas costas caribeñas de América Central y del Sur se integró a la población habanera y del resto del país. Se han forjado lazos íntimos de hermandad y de consanguinidad, como es el caso de ése y otros personajes que incluso formaron parte de mi propia familia y son entrañables para mí. (Álvarez Ramírez "Mujeres")

Martiatu's "Follow Me" is a short story, originally published in Spanish with an English title. It shares with Rolando's film the display of migrant experiences, for it opens with references to photographs, letters, and postcards from Jamaican-born Lola to her Cuban-born daughter, Virginia, who continues to reside there. Lola is the twentieth-century Caribbean migrant par excellence, a traveling performer constantly on the go, from New York and Chicago to St. Kitts and her island of origin, Jamaica. Virginia's letters and photographs are usually returned to sender for, by the time they get to the last address, Lola has already moved on. Lola, baptized Wendolyn, changed her name, perceiving it as more in keeping with her career plans; her passion is music and she dreams of becoming a singer and performer. She is very different from her mother, a Jamaican-born, controlling, conservative, God-fearing Anglican churchgoer, proudly named after Queen Victoria, who decisively does not approve of her daughter's evil ways. Victoria seems to belong to that generation (mostly men) that, at the turn of the twentieth century, had made its way into Cuba, in search of betterment. Lola emerges as a transgressive personality who resists her mother's disapproval and abandons home to seek her fortune. She will embrace the identity of the migrant, the idea of travel, and in the story, seems to be the character that, to escape her domineering mother, transitions away from Jamaican identity, drifts toward Cubanness displayed as more fun-loving, to ultimately become an international worker and wanderer. Martiatu seems to aim at creating a Cuban version of West Indian experience that Cuban readers can understand. One notable feature is that Lola and Victoria are mixed-race, which historically was not a common feature among the Jamaicans who migrated to Cuba. Lola has a "light complexion and the eyes of Bessie Smith" (Martiatu 3) while her mother is a "dominating Anglican mulata." (Martiatu 3). Anglicized references merge with Cuban ones for while individual identities are English Caribbean, they find themselves within a Cuban influencing space.

Lola is flavorful. She is vivacious, bent on a performer's career and abandons Camagüey for Havana where she will work in unsavory bars as a waitress and performer. She finds *danzón* stimulating and rhythmic, a liberating sensation from the more stoic Anglo-Saxon beat. Lola becomes enamored with Armando, a handsome mulatto heart breaker who will sweep her off her feet, give her the fascinating lively vivacious life she craves and then leave her in pregnancy. Lola's daughter Virginia

speaks her first words in Spanish in contrast with her mother who speaks English to her until she is seven. After love comes disaccord and prejudice, for Cuban Armando rejects Jamaican Lola and uses the systemic national mistrust of those migrants to take custody of Virginia in Ciego de Ávila. Lola retreats to her roots, moving into the Jamaican community, attending Jamaican dances, with a new and violent lover called Gilbert, born in the Canal Zone in Panama of a Jamaican mother and Barbadian father. Under Gilbert's influences, Lola collaborates in the Marcus Garvey movement and seems to rediscover herself as black, Caribbean, part of the world movement of peoples of African origin. They both migrate to the Canal Zone in Panama confirming the intra-Caribbean legacy of connectedness that is also Rolando's message. The connection is cultural (calypso, rum, dishes, hard labor, silver roll, gold roll, carnival, and so on) but also political; in the story the struggles for workers' rights especially for fair wages and better living and working conditions will take Gilbert's life. His burial ceremony reinforces the idea of their African origins seen in the ritualistic act of bathing in the water used to clean the dead man's body, as a way of attracting good luck. In Cuba, however, the Garvey legacy lingers on. Lola's singing "Let's fight! Follow me!" (Martiatu 7) will be the single element that she leaves with her daughter, unknowingly. Her child, expressively confused, will repeatedly pronounce an expression about which she has no understanding, only a sensing that it has to do with her mother. "Leta fai, folla mi" (8) will be totally incomprehensible to her Cuban father and relatives have no idea what it means. Years will pass before Lola returns to Cuba and she must bear linguistic anguish for she can no longer speak Spanish as her mother's condemnation is unwavering. The narrator enters the narrative by recounting this story as a summary of the interview she had with Lola. Lola is the same woman, unapologetic of her past, full of stories of her adventures, proud, and alone. She is reflective of what we all share i.e. the eternal very human search for prosperity and happiness.

