

WHICH WAY DID HE GO?
IDENTITY, CULTURE AND NATION
IN ALEJO CARPENTIER'S *CONCIERTO BARROCO*

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In the closing pages of *Concierto barroco*, the Afro-Cuban Filomeno is seeing off his former Mexican master, el Amo, at the railroad station after a rather incredible journey during Carnival in Venice. The Amo asks Filomeno when he will return to Cuba and Filomeno replies that he plans next to go to Paris. At first the Amo assumes this will be a tourist's journey for, "Las hembras. La Torre Eiffel" (Carpentier 68). Filomeno is quick to correct him explaining that there are women everywhere and the Eiffel Tower is now passé. Rather, he continues, he is going to Paris because, "En París me llamarán Monsieur Philomenè así, con P.H. y un hermoso acento grave en la 'e.' En La Habana, solo sería 'el negrito Filomeno'" (68).

The complexity of this statement is a direct reflection of the identity journey undertaken by Filomeno through the course of the novel. At first glance, his decision in the concluding moments of the novel to remain in Europe seems logical. Paris in the 1920's was a haven for many of African decent while in Cuba, despite the official rhetoric, racial and class barriers still existed¹ Yet, this acceptance in modern Europe is tempered by the fact that when the novel begins in the early 1700's, non-white races were little more than a curiosity for

most, especially within the circles that Filomeno and his Master were traveling. This rapid fast forward through time and space, however, and the purposeful conflation of history in *Concierto barroco* are hallmarks of Carpentier's work and central to his unique definition of the Baroque, which he calls "barroquismo."

How Carpentier employs the many aspects of *barroquismo* to explore identity formation in *Concierto barroco* is the focus of this essay. An analysis of the complex dynamics of nation, culture and self found in Carpentier's use of *barroquismo* will be highlighted through Antonio Benítez Rojo's understanding of "dissipative structures" and Arif Dirlik's work on "place-based consciousness." Taken together, these philosophical and theoretical frames clarify how identity is interwoven with notions of diaspora and community that are, themselves, independent of time and space in *Concierto barroco*.²

Alejo Carpentier's *Concierto barroco* (1974) is about the return of a Mexican Creole to Europe in the 17th century. During a layover in Cuba, his page dies and he hires a local Afro-Cuban, Filomeno, as a replacement. Their journey first to Spain and later to Venice during Carnival proves to be an important exploration of identity with interesting consequences for both. Throughout *Concierto barroco*, there are references to music, ranging from Antonio Vivaldi to Louis Armstrong, elaborate architectural details and disruptions of the time-space continuum. All of these details are directly related to Carpentier's understanding of the Baroque.

Carpentier's *barroquismo*, however, is a unique, well-known and highly controversial concept. In its simplest of forms, *barroquismo* is all that a traditional definition of the Baroque would entail: repetitions, dynamism, decadence, rejection of perfection, play between oppositions, the intent to destroy barriers between illusion and reality and a preference for forms that are open to infinity. The distinguishing mark of Carpentier's understanding is found in his reading of the Spanish philosopher Eugene d'Ors's definition of the Baroque as a "human constant" that is in continual process, shifting and changing and recombining through its history ("Lo barroco" 114). By insisting upon this human aspect of an aesthetic category, Carpentier ampli-

fies the meaning of the Baroque to include a variety of expressions ranging from the political to the historic. Indeed, Federico Asevedo notes, in his introduction to the 1994 edition of *Concierto barroco*, the most original elements of the novel are the subtle blendings of social and political critique within the play of the Baroque (“Estudio preliminar” *Concierto* XII).

Carpentier's insistence upon how *barroquismo*, transcends time and space, enables him to argue that the New World was Baroque even before the arrival of Europeans: “América, continente de simbiosis, de mutaciones, de vibraciones, de mestizajes, fue barroca desde siempre” (“Lo barroco” 123).³ Moreover, because of its temporal and spacial malleability, *barroquismo* describes the Creole experience in the New World. For the Creoles, Carpentier believes, *barroquismo* achieved its apex with the growing awareness that whether they were of European or African heritage, even with direct lineage to their homelands, they already had been transformed by the New World (126). Carpentier refers to these identity shifts as a kind of “symbiosis” of their historic past and their cultural present: “la conciencia de ser otra cosa, de ser una cosa nueva, de ser una simbiosis, de ser un criollo; y el espíritu criollo por sí, es un espíritu barroco” (126). The “Creole spirit,” then, is Baroque because its complex and distinct expressions are derived from an infinite array of temporal-spatial oppositions that give rise to unique, ever-changing, New World identities.

The symbiosis Carpentier describes however must be distinguished from contemporary concepts of synthesis or hybridity. From the initial contact between New and Old World cultures, the power relationships were uneven and, for the New World, ultimately fatal. To speak of cultural or ethnic hybridity, especially in colonial Latin America, glosses over what John Beverely, in *Subalternity and Representation*, describes as the “crossover” whereby the subaltern expression is always viewed in relation to the hegemonic discourses. Ultimately, it is the loss of the subaltern and the adoption of the dominant lexis that is acknowledged. (163-165). For Latin America, “Creole” hybridity, based upon European and non-European blending (such as indigenous or African), resulted in a crossover that was achieved

almost exclusively at the expense of the subaltern experience. As Arif Dirlik argues, “[H]ybridity suggests merely a proliferation of alternatives, but in real life may also lead to the extinction of alternatives” (“Place-Based Imagination” *Place and Politics* 28). Along with the loss due to cultural crossover, *barroquismo*, Carpentier insists, is an infinite and uncontainable art form that “va de un centro hacia afuera y va rompiendo, en cierto modo, sus propios márgenes.” (“Lo barroco” 117). Thus, as a “human constant,” *barroquismo*, built upon the tension of irreducible opposites is more than simply an aesthetic play of forms or ultimate resolution. Rather, the recurrent interaction (crossover) gives rise to continually new sources of identity as each new expression becomes interwoven with others resulting in ever-shifting boundaries and borders.⁴ Finally, as if coming full circle, this ongoing process or ever-delayed amalgamation of differences, which Erick Camayd-Freixas calls a kind of “irreducible” dialogical context, began with “el encuentro de dos mundos” in 1492 that “no ha de detenerse mientras coexistan aspectos diferenciales entre ambas culturas.” (56). Carpentier employs *barroquismo*, then, as a way of extending the concepts of Baroque beyond aesthetic boundaries in order to examine and express the complexities of New World identity that operate outside of traditional concepts of time and space. In the novel, the importance of this dynamic interplay operates almost like a character as identities shift, recombine and reemerge.

From the beginning of the novel, the Amo, a Mexican Creole, embodies Carpentier’s notion of the Creole as new, yet other. He is other in so much as his identity remains amorphous and diffuse. Throughout the story he is alternatively identified only as “amo,” “viajero,” “mexicano,” “Montezuma,” and “indiano” with no reference made to a proper or family name. He is new because despite his Spanish past, his heritage is marked only as being the “nieto de gente nacida en algún lugar situado entre Colmenar de Oreja y Viallamanrique del Tajo” (*Concierto* 19). This newness, like his sense of otherness, is a direct consequence of the Creole condition in the New World unable to trace roots back to pre-Columbian times, Africa or the Old World. In place of origins, Creoles (and, indeed, most New World

immigrants) had to rely on what Benitez Rojo has termed, “originary” sources of identity created out of their present circumstances with little reference to the lost past (*La isla* 31-32).

For the Amo, return to the Old World, however, necessitates at least the appearance of a fixed identity based on what he perceives as the successful Creole returning home. Thus, when the servant he brings from Mexico, Francisquillo, suddenly dies in Cuba, the Amo is compelled to find an immediate replacement or risk losing his status as a Master, “como si un amo sin criado fuese amo de verdad” (11). To order his identitary chaos and stabilize his position as “master” the Amo must anchor his “self” with an “Other” or risk perpetuating the anonymity of his forbearers. Benitez Rojo describes this anchoring as a kind of complementary in which the “Other” and their supposed opposite, are, in fact, intimately intertwined because each “desearía estar secretamente en el lugar de otro” (*La isla* 135). The Amo’s identity, like that of many New World Creoles, begins in relation to the colonized New World. His anchors, ironically, are associated with those whose histories had been threatened by his forefathers. His Mexican servant, Francisquillo is most certainly a mestizo, Filomeno is an Afro-Cuban, and the Amo chooses to masquerade as Moctezuma in Venice which turns out to be his personal epiphany. Thus, he has not one, but several, anchors among which his identity shifts. Ultimately, as in all processes of identity informed by *barroquismo*, then, there is a continual mediation at work between the Amo’s many selves that results in “un conjunto global de coexistencia en continua transformación” (135).