The narrator seems to be proposing the idea of a hybrid identity, a confusing Cuban Caribbeanness that becomes lost in language and in other irreconcilable differences. While Martiatu's text processes West Indianness differently from Rolando's film, they both share the intention of identifying a legacy of Afro-Descendant difference in Cuba. In the end, this is the narrator's story about three generations of women – Victoria, Lola, and Virginia. Their legacy of migrations, sacrifice, separations, and resistance is summed up in the victory song that Lola and Gilbert taught Virginia, a song in homage to Marcus Garvey. The marks of an Anglo-Caribbean identity in this story are clear. Her status as a West Indian migrant, the Anglican Church her mother will never leave, the British names, and the use of Jamaican Creole English are that part of Lola that she seems to want to erase even as she simply cannot since they represent her Jamaican origins. Particularly significant is the presentation of Camaguey as the town where Lola and her mother made their home upon arrival in Cuba. This coincides with that town's fame to date as the Cuban city with a strong Anglo-Caribbean legacy, one in which its Jamaican descendants take much pride.

Literary Themes of Experience and Identity

My Footsteps in Baraguá and "Follow Me" dwell on the West Indian legacy during the first decades of the twentieth century, however, Rolando's film gazes backward from today, while Martiatu's story is set at that time. They both employ multiple characters: *My Footsteps* will interview the older generations who are migrants and children of migrants while "Follow Me" is based on a family of three generations of Jamaican women in Cuba. They coincide in the way West Indianness is painted as a distant and dying legacy. This message is sustained by the way, in both cases, the younger generations, even as they bear the names, traits, Creole Caribbean languages, and legacies of their older family relatives who hail from the islands, are clearly associating with the idea of being West Indian in a distant way for they are now very Cuban. This detail feeds the intention of the producers who are recognizing the West Indian legacy in Cuba as another kind of Afro-Cuban cultural experience, one constructed on migration. In both works, there are no alliances between this legacy and revolutionary ideals. The protagonists are not painted as subjects inserted into the national ideological cause, rather, they seem to exist in isolation, with relevancy given only to their lives, their sacrifices, their challenges, and their achievements. Yet, in the end, they emerge as Cuban, by virtue of dislocation and new settlement. The productions seem to be seeking the same objective i.e. to widen local appreciation of this group of non-Hispanic Afro-Descendants.

Equally important is the way these recent productions force contemplation of West Indian difficulty in Cuba. They break the silence on this matter in a very tangible way, referring to the racial, social, and economic challenges the incoming migrants faced during those early decades. There are differences, however, for while "Follow Me" sustains an underlying discourse of conflicting identities, migratory restlessness, and self-searching displayed by the main character, Lola, *My Footsteps* is somewhat idyllic as it works with wonderful memories and a kind of nostalgic bitter sweet re-enactment of life in this village, helping us to imagine what it must have been like to labor under North American control, in a segregated social structure that naturally relegated this community to the very bottom of the social scale. Rolando's film does not dwell on the topic at length although the interviewees' stories and images speak to the challenges related to working at the Baraguá Sugar Company. "Follow Me" on the other hand displays Lola as directly involved in the labor movement struggle inspired by Marcus Garvey. The narratives seem preoccupied with identifying the residuals of West Indianness and explaining how inter-cultural relationships between Cubans and West Indians unfold through time. They aim less at the instances of friction but rather, in ethnographic style, emphasize the singularity of these peoples as British subjects, as English-speaking blacks, and ultimately as Cuban citizens and Afro-Descendants, the plurality of identities into which they eventually settle.

Both text and film rely on similar strategies of historical reenactment. They are framed within a pre-revolutionary time and the narrating voice fully assumes this historical perspective. Initially, there was a period of heavy migration of Jamaicans as they and thousands of other island peoples left their homelands heading to Panama and Costa Rica initially, then later into Cuba, driven away by failing economies, joblessness, and a shortage of land. It was a migration following news of available work and the dream of being able to sustain families back home. Their plan was to work, raise enough money and, as the film indicates, they always thought that they would return home. Passing time, distance, and separation are the pillars of these tales of migration for the main protagonist in "Follow Me" seems caught up in an unending cycle of movement to the detriment of her relationships; Lola's daughter, Virginia, writes her mother but the mail is always sent back for by the time it arrives at its destination, Lola has already moved on. In Rolando's film, feeling the effects of isolation, the interviewees talk of their dreams of returning home but those in the film never did.