The Amo’s search for an identitary anchor is most fully realized with Filomeno, a local musician and raconteur that he encounters in a local Cuban inn. From their first meeting, Filomeno makes clear to the Amo that he is the great-grandchild of a famous African known only as “Salvador” whose bravery was celebrated in the 17th century poem “Espejo de paciencia” by the Spanish poet Silvestre de Balboa (12). Fighting alongside a diverse group of Cubans (ranging from peninsular Spanish to Taino Indians) from the area of Manzanillo, Salvador delivers the death blow to the French pirate, Gilberto Girón,

who had kidnapped and humiliated the Bishop of Yara, Manzanillo, Don Juan Cabezas.⁵ In payment for his bravery, Salvador is freed as are his future generations including Filomeno. What makes Filomeno initially attractive to the Amo, however, is neither his illustrious past nor his present freedom, but his skills as a groomsman and musician. Most important for the Amo is Filomeno's race for, "es de moda de ricos señores tener pajes negros" (12). Filomeno, physically and socially, then, restores the Amo to the status of a Master by providing the Amo with the symbiotic relationship, the counterbalance, the necessary opposite that he needs to at least feign an identity for his much anticipated return to the Old World.

Here *barrroquismo's* interplay of identities is at work both for the Amo and Filomeno. For the Amo, Filomeno is a stabilizer, a route out of the chaos of ambiguous identity. Throughout their journeys the transitory nature of the Amo's self will be juxtaposed to the more fluid, dynamic, and hectic selves of Filomeno. Indeed, the Amo's identity will dissipate and lead to new expressions on at least three different occasions, and will culminate with the realization that he is, in the end, a Mexican Creole not a grandson of peninsular Spaniards. Filomeno's identity too fluctuates and dissipates, but the stability of his heritage permits present and future dissipation that operates in a specific space rather than place while the Amo's ambiguous history and chaotic present require such a place. Filomeno does not need an original, geographically based home, for he is at home wherever he goes. The Amo, meanwhile, has yet to discover a past from which to move freely in the future, so he must return to that geographic place, Spain, from which his ancestors arrived in the New World.

While the Amo is a fairly transparent soul, Filomeno is an enigma. As Roberto González Echevarría has noted, Filomeno shares a direct relation to the Baroque *picaro* tradition most notably in Francisco Quevedo's 17th century novel *El Buscón* (*Pilgrim* 66). Like the hapless *Buscón*, Filomeno too is a kind of man-child whose main interest seems to be satisfying his immediate basic necessities. His travels throughout the world are from a decidedly lower class point of view. Thus, it is through his eyes that many of the hypocrisies and cruel-

ties of society are humorously revealed. Moreover, it is through the dichotomy between Filomeno's humble beginnings and the harsh realities he confronts that the aesthetic and political dynamism of *barroquismo* is highlighted. One of the more salient examples of Filomeno the picaro is found in a discussion he has with a group of Venetians including Antonio Vivaldi. While the Europeans cannot fathom an opera with a black hero, Filomeno responds that in England there are several plays with men of African decent in lead roles, such as Othello. Vivaldi counters, with disgust, that the English theatre, as far as he is concerned, is full of unspeakable horrors. And to prove his point, he gives a rather simplified and particularly gory summation of Shakespeare's "The Tragedy of Titus Andronicus," focusing on Titus's final triumph of feeding Tamora, Queen of the Goths and his now hated wife, a pie containing the flesh of two of her sons (*Concierto* 44-45). Filomeno's reaction is immediate, "¡Y hay quien dice que ésas son constumbres de negros!" (45). Thus, with one simple, albeit humorous, statement, he exposes the hypocrisy of Western notions of associating Africa with cannibalism.⁶

Yet, Filomeno differs from the traditional picaro in significant ways. First, although he is an orphan, he is not without an illustrious past as he can trace his roots back to the illustrious Salvador. So too, Filomeno, while aware of the racial prejudice surrounding him in Europe, clearly sees this as their problem and not his. During an impromptu concert at the Ospedale della Pietà, a famous refuge of Antonio Vivaldi, Filomeno, inspired by the music, joins in on pots and pans, singing an ancient Afro-Cuban chant to kill a snake, "Ca-la-ba-són-són," distinctly Cuban in its blend of African rhythms and Spanish estribillos known as "sones" (39). Not even the disparaging remarks of Doménico Scarlatti that this "¡Diablo de negro! has ruined his, Scarlatti's, rhythm leaving him "tocando música de caníbales" fazes Filomeno who is busy exploring a trumpet given to him by the sisters of the nunnery (39). As the novel progresses, it is clear that while the Amo suffers a great crisis of identity, Filomeno has no such qualms about his identity. The clarity of purpose that Filomeno possesses, however, should not be understood as a fixed or static form of

identity. Rather, Filomeno's identity is unique in its composition and it is this Carpentierian *barroquismo* of identity that greatly complicates the concept of diaspora in the Afro-Cuban's case.

Baroque displacements

Two of the most important characteristics of the Baroque are tension and disharmony. Whether through a constant repetition of forms or the restrained juxtapositions of opposites, there is a sense of unresolved synthesis that approaches chaos. Much of this innovation and renovation, this flux and flow, is in response to the restricted and always ordered world of classicism that followed a very clear and delineated form (Maravall *La cultura* 179-180).

In the case of the New World, moreover, this constant motion, continual change, and dynamic antithesis begins with nature where tangles of mangroves, roots, and trees seem to spread in all directions, intersecting here and there, in an unremitting move toward filling each and every space. So too, Carpentier argues, one can see the Baroque in early texts such as the *Popol Vuh* where the Mayan cosmology clearly anticipates the Baroque geometric forms of concentric circles with no center, beginning or end ("Lo barroco" 123). More contemporary examples of the presence of *barroquismo* is found in Latin American and Caribbean theorists, such as Antonio Benítez Rojo, J. Michael Dash, Wilson Harris, and Edouard Glissant, where a Baroque vocabulary of chaos, limbos, dissipations and multiplicities often seems the most appropriate means of expressing what Benítez Rojo calls an "inexpressible" quality of reality (*La isla* xi).

In the introduction to *La isla que se repite*, Benítez Rojo asks how we can begin to talk about a Caribbean literature when, in fact, "su misma existencia es cuestionable" ("Introducción" xxx). From its beginning, the Caribbean has been marked by absence, first of the original inhabitants and, later, by the thousands of Africans brutally uprooted from their traditions and forced to begin anew. Certainly, there were other groups, such as the Europeans or East Indians who, at least initially, maintained strong ties with their home countries.

Yet, as Carpentier says, even these Creoles eventually would be transformed by their surroundings. In place of this ability to assume a stable identity, Benítez Rojo argues, the Caribbean is best understood as a series of “dissipative structures.” His approach is based on Ilya Prigogine’s theory of thermodynamic dissipation, wherein these structures are self-sustaining, defining their own boundaries through a continual “unfolding” and “bifurcating process” in which the new creation is always distinct and “irreversibly changed from the original” (iv).⁷

In *Concierto barroco*, it is Filomeno who best embodies this ongoing recreation of experience and expression through dissipation for he is equally comfortable at the Venetian carnival in the 17th century as he is, later, on his way to hear Louis Armstrong in 1956 in Venice. Not restricted to a specific time or place, Filomeno is free to create and recreate his identity relying:

en los Hierros de Ogún o en los caminos de Elegúa, en el Arca de la Alianza o en a Expulsión de los Mercaderes, en el gran bazaar platónico de las Ideas y artículos de consumo o en la apuesta famosa de *Pascal & Co. Aseguradores*, en la Palabra o en la Tea. (72)

All of which he is able to combine, divide, recombine, recreate to suit his experiences and expressions. Such freedom of motion, through time and space operates outside of specific cultural, national, and identity boundaries.