A clear mark of identity is in their names. In the film Baraguá dwellers proudly declare their English (British) names, as do their descendants. Martiatu's story self-identifies by way of its title as an Anglophone space and experience and brings into focus Victoria the first migrant in a story about three generations of women. Victoria is Jamaican, a very strict churchgoer and a single mother who is raising her daughter very conservatively and who cannot forgive her when she abandons the straight and narrow path and leaves home in search of her dream to be a singer and performer. Not only does she leave home but she also rejects her original name, Wendolyn, replacing it with the more festive and provocative Lola, a transformation that seems intended to facilitate her transition into the world of entertainment. Yet, their legacy as Jamaicans does not end rather her mother's legacy as first generation migrant will live on through her granddaughter, Virginia, interesting choice for a name for the way it intersects at both Anglophone and Hispanic culture. Naming, photographs, and letters serve to construct a sense of loss and recovery, distance and longing as here is a people constantly struggling to hold on to memories of their home spaces, sensing perhaps that those memories are all they really have left. In *My Footsteps*, the old black and white photographs and still shots are of days past. The photographs of calm yet serious West Indians in their best church attire gazing straight into the camera are clear configurations of their Anglophone legacy. In the story, Lola's photographs arrive in the mail, and in them she is always in a different location, mostly English-speaking countries, and always appears to be happy.

The protestant Church (Anglican, Methodist, Episcopal, and Presbyterian lines), the formal rather conservative style of dress typical of the English-speaking Caribbean countries under British colonization, and the use of West Indian English provide the backdrop both for Rolando's recuperative approach as well as for Martiatu's message of cultural non-confirmity and failed assimilation to Cuban culture. In the film, the manifestations of West Indianness are over-emphasized with great pride. This is a

different route from the one presented in "Follow Me" where the image of Lola is that of a migrating subject who seems to be fleeing from this legacy even as she really cannot deny it as her identity and that of her daughter. The adoption of the name Lola serves as an identity of entertainment for her style is very similar to the North American rhythm and blues divas that she is trying to emulate. The ethnic and racial components of being West Indian intrude, making the ideal of local acceptance and integration an ongoing quest, ultimately attainable two generations forward, even as Lola's daughter Virginia, will regurgitate Garvey rhetoric, thereby confirming the inevitable continuity of a legacy that many perceive as fading away.

There is room to argue that these works are reflective of Afro-Cuban female perspectives. For Rolando, it seems to be love of the art of filmmaking and a question of a community's legacy. Her journey is both one of both professional creativity and private desire to be able to reconstruct, moving backwards in time, the ancestral path of her people. As the Afro-Cuban professional independent filmmaker on the island, she brings such a positioning into her productions even as this is only one aspect that defines her pieces. Triana (123) will insert Rolando into the genre of black women writers and performers in Cuba today whose artistry focuses on black female subjectivity and the many dimensions of her often debilitating experiences through time. Rolando shares with Martiatu the strategies of invoking memory and elaborating on black female lives in a way that make them representative of a broader historical Afro-Cuban experience. By doing so, they break through the blinds of cultural descriptions to reveal such experience and perspective in a very uplifting way. Rolando's approach to the topic is to tell their story, even if it means revealing the internal dynamics of gender relations. In the Baraguá of days past the roles are clear. The family unit is intact. The woman is domesticated, taking care of the house, the garden, the family, the neighbors, the cooking, and the cleaning. If they do work outside the home they take in washing or are domestic servants. The men go out to work at trades or at the sugar mill. There are no further expectations, no room for advancement. Activism against conditions of labor did not extend to the female realm. The village seems small and the options are very few.

Martiatu's narrative, while similar in content, is feminist in spirit, for it envisions another kind of experience that counteracts the expected norm for women of color in those days. Lola is a free spirited protagonist who, in her quest to escape life's drudgery, runs the risk of being branded as immoral for the way she simply has no desire to fulfill society's 's vision of her expected role as a properly raised young woman, or be like her mother i.e. self-righteous and God-fearing. Instead, she follows her heart, has several love affairs, and finally has a child who she then abandons, leaving her with the relatives in Cuba while she takes off to become a globe trotter and entertainer, touching down in major cities in the USA. The very mechanisms used to describe the West Indian predominantly male migratory legacy is transferred to her, allowing for the creation of an ambitious and worldly figure who is single-minded, ambitious, earns her way, enjoys

some degree of prosperity, and is indeed very representative of what it means to be a West Indian today.

In conclusion, the productions were both very well received partly because there are so few literary and film representations of this ancestral line on the island; even though all three Hispanic islands have this legacy, it is not very visible, indeed, even repressed within the national spaces, for it does go against the grain in terms of those specific cultural markers that are normally used to determine what is acknowledged as Cuban, Dominican, and Puerto Rican. The favorable tones adopted in the productions facilitate highlighting this migrant tale without directing heavier tones of condemnation or culpability towards locals. The use of the West Indian family unit as the base confirms the establishment of deep roots and clearly illustrates West Indian integration into the Cuban island space.

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