While Filomeno moves comfortably through these cultural and social vortices, the Amo is clearly much more of what we would consider a diasporic subject inasmuch as he identifies with a specific absent homeland. First, at the beginning of the novel, he is returning, although born in Mexico, to Spain which he considers his ancestral home. Yet, once he has returned, he is sadly disappointed, comparing everything in Spain to his life in Mexico, which, ultimately, he prefers. His nostalgia for Mexico becomes so pronounced that once in Venice, he chooses to masquerade not as a Spanish conquistador

but as Moctezuma, a choice of costume that becomes an inspiration for Antonio Vivaldi to compose an opera.⁸ The Amo's pride in his New World identity, however, is directly challenged by Vivaldi's interpretation of the conquest of Mexico; culled, so it seems, not only from the Amo's first-person narrative but the historical texts of Moisés Antonio de Solís and Bernal Díaz del Castillo, and the maestro's own vivid imagination of the New World (*Concierto* 55). During the opening night of the opera, the Amo becomes increasingly distraught by what he considers the gross inaccuracies of the presentation (the most severe being Vivaldi's recreation of one of Montezuma's generals as a fragile princess in love with Hernán Cortés's younger brother) culminating in a desperate cry of "¡Falso, falso, falso; todo falso!" (53-54; 60). Vivaldi's liberties with what the Amo considers to be his history are an important step forward in his own growing self-awareness. At the end of the novel, he admits to Filomeno, as they are waiting for the train, that during the struggle between Cortés and [Moctezuma] in the opera, suddenly "dejé de sentirme espectador para volverme actor" realizing that "el cantante (Moctezuma) estuviese representando un papel que me fuera asignado, y que yo, por blando, por pendejo, hubiese sido incapaz de asumir" (66). The Amo, then, experiences diasporic displacement twice, first as a Spaniard in the New World then as a Mexican in the Old one. Ultimately, he must return to Mexico for his new, creolized identity depends upon a connection to a geographic place replete with a past, not of his making, but still, useable for his future identity negotiations.

While the Amo's identity is tied to Mexico and his return is essential for his self-awareness, Filomeno does not and, indeed, is unwilling to return to Cuba. On one level it cannot be denied that Filomeno too is a diasporic subject. As Ambrosio Fonet has clarified in the case of the Afro-Cuban the diaspora is "one of these phenomena of massive displacement" made by force not by choice that began with slavery ("Cuban Literary" 92). Yet, Filomeno, like the Amo, experiences dual displacement for he too is Creole in the New World having been born and raised there. His history, in fact, begins with the story of his great grandfather Salvador. When he does speak

of Africa, his knowledge is, understandably limited, although it is important to note that he has retained important cultural connections through oral literature and music.

With Cuba as his home, his journey to Europe, then, should have produced a similar nostalgia for the island as the Amo experienced for Mexico or at least a sense of identity schizophrenia. Yet, there is neither loss nor division in Filomeno's discourse. That he does not wish to return, exposes, perhaps, the limits of the concept of diaspora for all cases of geographic displacement. Indeed, as Arif Dirlik has noted,

diasporic culture lends itself to a cultural reification that erases significant differences within migrant populations... In the absence of close attention to these differences, the idea of a diasporic culture is converted easily into definitions of migrant groups based on race, that exacerbate the problems that such groups face in host societies" ("It is not where you are from" 2).

We need only recall Filomeno's final words to the Amo that "En París me llamarán Monsieur Philomenè así, con P.H. y un hermoso acento grave en la 'e.' En La Habana, solo sería 'el negrito Filomeno'" (*Concierto* 68). Regional identity, then, is nothing to him for there is a huge gap between his cultural and local identities and that of the colony of Cuba still attached to Spain. Uninterested in return to Cuba, even less to Africa, Filomeno must find other sources, other anchors for his identity. This search, however, is complicated further by the somewhat unpredictable temporal-spatial disjunctions of the novel that seem to threaten any stable identity formation. Yet, the very challenges to time and place found in Carpentier's *barroquismo* prove central to Filomeno's sense of self and belonging.

Place-based consciousness

In “Place-Based Imagination: Globalization and the Politics of Place” Dirlik argues that to avoid the vagaries of globalization in an age of shifting geographic boundaries, we should revisit the concept of place not as a fixed, bound, local space, but, as Dirlik explains in reference to the work of Doreen Massey, “as an open and porous” site where identity which is always “unfixed, contested and multiple” might best be expressed (21). For Dirlik, there are three key elements of this new understanding of place and its role in identity: community consensus, groundedness, and the ongoing interaction between the two. First, Dirlik contends that place is a metaphor that

calls for a definition of what is to be included in the place from within the place some control over the conduct and organization of everyday life, in other words—rather than from above, from those placeless abstractions such as capital, the nation-state, and their discursive expressions in the realm of theory. (22)

Indeed, he adds, “the struggle for place in the concrete is a struggle against power and the hegemony of abstraction” (22-23). Thus, our definition of place is what we use to connect ourselves to one another. Through community consensus, we create a shared identity. It is important, however, that this understanding of place be created by the members of the community rather than by a government or other official body. Such a definition from the bottom up, so to speak, calls into question a variety of present day geographic spaces that have been traditionally top down ranging from post-colonial divisions in Africa to redistricting in the United States; two of many examples in which place is defined by those outside of the actual boundaries.

The regional and cultural boundaries of Colonial Cuba are equally problematic for Filomeno. While his past, represented by the deeds of his grandfather Salvador, clearly ties him to the island, much of the physical, geographic place of Cuba has been created out

of the needs and imagination of Imperial Spain. True, Filomeno's freedom, although key to his self-identity as well as to how he is received in Europe, was not unique in Colonial Cuba. Whereas in much of the Caribbean, the monoculture of sugar led to the massive importation of millions of African slaves in the 1600's and 1700's, Cuba, traditionally divided up into small plots of farm land, did not begin to import slaves until well into the late 1700's and mid-1800's when large sugar plantations replaced the smaller individual ingenios (sugar factories). Indeed, Francisco A. Scarano considers Cuba's late entry into the slave trade along with the island's more urbanized economy to be among the key reasons for the comparatively large free population which, in the 1840's, was six of every ten Cubans; the highest proportion of nonslaves and whites for the classic sugar colonies ("Labor and Society" 76). Yet, while Filomeno's liberty was not uncommon for many Afro-Cubans, it was limited inasmuch as there continued to be significant barriers between races and classes throughout colonial and postcolonial Cuba.⁹

This lack of social mobility does not mean he is without a community identity. Rather, his community transcends place because it is tied to the second element of Dirlik's concept of place-based consciousness, *groundedness*. Groundedness, Dirlik says, makes the place a project that "insists on the importance of the past as a source of critical perspectives on the present while reworking the past with present concerns" (22-23). Thus groundedness, draws upon place constructed by community to produce an entirely new creation that is unlike the original and yet related to it; much in the same way that dissipative structures retain some of their original characteristics while, likewise, evolving into new expressions. For Filomeno, it is his African heritage that provides the groundedness. It is not where he comes from, but where he is that will provide a place porous enough to ground past, present and future.¹⁰ Given his place in Colonial Cuba, he has more control over his life and how he wants to live it in Europe.

Ultimately, Dirlik explains, for this place-based consciousness to resist the essentialization of globalization or the particularization of the local, it must be able to interact on both levels (30). This third

element of place-based consciousness, then, helps to stabilize place while, likewise, remaining open enough to change to create intertwined yet individual expressions of identity. Only then can place stabilize to prevent meaninglessness (38). Again, there is the constant tension between local and global which, while opposite, must coexist in an ongoing series of relations that provide for a myriad of meanings or, in the case of the Baroque, an unending process of replication, bifurcation, and creation.

For Filomeno the groundedness that allows him to maintain a dynamic, fluid, yet constant source of identity in Europe is the contrast between his Spanish and African cultural heritages. Beginning with the history of his grand-father Salvador, these often disparate elements of his past are essential. The Spanish sources begin with “Espejo de paciencia,” comprised of two cantos and 145 octavas reales (royal octaves) belonging to the tradition of “arte mayor,” (high art) of Baroque Spanish:

Andaba entre los nuestros diligente
un etíope digno de alabanza,
llamado Salvador, negro valiente,
de los que tiene Yara en su labranza,
hijo de Golomón, viejo prudente:

el cual, armado de machete y lanza,
cuando vido a Girón andar brioso,
arremete contra él como león furioso
(*Concierto* 15)

Salvador, described as “valiant,” “wise” and leontine in his bravery, however, stands in sharp contrast to this “arte mayor,” for rarely in Imperial Spain would an African be so recognized, so exalted, even one who is responsible for the death of a French interloper. The ongoing interplay of these two contrasting cultural expressions, however, is, for Carpentier, the essence of the Creole spirit. Moreover, in keeping with Benítez Rojo’s concept of dissipation, these elements, are further

elaborated upon and altered to give rise to new expressions. Building upon this established source of identity (community consensus through poetic form), Filomeno, in recounting his grandfather's exploits to the Amo adds his own layer, his own groundedness as he describes the celebration of Salvador's triumphant return. While Balboa does describe a salute to commemorate the death of Girón and the restoration of the Bishop's honor near the end of the poem, neither Salvador nor Filomeno's musical descriptions are mentioned¹¹ Yet, Filomeno insists, there was a "universal concierto [en que] se mezclaron músicos de Castilla y de Canarias, criollos y mestizos, naboríes y negros" (17). For the Amo this is an "¡Imposible armonía! (17). The long list of musical instruments, worthy of a Baroque catalogue, balanced by the "universal" blend of humanity, stands as a perfect example of identity dissipation and place-based consciousness. For each iteration there is a new creation in constant motion that issues from the give and take of place and space, past and present. Likewise, the rather overt nationalistic tone of the poem, while still a source of inspiration, is subtly changed by Filomeno's inclusion of the popular celebrations based upon his grand-father's triumph.

In addition to his re-appropriation of a traditional Spanish poetic form as a source of individuality, Filomeno draws strength from his relationship with African rhythms and music that provide his groundedness in identity. Rather than repeat "Espejo de paciencia" in Spain, where the high culture of such a poem would have been appreciated, he performs for the guests of the Inn by signing a Cuban *son* about a "una culebra cuyos ojos parecían candela y cuyos dientes parecían alfileres" (20).

—Mamita, mamita,
ven, ven, ven
Que me come la culebra,
ven, ven, ven.

Mírale lo sojo
que parecen candela

Mírale lo diente
que parecen filé.

Mentira, mi negra,
ven, ven, ven
Son juego é mi tierra,
ven, ven, ven.

La culebra se murió
Ca-la-ba-són
Son-són

Ca-la-ba-són
Son-són (37)¹²

The *son*, marks, of course, the next dissipative creation of the Spanish estribillo (another form of “arte mayor”) and the African rhythms. In Venice, he repeats the song, while focused upon a painting depicting Eve’s temptation, this time accompanied by some kitchen utensils. And now, it is Vivaldi who tries his hand at a new creation, repeating the chant to the snake “Calabasón” now, to his European ears as “Kábala-sum-sum-sum” (37). And yet another dissipative structure is created as Filomeno’s *son* created out of African and Spanish roots and rhythms becomes further dissipated by the repetition of the word “Kábala,” itself reminiscent of the name for the ancient and secret Judaic movement.

The culmination, or at least the last iteration of identity in *Concierto barroco*, occurs when Filomeno enters the concert hall to see Louis Armstrong. As he observes the musicians and their instruments, he recalls all the music and rhythm that has come before: the African hymn, the cantos to his grandfather, Vivaldi’s play with Cuban song and rhythms, all of which culminate in a “new Baroque concert,” of jazz that will be the New World’s legacy to the Old (73). Jazz will provide the groundedness for Filomeno and is the perfect embodiment for his ever-changing (improvised/dissipated) identity. Ralph Ellison’s

description of jazz and identity from *Shadow and Act*, underscores the connections between place and space in the New World:

[T]rue jazz is an art of individual assertion within and against the group. Each true jazz moment... springs from a contest in which the artist challenges all the rest; each solo flight, or improvisation, represents (like the canvasses of a painter) a definition of his identity: as individual, as member of the collectivity and as a link in the chain of tradition. Thus because jazz finds its very life in improvisation upon traditional materials, the jazz man must lose his identity even as he finds it... (Ralph Ellison "The Charlie Christian Story" *Shadow and Act* 234).

Jazz, like Filomeno's identity, is as porous as Dirlik's place-based consciousness yet historic, reminiscent of the original source of new expressions. The identity lost then regained by the "jazz man" echoes the ongoing process of dissipation Filomeno experiences as he moves through time and space. There is no nostalgia for what has been lost, no sense of diaspora or geographic longing, but celebration in what is to come, assured that this newest expression is but one more link in Ellison's musical "chain of tradition;" one more *island* in Benitez Rojo's ongoing dissipative structures. Indeed, Filomeno's African heritage is there in the rhythms now conjoined with Carpentier's New and Old World *barroquismo* counterpoints and improvisations, leading, finally to this new dynamic, changing, and fluid expression.

NOTES

¹See, for example, Alejandro De La Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality and Politics in 20th Century Cuba*.

²In agreement with many contemporary scholars, I use the term "diaspora" in a more general sense following the original Greek derivation comprised of the verb *speiro* (to sow) and the preposition *dia* (over) to mean "migration and

colonization.” Changes in the meaning of this term beyond the conventional use synonymous with mass displacements may be due to recent work on how globalization and how shifting national boundaries impact identity. See Arif Dirlik, “It’s Not Where You Are From, It Is Where You Are At: Place-Based Alternatives to Diaspora Discourses,” *Worlds On the Move*, eds. Jonathan Friedman and Shalini Randeria (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004) 142.

³ Carpentier is not alone in this conviction. Other prominent Caribbean intellectuals such as Severo Sarduy, José Lezama Lima and Perdo Henríquez Ureña also have commented upon the pre-existing Baroque of the New World. Nor has this discussion ended. Most recently, Edouard Glissant also talks of the Baroque as a constant of Caribbean reality in *Poetics of Relation*.

⁴ Benítez Rojo would describe this ongoing process as dissipative structures.

⁵ Carpentier’s inclusion of the poem functions on many levels as “Espejo” is considered to be the founding text of Cuban culture and nationalism that celebrates local flora and fauna as well as the cultural diversity of the island. The strong sense of independence of the people underscored in the poem would be further reinforced in the 19th century as Yara, would be the site for the beginning of the Ten Year War in Cuba (1868-1878) against Spanish occupation.

⁶ There is the problem of the Queen’s black lover, Aaron, who helps her in her bloody scheme against Titus. But, Filomeno seems unaware of this particular detail.

⁷ Within the Caribbean, Benítez Rojo argues, “pueden percibirse los contornos de una isla que se ‘repite’ a sí misma, desplegándose y bifurcándose hasta alcanzar todos los mares y tierras del globo... donde toda repetición es una práctica que entraña necesariamente una diferencia y un paso hacia la nada” (*La isla* iv)

⁸ Carpentier reproduces the first 4 pages of the opera “Moctezuma” published in 1733 at the end of *Concierto barroco* along with an explanation of how the opera inspired other European interpretations of the New World sight unseen (81).

⁹ One thinks of the experiences of the former slave, Esteban Montejo, chronicled in Miguel Barnet’s *Biografía de un Cimarrón*

¹⁰ Bennetta Jules-Rosette, building on the work of Véronique de Rudder, identifies this “groundedness” as the experience of the “double-rooted” immigrant, “whose in-betweenness... is influenced by, but not living in Africa.” (“Identity Discourses” 53).

¹¹ See *Espejo de paciencia* (108 -112).

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